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East Wharf, Watchet

Ecological Appraisal

C3075_01

Quality Assurance - Approval Status

This document has been Prepared and checked in accordance with
Waterman CPM's IMS (BS EN ISO 9001: 2000 and BS EN ISO 14001: 2004)

Author Date

Approved

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PLANS

Designated Sites
(3075/02 01/08 AP/JTF)

Habitat Features
(3075/01 01/08 AP/JTF)

Summary

- S1 Waterman CPM Limited (WCPM) was commissioned to carry out an ecological appraisal of land located in Watchet, Somerset. The appraisal was carried out for the purpose of informing a planning application for re-development of the site.
- S2 The site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation legislation and no such sites are likely to be affected by the proposed development. Whilst, the Watchet Station Local Wildlife Site runs adjacent to the site it can be easily protected during the construction phase, thereby avoiding impacts through disturbance or dust.
- S3 The potential for reptiles and nesting birds was identified during the survey; however, given no habitats that could support these species appear to be affected, it is not likely that specific mitigation measures will be needed.
- S4 Opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of the site have been identified. These include provision of bird nest boxes and the planting of native shrubs and trees.
- S5 Overall, it is not considered that there are any significant ecological constraints to development on the site. With the simple enhancement measures proposed, (the development should conform to relevant existing planning policy and legislation).

Section 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by Waterman CPM Limited (WCPM) on behalf of Urban Splash South-West Limited. It describes an ecological appraisal of land located in East Wharf, Watchet, Somerset for the purpose of informing a planning application. The land will henceforth be referred to as the 'Site'.
- 1.2 The Site covers approximately 0.9 hectares (ha) and is centred upon East Wharf adjacent to the marina in Watchet.
- 1.3 The purpose of this Ecological Assessment is to:
 - Identify ecological issues that could constrain the proposed development;
 - Assess the consequences of the redevelopment in relation to national and local environmental policy; and
 - Make recommendations for mitigation and enhancement, where appropriate.

Section 2 Methodology

Ecological Data Search

- 2.1 Understanding nature conservation issues within the wider area aids in assessing the value of a site and the habitats and species that it supports. Accordingly, background ecological records were obtained for the Site and the local area. This consultation exercise is valuable in identifying past records of, for example, protected species and sites subject to nature conservation designations.
- 2.2 A data search of ecological records and information was undertaken in November 2007 for a radius of up to 2km of the Site. The statutory and non-statutory organisations for nature conservation contacted as part of the data search were as follows:
 - Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC);
 - Francis Farr-Cox of the Environment Agency (EA) was consulted to determine whether there would be any adverse impacts on the marina and intertidal coastal zone adjacent to the Site; and
 - Somerset Ornithological Society.
- 2.3 In addition, the Government's Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside website (Ref. 1) was accessed for contextual information on the location of statutory designated nature conservation sites within a 5km radius of the Site.
- 2.4 Where relevant, reference to data collected from the above sources is made in the report.

Field Survey

- 2.5 An extended Phase I Survey was undertaken to identify and map habitats and dominant flora present, together with the presence of, or potential for, specially protected species. The WCPM survey technique adopted was at a level intermediate between the standard Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) Phase I (Ref. 2) and Phase II (detailed botany/fauna) survey.
- 2.6 The survey was carried out by Rebecca Bohane and Alison Pike and took place on 13th December 2007. Weather conditions at the time of the survey were clear and dry.
- 2.7 The winter months are a suboptimal time for carrying out ecological assessments, as certain plants may not be visible at this time of year. However, it is considered that despite this owing to the nature of the habitats present on Site, the timing of the survey was not considered to be a significant constraint.

Evaluation

- 2.8 The habitats and species evaluations are based on the guidance from the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) (Ref. 3). The level of value of specific ecological receptors is assigned using a geographic frame of reference, i.e. international value being the most important, then national, regional, county, district, local and lastly, within the site boundary only.
- 2.9 Value judgements are based on various characteristics that can be used to identify ecological resources or features likely to be important in terms of biodiversity. These include site designations (such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)) or, for undesignated features, the size, conservation status (locally, nationally or internationally) and the quality of the ecological resource. In terms of the latter, 'quality' can refer to habitats (for instance if they are particularly diverse, or a good example of a specific habitat type), other features (such as wildlife corridors or mosaics of habitats) or species populations or assemblages.

Section 3 Planning Policy Context

National Policy

- 3.1 Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9)(Ref. 4) - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation 2005, outlines the Government's commitment to the conservation of wildlife and natural features. PPS9 supersedes Planning Policy Guidance 9 (PPG9); there is now an emphasis on restoration and enhancement of features of ecological value. The policies and guidance within PPS9 are a material consideration when regarding development proposals.
- 3.2 PPS9 places emphasis on local authorities to further the conservation interest of those Habitats of Principal Importance, or those habitats supporting Species of Principal Importance (SoPI), which are identified in Section 74 of the Countryside Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 (Ref. 5). PPS9 requires that adverse effects of development on SoPI should be avoided through planning conditions or obligations, and that planning permission should be refused where harm to these species, or their habitats, may result, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh the harm.
- 3.3 PPS9 requires that opportunities for improving biodiversity within developments should be maximised. It states that development proposals provide many opportunities for building-in beneficial biodiversity features, as part of good design and also suggests that networks of natural habitat should be protected and repaired, and the fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats avoided.

Regional Policy

- 3.4 RPG10 (Ref 6) - is the current Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West, although it is presently under review. Policy EN 1 covers Landscape and Biodiversity; relevant clauses are summarised below:
 - Provides protection for internationally and nationally important nature conservation sites;
 - Protects biodiversity and seeks to enhance where possible, these enhancements should be planned into new developments from the outset;
 - Encourages the restoration and expansion of wildlife habitats, to create continuous viable habitats and reverse fragmentation; and
 - Protects the character of the countryside, through, for example minimising light pollution.
- 3.5 The draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (Ref. 7) is a full revision of RPG10 and its broad aim is to achieve sustainable development. The RSS makes reference to Policy SD3, which encourages positive planning to enhance natural environments, taking a holistic approach based on landscape and ecosystem scale planning.

- 3.6 The Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (Ref. 8), adopted in April 2000, has several relevant policies:
- Policy 1 protects European sites, national sites and local nature conservation sites, enhancing them where possible through the creation of green corridors;
 - Watchet is an Outstanding Heritage Settlements (OHS), Policy 8 aims to conserve the historic and architectural heritage of Somerset's OHSs; and
 - Policy 15 relates to coastal development, new developments should minimise the risk of landslip, flooding and erosion.

Local Policy

- 3.7 The West Somerset District Local Plan (Ref. 9) 2004 is currently being modified. Relevant policies include:
- Policy 4.2.3 states the Council supports (through its Local Agenda 21 Strategy) a sustainable approach to tree management;
 - Policy TW/1 protects trees and requires the replacement or additional planting of trees where necessary;
 - Policy 4.2.8 protects all hedgerows classified as 'important' under the Hedgerows Regulations, 1997;
 - Policy LPO protects international, national and local designated sites;
 - Policy 4.3.8 protects ecological and geological SSSI;
 - Policy 4.3.11 protects sites of local nature conservation;
 - Policy NC/3 encourages the enhancement and recreation of habitats where appropriate;
 - Policy NC/4 protects legally protected species and their habitats;
 - Policy NC/5 protects Biodiversity and in particular Somerset Habitat Action Plans (HAPs).

Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs)

- 3.8 The National and Local BAP identifies habitats and species of nature conservation concern and sets out objectives to improve their conservation status, together with actions to fulfil these objectives. BAPs are divided into Species Action Plans (SAPs) and HAPs.
- 3.9 The relevant SAPs for the Site are lesser horseshoe bats *Rhinolophus hipposideros*, within the West Somerset BAP (Ref. 10) and house sparrows *Passer domesticus*, within the UK BAP (Ref. 11).
- 3.10 Relevant HAPs for the Site include built up areas and gardens, as well as mudflats, mentioned the UK HAP.

Section 4 Results

Natural Area Context

- 4.1 Natural England (NE) has divided England into 'natural areas', which are defined by geology, landscape character and habitats. The Site lies within NE's Natural Area number 88, 'The Vale of Taunton and Quantock Fringes' (Ref. 12). The landscape of this area comprises a wide range of habitat types, although they now only cover small areas due to agricultural intensification. Woodland cover is minimal, although many tree and shrub species are associated with ancient hedgerows. Semi-natural habitats also tend to be highly fragmented. The importance of linear features such as hedgerows, rivers and streams are vital in preserving the wildlife of this area.

Statutory Nature Conservation Designations

- 4.2 The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory site designations.
- 4.3 Three SSSIs are located within a 5km radius from the Site (see Plan 3075/02):
- The Blue Anchor to Lilstock Coast SSSI runs adjacent to the north of the Site and has been designated because of its unique geology, rather than ecological interest;
 - The Cleeve Hill SSSI lies approximately 1.4km to the south-west of the Site and has been designated for the calcareous grassland it supports; and
 - The Quantocks SSSI located approximately 4.1km to the south-east of the Site and has been designated because it comprises extensive areas of semi-natural habitat.

Non-statutory Nature Conservation Designations

- 4.4 The Watchet Station Local Wildlife Site (LWS) runs adjacent to the south-east of the Site and has been designated because it supports notable plant species for Somerset including crown vetch *Coronilla varia*, bithynian vetch *Vicia bithynia*, grass vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia*, yellow wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*.
- 4.5 The Blue Anchor to Lilstock Cliff LWS is located approximately 0.2km to the east of the Site and has been designated for the calcareous grassland it supports.
- 4.6 The Washford River LWS is situated approximately 0.3 km to the west of the Site and has been designated because of its high biological water quality; records from the EA indicate the river has a BMWP score of up to 190. This means it supports a diverse range of freshwater invertebrates that are pollution sensitive.

Site Habitats

Buildings, Hardstanding and Ruderal Species

- 4.7 There is a large boat storage shed in the centre of the Site, which is in a poor state of repair (see Plan 3075/01). The single storey building has a corrugated asbestos roof, with concrete walls plus steel joists and doors.
- 4.8 The marina offices are located to the very south of the Site and consist of two, two storey brick buildings. They have wooden cladding and are in a good state of repair.
- 4.9 The opportunities for species associated with the structures, namely bats and birds, are considered extremely limited and as such the buildings are considered to be of negligible value.
- 4.10 The majority of the site is comprised of hardstanding, with occasional scattered ruderal species. The main ruderal species recorded included: ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, ragwort *Senecio* spp., perennial sow thistle *Sonchus arvensis*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* and scentless mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum*. Hardstanding provides little or no opportunities for wildlife and is therefore considered to be of negligible value. Due to the limited coverage of what are common ruderal species, the habitat is considered to be of negligible value.
- 4.11 The north-western perimeter of the Site is bounded by a 1.5m high sea wall; there is no vegetation growing within crevices on the wall. There is public access to the shore via some concrete steps.

Scrub

- 4.12 Adjacent to the south-eastern boundary there is a belt of scrub. Species recorded include: buddleja *Buddleja davidii*, an ornamental cherry *Prunus* sp. and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Areas of dense scrub are likely to be of value to nesting birds and invertebrates for foraging. As such, scrub habitats are considered to be of value within the context of the Site.

Woodland

- 4.13 A patch of semi-mature woodland extends into the Site. The trees have a modal diameter at breast height of 15cm. Canopy species noted include: sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and English elm *Ulmus procera*; the ground flora consisted of species such as wood avens *Geum urbanum* and ivy *Hedera helix*.
- 4.14 The woodland has been used by local children for mountain bike activities which has seriously eroded the top soil and suppressed under-storey growth. That said, together with woodland off-site to the east, the woodland on the Site enriches the local habitat resource in a relatively urbanised area. It is therefore considered to be of local value, although it is heavily degraded and its value could decrease if disturbance continues unchecked.

Ornamental Planting
4.15 Close to the station there is a patch of ornamental shrub species. These non-native species offer little to the local biodiversity resource and are considered to be of negligible value.

Exposed Cliff Face
4.16 Outside and to the north of the site is an exposed cliff face. It is extremely steep, supporting no vegetation. It has no obvious biodiversity interest and is considered to be of negligible ecological value.

Rough Grassland
4.17 A band of rough grassland runs adjacent to concrete slab path that leads up to the top of the cliffs. Species recorded include: ground elder *Aegopodium podagraria*, cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*. Although this habitat provides only limited potential for wildlife, it is considered to be of value within the context of the Site.

Habitats Adjacent to the Site

Watchet Station Local Wildlife Site
4.18 The part of the LWS adjacent to the site comprises railway embankments supporting rough grassland. Owing to the timing of the survey it is not known whether the plant species for which the LWS is designated are found in this area. Due to the sites designation and function as a wildlife corridor the area is considered to be of district value.

Bristol Channel Tidal Estuary
4.19 The Bristol Channel lies to the north of the Site and is tidal in the section adjacent to the Site. At low tide, shingle, intertidal mud and the underlying bedrock is exposed. The shore was largely barren with a minimal covering of seaweed. It is considered to be of negligible ecological value offering few opportunities for flora and fauna, however, it is an SSSI owing to its geological interest.

Marina
4.20 The marina is adjacent to the west of the Site. Water is impounded by a weir at low tide. There is a 12m drop to the water. No data was returned regarding this area although based on the habitat present it is unlikely that the marina supports substantive biodiversity interest.

Scrub
4.21 There is a patch of scrub merging into rough grassland at the top of the cliffs. Species recorded include bramble and elder *Sambucus nigra*. As such the habitat is considered of negligible value.

Protected or Notable Plant Species

- 4.22 The data search returned several records of Somerset notable plant species from within the 2km data search area: yellow wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, dodder *Cuscuta epithymum*, nit-grass *Gastridium ventricosum* and fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*.
- 4.23 Red Data book species returned in the data search include: rough marsh-mallow *Althaea hirsuta* and cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*.
- 4.24 These species are associated with habitats that do not occur within the Site boundaries and, as such, are not considered further.

Fauna

Bats

- 4.25 The Somerset Bat Group holds only one record of bats within 2km of the Site. The record is of an unknown bat species at St Decumans Church, located approximately 1km south-west of the Site.
- 4.26 The Site's urban context and position next to the Bristol Channel make it unlikely to support significant numbers of bats. However, certain species, such as the common pipistrelle can be associated with urban centres, particularly if suitable foraging habitat is available. The railway corridor adjacent to the Site may offer suitable foraging habitat for bats.
- 4.27 No suitable roosting opportunities were available in any of the buildings within the site boundaries. The large boat storage shed had a small patch of ivy cover on the western side of the building, but because of its exposed location open to the wind, it holds only limited bat potential. The rest of the building was in a poor state of repair and so offered limited bat potential. The two marina office buildings are in a good state of repair and consequently have limited bat potential.
- 4.28 None of the trees in the adjacent woodland had any bat roosting potential because of their immaturity.

Birds

- 4.29 Several records of Schedule 1 species were returned through the data search. All birds, their eggs and nests, are protected to some extent by the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended) (Ref. 13). Certain rare or more endangered species - those listed on Schedule 1 of the Act - are further protected by increased penalties.
- 4.30 Records of Schedule 1 species include: goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, scaup *Aythya marila*, peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus*, hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Mediterranean gull *Larus melanocephalus* and common crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*. Given the nature of the habitats present it is unlikely that any of these species are using the Site for either breeding or foraging (Ref. 14) and, as such, should not be impacted by the proposed development.

- 4.31 Records from SERC indicate that there are four red data list species (Ref. 15) within a 2km radius of the Site: marsh warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*, cirl bunting *Emberiza cirlus*, spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* and grey partridge *Perdix perdix*. The Site holds limited habitat for these species or other species due to its urban character.
- 4.32 Casual observations recorded seagulls were flying overhead. Also a blackbird *Turdus merula* and a robin *Erithacus rubecula* were noted in the immature woodland. These birds could be using the woodland and scrub for breeding, although none of these species is considered of particular note.
- 4.33 Five records for black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* were returned through the data search, located approximately 0.3km to the south of the Site. This species is usually associated with urban areas; in particular, they require stony ground for feeding (Ref. 16). They are likely to be on passage rather than nesting, as supported by the fact the birds were recorded during the winter. As such, the habitats on Site were considered unsuitable to support the species.
- 4.34 The lower shores of the Bristol Channel tidal estuary, to the north of the Site, are unlikely to offer foraging habitat to large numbers of estuarine bird species due to the lack of substantive foraging habitat and disturbance from both passing boats and the public.

Fish

- 4.35 The EA hold several records of UK BAP species along the Washford River including: European eel *Anguilla anguilla*, river lamprey *Lampetra fluviatilis*, Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* and brown trout *Salmo trutta*. Some of these could use the Marina, although not in notable numbers.

Great Crested Newts

- 4.36 SERC holds no records for great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* from the Site itself or within a 2km search radius. Potentially suitable terrestrial habitat exists at the Site margins, in the form of scrub, woodland and rough grassland habitats. However, the presence of the species is considered unlikely.

Reptiles

- 4.37 SERC holds several records for adders *Vipera berus* and two records of slow-worms *Anguis fragilis*, within 2km of the Site. These reptiles are protected from intentional harm under the WCA 1981 (as amended) (Ref. 13).
- 4.38 The rough unmanaged grassland that is found at the base of the cliff face, in the north-eastern corner of the Site, is considered suitable habitat to support reptiles.

Water Vole

- 4.39 SERC holds several records for water voles *Arvicola terrestris*, the nearest being located approximately 1.7km to the south-east of the Site. Water voles are also listed on the West Somerset SAP.
- 4.40 However, there are no habitats within the site boundaries or connected habitats, which are suitable for water voles and, as such the species is not considered further.

- Protected or Notable Invertebrates
- 4.41 SERC holds several records for UK BAP invertebrate species within a 2km radius of the Site: dingy skipper *Erynnis tages* (notable), marbled white *Melanargia galathea serena* and bog bush cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera*. The rough grassland could potentially support these species.

Section 5 Potential Impacts, Mitigation and Enhancement

Proposed Development

- 5.1 The proposed development will consist of residential and commercial units. This will largely affect habitats of negligible value, with habitats of some value namely a small area of scrub, woodland and rough grassland would be retained. The implications of this are described below, with reference to relevant planning policies.

Construction Phase

- 5.2 On account of the current use of the Site and the nature of the development, no significant adverse impacts on the three statutory sites within 5km are expected. There is however the potential to cause disturbance to the Watchet Station LWS, which runs adjacent to the Site. This could be avoided by temporary protective fencing during construction, and usual site best practice to avoid pollution or excessive dust deposition.
- 5.3 Potential for protected species is limited to reptiles and nesting birds in grassland and scrub at the Site boundaries. From the plans of the proposed development it appears that habitats these are not likely to be directly affected. If this is not the case then mitigation may be required, although this could be simply achieved through timing works or sensitive clearance. All wild birds, with a few exceptions, their nests and eggs are protected under the WCA 1981 (as amended) (Ref. 13). Reptiles are protected from harm under the same legislation.
- 5.4 There is also the potential for the trees to be impacted during the construction works if not adequately protected. Standard tree protection measures should avoid damage and significant adverse impacts to the trees of local value that are to be retained on site.
- 5.5 There is the potential to cause pollution to the marina when construction works are undertaken, which could affect fish and other wildlife. However, such impacts can be avoided by adopting pollution prevention measures as recommended by the EA.

Operational Phase

- 5.6 The proposed buildings are five and six storeys in height. As such, there will be an increase in extent and duration of shading of some areas when compared with the existing situation. However, given the nature of the existing habitats it is unlikely that this will result in adverse effects.

- 5.7 The new development will increase lighting within the Site and potentially light spill to adjacent areas. In the Watchet Planning Design and Access Statement (Ref. 18) there is a clause stating that there would be 'minimal light spill to surrounding areas'. The surrounding habitats are unlikely to be particularly sensitive to slight increases in night-time light levels, however, although minimising light spill, as stated, would be preferable.
- 5.8 Whilst the development will introduce greater numbers of people to the Site, and hence disturbance, it is not considered likely to result in adverse effects on the valued flora and fauna identified.

Section 6 Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

Enhancement Measures

- 6.1 PPS9 (Ref. 4) and RPG10 (Ref. 7) places a requirement to seek the enhancement of the biodiversity within development. This requirement is also included in Local Plans Policy NC/3 (Ref. 9).
- 6.2 The steep slopes supporting rough grassland and woodland within the Site do not present straightforward opportunities for enhancement owing to the difficult terrain. This habitat should be retained within the development, however. Opportunities are realistically limited to Site landscaping.
- 6.3 The Site could be enhanced for nesting birds by erecting nesting boxes.
- 6.4 Currently no landscape proposals have been put forward. In the developers Planning Design and Access statement (Ref. 18a) there is a clause concerning introduction of 'as much greenery to the site as possible' and the use of native plant species would be considered. Preferably these species need to be of local provenance and be fruit and seed bearing. This would provide a food source for birds and small mammals, enhancing the Site's biodiversity. The planting of additional trees and use of planting as stated above would enhance the site and therefore would be in line with policy RPG10 (Ref. 7) and Policy TW/1(Ref. 9).

Enforcement of Strategies

- 6.5 The mitigation and enhancement measures described could be enforced through appropriately worded planning conditions.

Section 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Overall, it is not considered that there are any significant ecological constraints to development on the Site. Simple mitigation measures are described to avoid impacts to valuable ecological resources. There are limited opportunities to improve the biodiversity resource within the Site through site landscaping, which are described. With the approach outlined in this report it is concluded that the Site can be developed in line with relevant policy and legislation.

Section 8 References

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Plans

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