

Biodiversity net gain. Good practice principles for development

Case studies

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5 Redevelopment at St Leonards Hospital, Dorset

Details

Organisations Natural England, East Dorset District Council, Homes and Communities Agency, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Sovereign, Johns Associates, Forestry Commission

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5.1 PROJECT SUMMARY

St Leonards was a former hospital built in 1942, used first for military staff and then for civilian patients. It was then taken over by the National Health Service (NHS) in the 1950s. The site was maintained as ranks of single-storey wards linked by concrete paths and covered walkways and with mown grassland between. It also incorporated a cricket pitch, tennis courts and less well-managed areas of pine woodland/scrub and heathland adjoining a Forestry Commission plantation. The site covers 25.9 hectares comprising 7.75 hectares of development site and 18.4 hectares of local wildlife site (called a Site of Nature Conservation Interest [SNCI] in Dorset). The planning application for the development of the site was approved by East Dorset District Council in December 2015.

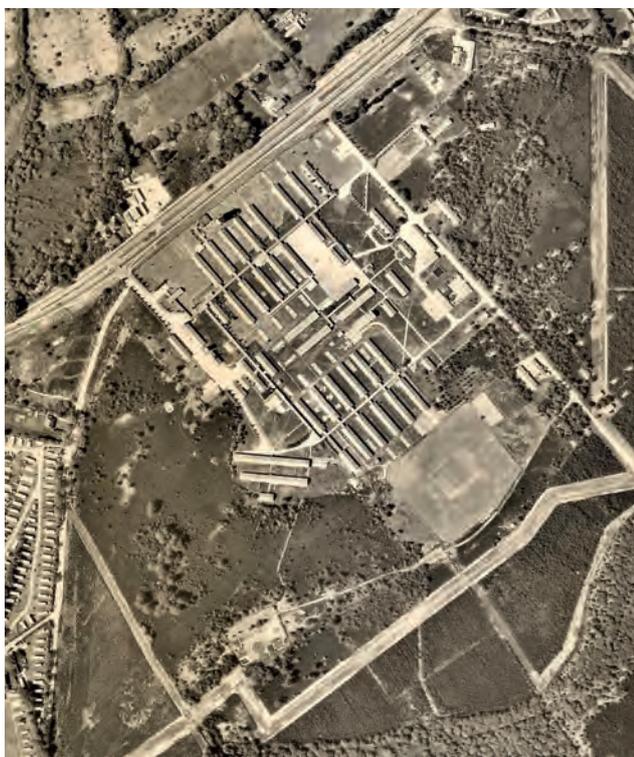


Figure 5.1 Site area

The site was sensitive in terms of its biodiversity, including:

- population of sand lizards (and smooth snakes in the past) with five species of reptile currently present
- priority acid grassland and lowland dry/wet heath habitats
- significant populations of rare/scarce plants (eg green winged orchids, autumn ladies' tresses, mossy stonecrop)
- nightjars from the nearby Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA) that use the site
- two maternity bat roosts and roost sites in 16 of the buildings to be demolished on site, with 10 separate species present.

Natural England has advised on the redevelopment of the site for many years, and the resultant planning application protected the on- and off-site biodiversity interest.

5.2 ISSUES

Natural England's advice was reinforced by the firm policy background for this site, which had been worked up with the local planning authority (LPA) within the local plan. This close working, and the

involvement of the Dorset Wildlife Trust, was critical in securing the environmental outcomes. By working with the Forestry Commission a new 25 hectares natural green space, improved for public access and biodiversity, will be delivered. A Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) steering group was formed with representatives from Natural England, Sovereign (housing association), Dorset Wildlife Trust, Drew Smith (principal contractor), Johns Associates (ecological consultants), East Dorset District Council, the hospital services Cricket Club and Alaska (translocation specialists). This enabled everyone to have continued involvement in the implementation of the plan, which sets out the ecological objectives for the site along with the mitigation, enhancement and restoration measures and the long-term management of the future SSSI and nature reserve.

5.3 OUTCOMES

- 18 hectares of priority habitat restored to a high standard over seven years.
- Dorset Wildlife Trust will take ownership of the new nature reserve, with grazing in place and a new community on its doorstep to work with.
- Management secured and funded through an agreement for 50 years.
- Key acid grassland/heathland communities in the development site (about two hectares) will be translocated using expert contractors.
- 12 hectares of tree and scrub clearance in the SSSI is authorised through the planning application to avoid the need for a separate felling licence.
- A new bespoke bat maternity roost created from an existing brick building (cost saving) and a substantial number of new bat boxes are to be provided.
- The Forestry Commission will deliver a new 25 hectares site, improved for public access and biodiversity. This will be continually maintained.

This example shows the unique partnership of public and private organisations working together to deliver biodiversity gain through a residential development. It has been highlighted nationally by the Wildlife Trusts as an example of good practice.