

Thomas Bell
North Somerset Council
Walliscote Grove Rd
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

28th February 2024

TB/280224/HS/8280

Dear Thomas,

Thank you for the response received in relation to Land North of Rectory Farm, Yatton; planning ref: 23/P/0664/OUT. I was pleased to see that you have had the chance to review the report and wanted to provide clarifications on some of the points raised.

I respond to your comments relating to horseshoe bats; the provision of off-site compensation and its interplay with the scheme to the south; artificial lighting and the survey of additional offsite land.

I have reproduced the comments you provided below (*italics*) for clarity and numbered these to reference my subsequent comments.

Considering Natural England's comments dated 18th December 2023 further information will be required to inform the councils HRA and ensure the scheme is acceptable with no adverse effect on horseshoe bats associated with the SAC.

Overall bat activity across the red line boundary was variable with the in-field trees, western and northern boundaries being the most valuable with lesser horseshoes regularly recorded using these habitats for 'foraging'. The Site is considered valuable due to the general lack of illumination and excellent off-site habitat connectivity. Both species of horseshoe bat have been confirmed as foraging within the redline boundary.

1. Lighting

I concur with Natural England's comments that additional information regarding light spill should be provided. To inform the HRA and provide a worst-case scenario which demonstrates that sufficiently low levels of lighting can be achieved, all areas of external lighting should be modelled and where windows and glazing from properties are in close proximity facing the areas included into the HEP calculations as depicted in figure 6 of the sHRA internal lighting should be modelling to provide indicative light spill onto the surrounding habitat. Considering in all scenarios modelled for vertical light spill where planes B and E fail in the Lighting Scheme and Assessment dated 24th march 2023 by e3 consulting engineers the areas within the centre of the site should not be counted as accessible to horseshoe bats within the HEP calculation (and would require additional areas to be used in the offsite location as compensation habitat), unless it can be demonstrated that mitigation in the form of close-board fencing would not result in unacceptable light spill in these areas.

2. Division of Compensation Land

I understand from the letter dated 9th September 2023 "The offsite land provision for this scheme is separate and distinct from that used for the Rectory Farm application 21/P/0236/OUT; this is marked in a figure in the shadow HRA produced. There is no physical feature separating these compensation areas, but the land within the fields has been divided to reach the quantum of compensation bat habitat required by both of the schemes separately. There are over 5 hectares of land within the two fields: 0.95ha of land is allocated for the original Land at Rectory Farm scheme and 3.3ha is allocated for the Land to the North of Rectory Farm proposals."

Within the sHRA, the site plan in figure 5 shows the northern parcel, as shown in the blue line, which has previously been put forward for application 23/P/0238/RM whereas figures 4 and 7 show the offsite area includes an additional field to the southwest. Considering the HEP calculations put forward, as it stands, the scheme needs to deliver the equivalent to 0.55ha optimal Greater Horseshoe bat habitat on this offsite location to offset the losses from the redline boundary.

Despite areas stated as available in the letter dated 9th September, my concern is for any overlapping and double counting of offsite mitigation between this application and 23/P/0238/RM. It would be helpful to have a clearly marked up plan for the offsite location distinguishing the HEP areas allocated for this application against the HEP areas for 23/P/0238/RM. Particularly as 23/P/0238/RM is currently being reviewed and due to changes in the scheme compared to what was consented at outline stage may require additional offsite mitigation.

3. Further Survey of Compensation Land

Furthermore, the current intended areas of offsite mitigation are slightly confusing as the sHRA states "A further field which is present to the southwest of the field surveyed is also proposed to be used... Further activity surveys of this land are being undertaken in 2023 to fully inform the current use of these fields by both lesser and greater horseshoe bats." Similar to the above, it is not clear if the southwestern parcels are intended to be brought forward as compensation habitat for this application, if so, is the survey data available as suggested by the sHRA? I note that bat surveys of the northern parcel (as depicted in Figure 5 of the sHRA) have been submitted for consideration under application 23/P/0238/RM and are referred to in the results section of the sHRA. The sHRA highlights that the section of the offsite area that was surveyed had similar value to Greater Horseshoe bats compared to the redline boundary whereas for Lesser Horseshoe bats most activity was associated along the strawberry line at the eastern boundary. However, I note the report submitted for 23/P/0238/RM indicates that the offsite area surveyed is of District importance to bats and both Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats were recorded foraging.

4. Grazing management

The current HEP calculations for the offsite location are reliant on grazing to provide the offset in suitable habitat areas however it is not clear that this has been secured in perpetuity at this stage. While grazing would be preferred consideration should be given to alternative feasible options.

Kind regards

Tom

1. Lighting

The exclusion of habitat from the HEP calculations have been undertaken on the basis of the worst-case scenario of the horizontal plane calculations from the street lighting and security lighting specified. Select vertical planes were modelled to test the feasibility of culvert crossing points which if functional would have allowed horseshoe bat to access another area of grassland along with ditches and hedgerows to the east of the access road. As illustrated by vertical planes A-E in the initial lighting assessment, these potential crossing points are illuminated to above 0.5 lux in the area alongside the culvert entrances. As a consequence, all habitat to the east of the access road and any habitat illuminated alongside the culvert were excluded from the habitat included in the HEP calculations. This includes a fringe of habitat to the culverts which was illustrated as being illuminated above 0.5lux in the worst-case vertical plane calculations. It should be noted the vertical planes illustrated the corridors where they are situated away from the culvert entrances were unlit from the proposed street and security lighting. As such the corridors where unlit are available to horseshoe bats for foraging.

Internal light spill assessment is unfeasible at the outline stage due to the need to model the internal dimensions of each dwelling which are currently unspecified. It is agreed that modelling of internal lighting from dwellings which face onto proposed mitigation land should be undertaken to ensure the full quantum of mitigation habitat required can be delivered without impacts from internal lighting. However, in the absence of being able to progress an internal lighting assessment a 10m buffer from each house facing directly onto the habitat has been applied to ensure that light can dissipate adequately and negate the need to undertake further internal light calculations at this stage. Including the exclusion of the habitats within 10m of the dwellings the proposals remain compliant with the habitat provision for both species of horseshoe bat. Adjustments have been made to the HEP calculations to exclude an additional 800m² of grassland and 428m² of SuDs habitat as a result of a 10m buffer from each building facing the mitigation habitat and security lighting impacts being applied. The changes to the HEP calculations result in the proposals delivering 0.02 gain in equivalent hectares for greater horseshoe bats.

2. Division of Compensation Land

I have provided a figure with the area shown as compensation habitat associated with Land at Rectory Farm 21/P/0236/OUT marked along with the remaining 2.9ha of which is earmarked for compensation habitat associated with the Land North of Rectory Farm proposals 23/P/0664/OUT. This is provided in a revised Shadow HRA (Figure 9) and reproduced below. This includes an eight meter offset from the bank tops of all ditches land within which is not included in the HEP calculation totals. This is a slight reduction in the ten meters originally proposed but is more than the 5m riparian buffer zone put forward in the BNG methodology for the protection of ditches¹. It is considered an adequate buffer to protect the ditches from impacts from the restoration of the grassland. No scrub or trees are proposed for inclusion within ten meters of any ditch to prevent shading and to allow ongoing management by the IDB.

¹ Table 11, Biodiversity Net Gain User Guide link : https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65c60e0514b83c000ca715f3/The_Statutory_Biodiversity_Metric_-_User_Guide_.pdf



3. Further Survey of Compensation Land

The survey of the second field of the off-site compensation area is complete and will be submitted in the Land North of Rectory Farm Off-Site Land (2023 surveys) report along with an updated Shadow HRA to provide clarity on the points raised. Use of the two fields by greater and lesser horseshoe bats was similar to the level of use found in the previous area of compensation land subject to activity surveys and the results gathered in the northern field in 2022. Foraging by both species of horseshoe bats was recorded, although overall passes from horseshoe bats were lower than during the 2022 surveys undertaken on the northern field.

4. Grazing management

The previous version of the Shadow HRA set out that a range of options were being looked into for the future management of the offsite mitigation land. It is now proposed that the offsite mitigation land be managed through a cutting regime, which was one of the earlier identified options. The restoration management of the compensation land will be managed by cutting and the collection of arisings. Open areas of grassland will be cut mechanically leaving arisings for a day or so to drop any seed. The arisings would then be collected baled and removed from the site. Those areas of grassland which are enclosed within scrub would be managed using hand tools with arisings also collected and taken off site. It is considered the application of an ecologically sensitive cutting regime can be used to enhance the foraging potential of the grassland for both greater and lesser horseshoe bats and maintain the current value of local foraging habitat for bats.

I trust the information provided answers the points raised. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Sturgess', written in a cursive style.

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