

Lewes – Eastbourne Local Plan, Part 2 – Policy E1 – Mitigation ideas.

1. Background

1.1 The Inspector, Mike Fox, has asked SOS and SWT to submit some “proposed alternative mitigation to the wildlife site” at Tide Mills should he be minded to permit development east of the Port Access Road (Policy E1). This document puts some mitigation ideas forward.

1.2 These ideas have been developed by the SOS with mitigation for birds primarily in mind. There has not been time to consult conservationists concerned with other taxa. Nor has there been time to consult NGO’s such as NE or EA. These mitigation ideas should therefore be regarded as conceptual rather than as fully worked up proposals.

1.3 However, we nonetheless believe that these ideas convey a realistic sense of what could be involved in putting mitigation in place that would provide a net gain in biodiversity, and that they also convey the considerable length of time (probably 10 or more years) before a net gain in biodiversity could be achieved.

2. Key Factors

Should E1, east of the Port Access Road, be developed, 24 hectares of the Local Wildlife Site would be lost to this development. The E1 site has developed into a shrubby area with some particularly dense and tall clumps of brambles, which make it particularly attractive to breeding and migrant birds. There are also a number of paths through it which are regularly used by dog walkers.

The mitigation ideas below address two things:-

- how to mitigate for the biodiversity loss were E1 to be developed
- and how to compensate for E1’s loss for recreational use (primarily dog-walking).

As will be seen below, we believe that a new nature reserve will have to be created to replace the biodiversity lost were E1 to be developed, and that a separate new area will need to be opened up to provide a new dog-walking area. The latter area we believe will need to be as close to Tide Mills as possible, whereas the new nature reserve can be further away.

The map below shows the E1 site. It also shows site A which is the recently designated nature reserve to the east of E1 and west of the Tide Mills. An obvious question is whether this nature reserve could become mitigation for the development of E1. We believe it cannot, because nothing has been done, nor is planned (to the best of our knowledge) to make it a better place for birds – we are not aware of any proposals to introduce new plantings or to wet it for example. Rather it has always been a good site for birds and merely designating it as a Nature Reserve has not altered its ecological status, at least with respect to birds. This is not a criticism, as SOS are not proposing that it be changed to increase bird biodiversity. We believe it is a good site for birds and an important part of the variety of habitats across the Tide Mills LWS that makes the whole LWS so important for birds. Changing its planting could have negative as well as positive impacts for birds.

3. The Mitigation concept

3.1 If you look at the map below you will see that the following sites are marked up:

- E1.
- A : the recently designated Nature Reserve to the east of E1 and west of the Tide Mills.
- The Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve
- Areas B, C, D and F, which are discussed below.

019

Google Maps

Google Maps



www.google.com/maps/@50.7888644,0.0713758,2376m/data=!3m1!1e3

1/1

3.2 Were E1 to go ahead, what we propose by way of mitigation is as follows:-

3.2.1 We believe that with the loss of E1 the recently designated nature reserve, site A, will degrade due to pressure from dog walkers who have already lost some walking paths with the development of port areas to the south west, and would now lose walking paths through site E1 too. Without the creation of new dog walking options A could become seriously “over-walked” degrading its wildlife potential.

3.2.2 To counter this we would like to see paths created to provide a circular dog-walk around F, if that is possible. There is already a footpath in F starting at the footbridge in the west and going eastwards alongside Mill Creek. We believe that a loop to this footpath could be created in the eastern two thirds of F, with the new paths being to the north of the currently established footpath. However, as F is classified as salt marsh there may be serious objections to this proposal, even if the new paths across it were on raised board walks. If that is the case then an alternative dog-walking area would need to be created, as

close to Tide Mills as possible – perhaps on agricultural land to the north of F and on the northern side of the railway line.

3.2.3 Site B is already used as a dog walking circuit with a footpath around its edge. On its southern (sea) side there are some reeds and in winter it can be wettish and often hosts Jack Snipe, a scarce winter visitor and passage migrant in Sussex. So it already has some merit as a site for birds. We believe if a couple of scrapes could be put in it and the area around the reeds made a bit wetter it could become a better wildlife site – another nature reserve. A small amount of fencing between the dog-walking path and the reeds may be desirable along part of the southern side to maximise its potential for birds, and minimise disturbance from walkers and their dogs.

3.2.4 If F were not to happen then site B is likely to come under more pressure from dog walkers, which would reduce its current benefit as a wildlife asset.

3.2.5 C is the cropped field behind the Tide Mills car park adjacent to the A259. We suggest that this could be taken out of agricultural production and planted up to become a new nature reserve, with a good number of shrubs, so as to provide cover for breeding and passage (migrant) birds in the same way that the thick brambles in E1 do at present.

3.2.6 D would be an alternative location to C, but being more to one side of the Seaford/Newhaven strategic gap it would be our second choice behind C. We understand that this land is owned by some of the residents of Bishopstone who have bought this site in order to secure their views, so they might or might not agree to its becoming a nature reserve.

3.2.7 Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve: If several deeper scrapes could be dug in this nature reserve it would create more permanent wet areas, which would significantly increase the variety of habitats in this reserve and thus its attractiveness for wildlife. The concern always has been that digging down might introduce salt water into the non-salt water in this reserve thus harming its Great Crested Newt population. Talking to the person who was the NE lead when this Nature Reserve was created, he does not believe that this is a risk. It would be good if a formal assessment could be made, as a wetter Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve would be a really big improvement – for all kinds of wildlife.

4. Mitigation “scores”

4.1 This sounds like a lot of mitigation, so we have tried to score the net impact of losing E1 to development, but gaining the mitigation improvements outlined above. These scores aim to reflect the impacts of the changes proposed, but no absolute score is given to any of the above sites apart from E1. In other words we are not trying to score the merits of one site versus another, but rather are trying to score the biodiversity impact that the above changes might have on various sites if E1 is lost to development.

4.2 Attaching a score of 10 to the wildlife value of E1, its loss to development would mean minus 10.

4.3 Without F, or some alternative to F, we believe there will also be a loss in the wildlife value of A due to much increased levels of dog-walking, which we have scored at minus 2, and that there will also be more dog-walking in B, and the effect of this on its wildlife we have scored as minus 1.

4.4 With a new dog walking site at F there will be no loss of wildlife value in A or B, so F scores plus 3. (We do not perceive that putting more dog walking into area F will have a

negative impact on its wildlife value as we do not perceive it has much value at present for birds, although we cannot talk about any other wildlife value that it has).

4.5 The improvements to B and its creation as a formal nature reserve would add 3 to its current wildlife value.

4.6 The creation of C will provide increasing benefits as it matures – but judging by the Ouse Estuary Project it will take 10 to 15 years for this to happen. 5 years after its creation we would hope to see it achieving a score of 5 - hopefully increasing to 10 after 10 to 15 years. We probably would want to see the habitat currently in E1 replicated in C, at least to some extent, but this may not be possible as they have very different soils.

4.7 If the Ouse Estuary Project can be made significantly wetter we would see that adding a score of at least 3 to its existing value and potentially more, depending on the extent of additional wetness that could be achieved.

4.8 In setting these scores the assumption is made that any development on E1 will NOT create any environmental pollution such as dust pollution, or excessive light or noise pollution, such as to degrade the adjacent nature reserve A, otherwise a further minus score would need to be attached to allow for these effects on site A.

4.9 So the loss of E1 (minus 10) plus the resulting degradation of A and B (minus 3) gives a total loss of wildlife habitat of minus 13 – were E1 to be developed.

4.10 This could be compensated by

- putting a path all the way around F (plus 3) to create a new dog-walking area, or if F is not suitable, doing this in a new site just to the north of F.
- the improvements to B (plus 3),
- creation of C (plus 5 after 5 years, increasing to plus 10 in 10 to 15 years)
- making the Ouse Estuary Project wetter (plus 3), if this is possible.

4.11 That is a total of plus 11 after 5 years (or plus 14 if wetting the Ouse Estuary Project is viable) increasing to plus 16 after ten to fifteen years (or plus 19 with a wetter Ouse Estuary project).

4.12 Policy DM24 says “Development that would result in the loss or damage to a Local Wildlife Site.....will only be permitted whereany loss can be mitigated to achieve a net gain in biodiversity...”

4.13 Versus minus 13 if E1 is developed (ref 4.9), implementation of 4.4 to 4.6 would deliver only plus 11 after 5 years (i.e. still a net loss of biodiversity) unless the Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve could be made wetter (4.7), in which case the score would be plus 14, a minimal gain in biodiversity.

4.14 In a 10 to 15 year period implementation of 4.4 to 4.6 should deliver plus 16 versus minus 13 were E1 to be developed – a reasonable net gain in biodiversity. This would increase to plus 19 were the Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve to be made wetter.

4.15 Therefore a net gain in biodiversity is going to be achieved quicker if the Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve can be made wetter than if it cannot be made wetter.

5.0 Timescales

5.1 It is going to take some time to carry out some detailed ecological studies and develop a comprehensive mitigation plan based on sound facts. Time will then be needed to get agreement to this plan and to the necessary change of land uses. It is hard to see how the planning process would not take at least 3 years and perhaps longer.

5.2 When it comes to implementing the mitigation (4.4 to 4.8 above) it needs to be put in place before any development takes place on site E1, otherwise there would be an unacceptable minus score = loss of biodiversity. Indeed the start of E1's development needs to be delayed until at least five years after C is created.

5.3 Realistically it is probably going to take at least 8 (and more likely 10 years) to plan and then implement mitigation measures that will create a net gain in biodiversity, and that will only be attained within this time frame if the Ouse Estuary Nature reserve can be made wetter.

5.4 If the Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve cannot be made wetter it will take longer than this for the new nature reserve at site C to be planned and to then mature sufficiently for a net gain in biodiversity to be delivered.