

**Application 16/01778/MMA**

## Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

Application reference:	16/01778/MMA
Application address:	224 Portswood Road, Southampton S017 2AD
Application description:	Proposed development of land at 224 Portswood Road, Southampton S017 2AD (the former Bus Depot Site) to provide purpose built student accommodation
HRA completion date:	05/10/2015

HRA completed by:

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Summary

The project being assessed would lead to the provision of student halls of residence with a total of 443 bedspaces located approximately 1km from the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA)/Ramsar site and 7.5km from the New Forest SPA/Ramsar site.

The site is currently vacant having been previously used as a bus depot. It is located a significant distance from the European sites and as such construction stage impacts will not occur. Concern has been raised however, that the proposed development, in combination with other residential developments across south Hampshire, could result in recreational disturbance to the features of interest of the New Forest SPA/Ramsar site.

The findings of the initial assessment concluded that a significant effect was possible. A detailed appropriate assessment was therefore conducted on the proposed development. Following consideration of a number of avoidance and mitigation measures designed to remove any risk of a significant effect on the identified European sites, it has been concluded that **the significant effects which are likely in association with the proposed development can be overcome.**

## Section 1 - details of the plan or project

<p>European sites potentially impacted by plan or project:</p> <p>European Site descriptions are available in Appendix I of the City Centre Action Plan's Habitats Regulations Assessment Baseline Evidence Review Report, which is on the city council's website at</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New Forest SPA</li> <li>▪ New Forest Ramsar site</li> <li>▪ Solent and Southampton Water (SPA)</li> <li>▪ Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar Site</li> </ul>
<p>Is the project or plan directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (provide details)?</p>	<p>No – the development consists of new student accommodation which is neither connected to, nor necessary for, the management of any European site.</p>
<p>Are there any other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could affect the site (provide details)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Southampton Core Strategy (amended 2015) (<a href="http://www.southampton.gov.uk/policies/Amended-Core-Strategy-inc-CSPR-%20Final-13-03-2015.pdf">http://www.southampton.gov.uk/policies/Amended-Core-Strategy-inc-CSPR-%20Final-13-03-2015.pdf</a>)</li> <li>▪ City Centre Action Plan (<a href="http://www.southampton.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/adopted-plans/city-centre-action-plan.aspx">http://www.southampton.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/adopted-plans/city-centre-action-plan.aspx</a>)</li> <li>▪ South Hampshire Strategy (<a href="http://www.push.gov.uk/work/housing-and-planning/south_hampshire_strategy.htm">http://www.push.gov.uk/work/housing-and-planning/south_hampshire_strategy.htm</a> )</li> </ul> <p>The South Hampshire Strategy plans for 55,200 new homes, 580,000m<sup>2</sup> of office development and 550,000m<sup>2</sup> of manufacturing or distribution floorspace across the South Hampshire area between 2011 and 2026.</p> <p>Southampton aims to provide a total of 16,300 net additional dwellings across the city between 2006 and 2026 as set out in the Amended Core Strategy.</p> <p>Whilst the dates of the two plans do not align, it is clear that the proposed development of the former Bus Depot site is part of a far wider reaching development strategy for the South Hampshire sub-region which will result in a sizeable increase in population and economic activity.</p>

Regulation 68 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) (the Habitats Regulations) is clear that the assessment provisions, i.e. Regulation 61 of the same regulations, apply in relation to granting planning permission on an application under Part 3 of the TCPA 1990. The assessment below constitutes the city council's assessment of the implications of the development described above on the identified European sites, which is set out in Regulation 61 of the Habitats Regulations.

## Section 2 - Assessment of implications for European sites

### Test 1: the likelihood of a significant effect

- This test is to determine whether or not any possible effect could constitute a significant effect on a European site as set out in Regulation 61(1) (a) of the Habitats Regulations.

The proposed development is located 910m to the west of a section of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar Site whilst the New Forest SPA and New Forest Ramsar site are approximately 7.6km to the south.

A full list of the qualifying features for each site is provided at the end of this report. The development could have implications for these sites which could be permanent arising from the operational phase of the development.

In their response to the consultation on this planning application, dated 11th August, 2015 Natural England raised concerns about insufficient information being provided about potential impacts on the New Forest sites. The response also highlighted the potential for recreational impacts upon the New Forest SPA as a consequence of the operation of the proposed development.

The following mitigation measures, which are set out in the 'Response to Objection by Natural England, September 2015, have been proposed as part of the development:

- No parking spaces, apart from 4 for disabled students, will be provided within the proposed development.
- Information on public transport plus pedestrian and cycle route maps will be provided.
- The development will incorporate 220 secure cycle parking spaces and a free cycle rental scheme within the accommodation.
- A restrictive tenancy barring students from bringing their own cars will be used. Breaching this clause will result in termination of the tenancy.

### Conclusions regarding the likelihood of a significant effect

This is to summarise whether or not there is a likelihood of a significant effect on a European site as set out in Regulation 61(1)(a) of the Habitats Regulations.

The project being assessed would lead to the provision of a total of 443 bedspaces for students located approximately 1km from Solent and Southampton SPA/Ramsar site and 7.5km from the New Forest SPA/Ramsar site.

The site is currently vacant having been previously used as a bus depot. It is located a significant distance from the European sites and as such construction stage impacts will not occur. Concern has been raised however, that the proposed development, in combination with other residential developments across south Hampshire, could result in recreational disturbance to the features of interest of the New Forest SPA/Ramsar site.

The applicant has provided details of several avoidance and mitigation measures which are intended to reduce the identified impacts. However, without more detailed analysis, it is not possible to determine whether the proposed measures are sufficient to reduce the identified impacts to a level where they could be considered not to result in a significant effect on the identified European sites. Overall, there is the potential for permanent impacts which could be at a sufficient level to be considered significant. As such, a full appropriate

assessment of the implications for the identified European sites is required before the scheme can be authorised.

## Test 2: an appropriate assessment of the implications of the development for the identified European sites in view of those sites' conservation objectives

The analysis below constitutes the city council's assessment under Regulation 61(1) of the Habitats Regulations

The identified potential effects are examined below to determine the implications for the identified European sites in line with their conservation objectives and to assess whether the proposed avoidance and mitigation measures are sufficient to remove any potential impact.

In order to make a full and complete assessment it is necessary to consider the relevant conservation objectives. These are available on Natural England's web pages at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/6528471664689152> .

The conservation objective for Special Protection Areas is to, "Avoid the deterioration of the habitats of the qualifying features, and the significant disturbance of the qualifying features, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes a full contribution to achieving the aims of the Birds Directive."

Ramsar sites do not have a specific conservation objective however, under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), they are considered to have the same status as European sites.

### **TEMPORARY, CONSTRUCTION PHASE EFFECTS**

The designated sites are all located a substantial distance away from the development site and are therefore outside the zone of influence of construction activities. As a consequence, there will be no temporary, construction phase effects.

### **PERMANENT, OPERATIONAL EFFECTS.**

#### **New Forest SPA/Ramsar site**

The New Forest National Park attracts a high number of visitors (13.3 million annually), and is notable in terms of its catchment, attracting a far higher proportion of tourists and non-local visitors than similar areas such as the Thames Basin and Dorset Heaths. Research undertaken by Footprint Ecology, Sharp, J., Lowen, J. and Liley, D. (2008) Changing patterns of visitor numbers within the New Forest National Park, with particular reference to the New Forest SPA. Footprint Ecology.), indicates that 40% of visitors to the area are staying tourists, whilst 25% of visitors come from more than 5 miles (8km) away. The remaining 35% of visitors are local day visitors originating from within 5 miles (8km) of the boundary.

The report states that the estimated number of current annual visits to the New Forest is predicted to increase by 1.05 million annual visits by 2026 based on projections of housing development within 50km of the Forest, with around three quarters (764,000) of this total increase originating from within 10km of the boundary (which includes Southampton).

The application site is located 7.6km from the nearest part of the New Forest SPA and Ramsar site in terms of linear distance and as such, students resident in the proposed

development would fall into the category of non-local day visitors.

### **Characteristics of visitors to the New Forest**

In addition to visitor numbers, the report, "Changing patterns of visitor numbers within the New Forest National Park", 2008 also showed that:

- 85% of visitors to the New Forest arrive by car.
- 23% of the visitors travelling more than 5 miles come from the Southampton/Eastleigh area (see para 2.1.1).
- One of the main reasons for visiting the National Park given in the 2005 Visitor Survey was dog walking (24% of visitors - Source New Forest National Park Visitor survey 2005).
- Approximately 68% of visitors to UK National Parks are families. (Source:www.nationalparks.gov.uk).

The majority of the visitors to New Forest locations arriving from Southampton could therefore be characterised as day visitors, car-owners in family groups and many with dogs. Whilst students may fall within the first two of the above bullet points they are unlikely to have dogs or visit as part of a family group.

### **Occurrence of students**

The peak period for visitor numbers in the New Forest National Park is the summer, Sharp, J., Lowen, J. and Liley, D. (2008), which also coincides with the critical breeding period of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford Warbler which are features of interest of the New Forest SPA. Although students would be able to remain in occupation within their accommodation throughout the year (tenancies would be for a complete year) many, particularly undergraduates will vacate their accommodation and return home over the summer period.

There is no direct evidence of the extent to which students contribute to visitor numbers to the New Forest National Park. However, the characteristics of typical visitors to the New Forest are consistent with an analysis of visitors to the North York Moors National Park in 2002 which showed that skilled manual workers, poor retired couples, young single parents and students were more likely to use the local Moorsbus Network but were poorly represented in surveys at car parks (Countryside Recreation News April 2002, "Missing Persons - who doesn't visit the people's parks". Bill Breaker).

It would therefore be reasonable to conclude that there are likely to be very low numbers of students visiting the New Forest, particularly during the sensitive summer period.

### **Car ownership and accessibility**

Data gathered as part of the visitor survey undertaken by Footprint Ecology in 2008 clearly indicated that the majority of visitors travel to the New Forest by car. The proposed development will not have any private car parking spaces available for students and it is a condition of their tenancy agreement that students are not allowed to bring their own cars. This would be enforced by termination of the letting agreement (see para 7.1.4 of the Framework Travel Plan submitted with the planning application). Facilities at the proposed development will be limited to just 10 car parking spaces, consisting of 4 disabled spaces

and 6 staff spaces. On this basis the development can reasonably be described as car free.

Car parking on the campuses of both universities is very limited. Solent Southampton University (SSU) does not have any on campus parking whilst the University of Southampton (UoS) is seeking to further reduce levels of car use from the current 4.6% down to 4.2% by 2015 (UoS Travel Plan)

Students will therefore be expected to travel around Southampton on foot, bicycle and public transport. To support this the development will provide:

- A Travel Plan Coordinator;
- Pedestrian route information, cycle route maps and public transport information;
- 220 secure cycle parking spaces and a free cycle rental scheme within the student accommodation;
- A restrictive tenancy barring students from bringing their own cars. Breaching this clause will result in termination of the tenancy.

The Framework Travel Plan, in paragraph 4.1.1, shows that the site benefits from its close proximity to the central location of Portswood Centre and is therefore highly accessible by public transport, bicycle and on foot. There are 8 bus services passing within 250 metres of the site including Uni-link buses serving UoS campuses and enabling travel to SSU. The site is therefore highly accessible to residing students whilst the nearby Portswood Road is both pedestrian and cycle friendly.

The high level of accessibility and the restrictive tenancies mean that it is very unlikely that the residents have access to cars.

### **Recreation options for students**

Students at both universities have extensive opportunities to access sports and recreational facilities and are positively encouraged to make use of these. Details of the UoS facilities can be found at the following web address:

[http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads\\_Download/67A7C84E3D424F08B28A6E76CADD46E5/2015-16%20Sport%20and%20Wellbeing%20Brochure.pdf](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads_Download/67A7C84E3D424F08B28A6E76CADD46E5/2015-16%20Sport%20and%20Wellbeing%20Brochure.pdf) . Solent University has two major sports centres in the city centre, extensive playing fields at Test Park Sportsground, Fitness Centres and access to a range of local sports clubs and recreational facilities (details available on SSU) website <http://www.solent.ac.uk/sport/facilities/facilities-home.aspx> ).

In addition, Southampton benefits from an extensive network of common land, green corridors, city and district parks and local green spaces, which provide opportunities for quiet recreation of the type available to visitors to the New Forest. In particular, Southampton Common, a 125 hectare natural green space in the heart of the city, is only 20 minutes walking distance from the application site. Just to the north of the Common lie the Outdoor Sports Centre, Southampton City Golf Course, and the Alpine Snow Centre which provide opportunities for organised and informal recreation activities. Outside the city centre are the Greenways, a series wooded stream corridors which connect a number of

open spaces. The four most significant of these, Lordswood, Lordsdale, Shoreburs and Weston, are within easy cycling distance of the development site and provide extended opportunities for walking and connections into the wider countryside.

Figure 3 of the Framework Travel Plan (page 10) shows walking distances from the development site. Southampton Common lies within a 20 minute walking distance west to the site and offers a wide range of opportunities for recreation and a healthy lifestyle. The waterfront of the River Itchen is a 10 minute walk to the east of the site and allows access to the Itchen Riverside Boardwalk which runs along the western river bank. The general accessibility of the site to a wide range of services gives residents the opportunity to walk on a regular basis.

The road network around the application site also encourages cycling. Figure 4 of the Framework Travel Plan (page 11), is an extract from the Southampton Cycle Map which demonstrates that carriageways adjacent to the site are quiet routes appropriate for cycling. These cycle routes link the development site with Southampton Common (10 min) and National Cycle Route 23 which passes through Southampton. It is reasonable to expect that students will make use of the many leisure activities and commercial centres of Southampton.

Just outside the city boundary, to the north-east, are the Itchen Navigation (3.5km) and Itchen Valley Country Park (4.5km). These sites provide opportunities for informal recreation in a 'countryside' type environment and can be readily accessed on foot. The Itchen Valley Country Park can also be accessed by bicycle.

The availability of good quality and accessible open space described above, combined with sport and recreation facilities at both universities, reduces the likelihood that students would travel to the New Forest for recreational purposes.

### **Visiting the New Forest National Park using public transport**

The linear distance to New Forest SPA/Ramsar site is approximately 7.6km however, by road the distance is somewhat longer. The shortest route, using the Hythe Ferry, is 10.4km whilst the closest section when travelling purely by road is approximately 12km. It is unlikely, therefore, that visits made on foot or by bicycle will a frequent occurrence.

Should students choose to visit the National Park using public transport they are unlikely to find it a straight forward proposition. Direct travel from the development site is not possible. The first stage of a visit requires a journey to Southampton Central Station or the bus interchange in the city centre. Bus services into the city centre are frequent however, train travel requires a 10min walk to St Denys station from where there are just two direct trains an hour.

Travelling onward from Southampton city centre, the destinations for train and bus services are the urban centres which, aside from Beaulieu Road, lie outside the New Forest SPA/Ramsar site. Once at these locations further travel is required to reach the

designated site. Table 1 below provides details of the train services available from Southampton Central Railway Station.

**Table 1 Train services from Southampton Central to New Forest Locations**

<b>Destination</b>	<b>Service frequency (outside of peak hours)</b>	<b>Journey time</b>
Ashurst	1 service per hour	10 mins
Beaulieu Road	6 services between 0900- 1800	14 mins
Lyndhurst	No service	
Brockenhurst	4 services per hour	16 mins
Lymington	2 services per hour (change at Brockenhurst)	20 mins
Burley	No service	

The only direct bus service from Southampton to the locations in the New Forest identified above is the Bluestar 6 service which runs hourly from the city centre (during the day) to Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst and Lymington taking 30-40 minutes. Other services are available throughout the National Park from those locations.

Clearly, whilst it is possible to reach the designated site from the proposed halls of residence the process is complicated and likely to be costly. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that there are only likely to be a very small number of visits as a consequence.

### **Conclusions**

The evidence provided suggests that students comprise a small proportion of visitor to the New Forest and that, as a visitor destination, the New Forest is most attractive to dog walkers and/or families that have access to a car.

Students resident within the new accommodation will not be permitted to keep dogs and will not be present with their families. In addition, the development will be designed in such a way as to stop students bringing their cars with them. Finally, the wide range of recreation and sports facilities available to students are closer to the development and easier and cheaper to access than the New Forest. As a consequence, it is very unlikely that students will make trips to the New Forest designated sites and will not therefore contribute to increased recreational disturbance,

### **Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar site**

In 2008 the Council adopted the Solent Disturbance Mitigation project in collaboration with other Councils within the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire in order to mitigate the effects of new residential development on the Solent SPA. This enables financial contributions by developers to be made to fund appropriate mitigation measures. The report to the Cabinet of 19 August 2014 acknowledged that impacts on the SPA would be less likely from single bedroom car free developments within the city centre and student residential schemes than from typical family dwellings and that these would be exempted from the need for mitigation. This took account of the lower likelihood that residents of single bedroom flats with no car ownership and particularly students would visit the waterfront areas of the SPA and would be less likely to own dogs. As the current proposals

are for 443 bedspaces with no car parking spaces for students (except for 4 spaces for disabled persons) and limited to student occupation the impact on the New Forest SPA would be similarly limited, particularly as the site is even further from the New Forest sites than it is from the Solent SPA.

Conclusions regarding the implications of the development for the identified European sites in view of those sites' conservation objectives

### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions can be drawn from the evidence provided:

- Residents of the new accommodation will not have access to cars.
- The availability of open space, sport and recreation facilities at both universities reduces the likelihood that students would travel to the New Forest for recreational purposes.
- Evidence suggests that low car and dog ownership amongst students contributes to the relatively low proportion of students in the make-up of visitor numbers to the New Forest.
- Access to New Forest locations by students living at the proposed development would be complicated and costly especially when compared to the availability of alternative recreational activities.

The following mitigation measures have been proposed as part of the development:

- No parking spaces, apart from 4 for disabled students, will be provided within the proposed development.
- Information public transport and pedestrian and cycle route maps will be provided.
- The development will incorporate 220 secure cycle parking spaces and a free cycle rental scheme within the accommodation.
- A restrictive tenancy barring students from bringing their own cars will be used. Breaching this clause will result in termination of the tenancy.

As such, visitor pressure on European and other protected sites in the New Forest arising from the proposed development is likely to be extremely low and it can therefore be concluded that, subject to the implementation of the identified mitigation measures, **significant effects arising from recreational disturbance will not occur.**