

H Norford for Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

Creation and enhancement of wildlife habitats including shallow scrapes and ridge and furrow features, and reprofiling of north bank of River Dearne

Smithies Marsh, Off Smithies Lane, Barnsley

Site Location and Description

The site lies to the west of the Smithies depot.

This site is 7.34. located to the north of the River Dearne (to the west of Smithies Depot and is an elongated piece of land running north to south from the Dearne Valley Way to the River Dearne in the south. It abuts the travellers site at Smithies in the east and follows the line of surface drains to the west. Access would be from Smithies Lane.

The Dearne Valley Way lies to the north east, and whilst the majority of the site lies within a low risk area for coal mining legacy, some lies a high risk area. A landfill lies immediately to the east. A small area (1ha) designated as a Local Wildlife Site (Barnsley Canal at Wilthorpe) within the site boundary, this area is outside of proposed works and will be unaffected by travelling machinery on site

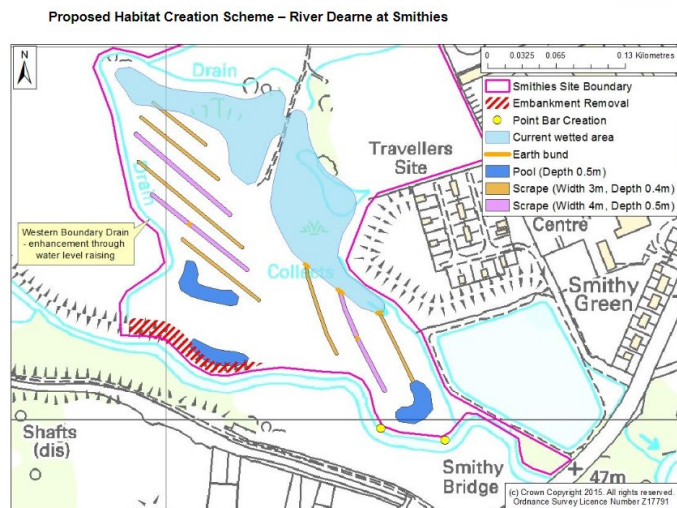
The site lies predominantly in floodzone 3 and is a functional floodplain, with a small amount floodzone 2 as the site extends north. The majority of the site also lies within Green Belt and comprises a mosaic of grazed pasture, ponds, swamp, rough grassland, scrub and woodland in two parts; to the south there an area of low-lying land within the floodplain of the River Dearne which is open and has extensive areas of reeds and marsh; to the north there is an area which slopes up the valley side to the disused railway line, now Barnsley County Borough Footpath No. 1. This is vegetated with self set scrub and trees such as hawthorn. A track runs from the footpath south part way into the site and is bounded by larger species including oak.

Proposed Development

The proposal is intended to create and enhance wildlife habitats by excavating shallow scrapes within existing grassland creating a series of 'ridge and furrow' features to enhance the site for breeding birds, invertebrates and marginal flora communities. A cut/reprofiling of the north bank of the River Dearne is proposed to reconnect the flood plain at Smithies Marsh

Permission is therefore sought for the following:

1. Raising of water levels within the River Dearne through the inclusion of gravel features (not woody debris)
2. Creation of point bar features on the River Dearne
3. Removal of the small flood embankment at the south-west of the site
4. Scrape creation 3 or 4m width and maximum 0.5m deep
5. Enhancement works on the western boundary drain
6. Minimal enhancement works to the existing wetland habitats on the site
7. Small-scale habitat opportunities



Access will be from Smithies Lane, using two no. vehicles, a Volvo 360 excavator and a 5.5 tonne dumper truck these vehicles will enter the site in the morning and exit in the evening. A maximum 2 no. contractor staff vehicles will be used during the works which will be parked in the existing car park off Smithies Lane. Opportunities will be available to undertake volunteer work via the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

On completion of the proposed works an interpretation board will be located at the entrance on the northern boundary which connects to a public footpath. Contents may include a history of the site, the wildlife in the location and in the wider Dearne and floodplains.

There is the potential for the site to deliver events, e.g., walks, ID training, pond dipping, bug hunting for local communities at some time in the future

Policy Context

Planning decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise and the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making.

Local Plan Policies

GB1 Green Belt – Green Belt will be protected from inappropriate development
 BIO1 Protection and enhancement of Biodiversity and encouraging biodiversity enhancements.

CC5 Water Resource Management – proposals will be supported which conserve and enhance:

- I. The natural geomorphology of water courses
- II. Water quality and
- III. The ecological value of the water environment including watercourse corridors

HE1 The Historic Environment

HE6 Archaeology

GS2 Green Ways and Public Rights of Way

POLL1 Pollution Control and Protection

NPPF

The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 set out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 states at para 150 that certain forms of development are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provide they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Engineering operations are included in the list.

It goes on in Section 15 to say that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. In particular, Para 179b states that to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should "promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

Para 180 (d) when determining planning applications, LPA's should apply the following principles "development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate".

Consultations

Barnsley Biodiversity Trust – supports the proposal on biodiversity, but cannot comment on technical or hydrological aspect of the proposal

Biodiversity – no objection subject to a condition

Coal Authority – no objection

Conservation – no objections -

Danum Drainage Commissioners – no objections

Environment Agency – no objection

Highways Drainage – Details are sufficient – no observations or to make in respect of land drainage

Highways DC – no objections or conditions proposed

Natural England – support the proposal

Northern Powergrid – no objections

Pollution Control – no objections subject to conditions

PROW – no objections

SYAS – the site has archaeological implications and a condition is

SYMAS - no objection providing fugitive gas is considered

Ward Councillors no comments received

Yorkshire Water – no observation or comments as no YW infrastructure involved

Representations

The proposal was advertised by press notice, site notices and neighbour notification letters. No comments have been received

Assessment

Principle of development

Para 147 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. However, Para 150 goes on to identify development (which includes engineering operations) which is not

inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

Green Belt Issues

Engineering operations are not considered to be inappropriate development. However, the nature of the operations must preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The development proposes a series of scrapes of 3m width and 0.4m depth, and of 4m width and 0.5m depth, extending generally in north west - south east direction within the site. Other works are even less intrusive and relate to biodiversity enhancements.

As this does not include any built development and do not increase the height of the land these developments are not considered to be of detriment to the character and openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. As such the proposal is considered to be in accordance with Local Plan Policy GB1.

Archaeology

The South Yorkshire Archaeology Service has no objections but considers that the site has archaeological implications and have proposed a planning condition requiring the submission of a Written Scheme of investigation for works. On this basis the proposal is satisfactory with respect to Local plan Policy HE6 Archaeology.

Residential amenity

The site is relatively close to a travellers site adjacent to Smithies Depot. However, due to the limited nature of the proposals and low lying nature of the ground, it is not considered that there would be significant impacts on residential amenity in the long term, although the Pollution Control Officer considers there may be some noise and disturbance whilst the scrapes are being created due to noise from machinery. Whilst 2 no. vehicles will pass the southern end of the properties twice each day (once at the start and once at the end of each day), the groundworks will be in the southern part of the site furthest away from the dwellings. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with Local Plan policies G1 and D1 subject to a planning condition.

Biodiversity

The submitted documentation states that it is considered the scrapes will become strategically important for breeding and migrating bird species such as lapwing (red listed), redshank (amber listed) and snipe (amber listed) whose populations are declining. The application documentation states that Project benefits are anticipated to be the following:

- 1) Creation of Natural England Priority Habitats
- 2) Creation of additional breeding and feeding opportunities for resident and migratory bird species
- 3) Creation of additional habitats suitable for aquatic invertebrate, amphibians and locally rare sedge species
- 4) Increase the connectivity of wetland habitats along the reach of the River Dearne leading to 'more, bigger and joined up' landscape for wildlife to disperse and use for breeding and foraging
- 5) Create a public amenity which will reconnect local communities to nature on their doorstep and a resource for visitors - increasing health and well-being opportunities within the area
- 6) Offer volunteering and environmental educational opportunities for local people
- 7) Increase legitimate use of the site and dissuade anti-social activities such as fly tipping

Natural England support the proposal stating that they are keen to see further work to develop biodiverse habitats and are pleased the proposal includes a volunteer element. The

projects proposals will directly compliment Natural England's wider strategic objectives in conserving and enhancing conservation in England's natural environment for biodiversity and landscape.

The Biodiversity Officer welcomes the proposals which include a 9.76% gain in habitat units and 12.51% gain in river units, and the trading rules have been satisfied. The recommendations proposed by the preliminary ecological appraisal are satisfactory but an updated assessment will be required along with a Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan and pre-works check for watervoles which can all be secured by conditions.

Overall the proposal is considered to be in accordance with Local Plan Policy BIO1, CC5 and NPPF paras 179b and 180.

Conservation

The Conservation Officer considers that the impacts on designated and undesignated assets in the vicinity is likely to be nil. The works involve the creation of a number of shallow ridge and furrow feature to enhance the habitats for wildlife of Smithies Marsh plus the reprofiling of the flood bank / northern edge of the Dearne to allow better flooding / drainage onto the floodplain of the marshland. The site red line is at its northern edge relatively close to the SAM at the former North Gawber Colliery (Fanhouse), but would anticipate setting impacts would be nil, due to the nature of the works and the fact they are to the middle and southern half of the site. The re-profiling of the bank of the Dearne involves altering the modern flood bank so this is (by its very nature) a modern feature. Overall, the possible impacts on the historic environment seem to me to be extremely slight and the Conservation Officers view is that the proposal would not cause harm to designated or undesignated historic assets in the area. The proposal is therefore considered to be compliant with Local Plan Policy HE1.

Highways

The proposed works will be undertaken using two site vehicles operated by two contractor members of staff who will park their own vehicles within the car park area close to the access road junction with Smithies Lane. The wheel washing facility is to be located within the Waste Recycling Centre where the vehicles are to be kept overnight. A wooden ramp is to be utilised to facilitate the movement of the site vehicles over the kerb into the site and a banksman will oversee this procedure.

In view of the above, the Highways Officer consider that the proposals would have minimal highway implications and as such there are no objections from a highways development control perspective and is therefor compliant with Local Plan Policy T4.

Public Rights of Way

There are no objections, there are no recorded public rights of way within the red line boundary.

Summary

The proposal intends to create and enhance wildlife habitats the site for breeding birds, invertebrates and marginal flora communities with an aspiration for the site to become strategically important for several species of endangered bird species, with additional habitats suitable for aquatic invertebrate, amphibians and locally rare sedge species. The works will increase connectivity of wetland habitats along the River Dearne and create a public amenity acting as a resource and increasing health and well-being opportunities as well as volunteering and environmental educational opportunities through the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The proposal is supported by Natural England who considers that it will compliment Natural England's wider strategic objectives in conserving and enhancing conservation in England's natural environment for biodiversity and landscape. The proposal

is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt and will not affect openness. No consultees have objected subject to conditions in some cases. Taking into account the relevant development plan policies and other material considerations, it is not considered that there are any significant and demonstrable adverse impacts that would outweigh the benefits associated with the granting of planning permission for the scheme. The proposal therefore complies with the development plan as a whole and the advice in the NPPF.

As such the scheme is considered to accord with policies and guidelines and is recommended for approval.

Recommendation

Grant subject to conditions