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Issued via email to: carl.stott@nineteen47.co.uk

RE: LECONFIELD ROAD, NANPANTAN [P/20/2199/2]: response to Julian Jones and Charnwood Borough Council

Background

RammSanderson have undertaken an Ecological Impact Appraisal (RSE_4942_01_V2) at this site (PSH447 in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for the Charnwood Borough Council Draft Local Plan), inclusive of further surveys for reptiles. This letter should be read in conjunction with this report, as well as an updated letter (RSE_4942_L1_V1) which assesses the site against the Charnwood Borough Council Local Plan site assessment criteria. The purpose of this letter is to address comments raised within local objection documents: the report for the Nanpantan Ward Residents Group (Julian Jones Ecology Services, September 2021) and the Ecology comments from Charnwood Borough Council (September, 2021).

Documents referenced throughout this Letter:

- RammSanderson, 2021.RSE_4942_01_V2. Ecological Impact Appraisal (EcIA)
- RammSanderson, 2021. RSE_4942_L1_V1. Letter Response
- Froglife, 2015. Surveying For Reptiles: Tips, techniques and skills to help you survey for reptiles.
- LCC, 2011. Leicestershire County Council: Guidelines for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites.
- JNCC, 2010. Joint Nature Conservation Committee: Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey.
- Natural England, 2019. The Biodiversity Metric 2.0: Technical Supplement.
- CBE Consulting, 2020. Extended Phase 1 Survey: Land at Leconfield Road, Nanpantan
- MAGIC, 2021. Interactive mapping. Accessed on 22/10/2021 [Magic Map Application (defra.gov.uk)]
- Charnwood Borough Council, September 2021. Ecology Comments.
- Julian Jones Ecology Services, September 2021. Land off Leconfield road – updated report on potential ecological impacts arising from proposed housing development.

Grassland

It was suggested by Julian Jones Ecology (2021) that there was a lack of detailed survey carried out on the grassland habitat on site, with varying levels of quality and classification suggested within this desk-based review. RammSanderson have undertaken a preliminary level survey following the methodologies of an extended phase 1 habitat survey (JNCC, 2010). A phase 1 habitat survey is a standardised system for classifying and mapping habitats based primarily on the vegetation structure and type present. Based on the species present at the time of the survey the grassland has been classified as poor semi-improved grassland. Semi-improved grasslands are typically areas that have been modified for agricultural purposes or through lack of appropriate management and have a sward that is less diverse than that of unimproved grasslands. It is important to note that this survey was not a National Vegetation Community botanical assessment (and a full species list was not considered necessary, but instead a characterisation based on the overall habitat).

Additionally, although it would be possible to undertake a more detailed botanical assessment this was not considered necessary due to the low diversity of the habitat. It should also be noted that the site is c. 1.5ha in area in total, with areas of habitat being retained and enhanced, this is not being lost in its entirety.

The dominant two species of this grassland were cocksfoot and false oat grass, with perennial ryegrass occurring frequently within the sward. These are species indicative of poor-quality grassland which has been subject to modification and lack of management over the years. Whilst there were areas within the site that were of higher diversity than others, this was not characteristic of the sward as a whole and is likely the result of the declining quality of this grassland. Additionally, it was also taken into consideration the levels of use of the site by locals for walking and dog walking resulting in trampling and increased nutrient enrichment which over time will damage this habitat, leading to a loss of structural and species diversity.

The grassland within the site has also been assessed against the Leicestershire LWS criteria (LCC, 2011) for both acid and mesotrophic grassland, it does not meet the criteria for either of these grassland habitats. The site has only one out of the required 10 species present for mesotrophic grassland (meadow buttercup) and only two out of the required 5 for acid grassland indicator species (Sheep's sorrel and bent grass). These were not picked up during the phase 1 habitat survey undertaken in April 2021, but by a re-survey carried out later in the year by Charnwood Borough Council and they are likely present in low numbers across the site. Therefore, the site is not of LWS quality as defined within the LCC guidelines for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites (LCC, 2011).

The grassland present on site would have re-generation prospects if it was managed appropriately and public impacts were minimised. However, in its current state and with the continuation of current usage this is unlikely to happen. The proposals for this site include the incorporation of retained habitat which are proposed for enhancement as part of the proposals which will be subject of a suitable management plan for a period not less than 30 years. Ultimately, if this habitat is left to continue to degrade it will be lost in its entirety, conversely the proposals will safeguard areas of the site and manage and enhance these areas.

Local Plan

As previously stated within the letter report (RSE_4942_L1_V1), the site is not of grade D rating due to the lack of priority or botanically diverse habitat and the provision for net gain on site post development. Although the response from the local authority states that their stance on the matter has not changed, it is not appropriate to overstate the habitats on site and incorrectly classify this area as grade D despite the site not meeting the criteria for this grading. Instead a more accurate reflection of the site would be a C grading by the Council's own definitions, and its own initial classification as such:

> *C - Site with a risk of loss, but a balance could be achieved by on site measures if the developable area is reduced*
> *D - Site contains either a high proportion of priority habitat or botanically diverse habitat; or, contains potential for/evidence of protected species. Unlikely to achieve sufficient on site mitigation to make development acceptable but it may be possible if the developable area is significantly restricted. There may be risks of ecological harm associated with position in landscape. (See case studies C and D)*

It should be noted that the site was previously assessed by CBC's ecologist as grade C, this was revised and upgraded to a grade D as a direct result of a planning application being made at the site necessitating a revisit of the site. During this second assessment "acid grassland indicator species" were recorded on the site. As shown by the assessment of the site against the LWS criteria, the site does not qualify as acid

grassland, nor does it meet any of the other grassland LWS criteria and as such this site is not of grade D quality.

Biological Impact Assessment (BIA)

The condition assessment for the onsite habitats were undertaken following the DEFRA 2.0 technical supplement (DEFRA, July 2019), the results of which can be seen within the ECIA appendix 3, note that full botanical species lists/NVC Surveys are not essential to undertaking this assessment.

As is clear from the assessment carried out on the grassland, it passes two of the condition assessment criteria but fails the remaining 4, as such, this habitat is poor condition. The woodland habitat on site was assessed and found to be of moderate condition. The scrub habitat passed only one of the criteria and failed the remaining 4, giving it a poor condition and the tall ruderal habitat was also assessed as being in poor condition.

Both the grassland and the scrub habitats have been accurately, objectively and fairly assessed against both the DEFRA 2.0 condition assessments and the JNCC phase 1 survey handbook, though this does find both habitats to be in poor condition, this has been clearly demonstrated that it is a direct result of the low quality of the habitat on site. The quality of this grassland is being overstated by both Julian Jones and Rupert Sims, each for different purposes, to the same end.

Loss of habitat for Fauna

Though it is true that an area of the grassland will be lost as a result of this development, the impacts on fauna within the locality is anticipated to be minimal, as demonstrated in detail within the ECIA (RammSanderson, 2021). The grassland is also subject to regular disturbance due to the use by walkers and dogs which reduces its suitability for fauna such as ground nesting birds and reptiles to reside within the site. A full suite of 7 reptile surveys were undertaken over the active period of 2021, these surveys did not identify any reptiles present on site. In order to undertake these surveys, artificial refugia consisting of felt roofing mats and metal tins (0.5 x 1m) were deployed across the site, concentrating at the boundaries. A total of 24 mats were deployed across the site, well above the recommended 10 mats per hectare (Froglife, 2015).

A single reptile survey was undertaken at below the suggested guideline temperatures of 10-20^{o}C. This survey was undertaken despite local temperatures being below the online forecasted temperature. Reptile surveys utilising artificial refugia rely upon reptiles needing to bask in order to observe them during the surveys. Although this survey was undertaken one degree below the recommended temperatures, the other weather parameters such as no rain or wind and a lack of cloud were ideal with sun warming the mats during this early morning survey. A 1^{o}C variance from the wide range given in the guidelines is not materially significant to reptiles and the efficacy of reptile surveys. Field thermometers also have an error margin and factors such as humidity can affect readings by +/- 1^{o}C. It is not considered that this one survey undertaken in marginally sub-optimal temperatures would impact in the identification of reptile presence/ absence at this site across the full suite of surveys, and reptiles are considered absent as per the ECIA report (RammSanderson, 2021). This comment is therefore nugatory and should not be given weight in our considered opinion.

Figure 1: Reptile Mat Locations

Additionally, the site is located adjacent to Burleigh woodland and in turn this area links to extensive arable fields, areas of grassland and parcels of woodland through which fauna can easily disperse. These areas also form good foraging habitats for species such as birds, badger and bats. The site alone does not have the suitable heterogeneity required to form a core habitat for fauna locally, moreover there are alternative similar habitats present within the locality and as such, the impacts to local fauna from the loss of this grassland are considered to be minimal.

Wetland

Another issue raised was the presence of a wetland area within Burleigh woods, this was not observed at the time of the survey and no plan has been given to display the location. This woodland has been characterised (MAGIC.gov, 2021) as ancient woodland, with no mention of it being a wet woodland which the wetland areas described within the report submitted by Julian Jones (Julian Jones, 2021) suggests. A desk-based review of mapping, aerial images and Magic.gov.uk, prior to the original site survey, did not show any waterbodies present within the woodland. Considering this it is likely that these areas are not permanent aquatic features and instead are ephemeral areas of seasonal inundation formed following periods of heavy rainfall and resulting from the topography of the land. Moreover, these features were offsite and not visible at the time of the survey and as such could not be fully assessed.

Amphibian populations require the waterbody to remain wet throughout the breeding season (March-June for great crested newts) in order to successfully support amphibian populations. As it is highly unlikely that the wetland area remains a viable pond throughout the breeding season it is not likely to support breeding amphibians.

Invertebrates

The review submitted by Julian Jones raises concerns regarding the impacts of the habitat loss on site on local invertebrate species. A record of the white letter hairstreak butterfly was returned within the desk study within the CBE report (CBE Consultancy, 2020). The proximity of this record to site has raised concerns, however it is noted that the main food source and egg laying habitat for this butterfly is Elm, this was not recorded on site nor within the boundary hedgerows. Though Elm may be present within the woodland, the loss of a section of grassland / scrub within the site boundary will have a negligible impact upon the lifecycle of this invertebrate. In addition, it should be noted that these 4 records were from 1997, twenty-three years prior and has not been recorded since (CBE Consulting, 2020).

I trust this letter is satisfactory to your requirements

Yours Sincerely,

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