

Biodiversity issues relating to development proposals (SHLAA) affecting Plumpton

Preliminary comments re proposed development areas from the Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group

Background

A Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) carried out for Lewes District Council (LDC) identified several areas in Plumpton as potential for development. One of these has since been withdrawn and others are currently considered inappropriate for various reasons. This leaves three areas (04PL, 05PL and 08PL) still under consideration. The SHLAA does not address a number of issues that are critical parts of the planning process, including the impact on wildlife. This report outlines current knowledge of the wildlife in these areas.

Wildlife is considered in the planning process under various bits of legislation and guidance. For any of the proposed sites a full environmental impact assessment would be expected. This would probably consider the impact on the following:

1. General habitat assessment through a Phase 1 Habitat Survey, plus any further assessment if indicated;
2. European Protected Species (Species protected under the EU Habitats Directive and other international treaties).
3. Other UK Protected Species;
4. UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species, Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) species and Red List species;
5. UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats, Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) habitats;
6. Presence of any protected or otherwise designated areas;
7. Ancient woodland/ trees;
8. Other significant trees (including TPOs) or features;
9. Any particular requirements of local policy (including implementation of national policy such as Hedgerow Regulations).

Note that the planning process with regard to wildlife may be affected by adoption of the Localism Bill, and that the management of TPOs and Veteran Trees is currently being reviewed.

1. Phase I Habitat Survey

Completed 2004 and data available. Some more detailed data available for some areas (see Appendix 1 for a further update).

2. European Protected Species (vertebrates only)

2.1. Bats

All bat species are included. Roosts of common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*) and serotine bats (*Eptesicus serotinus*) are recorded adjacent to the proposed areas, including maternity colonies for the first two

species, but only evidence of isolated individuals for serotine bat. There has been no particular survey carried out in the area, but other species recorded adjacent to or over the proposed areas include noctule bat (*Nyctalus noctula*) and Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*). Further species are known to occur within the general area.

2.2. Great crested newt

Breeding populations of great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) are recorded immediately adjacent to area 08PL and within 100m of area 05PL and 04PL.

2.3. Dormouse

Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) has not yet been surveyed for, but has been recorded from an owl pellet within 2 km of the proposed sites and may well occur.

3. Other UK Protected Species (vertebrates only)

A range of other species are protected in some way or other in UK legislation.

3.1. Badger

A complete survey of the parish for badgers (*Meles meles*) has been carried out by the PWHG in 2010 and badger setts are identified within the proposed area 05PL, and one currently disused sett and one used set within 500m of 08PL.

3.2. Amphibians

A complete survey of ponds of the parish has been carried out between 2006-2010. In addition to great crested newt discussed above, common toad, common frog, smooth newt and palmate newt have all been found within or adjacent to the proposed areas.

3.3. Reptiles

No structured survey has been carried out, but slow worm, adder and grass snake have all been recorded within or adjacent to the proposed development areas. It is likely that common lizard will also occur.

3.4. Birds

All birds are protected to some extent. Specially protected bird species included in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act and which occur in and around the proposed areas are barn owl, hobby and kingfisher, but there is no evidence that they nest within the proposed areas. See also below under section 4.

3.5. Other species

Water vole has not been recorded, but might occur. Other species for which some protection is provided (but mainly in relation to methods and timing of taking) are deer, shrews and hedgehog.

4. UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species, Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) species and Red List species

A range of species is designated for special conservation programmes under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and Local (Sussex) Biodiversity Action Plan. The status of any species included and occurring in the proposed areas has not yet been assessed.

The national assessment of Birds of Conservation Concern 3 (2009) includes the following species that breed in or around the proposed development areas:
Red List: grey partridge, lapwing, turtle dove, cuckoo, skylark, song thrush, starling, house sparrow.

Amber List: mallard, stock dove, barn owl, kingfisher, green woodpecker, swallow, house martin, dunnoek, nightingale, mistle thrush, common whitethroat, bullfinch.

5. UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats, Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) habitats

A range of habitats is designated for special conservation programmes under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and Local (Sussex) Biodiversity Action Plan. The status of any habitats included and occurring in the proposed areas has not yet been assessed.

6. Presence of any protected or otherwise designated areas

There are no protected or otherwise designated areas within or adjacent to the proposed development areas.

7. Ancient woodland/ trees

Included in Appendix 1.

8. Other significant trees (including TPOs) or other features

See Appendix 1.

The Register of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) seems to be no longer available on the LDC website. In 2007 there were 24 TPOs in the parish. There are believed to be four TPOs close to the proposed development areas, but the details of these designations have not been checked:

reg. no. 3852:227. Saxon Cottage, Station Road. Four (now three) horse chestnut trees in garden of (now) Chestnut House.

reg. no. 3852:431. Rectory, Station Road. Hornbeam in garden thereof.

reg. no. 3852: 432. Oakdene, Station Road. Oak in garden of (now) Mulberry.

reg. no. 3852: 495. Whitehouse Farm, Station Road. Two plane trees near entrance track to Whitehouse Farm, one in Whitehouse Farm, one in (now) Grebe.

No other particular features of wildlife concern have been identified.

9. Any particular requirements of local policy

Not yet fully assessed.

Proposed further work with regard to this development proposal.

1. further survey for dormouse
2. further survey for bats
3. further assessment of implications for BAP species or habitats
4. assess any implications of local policy
5. request records search from Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre

Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group

March 2011

Appendix 1. Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

Habitat assessment of Areas 04PL, 05PL, 08PL identified on SHLAA Ditchling/ Plumpton map

Area 04PL

This consists of the land immediately surrounding the church and the adjacent graveyard plus two glebe fields.

The area between the church and the road is small but is an especially species-rich grassland, including a good population of green winged orchid and autumn lady's tresses among other species characteristic of flower-rich traditional hay meadows. The graveyard is also flower-rich and a valuable habitat for butterflies, bees and other insects. A plant species list is attached.

The two glebe fields (see 1 & 2 on map) were originally recorded on the Phase 1 Habitat survey of 2004 (plumptonwildlifegroup.yolasite.com) as unimproved grassland but at the time of the current survey (8 February 2011) were almost devoid of vegetation, having been heavily overgrazed by horses and extremely muddy and churned up. The derelict hedge between the two fields contains a field maple, whose dimensions qualify it as an ancient tree plus 7 well-grown oaks, whose health has been compromised by extensive damage to the bark, presumably due to gnawing by horses. This hedge also contains hawthorn and bluebells in the ground flora, perhaps indicating its considerable age.

There is a pond in the north-east corner of the easternmost field, with an adjacent, impressive old goat willow.

The hedge on the eastern side of the boundary of 04PL contains hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, bramble, oak, ash, dog rose, spindle, dogwood, goat willow, field maple, holly, honeysuckle and ivy. Bluebells occur in the ground flora, among other herbaceous plants, and anthills at the edge of the field indicate a lack of disturbance until the recent lack of appropriate management. The ditch on the eastern side of the hedge contains sedges and ferns on its banks but is at grave risk of pollution from the horse manure piled up on its edge. This ditch runs into the watercourse supplying the pond in area 05PL.

Area 05PL

Field 3 (see map) is sheep-grazed improved grassland, formerly cultivated for vegetables, bordered on its northern edge by a hedge of hawthorn and blackthorn with some ash, spindle, hazel, oak, goat willow, bramble and honeysuckle. It is divided from north to south by a wire fence and the grassland of the extreme eastern part, east of the short hedge (containing oak and bluebells), is more species rich, including mosses, wood-rush, creeping buttercup, violets and bugle. The anthills here indicate that it has not been disturbed for many years.

The ditch and its banks crossing the south eastern corner of this field are rich in species, including watercress, soft rush, jointed rush, flote grass, water starwort, brooklime, bulrush and purple loosestrife, hemlock water-dropwort and ladies smock.

The woodland and pond area is of good wildlife value and contains many ancient woodland indicator (AWI) species. This may be due to its once being continuous with woodland to the east that was cleared in the 1970s. The trees and shrubs include oak, field maple, wild service tree, wild pear, holly, oak, hazel, blackthorn, wild privet,

elder, European gorse, dog rose, honeysuckle and bramble. The ground flora includes AWI species – bluebell, moschatel, hart's-tongue fern, common polypody, wood speedwell, creeping jenny, pendulous sedge – as well as more common woodland species. Woodland mosses are abundant and the wetter areas contain bulrush, water mint, gipsywort, yellow flag, soft rush, hard rush, great willowherb, meadowsweet, marsh marigold, ragged robin and various sedges among other species.

The field in the west of this area (4 on map) is semi improved, sheep-grazed grassland with occasional creeping buttercup, white clover, lady's smock, dandelion, and mouse-eared chickweed. It is closely grazed and more species may be revealed as the season progresses.

There is a hornbeam in the hedge on the northern edge between this field and the adjacent garden whose dimensions qualify it as an ancient tree.

Area 08PL

This area is of historical interest and the pattern of its field and hedgerow is little changed in character since the date of the tithe map (1841). Its hedgerows are important for nesting birds and as corridors and refuges for small mammals, amphibians and reptiles and invertebrates.

1. This small field is wet, ungrazed and contains a small pond surrounded by goat willow scrub. There is an adjacent grove of aspen, which is unusual in the parish. It is worth further survey.

2. These fields are sheep-grazed, semi-improved pasture and their component species have some wildlife interest.

3. These field are improved grassland and are of little value for wildlife.

Hedges between and around these field are varied in species composition and condition. Most are of mixed species and some may be ancient in origin. Some are intact, others are eaten out at the bottom. Species include common hawthorn, hybrid hawthorn, holly, blackthorn, hazel, pedunculate oak, dog rose, spindle, hornbeam, wild privet, field rose, field maple, ash, goat willow. Some contain mature oaks and some are adjacent to ditches with a variety of aquatic vegetation.

4 (Pond 1 on map) This small pond is surrounded by large ash and oak trees, hawthorn and maple

5. (Pond 2 on map) The eastern one of these two ponds dries up in summer. Both are surrounded by ash, oak, goat willow, dog rose and blackthorn and are fed by a drain from a pond further to the north-west and beyond the boundary of area 08PL.

6. (Pond 3 on map) This fenced pond is well-vegetated, and fringed with field maple, sallow, hawthorn, blackthorn and ash.

Map 1. Areas proposed for potential development and referred to in Appendix 1
 04PL, 05PL, 08PL: areas proposed as suitable for development
 circled number: field number
 circled 'p' number: pond number

