

GMEU response

Summary

The only ecological issues are the low risk of disturbance to nesting birds and mitigation for the loss of around what is likely low value grassland to building and bare ground.

Protected Species

I am satisfied that it is very unlikely that the development will adversely effect any protected species. No further information or measures are required

Nesting Birds

There appears to be no direct loss of trees or shrubs but the propped development is immediately adjacent to the existing hedge along the southern boundary, with a theoretical risk of disturbance during construction. I therefore recommend an informative along the following lines is applied to any permission.

The applicant is reminded that, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended it is an offence to remove, damage, or destroy the nest of a wild bird, while the nest is in use or being built. Planning consent does not provide a defence against prosecution under this act. If a birds nest is suspected work should cease immediately and a suitably experienced ecologist employed to assess how best to safeguard the nest(s).

Contributing to and Enhancing the Natural Environment & Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Section 174 of the NPPF 2021 states that the planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The development will result in the loss of just over 0.1132ha of grassland, likely heavily modified and therefore a low ecological value habitat. No mitigation appears to be provided. Now Places for Everyone (PfE) has been through Inquiry, thematic policies in the plan can now be given weight in planning decisions. This includes the BNG Policy.

Given the simple nature of the development and because BNG is not yet mandatory, I would regard it as unreasonable to require a full BNG assessment and would be happy to assume a loss of 0.226 biodiversity units. (0.1132 x 2 (low value habitat) x1 (poor ecological condition)). To achieve 10% BNG would therefore require 0.25 BU. This could be achieved through the planting of native trees around the boundary of the site. 21 such trees achieving 0.25 BU. Alternatively, given BNG is not as yet mandatory, I would accept a new boundary hawthorn hedge along the new field boundaries. They may also own other grassland that they could enhance. Finally, they may prefer to provide a financial contribution via section 106. Currently I am recommending between £16k and £20k per BU. ie For this development between £4k & £5k.

I therefore recommend that prior to determination the developer indicates how they would prefer to provide mitigation for the loss of the grassland.

Ecologist

Planning

Planning and Transportation

Place