

07.12.2022 Staffordshire Wildlife Trust response to breeding birds letter

Dear Swara,

Bird mitigation

Thank you for the letter; I am pleased to see a suitable mitigation area is available, which would appear large enough and of habitat types that could be enhanced for birds if necessary. The larger more agriculturally improved field would seem the most suited to enhancement for ground nesting birds, if found to be present.

Regarding the desk study and evidence - bird data held by Staffordshire Ecological record does not yet include records from recent solar park surveys. It would be good to see the bird data from Upper Newton Farm referred to and interpreted, in terms of the bird usage of fields there regarding field size and habitat types. Lapwing were nesting in a field of 3.8 ha and about 130m wide, and skylark using fields of similar size; some arable and some improved grassland. The bird transects also covered part of the Totmonslow Farm site, so those records, or lack of, are useful. If more could be said about the habitats within the Totmonslow site and their suitability (or not) versus other areas where ground nesting birds have been recorded, I think this would provide more robustness. Also some information on the habitats within the mitigation areas and their current bird suitability and potential for enhancement.

Given that the Upper Newton Farm bird mitigation note, with bird survey sheets reproduced, is in the public domain, I have attached the original survey sheets that are clearer to read. I've also included the transect map which shows where surveyors walked north of the A50.

I think with this evidence and the availability of offsite mitigation areas, I would be confident to secure breeding bird surveys next year that would inform a bird mitigation/ management plan, which could then set out required measures within the site and on the additional compensation areas as and where needed.

BNG

I'm still awaiting confirmation that some enhancement of existing hedgerows, and the ditches/ watercourses on site can be included, so that we can see 10% net gain across all habitat types. Having talked last week to Stephen More of Phlorum who carried out the initial habitat surveys, and looking at the reported condition of the habitats, it would seem there are opportunities here, so if that can be added to the plans or confirmed, I can look to secure further details via condition.

Regards,

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Senior Planning Officer