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Our ref: 07072001132AG

Your ref: EIA 2020-0162



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VIA EMAIL

Dear Richard

Wallshield 2 EIA Screening Consultation

Apologies for the delay in getting back to you on this one, but you will appreciate that given the sensitivity of this particular proposal, additional consultation with our national specialists was necessary.

Natural England notes that this proposal does not raise any issues, either relating to deep peat soils or BAP Priority Habitats at this specific location. The main issue relates to the implications for breeding waders, specifically curlew.

On this occasion we would advise that this application should proceed to the next stage of the EIA process. Natural England's position on this particular proposal is that the breeding bird survey provided to support the application, does not allow us to give a fully informed view as to the likely potential impact of the proposal on the breeding curlew population in the wider area surrounding the proposed new woodland. In order to fully assess the potential impact of this particular proposal, we feel it is necessary for additional information on breeding curlew to be gathered on adjacent lands up to at least 700 m (some research points to up to 1km as being an appropriate survey area) from the redline boundary of the site at Wallshield 2. We know from the breeding bird survey undertaken to support this application that the proposal would lead to the direct displacement of 1 pair of curlew, but it is not possible to predict the impact (i.e. increased displacement or predation risk) on breeding curlew outside, but adjacent to, the proposed boundary without the information highlighted above. Therefore, an additional survey of the site and surrounding lands should be undertaken prior to a final decision being made as to whether or not to grant a licence for the application at this site.

Natural England realises that this advice has both financial and timing implications for the applicant. However, our advice on this particular proposal is based on an analysis of all the available information for the application site and the surrounding area, which indicates the location is potentially highly sensitive from a breeding wader perspective. The evidence used in arriving at our advice is summarized below:

The historical data provided by both the NNPA and RSPB highlights that the area south of Wark Forest covering Thirlwall Common, Whiteside, Wallshield, Edges Green, Farglow and south to the Roman Wall, has consistently held numbers of breeding curlew over a period of approximately the last 20 years. This indicates the value of the habitat for breeding curlew is high in this area, and that despite past land use changes it continues to be suitable.

This overall area has been targeted by Natural England with agri-environment schemes options to support breeding wader habitat management in order to maintain and increase wader populations.

The draft paper entitled 'Developing tools to recognise constraints and opportunities for breeding birds associated with forest expansion: North-east Cumbria Forest Investment Zone and the Great Northumberland Forest' produced by the BTO and commissioned by FC highlights modelled maps for curlew which indicate that the proposal for Wallshield 2 falls within a 'hot area' for curlew. The report advocates that plans for afforestation within these areas 'should be accompanied with detailed surveys of breeding waders to confirm, or otherwise, their importance'.

Additionally, another issue that needs to be considered relates to the original mitigation put in place as part of the licence for Wallshield 1. This included a 300m buffer to minimise the impact on waders on land adjacent to the site as set out in the Forestry Commissions 'Statement of Reasons for EIA Opinion' for Afforestation of Wallshield dated 11th July 2014. The current Wallshield 2 proposal includes the planting up of this buffer area. It therefore appears that both the reason for the deployment of the original mitigation measures for breeding waders and the mitigation area itself, are not being taken into consideration as part of the current consultation for the Wallshield 2 proposal. It should be noted the 300 m buffer agreed in 2014 as part of the Wallshield 1 consultation would now not be considered sufficient.

Curlew is a highly vulnerable red listed species that has experienced rapid population decline in recent years. If additional survey data show that the proposal has the potential to impact on the breeding success of curlew on land surrounding the proposed site boundary, in addition to the pair that will be displaced from within the boundary, then the proposal would be likely to have a significant effect on curlew populations in an important area for this species.

During our recent call we referenced other sites in the forestry pipeline, and Cara Courage would be interested in working with you to identify any opportunities to work more closely so as to realise the Government's ambitions for woodland planting alongside nature recovery. If you think this would have mutual benefits, Cara would be very willing to set up a meeting.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



ROBERT CUSSEN
Northumberland Team