

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report

Land off New Smithy Avenue, Thurlstone

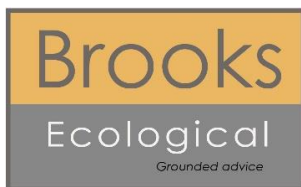


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Summary

This report is produced to inform Newett Homes Ltd of potential ecological constraints associated with the proposed development site.

Methodology

The report is based on a desk study of designated wildlife sites and records of protected or notable species, and an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and Bat Roost Suitability Assessment carried out in April 2019.

Findings - Key Points

The majority of the Site, being species-poor semi-improved grassland, is of low ecological value.

The hedgerow / treeline along the western boundary is of slightly greater ecological value and any loss should be suitably mitigated through native replanting to ensure no net loss.

No further detailed surveys are considered necessary, although standard precaution is recommended in regards to nesting birds.

Introduction

1. Brooks Ecological Ltd was commissioned by Newett Homes Ltd to carry out an update Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of land off New Smithy Avenue, Thurlstone, South Yorkshire, Grid Reference SE 232 035.
2. This report is produced with reference to British Standard BS:42020 'Biodiversity Code of Practice for Planning and Development' and the CIEEM (2017) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.
3. The Site was previously surveyed in by Brooks Ecological in 2016 and reported in R-2736-01.

Scope

4. 'The Site' comprises a pasture field as defined in Figure 1 below.
5. The assessment uses a 2km area of search around the Site for records of protected and notable species and locally or nationally designated wildlife sites.

Figure 1 The Site (red line boundary)



Purpose of a PEA

6. A PEA is an *initial assessment* of the baseline for a proposed development site and establishes whether the Site is likely to be constrained by ecology, and whether more information is needed to identify the ecological baseline.
7. The subsequent Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (PEAR) is intended to give early guidance to a developer and assist with the early stages of project planning and design. Where a site is not complex or constrained, and no additional ecological input is necessary the PEAR may be sufficient and suitable to support a planning application.

Desk Study

8. The Site is located within the small village of Thurlstone, found in the foothills of the Peak District, to the north of Sheffield. The Site is found over Grenoside Sandstone, a member of the Lower Coal Measures Formation. Depending on superficial deposits, the presence of sandstone bedrock may give rise to locally acid rich soil conditions.
9. It is bound by existing residential development to the north, east and south. A large pasture field is found beyond the western boundary.
10. The wider landscape is characterised by pastures of varying size, with occasional small arable fields interspersed throughout. Fields are generally separated by dry stone walls. The larger settlement of Penistone is found to the east, while the Peak District rises to the west.

Wildlife Corridors

11. The River Don flows west – east a short distance south of the application Site. This provides the major corridor through the area, which is supported by the railway line to its south; this appears to have vegetated boundaries along much of its length in this area.
12. This corridor links a number of areas of woodland along its length and ultimately links to Thurlstone Moors and the South Pennine SPA/SAC to its west. However, the Site is separated from this corridor by two roads, including the A628 (the main road through Thurlstone) and a narrow band of residential development. For this reason, it is considered that development at the Site is unlikely to impact on the functionality of the corridor or affect habitats to which it is linked.

Figure 2 Analysis of wildlife corridors and higher value habitat in relation to the Site



Water Bodies

13. Three standing water bodies are found on mapping within a 500m of the application Site, as detailed in the figure overleaf.
14. Pond 1 is a raised stonewalled rectangular structure located 240m northeast, whilst Pond 2 is a former mill pond located c.350m south west. Pond 3 is a large water body set within a farmstead 380m east.

Figure 3 Water Bodies within 500m of the Site



Designated Sites

Statutory Designations

15. A search has been made to identify any nationally designated sites within a 2km radius of the Site, and for internationally designated sites within a 10km radius. The results are shown in the below table.

Table 1 Statutory Designated Sites

Site Name	Distance from Site	Designation	Summary Interest
South Pennine Moors	4.3km east	Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Habitats being the primary reason for designation are European Dry Heath, Blanket Bog and old Sessile Oak Wood.
South Pennine Moors Phase 1	4.3km east	Special Protection Area (SPA)	Qualifying species: Golden Plover, Merlin and Shorteared Owl.

16. Neither of the South Pennine Moors statutory designations are functionally linked to the Site, both being separated by the town of Meltham. This, together with their spatial separation, makes direct impacts from development very unlikely.

SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZs)

17. The Site lies within the IRZ for Spring Meadows, Alderman's Head & Cow Croft Meadows SSSI, but does not fall into one of the highlighted categories which requires consultation between the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and Natural England (NE). The development is of a scale and nature which is unlikely to impact on this SSSI.

Non-Statutory Designations

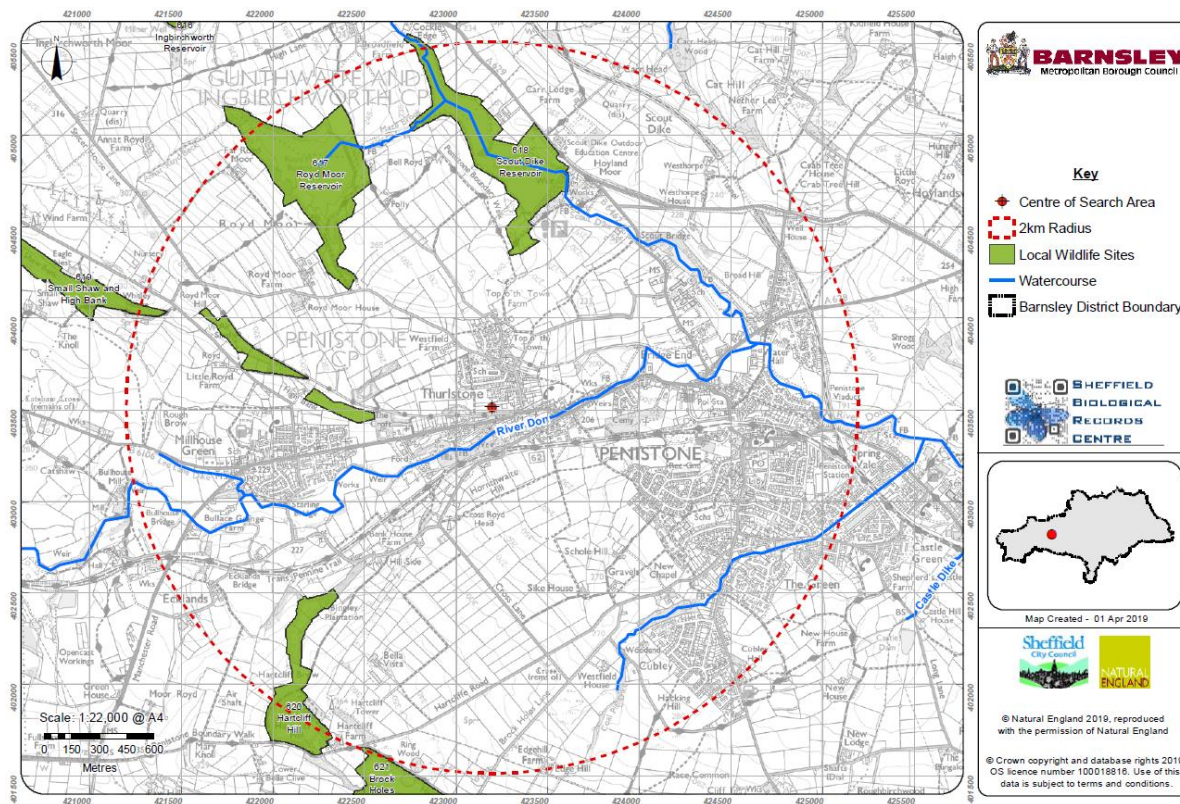
18. There are five locally designated sites within 2km of the Site, all designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS's). These are detailed in the table below:

Table 2 Non-statutory Designated Sites

Site Name	Designation	Distance from Site
618 Scout Dike Reservoir	LWS	830m north
617 Royd Moor Reservoir	LWS	950m northwest
619 Small Shaw and High Bank	LWS	570m west
620 Hartcliff Hill	LWS	1.2km southwest
621 Brook Holes	LWS	1.9km southwest

19. None of these locally designated sites are functionally linked to the Site, and their spatial separation makes direct impacts from development very unlikely.

Figure 4 Locally designated sites provided by Barnsley MBC



Survey

Method

20. The survey was carried out during April 2019¹ and followed Phase 1 habitat survey methodology (JNCC, 2010).

Limitations

21. The survey was carried out in spring when many plant species have died back, however the habitat types could still be assessed at this time by the surveyor.

Results

22. The following habitats were identified within the Site and on its immediate boundaries:

- Semi-improved neutral grassland
- Tall ruderal / scrub
- Hedgerows
- Trees

Semi-improved neutral grassland

23. The Site is dominated by a semi-improved neutral grassland sward, which appears to have been cut infrequently. Coarse grasses make up the sward, notably perennial rye (*Lolium perenne*) and Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) with smaller amounts of creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), cocks' foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), false oat grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) and red fescue (*Festuca rubra* agg.).
24. Occasional common forbs are noted throughout, including chickweed (*Stellaria media*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), dandelion (*Taraxacum vulgare* agg.), daffodils (*Narcissus* sp.), common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). A small amount of meadow cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*) was also noted along the southern boundary.

¹ This Report has been prepared during May 2019 following a visit to the site in April 2019 and our findings are based on the conditions of the site that were reasonably visible and accessible at that date. We accept no liability for any areas that were not reasonably visible or accessible, nor for any subsequent alteration, variation or deviation from the site conditions which affect the conclusions set out in this report.



Figure 5

Semi-improved neutral grassland

Tall ruderal / scrub

25. Small patches of tall ruderal and scattered scrub vegetation are found around the field boundaries, with a larger patch located in the north-western corner. These areas are dominated by bramble, with smaller amounts of rosebay willowherb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*), common hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*) alongside saplings of goat willow (*Salix caprea*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*).



Figure 6

Tall ruderal / scrub in the north-western corner

Hedgerow

26. A c.40m section of hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) hedgerow forms part of the western boundary, at approximately 3m in height and 2m in width. The ground flora comprises those aforementioned tall ruderal species.



Figure 7

Hawthorn hedgerow along part of the western boundary

Trees

27. A line of trees forms the rest of the western boundary, comprising a single sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and a group of goat willow (*Salix caprea*).



Figure 8

Trees along part of the western boundary

Semi-natural Habitats Summary Evaluation

28. Species-poor, semi-improved neutral grassland, and tall ruderal / scrub habitats are considered to be of low ecological value. The western boundary which includes the hedgerow and tree line is considered to be of slightly greater ecological value.

Fauna

Amphibians

29. Fourteen records of common toad, common frog and smooth newt have been returned; all but one relating to Royd Moor Reservoir (950m NW) or Scout Dike Reservoir (830m N). The other record is located along the dismantled railway line to the south. Four records of great crested newt (GCN) have been returned; all relating to Royd Moor Reservoir.
30. No waterbodies are found on Site and of the three off-site ponds within a 500m radius; all are considered well separated from the Site by busy roads and urban development, which are considered significant barriers to amphibian movement.
31. Given the lack of connectivity to any potential breeding ponds in the surrounding area, the likely absence of GCN from the Site can be reasonably concluded.

Bats

Records

32. Sixty-nine bat records have been returned, the majority of which relate to common or soprano pipistrelle bats, alongside occasionally recorded noctule, whiskered, Daubentons and indeterminate vesper bat species.
33. No records relate to the Site, with the closest record being along Manchester Road (c.40m south) in 1988. Of the records, 25 details roosts, all of which are found >600m from the Site.

Roost Suitability Assessment

34. No buildings are found on Site and none of the trees were found to contain any features which could be utilised by roosting bats.

Activity

35. The Site offers limited commuting or foraging features for bats, although the western tree / hedge line could provide a small-scale link for any bats roosting in the surrounding residential properties to move through the area.
36. However, due to the lack of any significant wildlife corridors or areas of higher value habitat in the surrounding landscape, it is assumed that this would only be to the extent of individual pipistrelle species on a low-level basis.

Birds

37. A large range of bird species have been recorded in the local landscape, the majority associated with Scout Dike Reservoir, Royd Moor Reservoir and Garden Watersmeet.
38. The Site is located 4.3km from the South Pennine Moors SPA and due to the distance from the moorland extents, impacts on the qualifying species and assemblages are considered to be unlikely. The Site is also considered to be of low value as a roosting or mustering site for wintering or passage birds due to it being enclosed by housing which creates poor sight lines.
39. As with most sites the standard precaution in relation to birds would apply: To prevent the proposed works impacting on nesting birds, any clearance of vegetation will need to be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season which is 1st March – 31st August inclusive. Any clearance that is required during the breeding bird season should be preceded by a nesting bird survey to ensure that the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) is not contravened through the destruction of nests and that any active nests are identified and adequately protected during the construction phase of the development.

Badger

40. Badgers are recorded within the 2km search radius, although all locations are not recorded in any proximity to the Site. No evidence of recent badger activity was noted on Site, and the current likely absence of this species can be reasonably concluded.

Reptiles

41. No records of reptiles have been returned. The Site provides little habitat for this group and is considered unconnected from any areas of significant reptile habitat or dispersal routes.

Hedgehogs

42. Hedgehogs are listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act and are declining in our countryside. Hedgehog droppings were noted throughout the Site and suitable precautions should be put in place to ensure this species is not impacted by the proposals.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

43. INNS are species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), for which it is an offence to cause or allow it to grow in the wild.
44. No invasive species were identified by the surveyor² during the course of the walkover survey, nor were any identified during the previous survey.
45. An area of tipped waste material was noted in the south-east corner of the Site and there is the potential for this to contain INNS material. Should further assurances be needed in relations to INNS you should commission a dedicated Invasive Weed Survey.



Figure 9

Area of tipped material in the south-east

² Whilst our ecologists are trained in the identification of INNS, this report is not a dedicated invasive species survey. Detectability of invasive plant species is seasonally variable and can be affected by several other factors which may not be apparent to the surveyor, so whilst every effort is made, a conclusive determination of status or extent is not possible through preliminary survey. As the presence of invasive species can generate significant costs to development the client may wish to instruct a dedicated invasive species survey prior to entering into contracts.

Ecological Constraints and Opportunities Plans (ECOP)

46. None of the on-Site habitats present any significant constraint to development. The western boundary hedge is of slightly higher ecological value than other on-site habitats, and ideally this should be retained, protected and enhanced. Any loss should be suitably mitigated for through native re-planting.
47. No protected species issues have been identified, although standard precaution is recommended in relation to nesting birds.
48. There are opportunities to enhance the Site for wildlife, most significantly in the form of creating new green corridors around the boundaries through native hedgerow and tree planting. Allowing hedgehogs to continue to use the Site by making any fences and walls permeable and by including wildflower seed mixes in areas of POS would also provide an ecological enhancement.

Figure 10 Potential constraints and opportunities identified at the PEA stage



Conclusions and Recommendations

49. This Site appears suited to development and largely unconstrained by ecology and biodiversity issues, but some additional information is likely to be needed to support a planning submission and deal with legal risks.

Table 3 Recommendations to support planning

Issue	Why	When calculated on the date of this report.
Take account of the ECOP and draw up a design to which engages with it	The NPPF makes it imperative that sites are designed according to the 'mitigation hierarchy'; Avoid - Mitigate - Compensate. Avoidance is the key first stage and designs must show that they have avoided important receptors if possible. Mitigation, and as a last resort, Compensation will only be appropriate where there are clearly no alternatives and a strong planning argument will be needed in these cases.	Prior to submission

Table 4 Other recommendations

Issue	Why	When calculated on the date of this report.
Nesting bird management	To prevent the proposed works impacting on nesting birds, any clearance of vegetation will need to be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season which is 1st March – 31st August inclusive. Any clearance that is required during the breeding bird season should be preceded by a nesting bird survey to ensure that the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) is not contravened through the destruction of nests and that any active nests are identified and adequately protected during the construction phase of the development.	Pre- and during - clearance