



BSG | ecology

Project Profile

Scaffold Hill: Major Housing Development and Country Park Extension

Background

In 2010 BSG Ecology was appointed by Northumberland Estates Ltd to undertake baseline ecological surveys and provide ecological advice for a major new housing development proposal. Following completion of a comprehensive range of surveys it became apparent that there were a number of ecological constraints that required detailed evaluation and consideration. In particular, great crested newts are present in the area, a council-designated Wildlife Corridor cuts across part of the site, and the Rising Sun Country Park lies immediately to the south.

BSG Ecology's Role in the Project

We worked very closely with the client and project design team to develop a viable scheme that nonetheless addressed these constraints. This included an extensive package of biodiversity enhancements for the site and surrounding area. The scheme was designed to accommodate great crested newts and encourage their expansion, and included measures to benefit many other species including birds, bats and mammals. Careful design of the project's green space will improve the ecological function of the Wildlife Corridor.

Northumberland Estates decided that the best way of delivering these extensive measures was to pass the enhanced land to North Tyneside Council to be managed as a 45 hectare extension to the Rising Sun Country Park.

As a result of the work undertaken by BSG Ecology, agreement was reached with the council that the proposed development would bring numerous ecological benefits to the locality. This meant that there was no reason for the council to refuse the application on ecological grounds, and this was the position when the application was reported to the council's Planning Committee for determination in August 2012.

Against a recommendation for approval, the Planning Committee resolved to refuse the application, citing ecological impacts as a reason for refusal. This was a very surprising outcome, particularly as the scheme was considered to be an exemplar of biodiversity enhancement within modern development and offered a significant contribution to local biodiversity targets.

Northumberland Estates subsequently resolved to take the application to appeal. Prior to the appeal the council decided to withdraw ecology as a refusal reason, acknowledging that:

- The appeal proposals would not have any adverse impacts on the Country Park in respect to biodiversity
- Operation of the wildlife corridor will be maintained
- The appeal proposals will result in the enhancement and expansion of the Country Park
- Neither the council's Biodiversity Officer or Natural England object to the appeal proposals.

Although the Northumberland Wildlife Trust had previously objected to the application, many of the Trust's concerns were addressed through subsequent correspondence. Following this the Trust concluded that the proposals included measures "which, if properly implemented and managed, would increase the biodiversity capacity of the area".

During the period leading up to the appeal hearing, Newcastle International Airport registered their objection to the development, citing concerns about the potential effects of the proposed habitat enhancements on bird strike risk for aircraft. We carried out a bird strike risk assessment and then commissioned FERA to review it, as the UK's leading authority on avian risk assessments for airports. Some minor adjustments were made to the habitat creation and enhancement proposals, to make the site less attractive to wildfowl and species such as starling, which can form large flocks. Following the submission of these reports to Newcastle International Airport, they withdrew their objection.

Outcome

The appeal was adjourned on the first day following the withdrawal of all ecological and other evidence by the council and the remaining objectors. At the current time planning conditions are being agreed to permit the development to proceed.