

LEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

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SE/22/02495/OUT: Land South of Greenview Avenue, Leigh

The Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment states that the site is located in the Green Belt and is within the Leigh Pasture and Marsh Local Wildlife Site.

Leigh Parish Council believe these are important designations that should be respected and protected. The site is part of a parcel - identified as "21" - which is graded in the SDC Green Belt Assessment Report with an overall summary of 'Strong' with respect to the 4 purposes of Green Belt land.

The site is not isolated – it is linked to the rest of parcel 21 by woodland and fields and together the whole parcel wraps right around the east of the village and extends north.

The Biodiversity report says the site would no longer meet the criteria for the previous citation of a Pasture and Marsh Wildlife Site, although 'in theory it could be restored'.

The report describes the site as mostly degraded, modified grassland. This is primarily due to the site being cleared of all mixed vegetation, being levelled and seeded in recent years – presumably in anticipation of this application. This questions how well the site has been looked after, and whose responsibility it is to prevent such degradation.

Rather than subject a Green Belt site to a development that – according to this report – would offer a net biodiversity gain primarily from what is described as 'urban' planting – mostly in the form of new hedges on a housing estate, we would argue that the site should be restored to its former citation as much as possible and at the very least could be enhanced to continue to act even more strongly as the valuable open Green Belt space it already is.

Urban planting (the description used in the application) is unsuitable on a rural site and is not conducive to retaining or encouraging wildlife accustomed to a peaceful open space of rough grassland.

To put 39 houses on an open Green Belt site will disturb existing biodiversity and any net gain the report predicts - mostly from new hedges - seems a poor substitute for the current wildlife. In this area egrets, barn owls, woodpeckers, herons and buzzards are frequently seen – the urbanisation of the site would negatively impact them and the many other animals, birds and insects seen on the site and the adjoining areas.

Since the site previously had a marsh classification and a flood area there is also concern about the drainage issues that the construction of thirty-nine houses poses – also causing potential environmental damage to the site.

This site is used by many people – local and beyond – for walking and recreation. It marks the end of the village residential dwellings – exactly as Green Belt areas were designed to do. It is hard to understand why that role should be compromised.

The following photographs were taken of the site on 5th July 2023.

