Ecological Assessments | Bat Surveys | Otter Surveys | Badger Surveys Great Crested Newt Surveys | Water Vole Surveys | Reptile Surveys Habitat Management Plans | Ornithological Assessments | BREEAM Ecological Land Management | Habitat Creation | Invertebrate Surveys



Planning Application Ref: PP-09480736

FAO Chloe Walker Melton Borough Council, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 1GH

25nd March 2021

Dear Chloe,

<u>Re: Proposed Construction of Two Ponds at Strawberry Farm, Wymondham,</u> <u>Leicestershire: Ecology Letter Report</u>

This letter report provides the results of a site visit conducted on 19th January 2021, to assess any potential ecological impacts associated with the proposed pond construction as detailed below. The proposed location and size of the two ponds is shown on the site plan on the appended sheet. A desk study of designated sites and protected/priority species within 1km of the proposed pond locations was also undertaken, and relevant records provided by Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre (LRERC)¹ are included within the text.

Proposals

Creation of two ponds is proposed within arable farmland near the village of Wymondham in Leicestershire (P1-044 and P1-045, as shown on Figure 1 in Appendix 1). The two ponds are each proposed to measure approximately 150m² with a depth of up to 1.5m, but with a variety of different depths and shallow areas and gradually sloping banks. A wide swath of terrestrial vegetation will be retained in a 10m wide buffer zone surrounding each pond. Fencing will be installed around the edge of the buffer zone at P1-045 to prevent encroachment of agricultural practices. The proposals also include creation of bunds on the southern side of each new pond using material from the pond excavation, between the ponds and the arable parcels to the south. The bunds will be allowed to vegetate naturally. The proposed location and size of the ponds, bunds, fencing, and access route are shown on the figures in Appendix 1.

Initial ground vegetation clearance will be supervised by an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW). Access for machinery will be along existing farm tracks and along field margins. A tracked digger will be used to construct the ponds, to minimise damage to surrounding field margins and arable land. If it is not possible to use a tracked digger, track mats will be used where it is necessary for the machinery to track over vegetation.

cont./

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SSIP MICRATER



¹ A full copy of the desk study can be provided upon request.



Site Location and Description

The proposed ponds are to be located on arable land to the west of Wymondham, Leicestershire at grid references SK 83901 18843 (P1-044) and SK 83894 19045 (P1-045). The land is largely flat although P1-045 will be located towards the highest area of the farm to the north. The soil is predominately clay and it is largely water-logged in both pond locations.

P1-044

This pond is to be located within the north-eastern margin of a small arable field parcel, adjacent to a dense hedgerow and less than 30m from a disused railway line to the north. The area proposed for the pond was water-logged at the time of the survey. The arable parcel was recently ploughed at the time of the survey and few species could be identified; spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), hairy bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) and dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale agg.*) could be identified at such an early stage of growth. The adjacent hedgerow is 3m in height and 2m wide and runs between two arable parcels. The hedgerow comprised predominantly blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) with an understory of bramble (*Rubus fruticosus agg*), common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), false oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*) and cocks-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*). A beetle bank and dense hedgerows link the proposed pond with an existing pond 200m to the south-west.

P1-045

This pond is to be located within a wildflower buffer strip along the northern boundary of a large parcel of semi-improved grassland used for grazing cattle. Although the parcel has been left fallow to increase nitrogen within the soil, this parcel will likely be used for grazing in the future. Species comprise; dominant² perennial rye (*Lolium perenne*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) with occasional creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) and Timothy (*Phleum pratense*). The wildflower buffer comprises; dominant field scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), cocks-foot and clover sp. (*Trifolium hybridum*) with abundant ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and vipers bugloss (*Echium vulgare*), and rare yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). A large overgrown hedge is located 3m to the north of the pond location. This feature has not been managed in some time and reaches a height of 4m and a width of 3m. Species comprise; dominant damson (*Prunus domestica*) and blackthorn with occasional hawthorn. The ground flora is predominantly limited to cocks-foot and common nettle.

² DAFOR Scale has been used to describe the abundance of floral species.





Above; Proposed location of P1-044, within a parcel of cultivated arable land (view south).

Below; Proposed location of P1-044, within a parcel of cultivated arable land (view west).



cont./

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Above; Proposed location of P1-045, within wildflower buffer (view west).

Below; Proposed location of P1-045, with adjacent semiimproved grassland (view west).





Assessment & Conclusions

Designated Nature Conservation Sites

There are no designated nature conservation sites within the site, although Wymondham Rough Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located 1.35km to the south-west of P1-044, and a potential/historic local wildlife site (LWS) is located 30m to the north of P1-044. This dismantled railway cutting has been left to vegetate over time and now acts as a valuable corridor for wildlife. Due to the small scale and nature of the works no impact will be caused to either designated nature conservation sites, as such no mitigation is necessary.

Habitats

Machinery will access the pond locations via existing farm tracks and field margins, and a tracked digger, or track mats where necessary, will be used to limit damage to the ground (shown on Figure 1 in Appendix 1). As such, there will be minimal impact to grassland field margins or other vegetation outside of the excavation area. No seeding of the bunds or buffer zone will be undertaken, and the vegetation will be left to regenerate naturally. It is expected that this will occur over the next growing season.

Floral Species

There are no protected or priority plant species within the site. The closest record of a notable species is that of green winged orchid (*Anacamptis morio*), classified as near threatened on the vascular plant red data list for Great Britain, approximately 350m to the west of P1-044. This location will not be impacted by the proposed works and as such no mitigation is required.

There is one record of Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) approximately 680m to the east of P1-044, which is listed as an invasive non-native species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended). This location will not be impacted by the proposed works and as such no mitigation is required.

Faunal Species

The desk study revealed records of protected/priority species within 1km of the proposed pond locations, including bats, birds, amphibians, moths, hare (*Lepus europaeus*) and hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*). Where the proposed works have potential to impact these species, this has been discussed below.

No trees will be impacted by the works, therefore there will be no disturbance to any potential bat roosting features or barn owl roost sites. There will be a small area of grassland / wildflower habitat removed for P1-045, suitable for ground nesting birds these areas should be inspected by an ECoW prior to removal. Should any nests be found, an exclusion buffer would need to be established and works in these areas would have to cease until all chicks had fledged.



Neither pond area is currently suitable for breeding amphibians due to lack of any standing water. The tall sward grassland at the proposed location for P1-045 offers some, albeit limited foraging and sheltering opportunities for amphibians, such as common frog (*Rana temporaria*) and common toad (*Bufo bufo*), as well as some potential to provide shelter for grass snake (*Natrix natrix*). As such, under ECoW supervision any vegetation to be cleared will be first cut to a height of 15cm, after which the ECoW will conduct a fingertip search of the ground and remaining vegetation. Under ECoW supervision the turf of the proposed pond locations will be removed reduce its suitability for amphibians and reptiles. Any common amphibians or reptiles found will be moved out of the working area to suitable nearby habitat by the ECoW. If any great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) are found they will be moved by an appropriately qualified ECoW to suitable terrestrial habitat within 20m of where they were found (under a licence to disturb issued by Natural England, reference WML–OR59).

There are records of moths, hare, and hedgehog within 1km of the proposed pond locations. However, as the works will be conducted within a short time-scale, and a relatively small area of terrestrial habitat will be permanently removed, the works will not have a significant impact on populations of these species.

Conclusions

It is concluded that any potential ecological impacts will be minimal, as the works will be undertaken over a short time period and an ECoW will conduct checks for breeding birds, reptiles and amphibians prior to works.

Once the ponds are established, the habitats in the area will be enhanced for a variety of fauna. The ponds will have a range of shallows and deeper areas of open water, and areas of well-developed emergent vegetation to enhance the waterbodies further. The ponds will provide opportunities for breeding amphibians, including great crested newt, as well as invertebrates, such as dragonflies and damselflies, and the surrounding marginal vegetation will provide shelter and foraging habitat for reptiles and opportunities for pollinators. The bunds (to be created using the excavated materials) will be west and south-facing providing warm, sunny banks for basking fauna. The bunds will also reduce the likelihood of the ponds over flowing onto the adjacent land after periods of heavy rainfall. Brash from cleared vegetation will be combined within the bunds to form hibernacula within the buffer zone to provide hibernation and shelter habitat for a variety of fauna, including great crested newt.



I trust the above meets with your approval. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the contact details below.

Yours sincerely,

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Greg Gilmore BSc (Hons) Ecologist EMEC Ecology

FAO: Chloe Walker cont./page 8

APPENDIX 1: SITE LOCATION AND PLANS Figure 1. Site Location

Site Plan for Strawberry Farm, Wymondham, Leicestershire





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Figure 2. Cross-section drawings of proposed ponds





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