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Our ref: 528048



Chorley Borough Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

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Dear Chorley Borough Council,

Consultation: Initial overwintering bird questions from the Inspectors for the Central Lancashire Local Plan to the Local Planning Authority

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 23 September 2025, which was received by Natural England on the same date.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

We enclose our advice on overwintering birds surveys in the response below:

Potential Impacts

As birds are mobile species, they may rely on land outside of the designated area as part of a passage route and/or supporting habitats or 'Functionally Linked Land/FLL'. These supporting habitats may be used by the designated site bird population or just some of this population, some or all of the time.

FLL can play an important role in maintaining the bird populations of the designated site, and proposals affecting them may have the potential to affect the designated site. It should be noted that some of the potential impacts that may arise from proposals relate to the presence of interest features that are located outside the site boundary.

A proposal should assess likely significant effects (LSEs) to qualifying bird species and functionally linked land/ supporting habitat during all phases of the development including construction and operation.

This may include consideration of loss, degradation and disturbance of habitat, implications to foraging habitat, barriers to species movement, changes and disruption to life cycle including breeding and overwintering through noise, light, visual disturbance and recreation.

Cumulative impacts must consider wider areas of FLL. This may be informed by: biological record data, habitat mapping, species preferences for habitats and travelling, background resources such as Identification of Functionally Linked Land supporting Special Protection Areas (SPAs) waterbirds in the North West of England ([NECR361](#)), NECR483 Edition 1 Identification of Functionally Linked Land in the North West of England – Phase 2 ([NECR483](#)) and our SSSI Impact Risk Zones GIS dataset accessible from the data.gov.uk website should also be used to initially inform areas of

Functionally Linked Land, alongside best available evidence at the time of your Local Plan preparation. It is also possible to commission further detailed bird counts such as [Portsmouth Local Plan](#).

The mitigation hierarchy should firstly be followed: avoid, mitigate then compensate. Any mitigation land that is required to be created must provide the same functions as the land predicted to be lost e.g. provision of roosting and/or feeding habitat for the relevant species and suitable for the same numbers.

Information Required to Support Decision Making

We provide the following recommendations:

Initial Assessment

To help assess the impact to supporting habitat, it is beneficial to:

- Use the [Designated Sites View](#) to find out which habitats and species are special features of a site, and which activities are likely to damage them
- Use the [Magic Map](#) or associated Special Scientific Interest Impact Risk Zones ([SSSI IRZs](#)) GIS dataset to view all designations, impact risk zones, waterways and other land features including supporting habitat
- Obtain site specific information from multiple appropriate bodies such as the [local records centre](#), wildlife trusts, or recording societies. You may wish to refer to specific species related layers on [Magic Map](#), the [NBN Atlas](#) and [Wetland Bird Survey Data](#)
- Within the initial assessment, bird species pertinent to the designated sites are listed including the season observed
- The desk study should set out the data clearly, stating whether the records cover winter, and spring and autumn passage. If there is an absence of records, it must be explained whether this is due to an absence of birds, or an absence of recording of this area. We would also expect the full details of the records to be provided as this indicates the broader and historical picture of site and nearby land usage
- If distribution and historical records suggest bird species which form part of the designated site are present, more survey information is required. However, please note an absence of a record does not mean there is no presence, but may indicate that there is no survey data available for that location
- Conduct a habitat suitability assessment, both on-site and within nearby fields, to record features which may be suitable for qualifying bird species (i.e. site characteristics including habitat type, field boundaries, size of site). Reference should be made to the scale of unrestricted views, food availability, size of the habitat and other habitat attributes associated to the qualifying birds to determine habitat suitability
- You may wish to utilise the [Key Habitat Attributes for Birds and Bird Assemblages in England](#) to understand the habitat requirements and list typical distance qualifying bird species may travel to inform potential LSEs

Detailed Bird Surveys

Should the initial assessment identify qualifying bird species and suitable habitat within the proposed site and neighbouring land, [detailed bird surveys](#) are recommended:

- Natural England advise any surveys be undertaken following the methodology set out [here](#), which includes two survey visits per month between October and March inclusive for wintering birds, (a minimum of 36 hours survey effort)
- During all detailed bird surveys, we request that records of birds in flight are made, especially if the application has potential to affect bird flight lines. We would expect to see commentary of birds landing and taking off within and in the vicinity of the development site. This is of significance for passage qualifying species
- Findings should be analysed in terms of significance of bird numbers in comparison to the population size at the designated site utilising information such as Conservation Objectives, Site Improvement Plans and condition status at [Designated Sites View](#)

Additional Advice

Whilst Natural England assess consultations on a case-by-case basis, we signpost the below resources which may be useful:

- Chapman, c. & Tyldesley, D. 2016. [Functional linkage: How areas that are functionally linked to European sites have been considered when they may be affected by plans and projects - a review of authoritative decisions](#). Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 207
- [Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy](#)
- Natural England has published [Conservation Advice packages](#) which should be used to aid your assessment. The packages set out the conservation objectives of each site, detailed information on the qualifying features and other useful information to inform assessments
- Further information regarding the designated sites can also be found at [Designated Sites View](#)
- Functional linkage: How areas that are functionally linked to European sites have been considered when they may be affected by plans and projects - a review of authoritative decisions - [NECR207](#)
- Identification of Functionally Linked Land supporting Special Protection Areas (SPAs) waterbirds in the North West of England - [NECR361](#)

Yours faithfully,

Zoe Haysted

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Natural England