

HABITAT WORKS

Riddle Pit Farm

Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan

22nd November 2024

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Issued By: Stuart Silver

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Stuart Silver', written in a cursive style.

Date: 20th November 2024

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Date: 22nd November 2024

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1.0 SUMMARY

Habitat Works have been commissioned to produce a Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan (BEMP) in relation to the conversion of an existing barn into a wedding venue located on Riddle Pit Farm, Flint Lane (OS Grid Ref. SE 1706 0418), between Hepworth and Carlecotes.

The Site lies approximately 1.9 km southwest of the boundary of the Peak District Moors (South Pennine Moors Phase 1) Special Protection Area (SPA). The site is also located within 34 m of the Western Moors Local Wildlife Site (LWS). Planning permission was granted in August 2024 (2021/1496) for the change of use from barn to a venue suitable for events and the formation of a temporary car park. Planning Condition 17 attached to the permission requires that the Site is appropriately sensitively managed with measures to including control of noise levels, defining 'No Entry' zones to sensitive areas and places restrictions on camping. Furthermore, landscaping and management of surrounding grassland is required to include sensitive management of a specific area of on-site grassland to provide habitat suitable for ground nesting birds with areas including wet ground/scrapes/shallow pools that is managed as unimproved grassland to maximise biodiversity.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Habitat Works have been commissioned by Paul Matthews Architectural to produce a Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan (BEMP) in relation to the conversion of an existing barn to a wedding venue located on Riddle Pit Farm, Flint Lane (OS Grid Ref. SE 1706 0418), between Hepworth and Carlecotes. The Site is in a rural area within the land surrounding the South Pennine Moors. There is an existing modern block and timber framed agricultural building with a pitched corrugated roof.

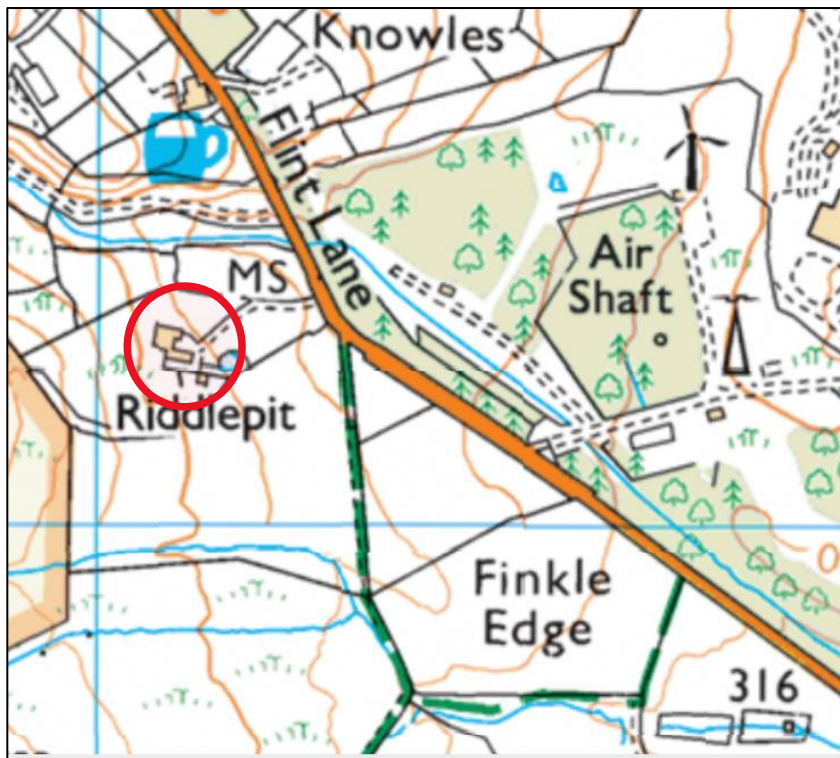


Figure 1: Site location. Not to scale.

To discharge planning condition number 7, a BEMP document completed by a suitably qualified ecologist will be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, prior to any events being held on site. This BEMP includes the following:

- a) A plan showing areas on site that will clearly marked as no entry, this will be limited to land east of the barn. This is to prevent people moving close to sensitive bird areas.
- b) A minimum of two bat and bird boxes to be installed in suitable locations on the main farmhouse.

c) Noise levels to remain at 90db within the barn throughout the year to prevent disturbance to wildlife.

d) Details when camping can/cannot be undertaken.

e) The field located to the north west of the barn (owned by the applicants) will be put into positive management to improve the habitat for ground nesting birds. Management will include sensitive management of the grassland for ground nesting birds, creation of additional foraging areas including scrapes/shallow pools and enhancement of the grassland to create an unimproved sward.

2.1 Proposed works

The development comprises the conversion of an existing barn to an events venue, primarily for weddings. No significant changes will be made to the building's exterior aside from the insertion of one new access door. A 37-space car park is also included in the proposal constructed from permeable paving grids that allow colonisation of grasses. Landscaping will be completed to screen cars parked at the site in accordance with 23/848/Landscaping Plan.

3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE BEMP

3.1 Conservation Objectives

The development has been undertaken with the aim of minimising impacts to nature conservation and where possible, enhancements have been made. Due to the Site's proximity (40m to the North and 120m to the West) to the Western Moors which is a local wildlife site used by moorland birds, the Site will be managed to maximise its biodiversity value as moorland fringe habitat. The development seeks to enhance nature conservation by providing the following:

- Installation of bat and bird boxes
- Signposting of 'No Entry' areas preventing access to sensitive bird areas
- Ensuring noise levels within the barn remain at 90 dB
- Inclusion of sensitive management of grassland for moorland birds
- Management of grassland enhancement to promote unimproved sward
- Removal of shrub trees around periphery of grassland to remove predator perches
- Inclusion of restrictions on when camping can occur

The following section outlines the measures that have been put in place to protect and enhance site ecology.

Bird and Bat Boxes

In accordance with the planning permission, a total of 2 bat and 2 bird boxes will be installed on Site to provide new nesting and roosting opportunities. 2 no. woodstone 'Seville' bird boxes with a 32mm entrance hole will be provided to provide additional nesting provision for species such as blue tits, great tits or house sparrow. The boxes will be erected on non south facing locations around the farm as shown on Figure 2. Elevations have been chosen to ensure they do not receive full sun so boxes do not overheat in the summer months.

The Site will also be fitted with 2 Woodstone 'Chillon' bat box or similar woodstone/woodcrete bat box to provide additional roosting opportunities for bats. Boxes will be cited on south-facing elevations where possible to provide warm

roosting locations. Boxes will be fitted a minimum of 4 m from the ground. Locations are shown in Figure 2.

Signposting

In accordance with the planning condition, signage will be placed at any locations that are to be out of bounds to customers to ensure they do not stray onto sensitive areas around the venue. The key route for signage will focus on the area located between the new car park and the venue and around the venue itself. Survey of the site identified a single gate between the car park and the venue providing potential access onto land east of the barn. A No Entry sign will be put in place on this gate to prevent people moving closer to ecologically sensitive areas of the Site. The location of the gate is shown on Figure 2.

Camping

There are no plans to allow camping on site and therefore, the adjacent LWS or more sensitive areas surrounding the site will not be disturbed.

Noise Levels

In accordance with planning condition 7, noise levels within the barn shall not exceed 90db at any time during events to prevent disturbance to wildlife.

3.2 Mitigation and Management

Grassland Baseline

During a survey in April 2021, wading birds were observed in the wider area surrounding Riddle Pit Farm. Two lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and one curlew *Numenius arquata* were observed during this survey (see Figure 2) and considered to be breeding locally, but not directly on site. In addition, curlew foraging activity was recorded in the offsite pasture field south of Riddle Pit Farm. Interestingly, no territories or foraging activity was recorded in the section of the Local Wildlife Site (LWS) (34m north) closest to the farm buildings.

No baseline data exists for the grassland area subject to the planning condition. Botanical assessment of this area does not appear to have been undertaken nor requested during the planning application stage either to inform the application itself or to help inform decision making in relation to setting appropriate planning conditions for the site.

A Site visit was undertaken by principal ecologist Stuart Silver, BSc, MCIEEM on the 10th October 2024 to assess the Site and determine the best locations for bat and bird boxes and 'No Entry' signage points. A walkover was also undertaken across the adjacent grassland area (land to the east of Riddle Pit arm) to record the baseline habitats and to assess the best options for enhancing and managing this area to meet the requirements of the planning condition.

Assessment undertaken by Stuart Silver BSc, MCIEEM on the 10th October found the grassland to be dominated by tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* (D) with Yorkshire fog (LD) *Holcus lanatus*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, with less frequent false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* (O) and cock's foot (O) *dactylis glomerata*. The grassland contains large areas dominated by soft rush *Juncus effusus* growing in wet flushes with locally frequent marsh willowherb *Epilobium palustre*. Other species recorded included vetch *vicia* sp. creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* and cow parsley. The grassland contains a varied sward height including areas of shorter grassland to the field margins with areas of longer grassland to the centre which includes areas of tussocky grassland. The grassland contains frequent wet flushes dominated by soft rush. The grassland as recorded meets the definition for g3c7 'Deschampsia neutral grassland' being dominated by tufted hair grass and Yorkshire fog, but partially meets the criteria for g1b upland acid grassland being over 300m in altitude with a grass dominant sward with wetter areas dominated by soft rush. Due to the time of year, indicator species for acid grassland such as tormentil and heath bedstraw etc. may have been missed but are considered likely to be present. The grassland was assessed against the UKHabs condition assessment criteria 'grassland (med & high distinctiveness)' which covers both acid grassland and neutral grassland types. On both occasions, the current grassland was found to be score as of 'moderate condition'.

Curlew and Lapwing prefer heterogenous vegetation including tussocks and reeds alongside a mixed sward of varying heights. To achieve this, Sites managed for these species are often managed by a single annual cut in early spring or autumn which provides suitable sward heights for nesting and foraging birds, imitating the effect of grazing by cattle.

Management Proposals

A single annual cut is already undertaken on Site (when conditions allow) and it is proposed that this will be continued. In addition to the annual main cut, the current management of the site includes more regular mowing of the perimeter which ensures a varied sward height is achieved across the grassland as a whole, providing a varied habitat structure and diversifying the site for foraging birds. A varied sward height is essential for creating microclimates within the grassland providing opportunities for insects, birds and small mammals to live and breed as defined in the *Statutory Biodiversity Metric – Technical Annex 1 Condition Assessment Sheets and Methodology*. The short grassland to the site perimeter, frequent wet flushes and tussocky grassland areas provide a variety of conditions.

It is proposed that the perimeter cutting is undertaken up to 4 times per year to create variation and the annual main cut will be undertaken on Site in either spring or autumn as suggested above. Due to the wet nature of the ground on Site which is not suitable for heavy machinery, the cutting time will be dependant on ground conditions to avoid damaging the habitat. When suitably dry to allow cutting without causing significant damage, the cut will be undertaken before the end of March to avoid nesting and foraging birds. If the spring cut cannot be undertaken, the autumn cut will be undertaken between September and the end of October. If the ground conditions are unsuitable in any given year, the annual cut will not be undertaken that year and will be attempted in the following Spring. The damage caused by attempting to cut the ground when too wet would be significant and will outweigh any conservation gains.

Curlew and Lapwing avoid nesting and feeding in areas close to tall trees and scrub cover¹. Therefore, the field will be further enhanced for Curlew and Lapwing breeding by removing eight trees from around the perimeter of the Site which will improve the openness of the site and prevent them from acting as potential predator perches. The location of trees are shown in Figure 2.

¹ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-we-do/influence-government-and-business/farming/advice-for-farmers-helping-bird-species/curlew-advice-for-farmers>

As the grassland already contains a number of sizeable wet flushes promoting multiple areas of boggy ground with a high water table providing good conditions for a range of invertebrates and foraging waders, it is not considered necessary to include any more scrapes within the grassland given areas of optimal foraging exist. The loss of tussocky grassland habitat to scrapes, coupled with the potential damage that could be caused by taking excavators across the wet grassland could outweigh the benefits and the creation of ponds has potential to alter the natural drainage of the site which could jeopardise the valuable natural flushes that are already present. Wetting the site further could also hinder access for the tractor, making the site more difficult to mow.

Table 1 Summary of Management Prescriptions and Timings

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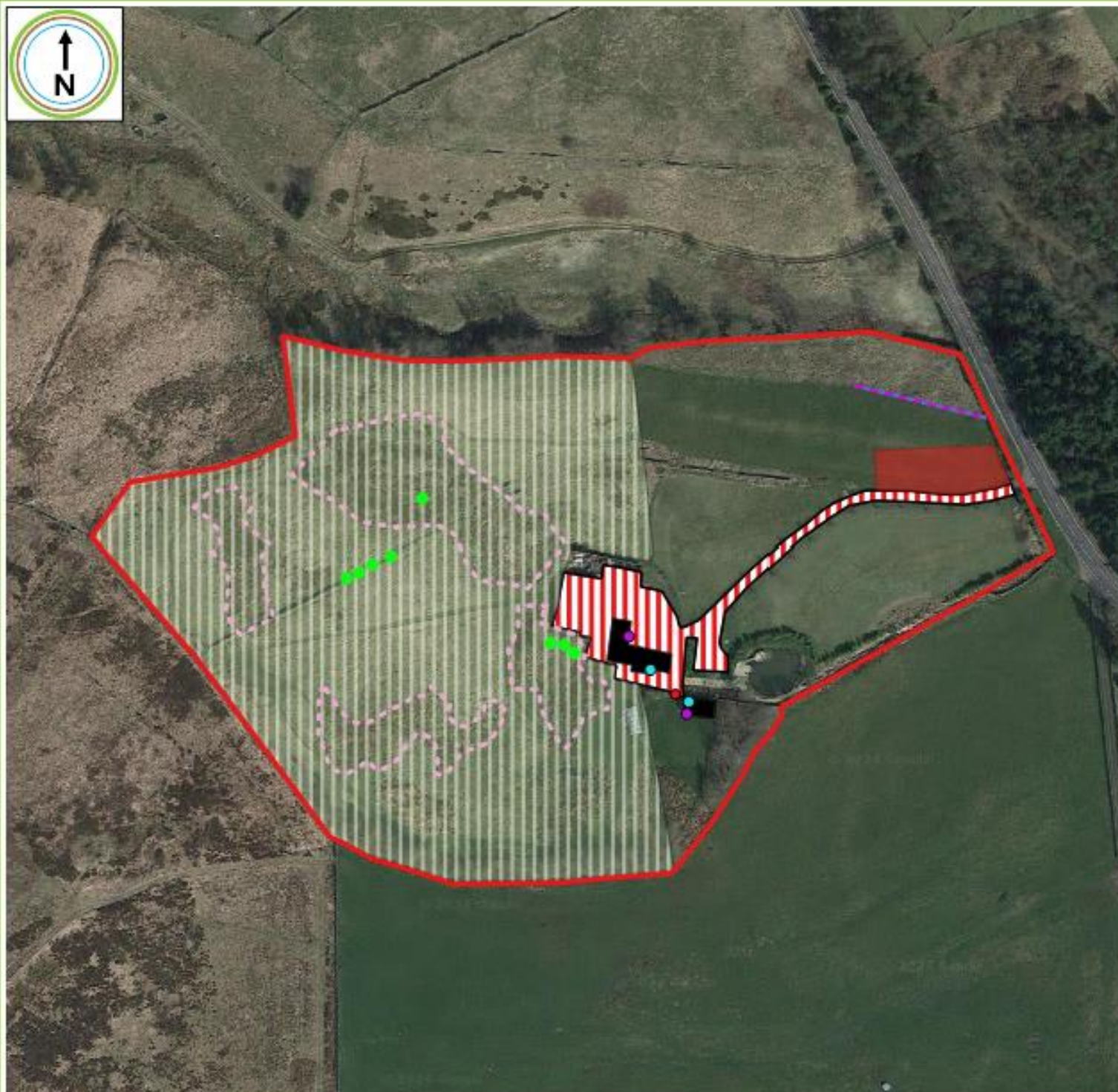
CONCLUSION

If the management is followed, the grassland should provide a variety of conditions for a wide range of species and include favourable areas for foraging curlew and lapwing and should maintain the grassland as unimproved *Deschampsia* dominated grassland with wet flushes. The nesting/roosting boxes will provide additional long lasting provision for local bat and bird populations present around the farm and the signage should prevent guests from wandering onto the more sensitive areas of the Site.

There are no plans to allow camping on the Site and therefore, the LWS and surrounding land will remain undisturbed.

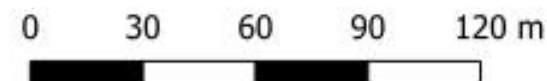
5.0 APPENDICES

5.1 Appendix 1: Figure 2 – Habitat Management Plan



Legend

-  Site Boundary
-  Urban - Developed land;
sealed surface
-  Urban - Developed land;
sealed surface (buildings)
-  Temporary grass grid carpark
-  Grassland - Upland acid grassland
-  Wet Flush
-  Willow screening
-  Individual trees (to be removed)
-  Batbox
-  Birdbox
-  'No Entry' sign



HABITAT WORKS

Riddle Pit Farm

Figure 2
Habitat Management Plan