



Thales Research and Technology Ltd, Worton Grange Industrial Estate, Imperial Way, Reading (Application Ref. 231254 PRE APP) – Ecology Response

Background

The following note responds to comments provided by Cathy Howill (RBC Ecology Consultations) dated 17 October 2023 on the above Planning Application and associated Ecology Report (Applied Ecology Ltd, July 2023). The issues raised by RBC can be summarised as follows:

1. The site appears to be bordered to the east by a watercourse which is shown on OS and Google maps although this is not discussed in the Ecology Report. It is advised that the scheme layout will need to be revised to provide an adequate buffer to this watercourse.
2. Confirmation how the mitigation hierarchy was followed and why further Habitat Units cannot be provided on site.
3. Submission of the Biodiversity Metric 4.0 spreadsheet.

1. The potential presence of a watercourse along the Site's eastern boundary

The definition of a watercourse, in this case a ditch, by the Biodiversity Metric 4.0, is an “*Artificially created linear water-conveyancing features which are less than 5m wide and are likely to retain water for more than 4 months of the year.*” The ditch in question was completely dry during our site visits (see photo below) with no evidence of aquatic or damp ground plant species that would indicate the channel holds standing water for significant periods. The channel was also partly overgrown with bramble suggesting it does not provide an important drainage function that necessitates regular clearance and maintenance. On this basis, the feature, judged to be located just beyond the Site boundary, was not considered to be a watercourse or ditch in UKHab or Biodiversity Metric 4.0 terms, and did not support characteristic plant or animal assemblages associated with permanent or ephemeral aquatic habitat.

The project engineers have also reviewed the status of this dry ditch and confirm that it has no meaningful hydrological significance in relation to the Site. They have also noted that the drainage strategy for the new development does not propose to discharge runoff into this ditch, so there will be no change in the volume of water entering it.

In summary, the potential watercourse identified by the RBC officer from OS maps and Google Earth is not (based on field inspection) considered to be a watercourse in ecological or hydrological terms. Policy EN111 (Waterspaces) of the Reading Local Plan 2019 which requires watercourses to be buffered is not therefore considered relevant.





Photograph taken April 2023 showing dry ditch on left hand side.

2. The mitigation hierarchy

Throughout the early design stage and development of the emerging masterplan, design team meetings and discussions were held that recognised the importance of **avoiding/minimising** habitat loss, most notably of trees which were the most significant habitat present in BNG terms. Tree loss was avoided where possible and specialist arboricultural advice was involved in the design evolution.

Areas of retained grassland along the eastern and southern boundaries will be **restored** by being enhanced to wildflower grassland.

Opportunities for **offsetting** habitat loss through new on-site habitat creation were explored but were inherently limited due to the relatively small areas of green space available and future use. The number of new trees to be planted was increased to the maximum considered feasible. Other possible options, such as green roofs, were considered, but discounted for non-ecological technical reasons.

3. Biodiversity Metric 4.0 spreadsheet

As requested, the Biodiversity Metric 4.0 excel spreadsheet has been provided along this note for RBC review.

Applied Ecology Ltd

14 November 2023

