

Planning application 69510 Land south of Leigh Lane – Greater Manchester Ecology Unit

Summary

The development will result in the permanent loss of part of an SBI. We therefore recommend refusal. In addition, the ecological surveys were outside the optimal season for woodland and after the site had been partially cleared. We also disagree with the findings of the biodiversity net gain assessment. Other ecological issues include nesting birds and invasive species.

Cyrus Ainsworth Nurseries and Parkers Lodges Site of Biological Importance

Whilst accepting this part of the SBI has already been damaged, it currently could be restored and enhanced. The proposed development will result in the permanent loss of around 16% of the SBI, a significant negative impact to a site classed as being of district wide importance. I cannot see that two dwellings is of more importance from a planning perspective than the site's current protection for wildlife. I therefore recommend refusal of the proposal because of the site's current designation.

Timing of Surveys

Two surveys of the site occurred one in January 2022 and one in August 2022. Given the site had already been cleared, the findings of the surveys cannot be regarded as true reflection of the vegetation that was present prior to clearance, in addition surveys of woodlands as accepted by the consultant are best in the period March through to early June both for ground flora and breeding birds. Whilst accepting the site has been cleared, it is unclear what level of the woodland ground flora remain. *I therefore recommend an updated botanical and breeding bird survey prior to determination.* As we are currently in the optimal period this should not result in any significant delay to the planning process.

Protected Species

I have no reason to doubt the findings of the extended phase 1 survey that no protected species are likely to be present. I am aware that this locality has been fairly well surveyed historically and more recently for PFE and that no such species other than bats found.

Nesting Birds

Further trees are proposed for removal, potential bird nesting habitat. All British birds nests and eggs (with certain limited exceptions) are protected by Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended. I recommend a condition along the following lines be applied to any permission.

No works to trees or shrubs shall occur between the 1st March and 31st August in any year unless a detailed bird nest survey by a suitably experienced ecologist has been carried out immediately prior to clearance and written confirmation provided that no active bird nests are present which has been agreed in writing by the LPA.

Other Priority Species

Whilst much of the potential cover for other wildlife has been removed, common toad a UK Biodiversity Priority Species is recorded from the SBI, probably breeding in Parkers Lodges and habitats in the wider site suitable for hedgehog. I therefore recommend reasonable avoidance measures during any additional site clearance and construction if the development is approved. This can be worded along the following lines.

Prior to any additional earthworks or vegetation clearance a reasonable avoidance measures method statement covering earthworks, vegetation clearance and construction will be provided to and agreed in writing by the LPA

Invasive Species

Japanese knotweed, himalyan balsam and rhododendron are abundant across the site. All are included within schedule 9 part 2 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended. I accept that these species are also present beyond the boundary of their control and therefore total eradication is unlikely ie reinfestation is likely to occur particularly for Himalayan balsam. There will however be a high risk of tracking of Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed off-site. I therefore recommend if permission is granted a condition along the following lines.

Prior to any earthworks a method statement detailing removal from the site and biosecurity measures for himalayan balsam, japanese knotweed and rhododendron should be supplied to and agreed in writing to the LPA. The agreed method statement shall be adhered to and implemented in full unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.

Contributing to and Enhancing the Natural Environment

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 around 0.5ha of woodland with dwellings and garden. There will also be a loss of bird nesting opportunities. A biodiversity net gain assessment has been provided which accepts that a net loss will occur at the site level for area based habitats with a gain of hedgerow habitat. The full metric does not appear to have been provided, but I would dispute the methodology.

I would regard this as quite a simple assessment in that it is the loss of around 0.5ha of woodland in I accept fairly poor condition due to the dominance of invasive species in the ground layer being replaced with garden and dwellings and do not agree that each tree should be individually assessed. This in one way benefits the developer as whilst this results in a significantly larger loss of biodiversity units in percentage terms actually reduces the gross number of BU lost. *I therefore recommend the BNG assessment is recalculated utilising the simpler approach I have recommended.*

With regards biodiversity mitigation and enhancement bird and bat boxes should be provided as has been indicated on the landscape proposal. The numbers shown are proportionate, but I would recommend targeting of woodland bird species not house sparrow at this location. *I would recommend all replacement tree planting is native and that prior to determination (if permission is to be granted), information supplied on how compensation for the loss of biodiversity units will be provided.*

Ecologist

Planning

Planning and Transportation

Place