Ecology Consultation

Proposal:	**Location:**
Enhancement works to Hinchingbrooke Country Park, to include an extension to the existing countryside centre, new car parking (to include new electric vehicle charging), improved access, biodiversity enhancements and other associated improvements and works	Hinchingbrooke Country Park Hinchingbrooke Park Road Huntingdon

Dc Case Officer:	**Ecology Officer:**	**Application Ref. No:**	**Date:**
LPA	ET	25/00577/FUL	03/06/2025

Submitted Plans and Documents Reviewed

- Aerial Tree Inspection, received 20/05/2025
- Ecological Impact Assessment, received 15/05/2025
- PEA Report, received 26/03/2025
- BNG Statement, received 15/05/2025
- BNG Metric, received 15/05/2025
- BNG Condition Assessments, received 15/05/2025
- Hinchingbrooke Off-site Grassland Survey July 2024, received 26/03/2025
- HCP Off-site Grassland Statutory Biodiversity Metric Condition Assessments 20241025, received 26/03/2025
- Arb report existing plans, received 26/03/2025
- Landscape Specifications, received 26/03/2025

Assessment

Having reviewed the documents submitted for the above application, the proposed development will not cause significant adverse impact to the ecology of the site or surrounding land and can provide a minimum 10% net gain so complies with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). No objections are raised.

Defer to and support Senior Landscape and Biodiversity Officer regarding the inappropriate use of non-native species in the planting scheme.

BNG

Strategic significance has been incorrectly applied in paragraph 1.2 of the Biodiversity Net Gain Statement. In the absence of a formally adopted LNRS, the metric user guide states specified alternative documents should be used. The only alternative document specified by Huntingdonshire District Council to operate the same way in the interim is the Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire (NRNH). Those habitats identified as strategically significance through the Local Plan despite sitting outside the Great Ouse Valley priority landscape area (habitat references: 13, 14, 15, 16; rural trees in the baseline or to be created; offsite reference G (Bobs Wood); and all hedgerows) will need to have the multiplier

removed in the metric. With this corrected, the proposal will still achieve an approximate 38.23% area uplift and a 954.69% hedgerow uplift.

The submitted onsite post-intervention habitat maps lack sufficient detail to cross reference with the metric and fully confirm their accuracy and additional zoomed in maps will be required in the Biodiversity Gain Plan when submitted. However, given the adjusted 38.23% area uplift is being provided off site and these areas are mapped clearly, the evidence presented demonstrates the development can achieve a minimum 10% net gain so complies with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

While a site visit confirmed the baseline habitat conditions to be accurate, completed condition assessments of some baseline habitats are missing. They will be required to evidence the baseline values and to inform the feasibility of proposed enhancement so will be required.

If the Planning officer is minded to approve the application, The Biodiversity Gain Plan will need to include the above amendments and information. The 30-year habitat monitoring mechanism is to be decided by the Planning officer.

EcIA

Overall, the EcIA provides suitable mitigation and compensation recommendations to prevent significant adverse impact to the ecology of the site and surrounding land. A Construction Environmental Management Plan, further details of ecological enhancements in addition to BNG, and protection for nesting birds should be secured by condition.

GCN DLL

The EcIA states "*Works will be undertaken under a great crested newt District Level Licence (DLL) which is in the process of being obtained from Natural England (NE) following a modification to the original red line boundary*." An Impact Assessment Conservation Payment Certificate issued and countersigned by Natural England has not yet been submitted and needs to be provided with the application prior to determination.

Bats

A Ground Level Tree Assessment was carried out on eighteen trees which found three requiring an Aerial Tree Assessment. This confirmed one Ash (W001 – Ash 4, MKA Aerial Tree Assessment) to contain a bat roost. The proposed works include the Ash's felling so a European Protected species licence must be obtained prior to commencement via condition.

The Aerial Tree Assessment recommends further surveys to classify the roost type in Ash 4 and obtain information from the maternity season to inform the EPSL mitigation strategy, and 24-48 hours prior to any proposed works on the other two trees inspected during the Aerial Tree Assessment (W001 – Ash 5 and W001 – Elm 3) to ensure an absence of roosting bats. In accordance with *BSI Standards Publication, Biodiversity — Code of Practice for Planning and Development, BS 42020:2013, Clause 9.2.4. c)* and *d)*, the additional surveys can be secured by condition as they fall within the criteria for exceptional circumstances.

Conditions

If the case officer is minded to approve the application, the following conditions are recommended:

1. Ecological Enhancements

No development above slab level shall take place until a Biodiversity Method Statement which provides details of how the recommended enhancements not covered under Biodiversity Net Gain (e.g. bat and bird boxes, amphibian hibernacula) contained in Section 6.0 Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures of the Ecological Impact Assessment (Greenwillows Associates ltd, received by the Local Planning Authority on 15/05/2025) and the Aerial Tree Assessment (MKA Ecology, received by the Local Planning Authority on 20/05/2025) will be carried out has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include but not be limited to; specification, location, maintenance, and monitoring. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure the conservation and enhancement of on-site biodiversity in accordance with Policy LP30 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

2. Construction Environmental Management Plan

No development shall commence (including demolition, ground works, vegetation clearance) until a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The CEMP shall follow all mitigation / compensation measures contained in Section 6.0 Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures of the Ecological Impact Assessment (Greenwillows Associates ltd, received by the Local Planning Authority on 15/05/2025) and include the following.

(a) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities.

(b) Identification of “biodiversity protection zones”.

(c) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid or reduce impacts during construction (may be provided as a set of method statements).

(d) The location and timings of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features.

(e) The times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works.

(f) Responsible persons and lines of communication.

(g) The role and responsibilities on site of an ecological clerk of works (ECoW) or similarly competent person.

(h) Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs if applicable.

The approved CEcMP shall be adhered to and implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: This is a pre-commencement condition to ensure an appropriate construction ecological management plan has been agreed to fully conserve and enhance ecological interests in accordance with Policy LP30 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

3. Breeding Birds

No removal of trees, scrub or hedgerow shall take place in the bird breeding season between 1 March and 31 August inclusive, unless a mitigation scheme for the protection of bird-nesting habitat has been previously submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To avoid causing harm to nesting birds in accordance with The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

4. European Protected Species Licence

No development shall commence until the following documents have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority: - Any necessary licence issued by Natural England / the relevant licensing body pursuant to Regulation 53 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 authorising the development to proceed on the application site, or - A statement in writing from the relevant licensing body to the effect that it considers that the development on the application site will not require a licence with regards to bats.

Reason:

To conserve protected species and allow the Local Planning Authority to discharge its duties under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and Policy LP30 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

5. Further Surveys

No development shall commence until all further surveys in recommended in the Aerial Tree Assessment (MKA Ecology, received by the Local Planning Authority on 20/05/2025) have been carried out by a licensed ecologist. A report of the findings including a suitable mitigation strategy if required, should the above specified species be found, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development thereafter shall be carried out in accordance with the approved report.

Reason:

To conserve protected species and allow the Local Planning Authority to discharge its duties under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and Policy LP30 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036