

Part Land On The North Side Of Gavray Drive, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 6SU (nearest)

(Appeal by Gallagher Estates, Charles Brown and Simon Digby Under Section 78 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, as amended)

Statement of Case by Save Gavray Meadows for Bicester

March 2018

PINS Appeal Reference: APP/C3105/W/17/3189611

Cherwell District Council Application reference (15/00837/OUT)

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on behalf of the Save Gavray Meadows Campaign

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1 BRIEF DESCRIPTION/BACKGROUND OF THE BICESTER 13 SITE

- 1.1 The appeal site in question is only one part of the area designated in Cherwell District Council's Local Plan Part 1 as Bicester 13. Bicester 13 is bounded by the railway on the west and north, the A4431 on the east and Gavray Drive on the south. It is divided north/south by Langford Brook. Bicester 13 contains the Bicester town end of the Upper River Ray nature Conservation Target Area (CTA) and within that, the important Gavray Drive Local Wildlife Site (LWS). The LWS is designated for its special ecology as it contains areas of unimproved floodplain grassland with ancient hedges, -ridge and furrow formations and dependent fauna and flora (see section 4 on wildlife). Both the LWS and the portion of the River Ray CTA that lies within Bicester 13 are of great ecological value and are together referred to as Gavray Meadows in this document. Such meadows have become very rare and are one of the Priority habitats specified in NERC 2006, S40/41.
- 1.2 It should be noted that application 15/00837/OUT for housing only on land west of Langford brook was submitted in May 2015. At this time none of the land north of Gavray Drive was included as a housing site in the then current Cherwell Local Plan (LP). Bicester 13 was brought into the LP as one of a number of additional housing sites in order to help with meeting a shortfall in housing provision identified at the beginning of the LP Examination and which led to the examination being adjourned. The Save Gavray Meadows Campaign did not oppose the allocation of Bicester 13 in principle because the Council made efforts to draft the policy in a way that recognised and protected both the LWS and CTA. However, the Campaign did have concerns about application 15/00837/OUT and submitted objections to the Council. That application did not go forward to the Council planning committee in 2015 and subsequently, the land north of Gavray Drive, both east and west of Langford brook, was included in LP Part 1 as Policy Bicester 13 which is for 300 houses. We would like to point out that following the adoption of LP Part 1, the developers did not amend application 15/00837/OUT to fit with the requirements of Policy Bicester 13, instead they challenged the Council in court to have the LP policy wording about building on the CTA changed, to benefit *their* plans! However, despite the change of wording of Policy Bicester 13 after the legal challenge, the special ecology of Gavray Meadows does remain strongly protected by re-adopted Policy Bicester 13 (LP 2011-2031, pp172-174) which states:

"Development must avoid adversely impacting on the Conservation Target Area and comply with the requirements of Policy ESD11 to secure a net biodiversity gain.

Protection of the Local Wildlife Site and consideration of its relationship and interface with residential and other built development.

Detailed consideration of ecological impacts, wildlife mitigation and the creation, restoration and enhancement of wildlife corridors to protect and enhance biodiversity.

The preparation and implementation of an Ecological Management Plan to ensure the long-term conservation of habitats and species within the site."

2 THE SAVE GAVRAY MEADOWS CAMPAIGN

- 2.1 The Save Gavray Meadows Campaign, henceforth referred to as 'The Campaign', is comprised of citizens of Bicester and the surrounding villages who are concerned for the future survival of this group of ancient meadows. As well as its individual members, it is an umbrella organisation representing the views of local groups who have contributed to the Campaign, namely Bicester Local History Society, Bicester Green Gym, Langford Village Community Association, Langford Community Orchard Group, Grassroots Bicester Community Action Group, and Bicester and Kidlington Ramblers.
- 2.2 The Campaign has involved undertaking a range of activities: it has researched the history, the wildlife and habitat, as well as the value of the Meadows to local people. The Campaign has sought the views of local people about the future of the area and represented their views at Town and District Council Planning Meetings and both the Consultation stages and Examination in Public of LP Part1 from which Policy Bicester 13 emerged.
- 2.3 Campaign member, Dr Patricia Clissold has made near daily surveys of the site for several years recording both plants and animals that depend on this rare habitat. In addition, her data includes rare species not found by the developer's ecologists and photographic evidence of some of which is shown (Appendix 1). More evidence can be provided for this Appeal if required.
- 2.4 A Friends of Gavray Meadows group has been set up to research, conserve and enhance the landscape, biodiversity and heritage of this site and via community involvement to foster its care, and promote enjoyment and understanding of its biodiversity for the benefit of the wildlife and the public. The Friends group recognises that Policy Bicester 13 provides for the protection and future management of the Meadows alongside some development and wishes to play an active role in that secured future for the Meadows.

3 GENERAL STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE COUNCIL'S POSITION:

- 3.1 The Campaign is not opposed to some housing development on the least ecologically important parts of the Bicester 13 site as proposed in LP Policy Bicester 13, recognising that this enables some of the more positive parts of the Bicester 13 policy. Given that the Council has a 5.7 year housing supply from April 2018 and there are at least 13,000 houses planned for Bicester in LP Part1 alone, the Campaign feels that the priority for Bicester is the protection and maintenance of both the LWS and the portion of the Ray CTA that lies within the boundary of the Policy Bicester 13 site. Thus the Campaign supports the Council's refusal of planning permission for the 180 houses in application 15/00837/OUT because this application does not provide for the future survival or management of the wildlife site or CTA. There is a requirement, as stated in the re-adopted Policy Bicester 13 in LP Part 1, that *any* planning proposal should include provision for the maintenance of the LWS and CTA.
- 3.2 The current application for 180 houses endangers the ecologically sensitive land on the east of Bicester 13 because if this number is built on the west, then to comply with the policy for a total of 300 houses, it follows that up to 120 houses would need to be built on the east. This is far too many to comply with protecting the wildlife, especially as the developers' biodiversity assessment data show that as much as 52% (8.18 hectares) of the land on the east of the brook would be lost to development to provide these houses (see Biodiversity Metrics Gavray Drive East [GDE]; uploaded on Council's website on 28/3/2017). How can the loss of this proportion of land give no net loss of biodiversity when all of the land east of the brook is ecologically valuable? It cannot and thus will fail to comply with Bicester Policy 13 and with national policy. Therefore the intentions of the developers for all the land on the entire site should be submitted to Council for scrutiny as to whether the requirements of Bicester 13 can be fulfilled.
- 3.3 In addition, the developers Environmental Statement 2015 states that building houses on the west will have a permanent negative effect on the wildlife to the east because of increased population pressure from at least an additional 450 new residents. This emphasises the need for a management plan that will take into account and protect the needs of the wildlife in these circumstances.
- 3.4 It is clear from policy Bicester 13 that the Council recognises and supports the importance of the biodiversity of this area. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without safeguarding biodiversity. The planning system provides an opportunity for this in Policy Bicester 13 through the funding of a management plan for the LWS and CTA.

We respectfully recommend that the Inspector dismisses this Appeal.

4 THE VALUE OF GAVRAY MEADOWS AS A WILDLIFE HABITAT (STATEMENT FROM DR CLISSOLD)

The value of Gavray Meadows is the habitat itself which is capable of supporting so many different species. It has many natural assets which cannot be moved elsewhere or offset. It is more than a lowland meadow, in itself a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) classification. Mature native trees on site, both ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and oak (*Quercus* sp.), support a huge number of different insect species both in the leaf canopy and in bark fissures. These are food for many species of birds and bats. Caterpillars and flies are essential food for fledglings. Bats roost in deep splits in the old trees. Bats observed in Gavray Meadows (at least six different species, and we can provide evidence of roosts that have not been found by the developers' ecologists) catch night flying moths and flies. The trees also supply holes for nesting for woodpeckers (green and great spotted) and for blue tits. Trees are irreplaceable for habitat conservation and preservation of biodiversity (i.e. as many different species as are able to exploit the habitat). There are several different habitats in Gavray Meadows, namely, small woodland, lowland meadow some on a flood plain, long connecting hedges and a small river. The site provides a rich microcosm of different habitats.

A small belt of deciduous woodland grows on slightly acidic soil while on more neutral soil several old hedges of sloe grow surrounding unimproved fields. Hedges harbour crab apple trees, rose briars and brambles, all of which are food for wildlife as well as the sloe berries. Wild orchids grow at one end, exploiting a more alkaline patch of soil. There is also a source of essential running water called Langford Brook which is classified by Thames Water as a major water course. The main field in Gavray Meadows adjoins the east bank of Langford Brook and is bordered by large willow (*Salix* sp.) trees (see photo Appendix 1). The main fields east of the brook are in a flood plain. As I write this now (February 2018) a central part is ankle deep in water. These wet meadows present opportunities for wading birds like snipe to feed in the soft mud. Despite neglect these fields still have *Alopecurus* (Meadow foxtail grass)-*Sanguisorba* (Great burnet) flood meadow indicator plants, which could recover well with some hand cutting of other vegetation (see photo Appendix 1). There is also a long narrow field that was an accommodation field for the draught horses, the most valued farm animal. This field (see photo Appendix 1) has slightly acidic soil and supports an abundance of devil's bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*). This plant is sole food for the caterpillar of the rare marsh fritillary butterfly, found on the site previously in perhaps its last Midlands location and which still could return given a reintroduction initiative at a nearby Otmoor reserve. An expert from Butterfly Conservation has just counted (February 2018) 176 eggs of the brown hairstreak butterfly (see photo Appendix 1) laid on the sloe hedges which have not been flailed. There were only 2 eggs seen in a long sloe hedge which had been flailed in the summer.

Gavray Meadows demonstrate the history of farming from Medieval times up to the second world war. As such they are a living social record of human endeavour in the SE of England, unlike the famous book, "Larkrise to Candleford" by Flora Thompson which is a written history. Gavray Meadows are a living document of how the land was once farmed. One can still see its layout of hedges on old Ordnance Survey maps of the 1800s and on even older hand drawn maps at the time of the first enclosures. Farmland wildlife depends on keeping traditional farming methods going but, we also need to appreciate what these practices were that enabled lowland wildlife to prosper. The huge and rapid change in farming practices in recent years is the main reason that all Lowland

Farmland Wildlife is in such trouble. These include beautiful wildflowers, insects, birds, and mammals. Species have failed to cope with weed killers, fertilisers, mechanisation and new cutting and planting regimes etc. 97% of hay meadows were lost between 1945 and 1984. The UK Farmland Bird Indicator (DEFRA National Statistics release) shows that of 19 species, 12 have declined between 1970 and 2007, some drastically. Pollinators are dying off. Lowland wildlife has adapted over the last thousand years to traditional farming methods, but, now needs our help to survive through habitat conservation and linking these up by wildlife corridors.

Can we afford to destroy Gavray Meadows now by neglect and bad planning (surrounding it with houses on all sides) when the new Government 25 year plan for the environment has just been released? A summary is at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan/25-year-environment-plan-our-targets-at-a-glance> . The plan says that it will enrich plants and wildlife by "restoring 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term." Gavray Meadows, as an example of a BAP habitat, could be one of these sites if given some protection against human encroachment now. UK Government Policy on Wildlife Conservation is changing to one of favouring active conservation, as many people are realising that UK wildlife is in steep decline and that action is needed to address those losses.

This submission is not a list of what we **have** seen in Gavray Meadows (most of our records are held by the Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre (TVERC) but it looks to the future. The NPPF (2012) calls for sustainable development that considers not only social and economic factors but balances these with environmental factors. The NPPF calls for there to be biodiversity gains. Gavray Meadows can be restored as a superb area for wildlife given that the correct management is implemented. It is a moral argument also. What will be lost to our children? How many now can mimic the cuckoo call or even know about it? We need to save any accessible wildlife site that can be used to educate children about Nature and the Environment. If we do not do this, all initiatives will fail. Humans will continue to drop litter everywhere and assume that it does not matter and that there will be no comeback. As educated adults we now know better. We should teach our offspring that profit may not be always the best outcome in the long run. We should want to share this planet with species other than those in our food chain. A dawn without a dawn chorus will be bleak indeed.

5 EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE ENQUIRY:

- 1) Gavray Meadows are important to Bicester people for health of body and mind, tranquillity, landscape value, historical value and for the environment and its associated biodiversity. Therefore appropriate management of the LWS and protection and enhancement of the CTA to secure net biodiversity gain, as demanded by LP Policy Bicester 13, needs to commence as soon as possible. As evidence of strong public support, we draw the Inquiry's attention to:
 - results of petitions from residents of the Bicester area (on paper and in electronic form on the Council's website that could only be signed by Cherwell District residents, together totalling 1,900 signatures, (for details see Appendix 2),
 - the number of local people supporting the Campaign's two 'Facebook' pages (480 'likes' on the Save Gavray Meadows for Bicester page and 258 'likes' on Gavray Meadows News),
 - attendance at and addresses made at Town and District Council meetings,
 - representations on the Proposed Modifications of LP Part 1, August 2014,
 - letters of objection written to the Council in response to Application 15/00837/OUT,
 - submissions from Interested Persons to this Appeal,
 - letters and articles published in the local and national press .

The importance of the Meadows to Bicester is such that Local Green Space designation has been sought and the Council has voted to secure this as part of the ongoing LP Part 2 process (see CPRE, John Broad, Rule 6 party's submission).

- 2) There is no other green space in Bicester with equivalent habitat to Gavray Meadows or having equivalent wildlife value, as the majority of open space is amenity land of poor ecological value. Bicester's only LNR at Bure Park in the north of the town is degraded because of over-use by the public (it is surrounded by a housing estate) and lack of management. This is so severe that the Council via the Bicester Garden Town Delivery Team are currently investigating how the ecology of that reserve could be improved. In addition, there was in 2017 the loss, prior to any planning application being granted, of the majority of vegetation from half of a proposed District Wildlife Site at Skimmingdish Lane which was about to be designated by CDC. There is no other designated LWS than Gavray Meadows within the Town's ring road.
- 3) The resident wildlife in Gavray Meadows is notable for legally protected species and habitats protected under the NERC 2006 Act. This rich biodiversity should not be compromised by lack of proper management. Some of the species Dr Clissold and others have found have not been reported in surveys carried out by the appellant nor presented in their Environment Statements. They include the forester moth and grizzled skipper (both of these being NERC Act S41 species indicating unimproved grassland) along with brown argus butterfly. The south-eastern field supports four species of orchid, including early marsh and pyramidal orchid and the rare variant of bee orchid known as wasp orchid. Unusual birds that have been seen and not reported by the appellant include lesser redpoll, grasshopper warbler and tree creeper. We have found bat roosts on site that were not reported by the appellant. Photographic evidence is presented in Appendix 1 to show the variety of rare species observed on the site.

- 4) The habitat of Gavray Meadows is rare as 98% of such unimproved lowland meadow has been lost to England and Wales since the 1930s (UK National Ecosystem Assessment, 2011). However, the place is special not just because both the habitats and species are rare, but also because it is proximal to the centre of Bicester (about 750 metres), thereby providing that equally rare opportunity for truly local contact with a wildlife habitat, rather than the bland amenity experience of 'parks and gardens' wildlife. Thus Gavray Meadows also provide unique opportunities for education on biodiversity and wildlife as they are so near to Langford Village Community Primary School, Longfields Primary School and other schools within the Town's ring road.

- 5) The importance to the Town of the ecology contained in Gavray Meadows is increasing as the cumulative negative effects of recent development on the Town's other natural green spaces becomes evident. Within the area of the Town bounded by the ring-road there are examples of the loss through development of three large natural green spaces along Skimmingdish Lane, namely, a) a 2.51 hectare site for 46 new houses, b) a 0.9 hectare site for large £25 million electricity substation, and c) an approximate 1.56 hectare site for a proposed new care-home. These sites totalling 5.0 hectares along the south side of Skimmingdish Lane were once reserved green space for a linear park as per saved policy R1 from the 1996 and 2011 Local Plans. In addition, a current application for shops, restaurants and housing in the central area of the Town would result in the loss of the old St Edburg's school playground and 4.13 hectares at the adjacent sports fields at the London Road site (totalling about 5.0 hectares). Thus at least 10 hectares of green space has recently been, or is planned to be, lost to the town within the ring-road alone. This calculation ignores the loss of greenfield sites which also used to harbour wildlife just outside the ring-road, such as the new developments of Symmetry Park, Wretchwick Green, Graven Hill, the extension of the Kingsmere estate, and warehousing and a care home just north of Skimmingdish Lane. There is also further chronic loss of green garden space within the town through numerous house extensions and conversions.

- 6) The preservation and enhancement of Gavray Meadows are also required to satisfy the green space requirements for the Town as laid out in the Council's green spaces review (LE102 Open Space Update, 2011, evidence base for LP1). This study showed that Bicester has a shortfall of 11.69 hectares amenity and natural green space even without the loss of the 10 hectares as outlined in paragraph e) above. It is recommended that there should be one hectare of LNR for every 1000 residents. For Bicester's current population that should be at least 30 hectares of LNR, instead Bicester with about 34,000 residents and growing, currently has only 8.4 hectares at a single LNR at Bure Park. This falls well below what is needed for people's health and well-being. The Campaign has a vision for working with the Council to see the land east of Langford brook designated as a Local Nature Reserve and an illustrated plan for this has been prepared (see Appendix 3).

- 7) There is evidence that Gallagher's neglect of their landholding and Digby and Brown's "management" of theirs to date has been detrimental to the wildlife, thus the appellant's assertion to provide for the LWS at some future date when the land east of Langford Brook is developed, lacks credence. In spite of knowing that it is an environmentally sensitive area, some

of the hedges have been flailed to near destruction with loss of the eggs of rare butterflies [please see the Statement of Case of Butterfly Conservation]. In addition, inappropriately heavy machinery was used on ground where reptiles and great crested newts are likely to have been sheltering (see photograph in Appendix 4). This damage was only stopped because it was seen and the police were called. There has been complete lack of management in other areas that has allowed the degrading of biodiverse grasslands. The funding and implementation of an appropriate management plan as soon as possible is therefore vital.

The Campaign is concerned that deliberate neglect of the site allowing deterioration may be a strategy to allow later improvement of the site to appear to give greater benefit to improving biodiversity. Also neglect may cause deterioration so that when plans for building on the east of the site are put in, developers will apply for more houses to be built and the wildlife will be crowded out. A buffer zone around the ecologically sensitive areas is needed and the wildlife corridor to the wildlife sites to the east should also be protected.

Although it has not been managed appropriately to benefit the varied ecology for many years, there is a consensus of expert opinion that it is perfectly possible for the glory of the site to be fully restored (see photos in Appendix 1). Management could easily bring it back as the unimproved soils and the constituent species are still there. The provision of a management plan presents an opportunity for halting and reversing the habitat loss and species loss.

The conservation group Bicester Green Gym offered to provide some initial management using hand tools and approached the appellants to obtain permission to start this work. Bicester Green Gym is a voluntary group and members have learned conservation skills and hedge management by volunteering with BBOWT at their Meadow Farm reserves. Letters sent from Bicester Green Gym in April 2013 and May 2016 were ignored by the appellant. A third letter sent in December 2016 was replied to by the appellant and an e-mail conversation ensued (Appendix 5) resulting in the appellant declining the offer of practical help but offering collaboration on drafting a management plan. A final e-mail said they would consider Bicester Green Gym's involvement in drafting a management plan *only* after the application for the housing on the west of the site was agreed.

- 8) Gavray Meadows are also of historical importance. The Bicester Local History Society has submitted a statement as an Interested Party to this inquiry. Old maps from the 17th century show double hedges and old oaks and the green lanes for driving sheep and cattle which are still there today. After the 1910 railway to London was constructed, cattle from Launton farms had to pass under it to the Meadows via three separate cattle tunnels. Thus Gavray Meadows provide a living museum illustrating the manner in which farming was carried out up until the 1950s and the whole site instructs us in how farming over 500 years has shaped our landscape and its wildlife. They are of great educational value to Bicester's heritage as an important cattle and sheep market town and with regard to its farming history and the historic drove ways and green lanes across it.

6 FURTHER MATTERS

The Campaign would like to bring the following additional concerns to the attention of the inquiry:

- 1) That the small area of open space that is west of Langford Brook and within the River Ray CTA is not large enough to fit in the features named in application 15/000837, namely a hay meadow, informal and formal open space and a flood storage scheme. This southern part of the meadow floods every year as documented in photographs (Dr P. Clissold) and written evidence (Mr A. Buckley) submitted by Interested Parties. Policy Bicester 13 states that the CTA should be protected, however the current application indicates that 0.39 hectares is to be used as amenity grassland and 1.5 hectares as 'semi-improved neutral grassland' for absorption of public pressure away from the LWS and as a refuge for wild creatures. But there also is planned in that space flood compensation storage and much of the winter it is expected to hold standing water. It clearly cannot achieve all this and the assertion that there will be no net loss of biodiversity is unrealistic.
- 2) That there are likely to be further constraints to housing development on the part of Bicester 13 site that is east of Langford Brook, from the emerging Oxford County Council Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4). These are the construction of a link road from the A41 Oxford Road through to the A41 Aylesbury Rd which then passes through the housing development of Wretchwick Green (LP Bicester 12) to meet the A4421 at Gavray Drive roundabout. LTP4 proposes to make the A4421 into a dual-carriageway. It is likely therefore that the Gavray Drive roundabout will be made much larger. Land to accommodate this may be taken from the extreme south-west corner of Bicester 13. Land may also be taken from Bic 13 in order to construct the new sections of dual carriageway from the Gavray Drive roundabout north along Charbridge Lane and the widening of the railway bridge to accommodate the extra carriageway.
- 3) That piecemeal development of Bicester 13 will interfere with the delivery of the Policy whose aim is to enable a balance between housing and the wildlife in a holistic way over the entire site. The development of housing just on the west of the site seems to be a strategy to avoid the policy obligation to manage the wildlife site and provide sufficient amenities for local people.

7 CONCLUSIONS

For all of the above reasons, the Save Gavray Meadows campaign asks the Inspector to uphold the Council's refusal of this planning application.

The Campaign wishes to reserve the right to add further statements or evidence to the Inquiry in due course, while seeking to avoid duplicating information from other contributors regarding these matters.

Appendix 1:

Photographs taken in Gavray Meadows LWS and CTA by Dr Clissold

Willow Trees



Wasp orchid (left) and Forester Moth on Great Burnet (right)



Brown Hairstreak Protected species



Devil's bit Scabious in flower





Great Burnet with grasses.
Typical of MG4. Meadow sweet.



Ash Trees



Oak Tree

Tree Creeper feeding on insects in bark





Goldcrest in small wood.



Small woods where bats roost.



Damp ridge and furrow grasslands with ragged robin



Grizzled skipper butterfly



Sneezewort, a hay meadow flower



Hoary plantain



Damp grassland with common spotted orchid

Appendix 2:

Results of petitions from residents of the Bicester area.

- Paper Petition to the Council’s Consultation of the Proposed Modification of Local Plan Part 1 signed by 1,480 district residents, submitted 3 October, 2014:

“We the undersigned support the preservation of Bicester’s Local Wildlife Site at Gavray Drive, Bicester, Oxfordshire, and object to its destruction by development”.

- e-Petitions:

- a. To the Council signed by 417 district residents, submitted 7 September 2016:

“We the undersigned petition the council to stop all planned development on Gavray Meadows, on the land east of Langford Brook and bounded to the north by the London railway and to the south by Gavray Drive.

The land is a Local Wildlife site designated in 2002 from historic farmland. It is home to many different species, some rare and all of value to our appreciation of the countryside which is fast vanishing around Bicester.”

- b. To Central Government signed by 64 people, submitted 30 March 2015 (discontinued because of the snap election):

“We deplore the sudden increase in number of proposed strategic housing allocations in SE Bicester (Bicester 12) and Gavray Drive (Bicester 13) in the Local Plan. The developments encroach on ancient footpaths following field enclosures and parish boundaries and on a local wildlife site and conservation target area. The hedges and its oak trees are very old and provide protection for wildlife and promote its biodiversity. We will lose the corridors to the River Ray Conservation area and countryside access. We want a reduction in estate areas, and the local wildlife site left unspoilt and free of development for people's enjoyment to promote their health and tranquillity. We want policies ESD10 (protection and conservation of biodiversity and the natural environment) and ESD11 (conservation target areas) to be implemented specifically for the sites through a published plan which takes precedence over the developers' plans.”

Appendix 3:

Local nature reserve interpretation board

Gavray Meadows Local Nature Reserve

Welcome to Gavray Meadows - a precious and vital site for wildlife and people within the growing town of Bicester. Here, nestled between housing estates and the Bicester to Marylebone railway line, is a piece of ancient countryside: a landscape of small fields, green lanes and ponds with an abundance of wildlife that is now rare in the modern countryside. The site is a Local Nature Reserve, managed by [INSERT NAME] not only to preserve the wildlife but to enable people like yourself to experience and enjoy it at the same time.



Purple hairstreak



Common spotted orchid

Langford Brook

This stream is a tributary of the River Ray which flows into the Cherwell and meets the Thames in Oxford. Kingfishers and herons are regularly seen along its banks.



Barn owl

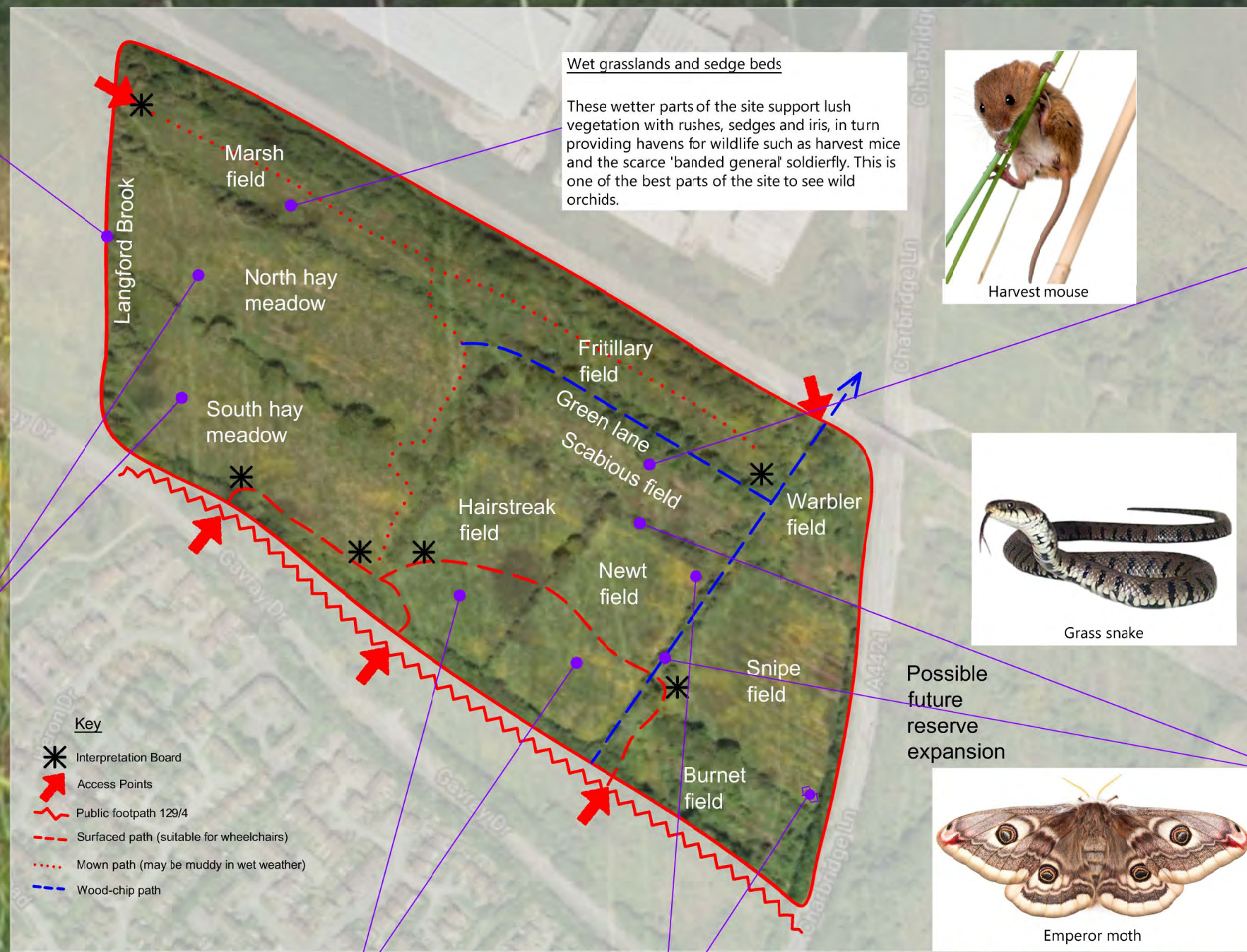
Traditional hay meadows

These areas are cut for hay in late summer and then the 'aftermath' grazed by livestock. This type of management, without modern agricultural chemicals, allows a huge number of plant species to co-exist and thrive, creating a colourful spectacle of nodding blooms alive with bees in summer. Please keep to the mown paths in spring and summer to avoid trampling the hay crop.



Great burnet

For further information on events or opportunities for volunteering, see the Friends of Gavray Meadows website [INSERT]



Wet grasslands and sedge beds

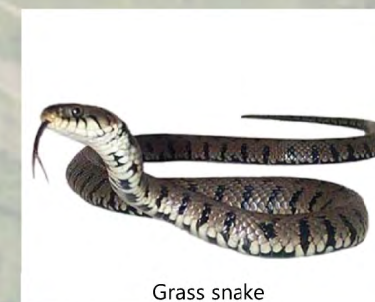
These wetter parts of the site support lush vegetation with rushes, sedges and iris, in turn providing havens for wildlife such as harvest mice and the scarce 'banded general' soldierfly. This is one of the best parts of the site to see wild orchids.



Harvest mouse

Drier pastures

The better drained parts of the site support grasslands with a slightly different set of plants to the hay meadows. Particularly characteristic of these areas is devil's-bit scabious, the beautiful mauve flowers of which can be seen in late summer. This plant is eaten by the caterpillars of the beautiful marsh fritillary and Gavray Meadows was the last site where it was found in the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire region. It is hoped that by restoring ideal conditions for it, it can be returned to grace these meadows again some day.

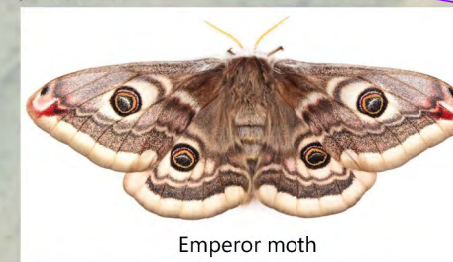


Grass snake



Marsh fritillary

Possible future reserve expansion



Emperor moth

Hedgerows and green lanes

The network of fields, hedges and green lanes visible today is exactly the same as that shown on the oldest maps of the area and studies have shown that some of the hedgerows date back to Saxon times. As well as their historical interest, the hedgerows support many different species, including rare butterflies. Gavray Meadows is one of very few sites in the whole country where all five hairstreak butterflies have been recently recorded.

Ridge and furrow

The lines of parallel lumps forming 'ridge and furrow' in many of the fields are a relic of Mediaeval agriculture. Although created by ploughing in the Middle Ages, the fact that they have not been smoothed out since shows that the site has remained unploughed for a long time, perhaps centuries. It is this rare combination of factors that allows much of the rare wildlife here to thrive.

Ponds and wet furrows

The ancient field ponds on the site and the furrows in the wetter ridge and furrow fields support amphibians, including frogs and all three British species of newt. These in turn attract species that prey on them, such as the impressive grass snake.



Great crested newt

Appendix 4:

Photographs showing heavy machinery and damage



Appendix 5:

Correspondence between Gallagher Estates and Bicester Green Gym (in reverse chronological order).

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Glen Langham <Glen.Langham@gallagherstates.com>

To: Steve Willott <stevewillott@yahoo.co.uk>

Sent: Monday, 6 February 2017, 10:55

Subject: RE: Gavray Drive, Bicester

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your letters dated 19th January and 2nd February. I have been out of the office for the last couple of weeks at a public inquiry, hence why I haven't responded.

We are currently focussing on trying to get our current application on the land to the west of the Langford Brook over the line. Hopefully, that will be in the next month. Once it is, I will ask our ecologists to contact you and arrange a meeting to discuss the way forward on the Local Wildlife Site.

Regards

Glen

Glen Langham

Planning Director

PLEASE NOTE THAT WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT MY NEW E-MAIL ADDRESS IS:

Email: glen.langham@gallagherstates.com

Direct Tel: 01926 455116

Mobile: 07974 319147

www.gallagherstates.co.uk

Gallagher Estates Limited

Gallagher House, Gallagher Way

Gallagher Business Park, Warwick CV34 6AF

Tel: 01926 339 339 Fax: 01926 339 222

From: Glen Langham
Sent: 19 December 2016 15:04
To: Steve Willott
Subject: RE: Gavray Drive, Bicester

Dear Steve,

I acknowledge the work that Bicester Green Gym does and appreciate the offer to undertake the works at no cost. While that is very generous, the financial cost is not the issue. The land is in private ownership and so for the reasons I mentioned before, the landowners' position is that we cannot let anybody on to the site, save of course for the public footpaths.

Perhaps the most appropriate way forward would be if you and/or your team were to meet with our team of ecologists to discuss and agree a package of works that could be undertaken on the site. Once they have been agreed, we will appoint a team of contractors carry out the works under the supervision of a qualified ecologist. If that is of interest to you, please let me have some dates and I will run them by our team.

Regards

Glen

Glen Langham
Planning Director

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Tel: 01926 339 339 Fax: 01926 339 222

From: Steve Willott [stevewillott@yahoo.co.uk]

Sent: 16 December 2016 13:52

To: Glen Langham

Subject: Gavray Drive, Bicester

Dear Glen,

Bicester Green Gym is aware of the different ownerships within the Gavray Drive site and can see how differently they are managed. The area we are concerned about is the Local Wildlife Site as it so clearly a very special place but realise that the whole site is very biodiverse and have seen how it has been neglected by the current owners. We can see that it has a much richer flora and fauna than Bicester's Bure Park Nature Reserve where we also regularly work.

We understand that some areas of the wildlife site, such as the hay meadow alongside Langford Brook, belong directly to Gallaghers. We are offering to do conservation work there without charge as we are a voluntary group. In our previous letters we explained that we bring all our own tools and we work by hand in a careful way. We are affiliated to the Trust for Conservation Volunteers and have robust public liability insurance that covers us for any site that we work on. We work on both private and public sites in Bicester and within a five-mile radius and our work is valued by Cherwell District Council, supported by Bicester Town Council and local residents. This should re-assure you that there is no liability issue to you with regard to Health and Safety.

We regularly work at the BBOWT (the local wildlife trust) sites in the Upper River Ray, namely, Meadow Farm, Leaches Farm, Gallows Bridge Farm, all of which have ecology similar to the Gavray Drive site so we know how the wildlife trust manages there. We have been trained by the Upper River Ray reserve manager in techniques of hedge management for brown and black hairstreak butterflies and also techniques for selective thistle and ragwort removal prior to the annual haycut. Thus you can be confident that we work in a careful way and are extremely sensitive to the ecology which is in need of preservation in Gavray Wildlife Site.

We saw from pictures taken by local people that the work done to clear the land in the SE of Gavray Drive site by huge machines with caterpillar tracks in 2014 caused a lot of damage to the damp ground in a sensitive area. Also the hedge maintenance was not done in a way that is used by BBOWT to promote the survival of black or brown hairstreaks. This could not contrast more with the way Bicester Green Gym works solely with hand tools. Our access to appropriate ecological advice ensures that the work we do is appropriate to each site and is legal.

We know about the proposals for development at Gavray Drive and appreciate your intention to offer a management package for the LWS, and are interested in Bicester Green Gym being included in that management group. So we feel strongly that Bicester Green Gym's offer to start this work on a voluntary basis is a 'win-win' situation. Our work is frequently covered by local newspapers and in Council publications, so our being allowed to start work here before planning approval is obtained would bring Gallagher Estates some good publicity. In addition, the site is in need of management and the longer it is left, the

more it is going to cost to put it right. There is an increasing local interest in this site and it would surely do much for your position of taking environmental responsibility seriously to respond in a positive way to this.

Can we ask you to reconsider, please?

Kind regards.

Steve Willott
Chairman

Bicester Green Gym

www.bicestergreengym.org

From: [Glen Langham <Glen.Langham@gallagheruk.com>](mailto:Glen.Langham@gallagheruk.com)

To: Steve Willott

14 Dec at 2:33 PM

Dear Mr Willott,

No problem at all.

I am keen to understand which parts of the site you are specifically referring to. Is it the part of the site that is designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS)?

The first thing I should do is point out that not all of the land at Gavray Drive is owned by Gallagher Estates. Part of it is owned by the Norman Trust and part is owned by London and Metropolitan.

Together, and as I am sure you are aware, we have been working for many years to bring part of the site forward for development. Enhancements to and the long term management of the LWS has always been and will continue to be a key component of our proposals on the land to the east of the Langford Brook. We are fully aware of what the legislation and policies require, and we do take our environmental responsibilities seriously.

In the interim, the Norman Trust has continued to maintain the parts of the site that it owns under normal farming activities and practices.

In terms of managing the rest of the site, it is obviously not straightforward given the presence of various ecological habitats and species and there are clear rules as to what can be done and when it can be done.

In 2014, we started carrying out some basic management works on the site. The works had been scoped by and were being carried out under the supervision of a firm of professionally qualified ecologists. However, we were reported to Thames Valley Police and the works had to cease. Whilst the Police concluded that there had been no breach of the law and that we had not done anything wrong, we felt we had no choice but to abort completing the work

because it was clearly causing concern to some people. I am sure you can appreciate that we do not want a repeat of that.

It is our intention to propose a package of measures and a long term management strategy for the LWS as part of our planning application on the land to the east of the Langford Brook, which we are intending to submit next year. As you have already picked up, this will be in line with the Local Plan policy for the site and will not propose any development within the LWS.

We actually proposed something similar as part of the planning consent that was granted in 2006. At that time, CDC agreed to set up a management group to oversee the enhancements and management of the LWS. Unfortunately, that consent was never implemented following the successful legal challenge. I would have no objection to Bicester Green Gym being included in that management group to help inform the works to be undertaken and long term management plan, and would put that forward as a recommendation in our planning application if that was of interest to you.

In the meantime, due to health and safety issues and the strict ecological procedures that would need to be followed and adhered to, we cannot permit access to members of the general public on to the site.

I hope you can understand our position and I look forward to hearing from you regarding your organisation's potential involvement in the LWS management group.

Regards

Glen

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Planning Director

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