
Ainsdale Hope Learning Centre

Breeding Birds Survey Report

Compiled by Ecology Services Ltd.

on behalf of

Sefton Council

November 2023



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Ecology Services Limited was commissioned by Sefton Council in March 2023 to carry out a Breeding Bird Survey to inform potential residential development at the Ainsdale Hope Learning Centre, Sandringham Rd, Ainsdale, Southport, PR8 2PJ, National Grid Reference (NGR) 331260, 412950.
- 1.2 The site is allocated for residential development in the Sefton Local Plan (Sefton Council, 2017) with the requirement that an 'Ecological Improvement Area' is developed as a nature reserve on the site alongside the housing allocation. Development of the site must provide new habitat and ecological improvements on the adjacent 'Ecological Improvement Area', the extent of which is to be determined following the completion of future evidence (i.e. ecological surveys).
- 1.3 In its pre-application consultation response dated 17th February 2023, the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) stated that grassland on the site may provide opportunities for ground nesting birds, such as skylark and meadow pipit and that breeding bird surveys would be required prior to determination of any future planning application.

Site Description

- 1.4 The site comprises the Learning Centre Buildings plus their surrounding areas of hardstanding parking and landscaped grounds. In addition, the site includes a large area of grassland habitat that has developed on former sports pitches. The site was previously the location of Ainsdale Hope High School which closed in 2009. The site is located immediately adjacent to internationally, nationally and locally important nature conservation sites to the north and west designated for their important sand dune and coastal habitats and associated flora and fauna. To the south of the site lies residential development and to the north and east, golf courses. A large residential property and its grounds also lie adjacent to the north of the site.
- 1.5 The objectives of the breeding bird survey were to:
- Identify any legally protected species using the site;
 - Identify any Nationally, regionally or locally significant species using the site (including NERC Act 2006 Species of Principal Importance);
 - Identify key habitat areas for those species recorded; and
 - Provide recommendations, taking these species into account.
- 1.6 This report presents the results of the survey, evaluates the findings and makes recommendations for retention of ecologically valuable areas and mitigation recommendations to minimise impact on breeding birds.

2.0 Planning Policy and Legislation

Planning Policy

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023) places a clear responsibility on Local Planning Authorities (LPA) to contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural and local environment. LPAs should promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species (e.g. Species of Principal importance, Local Biodiversity Action Plan species); and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Circular 06/2005 provides administrative guidance on the application of the law in relation to planning and nature conservation.

- 2.2 A Local Planning Authority (LPA) has a duty to ensure that protected species and habitats within the UK are a 'material consideration' in the determination of a planning application. Therefore, an LPA is unlikely to determine an application until all relevant information relating to protected species or habitats is submitted to fully inform the application. Relevant information includes adequate surveys and, where required, mitigation strategies, which will need to be submitted to inform a planning application.
- 2.3 Although the UKBAP has been superseded by the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and, in England, Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (2011), many Local Authorities have prepared and operate Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs). LBAPs not only highlight species that are of Principal Importance but also species that are of local importance. LBAPs will be prepared for these species. Listing of a species in a LBAP does not confer any new statutory or planning policy protection. However, impacts upon species prioritised in LBAPs may be a material consideration in a planning application.

Legislation

- 2.4 The Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended) states that all wild birds are protected. Under the WCA, it is an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird, to take damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird or to take or destroy the egg of any wild bird. A special penalty is levied to any of the above offences being committed in conjunction with a bird listed on Schedule 1 of the WCA. It is also an offence if a person disturbs any bird listed on Schedule 1 while it is building a nest, is on or near a nest containing young or disturbs dependent young of such a bird.
- 2.5 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 made it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb Schedule 1 species as above and also an offence to intentionally or recklessly take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird or its eggs or dependent young.
- 2.6 Section 41 (S41) of the NERC Act 2006 (as amended) requires the Secretary of State, as respects England, to publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitat which are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving or enhancing biodiversity. Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 places a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity on every public body. The Local Planning Authority and Natural England will expect account to be taken of these species in the overall layout and landscape strategy for the development.
- 2.7 There are 49 bird Species of Principal Importance included on the NERC Section 41 list. These are the species found in England which were identified as requiring action under the former UK BAP and which continue to be regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and, in England, Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (2011). Under its 25 Year Environment Plan (2018), the Government proposes to publish a new strategy for nature building on Biodiversity 2020. Bird Species of Principal Importance are selected, in England, if they fall under one or more of the following criteria: species which are globally threatened and species which are rapidly declining in the UK i.e. by more than 50% in the last 25 years.
- 2.8 The above sections provide an overview upon current planning policy and legislation relating to species and habitats that could be located within the survey area.

3.0 Methodology

Desk Study Methodology

- 3.1 Ecological data and historic records of protected birds/ bird Species of Principal Importance/ LBAP birds and sites designated for their bird interest was collated from the following sources listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Desktop Study Resources and Record Centres Consulted

Source of information	Information supplied
Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (https://magic.defra.gov.uk/)	To identify nature reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and non-statutory protected sites or features of interest designated for bird interest within 1km of the site.
Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (as amended)	Review of Habitats/Species of Principal Importance known to occur in the region.
North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP)	Identification of LBAP bird species known to occur in the region.
Merseyside Biobank	To identify locally protected sites designated for bird interest or bird species of interest within 1km of the site.

- 3.2 The data search with Merseyside Biobank was undertaken on 11th August 2022.
- 3.3 The aim of the desktop study was to assist the surveyor undertaking the breeding bird survey by providing background information on the likely habitats and species that occur within the local area.
- 3.4 A review was undertaken using existing maps and aerial photographs of the local area to identify any features of ecological interest to breeding birds.

Survey Methodology

- 3.5 A breeding bird survey (BBS) was undertaken using the Bird Survey Guidelines for assessing ecological impacts 2023¹.
- 3.6 The guidelines recommend 6 survey visits between late March and July, each starting between half an hour before sunrise and half an hour after sunrise. However, it was agreed with MEAS that the survey effort could be reduced to 4 survey visits if there was relatively little activity or only common species recorded on the proviso that the survey effort would be increased appropriately, if required, following a review of the initial surveys. Morning surveys were concluded by mid-morning (10–11 am, with some regional variation) in line with the guidelines as activity levels (and hence detectability) of many species tails off.
- 3.7 A total of 5 survey visits were undertaken, which included an evening survey extending beyond sunset for at least one hour as recommended in the guidelines to pick up species not readily recorded by surveys early in the morning. All the surveys were completed during the 2023 season.
- 3.8 Prior to starting the survey, the surveyor recorded the date, start time, time of sunrise / sunset, temperature (°C), wind (Beaufort scale 0–12), cloud cover (Okta 0–8) and rain (as a brief description e.g. dry, light drizzle). The end time and closing weather conditions (if there had been a substantial change during the survey) were also recorded.
- 3.9 Where possible, surveys were carried out in good conditions avoiding heavy rain, strong winds (Beaufort force >5) and any scenario where visibility/detection would be negatively affected (e.g. fog, excessive disturbance on site etc.). If surveys were carried out in less than ideal conditions, this is noted as limitation in the report.
- 3.10 On each visit a pre-determined transect route was walked slowly with frequent stops to scan habitat features such as scrub, trees, hedgerows and areas of standing water where appropriate. The transect route was selected to allow for the entire site to be viewed with ease and with a minimum distance of 50m of open ground between the areas walked so species could be easily heard, taking into consideration the need to not physically disturb any habitats unnecessarily.

¹ <https://birdsurveyguidelines.org/>

- 3.11 All species encountered on the site or adjacent land were recorded and plotted on a site map using the standard BTO species codes, together with behavioural notation where appropriate. Observations of birds moving high overhead, and not associating with the site itself were or omitted from the survey. Exceptions were made for Species of Principal Importance that are likely to associate with the site itself (e.g. gulls) or, those Species of Principal Importance which could be associated with habitats present.
- 3.12 In the instances where birds are associated with breeding habitats not found in the site, these species were classed as non-breeding in the site (coot is an example of this). Conversely, species adjacent to the site in habitats found within the site, these were classed as possible or probable breeding species.
- 3.13 The breeding status of each species can be classified into three categories, as described in paragraph 3.19.
- 3.14 The survey method adopted provides a reasonable level of accuracy of the status of the majority of species present, but cannot successfully survey for all species. It is considered that the increased survey effort was adequate to determine the breeding bird usage on the site and assess its importance to local bird populations.

Timing

- 3.15 The breeding bird surveys were conducted on the 21st April 2023 (Round 1), 7th May 2023 (Round 2), 15th May 2023 (Round 3), 24th May 2023 (Round 4, dusk) & 19th June 2023 (Round 5) during the optimum bird survey period. Timings are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Survey Timings

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
Start time	06:45	05:30	06:30	20:40	05:35
Sunrise/set	06:00	05:20	05:00	21:19	04:41
Finish time	07:45	06:10	07:15	22:20	07:35

Weather Conditions

- 3.16 The weather during the surveys were as follows:

Table 3: Weather Conditions per Survey

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
Start temp	7°C	5°C	9°C	15 - 12°C	15°C
Wind	2-3 NE	1 SW	3 NW	3-5 NW	1 SW
Cloud cover (Okta)	8	1	7	0	7
Precipitation	Dry	Dry	Dry	Dry	Dry

Personnel

- 3.17 The breeding bird survey was undertaken by Ornithologist Tony Baker and Senior Consultant Ecologist Mr. S. Booth.

Survey Limitations

- 3.18 There were no known significant constraints in relation to surveys undertaken. Two of the surveys (Rounds 2 and 3) were undertaken fairly close together in May, hence a fifth survey was undertaken.

Determination of Breeding Status

- 3.19 The breeding status of each species can be classified in to three categories; confirmed breeder, probable breeder and possible breeder. The behaviour, sex, age and location of individual birds allow conclusions to be drawn about breeding status, based on categories used for the BTO Bird Atlas 2007-2011 (Balmer et. al., 2013). It is also possible that species are merely present in a habitat and are not actually breeding. Breeding evidence used in this report follows Balmer et. al. (2013) and these are given below. The three breeding categories, confirmed, probable and possible breeding species are abbreviated to CO, PR and PO in the accompanying tables. Birds not thought to be breeding on the site are classed as non-breeder, which is shown as NB in the tables. Birds recorded flying over the site are referred to as flyovers with this being abbreviated to FO in the accompanying tables.

BTO Bird Atlas Criteria for Categorising Breeding Status**Possible Breeding**

- Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat.
- Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season in suitable breeding habitat

Probable Breeding

- Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season
- Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song, etc.) on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place or many individuals on one day
- Courtship and display
- Visiting a probable nest site
- Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults
- Brood patch on adult examined in the hand
- Nest building or excavating nest-hole

Confirmed Breeding

- Distraction-display or injury feigning
- Used nest or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey)
- Recently fledged young or downy young
- Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nest or nest-holes, the contents of which cannot be seen) or adults seen incubating
- Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young
- Nest containing eggs
- Nest with young seen or heard

Conservation Status

- 3.20 The evaluation takes account of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) which is a review of the status of all birds occurring regularly in the United Kingdom. It is regularly updated and is prepared by leading bird conservation organisations. The latest report was published in 2021 (Stanbury et. al., 2021). The criteria are complex, but generally: Red list species are those that have shown a decline of the breeding population, non-breeding population or breeding range of more than 50% in the last 25 years; Amber list species are those that have shown a decline of the breeding population, non-breeding population or breeding range of between 25% and 50% in the last 25 years. Species that have a UK breeding population of less than 300 or a non-breeding population of less than 900 individuals are also included as Amber listed, together with those where 50% of the population is localised in 10 sites or fewer and those where 20% of the European population is found in the UK.
- Red list species are those that are **globally threatened** according to IUCN criteria; those whose population or range has declined rapidly in recent years;

and those that have declined historically and have not shown a substantial recovery.

- Amber list species are those with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; whose population or range has declined moderately in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders and those with internationally important or localised populations.
- Species that fulfil none of the above criteria are green listed. These species are not included in the evaluation.

4.0 Results and Evaluation

Desk Study Results

Designated Sites

- 4.1 There are five statutory protected sites designated on the basis of their interest for birds that are located within the vicinity of the site and which could be adversely affected by the proposed development of the site. These are the Ribble and Alt Estuaries Ramsar site, which is adjacent to the western and northern site boundary and the Ribble and Alt Estuaries SPA located 1km to the north west of the site. The Ramsar site is designated for breeding lesser black-backed gulls and the SPA for breeding common tern, lesser black-backed gull, ruff and black-headed gull (the latter species as part of the breeding assemblage).
- 4.2 While the statutory designated sites Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Ainsdale and Birkdale Hills Local Nature Reserve (LNR) do not mention breeding birds in the site descriptions, the non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites for Ainsdale NNR and Ainsdale Hills LNR are designated in part for non-breeding birds with Birkdale Hills LNR (including the green beach) designated in part for wintering and breeding birds.
- 4.3 None of the aforementioned sites are found within the site, although Birkdale Hills LNR is located directly adjacent to the site to the west.

Records Data Search

- 4.4 The desktop study identified the following records of protected species/ Species of Principal Importance/ LBAP species and Birds of Conservation Concern within the 1km of the development site:

Table 4: Desktop Study Species Results

Common name	Scientific name	Legally protected	NERC S41	LBAP	BoCC5
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	-	✓	✓	Amber
Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	-	✓	-	Amber
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	-	✓	-	Amber
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	-	✓	✓	Red
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	-	✓	-	Amber
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	-	✓	✓	Red
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	-	-	✓	Red
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	-	✓	-	Red
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	-	✓	✓	Red
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	-	✓	-	Red
House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	-	-	✓	Red
Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	-	✓	-	Red
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	-	✓	-	Red
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	-	✓	-	Red
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	-	✓	✓	Red
Corn bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	-	✓	✓	Red

Common name	Scientific name	Legally protected	NERC S41	LBAP	BoCC5
Grey partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	-	✓	✓	Red
Lesser redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>	-	✓	-	
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Sch1	-	-	Amber
Turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	-	✓	-	Red
Wood warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	-	✓	-	Red
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Sch1	-	-	
Willow tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	-	✓	-	Red
Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Sch1	-	-	
Crossbill	<i>Loxia scotica</i>	Sch1	-	-	Amber
Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Sch1	-	-	Amber
Little tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	Sch1	-	-	Amber

Sch1 – birds afforded additional protection during the breeding season

Results Summary

- 4.5 During the breeding bird surveys, a total of 33 species were recorded. Appendix 1 lists the bird species recorded within the site along with their indicative breeding status and comments on each species. No notable observations of birds were made during any of the other species surveys undertaken on site.

Breeding Status

- 4.6 Interpreting the data using the BTO Bird Atlas criteria, of the 33 species recorded, none were confirmed as breeding on the site, 20 were classed as probable breeding species and 19 were possible breeding species. Of the remainder, four were categorised as non-breeding species and four species were recorded flying over the site of which three of these are possible breeding species.

Schedule 1 Birds

- 4.7 No Schedule 1 bird species were identified at the site.

Conservation Status

- 4.8 Of the total assemblage recorded, the survey recorded 14 species of birds that are afforded conservation status. The survey results were as follows: six are Red listed species and eight Amber listed species. Of these, four of the red listed species and two of the amber listed species are Species of Principal Importance. Three species are included in the North Merseyside BAP, two of which are red listed and one amber listed; all three are Species of Principal Importance.
- 4.9 In total, of the Species of Principal Importance, one is assessed as probable breeding and four possible breeding species. One of the red listed species is assessed as a probable breeding species and four are assessed as possible breeding species. One species listed on the North Merseyside BAP is assessed as a probable breeding species with the remaining two species classed as possible breeding.
- 4.10 A list of the species of conservation concern along with their different designations is given in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Birds of Conservation Concern Recorded at the Site

Common Name	Scientific Name	Indicative Breeding Status	WCA Schedule 1	Red List	Amber List	S41	North Merseyside LBAP
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	PO	-	-	✓	✓	-
Wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	PR	-	-	✓	-	-
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	PO	-	✓	-	-	-
Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	PO	-	-	✓	-	-

Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	PO	-	✓	-	✓	-
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	PR	-	-	✓	-	-
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	PR	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Lesser black-back gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	PO	-	✓	-	-	-
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	PO	-	-	✓	-	-
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	PO	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	PR	-	-	✓	-	-
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	FO	-	✓	-	✓	-
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	PO	-		✓	✓	✓
Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	PO	-	-	✓	-	-

PR – Probable breeding

PO – Possible breeding

FO – Flyover

Evaluation

- 4.11 The desktop study identified six records of Schedule 1 bird species, namely greylag goose, kingfisher, quail, little tern, barn owl and crossbill within 1km of the development site. The development site does not provide suitable habitat for breeding greylag goose, kingfisher, little tern, crossbill or barn owl. It is considered unlikely that quail would be found on the site, although the site is suitable to support them. The site may also provide suitable foraging habitat for barn owl if maintained as rough grassland.
- 4.12 The desktop study also identified a range of bird Species of Principal Importance and eight North Merseyside BAP species, three of which were recorded on site (song thrush, house sparrow and starling). Two other North Merseyside BAP species could also potentially use the site (house martin and skylark).
- 4.13 The site contains mostly unmanaged grassland, formerly mown amenity grassland. On the boundaries are occasional scattered trees and encroaching bramble scrub. A large building and areas of hard standing are located on the south eastern side of the site. Adjacent land to the north comprises Hillside Golf Links with areas of fixed dunes with scrub located to the north west. Residential land is located to the south with Birkdale and Ainsdale Golf Club located to the east and south east.
- 4.14 The site supports a reasonable diversity of bird species, although the majority of these are typical of residential areas with a small number of the species found in more semi-natural habitats such as dune grasslands and scrub habitats, which is likely a consequence of the adjacent habitat types.
- 4.15 No Schedule 1 bird species were recorded during the surveys. On the whole, the majority of bird records were associated with the outer boundary habitats with far fewer species recorded centrally. The grassland is considered to offer sufficient structure to support tunnelling voles, which in turn supports could support predatory species such as barn owl, tawny owl and kestrel. The site lacks much in the way of tall scrub habitat that would otherwise attract a variety of warblers such as whitethroat and grasshopper warbler, although whitethroat was recorded on one survey on scrub directly adjacent to the site. Birds that seemed to commonly favour the inner portions of the site were magpie and woodpigeon, which typically like to forage in open areas along with occasional crow, jackdaw and lesser black-back gull. Also occasionally foraging in the long grass were species commuting in from adjacent residential gardens such as goldfinch and starling. The most notable record of the survey was that of meadow pipit, which was recorded on four out of the five survey visits with young observed on the fourth survey visit and is considered to have probably bred on site. The occurrence of meadow pipit is likely to have resulted in overspill from the adjacent dune grasslands in recent

times as the site has become more favourable due to lack of management resulting in good nesting habitat. However, even a small reduction in grassland habitat size for development would likely discourage meadow pipit from breeding and so trying to retain this species along with developing the site is considered unlikely to be viable.

- 4.16 Breeding density on site is relatively low with a maximum of five singing males observed within the site per site visit. The maximum number of males singing on land directly adjacent to the site was 13, indicating that the boundaries and adjacent land are of higher value to the land centrally. Of all the species recorded during the surveys, none were confirmed as breeding with 20 classed as probable breeding species and 18 possible breeding species. The remainder are either non-breeding or recorded as flyovers.
- 4.17 In total, of the Species of Principal Importance, none are classed as breeding on site, one is assessed as probable breeding and four possible breeding species. Of species listed on the North Merseyside BAP, one is assessed as a probable breeding species with the remaining two species classed as possible breeding.
- 4.18 Of the species of conservation concern (red and amber lists), none were confirmed as breeding with four classed as probable breeding species and 9 possible breeding species. The red listed species of conservation concern that are likely to value the habitats most on site are greenfinch, linnet, starling, dunnoek and house sparrow. Red listed lesser black-back gull and herring gull could potentially use the roofs of the existing buildings for breeding, but there was no evidence of this during the surveys undertaken.
- 4.19 Due to the range of bird species present (albeit at relatively low breeding density), including a number of species of conservation concern, the site is considered to be of value for birds at the Local level.

5.0 Impacts and Recommendations

- 5.1 In brief the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023) asks the Local Planning Authority to protect and enhance biodiversity and that any new developments should minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains.
- 5.2 S.40 of the NERC Act 2006 sets out the duty for public authorities to conserve biodiversity in England. Habitats and Species of Principal Importance for the conservation of biodiversity are identified by the Secretary of State in consultation with NE, under S.41 of the NERC Act for England. The Local Planning Authority and Government Conservation Organisations (e.g. Natural England and the Environment Agency) will expect account to be taken of these habitats and species in the overall layout and landscape strategy for the development.
- 5.3 Potential impacts on breeding birds resulting from any future proposed development include loss or modification of habitat, disturbance during construction and operation and increased predation from domestic cats.
- 5.4 The most valuable area of the site is just within the site boundary where many of the species recorded were observed commuting into the site to forage or extend their territories in the case of singing males. With the exception of linnet, all the remaining species of principal importance and also red listed species are those associated with built residential environments.
- 5.5 Ideally, areas of the grassland should be retained in the form of a buffer strip with emphasis placed upon areas adjacent to existing residential properties along the southern boundary and where the site lies adjacent to the Birkdale Hills LNR to the west. This should be managed as rough grassland with occasional scattered scrub. This buffer will also serve as

a root protection zone for the occasional trees found around the outer boundaries of the site in accordance with BS 5837:2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction'. To delineate this feature along the southern boundary, a new native hedgerow should be considered to prevent future access being too readily available to the public. A hedgerow should not be included along the western buffer as this would cause shading of dune grassland.

- 5.6 It is recommended that the width of any proposed buffer is agreed with Natural England and will also need to take account of recommendations of the botanical surveys along with fauna such as reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.
- 5.7 Species of principal importance namely starling, song thrush, dunnock and house sparrow are likely to remain unaffected by any proposals to build residential units at the site and may even benefit with provision of appropriate enhancement measures. Linnet, which is also a Species of Principal Importance, was only recorded once during the surveys and was recorded off site
- 5.8 The loss of grassland habitat to a probable breeding pair of amber listed meadow pipit is not considered to be significant in the context of the surrounding available habitats and would unlikely impact upon populations above the site level. The presence of these species on site has resulted from the recent reduction in management rather than it being a historical breeding site. On site mitigation measures are unlikely to prove successful alongside any future development due to the breeding requirements of the species, which tends to favour open habitats. The site is already considered at its minimum size to support them in reasonable numbers.
- 5.9 To avoid offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and to minimise disturbance to breeding birds, ideally any site clearance works (including the former playing fields and building demolition) should be undertaken outside the breeding bird season (March through to August/September inclusive). However, it should be noted that if weather conditions are favourable i.e. after a particularly mild winter, this period can start earlier. If habitat clearance works are expected during or near to the breeding season, then the impacted zone should be checked by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to any works taking place. Should a nest be identified and depending on the species and/ or location, a suitable buffer zone would be required to ensure the birds are allowed to continue their breeding cycle. This approach is only suitable for relatively small areas of habitat.
- 5.10 It is considered likely that the majority of bird species present will become accustomed to general disturbance levels during operations of any future development as most of the species recorded are associated with residential and often disturbed environments.
- 5.11 Despite the large numbers of birds killed by cats in gardens, there is no clear scientific evidence that such mortality is causing bird populations to decline. Many millions of birds die naturally every year, mainly through starvation, disease or other forms of predation. There is also some evidence that cats tend to take weak or sickly birds (RSPB, 2009). It is acknowledged that the site is located adjacent to statutory and non-statutory designated sites, designated in part for breeding birds, notably lesser black-backed gull and stonechat. There are also records of Species of Principal Importance and Birds of Conservation Concern which could be breeding within the vicinity of the site, which could nonetheless be impacted by cat predation.
- 5.12 There is a range of relatively simple measures which can be recommended to cat owners which could help to reduce the risk of cats catching birds including putting a bell on cat's collars, keeping cats well fed and cared for and keeping cats indoors when birds are most vulnerable. Cats should be kept indoors for at least an hour before sunset and an hour after

sunrise, especially during March-July and December-January and also after bad weather, such as rain or a cold spell, to allow birds to come out and feed (RSPB, 2009).

Enhancement Measures

- 5.13 In line with national planning policy new developments should seek to enhance biodiversity, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.
- 5.14 Summary of potential recommendations to ensure that there is an overall biodiversity gain for birds are as follows:
- Installation of additional nesting bird boxes, including within new buildings. Provision of sparrow terraces and starling boxes within new buildings would provide additional nesting opportunities for these species within the site.
 - Creation of a continuous species rich hedgerow around the protection area.
- 5.15 Ecological surveys are generally considered likely to be valid for 12 months and up to 18 months unless the site has potential to support mobile species which could colonise the site such as breeding birds. Between 18 months and three years, a professional ecologist will need to undertake a site visit and potentially update the desk study information to review the validity of the report and advise on which surveys require updating and the scope, timing and methods of those surveys. Beyond three years, the report is unlikely to still be valid and most, if not all, of the surveys are likely to need to be updated (CIEEM, 2019).

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The breeding bird survey at Ainsdale Hope Learning Centre was undertaken at a suitable time of year by experienced ecologists/ornithologists. The survey identified a range of common and widespread bird species to be using the site along with six Species of Principal Importance, fourteen Birds of Conservation Concern (six red listed and eight amber listed) and three Local Biodiversity Action Plan species.
- 6.2 The grassland and scrub habitat around the outer boundary of the site was found to be the most valuable habitat overall, which was used by a wide range of species for the purpose of foraging and extending territories beyond the adjacent land. The more central areas of the site were found to be the least important to breeding birds. It is considered that with careful planning, the site value could be maintained for birds by adopting protection zones around the site boundary that would be appropriately managed. However, the needs of other species should also be considered when these zones are defined to ensure there are no loss of biodiversity arising from any mitigation that is proposed for birds.

7.0 References

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**Figures 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d & 1e:
Breeding Bird Survey Activity Maps**

Figure 1a Breeding Bird Survey Map. Survey 1 - 21/4/23

Map Ref: (NGR) 331260, 412950
Map Scale: 1:1500@ A3

KEY

- Site boundary
- Survey route
- R Bird singing
- ♂ Male bird
- R → Bird flying away
- R Bird calling
- R Bird flying through
- R Bird landing
- R ↔ R Bird flying off and landing
- - . Two registrations of same bird
- ♀ Female bird
- juv Juvenile



Figure 1b
Breeding Bird Survey Map.
Survey 2 - 7/5/23

Map Ref: (NGR) 331260, 412950
Map Scale: 1:1500@ A3

KEY

- Site boundary
- Survey route
- R Bird singing
- ♂ Male bird
- R → Bird flying away
- R Bird calling
- R Bird flying through
- R Bird landing
- R ↔ R Bird flying off and landing
- Two registrations of same bird
- ♀ Female bird
- juv Juvenile



Figure 1c
Breeding Bird Survey Map.
Survey 3 - 15/5/23

Map Ref: (NGR) 331260, 412950
Map Scale: 1:1500@ A3

KEY

-  Site boundary
-  Survey route
-  Bird singing
-  Male bird
-  Bird flying away
-  Bird calling
-  Bird flying through
-  Bird landing
-  Bird flying off and landing
-  Two registrations of same bird
-  Female bird
-  Juvenile



Figure 1d
Breeding Bird Survey Map.
Survey 4 - 24/5/23

Map Ref: (NGR) 331260, 412950
Map Scale: 1:1500@ A3

KEY

- Site boundary
- Survey route
- R Bird singing
- ♂ Male bird
- R → Bird flying away
- R Bird calling
- R Bird flying through
- R Bird landing
- R ↔ R Bird flying off and landing
- - . Two registrations of same bird
- ♀ Female bird
- juv Juvenile



Figure 1e
Breeding Bird Survey Map.
Survey 5 - 19/6/23

Map Ref: (NGR) 331260, 412950
 Map Scale: 1:1500@ A3

KEY

- Site boundary
- Survey route
- R Bird singing
- Male bird
- R Bird flying away
- Bird calling
- R Bird flying through
- R Bird landing
- R←R Bird flying off and landing
- Two registrations of same bird
- ♀ Female bird
- juv Juvenile



Appendix 1: List of Bird Species Recorded

Species codes	Common Name	Scientific Name	Indicative Breeding Status	Comments
D.	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	PO	All observations are were made in habitats adjacent to the site
WP	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	PR	Numerous birds seen and a common visitor to the site
GR	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	PO	Only seen in areas near to buildings along the boundaries
WW	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	PO	Only seen in areas near to buildings along the boundaries
LI	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	PO	Two birds seen on one survey adjacent to the northern boundary and a single bird inside the site to the south.
WR	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	PR	Only seen in areas near to buildings along the boundaries
SG	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	PR	Observed only along the south western side of the site close to residential buildings.
LB	Lesser black-back gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	PO	Two birds observed near to buildings
MA	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	PO	Observed flying over the site but a possible breeding species
HS	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	PO	Observed only along the south western side of the site close to residential buildings.
MP	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	PR	Observed on site on four out of the five site visits and with young on one occasion
HG	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	FO	Observed flying over the site but a possible breeding species on buildings
ST	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	PO	Singing on only one occasion to the north of the site
WH	Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	PO	Observed on one occasion to the north of the site
CH	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	PO	Common within and around the site boundaries
GO	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	PO	Common within and around the site boundaries
BT	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	PR	A pair seen on one occasion to the north of the site
GT	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	PR	Occasionally seen and heard throughout the survey
CT	Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	PR	Only seen on one occasion
CD	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	PO	Seen on two occasions near residential houses to the south west of the site
MG	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	PO	Frequently seen in and around the site
C.	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	FO	Seen flying over on one occasion
B.	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	PO	Regularly seen around the site singing and foraging
CC	Chiff chaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	PO	Observed singing at two locations adjacent to the site
R.	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	PR	Regularly seen around the site
CO	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	NB	Observed on one occasion outside of the site
BC	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	PO	Singing on one occasion adjacent to the site
JD	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	PO	Recorded numerous times during the surveys
GC	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	PO	Recorded singing on one occasion
PW	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	PR	Juvenile bird seen on one occasion close to the buildings
J.	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	NO	Seen on one occasion
BZ	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	NO	Seen on one occasion
H.	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	FO	Seen on one occasion flying over the site

PR – Probable Breeding / PO – Possible Breeding / FO – Flyover / NB – Non-Breeding