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Our ref: 17563

23rd August 2021

FAO: Stewart Thomson, Senior Land Manager

Re: Pitt Street, Darfield – Breeding Bird Walkover

Dear Stewart,

Background

Ecus Limited (Ltd) was commissioned by Barratt Homes and David Wilson Homes Yorkshire West in July 2021 to undertake a breeding bird walkover survey at land at Low Valley Farm, Pitt Street, Darfield, Barnsley, S73 9PY, hereafter referred to as 'the Site'. The central Ordnance Survey (OS) National Grid Reference (NGR) of the Site is SE 40530 04166. The Site is displayed in Figure 1.

The requirement for a breeding bird survey was identified by Enzygo *('Ecological Impact Assessment [EcIA] - Pitt Street, Wombwell'* reference: CRM.1122.003.EC.R.002, dated December 2019) following consultation with the Local Planning Authority Biodiversity Officer Trevor Mayne who requested further survey, due to the potential for the Site to support ground nesting birds. Particular bird species highlighted in the EcIA by Enzygo are skylark *Alauda arvensis* and lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*.

Full breeding bird surveys were not able to be undertaken between April and June in 2021 and it is now not possible to undertake full breeding bird surveys at the Site until 2022, which is not feasible given the planning timescales. However, a single visit to record incidental sightings, observe bird activity (including breeding behaviour), and make an assessment of the Site's current suitability for breeding birds has been undertaken by Ecus Ltd on 23rd July 2021.

This is considered to be an appropriate approach as Enzygo recorded predominantly common and widespread bird species during their ecological surveys at the Site, no incidental observations of ground nesting birds were seen by Enzygo during their surveys and the Site was assessed as having limited suitability for ground nesting birds.

This letter report details the methodologies employed during the survey, any constraints encountered, all data collected and any required further survey, mitigation or compensation measures relating to ground nesting birds.

Methodology

The Site was surveyed on 23rd July 2021 by Consultant Ecologist and experienced ornithologist Katie Smith BSc (Hons). The survey involved a walkover of the Site to assess the suitability of habitats to support breeding birds, and notably, ground nesting species. Observations of birds were made whilst walking through the Site and from vantage points at appropriate locations within the Site, noting any bird species in adjacent land, where relevant. Behaviours linked to breeding including (but not limited to) frequent returns to the same spot, food/nesting material carried in the beak, and territorial behaviour were recorded onto a field map during the survey. Survey findings are detailed in Figure 1 and the details of the survey are in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Breeding Bird Survey Details

Date	Sunrise /Time on Site	Air temp ºC	General Weather Conditions
23.07.2021	Sunrise: 05:07 hrs Survey: 08:00 hrs – 09:40 hrs	16ºC	100% cloud cover (low cloud), gentle breeze (Beaufort Scale 2) and mostly dry but with very light drizzle at the start.

Survey Limitations

It is recognised that the survey has not been undertaken during the main breeding bird season of mid-April to June and it is possible that levels of breeding bird behaviour recorded during the survey may not be wholly representative of activity at the Site. However, given the nesting habits of skylarks and lapwing (the main target species of the survey) it is considered likely that if present, they would have remained within the Site even if not directly recorded breeding during this survey visit. Where habitats remain suitable, skylarks will typically nest until early August and lapwing will typically nest until the end of July (Ferguson-Lees, Castell, and Leech, 2011).

Taking into account the information gathered during the survey, including the suitability of the habitats for ground nesting birds, it is considered that a robust assessment of the current use of the Site by ground nesting has been made.

Findings and Evaluation

Site Description

Habitats within the main part of the Site comprise poor semi-improved grassland which has not been recently managed i.e. mown or strimmed, and which reaches a height of 1.5 metres (m) tall. Amongst the grassland are frequently occurring patches of tall ruderal vegetation and dense and scattered scrub. A public footpath used by dog walkers (as observed during the survey) runs from north east to south west through the centre of the Site. In the south west of the Site is a horse-grazed field separated from the main part of the Site by a fence and which also contains semi-improved grassland. The grass is at varying heights due to grazing by at least four horses within the field. The area of grassland in the south west of the Site is bounded by a hedgerow to the south. Photographs of the habitats at the Site during the visit are provided in Appendix 1.

Bird Activity

No ground nesting bird species were recorded at the Site or within adjacent habitats during the survey. Ten species of bird were recorded in total, and these formed a typical species assemblage of grassland and scrub habitats within or close to a built up area.

Breeding behaviour was directly observed for blackbird *Turdus merula*, dunnock *Prunella modularis*, whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, with possible breeding behaviour observed for wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*. Juvenile house sparrows with adults in attendance were observed on Site which confirms breeding in the area however house sparrows typically nest in buildings which are not present on Site, therefore are considered unlikely to currently nest on Site. The remaining birds recorded (woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, greenfinch *Chloris chloris*, carrion crow *Corvus corone* and swallow *Hirundo rustica*) were observed foraging on Site or flying over the Site and no direct breeding behaviour was observed. Further details are presented in Figure 1.

Statutory Designated Sites

In May 2021 a new statutory designated site for nature conservation, the Dearne Valley Wetlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) was created. The SSSI lies approximately 500 m to the south east of the Site and is designated for nationally important numbers and assemblages of breeding and non-breeding birds (Natural England, 2021). The Site lies within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) of the SSSI and as part of this it is considered that residential development of greater than 100 units may have an impact on the SSSI.

Assessment and Mitigation

Legislation

All wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) while a nest is in use or occupied. The nesting bird season is typically considered to fall between March and August (inclusive). Species listed under Schedule 1 of the Act receive additional protection against disturbance whilst occupying a nest site.

Nesting Habits

Skylark

Skylarks typically nest in open habitat including arable cereal crops and grassland and where vegetation is at a height between 10 cm and 40 cm tall. The nest comprises a scrape in the ground and a shallow cup of grass stems and often sheltered on one side by a tussock of vegetation (Ferguson-Lees, Castell, and Leech, 2011).

Lapwing

Lapwing typically require relatively flat ground with short, intermittent or negligible plant cover and the nest site is usually on the ground and on a slight elevation to provide a clear view for adults around the nest. The nest itself is a shallow scrape variably lined with grass and straw (Ferguson-Lees, Castell, and Leech, 2011).

Breeding Bird Assessment

As a result of the assessment of the habitats on Site based on a Site visit, knowledge of the habitat requirements of ground nesting bird species (particularly skylark and lapwing) and lack of ground nesting bird species observed during the survey, it is considered unlikely that the Site supports populations of ground nesting birds.

Given the small area and enclosure by a hedgerow of the grazed grassland in the south west of the Site, it is considered that even if present, the habitat would only support very low numbers of nesting birds and not support a notable or significant population size. Ground nesting birds typically favour nest locations in open habitat and not habitats close to field boundaries. The land in the wider area is also comprised of arable, grassland and wetland habitats which are also likely to offer suitable habitat for nesting lapwing.

Due to the abundance of scrub and tall ruderal habitat within the Site and the presence of a public footpath running through the centre of the Site which is used by dog walkers (creating frequent disturbance which limits the suitability of the Site for ground nesting birds), it is considered that the grassland habitat is too fragmented by unsuitable habitat (i.e. the tall ruderal and scrub) for skylarks to use for nesting, and as such the Site is considered sub-optimal for nesting skylark. Should skylarks or other species of ground-nesting bird be present it is considered that the Site habitats will only support small numbers of ground nesting birds. The tall height of the grassland, scrub and tall ruderal habitats is considered to reduce the suitability of the Site for ground nesting birds, however it is recognised that the survey was undertaken in July during the peak vegetation growing season, and the grassland may be shorter in height during earlier months of the year, depending on any existing management practices.

As a result, overall it is considered that ground nesting birds are unlikely to be found on Site and should they be present, it is considered that only small numbers of breeding pairs would be present. The wider landscape surrounding the Site is likely to offer suitable nesting habitat for ground nesting birds therefore any birds present are likely to also use such habitats.

Recommendations

Breeding Birds

No further survey or specific mitigation, compensation or enhancement measures are considered to be required in relation to ground nesting birds at the Site, however if vegetation is to be cleared during the breeding bird season (typically March to the end of August, inclusive), actions detailed in the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) and Ecological Enhancement Plan (EEP) ('*Pitt Street, Darfield Ecological Management Plan & Ecological Enhancement Plan*' ref: 16962 V3.0, August 2021, Ecus Ltd.) should be followed at all times.

Statutory Designated Sites

It is recommended that consultation with Natural England takes place to identify and consider the impacts of the development on the Dearne Valley Wetlands SSSI due to the Site being within the IRZ of the SSSI.

Yours Sincerely,



Katie Smith BSc (Hons)
Consultant Ecologist

References

Ferguson-Lees, J., Castell, R. and Leech, D. (2011). *'A field guide to monitoring nests'* British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford.

Natural England. (2021). *'Dearne Valley Wetlands SSSI – Overview.'* [online]. Last accessed 13th August 2021. Retrieved from https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-england/dearne-valley-wetlands-sssi/

Enclosed

Figure 1. Breeding Bird Survey Walkover Findings

Appendix 1. Site Photographs



BTO Species Code	Species
D.	Dunnock
B.	Blackbird
GO	Goldfinch
WH	Whitethroat
HS	House sparrow
SL	Swallow
WP	Woodpigeon
WR	Wren
C.	Carrion crow
GR	Greenfinch

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Legend

Site boundary

Bird Registrations

X Calling bird

(X) Bird in Song

Flight Path

Registrations definitely relating to the same bird

X food Adult bird carrying food

X fam Juvenile birds with parents in attendance

0 25 50 m

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Pitt Street, Darfield

Figure 1
Breeding Bird Walkover Survey Findings

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Plate 1	View of Site looking north from the southern boundary
Plate 2	View of long grassland adjacent the public footpath
Plate 3	View of overgrown footpath with grassland >1.5m tall.
Plate 4	Example of scrub/tall ruderal habitat at the Site
Plate 5	View of taller scattered scrub at the Site.

August 2021

Barratt Homes and David Wilson Homes Yorkshire West

Pitt Street, Darfield
Breeding Bird Walkover

Appendix 1 Site Photographs

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