Land North of Barkby Road, Syston
Ecology Note
edp4685_r008a

QA: RFo/NDo_FJe/CRo_231023

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Ecology Note has been prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) on behalf of Taylor Wimpey Ltd (hereafter referred to as 'the Applicant'). This note considers the ecological implications of update survey work in relation to the proposed development at Land North of Barkby Road, Syston (hereafter referred to as 'the Site').

1.2 The Site measures c.8.3 hectares (ha) and is centred approximately at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference (OSGR) SK 632 111, within the administrative boundary of Charnwood Borough Council. It is located along the eastern edge of the town of Syston in Leicestershire, c.8.3km north-east of Leicester city.

1.3 The Site is the subject of an outline application for up to 195 dwellings with all matters reserved except access (planning ref: P/21/2639/2). The proposals are the subject of an ongoing planning appeal (ref: APP/X2410/W/23/3325902) and while ecology matters are not considered to be contentious, the ecology work informing the original application was completed in 2021. In line with best practice it has therefore been updated in 2023 to maintain a current baseline position.

1.4 This Ecology Note briefly sets out the update ecology survey work completed in the context of the historic work. Its purpose is to identify whether any changes to the baseline are material to the impact assessment, mitigation recommendations and conclusions drawn in the Ecological Appraisal supporting the submission (ref: edp4685_r005). It does not seek to provide a comprehensive write up of the survey work completed in 2023 and instead provides a precis.

2 UPDATE ECOLOGY SURVEYS

2.1 Ecological surveys were carried out at the Site by EDP previously, in 2012 and 2014, as part of a wider strategic site. Surveys were updated in 2018 and then again in 2021 for the current site boundary, with update ecological survey work consisting of an Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey, breeding bird surveys, a great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment and bat activity surveys (manual transects and automated static detectors).

2.2 Update ecological surveys in 2023 included:

- Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey completed on 02 June (including habitat condition assessments and an assessment of trees for their bat roosting potential);
- Hedgerow assessment on 02 June;
- Breeding bird surveys – three visits between May and early July;
- Bat activity surveys – manual transects (single transect waked by two people in July, August and September);
- Bat activity surveys – automated detectors (two statics deployed for five nights on each occasion in June, July and September. Note – owing to an equipment failure only three nights by one detector was recorded in September); and
- HSI and eDNA survey for great crested newts on 01 June.

3 RESULTS

Designated Sites

3.1 No new information or changes in circumstance in relation to designated sites was identified through freely available online resources. There continues to be no designated sites within the wider landscape that are at risk of impacts from the proposed development.

Habitats

3.2 The Site continues to be under arable cultivation with only minor changes in the distribution and/or extent of field boundary habitats recorded. This includes a small area of blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) scrub along the south-western boundary of the northern field and a 2m grass margin between the northern fields dominated by false oat-grass (*Arrenatherum elatius*), cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) and other common wayside species.

3.3 Hedgerow H8 along the western boundary was considered to qualify as species-rich on reassessment with additional species recorded including dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), field maple (*Acer campestre*) and apple (*Malus* sp.). The ditch running through the centre of the Site was dry at the time of survey.

3.4 While there have been some minor changes to the extent and condition of boundary habitats, these are not considered to be material to the Ecological Appraisal previously completed. They would only have a minor bearing on the Biodiversity Net Gain assessment outcome, principally with respect to hedgerows, which were previously assessed to result in a +3.66 (48.18%) unit gain post development.

Species

Birds

3.5 The breeding bird surveys broadly confirmed the historic survey findings with small number of farmland species recorded as probably breeders on site, including the Red Listed and

Priority Species skylark (*Aluada arvensis*) (1–2 pairs) and yellowhammer (*Emberiza citronella*) (2–3 pairs). While skylark was not recorded breeding on site in 2021, they were in 2018, and their return in 2023 is likely to reflect changes in farming practices, as well as wider increases in skylark populations seen across the country (5–20% increase in last five years)[1].

3.6 Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), which were recorded breeding in 2021 were not recorded during the 2023 bird surveys but were noted during the Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey. Therefore this Priority and Red Listed species appears to continue to use the Site for foraging if not for breeding. While no linnet (*Linaria cannabrina*) were recorded on this occasion, newly recorded species included red kite (*Milvus milvus*) and kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), both sighted on one occasion hunting over the Site.

3.7 The small changes in the assemblage observed in 2023 are not considered to alter the previous assessments Local level valuation of the assemblage.

Bats

3.8 The update tree assessment confirmed the previous findings, albeit a single additional tree T4, a mature ivy clad ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) in the eastern corner, was upgraded to low bat roosting potential.

3.9 The update automated bat surveys recorded at least seven species, with the vast majority (>90%) relating to common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) then soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) and noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*). There were a small number of *Myotis* species (9 recordings), serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*) (17 recordings), Leisler's (*Nyctalus Leisleri*) (4 recordings) and Nathusius pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus nathusii*) (2 recordings) recordings. The greatest number of recordings were made in July in association with the southern hedgerow boundary of the Site.

3.10 Similar trends were noted during the transect surveys with the majority of recordings relating to common pipistrelle and only occasional recordings of soprano pipistrelle, noctule and *Myotis*. Activity was primarily associated with the Site's boundary hedges, though some recordings were also made along the ditch and hedgerow H6, which dissects the southern fields. Only low levels of foraging were recorded in June and August with moderate levels in September.

3.11 Bat species diversity, distribution and abundance is consistent with the historic data and therefore the previous Local level valuation of the assemblage is still considered to apply.

Great Crested Newts

3.12 The update HSI assessment confirmed the two new ponds associated with the housing estate to the south-west of the Site to have 'excellent' and 'poor' potential to support great crested newts. eDNA surveys of these ponds for great crested newts returned negative results suggesting that this species is likely absent. All the other known water bodies within

[1] https://data.bto.org/trends_explorer/?species=Skylark accessed 20.10.23

500m were found to be dry. This confirms the historical findings that great crested newts are likely to be absent from the Site.

Other Species

3.13 No other notable species or their signs were observed during the suite of 2023 update surveys and no new habitat opportunities have established.

3.14 A rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) warren is still present along the northern boundary and while there was an inaccessible hole present within the hedge of slightly larger dimensions, it was considered unlikely to be used by badger (*Meles meles*). Furthermore, should badgers be present, they are common and widespread in the local area and this hedgerow will be being retained as part of the development proposals. The Ecological Appraisal sets out the need for update surveys ahead of any future development of the Site and, should a sett be identified, there would be a legal requirement to proceed in line with the Badger Protection Act 1992.

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 The update survey work has confirmed that the current ecology baseline at the Site remains largely unchanged with the fields continuing to be under agricultural management and the species assemblages consistent with those previously recorded. There are no material changes in habitats or species that would alter the significance of potential effects, or the proposed mitigation previously set out. In light of this, the submitted Ecological Appraisal accompanying the planning submission remains valid for the purposes of informing the appeal and determination process.