

MdeC/1164

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Dear Sir/Madam

The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

Request for Screening Opinion - Construction of an irrigation reservoir to store water for agricultural spray irrigation - Land at Binton Farm, Binton GU10 1LQ

We write on behalf of Hall Hunter Partnership to request a screening opinion in relation to the above development. This letter and the accompanying plans seek to provide the necessary background information to allow the local planning authority to provide a screening opinion.

In addition to this letter, the following information is submitted:

- Site location plan
- Location aerial photograph
- Reservoir layout and section
- Reservoir layout (superimposed on aerial photograph) and section

The proposed development falls within Column 1, 10(i) of Schedule 2 of the Regulations (dams and other installations designed to hold water or store it on a long-term basis). The proposal exceeds the 1 ha threshold in Column 2. A screening opinion from the local planning authority is therefore required. The need for an EIA is therefore dependent on whether the development is likely to result in significant environmental effects.

The EIA Regulations require a local planning authority, when considering the requirement for EIA, to consider the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the Regulations including:

- the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
- the nature of the impact;
- the transboundary nature of the impact;
- the intensity and complexity of the impact;
- the probability of the impact;

- the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;
- the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development;
- the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

Location of the Development

The site forms part of Binton Farm which lies to the south of Sandy Cross. The western boundary of the farm is defined by Binton Lane and woodland, and the eastern boundary is defined by Elstead Road. The North Downs Way runs along the northern edge of the farm. To the south is Binton Farmhouse and cottages. The farm is accessed by road from Binton Lane.

Description of Site

The location of the proposed site forms part of larger field which is currently in arable production. The field boundaries are defined by hedgerows and a woodland block stands to its western side. The proposed site is the lowest point of the field. The land is classified as Grade 3 Bargate sand. The farm is accessed by road from Binton Lane.

The site lies within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and therefore lies in a “sensitive area” as defined in Section 2(1) of the Regulations. There are no other environmental designations relating to the land and no listed buildings in the vicinity of the site.

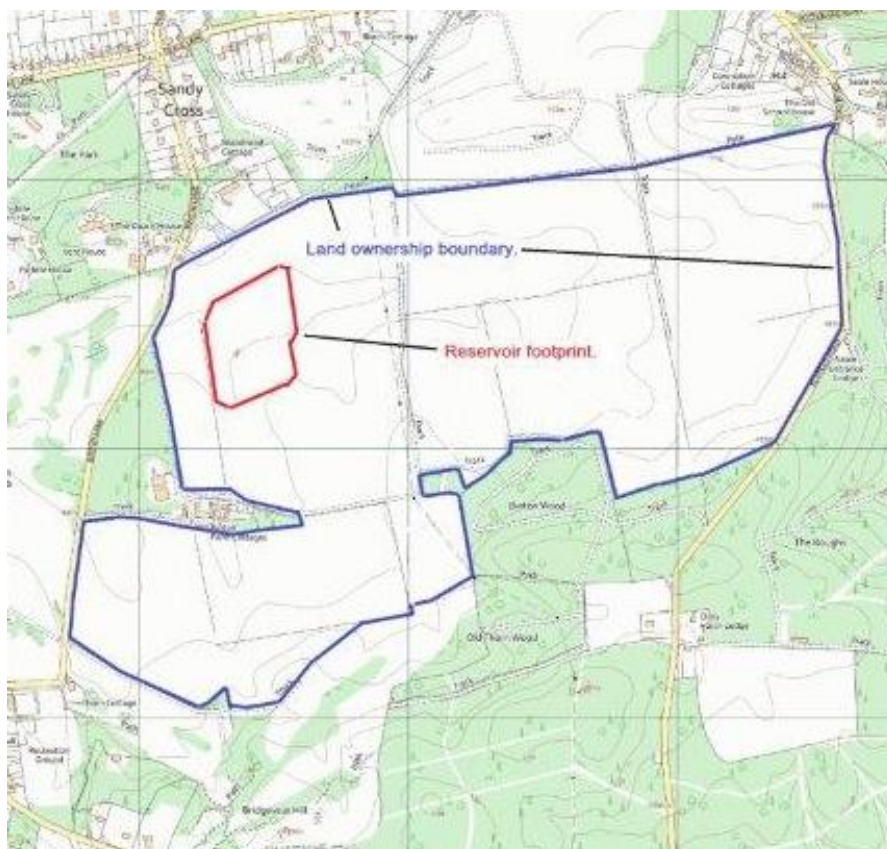


Figure.1 – Site location

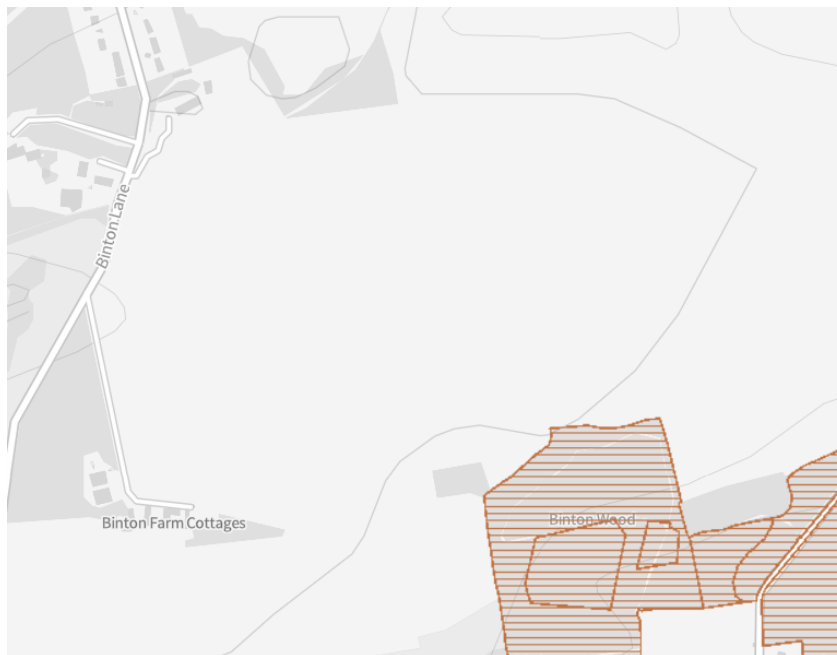


Figure.2 – Location of Ancient Woodland to the south of Binton Farm shaded brown (Source Magic Mapping)

Description of Development

The proposed reservoir would cover an area of 2 ha and would have a capacity of 100,000m³ of water up to 7.1 metres in depth. The reservoir would be constructed above ground water level and would involve a balanced cut and fill operation. Construction would take about 6 weeks to complete.

An outflow pipe would be installed to control the water level within reservoir. The reservoir would be formed by depositing excavated sub-soil to form the bunding. Topsoil would be removed prior to excavation and re-used on the bunding and seeded with grass (a healthy grass sward, across the crest and outside banks, is an integral part of the design as this prevents run off erosion, attenuates direct rainfall and promotes dew fall reducing the desiccation cracking of the crest and banks during drought years).

The reservoir would be filled via an existing irrigation pipe which links to a borehole from where water is extracted. (EA licence serial number 28/39/30/0411/R01). The EA licence allows abstraction for spray irrigation from 1st March to 31st October inclusive and allows the abstraction of up to 1000m³ per day or 136,380m³ per annum.

The reservoir would be used to spray a blueberry crop during periods of frost to prevent crop damage/loss of the crop particularly in the spring. This requires large quantities of water. The reservoir would provide water security for the farming operations on the land in the long term.

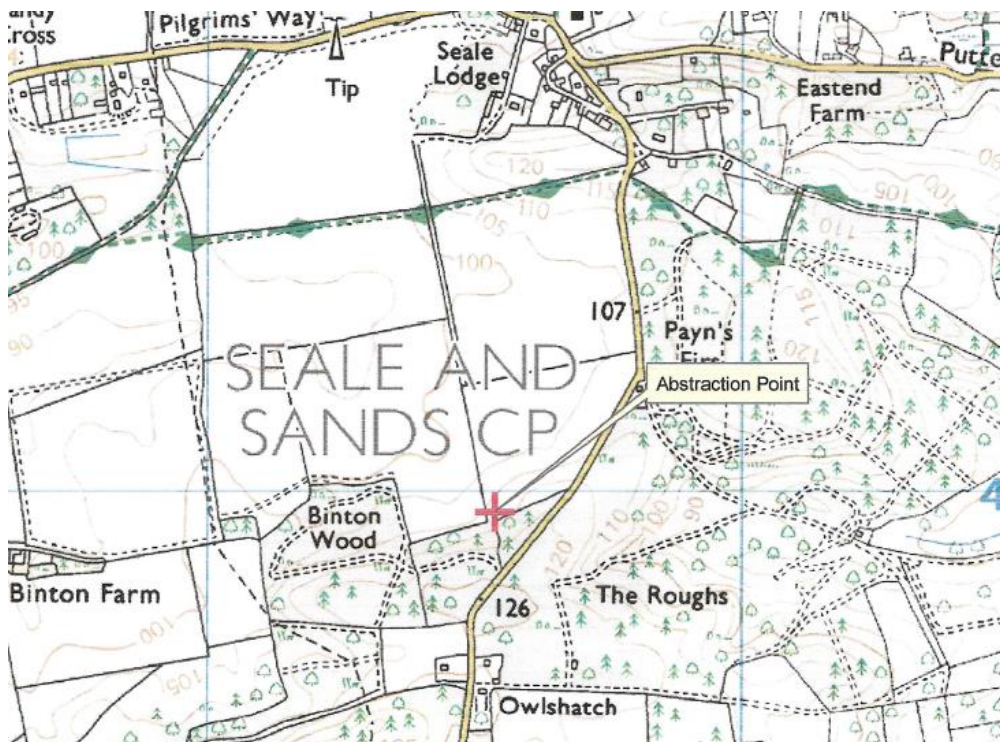


Figure.3 – Location water abstraction point

Potential effects of the Development

Landscape/Visual – The Guildford Landscape Assessment identifies the site as lying with the L1: Shackleford Open Greensands Hills character area. This is described in the Assessment as “...*largely open farmland, with pastures predominating to the north where the landform is more intricate and steeply sloping and a higher proportion of arable fields on the more level ground to the south.*” The proposal would be consistent with the landscape character because views across the land towards Binton Farm buildings from the North Downs Way would remain open and unobstructed (see proposed north-south section and Photograph 1 below).

Our client met with Clive Smith, Surrey Hills Planning Advisor, to discuss the siting of the reservoir. This resulted in the reservoir being sited in the proposed location to make best use of the natural contours of the land to minimise the amount of earth movement required. Consequently, the proposed siting sits within a natural depression. The impact on views of the facility from the North Downs Way are therefore minimised. There are no views across the field from Binton Lane to the west which is sunken.

In view of the above, is it not considered that the reservoir would have a significant effect on the landscape and visual qualities of the AONB.

Air Quality - Within the specification for the works a vacuum tanker would be used during the construction phase. This has two roles. Firstly, the tanker is able to suck up standing water after heavy rain, and secondly, it can discharge water when dust suppression is required. Dust control is a requirement of safe working as reduced visibility slows production and is unsafe. A water supply is available to fill the tanker if required.

There would be no ongoing requirement for dust mitigation following the completion of the construction phase.

It is therefore considered that the construction of the reservoir would not have a significant effect on air quality or the amenities of residents to the north and recreational users of the North Downs Way.



Photo.1 – View from North Downs Way looking south across site of proposed reservoir towards Binton Farm Cottage
(the bare soil area indicates the approximate siting of the reservoir)

Noise - Plant machinery would only be operated during normal working hours 8 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday and 8 am to 1 pm on Saturdays, with no working on Sundays or recognised Bank Holidays

during the construction phase (limited to about 6 weeks). Noise would be restricted to the operation of the earth moving plant and associated equipment during the construction phase. Noise suppression

would be provided by using the new generation earth moving equipment which uses the diesel engines to generate electricity, the plant is then driven by a variable speed electric motor with much reduced noise when compared with conventional diesel and gearbox powered plant. For a majority of the construction period the plant will be working within the surrounding reservoir banks which results in most of the plant noise being deflected upward rather than laterally.

Plant would be retained on site for the duration of the construction phase and there would be no transportation of spoil from the site. There would be no noise impact following completion of the construction phase.

It is therefore considered that noise during the construction of the reservoir would not result in a significant effect on the amenity of nearby residents and recreational users of the North Downs Way.

Hydrology - A site investigation has been completed to identify ground conditions and ground water levels determined. Long term monitoring of ground water levels has identified the likely upper bound ground water levels as it is not possible to construct a reservoir with a floor below ground water level. The floor will therefore be constructed above ground water level. Consequently, the stored water within the reservoir will be hydrologically discrete from the ground water and at no time during construction would plant work close to ground water levels. Indeed, heavy earthmoving equipment would be unable to work in such conditions. As such there would be no obstruction or influence on the movement of groundwater below the reservoir.

The reservoir would have an outflow which would allow water to be released from the reservoir during a major storm event. A non-impounding reservoir as proposed would result in less run off than the green field site pre-construction.

A non-impounding reservoir is simply a water storage facility surrounded by an engineered hydraulic cut off. No river or rainfall catchment is restricted in any way. Extreme weather or river flooding does not need to be addressed in its design as such events cannot influence its integrity.

Due to the theoretical possibility of a non-impounding reservoir causing an uncontrolled release of water, all large reservoirs of this type within the UK are subject to the legislation of the 1975 Reservoirs Act as amended by the 2010 Water Act.

During design, construction and operation the reservoir is subjected to the scrutiny of an engineer who can be on the Non-Impounding Panel within the ambit of the legislation. A Non-Impounding Panel Engineer will provide regular certification, a process enforced by the Environment Agency. Every reservoir of this type also has a minimum of one annual safety inspection.

The design would fall within the ambit of the 1975 Reservoirs Act as amended by the 2010 Water Act, as such all designs and construction will be subject to statutory independent review, construction inspection and certification. The completed reservoir will be subject to statutory annual safety inspections.

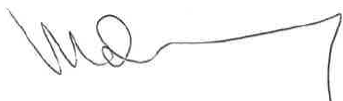
Therefore, it is considered that the reservoir would not have a significant effect on the hydrology of the area.

Conclusions

In view of the above it is considered that the proposed reservoir is unlikely to have significant adverse effects on the environment.

Should additional information be required to assist the Authority in assessing the proposal please do not hesitate to contact the writer.

Yours faithfully



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