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Summary Proof of Evidence: Ecology and Nature Conservation

LPA REF: 3/2025/0196
APPEAL REF: 6006485

Client

Hallam Land Land Management Limited

Project

**Land South of Longsight Road,
Langho**

Date

March 2026

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1.0 SUMMARY EVIDENCE1

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DECLARATION

“The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this appeal is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with guidance of my professional institution and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions”.

Rev	Issue Status	Prepared/Date	Approved/Date
-	Draft		KG / 28.03.26
	Final		IH / 31.03.26

1.0 SUMMARY EVIDENCE

- 1.1 The outline planning application for the Site was registered by Ribble Valley Borough Council on 31 March 2025. The proposal sought permission for up to 300 residential dwellings, associated access, railway station car park, green infrastructure (GI) and sustainable drainage system with all matters reserved except for means of access to, but not within, the site..
- 1.2 The application was refused on 27 June 2025, prior to the submission of additional ecological information requested by the Council. Two Reasons for Refusal (RfR 4 and RfR 5) related to Ecology and Nature Conservation were cited.
- 1.3 Since refusal, further ecological work and clarification have significantly narrowed the issues in dispute. The following matters are now agreed between the main parties:
- Sufficient ecological surveys have been undertaken to inform determination;
 - The baseline position in respect of habitats and species is agreed; and
 - The proposals provide appropriate mitigation and compensation for Protected and Notable species.
- 1.4 The remaining areas of disagreement relate principally to:
- Alleged isolation and fragmentation of retained and proposed habitats;
 - Alleged harm to Ancient Woodland;
 - The treatment of a small area of Lowland Meadow, including whether reasonable alternatives were available and whether the mitigation hierarchy has been followed; and
 - Whether the proposals undermine the recently adopted Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- 1.5 The ecological matters raised under RfR 5 largely overlap with these disputed issues rather than introducing separate concerns relating solely to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

Isolation and fragmentation

- 1.6 Policy ENV4 seeks to avoid isolation and fragmentation. This policy does not set a minimum requirement for the provision of green infrastructure corridors. The adopted LNRS does not recommend minimum width for connective habitats, instead it highlights broad areas where potential enhancements could be made. The only real guidance for the provision of corridor widths is Natural England's standing advice for Ancient Woodland where a minimum of 15m is recommended.
- 1.7 As described in my evidence, the required 15m buffer zone is provided adjacent to Ancient Woodland, and the width of the corridor varies from 15 - 80m along the eastern boundary
- 1.8 Further significant green infrastructure corridors are provided along the northern boundary of the site and adjacent to the retained watercourse R2. The width of these link range from 35 - 82m and 15 - 48m. My view is that these corridors provide connectivity for the ecological network, including the translocated Lowland Meadow, within the site
- 1.9 The existing baseline is characterised by small, fragmented areas of priority habitat in poor condition, a position accepted by the Council. Crucially, in the absence of development there is no mechanism to secure improved management or prevent further degradation. By contrast,

the appeal proposals introduce a coherent GI framework supported by long-term management, which will enhance connectivity and reduce fragmentation. This represents a net ecological benefit and accords with the objectives of Policy ENV4.

Harm to the Ancient Woodland & Veteran Tree

- 1.10 The Ancient Woodland and Veteran tree within the Site are retained in full. The scheme provides the buffer distance recommended in Natural England's standing advice.
- 1.11 The Arboricultural and Hydrological Assessments demonstrate that:
- No incursion occurs within root protection areas; and
 - The hydrological requirements of the woodland will not be adversely affected.
- 1.12 The Council accepts that the woodland is currently in poor condition and acknowledges the benefits of long-term management secured through the proposals. The creation of a defined and protected woodland boundary is also recognised as beneficial.
- 1.13 From the Council submissions, the only dispute the Council have with the scheme are potential isolation of the woodland and the effects to the expansion zone adjacent to the woodland. In relation to matters of isolation and fragmentation, I conclude that the green infrastructure will mitigate such effects and, given the baseline conditions should be viewed as a benefit.
- 1.14 My evidence reviews matters relating to the expansion zone and I concluded that the expansion zone and the buffer zone recommended by Natural England are the same. As discussed, the appeal proposals provide the buffer and enhancements within the buffer. The application of these measures and long-term management will provide an overall benefit to the woodland.
- 1.15 Given the above, I conclude that the proposals comply with the relevant core strategy policies ENV4 / DME1 and Natural England's standing advice.

Lowland Meadow and Alternative Design

- 1.16 The area of Lowland Meadow is in poor condition and the area only forms a very minor proportion of the regional resource. The survey information confirms the grassland is not managed in a manner which will maintain the habitat type in the long term.
- 1.17 Whilst retaining the habitat *in situ* is desirable, the completed survey work indicates, in the medium-term, the quality of the grassland is likely to be lost, a similar situation to that assessed at the Drake Broughton appeal. Translocation of the Lowland Meadow within the site avoids damage and fragmentation through the implementation of the site infrastructure, is an acceptable form of mitigation for a habitat that is likely to be lost through lack of appropriate management.
- 1.18 The proposals commit to a detailed translocation, management, and monitoring strategy. Further detailed being provided at Appendix B of my evidence. The Statutory Biodiversity Metric confirms that this approach achieves no net loss for Lowland Meadow within the Site. Furthermore, grassland translocation has been demonstrated to be effective through projects such as HS2 and long-term monitoring at Dunsmore.
- 1.19 From a policy perspective, ENV4 and DME3 indicate that affecting a priority habitat could cause conflict. However, this potential policy conflict needs to be balanced with the inevitable consequence that a lack of management is likely to result in the loss of the grassland, the onsite proposals can achieve 'no net loss' for Lowland Meadow and the fact Key Statement ENV4

allows the use of Biodiversity offsetting for non-statutory designated habitats. When taken in the round and considering the appellant has sourced Lowland Meadow credits off-site, providing a 113% gain in this habitat type, it is my view that the requirements of ENV4 and DME3 are satisfied.

The Mitigation Hierarchy

- 1.20 The mitigation hierarchy outlined at Paragraph 193(a) of the NPPF recommends that where significant harm to development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site or alternative designs), mitigated or compensated planning permission should be refused. As discussed, the Council's view is that this hierarchy has not been followed due to translocation of the Lowland Meadow.
- 1.21 When applying the hierarchy, it is important to first consider the baseline conditions. As my evidence outlines, it is my view that the development is not causing significant harm to this receptor, but the harm is the result of the current lack of management.
- 1.22 When considering the overall design and potential alternatives, as I understand matters, development of the site requires the implementation of a loop road. The implementation of the loop road would either require the removal of an area of Lowland Mixed Deciduous woodland (W2) or the effect to the Lowland Meadow, which is known to be in poor condition. Both of these habitats are listed as priority habitats as listed in the NERC Act.
- 1.23 Given the infrastructure requirements, it is important to consider the potential effects on the two habitats and the likely success of mitigation in the short to medium term. In this respect, mitigation or compensation for the woodland in this timescale is not possible. However, translocation of the Lowland Meadow with the application of long-term habitat management and monitoring requirements is likely to result in successful mitigation in the short to medium term. Translocation through this development will also provide protection for the grassland in the long term.
- 1.24 Given the above, it is my view that translocation of the Lowland Meadow does follow the requirement of the mitigation hierarchy and is consistent with the appeal decision at Drake Broughton and Bishops Itchington.
- 1.25 In terms of the step-wise hierarchy recommended for Biodiversity Net Gain as explained through my evidence, I consider this process has been followed.

Undermining the recently adopted LNRS

- 1.26 The Council's case on this matter makes no logical sense. In simple terms, the LNRS is a spatial planning tool which does not provide a mechanism to enforce the creation of the potential measure outlined in the strategy.
- 1.27 The scheme retains and manages existing ecological features and delivers enhancements aligned with the opportunities identified in the LNRS. Although there are no local policy mechanisms requiring strict compliance, the proposals accord with Paragraph 159 of the NPPF.
- 1.28 The development should in my view therefore be seen as supporting, rather than undermining, the objectives of the LNRS.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 1.29 With respect to Biodiversity Net Gain, the submission acknowledge that the development proposals require the provision of mitigation within the site and the provision of offsite compensation at a strategic level habitat bank identified in the LNRS. Through these onsite and offsite provisions, the updated metric submitted to this appeal confirms a net gain in habitat units equivalent to 12.15%. In terms of hedgerows, the scheme provides a net gain of 24.37% and an uplift of 13.3% in watercourse units.
- 1.30 From this assessment and the evidence I provide, it is my professional opinion that the proposals will not result in harm to biodiversity; rather, the proposals will lead to a net gain to biodiversity, which is in accordance with both the requirements of the NPPF, local planning policy, and Part 6 of the Environment Act, and matters raised in RfR5 have been resolved.

Conclusion

- 1.31 The proposals do not result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats as defined in the NPPF. Appropriate and proportionate mitigation and compensation are secured to ensure that ecological effects do not exceed low-level harm.
- 1.32 The development delivers measurable Biodiversity Net Gains through on-site enhancement and off-site provision, including a significant uplift for the priority habitat Lowland Meadow.
- 1.33 For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the proposals accord with national and local planning policy, the Statutory Biodiversity Metric, the Planning Practice Guidance, the requirements of Part 6 of the Environment Act and Natural England's standing advice. I therefore respectfully request that the appeal is allowed.

FPCR Environment and Design Ltd

Registered Office: Lockington Hall, Lockington, Derby DE74 2RH
Company No. 07128076. [T] 01509 672772 [E] mail@fpcr.co.uk [W] www.fpcr.co.uk

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