

Written Statement of Mr Samuel Fisher before the North Tyneside Council Planning Committee, in respect of Planning Application Reference 19/00257/FULES

16 November 2021

Chairman and members of the Planning Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to provide this written statement. It is provided in my capacity as a local naturalist and resident of North Tyneside near to the proposed development.

I would like to record my continued objection to the above application. Whilst there are grave concerns around flooding risk posed by the proposal, I will focus on the application's impact on biodiversity and nearby statutorily designated sites (the Coastal Special Protection Area "SPA" and RAMSAR sites).

North Tyneside's natural heritage is remarkable and something of which we should all be proud. Yet development across the borough continues to damage biodiversity, placing our natural heritage at risk, as we struggle to adequately safeguard it through the planning system. It is within this context that the above development has been proposed.

As the Committee will be aware the proposal is within 6 kilometres of three statutorily designated sites of national or international importance (the Coastal SPA and RAMSAR sites). This means it is of critical value to wading birds, which use our coastline in wintertime to roost and refuel, with many staying the entire winter. As residents of North Tyneside we are privileged to share our coastline with wildlife in this way. Unfortunately, as noted in the Planning Officer's report, this proposal will likely have significant impacts on these sites through increased recreational disturbance (primarily dog-walking), which prevents the birds from feeding and resting, ultimately leading to detriment at a population level.

However, the Officer's report inaccurately asserts that these impacts can be mitigated by a financial contribution of around £104,000 towards the Coastal Mitigation SPD, with the suggestion that funds may be used to employ a warden. This sum would not pay for such measures for more than a few years and what then? In any event it would be almost impossible to effectively close parts of the North Tyneside coastline in winter, given the sheer

number of residents already using it. Where such measures have been employed elsewhere, this has typically been during the breeding season (a shorter period in spring and early summer), in areas with significantly lower recreational pressure. It is inaccurate to conclude that the negative impacts of the proposal on the Coastal SPA can be adequately mitigated and therefore the application remains contrary to Local Plan policy DM5.6 and the NPPF.

Populations of farmland birds have dwindled in North Tyneside as their habitat has been rapidly developed, with specific impacts on Red and Amber-listed species of conservation concern. The Strategic Allocation sites of Murton Gap and Killingworth Moor are amongst the last strongholds in the borough for species such as Skylark (Red-listed), Grey Partridge (Red-listed), Yellowhammer (Red-listed), Reed Bunting (Amber-listed) and Meadow Pipit (Amber-listed). Such species rely on the open aspect of farmland habitat; once developed, it is no longer suitable, making mitigation difficult. The Planning Officer's report wrongly asserts that the proposal's impacts on our farmland birds can be adequately mitigated through off-site compensation, at Backworth. It remains unclear whether this compensation site has been secured or for how long. The Committee may remember that an area of Murton Gap was previously promised as a compensation site for development elsewhere, and yet it now finds itself subject to development as part of the Strategic Allocation, meaning a planning condition was broken. Will this happen at Backworth too? The proposal therefore remains in contravention of Local Plan policy DM5.5.

The Committee should also be aware that the wintering bird assessments provided in the application's ecological reports are woefully out of date and unreliable, and imply that only species of limited concern use the site in winter. In fact, in the winter of 2020-21 the site held flocks of up to c. 50 Yellowhammer, c.200 Reed Bunting, c.200 Linnet and c.200 Skylark simultaneously; representing notable counts of Red and Amber-listed species, not just in the borough but the whole of Northumberland.

When considering this application I would urge the Committee to disregard the Biodiversity Net Gain report and assertions that the proposal will result in a net gain for biodiversity. This concept is completely meaningless and there is almost no empirical evidence demonstrating the achievement of biodiversity net gain in any previous UK development.

It should be clear to the Committee that the proposal places North Tyneside's natural heritage in significant jeopardy. Not only that, the applicant and the Council's Planning Officers have been unable to rigorously demonstrate that the proposal is aligned to the NPPF and Local Plan policies, in respect of its obligations to biodiversity and our local wildlife. I urge the Committee to reject this application. Thank you.