



BERKSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

Registered Charity No 1011776

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Burghfield Park Housing Development Comments on concept proposal by Floodline Developments

The Berkshire Ornithological Club is concerned with the conservation of birds in their natural environment, education about birds and encouraging people to enjoy bird-watching. The proposed development, on one of the most important sites in Berkshire for breeding and wintering birds, would seriously impact many key species and reduce the value of the area as a place to enjoy and learn about nature. We oppose development at this and other water bodies of the lower Kennet valley, which are the central part of a lakes and wetland corridor from Newbury to Twyford.

The proposed site has one of the densest populations of Nightingales in the U.K. Recently added to the UK's Red List of most threatened wildlife, Nightingales are declining rapidly elsewhere in the country, particularly in southern England. Notably however, they have been holding their own in the lower Kennet, whose wetland edge habitat has so far been protected and sympathetically maintained. The proposed development would threaten a substantial part of the Nightingale population by destruction of their breeding habitat and more widely by disturbance from the greatly increased use of the surrounding area by influx of new residents and their dogs.

Disturbance would also adversely impact the great majority of the wetland species using the Theale Lake and adjacent water bodies, including Hosehill Nature Reserve, a local nature reserve managed by BBOWT for West Berkshire Council. The lake is one of the three breeding sites in Berkshire of Oystercatchers and is used for breeding or feeding by other wetland species, including the Lapwing, another declining species on the UK's Red List; the Little Ringed Plover, a scarce bird that is legally protected from disturbance under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and the Redshank, which is declining rapidly in the south of England. In winter, the lake is used by a wide range of wildfowl. It is the largest lake of the complex of water bodies in the Lower Kennet Valley, holding in excess of 2,500 wintering ducks each year and has a gull roost that includes internationally important numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

The proposed flood control measures would potentially eliminate waders and wildfowl breeding on the lake edges and islands with occasional level increases of up to a metre. They may also impact the wet meadow areas and wetlands downstream that rely on occasional flooding, such as Fobney Meadows and Fobney Island.

The site is part of a Local Wildlife Site. Under West Berkshire's Core Strategy (its adopted overall planning policy document) policy CS 17, any development which might harm a Local Wildlife Site will only be permitted if there are no reasonable alternatives and there are clear national or regional social or economic benefits which outweigh the need to safeguard the area and adequate mitigation and compensation measures are provided. There is no compelling reason why this Local Wildlife Site should be harmed given the availability of other suitable housing sites, currently under evaluation by the Council for its Housing Sites Development Plan Document.

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256431st March 2016

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