



Mr David Easton,
Planning Department,

By e-mail only

12th February 2018

Dear David Easton

Location: Land South of Summer Lane & West of Pagham Road Pagham

Proposal: Mixed use development comprising of up to 400 dwellings, a care home with up to 70 beds, a Local Centre comprising up to 2000sqm of A1/A2/A3/D1/sui generis floorspace, provision of land for a 1FE primary school (with sufficient space to ensure that it is expandable to 2FE), provision of land for a scout hut, safeguarding of land to help link the site to the Pagham Harbour Cycle Route & other community uses including public open space & allotments with some matters reserved.

Application No: RU.17/1295

Many thanks for giving RSPB the opportunity to comment on the proposed Brent Goose Mitigation Plan.

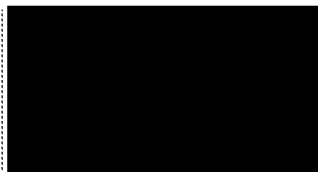
In commenting on the mitigation plan, we would also refer you to our letter of 1st September 2017.

The RSPB welcomes the recognition by Ecology Solutions (on behalf of Hanbury PM Ltd) of the concerns raised by the RSPB and Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS), over the likely importance of the Pagham South planning application site (Ref: P140/16/OUT) for foraging Brent Geese, which are a qualifying interest feature of the Pagham Harbour SPA/Ramsar and SSSI.

Whilst we do not agree with Ecology Solutions statement that there is 'no evidence to allow a conclusion that the Development Proposals would give rise to an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA/Ramsar site', we do support the decision reached with NE, that the 'precautionary principle' should apply and that additional mitigation is required (Section 1.9).

We believe the detail and background provided in the supplementary Brent Goose Mitigation Plan and the proposed creation of a 'defined Brent Goose Reserve' (Sections 2.7 – 2.24), represent a good starting point to identify the extent of mitigation required in relation to the Pagham South planning application site. However, we do have a number of issues that need to be addressed in relation to the proposed mitigation measures, in order for us to consider that the mitigation proposals are both appropriate and capable of adequately offsetting the loss of Brent Geese foraging grounds that will arise should the above development be approved.

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Mitigation Measures

The RSPB supports the approach taken by Ecology Solutions to define the land for use as part of the mitigation package, however, the RSPB has concerns that the current proposed area of replacement Brent Goose foraging habitat does not adequately replace the area to be lost as a result of the development site.

The mitigation plan submitted has provided useful details of the cropping rotations since 2011 for the fields involved and has identified a loss of 18.7ha of suitable Brent Goose foraging habitat (although it also suggests that a certain amount of this 18.7ha should be discounted), should the development go ahead.

The Mitigation Plan then proposes a number of mitigation measures (Section 3) for the loss of this 18.7ha of

potential Brent Goose foraging area, including:-

- 5ha of specific habitat enhancement
- Approximately 1ha of winter cereal / clover rich fallow mix
- Selective scrub removal to improve sight lines for Brent Geese
- The removal of bird scaring initiatives on a total of 18.5ha (including the 5ha of habitat enhancement area plus the fields immediately to the north).

Whilst the RSPB welcomes this integrated approach and recognises that in principle, these measures follow the advice given by Natural England, including the advice to seek mitigation areas in close proximity to important roost areas in Pagham Harbour SPA, it does not believe that the overall Mitigation Plan detailed for the 18.5ha adequately addresses the loss of foraging habitat previously associated with the development site.

We believe the area to be directly enhanced for Brent Geese foraging habitat should be around double that proposed in the Mitigation Plan (currently 5ha of permanent grass with a smaller area of winter cereal / clover rich fallow mix available as foraging habitat in every winter) along with the additional measures identified within the Plan. In coming to this conclusion, we have reviewed the data provided on cropping rotations (including areas of different crops) and referenced this to timelines from Google Earth and observational data of Brent Goose in the Pagham and Medmerry area.

Since 2011 (including 2017 which would appear to be atypical in that no winter cereals have been included in the crop rotation) on average this area has provided around 9.7ha of winter cereal (range 0.0 ha – c.16.5ha). The level of discounting of areas, due to factors such as field position and disturbance, should also be less than apparently applied in the mitigation plan. Ecological Solutions has concluded that, due to the lack of information about crop rotations prior to 2011, the uncertainties of future crop rotations and that Brent Geese will only forage in certain areas of these crops (depending on factors such as field position and disturbance), it is not possible to properly quantify the area to be discounted.

Whilst consideration of the area to be discounted should be made, observations of foraging Brent Geese, both within the Pagham Harbour area and the wider Solent, clearly show Brent Geese do forage up to field edges and close to public roads. Brent geese appear little affected by disturbance from road and farm traffic (photographs have been previously submitted by SOS showing brent geese grazing close to the Pagham road at the P/140/16 site) and often forage in/over suitable field margins. Disturbance from walkers and/or dogs can be temporal and reduced by suitable buffering and dogs kept under close control.

In addition, in identifying an appropriate area of replacement foraging habitat, it needs to be recognised that the actual housing development will have disturbance impacts on use by Brent Geese of associated fields immediately to the west of the site. This will be in part due the direct permanent impacts of the housing development footprint and indirect impacts due to residents (with or without dogs) using the area immediately around the housing.

Mitigation habitat and management options

The RSPB supports the proposed location of the 18.5ha mitigation land. The choice of this area again follows the advice of Natural England, positioned closer to the existing SPA Brent Goose roost sites and away from existing public disturbance.

We also note that the mitigation plan recognises the potential impact due to residents and has identified additional hedge planting to be undertaken along the footpath to screen walkers and their dogs from the adjacent fields to the west. This is welcomed, but would be more likely to be effective with dog proof fencing that would also protect the establishing hedge from accidental damage and damage from rabbits.

The 5ha plot (currently rough fallow) on field parcel SZ8798 9309 (refer to Plan ECO1) managed as permanent pasture would undoubtedly be attractive to foraging Brent Geese in winter, provided the grass was managed appropriately. The creation of the two 'scrapes' would also be of additional value for other wintering waterbirds and potentially for breeding wading birds.

However, we note the intention would be to manage this field parcel in effectively three plots, with suitable Brent goose foraging habitat provided in every year in the plot to the west of the 5ha permanent grass plot (by sowing winter cereals or a clover rich mix in fallow years), whilst the plot to the east of the permanent grassland will only benefit from no use of winter bird scaring initiatives.

This proposal whilst providing around 6ha of suitable Brent Goose foraging habitat, would not effectively replace the c.10ha lost and would appear unnecessarily complex to manage in perpetuity. We would suggest all of SZ8798 9309 (7.04ha) to be managed as permanent pasture. We would also recommend that the field is livestock fenced to allow any mowing regimes to be complemented by grazing with livestock. This 7.04 ha still falls short of the area of the foraging habitat lost to the development.

Managing this shortfall could be achieved by following a crop rotation in the two fields to the north of this area, field parcels SZ8798 9029 (8.45ha) and SZ8898 1141 (4.32ha), where a winter cereal or a clover rich fallow mix was sown in either one of the fields at least one year in three. If the larger field (SZ8798 9029) could be managed as two parcels, this would allow for a crop rotation including 4ha of either winter cereal or clover rich fallow mix to be present in any one year.

Enhancing sight lines for Brent Geese

The RSPB welcomes the consideration that has been given to improving sight lines for Brent Geese. Whilst selective management of the northern and southern boundaries of SZ8798 9309 could significantly improve the sight lines and therefore increase the likelihood that the mitigation will prove attractive to Brent Geese and could also be beneficial to breeding wading birds, any removal of scrub along these boundaries will need to be done with due care for their existing wildlife value. The merit of removing scrub along the boundary between SZ8798 9029 and SZ8898 1141 is questionable. These concerns would be best addressed as the detailed management plan is developed.

Cessation of bird scaring measures

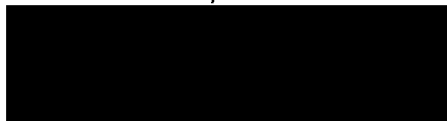
The RSPB believes an agreement to no bird scaring initiatives in perpetuity (defined as 80 years), on the 18.5ha of land, is essential as part of any integrated mitigation plan.

Management plan

The production of a management plan detailing the works to be carried out in perpetuity is also essential and the RSPB would welcome the opportunity for further comment on any proposed management plan as it develops.

The RSPB had previously requested that a further two winters of Brent Goose surveys and habitat mapping should be undertaken to properly ascertain usage by Brent Geese of these areas. In order to help with gathering this information, a programme of surveys and mapping has been commenced with RSPB and Sussex Ornithological Society helping to coordinate these surveys.

Yours sincerely



Chloe Rose
Conservation Officer

