

From: [Curley, Jane](#)
To: [Planning Comments \(SMDC\)](#)
Subject: FW: SMD/2021/0536 Land at Barnfields Industrial Estate- REM
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Jane Curley (Mrs)
Senior Planning Officer (Majors & Commercial)
01538 395400 ext 4124
Mobile 07794 768397

From: Kate Dewey <k.dewey@staffs-wildlife.org.uk>
Sent: 13 October 2021 08:00
To: Curley, Jane <jane.curley@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk>
Cc: Swithenbank, Arne <arne.swithenbank@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk>; Steve Massey <Steve.Massey@highpeak.gov.uk>; Anne-Marie McLaughlin <anne-marie.mclaughlin@environment-agency.gov.uk>; SCC Flood Team <flood.team@staffordshire.gov.uk>; Planning.APWest@severntrent.co.uk; Alex Fitzroy <a.fitzroy@staffs-wildlife.org.uk>; Nick Mott MCIEEM <n.mott@staffs-wildlife.org.uk>; David Cadman <d.cadman@staffs-wildlife.org.uk>; Jeff Sim <j.sim@staffs-wildlife.org.uk>
Subject: SMD/2021/0536 Land at Barnfields Industrial Estate- REM

Ref number SMD/2021/0536

Application Location Land at Barnfields Industrial Estate, Sunnyhills Road, Leek, Staffordshire, ST13 5RJ

Application description Reserved matters application for approval of appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale to provide: 157 residential dwellings (Class C3) providing a mix of two, three and four bedroom houses, and two bedroom apartments; 6 x live / work units (Sui Generis); 1 x public house / restaurant / café (Sui Generis / Class E(b)); a marina / basin and associated boating facilities with 13 berths; associated works including internal road network, associated highway works, drainage infrastructure, landscaping, open space, play area, pedestrian, and cyclist links; land reserved for future railway station with associated heritage / railway activities building/s and car parking; and land reserved for future link road including associated landscaping. The application is submitted pursuant to outline planning permission SMD/2014/0750.

Site area 6.59 hectares

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been asked to review the above application as part of a service level agreement with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to provide ecology advice regarding planning and development management functions.

SUMMARY –Holding objection -further information and amendments required.

Required prior to determination:

1. Updated Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA).
2. Updated bat survey of suitable buildings.
3. Updated great crested newt assessment two ponds within 250m.
4. Further species surveys as necessary following the PEA.
5. Biodiversity Net Gain assessment using DEFRA metric 3.0
6. Detailed surface and foul drainage plans, incorporating sustainable drainage features and complying with conditions 31 and 32 of outline.

7. Removal of built development from Flood zone 2
8. Detailed plans for landscaping and habitat enhancement/compensation, with better linked greenspaces and access to adjoining open spaces.

To be secured via condition should approval be given in future:

1. Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), to include mitigation for pollution, species, and any additional mitigation requirements pending PEA results.
2. Sensitive lighting scheme, mitigating for light spill onto the River Churnet and associated habitats.
3. Long term management plan for proposed habitats.
4. As per outline SMD/2014/0750, conditions that may impact on ecology:
 - a. Condition 22 – an arboricultural method statement detailing retained tree protection.
 - b. Condition 29 – a phased contamination remediation strategy to be approved.

Documents reviewed:

- Drawing - 21039_01_A_Proposed Site Layout
- Drawing - 21039_02_A_Illustrative Site Layout
- Drawing - 21039_03_Boundary Treatment Layout
- Drawing - 21039_04_Boundary Treatment Details
- Drawing - Preliminary Marina Layout
- Landscape - General Arrangement Plan
- Landscape - Hard Surface Plan
- Landscape - Soft Landscaping 1 – 3
- Ecological Assessment – Tyler Grange, 2014 (outline SMD/2014/0750)
- Decision notice (outline SMD/2014/0750)
- Flood Risk Assessment 17/01/2014 (outline SMD/2014/0750)

DESIGNATED WILDLIFE SITES, WIDER ECOLOGICAL NETWORK

Birchall Meadow Biodiversity Alert Site

This small species-rich meadow of district importance lies just to the east of the site. No direct impact is expected, but it is linked by the adjacent habitat corridor of the Leekbrook Line green space. The proposals could strengthen this corridor if well designed. The landscaping could benefit the wildlife site by using hay/seed collected from the meadow to create the new wildflower areas in the development.

The River Churnet runs parallel to the southern site boundary. This habitat corridor is likely to be important for a range of species. Additional disturbance from lighting and human residents, and predation from pet cats is likely. Therefore, the development will need to consider how to shield this habitat from the development by incorporating habitat features along the southern boundary. A sensitive lighting scheme will be required that avoids light spill onto the southern boundary of the site and the river and riparian habitat. This is to ensure protected species' foraging and commuting habitats are protected and do not become further fragmented. Habitat enhancements are discussed below.

Condition 29 of the outline application (SMD/2014/0750) requires a phased contamination remediation strategy to be approved. The construction phase also needs to adhere to pollution prevention guidelines to avoid pollution to the River Churnet and other associated habitats – to be part of an Ecology Construction Management Plan (ECMP).

HABITATS

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) survey by Tyler Grange for the outline application SMD/2014/0048 was carried out in August 2013. As per CIEEM guidance, the PEA report is now considered out of date, as habitats can change considerably and species may move onto or off a site. Due to this an updated PEA is required prior to determination, in order to determine whether the layout, landscaping and scale are appropriate.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Policy NE1 in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Adopted September 2020, expects that 'all development where possible seeks to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In circumstances where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable, developers will be required to ensure that impacts are appropriately mitigated, with suitable compensation measures towards loss of habitat used only as a last resort where there is no alternative'.

It is not clear whether the scheme would provide a net gain, as the baseline may have changed, and the current layout includes only a small area of public green space. Priority habitats such as Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land may have developed on site. A Biodiversity Impact Assessment utilising the latest DEFRA metric 3.0 (or above) is required to ensure the proposals are appropriate, prior to determination. Habitat data collected during the update PEA should inform the baseline.

Given that an amended design is being sought, without the marina, a final plan would need to be agreed before a BNG assessment is calculated. Any retained or enhanced habitats used for the metric must be secured for at least 25 years. Additional provisioning may be required if a net gain is not feasible within the current proposals. It is noted that the previous ecology survey found the site to be mainly hardstanding; if conditions are the same it may be that the proposed gardens do provide a net gain. We recommend further enhancements regardless (see below).

Landscaping and habitat creation

Wildflower areas are welcomed- these should be created using local seed harvested from an existing local wildlife site, such as Birchall Meadows to the east. This helps conserve diverse meadows as well as being generally cheaper alternative to commercial seed mixes.

The proposed areas of turf and amenity grass could offer more for biodiversity- all garden lawns should utilise a short flowery lawn seed mix, which can be cut short but provides a better habitat. Any trees cleared for construction should be reused as habitat piles adjacent to hedgerows and within wildlife areas. Small brush or log piles or bug hotels should be installed in optimal locations to encourage insects, perhaps around the site boundary. Around the houses themselves wildlife friendly planting should be included, for example, using climbers.

We recommend that mixed native hedgerows are included as boundary features rather than fences where possible. This will be essential at the rear of gardens that adjoin the boundary of the development, particularly along the southern boundary. This is to provide an additional buffer between the development and River Churnet. Hedgerows should be undersown with a hedgerow wildflower seed mix.

Enhancements are to be detailed on an updated plan. Please note that this is a starting point, so additional enhancements may be required pending the BIA and PEA.

Long term management should ensure that edges of amenity areas are mown less frequently, allowing for wildflowers to grow, providing habitat stepping stones to encourage insects such as bees and butterflies. A long-term management plan for greenspaces/ habitats will also need secured via condition.

Surface Drainage and Flooding

Proposals will need to satisfy conditions 31 and 32 of the outline application. Condition 32 of the outline application (SMD/2014/0750) states that *'No phase of development (except for works of site clearance and demolition) shall take place until such time as a phasing plan for a detailed surface water drainage scheme (based on sustainable drainage principles and an assessment of the*

hydrological and hydrogeological context of the development) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.'

No surface drainage details have been submitted. Due to the scale of the site, areas of floodplain within the boundary and proximity to the River Churnet which supports the priority species Brown Trout, a detailed drainage scheme is required prior to determination. Effective SuDS need to be integrated into landscaping and road designs at this stage, rather than at discharge of conditions.

The Flood Risk Assessment submitted for the outline application SMD/2014/0750 reports that flood plain extends over some areas of the development site. It is proposed to alter and compensate for flood levels, altering the zones to areas on the edge of the site. Zone 3 areas have been designed as open spaces, however, the current layout plans appear to show houses within in the 2 areas of Flood Zone 2 on site – plots 03,04,05, 41,42 and 43. This needs to be avoided.

The proposals would reduce impermeable areas by around 10% but infiltration is not generally suitable. The FRA lays out a number of SuDS features to be incorporated including detention basins, however none are shown on the layout plans. Any SuDS features will need to be located outside of the floodplain- it is not clear whether sufficient space is available in the current layout. Updated run-off calculations will be required reflecting the current detailed design. Discharge of controlled run-off is proposed through existing surface water outfalls to the river.

Nature-based solutions means systems are more resilient, easier to manage, reduce pollution and give benefits for amenity and wildlife. Design should follow SuDS principles (CIRIA SuDS Manual C753) where possible, including source control measures and allowing water to flow above ground through open ditches, swales, and other features rather than underground. Filtering of pollution is particularly key due to proposed discharge to the River Churnet, to protect flora and fish populations.

While some permeable paving is proposed, permeable pavements and parking spaces could also infiltrate and store water. Rainwater harvesting systems and water butts should also be considered, which would additionally reduce potable water use and increase drought resilience. Green roofs on larger buildings or blocks should be considered.

Foul Drainage

No foul drainage details have been submitted - details are required prior to determination. The design should be mindful of any constraints or limitations on the current system and avoid any overflow discharges into watercourses.

Trees and hedges

As per condition 22 of the outline application (SMD/2014/0750), no phase of the development should take place until an arboricultural method statement detailing retention and protection of any trees and hedgerows has been approved.

It is noted from the plans (Drawing – 21039_01_A_Proposed Site Layout) that an area along the northern boundary is shaded as 'safeguarded land for potential link road'. This overlaps with the retained trees along the northern boundary shown on the same plan. It also shows that some of the new tree planting along the same boundary may also be lost if the link road goes ahead.

SPECIES

Bats

The previous ecology survey (2013) found the buildings to be of negligible potential. The update survey should ensure that conditions have not changed since then. Buildings of corrugated metal construction are highly unlikely to support bats, but any buildings of brick construction may have deteriorated since the last survey.

As mentioned previously, a sensitive lighting scheme mitigating for light spill onto surrounding habitats and avoiding bat boxes will be required.

We would like enhancements in the form of bat and bird boxes implemented throughout the development, where suitable conditions exist.. The site ecologist should inform of suitable design, locations and aspect. Enhancements to be shown on updated plans.

Great Crested Newts, Amphibians

Two ponds are located in close proximity to the site. The first is located just to the south of the development. The previous ecology survey (2013) deemed it to be in poor condition for amphibians, and that the development site itself did not contain suitable terrestrial habitat at the time.

There is now also a second pond to the north-west, which has been created since the last survey. The site, in our opinion *does* contain suitable terrestrial habitat for amphibians particularly for

hibernation. The updated PEA should assess the current habitats for GCN and if a licence is likely to be required, assess presence/ absence in the two ponds, and whether mitigation is required. Required prior to determination.

Otters and water voles

No otter or water vole evidence was found in previous surveys. However, otters, a European protected species, are known to use the river and disturbance could occur where construction is within 10m of the river. The CEMP should include a pre-commencement survey of the river to identify any resting sites and ensure suitable mitigation is put in place.

Badgers

Potential badger habitat is present in the surrounding area. A check for badger signs within 20m of the site to be conducted at least a month prior to construction commencing. Mammal protection measures to be undertaken to prevent animals being trapped in excavations. Include within CEMP.

Other species

The update PEA may identify further species or habitats that need to be considered – invertebrates and reptiles could be relevant given the site supports post-industrial brownfield habitats. Mitigation may be required within the detailed design.

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN, ACCESS TO NATURE

Orientation and roof design should be amended to enable better suitability for solar panels.

Access to natural greenspaces off the site is not well considered- clear links should be provided to the canal, country park and to the Leekbrook Line greenspace to the east. The small green spaces are not particularly well linked- consideration should be given to circular green walking routes within the development that join the green spaces, to enable short 'doorstep' walks and increase the value and usability of the spaces.

Regards,

Kate Dewey BSc (Hons) MCIEEM

Senior Planning Officer

07494852383

Planning consultations- please send to planning@staffs-wildlife.org.uk

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