



ECOLOGICAL ADVICE SERVICE

TO: *Marion Geary*

FROM: *Helen Forster*

DATE: *06 September 2022*

SUBJECT: *Land North Of Little Cheveney Farm, Marden 22/501335/FULL*

The following is provided by Kent County Council's Ecological Advice Service (EAS) for Local Planning Authorities. It is independent, professional advice and is not a comment/position on the application from the County Council. It is intended to advise the relevant planning officer(s) on the potential ecological impacts of the planning application; and whether sufficient and appropriate ecological information has been provided to assist in its determination.

Any additional information, queries or comments on this advice that the applicant or other interested parties may have must be directed in every instance to the Planning Officer, who will seek input from the EAS where appropriate and necessary.

We have reviewed the ecological reports submitted as part of this application and we are satisfied with the range of ecological surveys which have been carried out and satisfied with the majority of the proposed mitigation. However we highlight that no information has been submitted demonstrating that the proposed skylark mitigation can be implemented.

Ecological Surveys

We have reviewed the ecological survey and we are satisfied with the results of surveys and submitted information has detailed the following:

- At least 9 species of foraging bats (common and soprano pipistrelle were the most common species recorded)
- Tree with bat roosting potential (to be retained).
- 53 species recorded during the breeding bird survey (including red and amber listed species). The survey recorded farmland birds including skylark (a ground nesting bird).
- 48 species recorded during the wintering bird survey
- Potential for reptiles within the field margins
- 3 badger setts recorded along the western boundary
- Potential for hedgehogs within the site.

- 5 Confirmed GCN breeding ponds within 250m of the site.
- The site is adjacent to ponds and 2 areas of woodlands (including ancient woodland).

As the site is arable fields surrounded by hedgerows/ditches/woodlands/ponds we agree with the conclusion of the report that the boundaries have the greatest ecological interest. The only exception to this conclusion is breeding skylark and up to 10 skylark territories were recorded during the survey within the arable fields.

Ecological Mitigation, Enhancements and long term management

The submitted Proposed Mitigation, Landscape and Ecology Enhancement Plan (asScape; Feb 2022) has demonstrated that the development has been designed to minimise impact on the hedgerows, woodland and ponds and therefore the associated species those habitats. As the greatest ecological interest is the field boundaries we advise that we are satisfied that the proposed precautionary mitigation is appropriate to avoid a breach of wildlife legislation.

The submitted information has detailed the habitats within the site will be enhanced through the following:

- Creation of wildflower grassland,
- Enhancement/planting of hedgerows
- Woodland planting
- Orchard planting
- Erection of enhancement features (bat and bird boxes)

Therefore the habitat to benefit the majority of species found within the site is likely to increase for the life time of the development if it is implemented as detailed within the submitted Landscape and Ecological Management Plan with Biodiversity Net Gain Management and Monitoring Plan Plan (asScape; March 2022). We are largely satisfied with the proposed management the only point we would raise is concern that the habitats will not be managed to benefit reptiles. Therefore we recommend that an irregularly cut grassland buffer is maintained between the hedgerow and the wildflower meadows to provide good quality habitat for reptiles and great crested newts.

We highlight that no information has been provided to demonstrate how the proposed habitats will be established within the site. To ensure that the habitats meet the conditions detailed within the Biodiversity Net Gain report there is a need to ensure that appropriate methodology is implemented during the habitat creation works.

We advise that if planning permission is granted we advise that we are satisfied that details of the habitat establishment and the update to the management plan can be submitted via a condition of planning permission.

Biodiversity Net Gain

A biodiversity net gain assessment has been submitted and detailed that an anticipated net gain of 51% for habitats and 39% for hedgerows is proposed. We advise that we are satisfied that if the habitat creation and on going management is implemented it is likely that a BNG of over 20% can be achieved. We highlight that due to the changes we have recommend for the proposed management the BNG for habitats may be less than 50%.

To ensure a BNG is achieved there is a need to ensure that the proposed management and on going monitoring is implemented. Therefore we recommend that if planning permission is granted there is a need for on going monitoring reports to be submitted to the LPA to demonstrate the management is being carried out and if the site is on track to achieving the BNG.

Skylark

The proposal will result in the loss of skylark habitat. The information has detailed that there is evidence of skylark being recorded within solar farms but until conclusive proof has been provided that solar farms do support breeding skylarks in similar numbers recorded in an arable field of the same size we advise that it needs to be assumed the breeding habitat will be lost.

The report has made recommendations for the creation of skylark plots in adjacent habitat however it is not clear within the submitted information that the land is within the applicants ownership/control. There is a need to ensure that if planning permission is granted appropriate skylark mitigation can be implemented as a result of the development.

We recommend that a letter is submitted confirming that there is sufficient space within the wider land ownership that the skylark mitigation can be implemented.

If you have any queries regarding our comments, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Helen Forster MCIEEM
Biodiversity Officer

This response was submitted following consideration of the following documents:
Landscape and Ecological Management Plan with Biodiversity Net Gain Management and Monitoring Plan Plan (asScape; March 2022).
Proposed Mitigation, Landscape and Ecology Enhancement Plan (asScape; Feb 2022)
Biodiversity Net Gain Report (asScape; Feb 2022)
Ecological Impact Assessment; (asScape; Feb 2022)