

24 May 2021

NOTE FOR INQUIRY – PURPLE MOOR GRASS AND RUSH PASTURE

APP/13B Proof of Evidence – David West – Ecology

Sandleford Park, Newbury

1.0 Introduction

Following the Planning evidence session held on 21 May 2021, a Note for Inquiry was requested to clarify the presence or absence of purple moor grass on site.

2.0 Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pastures

Evidence in relation to purple moor grass and rush pastures is given in Appendix F22 of the Environmental Statement (CD22.32).

Purple moor grass and rush pastures is a Habitat of Principal Importance (HPI) as listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, and formerly on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. As discussed in CD22.32, this HPI has a broad, non-specific definition:

*“vegetation, which has a distinct character, consists of various species-rich types of fen meadow and rush pasture. Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, and rushes, especially sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, are usually abundant. Just as the best examples of lowland heath contain a wide range of plant communities, so the same is true for this habitat” (JNCC 2018).”*

Although the species purple moor grass is usually abundant within this HPI, it is possible to characterise the habitat where it is absent.

At Sandleford Park, no purple moor grass was recorded during the NVC (National Vegetation Classification) botanical surveys. However, sharp-flowered rush (also an indicator of the purple moor grass and rush pastures HPI) was found to be locally abundant. These small patches were considered to be of high botanical value and clearly of elevated importance when compared to the surrounding areas of marshy grassland of lower interest (largely comprising modified grassland types). These are shown on Figure 1 of CD22.32 as the NVC community M23 sharp-flowered rush pasture.

Although purple moor grass was absent, the presence of sharp-flowered rush and higher botanical value led us to categorise these patches as falling within the purple moor grass and rush pastures HPI. As such, this habitat was valued at the County level for the purposes of the submitted Environmental Impact Assessment.