

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Planning Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 5 December 2023 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor G Richardson (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Atkinson, A Bell (Vice-Chair), D Boyes, M Currah, J Elmer, J Higgins, C Martin, A Savory, S Zair, L Brown (substitute for A Simpson) and C Hunt (substitute for P Jopling)

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Jopling, K Shaw, A Simpson and S Wilson.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor L Brown and C Hunt were present as substitutes for Councillors A Simpson and P Jopling respectively.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor C Martin declared an interest in item number 5a as he was involved in a recruitment process at Durham Wildlife Trust. Due to the potential perceived bias, he left the meeting at this point and did not return.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5 DM/23/02330/FPA - Land West Of Low Hardwick Farm, Sedgefield

The Committee considered a report of the Senior Planning Officer regarding the Conversion of agricultural land to wetland habitats with associated engineering works and creation of temporary access bridge at Land West of Low Hardwick Farm, Sedgefield (for copy see file of minutes).

C Harvey, Senior Planning Officer gave a detailed presentation on the application which included a site location plan, aerial photographs, site photographs, proposed site location plan and the temporary access bridge plan.

Councillor Currah queried whether the landowner received a payment for the change of use and the Applicant advised that the land was leased by the County Council however no payment was received for the change of use.

Councillor Elmer complimented the application which would restore an area of landscape to how it would have historically appeared. Due to one hundred years of artificial grazing the water table had lowered and this scheme would see the return of an area of fen vegetation which was a rarity in the north east due to the extension of land drainage. This method of restoration would recreate wetland areas and see animals and plants return and it would give a vital understanding of how quickly they could restore. This was a positive step towards restoring habitat and functionality of natural systems and accorded with the Councils ecological response plan. He assumed that Durham Wildlife Trust would operate a Membership model for access to the nature reserve.

Councillor Elmer moved the recommendation to approve the application which was seconded by Councillor Brown. She agreed with Councillor Elmer, this was moderate agricultural land on a flood plain and she was pleased that 35 hectares of land was being returned for wildlife.

Resolved

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the conditions outlined in the report.

6 DM/23/02331/FPA - Land North East Of Ricknall Grange Farm, Ricknall Lane, Preston-le-Skerne

The Committee considered a report of the Senior Planning Officer regarding the Conversion of agricultural land to wetland habitats with associated engineering works at Land North East Of Ricknall Grange Farm, Ricknall Lane, Preston-le-Skerne (for copy see file of minutes).

C Harvey, Senior Planning Officer gave a detailed presentation on the application which included a site location plan, aerial photographs, site photographs and proposed overall site plan.

He provided an update on the following proposed condition which had not been included in the report;

- Prior to works commencing, an updated Construction Management Plan detailing the use of a banksmen along the proposed access route shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority

The Senior Planning Officer confirmed that the site photographs were taken in October and the Chair noted that this time of year was susceptible to flooding.

In response to a query from Councillor Brown the Senior Planning Officer advised that he was not aware of any nearby wildlife corridors and there was a significant distance between this site and that of the previous application.

Councillor Brown highlighted that the site would not be accessible to the public and the Applicant advised that whilst the wider scheme had public access factored in, this particular site had no means to access as it was in between the A1 and the east coast mainland railway.

Councillor Brown moved the recommendation to approve which was seconded by Councillor Hunt.

Councillor Elmer suggested that the work was of historic significance and importance and the decision represented the return of a particular habitat which had been lost for so long. He was delighted with the scheme and suggested that the Council should encourage some media interest in.

In response to a question from Councillor Bell the Senior Planning Officer advised that the scrapes were shallow with a maximum depth of 50cm to attract particular types of birds that fed on those areas.

Resolved

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the conditions in the report and;

- Prior to works commencing, an updated Construction Management Plan detailing the use of a banksmen along the proposed access route shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.