PROPOSED VIEWING PLATFORM

IRCHESTER COUNTRY PARK, GIPSY LANE, LITTLE IRCHESTER, WELLINGBOROUGH, NN29 7DL

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
1 INTRODUCTION

The Proposal

1.1 This Planning Application is submitted to Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) on behalf of the Property Services Department at the Council (Regulation 3 Planning Application) for the construction of a viewing platform at Irchester Country Park, Gipsy Lane, Little Irchester, Wellingborough.

1.2 The development will consist of a galvanised steel viewing arm and cabin. The cabin will measure approximately 6.6 metres in length x 3.6 metres in width by 4 metres in height (to the roof top) and in part will include corten pre-rusted steel panels to the elevations and roof. The galvanised steel viewing arm will measure approximately 9.6 metres in length x 1.8 metres in width.

1.3 The galvanised steel cabin will be constructed with concrete foundations and will be erected on a concrete pad. The viewing arm will be supported by galvanised steel twin support arms and will be set within a concrete foundation pad. Pulley wheels (four) including steel cabling will be fixed above the viewing platform.

1.4 The galvanised steel viewing platform will cover an area of approximately 0.01 hectares and the general location of the proposed development is shown on drawing no. GPP/NCC/ICP/16/01 titled Site Location Plan, and the Application Site is edged red on drawing nos. GPP/NCC/ICP/16/02 titled Site Plan and GPP/NCC/ICP/16/03 titled Site Layout Plan.

1.5 This proposal is part of a wider Heritage Lottery funded project which aims to protect and enhance the geological, industrial and wildlife attributes of the Country Park. The viewing platform is intended to be an interpretation feature within a wider ironstone heritage trail. Other elements of the wider project include the restoration of limestone grassland on the quarry banks.

1.6 The Planning Application submission includes the following information, documents and drawings:

- Planning Application Form (1APP);
- Supporting Planning Statement;
- Site Location Plan;
- Site Plan;
- Site Layout Plan;
- Viewing Point Layout;
- Axonometric Views; and
- Ecological Method Statement.

2 THE APPLICATION SITE AND ITS SETTING

Site Description

2.1 Irchester Country Park occupies a spur of high ground on the south-east side of the River Nene some 2km to the south-east of Wellingborough, due west of Rushden. More locally, the Country
Park is situated to the north-west of Irchester, immediately south of Higham Road (the A45) and due east of the A509.

2.2 The Country Park occupies an area of approximately 83 hectares and has been subject to extensive quarrying, initially for limestone and later ironstone, conducted during the early and mid-20th Century. The resultant landscape is a particular feature of the park and one which is of industrial archaeological interest, most notably the extensive ‘hill and dale’ spoil earthworks and the deep gullet with its former quarry face.

2.3 The proposed development will be located towards the south-eastern boundary of the Country Park and will facilitate views from within the viewing platform towards what was the working face of the former ironstone quarry.

2.4 The extent of the Application Site is shown on drawing no. GPP/NCC/ICP/16/02 titled Site Plan.

Designations

Historic Designations

2.5 The following historic designations are located within a 1km radius from the centre of the Country Park:

Scheduled Monuments

- Roman town of Irchester and preceding Iron Age settlement; including remains of the medieval hamlet of Chester on the Water;

Listed Building(s)

- Poplar Barn (Grade II);
- Chester House and the attached cottage to the east including attached walls to the south and west (Grade II*);
- Kitchen garden walls approximately 20 metres south-west of Chester House; and
- Cartsheds approximately 80 metres south-east of Chester House.

Ecological/Geological Designations

2.6 The following landscape/ecological designations are located within a 1km radius from the centre of the Country Park:

Ramsar Sites

- Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits;

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

- Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits;

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

- Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits;
Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

- Irchester Country Park;
- Irchester Country Park West; and
- Irchester Disused Quarry ‘Potential Wildlife Site’.

Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS)

- The Quarry or "Wembley Pit" – RIGS site no. W.3

Public Rights of Way

2.7 The development will not adversely affect or obstruct access into or through the Country Park.

3 PLANNING POLICY

Introduction

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that determination of a Planning Application must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan

3.2 This section provides an indication of the main Development Plan policies that are relevant to the determination of this Planning Application. The Development Plan in this instance consists of:

- Northamptonshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan adopted October 2014;
- North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (NNCSS) adopted June 2008;
- North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) – Proposed Main Modifications to the Submitted Plan – February 2016; and
- Borough of Wellingborough Local Plan ‘Saved’ Policies adopted April 1999.

3.3 The Minerals and Waste Local Plan (MWLP) sets out the strategy, policies and locations for minerals and waste development in the county to 2031. The MWLP is in the process of being updated in order to ensure that it remains up to date, the focus being to review all sites and allocations within it.

3.4 The Draft Plan was approved at Cabinet on 10 November 2015 and consultation commenced on 3 December 2015 for 10 weeks until 11 February 2016. All representations made are now being analysed by the Council and the next stage will be the final Draft Plan which is programmed to go to Cabinet on 10 May 2016 with a further consultation window commencing later that month.

3.5 The alterations, amendments and modifications as proposed by the Council do not affect the development as proposed, Application Site or general locality.

3.6 Therefore, the main planning policies that are relevant to the proposed development are as follows:


**Northamptonshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan**

**Policy 28 – Restoration and After-Use**

3.7 "All minerals and waste related development of a temporary nature must ensure that the site is progressively restored to an acceptable condition and stable landform.

3.8 The after-use of the site will be determined in relation to its land use context, the surrounding environmental character and any specific local requirements, but on the basis that it:

- Enhances biodiversity, the local environment and amenity, and
- Benefits the local community and/or economy.

3.9 The restoration of minerals and waste sites should meet the following requirements (where appropriate):

- Sites previously comprising high-grade agricultural land or good quality forestry use should be restored to the original land use and coupled with a secondary after-use objective;
- Precedence should be given to the establishment of Biodiversity Action Plan habitat, strategic biodiversity networks, promotion of geodiversity and enhancement of the historic environment and heritage assets where the specific conditions occur that favour such after-use objectives;
- Sites connecting or adjacent to identified habitat areas should be restored in a manner which promotes habitat enhancement in line with Biodiversity Action Plan targets and green infrastructure plans;
- Sites located near to areas identified as lacking recreational facilities should be restored in a manner that promotes such opportunities; and
- In specific instances, and where fully in accordance with policies in other local plans in Northamptonshire, sites may be restored in a manner that promotes economic opportunities”.

**Policy 30 – Sustainable Design and Use of Resources**

3.10 "New built development should seek to utilise the efficient use of resources in both its construction and its operation”.

**North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy**

**Policy 13 – General Sustainable Development Principles**

3.11 Seeks a high standard of design, architecture and landscaping and requires new development to both respect and enhance the character of the site and its setting.

**North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) – Proposed Main Modifications to the Submitted Plan – February 2016**

**Policy 1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development**

3.12 "When considering development proposals the Local Planning Authority will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the
Planning Statement / TFC

20/04/16

National Planning Policy Framework...and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area”.

Policy 7 – Community Services and Facilities

3.13 "Development should support and enhance community services and facilities where appropriate...not resulting in a net loss of open space, allotments, sports and recreation buildings and land, including playing fields”.

Borough of Wellingborough Local Plan ‘Saved’ Policies

Policy G6 – Open Countryside

3.14 "Development in the Open Countryside will not be granted planning permission unless:

1. It cannot be accommodated other than in the Open Countryside;
2. It involves no more than a limited number of buildings or structures and these are small scale;
3. It includes landscape screening, as appropriate, and all buildings and structures are designed, sited and of materials to minimise adverse impact upon the intrinsic character of the countryside;
4. It will neither individually nor cumulatively with existing or proposed development, result in a local proliferation of new buildings or structures;
5. When it involves a use which is principally to serve the town, it is located in immediate proximity to existing or proposed urban development; and
6. It will not result in the urban growth of Northampton to its east or Wellingborough to its west”.

Policy G16 – Art

3.15 "Planning permission will be granted for public works of art where such works will not detract from the character of the local environment”.

Policy G18 – Sites of Nature Conservation

3.16 "Planning permission will not be given for development which would adversely affect a site designated as a 'Site of Nature Conservation Value’ on the Proposals Map, except where there is no suitable alternative site for the development and the proposal includes satisfactory mitigating measures to reduce its impact upon the special interest of the site”.

Other Relevant Documents

3.17 This section provides an indication of the other main relevant documents that have been considered and assessed in the preparation of this Planning Application. They are as follows:


National Planning Policy Framework

3.18 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced into the Planning System in March 2012. It sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
3.19 The NPPF sets out economic, environmental and social policies. Taken together, these policies articulate the Government’s vision of sustainable development, which should be interpreted and applied locally to meet local aspirations.

3.20 The NPPF replaces a variety of Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance documents, which are listed in Annex 3 of the NPPF.

3.21 Paragraph 7 of the NPPF outlines that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental and that these dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

- An economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; by identifying and co-ordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;

- A social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of the present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community’s needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and

- An environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

3.22 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and Paragraph 14 states that for decision-taking this means:

3.23 "Approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay: and

3.24 Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting planning permission unless:

- Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or

- Specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted”.

4 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 This Planning Application proposes the construction of a viewing platform which will overlook the disused quarry gullet towards the south-eastern edge of Irchester Country Park, Wellingborough.

4.2 The viewing platform will comprise of a covered shelter and gantry that extends beyond the crest of the quarry slope. The viewing platform will not be lit.

4.3 The Country Park was opened in 1971 and is one of the most visited countryside attractions in the East Midlands. Facilities include extensive car parking areas, play areas, picnic meadows, a
visitor centre and toilets. The restored ironstone quarry comprises approximately 83 hectares of mixed plantation woodland, scrub and amenity grassland. The woodlands are intersected by a network of both formal and informal paths which provide unrestricted access throughout the site.

4.4 The proposed development is part of a wider Heritage Lottery funded project which aims to protect and enhance the geological, industrial and wildlife attributes of the Country Park. The viewing platform is intended to be an interpretation feature within a wider ironstone heritage trail. Other elements of the wider project include the restoration of limestone grassland on the quarry banks.

4.5 Policy 28 (Restoration and After-Use) of the MWLP aspires for the after-use of former mineral workings to ‘enhance biodiversity, the local environment and amenity’ and to ensure that the development ‘benefits the local community and/or economy’. The viewing platform is part of a wider programme to enrich the biodiversity and the amenity attributes of the Country Park, and will benefit the local and surrounding community providing an attraction which will help to ensure the economic sustainability of the site.

4.6 In addition, Policy 7 (Community Services and Facilities) of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy states that ‘development should support and enhance community services and facilities where appropriate’. The development as proposed will both support and enhance community facilities within the locality and is therefore also fully compliant with Saved Policy 7 (Community Services and Facilities) of the Wellingborough Local Plan.

4.7 The addition of a viewing platform at the Country Park will add to the overall experience of the visitor, providing not only exceptional views across the disused quarry gullet but will also offer an educational experience through the use of informative display boards.

4.8 Irchester Country Park, a former ironstone/limestone quarry has now been fully restored and has been open to the public since the 1970s. By definition the Country Park is located within the Open Countryside whereby new development must comply with Saved Policy G6 (Open Countryside) of the Wellingborough Local Plan.

4.9 The viewing platform is very much relevant to its immediate setting and could not feasibly be located elsewhere beyond the limits to the Open Countryside. The development is considered to be of a size and scale which is proportionate to the end use, whilst ensuring the safety of the end user. The Application Site is well screened by existing vegetation and will not be visible from beyond the site boundary of the Country Park.

4.10 The development will not create a local proliferation of new buildings or structures, and will not result in the urban growth of Northampton to its east or Wellingborough to its west. As such, it is considered that the development is fully compliant with Saved Policy G6 (Open Countryside) of the Wellingborough Local Plan.

4.11 Careful thought has been given to the design of the viewing platform including construction materials to be used. A local Architect has ensured design compatibility with the locality, which includes consideration of the site history and the wider locality.

4.12 The viewing platform has been designed to replicate an excavator that would have been operational during the extraction of ironstone/limestone from the site. Details in relation to design are shown on drawing no. 301/sk031 titled Axonometric Views.
4.13 Given the history of the site and the efforts made through design to resemble that history, the development is in many respects a piece of art work. Saved Policy G16 (Art) of the Wellingborough Local Plan states that ‘planning permission will be granted for public works of art where such works will not detract from the character of the local environment’.

4.14 The viewing platform will enhance the locality through visual art, will promote the history of the site offering educational benefits and will contribute positively to the wider visitor experience.

4.15 As such, the development is fully compliant with Policy 30 (Sustainable Design and Use of Resources) of the MWLP and Saved Policy G16 (Art) of the Wellingborough Local Plan.

4.16 As part of the Planning Application an Ecological Assessment has been undertaken by R.S. Brayshaw Ecological Consultancy in order to assess the potential ecological impacts of the development, a copy of which is included within Appendix 1 of this Planning Statement.

4.17 The Assessment identifies that the Application Site is located within a non-statutory Local Wildlife Site and on the edge of a non-statutory Regionally Important Geological Site, and the boundaries of the two sites overlap. However, the Assessment through appropriate field survey work and evaluation has concluded that:

"The proposed development is not within a sensitive location of either site and there will be no adverse impacts due to the current high levels of disturbance and the degraded nature of the habitat of the development site.

There are unlikely to be any adverse impacts on protected and locally notable species. However, the implementation of the working method, principally to address potential issues associated with great crested newts, but also benefiting other species, will ensure that this is the case”.

4.18 It has been concluded by the Applicant’s professional Ecologist that subject to the implementation of appropriate working methods, then the development will not result in a net loss of biodiversity at the Country Park.

4.19 One of the management objectives of the wider site aspires to both conserve and enhance biodiversity within the Country Park. Additional habitat works associated with the wider project will result in an overall increase in the extent of well-managed limestone grassland which will in turn benefit a wide range of associated species.

4.20 As such the development fully complies with Policy 28 (Restoration and After-Use) of the MWLP and Saved Policy G18 (Sites of Nature Conservation) of the Wellingborough Local Plan.

4.21 Having assessed the aspirations of the MWLP, general location, design and ecological impacts of the development, it is considered that the development as proposed is supported by Policy 28 and 30 of the MWLP, Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy, Policy 1 and 7 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy and Saved Policy G6, G16 and G18 of the Wellingborough Local Plan.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 This Planning Application proposes the construction of a viewing platform at Irchester Country Park, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.
5.2 The development has been designed to replicate an old drag-line or excavator which would have been operational within the site when an active ironstone/limestone quarry. In addition, educational display boards will add to the visitor experience.

5.3 The Country Park over time has become a haven for both flora and fauna to the extent whereby it is now recognised as a Local Wildlife Site. The underlying geology and its exposure across parts of the site, has resulted in the Country Park being recognised as a Regionally Important Geological Site.

5.4 The Heritage Lottery funded project will enhance biodiversity beyond the Application Site and will introduce an additional visitor attraction in the form of a viewing platform, which will showcase the former quarry face and its geological richness/importance.

5.5 An Ecological Assessment of the Application Site (approximately 96m²) has confirmed that subject to the implementation of appropriate working methods, then the development will not result in a net loss of biodiversity at the Country Park.

5.6 Given the natural/worked topography of the site including the presence of extensive mature vegetation, then visually the viewing platform will be very much ‘contained’ within its immediate setting and will not be a detriment to the immediate or surrounding landscape.

5.7 The development is considered to be ‘sustainable’ development with minimal impacts on the open countryside. The wider project will enhance and improve the biodiversity at the Country Park and the attraction can be enjoyed and utilised by the local and surrounding community. Maintaining/improving visitor numbers will help to ensure the future economic viability of the site.

5.8 It is considered that the proposal will not give rise to unacceptable environmental effects and that the potential benefits of the scheme outweigh any negative harm that may be brought about by the proposal. In this regard, the proposal is considered to be compliant with the Development Plan and the NPPF.
Irchester Country Park,
Nr Wellingborough,
Northamptonshire

Proposed Viewing Platform:
Ecological Assessment

April 2016

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Disclaimer
Ecological surveys can only provide an assessment of a site at the time the survey was undertaken. The results of a survey and historical biological data can be used as evidence to draw conclusions as to the likely presence or absence of a particular species, population size, likely successional changes and the potential impacts of future development. However, the prevailing weather conditions, seasonality and the accessibility of the survey area may influence the results and consequently any survey cannot be regarded as definitive or complete.

Every effort has been made to provide an accurate assessment of the ecological condition of the survey site and the habitats and species that are or may be present. However, no liability can be assumed for omissions or changes that have occurred after the work was undertaken.
1 INTRODUCTION

This Ecological Assessment Statement has been commissioned by First for Wellbeing CIS to support a planning application for the construction of a viewing platform overlooking the disused quarry gullet at Irchester Country Park, Northamptonshire.

1.1 Assessment Methodology

The potential ecological impact of the proposed development has been assessed by a combination of reference to existing biological information and field survey. Initially a data search was used to identify any known important habitats and species. A field survey was then undertaken to provide current biological information for development site.

This report outlines the biological information that was gathered, it goes on to assess the value of the biodiversity features identified and to evaluate the potential impact of the proposed development upon them. Finally measures for avoiding and reducing impacts and related biodiversity enhancements are outlined where necessary.
2 THE SITE, LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

2.1 The Site
Irchester Country Park is located to the south west of Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. It is a restored ironstone quarry which now comprises 83 hectares of mixed plantation woodland, scrub and amenity grassland. The Country Park was opened in 1971 and is one of the most visited countryside attractions in the East Midlands. Facilities include extensive car parking areas, play areas, picnic meadows, a visitor centre and toilets. The woodlands are intersected by an extensive network of formal and informal paths which provide unrestricted access throughout the site.

2.2 Location of Development
The proposal is to construct a new viewing platform that resembles one of the excavators that was used in the original quarrying operation. Fig 1 shows the location of the proposal.

![Fig 1. Location of the proposed viewing platform](image)

It is part of a wider Heritage Lottery funded project which aims to protect and enhance the geological, industrial and wildlife heritage of Irchester Country Park. This viewing platform is an interpretation feature within a wider Ironstone Heritage Trail. Other elements of the project include
the restoration of limestone grassland on the quarry banks through scrub control, under a five year plan devised by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, which will see significant habitat improvements in and around the development area.

2.3 Description of the Proposed Development

The viewing platform will comprise a covered metal shelter and gantry that extends beyond the crest of the quarry slope (See Fig 2). It will not be lit.

Fig 2. Artist’s impression of the proposed viewing platform
2.4 Construction Details

2.4.1 Timing and Extent

- Anticipated start date: September 2016.
- Total estimated construction time on site: 3 weeks
- Total working area including material store, parking and welfare facilities: 325m² / 0.0325 hectares (see Fig 3).

2.4.2 Outline Construction Method

NB. The metal superstructure (shelter and gantry) will be fabricated off-site in sections and delivered to site for assembly.

Access to/from the working area for construction traffic will be via the existing quarry road.

- Define the secure working area using Herras Fencing to include a section of the existing rolled-stone quarry road.
- Operating from within the secure working area, excavate footings (See Fig 4) to accommodate:
  - 1no. 3600mm x 1200mm x 800mm concrete pad (A),
  - 1no. 1500mm x 1500mm x 800mm concrete pad (B)
  - 1no. 5500mm x 400mm x 400mm ground beam to connect (A) and (B)
  - 2no. 1500mm x 1500mm x 600mm pads to support the gantry
- Stockpile all excavated material from the footings on the existing rolled-stone quarry road prior to removal from site.
- Locate fixing points for metal superstructure and lay pre-mixed concrete.
- Allow concrete to cure.
- Delivery of pre-fabricated metal superstructure to site by lorry with Hiab.
- Assemble metal superstructure and secure to concrete pads.
- Make good the working area.
- Remove Herras fencing.
- Completion of construction.

No formal landscaping, including seeding, will be undertaken. However, where necessary, following making-good by the contractor, the rangers will prepare a seed bed to encourage the natural regeneration of native vegetation.
Fig 3. Extent of secure working area (also see Fig 1)

Fig 4. Plans of the proposed viewing platform
3 DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

3.1 Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre Search

The primary source of biological data relating to the site is the Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre (NBRC). An earlier data request for biological information for the whole of Irchester Country Park was made to the NBRC. The information request included a search for:

- International and National Statutory Wildlife Sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI], Special Protection Areas [SPA], Ramsar Sites, National Nature Reserves [NNR] and Local Nature Reserves [LNR]);
- Local Non-statutory Wildlife Sites (Local Wildlife Sites [LWS], Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites [RIGS], Protected Wildflower Verges [PWV] and Pocket Parks);
- All protected and locally notable species records (including UK Biodiversity Action Plan [UKBAP], Northamptonshire Biodiversity Action Plan [LBAP] and Red Data Book [RDB] Species); and
- All other species records.

3.2 Designated Sites

All designated sites within the boundary of the country park are shown on the map in Fig 5.

3.2.1 Sites of International/National Importance

The proposed development is not within a site of international or national biodiversity importance. However, the nearest boundaries of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site and SSSI lie c1km to the north and c2.1km to the south west of the development location.

The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA/Ramsar Site is designated because the series of disused gravel workings support an internationally important assemblage of migratory waterbirds and internationally important wintering populations of several waterbird species.

3.2.2 Sites of County Importance

Sites of wildlife (or geological) importance in Northamptonshire, other than statutorily protected sites, are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) or Protected Wildflower Verges (PWV).

The proposed development is located in Irchester Country Park Local Wildlife Site. The description of the site states that the Irchester County Park Local Wildlife Site is:

*A large area of disused limestone quarry, most of which now has well-established conifer*
plantation or scrub. Some of the deeper gullies are flooded, with rabbit-grazed grassland and ruderal vegetation on the banks. The whole area is managed as a country park with full public access. The plantations are dominated by larch and Scot’s pine, with other species including sycamore, birch and hawthorn scrub. The most diverse wooded areas are the scrublands, which have aspen, crab apple, oak, poplar, ash, wayfaring tree, hawthorn, blackthorn and some sallow scrub. Grey sallow is most frequent around the damp or flooded areas of the gullies. Apart from some small mown areas the main grasslands are on the slopes of the deepest gullet, which runs to the south and east of the side. Species include abundant Linum catharticum, Lotus corniculatus, Agrimonia eupatoria, Tussilago farfara, Pilosella officinalis and Erigeron acer. Other species include Inula conyzae, Cirsium eriophorum, Dipsacus fullonum, Geranium dissectum, Cirsium arvensis, Conyza canadensis and the county rarity Carlina vulgaris. The pools in this and other gullies are well-established and contain frequent Potamogeton natans, Lemna minor and occasional emergents such as Mentha aquatica, Carex riparia, C. otrubae, Typha latifolia, Glyceria maxima, Juncus inflexus and Iris pseudacorus. Alisma plantago-aquatica is frequent in one of the pools. The largest lake within the site has rather disturbed edges in parts because of the large amount of ducks present. Other waterfowl are also frequent.

The data search also identified a further two locally important sites within the broad area of search - Irchester Country Park West Local Wildlife Site, which is located outside the country park, and Irchester Country Park RIGS – and another site that is potentially important - Irchester Disused Quarry Potential Wildlife Site. The Wildlife Site and Potential Wildlife Site, due to their distance from the development, will not be affected by the proposal, but the proposed development lies on the edge of the western boundary of Irchester Country Park RIGS so may have an impact on this site.

3.3 Protected and Locally Notable Species
The NBRC report identified only 38 individual records of 29 protected and locally notable species (mainly plants and birds) within Irchester Country Park and the surrounding area. Although none of the records were specific to the location of the proposed development those that may potentially be impacted by the proposals are great crested newt Triturus cristatus and badger Meles meles.

In addition to casual records of the above species, the rangers at Irchester Country Park have also recorded common lizard Zootoca vivipara and grass snake Natrix natrix in the quarry. Bats are also recorded in the woodland and quarry and, although the footprint of the development is small, nesting birds have the potential to be adversely affected by the development if the timing of the work is not carefully planned.
Local Wildlife Sites in the vicinity of the proposed development.

Fig 5. Local Wildlife Sites in the vicinity of the proposed development.
4 FIELD SURVEY

The desk based assessment identified that the proposed development is within Irchester Country Park Local Wildlife Site but, whilst it provided the available biodiversity information for Irchester Country Park as a whole, it did not identify any data specific to the development site.

Although the Local Wildlife Site comprises a number of habitats, due to the heavy recreational disturbance throughout the woodland, it was determined that the ecological field survey work should be concentrated on the immediate area of the development.

A walkover survey was conducted on 8 April 2016. The purpose of the survey was to record the vegetation to enable the production of an ecological description of the proposed development site and to determine the likely presence of any protected species.

4.1 Ecological Description of the Proposed Development Site

The proposed viewing platform will be located at an existing unsurfaced viewpoint on the plateau above the quarry and adjacent to the existing rolled-stone quarry road. The works to construct the concrete pads that will support the viewing gantry will extend beyond the quarry crest for a distance of approximately 10m. The quarry road is heavily used by visitors and the existing viewpoint is heavily trampled to the extent that the surface between the road and the edge of the quarry is primarily bare ground. The edge of the existing viewpoint is defined by a fence line with a locked gate to prevent access down the slope, however visitors have created an informal path around the fencing and a heavily eroded path leads down the slope to the base of the quarry. At the time of the survey visit the slope comprised mainly bare ground with some light scrub, including hawthorn Crataegus monogyna, dog rose Rosa canina and bramble Rubus fruticosus agg, and several flowering sweet violet Viola odorata. A small pile of fallen deadwood was found at the bottom on the slope. Several semi-mature larch Larix sp trees are located adjacent to, but outside, the working area all of which are in good condition without cracks and fissures that may support bats.

The light scrub on the slope within the working area was not in leaf at the time of the survey. It was inspected for evidence of breeding birds, but none was found. No evidence of badger activity was identified. It was too early in the year to determine the use of the area by reptiles.

The photographs below (Figs 6-11) were taken during the site survey and show the heavily eroded and disturbed nature of the development site.
Fig 6. The existing viewpoint from the quarry road.

Fig 7. The existing viewpoint and quarry road.

Fig 8. The quarry road.

Fig 9. The fencing on the quarry crest that defines the edge of the viewpoint.

Fig 10. The sparsely vegetated quarry slope.

Fig 11. The path leading from the viewpoint, through light scrub, down the quarry slope.
Several ponds are located in the Park and most are identified on Ordnance Survey mapping, but there is also a semi-permanent pond in the bottom of the quarry that is not. As great crested newts are found in all the ponds on the site (Countryside Services Manager pers comm) the location of the quarry pond was mapped to ensure that the Natural England Great Crested Newt Rapid Risk Assessment Tool could be used effectively to determine whether or not there were any great crested newt licencing requirements relating to the development proposals. The location of all the ponds in the vicinity of the development site, including the quarry pond, is shown in the Fig 12. The concentric red circles in Fig 12 show the 100m and 250m radii from the proposed viewing platform. The nearest pond is c220m from the edge of the fenced working area.

Fig 12. Pond locations in relation to the development site. Concentric circles in red mark 100m and 250m radii from the development.
5 ECOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND PREDICTED IMPACTS

Potential significant impacts can occur during the construction and operational phases of the development. The following section makes an assessment of the conservation importance and sensitivity of the identified habitats and species known to occur on the development site and seeks to determine the degree of impact that the proposed development may have upon them.

5.1 Impact on Protected Sites

The proposed development is not within a site of international or national biodiversity importance. However, the nearest boundaries of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site and SSSI lie c1km to the north and c2.1km to the south west of the development location.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) (‘the Habitats Regulations’), require competent authorities to “appropriately assess” certain plans or projects which affect Natura 2000 Sites, which include SPA. Any development proposal which requires planning permission or other consent, is a ‘project’ which may require consideration under the Habitats Regulations. An “Appropriate Assessment” (AA) is required when a plan or project potentially affecting a Natura site:
- Is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site for nature conservation, and
- Likely to have a significant effect on the site (either alone, or in combination with other plans or projects).

Due to the small scale of the proposed viewing platform and its distance from the SPA it is considered that its construction and use will not have a significant direct effect on the interest features of SPA.

In respect of indirect effects on the SPA, the new viewing platform (and associated Heritage Trail) is designed to improve the visitor offer at Irchester Country Park and encourage visitors to stay for longer to enjoy the greater range of the opportunities available. Consequently the proposal may actually have a positive impact on the SPA, with the improved facilities at Irchester Country Park, reducing recreational pressure in the SPA by drawing visitors away from the designated area.

It is considered that this proposal will have no significant direct or indirect effects on the SPA, consequently it considered that the planning authority (the “Competent Authority”) does not need to undertake an Appropriate Assessment in respect of this proposal.
5.2 Impact on Habitats

The proposed development is within Irchester Country Park Local Wildlife Site. However, the field survey has identified that it is sited in a currently heavily disturbed and trampled area of the Wildlife Site which primarily comprises bare ground and light scrub. The total working area, which will be defined by a line of Herras fencing, is small - in the region of 325m$^2$ (0.0325 hectares), 80m$^2$ of which comprises the existing quarry road.

As the proposed development will only affect a small area of already heavily disturbed ground it is considered that there will be no adverse impact on important habitats as a result of the development in either the construction or operational phases.

5.3 Impact on Geology

The proposed development is on the edge of Irchester Country Park Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site (RIGS).

The RIGS boundary includes the whole of the quarry outlined in yellow on the map in Fig 5, however scrutiny of the site description reveals that the geological exposure for which the site is designated relates to the steep quarry face that forms the southern and eastern boundary of the site:

*The section exposes Middle Jurassic rocks along 1300 metres of steep quarry face. Intermittently exposed is the Northampton Sand ironstone at the base (4 to 5 m), overlain by varied sediments of the Rutland Formation (10 m), including the limestone of the Wellingborough Member (formerly known as the Upper Estuarine Limestone), and up to 6 m of the Blisworth Limestone Formation which is well exposed along the top of the quarry. The lower part of the Rutland Formation (Bathonian) overlying the Northampton Sand (Aalenian) is partly hidden by landslip and scree.*

So whilst the proposed development lies on the edge of the RIGS it will not have an adverse impact on the geological interest.

The Northamptonshire RIGS group which surveyed, evaluated and identified the Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site at Irchester Country Park is a full partner in the wider Heritage Lottery funded project to protect and enhance the geological, industrial and wildlife heritage of Irchester Country Park. Specialists from the RIGS group have prepared a management plan for site to ensure that important elements of the exposure are appropriately managed and the geological heritage is effectively interpreted to the public.
5.4 Impact on Protected and Locally Notable Species

5.4.1 Great Crested Newts

Great crested newts are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulation 2010.

Under Regulation 41 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 it is illegal to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of a European Protected Species (EPS).
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of an EPS (affecting ability to survive, breed or rear young) – disturbance of animals includes in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young.
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of an EPS (impairing ability to migrate or hibernate) – disturbance of animals in particular any disturbance which is likely impair their ability in the case of hibernating or migratory species to hibernate or migrate.
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of an EPS (affecting local distribution and abundance) – disturbance of animals includes in particular any disturbance which is likely to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a wild animal of an EPS.

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is illegal to:

- Recklessly or intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animals included in Schedule 5.
- Recklessly or intentionally damage or destroy, or obstruct access to any structure or place which any wild animal included in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection.
- Recklessly or intentionally disturb any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection.

Where offences under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 cannot be avoided Licences from Natural England can be obtained. Licences cannot be obtained to provide protection under offences under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

It is, however, possible to avoid offences under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 through the provision of mitigation. Such mitigation can include undertaking works at an appropriate time of year and completing works in accordance with methods that will minimise or avoid potential disturbance or destruction of habitats. In such circumstances works can be completed under a working method statement.
The Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was to determine whether a Licence is required for the viewing platform development.

The rapid risk assessment is based on the following:

- Extent of the working: 0.0325ha (See Fig 3)
- Distance from the nearest pond: 220m (See Fig 12)
- The assumption that all ponds at Irchester Country Park are great crested newt breeding ponds.

The result is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)</th>
<th>Notional offence probability score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great crested newt breeding pond(s)</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)</td>
<td>0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land &gt;250m from any breeding pond(s)</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual great crested newts</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum:</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Guidance relating to this result states:

“Green: offence highly unlikely” indicates that the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that it is highly unlikely any offence would be committed should the development proceed. Therefore, no licence will be required. However, bearing in mind that this is a generic assessment, you should carefully examine your specific plans to ensure this is a sound conclusion, and take precautions (see Non-Licensed Avoidance Measures Tool) to avoid offences if appropriate. It is likely that any residual offences would have negligible impact on conservation status, and enforcement of such breaches is unlikely to be in the public interest.

Furthermore, the open, bare habitat at the development site is unsuitable for feeding and, other than the small log pile on the quarry slope there are no suitable resting places for newts.

As the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool has produced a “Green: offence highly unlikely” conclusion and the terrestrial habitat is unsuitable for newts it is considered that an adverse impact on great crested newts is unlikely as a result of the development in either the construction or operational phases. However, a working method based on the Non-Licensed Avoidance Measures Tool will be implemented to ensure that this is the case (see Section 6).
5.4.2 **Reptiles (grass snake and common lizard)**

All native reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Sand lizards *Lacerta agilis* and smooth snakes *Coronella austriaca* (neither of which occur in Northamptonshire) receive the greatest level of legal protection under Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. The more widespread and common reptile species - common lizard, slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, grass snake and adder *Vipera berus* - are protected against deliberate or reckless killing and injury.

No evidence of reptiles using the development site was noted, but the bare ground is a potentially suitable basking area. It is unlikely that the development once completed will have an adverse impact on reptiles, and that disturbance during construction, if they are present, will lead only to temporary displacement.

It is considered that an adverse impact on reptiles is unlikely as a result of the development in either the construction or operational phases. However, implementation of the Non-Licensed Avoidance Measures for great crested newts will also benefit these species (see Section 6).

5.4.3 **Badgers**

Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badger Acts 1992. It is offence to

- Willfully kill, injure, take or attempt to take a badger from the wild;
- Possess the body or any the remains of a dead badger;
- Possess, sell or offer for sale a living badger;
- Cruelly ill-treat any badger;
- Use badger 'tongs' in any attempt to kill or take a badger from the wild;
- Dig for a badger; and
- Use a firearm to kill a badger.

Although there are records of badgers from the Irchester Country Park there was no evidence of badger activity in the vicinity of the development site.

It is considered that there will be no adverse impact on badgers as a result of the development in either the construction or operational phases.

5.4.4 **Bats**

All bats are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and are also included in Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations 1994. These include provisions making it an offence to:
- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take (capture) bats;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb bats in a roost or any other structure or place it uses for shelter or protection; and
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to bat roosts even if bats are not in residence.

Should development works affect a known roost then Natural England should be consulted, and if necessary any works undertaken under a licence.

The NBRC report did not highlight the presence of any bat species, although there are numerous casual records. There are several semi-mature larch trees in the vicinity of the development site, but they lack cracks and fissures that may support bat roosts. There development will not be lit.

**It is considered that there will be no adverse impact on bats as a result of the development in either the construction or operational phases.**

### 5.4.5 Breeding Birds

All wild birds and their nests receive protection under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to intentionally kill or injure a wild bird at any time (with the certain limited exceptions); to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built; and intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird. Species included on Schedule 1 of the Act receive greater protection and are subject to special penalties. Many of these species are rare breeders or Birds of Conservation Concern (Red List) and as such are also identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Birds of local importance are identified in A Biodiversity Action Plan for Northamptonshire.

Only limited bird survey work was undertaken. Had the works been planned during the breeding season the current levels of recreational disturbance and the poor quality nesting habitat would be a limiting factor, but, as the works are planned for September 2016, outside the generally accepted bird breeding season for the birds that may be expected to breed this location, it is considered that’s there will be no adverse impact on nesting birds.

**It is considered that there will be no adverse impact on breeding birds as a result of the development in either the construction or operational phases.**
6 AVOIDANCE MEASURES AND RELATED BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENTS

Due to the small scale of the proposed viewing platform development and the heavily disturbed nature of the development site, both from trampling at the existing viewpoint and the frequent passage of visitors through the site and along the quarry road, it is unlikely the development will result in any significant adverse impacts on protected habitats and species.

In respect of great crested newts, which are potentially the most significant species that could be affected by the development, it has been determined using the Natural England (NE) Rapid Risk Assessment Tool that the development is of a type, scale and location where it is highly unlikely any offence would be committed should the development proceed. Therefore, no licence will be required. However it is proposed, using the NE Non-Licensed Avoidance Measures Tool, to develop a working method that minimises the potential harm to great crested newts (and other species) during the construction phase.

The NE Non-Licensed Avoidance Measures Tool suggests the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project element</th>
<th>Suggestions for avoidance measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location &amp; layout</td>
<td>(a) Locate site as far as possible from potential breeding ponds and high quality terrestrial habitat. (b) Locate in areas subject to high pre-existing fragmentation. (c) Locate on hard, compacted ground with few fissures. (d) Design layout so that any hard landscaping is as far as possible from ponds, with retained habitat and soft landscaping toward ponds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing &amp; duration</td>
<td>(a) Restricting works to the winter period (when newts are rarely active above ground) is sensible if the project would not harm hibernation habitat. Projects with temporary habitat disruption and reinstatement, such as some pipelines, could potentially be carried out without any licensable activity in this way. (b) Keep duration of groundworks as short as possible. (c) Undertake during the day works that might only affect newts above ground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction methods &amp; special precautions</td>
<td>(a) Backfill trenches and other excavations before nightfall, or leave a ramp to allow newts to easily exit. (b) Raise stored materials (that might act as temporary resting places) off the ground, e.g. on pallets. (c) For pipelines, use directional drilling to cross areas of core habitat and dispersal routes. (d) Avoid installing structures that act as barriers close to ponds, or include gaps at ground level where walls or fences are unavoidable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Location and Layout and Timing and Duration have already been addressed by the applicant in the development of the proposal and this is outlined in Section 2.4. This complies with the suggested
avoidance measure above, in all but the timing of the works – the works are planned for September rather than the suggested winter period as ground conditions during the winter are unlikely to be suitable. However, it has already been determined that the potential for disturbance to great crested newts and other species is already unlikely due to the small scale, heavily disturbed and, open, bare nature of the development site, so the timing of works is not considered to be critical.

6.1 Construction Method and Special Precautions

The following measures will ensure that any potential adverse impacts principally on great crested newts, but also on other species are avoided. Some measures will be implemented prior to the start of the works, and others will be implemented during construction of the viewing platform.

6.1.1 Pre-construction works

a) Following the search for bird nests undertaken as part of this assessment the light scrub on the quarry slope has already been cleared from the working area by the park staff, who will maintain short vegetation (if it regenerates) by regular cutting until the works to construct the viewing platform commence. NB. Whether or not the development takes place this action is in line with wider proposals to restore the limestone grassland on the quarry slope and provide open basking areas for reptiles and in itself constitutes an ecological enhancement.

b) The small pile of logs at the bottom of the slope that could provide a refuge for amphibians and reptiles, has also been relocated outside the working area.

6.1.2 During construction

a) Ecological supervision will be undertaken by the park rangers who will work closely with the designer and construction contractor to ensure compliance with working method.

b) To prevent damage to the vegetation on western verge of the quarry road the western edge of the quarry road surface will define the line of the fence to secure the working area.

c) The existing quarry road will be included within the fenced working area to provide an area of hard standing for parking and the location of welfare facilities.

d) If they are not to be removed from site immediately, excavated soils will be stockpiled within the fenced working area. Stockpiles will be “battered-off” so that they do not contain holes and fissures that could be used by resting newts during the day following night time foraging.

e) If excavations to create the footings for the concrete pads are likely to remain open overnight an earth ramp will be maintained to allow newts and other species a means of escape.
f) Excavation will be inspected prior to infilling to ensure there no trapped newts or other species are present.

6.2 Mitigation and Biodiversity Enhancement

No mitigation is required as it has been determined that there will be no adverse impacts on habitats or protected species as a result of the development.

Biodiversity enhancement is an integral part of the wider Heritage Lottery funded project of which this viewing platform is part, including the restoration of limestone grassland on the quarry banks through a five year scrub control plan prepared by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. This will result in significant habitat improvements in and around the development area, which will in turn benefit a wide range of associated species.
7 CONCLUSIONS

The initial desk-based assessment identified that the proposed development of the viewing platform overlooking the quarry at Irchester Country Park is within a non-statutory Local Wildlife Site and on the edge of a non-statutory Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site. The boundaries of the two sites overlap. However, subsequent field survey and evaluation has determined that the proposed development is not within a sensitive location of either site and that any there will be no adverse impacts due to the current high levels of disturbance and the degraded nature of the habitat at the development site.

The evaluation also determined that there are unlikely to be any adverse impacts on protected and locally notable species. However, the implementation of the working method, principally to address potential issues associated with great crested newts, but also benefitting other species, will ensure that this is the case.

In conclusion the development of the new viewing platform should result in no net loss of biodiversity at Irchester Country Park, indeed, within the context of a site where the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity is a primary management objective, the additional habitat restoration works associated with this project should result in an increase in the extent of well-managed limestone grassland which will in turn benefit a wide range of associated species.