P/2019/00640

Brankley Farm, Dunstall Lane, Stoneyford, Barton under Needwood, Staffordshire, DE13 8BN

Reserved Matters application relating to P/2017/00446 for the construction of an underground shooting range to provide 8 practice shooting lanes, car parking and landscaping including details of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale

SK158209

0.78 hectares

Documents reviewed:

* Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated July 2016 by Arc Ecology (for P/2017/00446)
* APP/B3410/W/17/3189574 (P/2017/00446) Appeal Decision 3 May 2018
* Site Plan- As Proposed Dwg. No 1819/02 Rev A April 2019 by John Grew Design
* Proposed Landscaping Dwg. No 1819/04 Rev B 11/06/19 by John Grew Design
* Woodland Planting Dwg. No 1819/06 Rev A March 2019 by John Grew Design

The proposal site is near to a registered ancient woodland, and bordered to the east by part of SWT's nature reserve Brankley Pastures.

**HABITATS**

Condition 7 of the appeal decision states:

‘The landscaping details shall include for the planting of a 20m wide buffer adjacent to the ancient woodland. The scheme shall include indications of all existing trees and hedgerows on the land indicating those to be retained, and set out measures for their protection throughout the course of development.’

The Proposed Landscaping plan needs to ensure the buffer tree planting adjacent the ancient woodland does not encroach on existing tree RPAs, which were previously recommended in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated July 2016 by Arc Ecology as T1 an oak 6.6m, T2 a holly 6m, and T3 an oak 7.2m. Trees are shown on the plan, with planting shown skirting the trees, but RPAs are not shown. It would also be best to leave a greater radius around existing trees to prevent them becoming shaded in future. A line of temporary Harris fencing is also shown on the plan, but the distance from the trees/ boundary is not specified. Likewise, the access track will need to avoid tree RPAs – passing places may need to be re-positioned. No protective measures are shown for these trees. There are also a number of spelling errors on the Proposed Landscaping Plan and Woodland Planting plan in terms of tree species which could be corrected.

Tree planting species mix- we recommend removing ash from the planting mix due to the risk of spreading Ash Die-back disease.  Ash may well spread naturally from existing trees in the area. All trees and shrubs need to be of local origin and a reputable source to avoid pest and disease issues. Trees need to be checked for pests and diseases as part of a management plan, to avoid any issues spreading to adjacent land.

Soil preparation for tree planting areas should include, if sufficient material is available, a layer of subsoil at least 30 cm thick over topsoil. This benefits tree roots establishment as moisture is retained, fewer weed issues occur and native flowers can better establish. This should also reduce the need for spraying or strimming around trees during early establishment.

Rather than meadow planting between trees, a hedgerow/ woodland mix with no grass seed would be preferable so that a woodland flora can develop in time, and competition to trees from grasses is minimised. Ideally locally sourced seed should be used, and we are happy to allow seed collection such as bluebells from our reserve. 1-2 g of seed per m2 is usually sufficient.

The banked areas around the car park, and the field margin alongside the access track are not shown as being sown/ planted/ turfed on the Proposed Landscaping plan – this should be specified.

Condition 8 of the appeal decision states that the ‘scheme shall be managed and/or maintained in accordance with an approved scheme of management and/or maintenance.’ A landscape/ habitat management plan covering at least 10 years, including monitoring of habitats, for the site and all woodland planting should be submitted.

**SPECIES**

No further ecology surveys or checks have been made since the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated July 2016 by Arc Ecology, submitted with the outline application P/2017/00446. This report was originally commissioned for the previous application P/2016/00539 which had a different layout and access track location, therefore does not refer to the current plans.

In order to ensure no new ecology issues have emerged over the last 3 years, and that construction of the proposed access track adjacent to SWT’s nature reserve boundary does not impact on any badger setts or other wildlife that may be present, an ecology update survey is required before determination.

There are ponds nearby and great crested newts have been recorded 400m from the site boundary. A smooth newt was also recently recorded within Brankley Covert, and toads may also be present. Previous surveys found the pond to the east of the site to have no GCN present, although this may not be the case now. The ecology update should risk assess the proposals relative to the presence of ponds to the east and south, and confirm that, should GCN be present, a licence will not be needed and Reasonable Avoidance Measures to protect amphibians can be carried out.

The Ecology Update Report should also detail measures for avoidance/protection of nesting birds, and tree protection measures.

**SUMMARY**

As further information and amendments are required to ensure ecology issues are considered, and to meet conditions within the appeal decision, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust currently submits a **holding objection** to the proposals. Subject to these points above being addressed, we will review our recommendations.

Required before determination:

* Ecology Update Survey
* Amended woodland planting mix, soil preparation and ground flora seeding details. Amended landscaping and access track plan to show avoidance of existing tree RPAs. Add seeding/ planting details for car park banks and access track margins.
* 10 year Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan