



South West Milton Keynes

## Ecological Review

Prepared by  
CSA Environmental

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May 2019

This report may contain sensitive ecological information. It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to determine if this should be made publicly available.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION & METHODS

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by CSA Environmental in relation to South West Milton Keynes ('SWMK') for which a planning application is under consideration (reference: 15/00314/AOP).
- 1.2 This report sets out a review of the existing assessment (Ecology Chapter of Environmental Statement, 2015) submitted with the above application, being required due to the time elapsed since previous assessment and survey work.
- 1.3 This review is based upon an update walkover of the Site carried out by Jamie Woollam CEcol MCIEEM on 17 May 2019 during which time broad habitat types were noted and considered in respect of their potential to support protected or notable species. In addition an appraisal of publically available nature conservation information was undertaken, which included interrogation of the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website. A full extended phase 1 habitat survey or formal desktop study was not conducted.
- 1.4 The scope of this report has been determined with due consideration for best-practice guidance provided by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, 2017), and to the *Biodiversity: Code of practice for planning and development* (BS 42020:2013) published by the British Standards Institution (2013). In addition, consideration of CIEEM's advice note on the lifespan of ecological reports and surveys (April, 2019) has also been given.

## **2.0 LEGISLATION, PLANNING POLICY & STANDING ADVICE**

### **Legislation**

2.1 Legislation relating to wildlife and biodiversity of particular relevance to this report includes:

- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- The Protection of Badgers Act 1992

2.2 This above legislation has been addressed, as appropriate, in the production of this report. No substantive changes in the above legislation has occurred since 2015 which would affect the previous assessment.

### **National Planning Policy**

2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out Government planning policies and how they should be applied. The NPPF has been revised twice since the submission of the planning application (2018 & 2019). Chapter 15: Conserving & Enhancing the Natural Environment is of particular relevance to this report as it relates to matters of ecology and biodiversity.

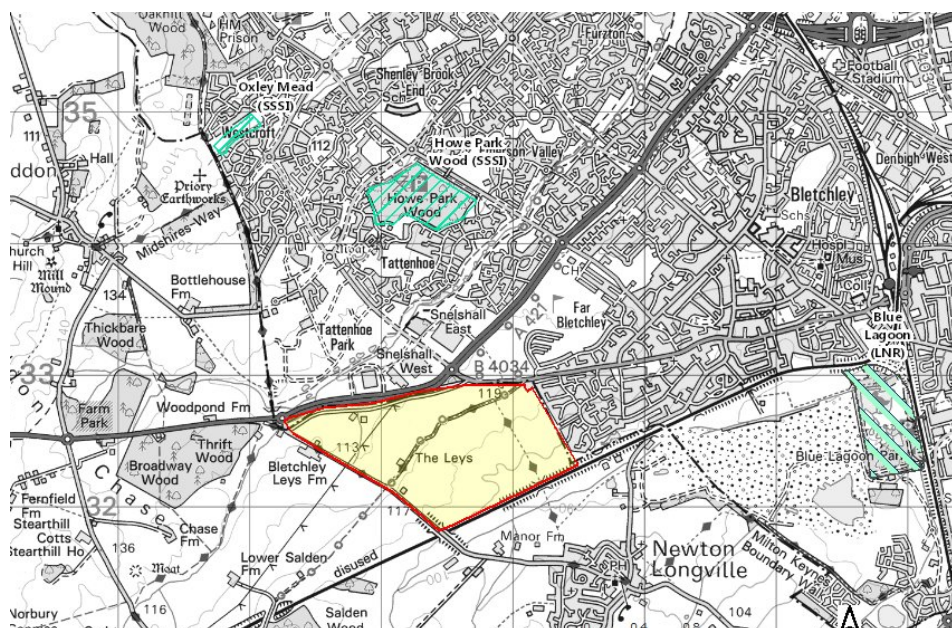
2.4 The Government Circular 06/2005, which is referred to by the NPPF, provides further guidance in respect of statutory obligations for biodiversity and geological conservation and their effects within the planning system.

### **Standing Advice**

2.5 Natural England and Defra's Standing Advice (Natural England & Defra, last updated in 2016) regarding habitats and protected species aims to support local authorities and forms a material consideration in determining applications in the same way as any individual response received from Natural England following consultation. Standing advice has therefore been given due consideration, alongside other detailed guidance documents, in the production of this report.

### 3.0 NATURE CONSERVATION DESIGNATIONS

- 3.1 Based upon a review of publicly available information, the no substantive changes are understood to have occurred in respect of designation of statutory nature conservation sites in the proximity of the application site (see Plate 1 Below).
- 3.2 Condition assessments relating to two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Howe Park Wood and Oxley Mead, were last undertaken in 2010 and 2008 respectively, with both being in favourable condition. No condition assessment is available for Blue Lagoon Local Nature Reserve (LNR) or non-statutory designations.



**Plate 1.** Statutory Nature Conservation Designations within proximity of the application Site (extract from MAGIC maps, interrogated May 2019)

- 3.3 It is considered unlikely that there has been any change in the condition or sensitivities of the identified designations and that in consequence the previous assessment remains applicable, i.e., in that no significant adverse effects are predicted. This assessment principally relied upon the distance of nature conservation designations from the application Site, as well as the provision of public open space at the application Site to minimise off-site recreational pressures.

## 4.0 HABITATS AND FLORA

4.1 All habitats previously recorded at the application Site were found to be present and reflected habitat descriptions previously made. These include:

- Arable farmland, principally cereal crops
- Pasture & arable leys (semi-improved grassland)
- Native hedgerow (S41 priority habitats), some with mature trees
- Scrub and tall ruderal

4.2 Condition of the above habitats appear to remain as previously found in respect of both management regimes and arable cultivation.

4.3 Given type and condition of habitats at the application Site remain broadly similar, impact assessments previously made remain applicable and therefore mitigation for the loss of/impact to habitats proposed is considered reasonable and proportionate. Moreover, it is anticipated that, as previously stated, net gains for biodiversity would be achievable based on the existing conditions of the application Site and the scheme proposed. It is advised however that detailed landscape design be adequately controlled to allow such net gains to be delivered alongside any mitigation required in respect of other ecological interests.

## 5.0 FAUNA

- 5.1 Given the type and condition of habitats found at the application Site remain broadly similar to that found in previous survey work, it is reasonable to presume that faunal interest would remain broadly similar with no substantive change (e.g. local extinction or colonisation) to faunal populations of species/groups since 2015. As such, it is considered that the previous assessment of impact to fauna at the application Site remain applicable and that the broad mitigation approaches set out remain reasonable and proportionate.
- 5.2 It is acknowledged that populations of mobile species, such as badger, reptiles, bats and breeding birds, may have varied both in distribution and abundance at the application Site since 2015/2016. However, this is not anticipated to substantively alter the overall baseline conditions at the application Site and assessments thereof. Nonetheless, it is important therefore that the detail of any mitigation measures be informed by an appropriate update suite of surveys for such species/groups. These surveys would also provide the necessary information to inform any licence applications to be made in respect of protected species. It is anticipated that update survey work would be controlled via suitably worded conditions and/or legal agreement.



## **6.0 SUMMARY**

- 6.1 Based upon an update walkover of the application Site and review of online information it is concluded that baseline conditions characterised in the submitted Environmental Statement and its Appendices remain applicable. As such the assessment of proposed development at the application Site is anticipated to remain reliable and therefore any broad mitigation approaches proposed are anticipated to remain reasonable and proportionate.
- 6.2 The detail of any ecological mitigation measures to be undertaken at the application Site will be informed by an appropriate suite of update ecological surveys given the time elapsed since previous survey work. This will allow for any necessary licensing regimes adopted at the site to be appropriately informed.

## 7.0 REFERENCES

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