SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT REPORT

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App. Ref: **GU/24/CON/00011**

SCC Ref: **2023-0185**

Site: **Land at Merrist Wood Golf Club, Holly Lane, Worplesdon, Surrey, GU3 3PB**

Proposal: **The importation and deposit of inert materials and soils on 55 hectares of land to construct and remodel the existing golf course, with associated water features and the creation of heathland and wetland habitat.**

1. Introduction and Legal Context

1.1 The requirement for 'appropriate assessment' prior to the grant of planning permission comes from Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (Statutory Instrument 2017 No.1012) (as amended). The requirement applies to projects likely to give rise to significant impacts, alone or in-combination, on Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

1.2 As a matter of policy in the UK, sites designated under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance enjoy the same level of protection as SPAs and SACs. In Surrey the county's two Ramsar Sites are coincident with SPA and/or SAC designations. All SPAs, SACs and Ramsar Sites are composed of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

1.3 The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) process can involve up to four stages: Stage 1 – Screening; Stage 2 – Appropriate assessment; Stage 3 – Assessment of alternative solutions; Stage 4 – Assessment of compensation and imperative reasons of over-riding public interest. The aim of the HRA process is to ascertain whether the project will adversely affect the integrity of the SPA or SAC concerned. Mitigation measures can be considered at Stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment).

1.4 HRA is not required for projects directly connected with or necessary to the management of the SPA or SAC of concern. The development proposed in planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185, import and deposit of inert materials on 55 hectares of land to remodel an existing golf course, is not connected with or necessary to the management of the SPA or SAC covered by this assessment.

1.5 This document provides a record of the HRA for the inert material deposit and golf course remodelling operations proposed in planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185.

2. Development summary

2.1 The development proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185 would involve the temporary use of land for the deposit of inert materials followed by restoration to a golf course use. The proposed scheme would involve the import and deposit of c.369,038 cubic metres (m^3) of inert waste material and soils to remodel approximately 55 ha of the existing golf course, comprising holes 1 to 18. The works would also involve use of c.58,753 m^3 of material generated on-site, mainly from creation of a lake on the new 18th hole, extension of the pond on the new 9th hole and an irrigation storage lagoon adjacent to the new 15th hole. The gross fill required for the project is c.427,791 m^3. The proposal seeks to re-design and re-construct the course to improve the established golf business.

2.2 The proposal includes creation of heathland habitat and wildlife corridors between the fairways and around the course, to provide biodiversity enhancement within the site and to connect with wildlife corridors and habitats outside of the site. The re-design of the golf course offers the potential for future use by community groups or for outdoor recreational purposes, to further diversify the club's income and enhance public access, for example through new footpath routes.

2.3 The works would take up to two years to complete with importation taking place up to 256 days a year. The proposal would generate 83,211 (two-way) HGV movements on the local network over the two-year period. This would equate to c.141 daily two-way movements. The vehicle movements are proposed to be spilt (50/50), with 50% accessing the site from the north via Junction 3 of the M3 and the A322 and 50% accessing the site from the south, travelling north on the A3 and the A322.

3. European sites covered by the HRA

3.1 Part of one SPA and part of one SAC adjoin the application site to the north.

- **Thames Basin Heaths SPA –** designated for breeding populations of European nightjar, Woodlark, and Dartford warbler – Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI, immediately north of the western part of the application site, is the closest SPA component. A further component, Whitmoor Common SSSI, is c.1.8 kilometres east beyond the Merrist

Wood College campus, the settlement of Worplesdon, and the A322 (Worplesdon Road / Bagshot Road). The proposed routes by which HGVs would access the site during construction includes roads passing within 200 metres of three SPA components - Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI, Whitmoor Common SSSI, and Colony Bog and Bagshot Heaths SSSI.

- **Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC** – Designated for wet heath, dry heath, and bog habitats – Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI, immediately north of the western part of the application site is the closest SAC component. The proposed routes by which HGVs would access the site during construction includes roads passing within 200 metres of two SAC components - Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI and Colony Bog and Bagshot Heaths SSSI.

3.2 The proposed development would not result in land-take from any of the within scope European sites.

4. Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC

4.1 Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI, immediately north of the application site, is the closest Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC component. A further component of the SAC, Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath SSSI, is located within 200 metres of the route by which construction phase HGVs would access the site.

4-A SAC Conservation Objectives, Qualifying Features, and Key Threats and Pressures

4.2 The published SAC conservation objectives and reasons for the SAC's designation are, as follows.

Conservation Objectives

With regard to the SAC and the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated ("the Qualifying Features" listed below), and subject to natural change: Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to the achieving Favourable Conservation Status by maintaining or restoring:

1. The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats;
2. The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats;
3. The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely.

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Qualifying Features

- H4010. Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*; Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath
- H4030. European dry heaths
- H7150. Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*

4.3 The published SAC Site Improvement Plan (SIP) (Natural England, dated 3 November 2014) identifies key pressures and threats to the SAC's ecological integrity. That SIP also covers the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Of the eleven threats and pressures identified in the SIP nine (listed below) are relevant to the SAC designation. The following threats/pressures are numbered in accordance with the SIP.

- Threat/Pressure SIP No.2 – Under grazing.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.3 – Forestry and woodland management.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.4 – Local hydrological conditions.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.5 – Inappropriate scrub control.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.6 – Invasive species.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.7 – Wildfire / arson.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.8 – Air pollution (nitrogen deposition).
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.10 – Military site management.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.11 – Habitat fragmentation.

4-B Screening assessment

4.4 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.2 – Under grazing; Threat/Pressure SIP No.3 – Forestry / woodland management; Threat/Pressure SIP No.5 – Inappropriate scrub control**: Grazing, forestry and scrub management practices across the SAC would be unaffected by the proposed development. The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SPA. The SAC is separated from the application site by intervening trees and hedgerows that would be left intact. No development is proposed beyond the boundaries of the application site. Land within the SSSI and SAC would not be directly affected by the proposed development and grazing, forestry and scrub management practice decisions made by the SSSI and SAC landowners (mainly the Ministry of Defence (MoD)) would not be influenced by the development proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185. **No further assessment is required.**

4.5 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.4 – Local hydrological conditions**: The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SAC. The threat/pressure of changes in local hydrological conditions as discussed in the SIP is specific to the Thursley, Hankley and Frensham Commons SSSI component of the SAC. That SAC component is more than 10 kilometres south-west of the application site. Implementation of the development proposed in planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185 would not alter the availability of water to the wet heathland and bog habitats of the Thursley, Hankley and Frensham Commons SSSI component of the SAC. **No further assessment is required.**

4.6 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.6 – Invasive species**: The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SAC. The presence of several invasive plant species (New Zealand Pygmyweed, Rhododendron and Himalayan Balsam) within the application site is identified in the submitted Phase 1 Habitat Survey (Appendix C to the Environmental Statement). **Further assessment is required.**

4.7 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.7 – Wildfire / arson**: Fire management and prevention practices deployed by landowners across the SAC would be unaffected by the proposed development. The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SAC. The proposed works involve the import and placement of inert materials, and the excavation and re-placement of inert materials on-site. Such works would not, in the normal course of events, present a greater fire risk to the adjoining SAC than the established leisure use (golf course) of the application site. **No further assessment is required.**

4.8 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.8 – Air pollution (nitrogen deposition)**: The heathland and bog habitats of the SAC are susceptible to change as a consequence of nutrient nitrogen and acid deposition from atmospheric pollution arising from point and diffuse sources. Traffic from the proposed development has the potential to contribute to nutrient nitrogen and acid deposition on parts of the SAC close to the identified HGV route. Given the proximity of part of the SAC to the application site and considering the type of development proposed (deposition of inert material and soils) there is also potential for dust deposition on the heathland habitats. **Further assessment is required.**

4.9 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.9 – Military site management**: The Ministry of Defence (MoD) owns parts of the SAC complex, including much of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component. Future MoD decisions as to the management and use of the SSSI and SAC would be unaffected by the development proposed under planning application SCC

ref. 2023-0185. The construction phase would be of short duration (2 years) following which the land would revert to its established leisure use (golf course). **No further assessment is required.**

4.10 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.10 – Habitat fragmentation**: The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SAC. No additional road or footway links would be created across designated land as part of the proposed development and no land within the SAC would be required to enable the development proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185. **No further assessment is required.**

4-C Appropriate assessment

Invasive plant species (SIP Threat / Pressure No.6)

4.11 The submitted Phase 1 Habitat Survey (Appendix C to the ES) reports the presence on site of several invasive plant species – New Zealand Pygmyweed, Rhododendron, and Himalayan Balsam. Given the proximity of the application site to part of the SAC measure will be required to prevent the spread of those species onto the heathland and into any waterbodies located within the SAC. No such measures are proposed in the application documents.

4.12 A pre-commencement condition requiring submission for approval by the planning authority of an invasive plant species management plan must be attached to any planning permission that may be granted in respect of the scheme. The submitted management plan must include provision for the on-site presence of an ecological clerk of works during the construction phase to supervise removal and subsequent management of all invasive plant materials.

4.13 Subject to an invasive plant species management plan being secured by pre-commencement condition it can be concluded the scheme would not result in likely significant effects due to the spread of invasive plant species onto the SAC.

Air pollution from dust emissions (SIP Threat / Pressure No.8)

4.14 The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SAC. That SSSI encompasses areas of wet and dry heathland, both qualifying features of the SAC. The proposal would involve the import and deposit of inert materials and soils, and the on-site excavation and re-placement of soils, which activities have the potential to generate emissions of dust during dry conditions. Dust deposit on the heathland plants could, in large volumes, be harmful to plant health and therefore habitat viability.

4.15 The application site is separated from the adjoining part of the SAC by hedgerows and trees within the SAC area. No removal of trees or hedgerows is proposed along the boundary with the SAC, which would provide screening of the SAC habitats from emissions of dust arising from the site. The prevailing wind direction is from the south-west, with the nearby SAC component located north-west of the site, reducing the risk of dust deposition.

4.16 The proposal makes provision for deployment of a dust management plan, which would include measures to avoid and suppress emissions of dust throughout the construction phase of the scheme. Implementation of the proposed dust management plan would provide further protection of the SAC habitats from dust deposition.

4.17 Taking account of the physical relationship of the application site and the SAC and the short-term and temporary nature of the construction phase, and the proposed implementation of a dust management plan, no likely significant effects on the SAC would arise from dust deposition. On a precautionary basis it is recommended the proposed dust management plan be secured by planning condition.

Air pollution from vehicle movements (SIP Threat / Pressure No.8)

4.18 Three figures for construction HGV movements are given in the submitted Air Quality Assessment and Transport Statement. The former gives an AADT figure of 99, and an HGV movement on working days figure of 138.45. The latter gives an HGV movement on working days figure of 141.

4.19 The route by which HGVs would access the application site is described in the submitted documents as comprising of two options – a northern route to the M3 motorway via the A322 and a southern route to the A3 via the A322. The proposed northern route passes within 200 metres of two SAC components – Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI and Colony Bog to Bagshot Heaths SSSI.

4.20 Background traffic levels for the sections of the A322 within the proposed northern route within 200 metres of the two SAC components for the period 2019 to 2023 are given below.

Road section	**2023**	**2022**	**2021**	**2020**	**2019**	**5-year mean**
A322 – Cumberland Avenue to B380	17584	17279	16143	14691	18904	16920
A322 – B380 to A324	11351	11156	9616	8758	11219	10420
A322 – A324 to A319	17694	17394	16261	14803	19045	17039
A322 – A319 to M3	26203	25637	25810	23360	27050	25612

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4.21 The predicted HGV movements for the construction phase of the scheme would result in the following percentage based increases on the 5-year AADT figure for each section of the northern route. The worst case scenario given below assumes 100% of construction phase traffic would travel on the north route, which is unlikely to be the case in practice. Those additional HGV movements would only arise during the 2-year construction period. Operational phase traffic associated with the reinstated golf course would be comparable to that experienced prior to the works.

Submitted traffic predictions for the construction phase	**A322 – Cumberland Avenue to B380 5-Yr Mean 16920**	**A322 – B380 to A324 5-Yr Mean 10420**	**A322 – A324 to A319 5-Yr Mean 17039**	**A322 – A319 to M3 5-Yr Mean 25612**
AADT = 99	0.6%	0.95%	0.6%	0.4%
Working day movements (TS) = 141	0.8%	1.4%	0.8%	0.6%
Working day movements (AQA) = 138.45	0.8%	1.3%	0.8%	0.5%

4.22 Background air quality for those SAC components located within 200 metres of the affected sections of the A322 is reported on APIS (https://www.apis.ac.uk/app) as being within the site relevant critical level or load ranges for nitrogen deposition, ammonia and sulphur dioxide.

- Nutrient nitrogen deposition – the critical load range for heathland habitats (dry and wet) is 5 to 15 kg/N/ha/yr and the reported background levels for SAC components within 200 metres of the road range from 11.6 to 11.7 kg/N/ha/yr.
- Ammonia – the critical level for heathland habitats (dry and wet) is 1 $\mu g/NH_3/m^3$ and the reported background level for SAC components within 200 metres of the road is 0.9 $\mu g/NH_3/m^3$.
- Sulphur dioxide – the critical level for heathland habitats (dry and wet) is 10 $\mu g/SO_2/m^3$ and the reported background levels for SAC components within 200 metres of the road range from 1.3 to 1.6 $\mu g/SO_2/m^3$.

4.23 The scheme would result in relatively small changes in traffic movements on those sections of the A322 close to the SAC. Those movements would arise during the 2-year construction period and would therefore be temporary and short-term. Background air quality within the components of the SAC close to the A322 currently falls within the relevant critical load or level ranges for nutrient nitrogen, ammonia and

sulphur dioxide. Considering those facts, it is concluded the scheme would not result in likely significant effects on the SAC due to changes in air quality. On a precautionary basis the proposed Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) and HGV route should be secured by planning condition.

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4-D Conclusion

4.24 The development proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185 would not result in or contribute to 'likely significant effects' on any part of the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC. On a precautionary basis the controls listed below being secured by planning condition or legal agreement. Implementation of the project, including the specified mitigation measures, would not prevent attainment of the stated conservation objectives for the SAC.

- Dust deposition – In line with Natural England's advice mitigation to prevent likely significant effects from dust deposition during construction should be secured in the form of a dust management plan.
- Invasive plant species – In line with the recommendations of this assessment and the comments of the County ecologist a pre-commencement condition should be attached to any permission granted requiring the submission for approval of an invasive plant species management plan.
- Vehicle emissions – The HGV routing plan proposed by the applicant should be secured as part of the CTMP by condition or legal agreement as appropriate for any planning permission granted.

5. Thames Basin Heaths SPA

5.1 Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI, immediately north of the application site, is the closest Thames Basin Heaths SPA component. Further components of the SPA, Whitmoor Common SSSI and Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath SSSI, are located within 200 metres of the route by which construction phase HGVs would access the site.

5-A SPA Conservation Objectives, Qualifying Features, and Key Threats and Pressures

5.2 The published conservation objectives for the SPA and the reasons for its designation are, as follows.

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Conservation Objectives

"Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring:

1. The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features;
2. The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features;
3. The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely;
4. The populations of the qualifying features; and
5. The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

Qualifying Features

- A224 *Caprimulgus europaeus*; European nightjar (Breeding)
- A246 *Lullula arborea*; Woodlark (Breeding)
- A302 *Sylvia undata*; Dartford warbler (Breeding)

5.3 The published SPA SIP (Natural England dated 3 November 2014) identifies key pressures and threats to the SPA's ecological integrity. That SIP also covers the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC (see section 4 of this report). Of the eleven threats and pressures identified in the SIP nine are relevant to the SPA designation. The following threats/pressures are numbered in accordance with the SIP.

- Threat/Pressure SIP No.1 – Public access / disturbance
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.2 – Under grazing.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.3 – Forestry and woodland management.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.5 – Inappropriate scrub control.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.7 – Wildfire / arson.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.8 – Air pollution (nitrogen deposition).
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.9 – Qualifying feature location, extent and condition unknown.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.10 – Military site management.
- Threat/Pressure SIP No.11 – Habitat fragmentation.

5-B Screening assessment

5.4 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.1 – Public access / disturbance**: The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SPA. During the construction phase activities on-site will be of a type and scale materially different to the established golf course use of the land. Noise and visual intrusion associated with the importation and placement of inert material across

the site and in particular along the north-western perimeter could cause disturbance of the SPA bird species. **Further assessment is required.**

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5.5 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.2 – Under grazing; Threat/Pressure SIP No.3 – Forestry / woodland management; Threat/Pressure SIP No.5 – Inappropriate scrub control**: Grazing, forestry and scrub management practices across the SPA would be unaffected by the proposed development. The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SPA. The SPA is separated from the application site by intervening trees and hedgerows. No development is proposed beyond the boundaries of the application site. Land within the SSSI and SPA would not be directly affected by the proposed development and grazing, forestry and scrub management practice decisions made by the SSSI landowner (Surrey County Council) would not be influenced by the development proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185. **No further assessment is required.**

5.6 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.7 – Wildfire / arson**: Fire management and prevention practices deployed by landowners across the SPA would be unaffected by the proposed development. The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SPA. The proposed works involve the import and placement of inert materials, and the excavation and re-placement of inert materials on-site. Such works would not, in the normal course of events, present a greater fire risk to the adjoining SPA than the established leisure use (golf course) of the application site. **No further assessment is required.**

5.7 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.8 – Air pollution (nitrogen deposition)**: The heathland habitats on which the SPA bird species depend are susceptible to change as a consequence of nutrient nitrogen and acid deposition from atmospheric pollution arising from point and diffuse sources. Traffic from the proposed development has the potential to contribute to nutrient nitrogen and acid deposition on parts of the SPA situated close to the identified HGV routes. **Further assessment is required.**

5.8 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.9 – Qualifying feature location, extent and condition unknown**: The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SPA. No project activities would be undertaken on land within the SPA and the scheme would not contribute to improved monitoring of the SPA bird species within the designated site. **No further assessment is required.**

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5.9 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.9 – Military site management**: The Ministry of Defence (MoD) owns parts of the SPA complex, including much of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component. Future MoD decisions as to the management and use of the SSSI and SPA would be unaffected by the development proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185. The construction phase would be of short duration (2 years) following which the land would revert to its established leisure use (golf course). **No further assessment is required.**

5.10 **Threat/Pressure SIP No.10 – Habitat fragmentation**: The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SPA. No additional road or footway links would be created across designated land as part of the proposed development and no land within the SPA would be required to enable the development proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185. **No further assessment is required.**

5-C Appropriate assessment

Disturbance / Effects on qualifying features (SIP Threat/Pressures No.1 and No.9)

5.11 The western part of the application site is immediately south of the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI component of the SPA. The proposal would involve the import and deposit of inert materials and soils, and the on-site excavation and re-placement of soils, which activities have the potential to generate noise and visual disturbance (due to the movements of vehicle, plant and equipment). Noise and other disturbance could impact on the SPA bird species with respect to feeding, roosting, breeding and nesting behaviours.

5.12 The application site is separated from the adjoining part of the SPA by hedgerows and trees within the SPA area. No removal of trees or hedgerows is proposed along the boundary with the SPA, which would provide screening of the SPA bird species and their favoured habitats from noise and visual intrusion.

5.13 The proposal provides for deployment of a construction environmental management plan (CEMP), which would include measures to avoid and suppress emissions of noise and the incidence of activities that could be visually intrusive throughout the construction phase of the scheme. Implementation of the proposed CEMP would protect the SPA bird and their habitats from noise and visual intrusion.

5.14 Taking account of the physical relationship of the application site and the SPA, the short-term and temporary nature of the construction phase, and the proposed implementation of a CEMP, no likely significant effects on the SPA bird species would arise from noise or visual disturbance. On a

precautionary basis it is recommended the proposed CEMP be secured by planning condition.

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Air pollution (SIP Threat/Pressure No.8)

5.15 The likely effects of HGV emissions on the Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI and the Colony Bog and Bagshot Heaths SSSI components of the SPA are assessed in paragraphs 418 to 4.23 of this report. A conclusion of no likely significant effects was reached, with the proposed HGV route and CTMP to be secured by condition as a precaution.

5.16 The proposed northern route and southern route for HGVs pass within 200 metres of the Whitmoor Common SSSI, part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA not covered by the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC. The only section of the A322 passing within 200 metres of Whitmoor Common SSSI is that between Cumbernauld Avenue in Guildford and the B380. The expected temporary change in vehicle movements from the 5-year mean AADT for that section of the A322 arising from the project's construction traffic would be in the range of 0.6-0.8%.

5.17 The SPA bird species are not considered sensitive to the impacts that changes in ammonia levels or sulphur dioxide levels can have on their heathland habitats. The main pollutant of concern is nutrient nitrogen deposition, for which the critical load range is 5-15 kg/N/ha/yr. Background levels for those parts of Whitmoor Common SSSI within 200 metres of the A322 are in the range 11.8 to 12.1 kg/N/ha/yr, within the critical load range.

5.18 The scheme would result in relatively small changes in traffic movements on those sections of the A322 close to the SPA. Those movements would arise during the 2-year construction period and would therefore be temporary and short-term. Background air quality within the components of the SPA close to the A322 currently falls within the relevant critical load or level ranges for nutrient nitrogen. Considering those facts, it is concluded the scheme would not result in likely significant effects on the SPA due to changes in air quality. On a precautionary basis the proposed Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) and HGV route should be secured by planning condition.

5-D Conclusion

5.19 The development proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185 would not result in or contribute to 'likely significant effects' on any part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. On a precautionary basis the controls listed below should be secured by planning condition or legal agreement. Implementation of the project, including the specified

mitigation measures, would not prevent attainment of the stated conservation objectives for the SPA.

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- Disturbance of SPA bird species – In line with Natural England's advice mitigation to prevent likely significant effects from noise and disturbance during construction should be secured in the form of a CEMP.

- Vehicle emissions – The HGV routing plan proposed by the applicant should be secured as part of the CTMP by condition or legal agreement as appropriate for any planning permission granted.

6. Habitats Regulations Assessment Conclusion

6.1 This Habitat Regulations assessment considered the potential for the development proposed in planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185 (ref. GU/24/CON/00011) to give rise, alone or in-combination, to likely significant effects on one SPA and one SAC.

6.2 **Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC**: For this SAC, designated for its wet and dry heathland and bog habitats, this HRA concludes there would be no likely significant effects from implementation of the project proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185. On a precautionary basis the controls listed below being secured by planning condition or legal agreement.

6.3 Dust deposition – In line with Natural England's advice mitigation to prevent likely significant effects from dust deposition during construction should be secured in the form of a dust management plan.

6.4 Invasive plant species – In line with the recommendations of this assessment and the comments of the County ecologist a pre-commencement condition should be attached to any permission granted requiring the submission for approval of an invasive plant species management plan.

6.5 Vehicle emissions – The HGV routing plan proposed by the applicant should be secured as part of the CTMP by condition or legal agreement as appropriate for any planning permission granted.

6.6 **Thames Basin Heaths SPA**: For this SPA, designated for its breeding populations of European nightjar, Woodlark and Dartford warbler, this HRA concludes there would be no likely significant effects from implementation of the project proposed under planning application SCC ref. 2023-0185. On a precautionary basis the controls listed below being secured by planning condition or legal agreement.

6.7 Disturbance of SPA bird species – In line with Natural England's advice mitigation to prevent likely significant effects from noise and disturbance during construction should be secured in the form of a CEMP.

6.8 Vehicle emissions – The HGV routing plan proposed by the applicant should be secured as part of the CTMP by condition or legal agreement as appropriate for any planning permission granted.

Report prepared by: Dr Jessica Salder MIEnvSc MIEMA CEnv, Principal Environmental Assessment Officer, Surrey County Council

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Annex 1: European Site Citations

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Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC

Site Description

The heathland is a series of large fragments of previously more continuous areas and is principally dominated by heather – dwarf gorse (*Calluna vulgaris – Ulex minor*) dry heathland. There are transitions to wet heath and valley mire, scrub, woodland and acid grassland, including types rich in annual plants. This habitat supports an important assemblage of animal species, including numerous rare and local invertebrate species, including the nationally rare white-faced darter *Leuccorhinia dubia*, as well as sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* and smooth snake *Coronella austriaca*.

This site supports the sole area of lowland northern Atlantic wet heath in south-east England. The wet heath at Thursley is mainly cross-leaved heath – bog-moss (*Erica tetralix – Sphagnum compactum*) and contains several rare plants, including great sundew *Drosera anglica*, bog hair-grass *Deschampsia setacea*, bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* and brown beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca*.

Depressions on peat substrates are widespread, both in bog pools, mires and in flushes where they occur as part of a mosaic associated with valley bog and wet heath. They show extensive representation of brown-beak sedge and are also important for great sundew and bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa*.

Qualifying Habitats

The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*
- European dry heaths
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*. (Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath)

Thames Basin Heaths SPA

Site Description

The Thames Basin Heaths SPA is a composite site that is located across the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire in southern England. It encompasses all or parts of Ash to Brookwood Heaths Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Bourley and Long Valley SSSI, Bramshill SSSI, Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI, Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI, Chobham Common SSSI, Colony Bog and Bagshot Heaths SSSI, Eelmoor Marsh SSSI, Hazeley Heath SSSI, Horsell Common SSSI, Ockham and Wisley Commons SSSI, Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths SSSI and Whitmoor Common SSSI.

The open heathland habitats overlie sand and gravel sediments which give rise to sandy or peaty acidic soils, supporting dry heathy vegetation on well-drained slopes, wet heath on low-lying shallow slopes and bogs in valleys.

The site consists of tracts of heathland, scrub and woodland, once almost continuous, but now fragmented into separate blocks by roads, urban development and farmland. Less open habitats of scrub, acidic woodland and conifer plantations dominate, within which are scattered areas of open heath and mire. The site supports important breeding populations of a number of birds of lowland heathland, especially nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and woodlark *Lullula arborea*, both of which nest on the ground, often at the woodland/heathland edge, and Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*, which often nests in gorse *Ulex* sp.

Scattered trees and scrub are used for roosting. Together with the nearby Ashdown Forest and Wealden Heaths SPAs, the Thames Basin Heaths form part of a complex of heathlands in southern England that support important breeding bird populations.

Qualifying Species

The site qualifies under **article 4.1** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by 1% or more of the Great Britain populations of the following species listed in Annex I in any season:

- Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* - 264 churring males – breeding (1998/99) - 7.8% of GB population
- Woodlark *Lullula arborea* - 149 pairs – breeding (1997) - 9.9% of GB population
- Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata* - 445 pairs – breeding (1999) - 27.8% of GB population

Non-qualifying species of interest

Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, merlin *Falco columbarius*, short-eared owl *Asio flammeus* and kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (all Annex I species) occur in non-breeding numbers of less than European importance (less than 1% of the GB population).

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