
From:
Sent: 25 January 2022 08:00
To:
Cc:
Subject: Re: SMD/2021/0700 Former Railway Line, Barnfield Road

SMD/2021/0700

Former Railway Line, Barnfield Road, Leek, Staffordshire

Reinstatement of railway track, new platform and replacement footpath on former railway line between Cornhill, Leek and boundary of existing operational railway land at Leekbrook.

2.52 hectares

SJ 98149 55104

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.

Having visited the site on 21/01/2022 and discussed the issues with Evolution Ecology, we are satisfied that key habitats with potential for Local Wildlife Site status and supporting scarce breeding birds will be retained. Birchall Field BAS will not be impacted.

It has been confirmed that no work is proposed to be carried out to the tunnel in terms of repairs or additional lighting, and given that the Cheddleton Tunnel supports bats while in use by trains, it is considered that any bats using the smaller tunnel on this site would not be significantly impacted- therefore further survey is not necessary before determination.

Tree clearance will be minimised, and we understand that the footpath route and design will be flexible enough to avoid larger trees along the indicated route. Work will be supervised by an ecologist and felled material retained as habitat onsite. Habitat enhancements can be made to mitigate for short-term impacts and achieve a net gain in the long term alongside ongoing management.

In order to show more clearly the future construction and landscaping of the area, we recommend further details regarding landscaping and footpath construction are provided, particularly around the proposed platform as this northerly section will see the greatest vegetation clearance, as well as interaction with existing footpaths and the urban edge.

SUMMARY – No objection subject to conditions

Recommended conditions:

1. Prior to commencement of any clearance/ construction, an updated Ecology Construction and Enhancement Plan to include:

a) Vegetation clearance and construction methodology to minimise tree loss, and transplant any flora of value. Protection measures for all key species including amphibians and reptiles, bats, birds, otters and badgers.

b) Enhancement proposals and plan setting out habitat features for key species including willow tit and redpoll, retention of all cleared vegetation on site to form habitat piles, and proposed planting/ seeding.

c) Biodiversity Impact Assessment using Defra metric 3.0, including current and proposed habitat plans. Off-site areas to be included as necessary to achieve a net gain.

2. Within 6 months of work commencement, an Ecology Management and Monitoring Plan covering 20 years to detail ongoing habitat management and monitoring of key species, informed by a breeding bird survey, botanical survey of woodland areas in spring, grassland areas in May-June and assessment against Local Wildlife Site criteria.

3. Proposed landscaping plan for the northern section of the site covering the platform, water tower and footpath section, detailing planting and materials.

4. Prior to the commencement of development full constructional details for the proposed concessionary footpath, including avoidance of trees where possible.

We will continue liaison with the applicant and ecologist with regards to the content of the ECEP.

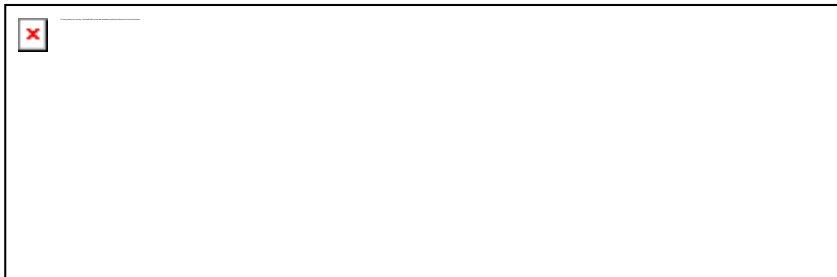
Regards,

Kate Dewey BSc (Hons) MCIEEM

Senior Planning Officer



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On Fri, 14 Jan 2022 at 08:00, wrote:
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SUMMARY – Objection -further information/ amendments required. There is insufficient information on the location, scale and value of habitats to be impacted to be able to determine the application at present.

Required prior to determination:

1. Survey of woodland areas in spring and assessment against Local Wildlife Site criteria
2. Biodiversity Impact Assessment using Defra metric 3.0
3. Breeding bird survey and further bat surveys; confirm badgers are not affected.
4. Revised mitigation plans including replacement species habitats/ nesting features and habitat creation to demonstrate a measureable net gain for biodiversity.
5. Clarification of application boundary to include works to footpath diversion and vehicle crossing.

DESIGNATED WILDLIFE SITES & WIDER ECOLOGICAL NETWORK

The application site is currently a linear habitat corridor linking other semi-natural habitats in the area.

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

Birchall Meadow BAS is located adjacent to the site to the east at the northern end. There does not appear to be any direct impact to the site. Depending on landownership, this site would benefit from management and enhancement and could be an opportunity for offsite mitigation.

Potential Local Wildlife Sites

Parts, if not the whole of the site, have potential to be designated as a Local Wildlife Site if woodland and grassland areas are sufficiently diverse. A spring survey of the woodland areas is required, as well as review of other habitats against the criteria.

Willow tit, a scarce breeding bird in Staffordshire, area also known to breed on the railway line – breeding sites for these birds can qualify for designation so this required further assessment.

HABITATS

Habitat Survey

The red-line boundary does not appear to cover all the areas proposed for work. The footpath diversion is partly outside of the site boundary to the south, and so is the proposed vehicle level-crossing. These would impact further areas of habitat, that have not been covered in any of the surveys. These areas need to be assessed.

We understand from other comments made that the footpath location is of some concern and so may be changed. Work areas and boundaries need to be confirmed in order to assess impacts.

Specific habitat impacts/ opportunities

Parts of the site support semi-natural broadleaved woodland, which may be Habitat of Principal Importance for Conservation (NERC Act 2006) depending on its diversity. Areas along the trackway also potentially meet the description of Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously developed Land.

Tree removal between the boundary fences appears to be the main proposed impact to habitats, although no plan shows exactly how much vegetation removal is proposed, or, the planned surfacing and landscaping. Habitat loss, if deemed acceptable and not avoidable, would need to be mitigated/ compensated by: planting of trees off-site, managing and enhancing retained woodland areas, creation of replacement habitat compatible with railway usage e.g. species-rich grassland and open mosaic habitats, re-use of all felled brash and timber to create dead hedges, bird nesting piles and log piles in appropriate areas. It is likely that off-site compensation would be required to achieve a net gain – see below.

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’

The proposal appears likely to result in a significant net loss of habitat, and it is not clear where this would be compensated for within the site. A Biodiversity Impact assessment using Defra metric 3.0 is required, along with a plan showing the location and type of compensatory habitats proposed.

SPECIES

Bats

The Bat Survey conducted in 2017 made recommendations as to the level of tree clearance or retention where bat activity was highest (around the tunnel area). It is not clear whether this is to be followed. Further surveys of the tunnel and any mature trees with bat roost potential are also required before determination.

Great Crested Newts, Amphibians

Further assessment of impacts from footpath and road crossing is required and revised mitigation measures where necessary.

Birds

The site supports a number of notable bird species, including House sparrow, Redpoll and Willow Tit which is scarce in the county and declining nationally. Three are likely to be other birds on or near the site which may be affected by works. There would be long-term impacts to birds of scrub and woodland due to habitat loss, even if replacement planting is carried out elsewhere. A breeding bird survey of the site and any areas subject to disturbance adjacent, is required to assess the bird assemblage, and plan suitable replacement habitats.

Badgers

Badgers don't appear to be mentioned in any of the survey reports; confirmation that surveys have been carried out is required.

ACCESS TO NATURE

The site is within the greenbelt, and is designated as Open Space (C2) within the Local Plan. It is a well-used accessible natural greenspace. Provisions to compensate for any loss of amenity, area and usability of the open space should be included in the plans.

Regards,

Kate Dewey BSc (Hons) MCIEEM

Senior Planning Officer



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