

MARTON MOSS NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

Minimising the Risk of Harming Specially Protected Wildlife

This is a summary of the Marton Moss Habitats Regulations Assessment that was produced for the Neighbourhood Forum by planning consultants AECOM

The Fylde coast, especially the Ribble Estuary, is home to many sea birds and the marine areas are protected wildlife habitats of European importance. New development and their use by residents can have harmful effects on these bird populations which can rely on grounds in-land from the shoreline for feeding and roosting. A Habitats Regulations Assessment is a prescribed systematic way of establishing the likelihood of development proposals causing any harm to protected wildlife and proposing measures that would minimise any such harm.

After evidence is gathered on the wildlife species present in the study area the first step in the assessment process is to carry out what is called a 'screening' exercise to gauge whether there are likely to be 'significant effects' on the European protected site(s). This screening work is done in consultation with the national wildlife conservation body – Natural England. For Marton Moss the screening work took account of the proposed policies, including the envisaged housing sites, being considered for inclusion in the Regulation 14 draft of the Neighbourhood Plan. The conclusion was that for three policies relating to housing site allocations, windfall housing and that intended for footpaths, bridleways, and cycle routes it was possible that significant effects could arise. This meant that a full 'Appropriate Assessment' of the situation was required.

The screening process had examined a range of 'potential impact pathways' arising from increased development on the European protected sites and had concluded that two types of impact were a concern – 'recreational pressure' and 'loss of functionally linked land'. These were considered in the subsequent assessment.

Recreational pressure is the direct and indirect effect of human activity associated with people passing through habitat associated land such as by hiking and dog walking, leading to species disturbance and trampling of vegetation. Nearby additional housing development can directly lead to more people locally taking part in these pursuits as can improvements to footpaths and other off-road routes. Functionally linked land takes account of wildlife species 'straying' from the defined protected areas to feed and sleep.

The potential impacts on protected habitats in the wider Fylde area are not a matter confined to the proposals in the Marton Moss Neighbourhood Plan as there have been and continue to be other developments locally elsewhere and the measures that have already been taken to deal with adverse effects on wildlife are factored in to the assessment. The Marton Moss work concludes that it is not likely there will be loss of functionally linked land through sites being developed and in fact such land should increase with the proposed restoration of Midgeland Farm. However, measures are proposed to minimise recreational pressure impacts by requiring developers of new housing to provide information packs to new residents and recommending that foot/bridle path improvements should be done in ways which avoid adverse wildlife effects.

These findings have been agreed and approved by Natural England and the Regulation 14 draft of the Neighbourhood Plan incorporates the recommendations. Therefore, the Habitats Regulations Assessment document has been finalised but before the Plan is finalised there is still an opportunity for local people and other interested parties to put forward other suggestions or to comment on the outcomes of this research within the six weeks set aside from when the report was published. The full report can be viewed on the Forum's website www.martonmossforum.org and comments made using the form available there. The Forum can also be contacted via enquiries@martonmossforum.org or on 07739 517630.

Do you agree with the findings of the Habitats Regulations Assessment?

Do you disagree or wish to comment on it?