



eyebright
ECOLOGY

Ref: C329_1

8 May 2025

Claire Spooner
Tower Hill Road
Mow Cop
Staffordshire
ST7 3PS

Dear Claire,

Re: SMD/2024/0291: Land off Park Drive, Cheadle – Addendum to PEA report

Background

Following an objection by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust regarding the habitat survey carried out at land off Park Drive, Cheadle, I undertook an updated UKHab survey on 2 May 2025.

The objection by the planning ecologist was that the habitat survey was carried out in the sub-optimal month of December which may have missed additional species diversity in the peak growing season.

This provides the results of the updated survey and any further recommendations and should be read in conjunction with the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Eyebright Ecology, 2025).

Methods

An updated survey of the grassland was undertaken, using classifications within the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab). The habitat types within the site were identified and mapped according to the criteria set out in UKHab 2.0. Plants which were visible were identified and their abundance classified using the 'DAFOR' scheme, whereby; D = Dominant, A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional, R = Rare.

In addition, three 1m x 1m quadrats were undertaken in the area which may be impacted by the proposals to record the percentage cover of species and to estimate the average species diversity across the grassland.

A habitat condition assessment was not undertaken as the site is exempt from Biodiversity Net Gain.

Results

The grassland has long been managed and used as a garden, with frequent mowing of the whole area until around two years ago. The west side was still being mowed at the time of survey, with the sward height around 5cm. The east side had been unmown for around two years so the sward was at least 30cm tall with thatching present.

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The grassland survey found abundant red fescue *Festuca rubra*, with occasional sweet vernal-grass and Yorkshire fog within the area impacted by the proposals. Previous survey of the wider grassland also found abundant rough meadow-grass *Poa trivialis* and common bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, frequent crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and rarely occurring cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*.

There were a range of herbs within the sward, including occasional common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* (This was mostly higher up the slope and there was none in the area which may be affected by work), occasional dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, self-heal *Prunella vulgaris*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, dove's-foot crane's-bill *Geranium molle*, bush vetch *Vicia sepium*, germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and common ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*. The mown areas also included occasional field woodrush *Luzula campestris* and abundant mosses.

The quadrats undertaken in the lower part of the garden (which is the area which may be affected by the proposals) found the following:

Quadrat 1:

- Red fescue 60%
- Yorkshire fog 20%
- Sweet vernal-grass 9%
- Germander speedwell 1%

Quadrat 2:

- Red fescue 70%
- Yorkshire fog 10%
- Sweet vernal-grass 10%
- Mosses 8%
- Germander speedwell 2%

Quadrat 3:

- Red fescue 60%
- Yorkshire fog 20%
- Sweet vernal-grass 20%

The lower area of grassland was an average of 4 species per m² (see Plates 1-3). Overall the grassland was an average of 6 species per m².

The grassland supported a relatively low abundance of herbs – this was less than 10% per m² in the western half which was tall and rank; there was more herbs in the mown areas (average 15% per m²). Grasses dominated throughout.

The objection by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust notes that the grassland could be 'Other Neutral Grassland'. Whilst the grass species are not typical for modified grassland, we would argue that the management of the grassland as mown lawn up until recent years, has probably reduced species diversity. It is also possible that the lawn had been improved in the past.

Within the UKHab guidance, to be classified as Other Neutral Grassland it must pass 3 of 4 of the following criteria:

1. 20% cover of broadleaved herbs and sedges – NO
2. >8 species per m² – NO
3. 1 or more grass species not usually sown for intensive agricultural production is at least abundant – YES
4. Cover of rye grasses and white clover is less than 30% - YES

As the grassland only passed 2 of 4 criteria, it is classified as g4 - modified grassland which is low distinctiveness. This is in line with the Phase I habitat code of 'species-poor semi-improved grassland'. However, we would still classify as secondary code of Vegetated Garden given the way that the site has been managed to date.

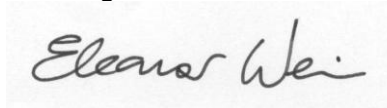
Recommendations

The proposals do not actually affect a large area of grassland – the building will remove the rhododendron and laurel bushes and potentially a very small amount of grassland at the bottom of the slope which I do not believe would be significant in any way. The majority of grassland on site will be retained and used in a similar way to previous management as it will continue to be managed as a garden in future.

We would always encourage garden owners to seek to enhance the biodiversity in their garden, and one way to do this is by varying the height of lawn where possible – leaving some areas long for the summer is ideal to allow habitat for invertebrates and other species such as mammals and birds. It could be that the edges are left long, or larger areas are left to grow long, perhaps with paths mown through. With any longer areas of grass, it is good to still cut once a year in late summer or ideally autumn, removing the cuttings which allows flowers to set seed, but doesn't add extra nutrients. Cutting once a year also means that grasses do not become rank and outcompete the herbs (as reflected in the current grassland where there is a lower abundance of herbs in the long side than in the mown areas). It can also be good to vary the areas left long each year.

I would encourage the planning ecologist to contact me directly on the details in the footer if there are any further queries or discussions needed regarding the proposals.

Kind regards



Eleanor Weir MCIEEM
Director & Consultant Ecologist

Plate 1: Grassland in area due to be affected by proposals



Plate 2: Grassland in area due to be affected by proposals



Plate 3: Typical species-poor quadrat of grassland

