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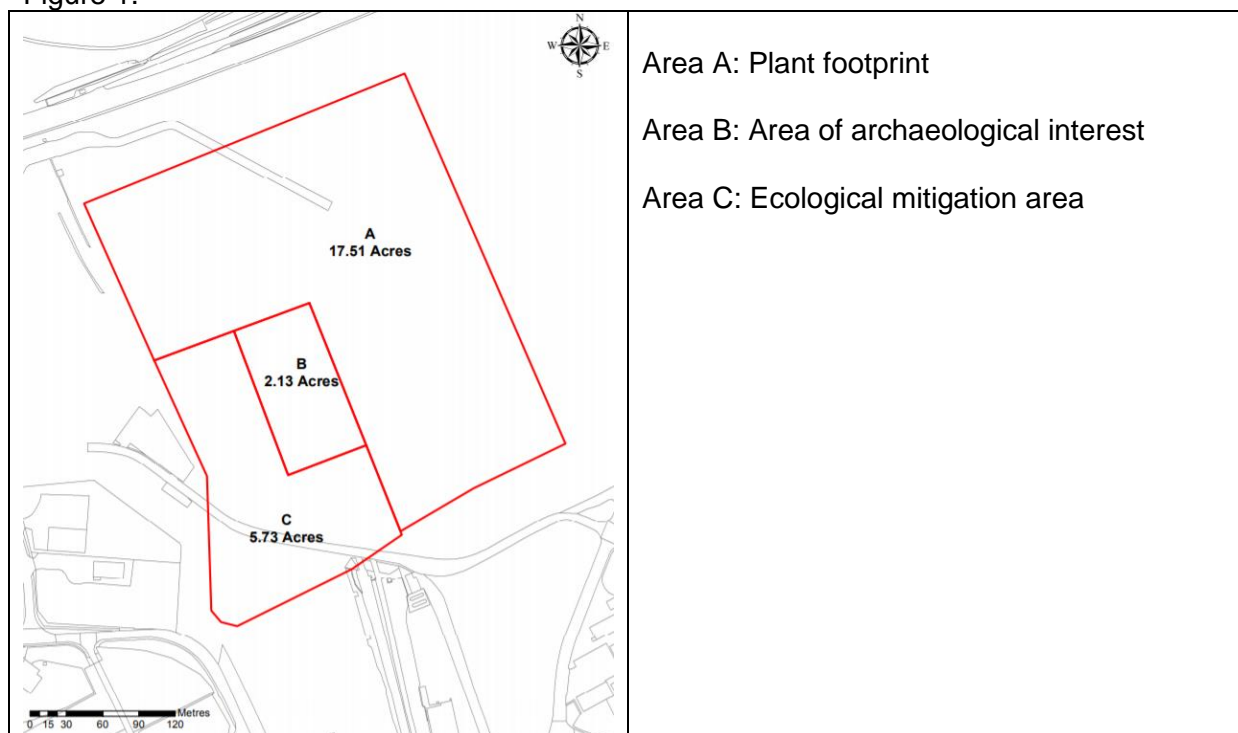
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Prairie Site Ecological Appraisal

Introduction

The South Tees Development Corporation (STDC) has identified a suitable site for the building of an Energy Recovery Facility (ERF). The site is part of a large area of brownfield known as the Prairie, lying north of Grangetown and east of South Bank. The centre of the site is at National Grid Reference NZ 544-214. The red line boundary is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.



Area A: Plant footprint

Area B: Area of archaeological interest

Area C: Ecological mitigation area

A Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) was prepared in May 2018 by INCA (Industry and Nature Conservation Association) and follow-up great crested newt survey work done in May 2019. Two site visits and surveys were undertaken by Hartlepool Borough Council and JBA Consulting in August and November 2019.

Designated sites

The potential Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA and Ramsar and the underlying Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest lie to the north and include the River Tees, Tees Dock and the Drainage Cut (1.2km at closest point). The tidal reaches of the river are designated for supporting breeding common tern (foraging), while intertidal margins along the river support passage and wintering waterbirds.

A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) will be required to assess Likely Significant Effect of the development on the pSPA and Ramsar.

There are no non-statutory or locally designated wildlife sites within 2km of the site and no indirect impacts on sites further away are likely.

Habitats

There are several ponds on site. Ponds is a Tees Valley Local Biodiversity Action Plan habitat and a NERC Act 2006 (Schedule 41) Habitat of Principal Importance. This habitat is a material consideration in planning and is subject to the mitigation hierarchy.

The site is wholly brownfield, which is a Tees Valley Local Biodiversity Action Plan habitat and a NERC Act 2006 (Schedule 41) Habitat of Principal Importance, listed as Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land. The findings of the site survey were assessed against the Defra criteria (UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat descriptions, Defra July 2010) - Appendix 1. This habitat is a material consideration in planning and is subject to the mitigation hierarchy.

While each of the five qualifying criteria were broadly met, the site has not been comprehensively cleared of industrial artefacts and was littered with concrete, rubble, cable, steel, timbers and other materials. This has reduced the nature conservation value of the site. Approximately 20% of the site is assessed as being of good habitat quality.

An area of 5.73 acres (2.32 Ha) should be retained and enhanced. Enhancement, or uplift, should be through clearing the site of industrial residue, levelling the site, leaving a bare and loose substrate and creating several ponds of varying depths. Tree and shrub planting should be avoided. The habitat improvements and subsequent management should follow a prepared conservation management plan.

Species

The site supports/ is likely to support several Tees Valley Local Biodiversity Action Plan species, NERC Act 2006 (Schedule 41) Species of Principal Importance and red/ amber Birds of Conservation Concern. These include:

- Brown hare
- Lapwing
- Herring gull
- Black-headed gull
- Skylark
- Reed bunting
- Meadow pipit
- Common toad
- Grayling butterfly
- Wall butterfly
- Dingy skipper butterfly
- Small heath butterfly

The site does not support any European Protected Species. While common pipistrelle bats may use the site for foraging likely impact on this species is assessed as negligible. Several of the ponds were tested for great crested newt DNA and all results were negative. There are no populations of great crested newt within 5km and this species is assessed as not occurring. The measures outlined for habitat will provide an appropriate level of mitigation for all of the species assessed as being at risk of harm.

Invasive non-native species

Small-leaved cotoneaster occurs on adjacent land and may be present. Buddleia is widespread on the site. There is a legal requirement to responsibly remove any notifiable species.

Biodiversity enhancement requirement

NPPF (2018) paragraph 170 d) includes the bullet point: *Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.* Net gain should be appropriate to the scale of the development and should be conditioned. The measures outlined for habitat will provide an appropriate level of biodiversity enhancement.

Conclusion

- HRA needed.
- No further survey or European Protected Licenses needed.
- Mitigation measure to include the safeguarding and enhancement of 5.73 Ha of Brownfield habitat, which is adequate to mitigate the loss of habitat, harm to priority species and to deliver a 10% biodiversity net gain.

Appendix 1.

Defra UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land.

1. The area of open mosaic habitat is at least 0.25ha in size.
2. Known history of disturbance at the site or evidence that soil has been removed or severely modified by previous use(s) of the site. Extraneous materials/substrates such as industrial spoil may have been added.
3. The site contains some vegetation. This will comprise early successional communities consisting mainly of stress-tolerant species (e.g. indicative of low nutrient status or drought). Early successional communities are composed of (a) annuals, or (b) mosses/liverworts, or (c) lichens, or (d) ruderals, or (e) inundation species, or (f) open grassland, or (g) flower-rich grassland, or (h) heathland.
4. The site contains unvegetated, loose bare substrate and pools may be present.
5. The site shows spatial variation, forming a mosaic of one or more of the early successional communities (a)–(h) above plus bare substrate, within 0.25ha.

End