Land off Stile House Lane, Bradnop, North Staffordshire

Proposal to Erect a Residential Building

An Ecological Appraisal

April 2018



The new building is proposed in this part of the field. Clumps of Docks indicate the poor conservation value of the grassland.

Prepared by Colin Hayes

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A. Introduction

'Ecology-first' was invited to undertake this survey when Staffordshire Moorlands Council asked the applicants, Mr & Mrs Waterhouse, to provide a biodiversity statement to accompany their planning application to build a new residential property.

B. Survey Method

The survey involved only a walkover of the application site (17th April 2018). A short botanical species list and a description of the grassland were recorded, and photographs taken of relevant features. The potential presence of legally protected species on the land was evaluated during the walkover.

C. Findings

i. General site description

The application site comprises a single field of agriculturally improved grassland. It has been fenced off from the adjacent land to the east, which has been excavated recently to create a large fishing lake (see photo 1). Stile House Lane borders the western side where a barbed wire fence excludes a shallow, marshy roadside ditch. Similarly, along the southern edge, a barbed wire fence excludes a hard-surfaced track giving access to the fishing lake. The northern boundary (with the property 'Lark Hall') is slightly more substantial, being the remains of drystone wall, topped with barbed wire.

ii. Botany

The pasture has very poor botanical diversity and has many small muddy areas resulting from the winter grazing of two horses. At this early spring date, it is difficult to identify the dominant grass species. The landowner reports that the field was reseeded some years ago to improve its productivity. Most of the field is poorly drained, although there is no evidence of rushes in the sward. Docks and Creeping Buttercup make up the herb component almost exclusively; both species have a high percentage cover throughout the field (see photos 1 & 2). Clover was also present, but is confined to the NE edge where drainage is slightly better over ground made-up historically with rubble.

iii. Legally Protected Species

1. Breeding birds

No impact is expected because the short sward of the field provides no shelter for ground-nesting birds.

2. Badgers

No evidence of Badger activity could be found in the field or its immediate surroundings.

3. Bats

A storage container is the only structure on the land. It is completely closed leaving no access for roosting bats.

4. Great Crested Newts (GCNs)

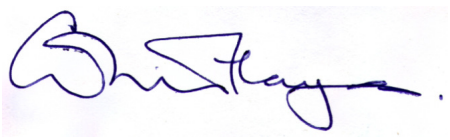
This region of high ground in North Staffordshire is not known to support many populations of GCNs compared to lowland areas a little further south. The area is primarily the source of small streams and ditches draining westwards. There are no long-established ponds in the vicinity from which this species could have spread. The angling lake is the only waterbody within 250m of the application site. Its water is extremely turbid, suggesting a high population of large fish, probably Common Carp. It is very unlikely that a population of GCNs is present because fish predate heavily on newt eggs and larvae. The marshy ditch beside Stile House Lane retains no areas of standing water suitable for breeding amphibians. The presence of GCNs on the development site is extremely unlikely.

D. Summary of Expected Impact

Virtually no adverse impact on local wildlife interests could be expected as a result of this development. The area chosen for the building is no different from any other part of the field, so its construction will only result in the loss of a small area of species-poor grassland. No legally protected species appear likely to be affected.

E. Conclusion

No ecological reasons why the development should not proceed could be found.



Colin Hayes, Ecology-first

20th April 2018

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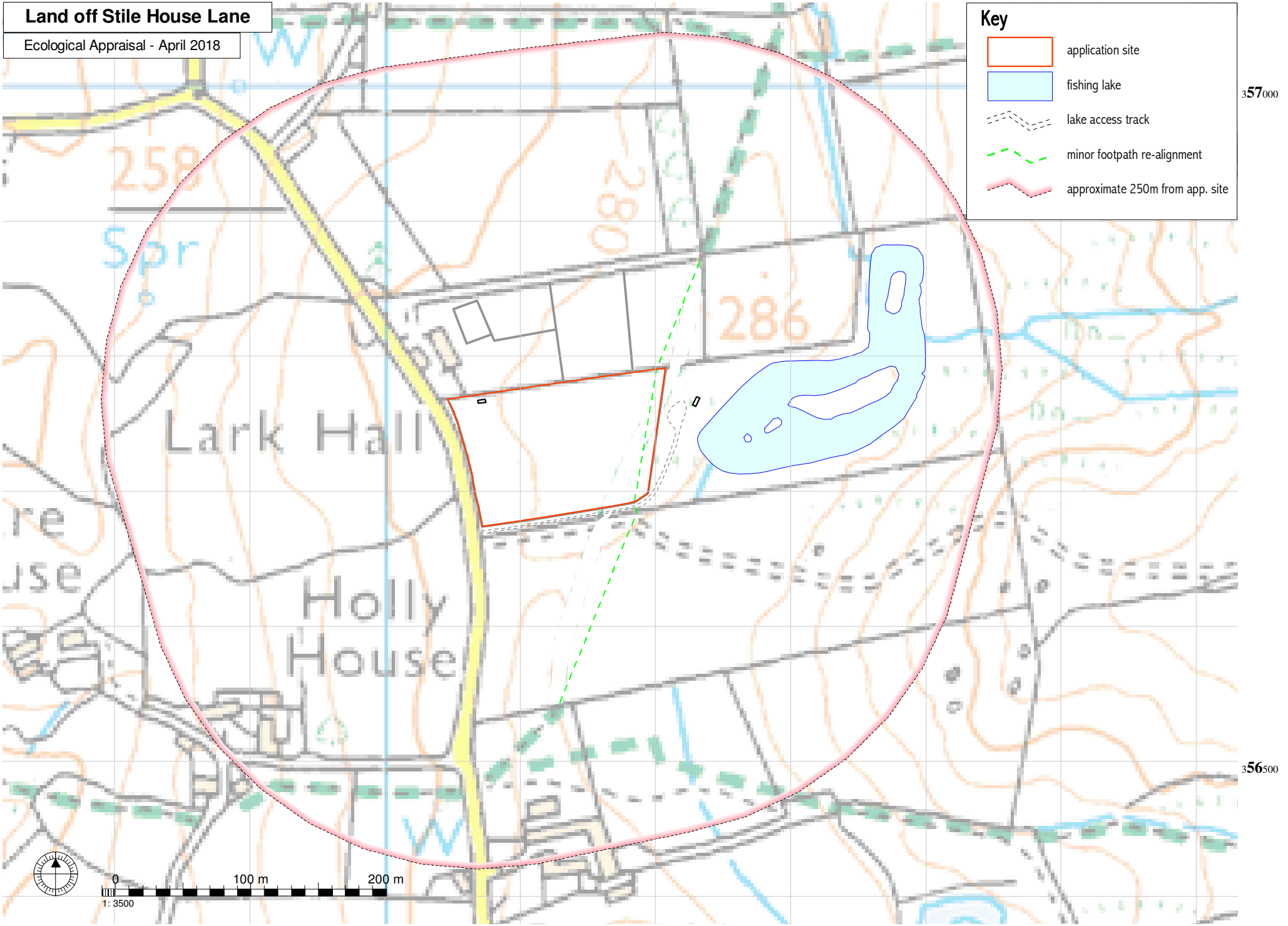



Photo 1: The grassland sward is particularly heavily poached around the field entrance. This view looks aproximately along the line of the proposed driveway.



Photo 2: Docks (and Creeping Buttercup) are the dominant herbs across most of the grassland. Poaching has produced many small areas of bare soil. The recently created angling lake and car park can be seen in the background.