**From:** Planning For Nature
**To:** Alan Lynch; Planning Comments (SMDC)
**Cc:** Steve Massey
**Subject:** SMD/2023/0381 Land Off, Stile House Lane
**Date:** 25 August 2023 15:22:14

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**SMD/2023/0381**
**Land Off, Stile House Lane, Leek, Staffordshire ST13 7LS**
**Erection of stable block, formation of manege and associated change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian use**
**2.6 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/ amendments required to ensure a biodiversity net gain.

1. PEA and biodiversity metric
2. Habitat enhancement plan
3. Further species surveys if necessary

Secure via condition should approval be granted:

4. Landscaping/ habitat enhancement details e.g. seeding, planting, soils
5. Detailed drainage scheme
6. Details/ specification for species mitigation/ enhancement measures

NATURE RECOVERY NETWORK

The site is within the Grassland, Pastures and Wetland Habitat Connectivity Opportunity Areas. Local priority habitats and wildlife corridors include: hedgerows, dry stone walls, marshy grassland, small semi-natural woodlands and ponds. These are the type of habitats that are a priority to restore and create here.

The site is within an ecological corridor, ‘Churnet Valley corridor’ as shown in map 7.2 within the Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy May 2018. It is also within the Churnet Valley masterplan area.

DESIGNATED WILDLIFE SITES

**Local Wildlife Sites**

The proposal is adjacent, and partly within, Kniveden Hall (east of) Site of Biological Importance, a site of county importance for wildlife. It is designated for its marshy grassland, semi-improved neutral grassland and broadleaved woodland.

The access track passes through the northern part of the SBI, but is already in place although grassed over. Any further impacts should be assessed from changed usage. There could be opportunities to enhance the SBI through creating wetland features such as a new shallow pond, and enhancing wildflower diversity.

HABITATS

**Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA)**

No ecology surveys have been submitted. Due to the impact on a Local Wildlife Site, and overall loss of grassland to buildings and hardstanding, protected/ priority species and habitats could be impacted, leading to a net loss of biodiversity. In order to inform decision making, a PEA, conducted by a suitably qualified Ecologist, of all areas to be impacted is required prior to determination. This also needs to take into account any drainage infrastructure required, as well as change of use of the wider site to equestrian management.

Any required species specific surveys required should be conducted within the suitable survey time period and accompany the application.

**Biodiversity Net Gain**

Policy NE1 paragraph 5 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 would involve the loss of grassland to a new access track, stable block with surfaced area and manege. An area of land will also change from agricultural to equestrian use/ management which is likely to affect the habitats within the site. Some seeding of disturbed ground/ spoil and new hedge planting is proposed and welcomed, however this is likely to be too small to adequately balance impacts.

It is not clear whether the proposal would achieve a net gain, therefore a Biodiversity Impact Assessment using the latest Defra metric is required. Due to the site’s location within a recognised ecological corridor in the Green Infrastructure Strategy, partly affecting a LWS, and the size of the site/ land available for enhancement, a 10% net gain would be appropriate and achievable here.

We suggest enhancing a larger area of grassland within site, with an appropriate seed mix, or, ideally, green hay/ seed from a local diverse meadow such as the adjacent SBI. This could also enhance the forage quality for horses by adding more herbs. Horses may also benefit from parkland trees planted in the field to provide future shade.

The area of proposed hardstanding may be more suitable as reinforced grass, such as 'grasscrete' which would reduce loss of grassland.

**Drainage**

Water from the site flows to the west and south into drains, and into a brook, discharging into the River Churnet. The western end of the site is marshy and subject to some surface water flooding.

No surface water drainage scheme has been provided. We advocate an integrated approach that maintains existing site hydrology, makes the best use of water in the landscape and maximises biodiversity value.

A small wetland area could be suitable to take run-off from the stable and hardstanding- a ditch around the muck heap may also be advisable to avoid run-off escaping during heavy rain, or the much heap could be covered. A water butt would also be useful for water storage from the stables. It will be important not to allow mud or silt to enter the nearby watercourses or road during construction/ operation.

A detailed drainage scheme could be secured via condition.

SPECIES

The PEA should assess the site for potential protected/ priority species such a , amphibians and ground nesting birds. Snipe and curlew have been recorded within the SBI to the south.

Barn owls have also been recorded in the area. A net gain for species could be provided by including a barn owl box on the property on a tree or pole, and bat/ bird features within the new stable block.

Regards,

**Kate Dewey BSc (Hons) MCIEEM**

**Senior Planning Officer**

Please note, ecology advice is provided to SMDC 2 days per week- working days are normally Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Planning consultations- please send to

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