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SITE DESCRIPTION 2

INTRODUCTION

2.1 As set out in Chapter 1, Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations requires that an ES should include a description of the application site. This Chapter summarises the existing characteristics of the application site and its surroundings. More detailed baseline descriptions are provided within the individual ES chapters, notably Chapter 6 describes the highway network and Chapter 9 sets out the hydrological and hydrogeological regimes in the area. Chapter 11 describes the landscape character, with Chapters 12 and 13 describing the ecological and heritage interests respectively.

2.2 These existing conditions provide a baseline against which the effects of the proposals may be evaluated.

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

2.3 The application site consists of approximately 3 hectares of previously developed land to the north of Micheldever railway station and to the south of the A303. The western and eastern boundaries of the site are formed by the South West Mail railway line and Overton Road respectively

2.4 The application site currently consists of sparsely vegetated and patchy bare ground, with scrub and grassland. A mature belt of deciduous (including Beech, Oak and Hawthorn with an understory of Holly, Blackthorn, Wild Rose and Hazel) tree planting is located around the eastern and northern edges of the application site. This plantation is approximately 15m wide at the north and 50m wide at the east and stands approximately 15-20m in height. The tree belt which runs along much of the eastern boundary is protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

2.5 The site was previously used as an oil terminal/rail freight yard and as a rail head. Land immediately adjoining the application site to the west is identified in the Draft Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan as potentially suitable for use as an aggregate rail depot and as having some potential for waste uses.

2.6 Network Rail has confirmed that the adjoining land identified in the Draft Plan is still required for rail operational purposes and is not available for waste management development. Representations to extend the identified land to include the available, and now proposed, site have been made to Hampshire County Council.

SURROUNDING AREA

2.7 The site is situated within a predominately rural setting, being sparsely populated but with some residential properties immediately surrounding the site. The nearest residential property is Western Farm at 80m to the south east, with a small settlement at Micheldever Station (with a recreation ground), at 530m south of the site.

2.8 There are other properties along the north side of A303 (including Coxford Farm, The Boundary, Holinshea, The Beeches, Woodlands, The Pines and Cobley Wood House), although vegetation exists along the roadside. The largest settlement within the 5km study area is the village of Micheldever, which is located approximately 4km south of the site.

2.9 Public rights of way within the surrounding area include a footpath which runs parallel to the western side of the South Western Mail Line and is approximately 100m west of the site, although a belt of vegetation is indicated on the OS plan between the path and the railway line and site. There is also a bridleway along the western boundary of Black Wood approximately 600m east of the site and which may have clear views. There are a number of other footpaths within the surrounding area.

POTENTIALLY SENSITIVE RECEPTORS

2.10 A review of the application site and its environs has identified a number of receptors which could be sensitive to the environmental effects associated with the construction and operation of the proposed facility. These include;

- Existing residents of properties to the north, east and south;
- Designated nature conservation/ecological sites and possible protected flora and fauna on the site and surrounds (set out in Chapter 12); and
- Groundwater and nearby water bodies.

ACCESS

2.11 Main transport routes include the A303 which is immediately north of the application site and runs from the M3 in the east to Andover in the west.

2.12 Another main corridor is the M3 which runs north-east from Basingstoke to Winchester in the south west, and is 2km from the application site at its nearest point. The A33 runs parallel to the M3 converging with the A30 outside the study area to the north east.

2.13 Other transport facilities within the area include the “South Western Mail Line” which joins the settlements of Basingstoke in the north-west to Winchester in the south and is immediately to the west of the site.

GEOLOGY

2.14 The application site is situated over Cretaceous chalk of the Lewes, Seaford and Newhaven Chalk formation. No superficial geology is recorded at the application site. There are no recorded areas of artificial (made ground) deposits in the vicinity of the application site.

LAND QUALITY

2.15 Available data on the application site confirms that:

- the historical maps indicate the application site appeared to have remained undeveloped except in relation to excavation works to re-profile the site sometime between 1956 and 1974. However, information made available regarding the historical land uses at the application site indicate at least part of it was redeveloped during the Second World War as part of a larger fuel storage/distribution facility. Fuel storage tanks encased in concrete appear to be the only uses on the site;
- no surface water bodies at risk of ground contamination have been identified other than a minor surface water drain on the northern site boundary;
- no groundwater abstractions have been identified in the site area, but the site is located within the Zone III (Total) Source Protection Zone for a groundwater abstraction located approximately 5km southwest of the application site; and
- no adjacent land uses of concern (e.g. industrial/commercial premises, waste management activities, etc) have been identified that are likely to impact on the application site.

LANDSCAPE

2.16 The application site is not located within a national landscape designation (National Park or AONB), nor is it located within a local landscape designation. The East Hampshire AONB is located approximately 10km to the southwest of the application site at its nearest point.

2.17 The application site is situated approximately 2km north-west of Stratton Park which is identified on English Heritage's "*Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England*" as Grade II (Reference GD1864). However the citation for this designation also identifies that the "*Intermittent tree belts, including screen planting alongside the M3 and woodland within the site, restrict views into the park to glimpses from the lanes to the south and south-east*." This vegetation is also likely to restrict views from the park of any development within the site.

2.18 Outside the study area, at approximately 6km southeast of the application site, lies The Grange Park, also identified by English Heritage on the "*Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England*" (Grade II* Reference GD1229)". Again, English Heritage identify the enclosed nature of the site. The citation for this designation refers to "*The western and eastern boundaries abut roads (Northington Road to the west, the B3046 and a minor lane to the east) but are enclosed from these by broad tree belts. A further tree belt encloses the northern boundary from a public footpath running along most of its length while to the south*". This vegetation, along with distance, is also likely to restrict views from the park of any development within the application site.

NATURE CONSERVATION

2.19 The River Itchen Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is within 10km of the application site. Three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) have been identified within 10 km. These are:

Micheldever Spoil Heaps SSSI

2.20 Lying to the north of the application site and abutting the northern verge of the A303, this site comprises Nineteenth century chalk spoil heaps derived from railway cuttings; the substrates exhibit various stages of colonisation by a range of plant communities.

2.21 The site is considered of exceptional botanical importance as it supports many rare plants and species localised in their distribution; for example thrift *Armeria maritima* occurs in highly atypical habitat here and there are exceptionally populations of the nationally scarce species fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*.

River Test SSSI

2.22 The River Test lies some 5.5km west of the application site at its closest point. It is an extremely species-rich lowland chalk stream with a characteristic flora and a high diversity of invertebrates, a range of riparian birds, as well as strong populations of the fish species bullhead *Cottius gobo,* brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*, brown trout *Salmo trutta and* grayling *Thymallus thymallus*. Runs of the European protected species salmon *Salmo salar* also occur.

Bere Mills Meadows, SSSI

2.23 This site lies adjacent to the River Test, some 5.75km northwest of the application site. It comprises a group of damp, unimproved herb-rich neutral grasslands on the flood plain of the upper Test valley. These meadows have an extensive frontage along the River Test and provide a linear habitat that is particularly valuable for birds and invertebrates and represents a type of vegetation formerly widespread in the chalk stream valleys but now much diminished through extensive agricultural improvement, flood control and neglect.

Non-statutory Sites

Micheldever Oil Terminal SINC

2.24 This SINC site lies within the proposed development site. It has been designated for its species-rich unimproved chalk grassland and was last surveyed in 1992 (it was designated in 1995).

Other sites

2.25 A number of non-statutory designated sites are located within 2 km of the boundary of the application site with the majority comprising woodland, including a large amount of ancient semi-natural woodland, as well as semi-improved grasslands, including species-rich unimproved grassland.

TOPOGRAPHY

2.26 There are two distinct levels to the application site. The upper level, to the west of Overton Road, sits at elevations of 139m-140m AOD and is approximately 30m wide, orientated north - south. To the east of the upper level is an embankment (the top of the embankment is at 139m -141m AOD, whilst the bottom of the embankment is 129m -130.5m AOD), approximately 10m in height, measuring approximately 26m wide running north - south, turning west at the north of the site and tying into the chalk cutting to the north at the site boundary.

2.27 The lower level lies at elevations of approximately 129 -130.5m AOD at the bottom of the embankment to 125m – 123m AOD on the western boundary of the site adjacent to the railway line.

2.28 Thus locally there is significant variation in the topography resulting from the construction of the railway through a cutting and tunnel beneath the A303. The railway line lies approximately 10m below the lower plateau.

CULTURAL HERITAGE/ARCHAEOLOGY

2.29 No World Heritage Sites are located within 2km of site. The nearest is the southern component of the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites 37km to the west.

Scheduled Monuments

2.30 There are no Scheduled Monuments within 500m of the application site. A single monument is recorded within the wider 2km study area; Popham Beacons Round Barrow Cemetery, situated on higher ground (160m AOD) 0.6km to the northeast of the application site comprising a line of 5 upstanding Bronze Age barrows to the west of Popham Airfield. This asset is separated from the site by the line of the A303, with intervening housing and woodland.

Listed Buildings

2.31 There are no Listed Buildings within 500m of the application site. Within 2km there are 10 Listed Buildings, the majority concentrated at Warren Farm and Micheldever Station. These are all Grade II listed.

PLANNING HISTORY

2.32 A web base search of information available on the Winchester and Hampshire websites revealed no history for the site itself. Nearest recorded permissions are set out in the Table below (see next page):

Table 2-1
Planning History

Application No.	Description
01/01168/FUL	5m antennae and radio equipment on land at New Road.
03/02825/HCM	Periodic review of Stockbridge Oil Field which used part of the adjacent rail sidings as a terminal but the decision notice confirmed that Micheldever was no longer in use for this purpose. However, the supporting documents did identify the site as industrial land.