

Clarification response in respect of Natural England's response regarding birds and SANG.

Request for clarifying information in Regulation 25 letter:

I draw the applicant's attention to the response from Natural England in relation to the Solent Wader Brent Goose Strategy. The Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy identifies a network of non-designated terrestrial wader and brent goose sites that support the Solent and Southampton Water SPA, Portsmouth Harbour SPA, and Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA (commonly referred to as the 'Solent SPAs') and aims to protect it from land take and recreational pressure associated with new development. These sites can be referred to as 'SPA functionally linked land' or 'SPA supporting habitat'.

Natural England note that post development this site would provide a greenspace of approximately 60ha. We recognise that this could have significant strategic value within the local context and would therefore recommend that yourselves as competent authority explore ways to maximise this site's potential, for example through the emerging policies and guidance relating to the Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Net Gain. This site may have potential to form a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to help divert visits away from sensitive ecological areas in the region.

The current site is not part of the mapped network of SWBGS sites across the Solent. However, following these works a large area will be reinstated as a grassland area. This maintained grassland area could have the potential to enhance the SWBGS network in future by providing an open undisturbed grassland area. Further measures to enhance this area for overwintering birds would therefore be welcome, which may be something your authority wishes to consider.

Applicant's Response:

The Phase 2 wintering bird surveys undertaken on site in 2015/2016, 2017/2018 and 2021/2022 identified that the site supports a wintering bird assemblage of **Local value** (refer to appendix 4.4). The site was identified to be of value for overwintering flocks of the nationally declining farmland bird species skylark, linnet and meadow pipit (*Anthus pratensis*), as well as for its overall assemblages of birds recorded during the winter surveys. Low numbers of Dartford warbler were recorded on site during the winter surveys of 2015/2016 and 2017/2018, however this species has not been recorded on site since then. The findings of the wintering bird surveys to date are in line with the current Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy 2020 which does not identify the site as being used by citation SPA/Ramsar species. The site is not therefore currently considered as functionally linked to the SPA.

In the long-term after restoration, it is considered that the site will be of substantially greater value to wintering birds with a greater extent of broadleaved woodland cover and native hedgerows as well as better quality grassland habitat and some wetland habitat, all of which will provide a greater supply and variety of winter foraging opportunities, as well as substantially improved habitat connectivity within the local landscape. The planted and retained scrub, hedgerows and woodland will all provide good resources of

fruit and seeds (mostly berries and hips) as well as overnight roosting opportunities. The grassland habitat on site, with both rough and open sward types, will also provide a good foraging resource to birds seeking invertebrates and seeds from grassland plants.

There is also potential that the wetland habitats created on site, including ponds with surrounding damp fen vegetation, could attract waders and waterfowl from the surrounding coastal areas and NSN sites. The positive effects on wintering birds are expected to become more pronounced in the long term as the habitats on site become more established and the tree and shrub planting matures, this could potentially result in small local increases in wintering bird numbers and/or draw in a greater diversity of bird species to the site each winter period. There will therefore be long-term positive effects in terms of the effect upon wintering birds from the proposals.

The only public access would be the footpath around the edge of the site and the public access area in the north-east of the site, so disturbance to birds would be prevented. The remainder of the site is likely to be fenced and will have a number of small freshwater pools, which would ensure the site is suitable for the wintering birds. The management of the site will be set out in the Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan (EMMP) secured via the S106 agreement, and specific measures regarding wintering birds can be considered in the detail of that Plan.

It is concluded therefore that whilst the site is not proposed to be dedicated as part of the network, the proposal will result in long-term positive effects on wintering birds in terms of the habitats being provided, over and above the habitats currently present on site, and being fenced and managed without public access will also enhance the value of the site for the birds. Specific management in relation to the grassland being created to ensure it is suitable for wintering birds can be considered in the detail of the EMMP.

In terms of SANG, a circular walk of minimum 2.3km is not proposed on the site – instead there will be a permissive path of approximately 2.1km running from the south-east to north-west corners from early on in the development, and along the western side also upon restoration. Cemex are not the landowners and it is not their wish to designate the site as SANG, so this is not proposed. However, the site is currently private and the permissive path to be provided around the outside, as well as the area of public open space in the north-east corner of the site will be a benefit in terms of providing an accessible and suitable walking route, with links between the housing on the south and east of the site, to the north-western side of the site where the school and station are located, and the west (once restored), and as such is likely to be used by local residents rather than travelling further to walk on protected sites. Whilst there is currently unauthorized public access, the provision of a permissive path secured via the planning permission will provide a more suitable and accessible path for all, as currently it is difficult to walk through the site in some parts and there is no accessible exit on the north-west corner.

In terms of biodiversity net gain, the proposed restoration of the site will be providing net gain as set out in Vol 2 Appendix 4.8 – Biodiversity Net Gain metric.