Revised ecology comments and Method Statement for ST/0664/23/FUL Souter Lighthouse

Habitats

The habitats within the planning application area red line include the current car park, consisting of hard-core/bare ground. They also include two areas of grassland, where new soakways are proposed.

The grassland areas were surveyed by the author on 23rd of August 2022, originally for a separate planning application *ST/0856/19/FUL.* They comprise semi-improved neutral grassland. Very short mown and used as amenity grassland, and comprises the majority of the grassland type between the new coastal centre location and the lighthouse to the north. Although short and regularly mown it does contain a number of indicator species of moderately rich neutral grassland. Dominant grasses are *Lolium perenne, Festuca rubra, Cynosurus cristatu*s, with occasional short *Dactylis glomerata*. Herbs include *Achillea millefolium*, *Bellis perennis*, *Taraxicum* agg., *Plantago lanceolata* and occasional *Potentilla reptans*. Although on the whole this area is moderately species-rich overall, it does vary and adjacent to paths and septic tanks the grass and can be more improved with less indicators present. See Photos below.





Species

Please refer to "Whitburn Coastal Conservation Centre. Ecological Impact Assessment. National Trust. February 2020" which was submitted for a previous planning application in the same area, and gives full details of recent species assessments and surveys. South Tyneside reference ST/0856/19/FUL

There follow extracts from the EcIA:

This EcIA considered the presence of a range of protected and important species. The following species were scoped in to the EcIA following data searches of existing records and in some cases surveys (reptiles, which were negative)

- birds
- bats
- hedgehog
- common toad

Assessment of impacts (adjusted to current application)

Birds

- the habitat (grassland) within the application area may provide some limited foraging opportunities for Schedule 1 birds, such as barn owl which have been recorded nearby, but due to the short nature of the grassland this is a very low likelihood as it is close mown for amenity purposes
- no suitable buildings or nesting habitats for barn owls occur nearby and so there is negligible likelihood of any impact on nesting barn owls
- nesting birds are unlikely to be impacted directly as no areas of trees or shrubs will be removed.
- short-term disturbance of non-Schedule 1 nesting birds of local importance is possible during construction, however this does not contravene any legislation and may not be significantly above the level of disturbance already occurring from visitors to the site

Bats

- there are a small number of records of bats using habitats around the application site, and bats are considered to be of local value. No bat roosting habitats will be impacted. There will be temporary disturbance of very small areas of bat foraging habitat (improved and semi improved grassland) and therefore the effect on bats would not be considered significant

Hedgehog

- records of hedgehog exist for this area, and hedgehog are considered of local value.
- habitat impacts are not considered significant as grassland habitat is widespread in the local area
- hedgehog may wander through the site, particularly at night, and there is a high likelihood that hedgehogs might be impacted by certain construction activities

Common toad

- large numbers of common toad were found during surveys for the EcIA, and they are particularly common in longer, rougher grassland areas

- the grassland areas where work is proposed are short mown for amenity purposes, and are likely to impact on toads
- certain construction activities have potential to impact on toads

Grassland habitats

- small areas of amenity and semi-natural grassland habitat may be impacted by the proposed soakways
- construction activities have the potential to damage grassland, particularly through storage of materials, and through direct loss due to hard infrastructure (chamber covers)
- amenity and semi-natural are common and widespread, the mix of temporary and permanent impacts would not normally be considered significant
- apart from the catchpit chamber covers, the soakaway areas will retain the original topsoil and ideally original turf, and if so any permanent impacts will be minimal
- the semi-natural grassland habitats are valued locally and their retention through working methods will be prioritised

Mitigation

No specific mitigation is proposed for bats or birds. Due to the late summer and autumn working window for the works, the presence of nesting birds (scrub or grassland) are unlikely and so the impact on nesting birds is considered to be negligible, and they are not considered further.

Hedgehogs and common toads both have similar issues, namely impact of construction activities. This is particularly the case for excavation and leaving of trenches open overnight which has the potential to trap both hedgehogs and toads, as well as other small mammals and amphibians. The following mitigation is proposed:

- An ecological clerk of works (ECoW) will be appointed
- Prior to commencement the ECoW will deliver a ‘tool box talk’ to site staff outlining their responsibilities with regard to toads, hedgehogs and other small animals.
- Contractors or ECOW will undertake a site walkover prior to each working day to check for toads and hedgehogs, particularly within any trenching or other excavation works. Any animals discovered during the search will be carefully relocated by, or under direct instruction of, the ECoW
- There will be supervision of works provided by the ECoW during vegetation removal to ensure that there is no harm to toads. The supervision of vegetation removal will include a ‘fingertip’ search of all vegetation, rubble and other materials to check for the presence of hedgehog
- Any trenches or excavations should ideally be opened and closed the same day, or if left overnight should have a ramp of earth or wood present to allow escape of toads, hedgehogs and other small animals

General mitigation recommendations

- During March to August (when hedgehog and amphibians are more active therefore resilient if disturbed), any other vegetation removal, soil stripping, excavation, re-profiling etc to take place under supervision of the ECoW.
- Where loose materials such as topsoil are stored, the stockpile will be smoothed to reduce the number of cracks/crevices and prevent access by animals into these cavities
- Where any excavations are to be left overnight ramps should be left inside them to allow animals which may become trapped to easily escape;
- Care will be taken to ensure that chemicals used during construction are stored securely and that none is spilt on habitats present;
- Contractors will be made aware of the potential for finding animals, where any are encountered, work should stop immediately, the site foreman informed and a qualified Ecologist or ECoW. consulted on how to proceed;
- Where the ECoW is not present, animals will be photographed where possible so that their presence can be recorded and they can be identified by the ecologist without a site visit being necessary;
- Where any protected species are encountered and require relocation for their own safety this can only be undertaken under the direction of a qualified ecologist;

Amphibian friendly Construction Techniques

Drainage works will be modified to minimise negative impacts on amphibians. This will include:

- moving all gullypots to at least 10 cm away from the kerb to minimise amphibian bycatch

Grassland habitats

- construction traffic shall avoid using grassland areas for movements and storage wherever possible to minimise compaction and poaching
- areas of turf to be removed for construction of soakaways should be carefully lifted, and stored the in the correct orientation (turf side up), and then replaced *in situ* and carefully firmed back into place when works are completed to reinstate the grassland

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