



## Proof of Evidence - Summary

# Ecology

Produced by Geoff Settle  
Rule 6 Party  
Peel Hall - APP/ M0655/W/17/3178530

## 0 Peel Hall – Summary - Proof of Evidence - Ecology

### 1 Personal Details

- 1.1 My name is Geoff Settle. I appear on behalf of the Rule 6 Party, I have lived in the area for 36 years at [REDACTED] and I was a ward councillor between 2010 & 2016. I have a degree in Geography and Economics, served on both the Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust and Mersey Forest and for the last 10 years I have chaired the Warrington Nature Conservation Forum.

### 2 The last great green wild space of Warrington

- 2.1 Peel Hall is a large site and is known as the “last great green wild space of North Warrington”. Local people spend their leisure time there enjoying the wildlife and habitat, walking and relaxing to improve their mental health and wellbeing.
- 2.2 The recent coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has demonstrated the benefits of Peel Hall because during lockdown hundreds more people were out and about using the footpaths they have trodden over many decades. They were outraged when the footpaths were ploughed and immediately began re-establishing what they consider as their paths.
- 2.3 People posted their feelings about what the paths and place meant to them on Facebook pages with moving testimonies (Appendix A) and photographs of the wildlife they saw.
- 2.4 Sammy Dobson said *“I'm struggling to comment as it's so upsetting to think it might all disappear, 😞 I can spend hours just watching the bird life, buzzards , kestrel , sparrow hawk, and the last 5yrs a sky lark which has now GONE.”*
- 2.5 The Environmental Bill states that *“people care about wildlife in its own right’ and that ‘our ecosystems and their component species – plays a vital role in climate change mitigation, by removing, trapping and storing carbon, as well as in pollination, flood alleviation, and public health and wellbeing.’* All these considerations apply to Peel Hall and are shared by local people.

### 3 Site Land Management and current wildlife value

- 3.1 Although poorly drained, the site has a long farming history. There is even evidence of a medieval moat at Peel Hall that Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service have stated is of County Interest (Appendix B) and no development should take place within the area until a programme of archaeological work has been secured.
- 3.2 Very soon after the current owner acquired the site farming ceased, and fields were abandoned as the applicant had no interest in land or wildlife, presumably just the profit they could make from development. There have been three or four occasions when machinery has been brought on to spray the land and turn it over without any benefit to nature and simply to destroy any wildlife value that might reduce development profits.
- 3.3 In 1999 the developer cleared the fields of self-seeded saplings and bushes that had taken root, flourished, and were developing into woodland. The greenery was put into piles and set alight and the smoke from the fires billowed across the M62 causing motorists all sort of problems.

- 3.4 During the bird nesting season of 2016/17, the land was sprayed, drone footage (Appendix C) shows ground nesting birds being disturbed. Local people notified the police.
- 3.5 I believe that a responsible landowner should be taking every action they can to protect the environment and encourage the increase of local biodiversity, they should not be reducing or destroying it.
- 3.6 Just one kilometre away, on the other side of Delph Lane, the local wildlife site of Houghton Green Pool has 16,000 self-seeded beech and willow trees and thousands of common spotted orchids attracting many thousands of butterflies and insects. It shows that if left alone nature can grow and prosper.
- 3.7 Evidence provided to the last Public Inquiry in 2016 contained over 282 different species. Of the 110 species of birds, eight were on the critical Red at risk list and twenty-seven on the amber. These birds are facing increasingly severe declines in breeding populations across the UK. Loss of and fragmentation of habitat is likely to affect the local population status of at least some of these species by reducing opportunities for feeding and nesting.
- 3.8 Surveys have shown that Peel Hall supports a population of great crested newts. A mitigation plan has been put forward as part of the amended ES. However given the record of the applicant in deliberately destroying wildlife, and the potential constraint GCN are on development, together with inevitable hydrology changes after development it is impossible to see a situation where the GCN colony would even survive, let alone thrive.
- 3.9 The site also supports valuable foraging habitat for local bat populations. The loss of certain habitats to the development (notably ponds, watercourses and woodlands), and the fragmentation of the landscape, without sufficient mitigation, is likely to affect the nature conservation status of local bat populations by reducing the local feeding resource.
- 3.11 Hedgehogs have just been placed on the at risk list but here healthy hedgehogs have been seen during the summer wandering into people's gardens in Coldstream Close, Radley Lane and Gairloch Close whilst others have been seen crossing Ballater Drive from the playing fields. Given they often walk as much as 2 miles a night, they are probably once more active on Peel Hall.
- 3.12 An impressive number of moths have been trapped by the Peel Hall Conservation Group's George Dunbar in a peel hall local garden over a 5 year-year period leading up to 2019. He has trapped over 106 different types of moth as against 6 on the RECORD database (Appendix E). Many are of interest because they are not normally found so far north.

## 4 Net Environmental gain

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), requires a measurable net environmental gain and the forthcoming Environment Act will require new developments to improve biodiversity value by at least 10 per cent. The developer's offsetting report does NOT say how the scheme will result in a net biodiversity gain.
- 4.2 The current site is a large, interconnected area which adds greatly to its wildlife value, but this will be completely fragmented by development – habitats and species will become isolated islands, and much more likely to die out as populations fluctuate.

- 4.3 The GMEU conclude that *'Currently I would regard the amount of mitigation and/or compensation for impacts on local nature conservation as insufficient'* and *'Currently the plans do not appear to include the provision of any significant new, un-fragmented areas of semi-natural greenspace incorporated into the scheme that could be managed for people and for nature conservation.'*
- 4.4 The site was included by the Greater Manchester and Cheshire LNPs (local nature partnership) in the Greater Manchester Wetlands Nature Improvement Area (NIA). The developer proposes miniscule wetlands enhancements, but development will change the hydrology of the area such that existing wetland may degrade further as they did in Cinnamon Brow where ponds and brooks dried up.

## 5 Developer Proposals

- 5.1 There have been numerous failed attempts to get permission to build on this land over the last 30 years and none have proposed any benefit to wildlife or any solutions to their issues both now and in the future.
- 5.2 The developer proposes an 'Ecology Park', between the motorway and the development rather than functioning as an effective area for public recreation or wildlife, it is too sketchy and simply a nod to the concept of wildlife.

## 6 Is there a better way?

- 6.1 It is not contested by the applicant that their proposal would mean significant habitat destruction. But if more trees were planted on Peel Hall land it could become a mini carbon sink, capturing the fumes from the M62 traffic and soaking up the rainfall throughout the year. The place is already regarded as a green lung by the local community and a great amenity that could be enhanced if protected and managed as a green resource.
- 6.2 A green bund, rather than artificial acoustic fences, was built a kilometre away at Cinnamon Brow between the Poulton Golf course and the M6. It is now a mature woodland protecting the houses of Cinnamon Brow built during the New Town Development.
- 6.3 Peel Hall is ideally placed to contribute to mitigating the impact of traffic pollution, light at night and noise from the M62 using nature, rather than making a large number of people live next to it.

## 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 In conclusion.
1. Wildlife and biodiversity are important in general and specifically to people of north Warrington
  2. Covid-19 has revealed exactly how important the chance to enjoy nature is to physical health and mental well-being
  3. The developer has actively tried over several decades to destroy biodiversity on site to maximise its development value. They are no friend of nature.
  4. The site contains a lot of wildlife despite the active mismanagement.
  5. Environment Bill requires net environmental gain. The development will be here for 100+ years. The PI should accept 110% (as Government and the housebuilding industry does) as the standard to judge the scheme.

6. The proposals are mean to wildlife. Isolated, bog standard spec builders landscaping is not a replacement for genuinely wild habitats. They don't even meet a requirement for net environmental gain.
7. Off-site mitigation measures are not detailed – we can't be sure they will be delivered, establish or be maintained over 30 years and in any case they will be remote from existing and future residents.

7.2 The proposed Peel Hall application fails to deliver any ecological benefit. It is the wrong plan for the wrong location and will simply add issues to the area and resolve none. Trying to deliver a housing solution for 1,200 properties and add-ons will have a disastrous impact on wildlife and will place too much pressure on what will be left of the natural habitat, the rest having been dug up and built on.

End of main document, appendices follow.

## Appendices

Appendix A – Residents Testimonials

Appendix B – Peel Moat Documents

Appendix C – Crop spraying machine footage Chris Digitas – on **Warrington Worldwide** – (24<sup>th</sup> May 2016) <https://www.warrington-worldwide.co.uk/2016/05/24/wildlife-destroyed-by-developers-claims-former-mayor/>

Appendix D - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-48132490>

Appendix E – Moths trapped by George Dunbar

***For the complete collection see his spreadsheet (Appendix E) attached.***

The following are moths that caught which are noteworthy.

They are mainly found in the Sothern half of Britain but good to see that they have been found in the north west.

Triple-spotted clay  
 Dingy footman  
 Suspected  
 Beautiful hook-tip  
 Small ranunculus – formerly thought to be extinct but now recovering  
 Red twin-spot carpet  
 Barred Sallow  
 Chocolate-tip  
 Dwarf Pug  
 Marbled white spot  
 Round-winged muslin  
 Obscure wainscot  
 Red-necked footman  
 Buff footman  
 Grey shoulder-knot  
 Silky wainscot