

Assessment of Potential Impacts to Newton Marsh SSSI

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Introduction and Background

Jacobs UK Ltd. (Jacobs) was commissioned by Lancashire County Council (LCC) to provide ecological services to support the proposed Cottam Parkway Railway Station scheme (hereafter referred to as the 'scheme'). The planning application for the scheme was submitted in September 2022 (planning reference LCC/2022/0049).

Following the submission of the application and the subsequent consultation responses, a further information requirement was raised by Natural England (November 2022) and the planning applications' ecology consultee (Atkins, March 2023) to address concerns raised on the potential impacts to Newton Marsh Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This document has been prepared on behalf of LCC in response to these consultation comments.

Assessment of Potential Impacts

Evidence Base

This assessment has been based on information contained within the below listed reports:

- Jacobs (2022). Cottam Parkway Railway Station. Breeding Bird Survey Report. September 2020. B2327FEF-JAC-EBD-00-RP-ENV-0002. Environmental Statement. Volume 3: Appendix 6.6;
- Jacobs UK Ltd (2022). Cottam Parkway Railway Station. Wintering Bird Survey Report. September 2020. B2327FEA/WBS. Environmental Statement. Volume 3: Appendix 6.7;
- Jacobs UK Ltd (2022). Cottam Parkway Railway Station. Report to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment (Stage 1 - Screening). February 2021. B2327FEF-JAC-EBD-00-RP-ENV-0009. Environmental Statement. Volume 3: Appendix 6.15; and
- Lancashire County Council (2022). Cottam Parkway Railway Station. Environmental Statement. Volume 2: Main Statement. Chapter 6: Ecology. Document reference 07-ES-02-06-04.

Newton Marsh SSSI

The scheme is approximately 4.2km north-east of Newton Marsh SSSI. The description and reasons for notification of the SSSI are included below and as replicated from the latest available citation sheet (Natural England, 1986) and as obtained via the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database (magic.gov.uk).

"Newton Marsh is located near to the Ribble Estuary, 2 km east of Freckleton, and comprises 162 acres of grazed, improved pasture reclaimed from former saltmarsh but retaining a number of pools and ditches. These features, the relative lack of disturbance, its size and proximity to the Ribble Estuary and its position along a major migration route down the west coast of Britain account for the importance of the site for over-wintering and migrant birds. Over 100 bird species have been recorded from Newton Marsh, the majority being spring and winter visitors forming part of the migrant populations which use the west coast estuaries of Britain on their route from the breeding grounds in the far north and the wintering grounds further south. The proximity of Newton Marsh to the Ribble Estuary allows an interchange of birds between the two sites and total numbers will vary according to local conditions. On average Newton Marsh supports in the region of

10,000 birds each winter, but under adverse conditions these numbers can be substantially higher as the marsh provides a valuable source of refuge, protected from high tides and relatively free from disturbance. Large flocks of golden plover habitually favour this site in the winter and numbers present each year (up to 8,000) regularly exceed the qualifying level for national importance (2,000). Other winter visitors include large numbers of lapwing (up to 10,000) with smaller flocks of snipe, bar-tailed godwit, redshank, dunlin, mallard, teal, shelduck and wigeon. In spring and autumn up to 1,200 black-tailed godwits have been recorded from the site and numbers of this species are in most years in excess of the qualifying level for national importance (50). Other passage migrants include greenshank, spotted redshank, common sandpiper and sanderling. While the natural saltmarsh breeding bird community has been altered by a change in the nature of the vegetation brought about by reclamation, the wetness of the pasture has encouraged the development of a new bird community which includes freshwater fen, saltmarsh and farmland species. Regular breeding species include lapwing, redshank, mallard, moorhen, coot, skylark, yellow wagtail and meadow pipit, with less frequent breeding records for snipe, little grebe, mute swan, shelduck, reed bunting, oystercatcher and corn bunting. The interest of the site is further enhanced by the presence of a variety of aquatic and marsh plants in the pools and ditches, which include the flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus* and spiked sedge *Carex spicata*, both rare species in Lancashire".

It should be noted that both consultee comments relate to the bird species mentioned in the above citation only.

Summary of Field Survey Results

Table 1 below provides a summary of the species recorded in the survey area for the scheme during the breeding season which are also listed within the SSSI notification. Table 2 provides a summary of the birds that were recorded in the autumn / wintering period.

Table 1. Birds recorded within the breeding bird survey (2020)

Species Recorded	Breeding Status within survey area	Season in which the species form part of the SSSI notification	Visit 1 April	Visit 2 May	Visit 3 June
Coot	Breeding	Breeding	3	3	-
Lapwing	Breeding	Breeding (and wintering)	9	1	13
Mallard	Breeding	Breeding	26	13	18
Moorhen	Breeding	Breeding	3	4	1
Mute swan	Breeding	Breeding	-	2	6
Oystercatcher	Non-breeding	Breeding	2	-	-
Reed bunting	Non-breeding	Breeding	1	-	2
Skylark	Non-breeding	Breeding	-	2	-
Snipe	Non-breeding	Breeding	-	2	-

Table 2. Birds recorded within the wintering bird survey (2019/20)

Species Recorded	Visit 1 Oct	Visit 2 Nov	Visit 3 Dec	Visit 4 Jan	Visit 5 Feb	Visit 6 Mar
Lapwing	3	16	-	-	9	1
Mallard	17	18	20	30	14	9
Teal	5	1	29	102	37	8
Snipe	8	1	-	-	2	2

Potential Impacts

The following aspects are considered to represent the most likely potential (adverse) impacts to notified birds that may occur as a result of the construction and operation of the scheme:

- Loss of land that has a potential functional linkage to Newton Marsh SSSI

- Temporary disturbance / displacement of birds associated with Newton Marsh SSSI during the construction phase.

Evaluation

Breeding Birds

It is important to note that both the breeding bird and wintering bird survey areas were designed to cover suitable habitats within 500m of the initial development boundary line. This distance allowed for potential alterations of the boundary whilst still covering sufficient areas in which there may have been impacts to birds. Upon submission of the final design and planning boundary, much of the survey area was found to be in excess of 500m from the scheme's development boundary. Therefore, the distance between the scheme and birds associated with the SSSI is often in excess of any distance in which any impacts would potentially occur.

Of the four non-breeding species recorded during the field surveys (oystercatcher, reed bunting, skylark and snipe), all were recorded in low numbers (one to two) and within differing locations within the survey area during each visit. Only reed bunting (a single bird) was recorded within the planning applications' scheme boundary. The other sightings were within locations in which these birds would be directly affected by the construction or operation of the scheme. However, it is also considered unlikely that these birds were associated with Newton Marsh SSSI largely due to the intervening distance (4.1km). The surrounding area provides a number of habitat types to support these species.

Of the breeding birds, all species (coot, lapwing, mallard, moorhen and mute swan) were considered to be breeding within the suitable habitats in the survey area with no association with Newton Marsh SSSI. Lancaster Canal and the standing waterbodies within the survey area provide suitable breeding habitat for waterbirds and the cultivated fields present suitable breeding habitat for lapwing. Due to the change in the scheme boundary, the main breeding population of lapwing was 1km from the new planning boundary. Low numbers of post-breeding lapwing were distributed throughout the survey area in the June 2020 survey.

Given the low numbers along with the breeding nature and distribution of these birds within the scheme survey area, it is considered unlikely that any birds recorded within the breeding season formed part of the populations for which Newton Marsh SSSI was designated. **Therefore, the construction and operation of the scheme is extremely unlikely to have a significant impact on the notified breeding species of Newton Marsh SSSI.**

Wintering Birds

Of the four notified species recorded during the wintering bird surveys, a notable count of teal (102) was recorded on a waterbody within the survey area in January and within lower numbers in other months. As summarised in the Report to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment (Stage 1 – Screening) (Jacobs, 2023), this population was potentially associated with Ribble and Alt Estuaries Special Protection Area. However, the notable count of teal were recorded in excess of 205m north of the planning applications' scheme boundary and this area will remain unaffected by the scheme. **Therefore, the construction and operation of the scheme is extremely unlikely to have a significant impact on the teal population associated with Newton Marsh SSSI.**

Snipe were recorded in the highest numbers (eight) in the autumn passage period (October). Of these, low numbers (one to two) snipe were distributed throughout the survey area with two observed in the planning applications' scheme boundary. Other sightings of snipe were recorded in low numbers (one to two) between 65m and 720m from the scheme. Potentially adverse effects such as land loss and displacement to such low numbers are not considered to represent a significant impact on Newton Marsh SSSI. Suitable habitats for overwintering snipe are distributed throughout the wider area. **Therefore, the construction and operation of the scheme is extremely unlikely to have a significant impact on the snipe population associated with Newton Marsh SSSI.**

Mallard were recorded throughout the winter period and were distributed on several waterbodies throughout the survey area. The highest count within any one location (18) was recorded on the waterbody used by teal (205m north of the planning applications' scheme boundary). The nearest count to the scheme was eight mallard recorded on a small pond within the planning applications' scheme boundary in December. It would be extremely difficult to find association between the development area and the Newton Marsh SSSI

mallard populations as non-SSSI associated wintering mallard will utilise all the freshwater habitats within the survey area and beyond. Nonetheless, there were no habitats within or adjacent to the scheme that supported mallard in significant numbers. Any waterbodies that supported small numbers are to be retained. Whilst the construction may cause temporary disturbance of small numbers of mallard, this is highly unlikely to be significant in terms of adversely affecting the populations within the SSSI. **Overall, the construction and operation of the scheme is extremely unlikely to have a significant impact on the mallard population associated with Newton Marsh SSSI.**

The highest count of lapwing was recorded in November (16). This count was recorded in an arable field over 300m west of the planning applications' scheme boundary. The next highest count (9) was recorded around a pond 50m west. Neither count is considered to represent a significant proportion of the numbers cited within the SSSI notification (10,000). **Therefore, the construction and operation of the scheme is extremely unlikely to have a significantly impact the lapwing population associated with Newton Marsh SSSI.**

Conclusion

It is concluded that the construction and operation of the scheme is highly unlikely to result in significant impacts to the notification features of the SSSI. This is largely due to:

1. The intervening distances between the development area and any birds potentially associated with Newton Marsh SSSI; and
2. The very low numbers of birds recorded that would be temporarily impacted during the construction works.