

Assessment of Wallshield against the revised wader guidance

Introduction

A paper provided to the Commissioners' meeting in July 2022 summarised the results of the recently completed breeding bird survey and concluded that the proposals had the potential to impact on breeding waders. Thus, it concluded that would be difficult to justify the public funding for this site given the wider investment in the area targeted at breeding wader recovery, particularly in the light of the site's location within the Curlew Life project area. However, it was decided to defer a decision until the publication of the revised breeding wader guidance, which took place in August 2022. A copy of the guidance is appended along with a copy of the previous paper and the breeding bird survey report.

This paper has been prepared in consultation with Bob Cussen, Natural England.

Changes since previous assessment

Since the initial assessment made in July 2022, the key changes to the wader guidance that are relevant to Wallshield are: the inclusion of a threshold breeding density for curlew, lapwing and redshank, above which a scheme is subject to further scrutiny; specific reference to consideration of the Curlew Life recovery area, within which the site is located; an assessment of existing woodland cover; and, related to that, the inclusion of an assessment of the impact of predator shadow onto open land. These are examined in more detail below.

Summary of revised wader guidance

The relevant part of the revised wader guidance is Appendix 3. This takes the form of a flow chart which is used to assess any given site for which breeding bird survey has been undertaken. It considers several key issues:

- Proximity to SPA/SSSI notified for breeding waders or to Curlew Life area
- Density (pairs per km²) of breeding curlew (>1) redshank (>1) or lapwing (>2)
- Existing woodland cover
- Extension of predator shadow into open land
- Biodiversity benefits of proposal

There is a series of explanatory notes for each stage, to guide the user through the flowchart.

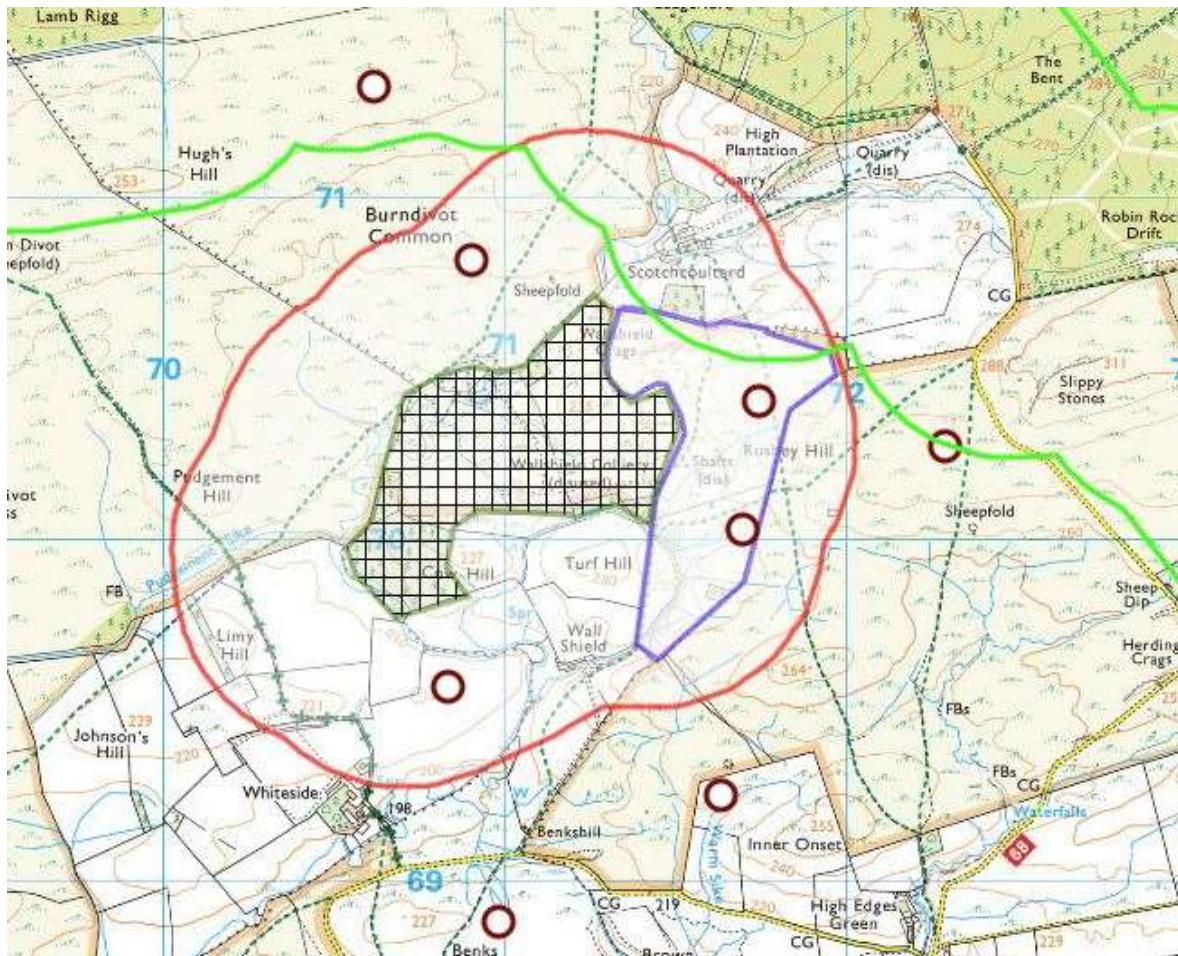
Determining the suitability of the Wallshield site for woodland creation

The stages (box numbers) of the flowchart relevant to Wallshield are summarised in the table below and the following figures provide an illustration of the process.

Box no.	Factor	Response
1	Proximity to SSSI/SPA	n/a
3	Waders present	Yes

4	Wader density	Curlew 1.8km ⁻² (Lapwing 0.5km ⁻²)
5	Woodland within 500 m	Yes
6	Significant extension of predator shadow	Yes
7	Habitats of high wildlife value	No
9 ¹	Proximity to Curlew Life area	Yes – site lies within

Figure 1 – Boxes 4 & 5



Key:

Blue line: Site boundary

Brown circles: Approximate central point of curlew territories (8)

Square hatching: Wallshield Phase 1 planted area

Red line: 500 m boundary around Wallshield Ph 1

Green line: 500 m boundary around existing plantation

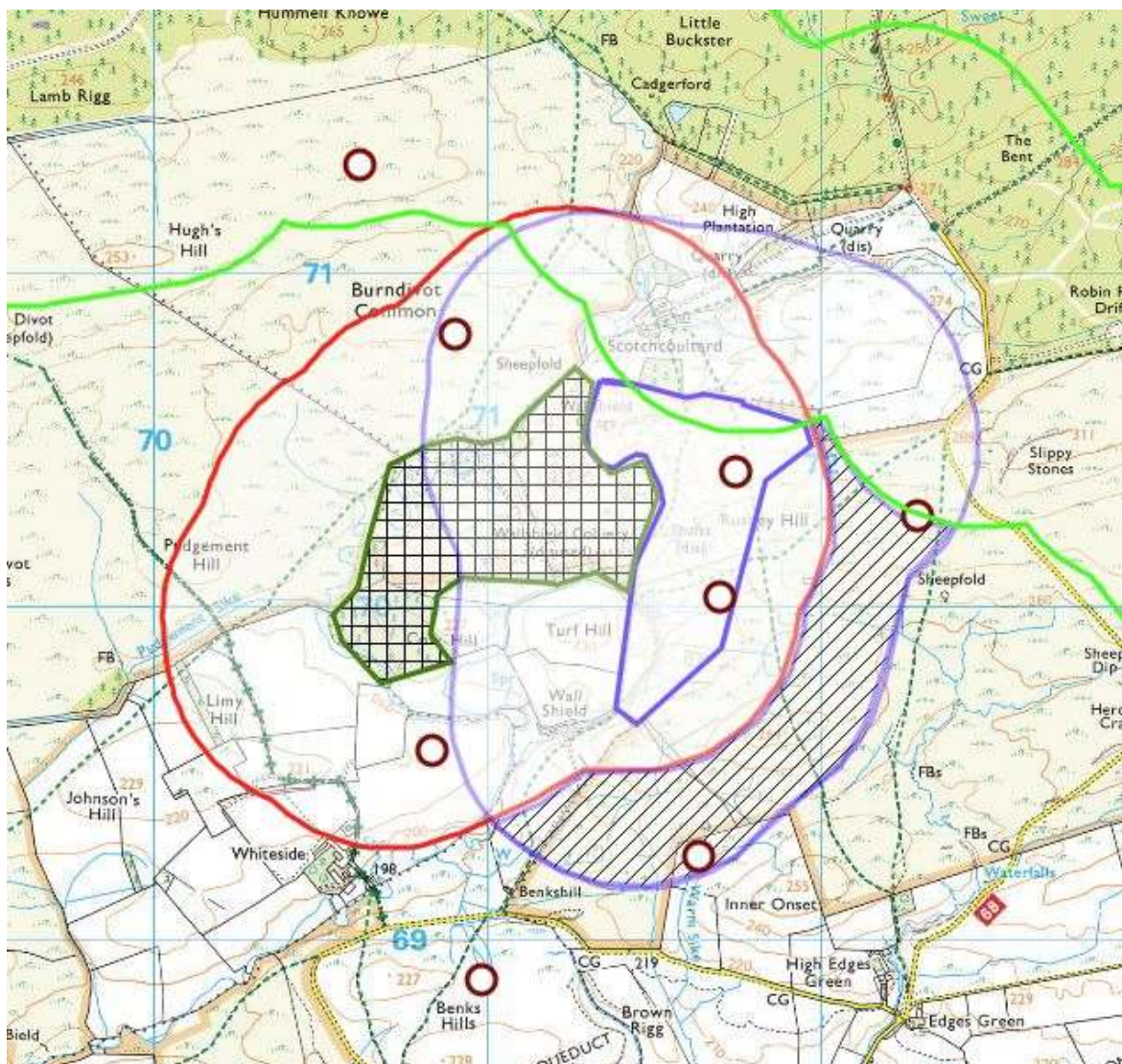
- In order to assess existing predator shadow, 500 m buffers are drawn around all existing woodland that is above 5 ha in extent, and within 500 m of the proposal site.

¹ This box is included for completeness, although because of the way the flow chart works, the assessment of this site does not actually reach Box 9. A map of the Curlew Life area is included at the end of this paper.

- The large plantation to the north-east is actually mostly over 500 m from the site, apart from the very small area at High Plantation; however, due to its size and maturity, it was included in the assessment.
- The existing predator shadow therefore includes the areas enclosed by the red line, and by the green line to the north and north-east of the proposal site.

Figure 2 – Box 6

The next stage, shown in Figure 2, is to assess the significance of the additional predator shadow that would be created by the planting proposal, and its potential impact on open land. Following the guidance, the outer blue line represents a 500 m radius from the new site boundary. The additional predator shadow is thus shown with diagonal hatching.



The additional predator shadow measures approximately 50 ha.

In addition, as can be seen from Figure 2, as well as the two territories that will be directly lost from the footprint of the site, a further two territories fall within the increased predator shadow area, and these will also be at high risk of being lost. Considering the potential

impact on the Curlew Life area (which covers 15000 ha and supports 220 pairs of curlew)², 50 ha and 4 breeding pairs represent, respectively, a little above 0.3% of the area, and a little below 2% of the breeding pairs.

However, there is also the issue of cumulative impact to consider. Wallshield Phase 1 (square hatch in Figures above) has a site area of approximately 43 ha with a predator shadow around this of approximately 200 ha. The predator shadow and footprint of the two schemes together measures c. 295 ha, which is approximately 2% of the total Curlew Life area; and the 6 pairs of curlew (from the 2022 breeding bird survey) that fall within this area represent slightly less than 3% of the area's total pairs (220). The increase in predator shadow has been assessed as being significant in terms of the guidance.

The final stage of the flowchart is Box 7 – will the proposal deliver habitats of high wildlife value. This is a mixed productive woodland proposal so will not be a scheme of high wildlife value.

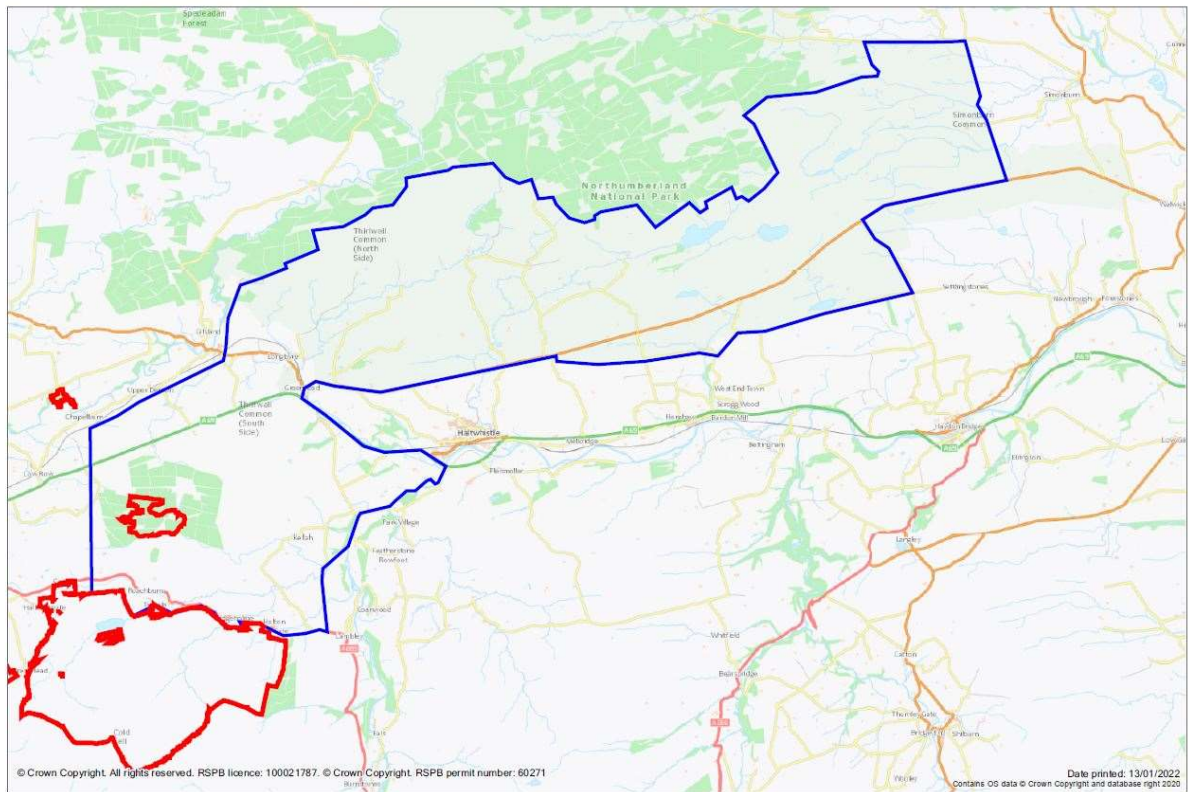
Conclusion

An assessment of the Wallshield scheme against the revised wader guidance results in a “Stop” conclusion i.e. planting here would not normally be approved. It is therefore considered that it would be difficult to justify providing public money to support the proposed planting scheme given the potential impact on breeding waders.

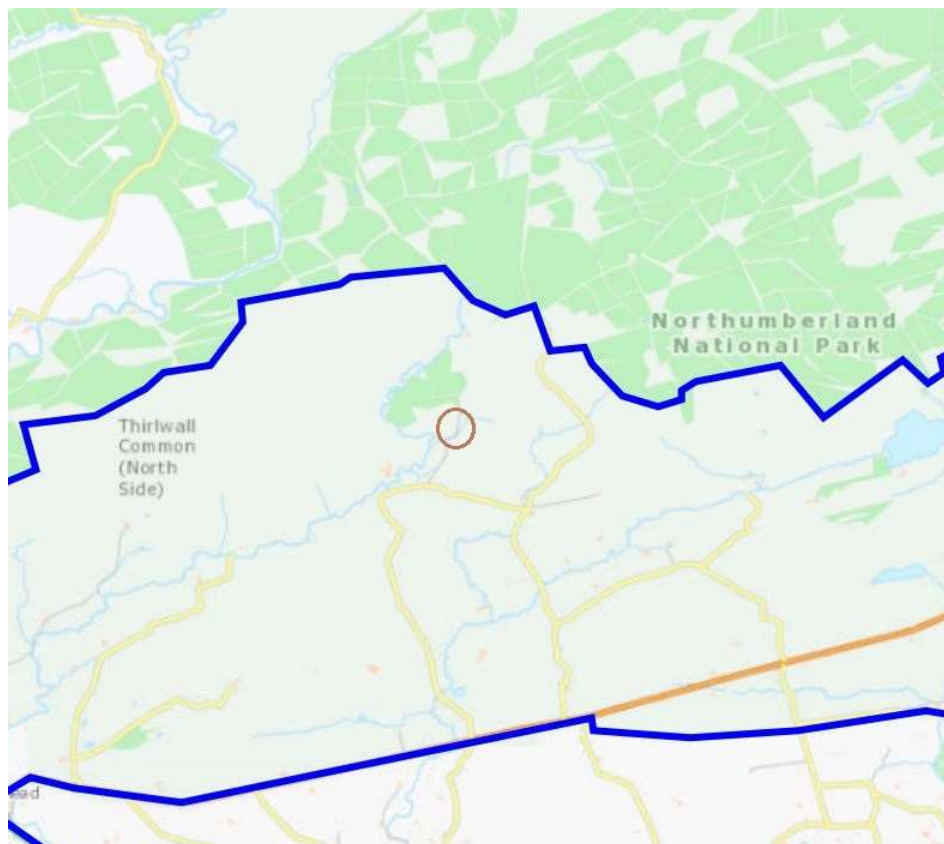
Lisa Kerslake, Area Ecologist
18 October 2022

² <https://curlewlife.org/project-sites/rspb-geltsdale-and-hadrians-wall/>

Curlew LIFE Gelsdale & Hadrian's Wall Project Site Boundary



Map of Curlew Life area



Location of Wallshield site within Curlew Life area