
From: Nikki Morton <nmorton@morph-ecological.co.uk>
Sent: 23 January 2024 20:21
To: Planning Folder New
Cc: Sarah Postlethwaite; Jennifer Lucas
Subject: 23/01229/OUT - Laura Ashton - Ecology Comments

Categories: Tidd

Good evening,

23/01229/OUT | Outline Planning application for up to 95 dwellings with associated access, open space and landscaping following demolition of all buildings on site | Land East Of The Common Barwell Leicestershire

The plans are quite similar to the other applications for the site from an ecology perspective. The ecology reports including the biodiversity net gain calculations have been updated to support the new plans and are acceptable. The ecology comments are the same:

I will refer you to my comments on the previous application, 21/01470/OUT. This current application is the same. The applicant and ecologist have kindly provided me with a copy of the documents that I requested: the Biodiversity Net-gain (BNG) assessment and habitat plan, badger survey and completed BNG metric as a spreadsheet.

I have copied parts of my comments on the earlier application below, for reference.

"The ecology report (PC&A) is excellent, and demonstrates that much of the existing grassland and hedges on the site have high conservation value. Some of the grassland would meet Local Wildlife Site criteria (the two oblong fields alongside the eastern boundary and the field behind houses on the south side of Garner Close). . . . There are also some veteran ash (T5, T7, T8 and T42) , which meet Local Wildlife Site criteria in their own right, and a veteran oak (T39). These should be retained. The two oblong species-rich candidate LWS fields will be enhanced as a result of development, according to the ecology report and the masterplan, which is welcomed. The field to rear of Garner Close will be lost to development. Its clear that some mitigation/ compensation for the loss of grasslands is possible with in the red-line boundary."

The baseline habitat assessment that form the first part of the BNG metric are satisfactory; I am in agreement with the assessments. The assessment are repeated in the accompanying documents, and correctly cross-referenced to the habitat plan. The grasslands are assessed as either 'Other Neutral Grassland', for the more species-rich fields, or 'modified grassland' for those that are of lesser 2 value. Two of the cLWS fields are classed as Other neutral grasslands (field 10 and 4). The third field (9) which does meet LWS criteria is classed as the less valuable 'Modified grassland'. Although field 9 meets LWS criteria, it is only on the basis of a few plants of some indicator species. For this reason I am able to accept its lower classification. All the grasslands have value as relatively undisturbed grasslands, and I agree with the ecologist that there is potential and opportunity to improve their biodiversity value through management.

The ecologist has proposed to convert all the retained meadows (both 'Other Neutral Grasslands' and 'Modified grassland') to a higher category of more value – 'Lowland Meadow'. This appears to be a scarce habitat in Leicestershire, although it is difficult to apply the habitat descriptions in the BNG documentation to the grasslands of this type in Leicestershire; however my assumption is hat that would be close to SSSI standard. Normally I would advise caution when 'Lowland Meadow' is proposed as a biodiversity gain; it is often unrealistic or overambitious, given the scarcity of this very high-quality grassland habitat in our area. On balance, however, I think it is possible, and agree it should be the aim of management. My reasoning is partly based on the location and context of the site, which is separated from heavily improved agricultural grasslands and arable land that may have adverse indirect impacts. They are also, in part, still of reasonable quality and clearly have not been heavily improved.

No proposals for how Lowland Meadow will be achieved have been put forward, to my knowledge; my apologies if I have overlooked this. A combination of haycutting and grazing, preferably in rotation, will be required, in my view. Hay-cutting alone will not achieve the desired result.

The main loss of habitat is field 4, which meets LWS criteria. It will all be lost to development (it is the southernmost parcel of the scheme, numbered 4 on the illustrative masterplan). This is regrettable, and if possible, the layout should seek to retain all or some of it. It contains one locally notable plant species – Pepper Saxifrage. This is not common in Leicestershire, and is in decline; it is particularly associated with old semi-improved or unimproved grasslands. I recommend that, if this field is lost to development, the Pepper Saxifrage and other grassland is translocated into one of the retained but currently species-poor meadows, to assist in the conversion to Lowland Meadow. Translocation should be based on a more detailed survey of both receptor and donor, to establish the locations of the best turf to move and the best place in which to translocate – which should be close in terms of soil-type, aspect, drainage etc. to the donor site's features.

Small amounts of woodland are proposed. I note that some is in Fields 9 and 10, which are already relatively species-rich (and meet LWS criteria). It would be preferable if this tree and shrub planting was relocated to another field of lower value, to avoid loss of potentially better grassland habitat.

The large SUDS feature in area 98M of the illustrative masterplan also features in the BNG as habitat creation. For it to achieve the desired condition it will need to be designed to optimise biodiversity value.

The majority of hedges within the site are retained with gaps to allow access. Further hedge planting in compensation is proposed, and this is acceptable; overall the development should be in clear net-gain as regards hedgerow habitat.

Several small badger setts are present along the northern edge, under an animal shelter and in the field close by. The status of these is difficult to assess; the ecologist feels they may be subsidiary setts to a main sett in the wider area. They are not main setts in themselves, and I agree that they can be closed down under licence from Natural England.

On balance I feel that the development is acceptable and can achieve BNG onsite; there should be no need for offsetting. This is with two provisos: 1 - the submission of a 30-year landscape and biodiversity management plan that demonstrates that all the grassland retained on site can achieve 'Lowland Meadow' status within the time period. This will require a combination of hay meadow and grazing, which must be established on granting of planning permission and before development starts, to avoid further damage to grasslands through neglect or inappropriate management. 2- grassland translocation from the LWS field that will be lost into the retained grasslands. I think it unlikely that all the grassland will need to be translocated, but recommend that at least 50% of the area is earmarked for this approach. A method statement will be needed, and it should be done before development starts.

These should be subject to planning conditions. The baseline assessment will form the basis for any future reserved matters. Each reserved matters application for each phase will need to revisit the BNG metric and make any changes needed as plans develop. In accordance with DEFRA current proposals, on-site gains should be front-loaded – therefore the landscape and biodiversity plan, establishment of the correct meadow management regime and the grassland translocation should occur alongside the first phase of development; it cannot be deferred to the end.

A planning condition regarding badger mitigation will be needed, as set out in the submitted document (PCA, April 2022). In the 3-month period before the commencement of ground clearance for each phase of development, an updated badger surveys and updated mitigation plan for that phase must be submitted to and approved, alongside the reserved matters,

The veteran/near-veteran oak and ash listed in my comments on the previous application (copied above) should also be retained; I recommend this is a planning condition.

Kind regards,

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On behalf of Leicestershire County Council (Ecology Team)

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