
PLANNING APPLICATIONS AFFECTING WILDLIFE WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

How Does The Planning Application Process Work?

The planning system can be complex, but in most cases:

- A developer submits an application to a local authority (usually City/District/Borough).
- The application is publicised by a notice on the site and sometimes in the local press.
- There is a consultation period (2-3 weeks) where anybody can comment on the application.
- The developer may be required to produce an environmental assessment, including wildlife surveys if necessary. An ecological consultant usually carries out these surveys.
- The council development control officer dealing with the case recommends refusal or approval.
- If there are no objections, the decision is made by the council's planning department.
- If there are objections, the decision is made by a Committee of Councillors.
- If permission is granted, conditions may be imposed e.g. the protection of wildlife habitats.
- If permission is refused, the applicant can appeal to the Deputy Prime Minister to overrule the decision, and there may be a Public Inquiry, at which objectors can put their case.

What You Can Do If Development Threatens Your Local Wildlife Patch

Know your Local Plan (or Local Development Framework) This is the blueprint for development in each District/Borough and can be found in libraries and council planning departments. It shows land allocated for future development, as well as Wildlife Sites and other protected areas. Once a site is allocated, it is likely to be developed, so it is a good idea to get involved when the Local Plan is produced (usually every 5 years). The Plan also tells you the Council's policies on issues like wildlife protection, which they must take into account when making a decision.

Get your facts right Contact the Development Control department, find out which officer is dealing with the application and go and look at it. This person will be your main point of contact, and it is their job to recommend refusal or approval - it pays to stay on their good side!

Be aware of the law Certain animals, including bats, badgers, great crested newts and water voles are legally protected. This means that harming them or disturbing their homes without a license (for the first three) or without due care is an offence. Planning permission can only be granted if there is an overriding need for the development. If it is, measures must be taken to avoid harm to protected species if possible, and a license may be required. If you believe any of these animals are on your site, ask the Council to request a survey from the developer.

Gain support Contact your local District and County Councillors, MP and Parish Council. Make other local people aware of the proposal and ask them to object. Lots of letters are better than a petition. Contact the local paper if you like, but make sure you get your facts right first!

Object to the planning application This is the most important thing to do. You will need to write to the development control officer to object. The following are worth remembering:

- Respond before the deadline. Be brief and to the point.
- Include the application reference number and don't forget to use the words 'I object'.
- Be polite and calm.
- Base your objection on facts - remember that you may be asked to prove what you say.
- Emphasise issues where there is conflict with the Local Plan.
- Describe the wildlife interest of the site and highlight any protected species.
- Say what you believe would be the main impacts of the development on wildlife (loss of habitat, noise, disturbance etc).
- If there is no wildlife survey, ask that the council request one from the developer.
- If the site is used or valued by the local community, say so.
- If you are a member of the Trust, by all means mention this, but *please do not say that you are acting on our behalf, or that we support your objection*, as this only causes confusion!

Wildlife Sites

Where a site is of national importance for wildlife, it may be protected by law. However, this applies to only a very few sites. Many others are important at a county or district level, and these may be designated as Wildlife Sites (also known as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation). Wildlife Sites have no legal status, but each of the local authorities (County, City, District and Borough Councils) has agreed to protect them from harmful development wherever possible. Sites are designated by an independent expert panel, only if they meet certain criteria. They are usually shown on Local Plan (or Local Development Framework) maps.

The Role of Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust

As an independent organisation, the Trust comments on Local Plans, and also objects to planning applications in its own right. Unfortunately we do not have the time or resources to deal with every application, and have to prioritise those with the greatest potential impact on wildlife. Generally, we prioritise applications that are important at a county level, such as those affecting Wildlife Sites, rare habitats and species, or sites supporting a high diversity of wildlife.

Useful Sources of Information

Campaign to Protect Rural England
www.cpre.org.uk/

Planning Aid
www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid