

Lady Green Farm SWT Comments 2025

Application Reference: SMD/2025/0177

Location: Lady Green Farm Huntley Road, Denford, Leek

Proposed Development: Change Of Use Of Agricultural Building To Form 1 Dwelling With Annex

Documents viewed

- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment, Witcher Wildlife Ltd, 21st February 2025
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Witcher Wildlife Ltd, 1st August 2025
- Lady Green Farm Completed SBMCT
- Lady Green Farm Completed SBMCT condition assessments
- Location Plan, Planning Design, 20/11/2023, revE 27/01/25
- Planning Statement, Planning Design, March 2025
- Baseline Map Fauna Forset Ecology 29/09/2025
- Baseline Map Fauna Forset Ecology 29/09/2025
- Lady Green Farm Ecology Report, Fauna Forset Ecology 29/09/2025
- SBMCT, Fauna Forset Ecology 30/09/2025

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.

This application was previously submitted under planning reference SMD/2024/0493. Plans have been updated and as such we have updated our previous comments to reflect this. Comments relating to the Witcher surveys are made in **green**. In addition to plans being updated, Ecological surveys were carried out by Witcher Wildlife. We had several queries that needed resolving as a result of these surveys which we raised with the applicant. In response the applicant commissioned further surveys with Fauna Forest Ecology to resolve our issues, comments on these are in **blue**. The conditions are in black and have had some updates but are all still relevant.

We recommend that **planning permission is granted, subject to conditions being imposed**.

Further information requested following the Witcher report and updates to these requests:

- BNG assessment – habitat survey of grasslands carried out at an optimal time of year by a suitably qualified botanist. See further comments regarding grasslands. This has been resolved
- Competency of the BNG assessor for carrying out habitat surveys detailed This has been resolved
- Post development habitats changed to gardens or the BNG secured by a separate planning condition / S106 so that the monitoring and management can be secured for 30 years. If the post development habitats are changed to gardens, it needs to be

demonstrated that a net gain can be achieved as per the NPPF and local plan policy – resolved to be secured by condition or S106.

- Confirmation that the biodiversity gain area is outside the curtilage of the dwelling house – if the BNG is to be secured as a biodiverse area on-site - resolved to be secured by condition or S106 and areas to be bordered by hedgerows and fences.
- Baseline and post-development BNG maps to include all habitats present within the whole of the red line boundary This has been resolved
- Clarification of the BNG area covered in the metric – is it the map in the BNG report baseline or the whole site red line boundary This has been resolved
- BNG metric to include all of the habitats within the red line boundary This has been resolved
- Pre and post development site habitat areas should be the same in the BNG metric This has been resolved
- Clarification as to whether grassland or woodland is being created and the metric updated accordingly This has been resolved
- PEA – an explanation as to why a data search from the local records centre was not carried out, especially as this is against the bat survey guidelines followed. This has been resolved through the precautionary approach and providing pollution prevention and management strategy and lighting mitigation strategy.
- PEA – clarification as to why the grasslands have been classified as they are. This has been resolved
- Conditions are listed at the end of these comments

Further Detail on Habitats and Protected Species

There is no evidence of consideration of habitats and protected species, delivery of a net gain (as per policy NE1 of the Local Plan) and application of the mitigation hierarchy within the whole of the applicant red line boundary. The plans propose that the site will be enhanced for biodiversity and we welcome this.

Section 3.2.1 of the Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment states '*The site consists of two agricultural structures accompanied by an access track, all situated within an area where vegetation has been cleared.*'. The PEA assessment and mapping should take into account any limitations imposed by recent site clearance, and recent habitat removal should be clearly identified with Target Notes and photographs.

Further information is required to be able to make a lawful determination with regards Ecology of the whole site. The application needs to demonstrate compliance with BS 42020:2013, the NPPF and Policy NE1 of the local plan.

A PEA has been carried out, this is resolved.

Bats and Bird Report

It is not clear whether GLTAs have been carried out on trees in the vicinity of the proposed development, clarification is sought on this.

The PEA states that trees have been assessed for their bat roost potential. This is resolved.

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Timing of Surveys – Grassland Habitats

The BNG assessment was carried out on 12th February 2025. This is a suboptimal time of year for surveying grassland. Many grassland flowers do not appear above ground until later in the year, the survey window for grasslands is April – October, ideally between May and September before any cut or grazing. For this reason, it would be very difficult to confirm the type of grassland following a survey at this time of year. Although BNG is not required, we cannot accept a grassland survey carried out in February unless strong evidence was provided to prove that it was modified – for example past and current use, soil tests, photos showing plants during the grassland survey season etc. The habitats present include other neutral grassland and modified grassland, however, grassland plants would not have been present to allow an accurate condition assessment to be carried out of these habitats in February.

Competency of Ecologist

The metric user guide states *‘The first principle is that the metric assessment should be completed by a competent person. A competent person has the knowledge and skills to perform specified tasks to complete and review biodiversity metric calculations. You obtain this through training, qualifications, experience, or a combination of them. Competency is aligned with the British Standard ‘Process for designing and implementing biodiversity net gain (BS 8683:2021)’.*’. The Ecologist has not stated their competency in carrying out habitat, UKHab or botanical surveys.

Modified Grassland

This is described as *‘The parcel of grassland beside the access track is dominated by springy turf moss (Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus), and abundant in Yorkshire fog (Holcus lanatus), with occasionally occurring red rescue (Festuca rubra), bramble (Rubus fruticosus agg.) and common hogweed (Heracleum sphondylium). The substrate of this area is understood to be very limited in areas, hence the abundance of moss.’*. Springy Turf Moss is a species that is an indicator of a lack of improvement and is usually associated with habitats under g3c or better, however can be found on lawns. The [British Bryological Society species description](#) states *‘R. squarrosus is a ubiquitous species of unimproved or semi-improved grassland’*. We would recommend a survey at the optimal time of year to ascertain the type of grassland.

Other Neutral Grassland

The description here does not match the UKHab description for g3c other neutral grassland (or appear to meet three of the four required criteria). The ONG has been classed as poor, however many of the plants associated with this habitat will not have been visible at the time of the survey. We recommend the survey is repeated at a correct time of year to ascertain the grassland type and condition.

Post Development Habitats

If these are to be part of a garden, the habitats should be inputted as ‘vegetated garden’. If the habitats are to be classed as something else, a condition or S016 would be required to ensure that they are monitored and managed for 30 years as these habitats as gardens

cannot be legally secured. They should also not be included within in the '*curtilage of a privately owned or tenanted dwellinghouse*' as this is the definition of private garden in the biodiversity metric user guide. If habitats are secured for 30 years, soil test may be required, depending upon the results of a grassland survey at the correct time of year, to show whether it is possible to create some of the grassland habitats proposed.

BNG Guidelines

Whilst we commend the applicant for carrying out a BNG assessment and showing willing to create a biodiverse site, unfortunately following current rules of BNG, the biodiversity area would need to be legally secured separately (so that it is not a garden) to allow a gain to be achieved on-site.

In addition, the grassland habitats should be surveyed at a suitable time of year to determine their type.

If the area is not legally secured separately and is within the curtilage off the dwelling house, the BNG metric should be updated to include a post construction habitat of 'vegetated garden' or 'unvegetated garden' where applicable and new figures given ensuring that a net gain is provided as per the NPPG and local plan policy, or if the development is subject to 10% BNG due to the site area, then this should be demonstrated.

Map

The baseline map and post development habitat maps do not include the whole of the red line boundary. These need to show the habitats in the whole of the red line boundary. The post development habitat map does not map the areas covered by buildings or hardstanding – all habitats need to be included.

Area

The area of habitats included in the metric is 0.50ha. It is unclear whether this includes habitats in the whole of the site's red line boundary as only part of this is shown in the BNG report. Clarification is required as to whether all of the habitats within the red line boundary are included within the BNG metric or just those included in the BNG map at the end of the BNG report. If only habitat within the map in the BNG report are included, the habitats in the northern part of red line boundary but not included in the report or metric and these need to be included. The area covered by the metric currently is 0.5ha which is the threshold for the self-build exemption. Therefore, if the habitats not shown are added to the metric, the area will be over 0.5ha and the development will not be exempt from statutory BNG.

The pre and post development areas should be the same in the metric, currently the pre is 0.50ha (excluding trees) and post is 0.33ha – there are 17ha missing post-development.

Habitat Creation – Woodland or Grassland

The area of trees retained and created over the grasslands will be 0.2484ha. The area of grassland retained or created will be 0.2588. These areas are for when the trees are small and have not grown. This equated to 96% tree cover over the grassland and will be more as the trees grow over time. The UKHab definition for broadleaved woodland is over 25% tree

canopy cover. Currently this meets the criteria for broadleaf woodland and, although there may be a grass understorey, the canopy cover suggests the post development habitat will be woodland. If this is not counted as vegetated garden, a decision needs to be made as to whether the applicant wishes to create grassland or woodland and the metric / plans updated accordingly.

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

A data search was not carried out using data from the local records centre. Please provide justification as to why this was not carried out.

3.1.2 – the MAGIC search did not include priority habitat or species licence returns. Clarification is sought as to why these were not included.

3.4 – this is different to the description of the other neutral grassland that appears to be referring to the same area in the BNG report. The description here does not match the UKhab description for g3c other neutral grassland (or appear to meet three of the four required criteria). Further explanation is required to explain how this habitat meets the criteria for g3c other neutral grassland.

3.4.3 – Springy Turf Moss is a species that is an indicator of a lack of improvement and is usually associated with habitats under g3c or better, however can be found on lawns. The [British Bryological Society species description](#) states '*R. squarrosus is a ubiquitous species of unimproved or semi-improved grassland*'. Please provide justification as to why this has been classed as modified grassland.

3.5.3 Bats – no records were obtained from the local records centre and 3.1. does not mention a search for species licence returns on MAGIC which should have been carried out. The Collins Guidelines that the surveyor followed recommend a minimum data search of 2km.

Planning Conditions

Recommendations set out in the Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment, PEA and BNG report should be secured with appropriate planning conditions. These include:

A condition ensuring that the Pollution Prevention and Management Plan (PPMP) and Lighting Mitigation Strategy (LMS) as detailed in the Fauna Forest Ecology BNG report are adhered to.

Removal of roof and cladding by hand as detailed in the Fauna Forest Ecology BNG report.

A suitably qualified Ecologist should inspect buildings for nesting Barn Owls prior to dismantling the building and appropriate measures taken to avoid disturbance until fledging.

Include a range of open-fronted and close-hole bird nesting boxes including Sparrow terraces, Barn Swallow Boxes one pole mounted Barn Owl box cited in a south/east facing position overlooking the neighbouring agricultural land. The number, type and citing of bird

boxes should be secured through a pre-commencement planning condition. A further planning condition should be set to demonstrate that these have been delivered

A planning condition should demonstrate that three Schwegler 1FF bat boxes (or equivalent high-quality alternatives) are installed on the building. These should be positioned on the southern or western elevations, ideally at least four metres above ground level to reduce the risk of disturbance and predation. All boxes must be located away from potential light spill, in accordance with best practice guidance, to ensure that they provide suitable dark roosting conditions.

A condition to secure the provision of one hedgehog box in an area of suitable habitat.

A planning condition or S106 or should be set to secure the BNG post development enhancements as detailed in the Fauna Forest report, maps and metric through management and monitoring for 30 years. This should also ensure that the BNG provision areas are outside the curtilage of the dwelling house.

A HMMP should be secured as a pre-commencement condition, following recommendations in the Fauna Forest report with remedial measure to ensure target condition of habitats is met.

Any plants and trees planted should be native species of local provenance.

A planning condition ensuring that the precautionary approaches for badgers, great crested newts, hedgehogs, reptiles, nesting birds as detailed in the Fauna Forest Ecology BNG report are followed. A provision should be made for construction personnel sign to say that they have read, understood and will adhere to this.