
Chapel Lane, Widnes

Breeding Birds Survey Report

Compiled by Ecology Services Ltd.

on behalf of

Taylor Wimpey

November 2020 (rev. April 2023)



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Ecology Services Limited was commissioned by Taylor Wimpey in March 2020 to carry out a Breeding Bird Survey of land to the east of Chapel Lane, Widnes, hereinafter referred to as 'the site'. The centre of the site is located by National Grid Reference (NGR) 35004, 38780. The location and boundary of the site are shown on Figure 1. See Figures 1a and 1b Breeding Bird Activity Maps.
- 1.2 This Breeding Bird Survey report has been prepared by Ecology Services Limited on behalf of Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd to assist the local planning authority's consideration of an outline planning application for a site at Chapel Lane, Widnes for:
- "Outline planning application (with all matters other than access reserved) (to be determined by Halton Borough Council only) for the development of up to 350 dwellings, public open space, landscaping and associated infrastructure works. Full details for site access arrangements via a new junction on Chapel Lane (to be determined by Knowsley Borough Council only) and emergency access via Sandy Lane (to be determined by Halton Borough Council)."*
- 1.3 The proposed development site is located to the north-west of the Widnes urban area. The site is situated within the boundary of two separate allocations for residential development within the adopted Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan [DALP] (March 2022) under Policy RD1 (Residential Development Allocations). The allocations comprise two separate land parcels separated by Sandy Lane, (Site Ref. W4 to the west of Sandy Lane and Site Ref. W5 to the east). The application red line boundary does not extend to the full extent of the allocation.
- 1.4 At the time of compiling this report, no detailed development scheme has been prepared and only outline biodiversity enhancements are provided. This report shall be updated to ensure that mitigation and enhancement measures are incorporated at the detailed design stage.
- 1.5 The site is located on the outskirts of the town of Widnes, within the Borough of Halton but on the boundary with Knowsley Council and contains a mix of habitats including: improved and poor semi-improved grassland, species-rich and species-poor hedgerows, wet and dry ditches, two ponds, scattered trees and buildings. The land to the north and west of the site is largely under arable cultivation crossed by hedgerows and ditches with further ponds and an area of broadleaved woodland. Broadleaved woodland adjoins the site to the east, beyond which lies Queensbury Way residential development with further residential development to the south.
- 1.6 The objectives of the breeding bird survey were to:
- Identify bird species protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) using the site;
 - Identify any nationally, regionally or locally significant species using the site (including NERC Act 2006 Species of Principal Importance);
 - Identify key habitat areas for those species recorded; and
 - Provide recommendations, taking these species into account.
- 1.7 An updated Ecological Appraisal of the site undertaken in June 2022, found the habitats on site to be the same as at the time the breeding bird survey was undertaken and this report is therefore considered to remain a valid assessment. An updated desk study has been undertaken and is included in this report.

2.0 Planning Policy and Legislation

Planning Policy

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) places a clear responsibility on Local Planning Authorities (LPA) to contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural and local environment. LPAs should promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species (e.g. Species of Principal importance, Local Biodiversity Action Plan species); and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Circular 06/2005 provides administrative guidance on the application of the law in relation to planning and nature conservation.
- 2.2 A Local Planning Authority (LPA) has a duty to ensure that protected species and habitats within the UK are a 'material consideration' in the determination of a planning application. Therefore, an LPA is unlikely to determine an application until all relevant information relating to protected species or habitats is submitted to fully inform the application. Relevant information includes adequate surveys and, where required, mitigation strategies, which will need to be submitted to inform a planning application.
- 2.3 Although the UKBAP has been superseded by the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and, in England, Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (2011), many Local Authorities have prepared and operate Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs). LBAPs not only highlight species that are of Principal Importance but also species that are of local importance. LBAPs will be prepared for these species. Listing of a species in a LBAP does not confer any new statutory or planning policy protection. However, impacts upon species prioritised in LBAPs may be a material consideration in a planning application.

Legislation

- 2.4 The Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended) states that all wild birds are protected. Under the WCA, it is an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird, to take damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird or to take or destroy the egg of any wild bird. A special penalty is levied to any of the above offences being committed in conjunction with a bird listed on Schedule 1 of the WCA. It is also an offence if a person disturbs any bird listed on Schedule 1 while it is building a nest, is on or near a nest containing young or disturbs dependent young.
- 2.5 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 made it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb Schedule 1 species as above and also an offence to intentionally or recklessly take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird or its eggs or dependent young.
- 2.6 Section 41 (S41) of the NERC Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State, as respects England, to publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitat which are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 places a duty to conserve biodiversity on every public body. The Local Planning Authority and Natural England will expect account to be taken of these species in the overall layout and landscape strategy for the development.
- 2.7 There are 49 bird Species of Principal Importance included on the NERC Section 41 list. These are the species found in England which were identified as requiring action under the former UK BAP and which continue to be regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and, in England, Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (2011). Under its 25 Year Environment Plan (2018), the Government proposes to publish a new strategy for nature building on Biodiversity 2020. Bird Species of Principal Importance are selected, in England, if they fall under one or more of the following criteria: species which are globally threatened and species which are rapidly declining in the UK i.e. by more than 50% in the last 25 years.

- 2.8 The above sections provide an overview upon current planning policy and legislation relating to species and habitats that could be located within the survey area.

3.0 Methodology

Desk Study Methodology

- 3.1 Ecological data and historic records of Schedule 1 listed birds/ bird Species of Principal Importance/ LBAP birds and sites designated for their bird interest was collated from the following sources; listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Desktop Study Resources and Record Centres Consulted

Source of information	Information supplied
Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (https://magic.defra.gov.uk/)	To identify nature reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Habitats of Principal Importance, non-statutory protected sites or features of interest within 1km of the site.
Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006	Review of Habitats/Species of Principal Importance known to occur in the region.
Halton Biodiversity Action Plan (the	Identification of LBAP species and habitats known to occur in the region.
Biodiversity Information Centre for Cheshire, Halton, Warrington, and Wirral - RECORD Merseyside Biobank	To identify locally protected sites or bird species of interest within 2km of the site.

- 3.2 The data searches with RECORD and Merseyside Biobank were undertaken on 27th and 15th June 2022 respectively.
- 3.3 The aim of the desktop study was to assist the surveyor undertaking the breeding bird survey by providing background information on the likely habitats and species that occur within the local area.
- 3.4 A review was undertaken using existing maps and aerial photographs of the local area to identify any features of ecological interest to breeding birds.

Survey Methodology

- 3.5 A breeding bird survey was undertaken between May and June 2020 using a combination of the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and the Common Bird Census (CBC) technique as described in Bibby et. al. (2000). Two bird recording survey visits are undertaken with the first visit between April and mid-May and the second at least four weeks apart between mid-May to the end of June in line with the BBS methodology.
- 3.6 On each visit a pre-determined route was walked early in the morning to encompass the period of highest bird activity increasing the chances of detecting breeding bird species present on the site. However, the one-hour period immediately after dawn was avoided as this is the period of greatest activity and may bias the results, as an area surveyed during this period would have an artificially high bird population in comparison to the rest of the site. All surveys were completed by midday. The route was walked in the opposite direction on the second visit to avoid bias in the timing of coverage of the site.
- 3.7 The location and behaviour of all birds encountered were recorded on a large-scale field map using the standard BTO species codes, using the CBC recording method rather than the BBS recording method to gather greater information on breeding activity. The re-occurrence of individuals displaying territorial and/or breeding activity in the same location over a period of time allows for certain assumptions to be made about the breeding status of each species, based on set criteria. The criteria used in the present assessment are adapted from the standard criteria used for the BTO Bird Atlas 2007-2011 (Balmer et. al., 2013). The breeding

status of each species can be classified into three categories, as described in paragraph 3.15.

- 3.8 The survey method adopted provides a reasonable level of accuracy of the status of the majority of species present, but cannot successfully survey for all species. It is considered that two visits were adequate to determine the breeding bird usage on the site and assess its importance to local bird populations.

Timing

- 3.9 The breeding bird surveys were conducted on the 11th of May 2020 between 06:40 and 08:15 and the 16th of June 2020 between 06:20 and 08:10.

Weather Conditions

- 3.10 The weather during the survey on 11th May 2020 was cold (3°C at start), sunny with scattered cloud, clouding over at times and a light breeze (Beaufort Scale 2). The weather during the survey on 16th June 2020 was cloudy, dry, calm (Beaufort Scale 0-1) and slightly misty with a temperature of 14°C at the start and 18°C by the end of the survey.

Personnel

- 3.11 The breeding bird survey was undertaken by Senior Consultant Ecologist Ms. L. Redgrave MA (Oxon), MSc., CEng, CEnv, MCIEEM.

Survey Limitations

- 3.12 Surveys only provide a snapshot of species that are there at that time, further surveys at other times of the year are likely to find additional species. Due to the coronavirus outbreak, there was no access to the farmyard so it was not possible to fully assess breeding bird activity within that part of the site. The northern, eastern and western boundaries of the farmyard were covered by the transect, the remainder of the farmyard being within the normal recording distance from a BBS transect, although visibility was partly obscured by buildings.
- 3.13 Any limitations have been taken into account within the evaluation and recommendations within this report.

Determination of Breeding Status

- 3.14 The breeding status of each species can be classified into three categories; confirmed breeder, probable breeder and possible breeder. The behaviour, sex, age and location of individual birds allow conclusions to be drawn about breeding status, based on categories used for the BTO Bird Atlas 2007-2011 (Balmer et. al., 2013). It is also possible that species are merely present in a habitat and are not actually breeding. Breeding evidence used in this report follows Balmer et. al. (2013) and these are given below. The three breeding categories, confirmed, probable and possible breeding species are abbreviated to CO, PR and PO in the accompanying tables. Birds not thought to be breeding on the site are classed as non-breeder, which is shown as NB in the tables. Birds recorded flying over the site are referred to as flyovers with this being abbreviated to FO in the accompanying tables.

- 3.15 **BTO Bird Atlas Criteria for Categorising Breeding Status**

Possible Breeding

- Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat.
- Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season in suitable breeding habitat

Probable Breeding

- Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season
- Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song, etc.) on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place or many individuals on one day

- Courtship and display
- Visiting a probable nest site
- Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults
- Brood patch on adult examined in the hand
- Nest building or excavating nest-hole

Confirmed Breeding

- Distraction-display or injury feigning
- Used nest or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey)
- Recently fledged young or downy young
- Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nest or nest-holes, the contents of which cannot be seen) or adults seen incubating
- Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young
- Nest containing eggs
- Nest with young seen or heard

Conservation Status

- 3.16 The evaluation takes account of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) which is a review of the status of all birds occurring regularly in the United Kingdom. It is regularly updated and is prepared by leading bird conservation organisations. The latest report was published in 2015 (Eaton et. al., 2015). The criteria are complex, but generally: Red list species are those that have shown a decline of the breeding population, non-breeding population or breeding range of more than 50% in the last 25 years; Amber list species are those that have shown a decline of the breeding population, non-breeding population or breeding range of between 25% and 50% in the last 25 years. Species that have a UK breeding population of less than 300 or a non-breeding population of less than 900 individuals are also included as Amber listed, together with those where 50% of the population is localised in 10 sites or fewer and those where 20% of the European population is found in the UK.

- Red list species are those that are **globally threatened** according to IUCN criteria; those whose population or range has declined rapidly in recent years; and those that have declined historically and have not shown a substantial recovery.
- Amber list species are those with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; whose population or range has declined moderately in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders and those with internationally important or localised populations.
- Species that fulfil none of the above criteria are green listed. These species are not included in the evaluation.

4.0 Results and Evaluation

Desk Study Results

Designated Sites

- 4.1 There are no statutory protected sites or non-statutory sites designated on the basis of their interest for birds that are located within the vicinity of the site and which could be adversely affected by the proposed development of the site. The site, however, falls within Natural England's Impact Risk Zone for the Mersey Estuary SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site, located approximately 3.7km to the south of the site at its nearest point. The site is designated for its wintering bird interest, not breeding birds and is not, therefore, considered further in this report.

Records Data Search

- 4.2 The desktop study identified the following records of Schedule 1 protected bird species/ Species of Principal Importance/ LBAP species within the 2km of the development site. The full search results are appended to the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (Ecology Services Ltd., 2019):

Table 2: Desktop Study Species Results

Common name	Scientific name	Date of record(s)	Sch 1	NERC S41	LBAP
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	1997-2013		✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	2002-2013	Sch1		
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	2002-2010	Sch1		
Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	1998-2010		✓	✓
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	1997-2019		✓	
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	2003	Sch1		
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	1997-2019		✓	
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1997-2008		✓	✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	2003-2015		✓	
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	2016	Sch1		
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	1997-2016		✓	
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	2003			
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	2002	Sch1		
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	2012-2019			
Corn bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	1998-1999		✓	
Grey partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	1997-2013		✓	
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1997-1999	Sch1		
Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	1997-2003	Sch1		
Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	1999	Sch1		
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	2003-2012	Sch1		
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	2002	Sch1		
Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	2011	Sch1		
Bulfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	1999-2011		✓	
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	1998-2019		✓	
Grasshopper warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	1998-1999		✓	
Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	1997-2007		✓	
Spotted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	1999		✓	
Tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	1997-2013		✓	
Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	2002			
Willow tit	<i>Poecile montana</i>	1998		✓	

Sch 1 – birds afforded additional protection during the breeding season.

Results Summary

- 4.3 During the breeding bird surveys, a total of 27 species was recorded within the site, plus tawny owl (*Strix aluco*) which was seen flying from the woodland to the east of the site on the bat survey on 16th September 2020. Appendix 1 lists the bird species recorded within the site along with their indicative breeding status and comments on each species. Feral pigeons (*Columba livia* (domest.)) were also seen outside the site and skylark was recorded in a field to the north of the site.

Breeding Status

- 4.4 Interpreting the data using the BTO Bird Atlas criteria, of the 28 species recorded, 1 was confirmed as breeding on the site (blackbird), 8 are classed as probable breeding species and 15 are possible breeding species. Of the remainder, one is categorised as non-breeding species and three species were recorded flying over the site.

Schedule 1 Birds

- 4.5 One Schedule 1 bird species was identified at the site, graylag goose, recorded flying over the site on the second visit. Wild graylag geese are a rare winter visitor, but feral graylag geese are fairly common breeders and common winter visitors in Lancashire and North Merseyside (White (Ed.), 2020). Greylag geese were only observed flying over the site on the second visit.

Conservation Status

- 4.6 Of the total assemblage recorded, the survey recorded 8 species of birds that are of conservation concern plus tawny owl recorded flying over the site during bat surveys undertaken at the site. The survey results were as follows: six species are Species of Principal Importance; five are Red listed species and four Amber listed species; one is included in the Halton LBAP (song thrush). In total, two of these species of conservation concern are assessed as being probable breeding species (dunnock and yellowhammer), five as possible breeding species and two species (greylag goose and tawny owl) as flying over the site. A list of the species of conservation concern along with their different designations, is given in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Birds of Conservation Concern Recorded at the Site

Common Name	Scientific Name	WCA Schedule 1	Red List	Amber List	S41	Halton LBAP
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			✓	✓	
Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Sch 1		✓		
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		✓	
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		✓		✓	
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓		✓	✓
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓		✓	
Tawny owl**	<i>Strix aluco</i>			✓		
Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			✓		
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓		✓	

* Under the Urban Birds Species Action Plan.

** Observed flying over the site during a bat survey.

- 4.7 The Species of Principal Importance, red listed and Halton LBAP species, skylark, was recorded in a field to the north of the site during the second survey.

Evaluation

- 4.8 The desktop study identified records for the Schedule 1 bird species kingfisher, peregrine falcon, little ringed plover, goshawk, fieldfare, redwing, brambling, firecrest, whimbrel and barn owl to be present within 2 km of the development site. The development site does not provide suitable habitat for breeding peregrine falcon, little ringed plover, kingfisher or whimbrel. Goshawk is a rare breeding bird in Cheshire and the Wirral with at least some of the birds having escaped or been released from captivity (Norman, 2008). Goshawks breed in dense woodland, particularly coniferous woodland and considered highly unlikely to breed within the vicinity of development site. Fieldfare, redwing, brambling and firecrest breed in woodland with fieldfare, redwing and brambling largely or entirely restricted to Scotland with breeding firecrests mainly confined to south-east England. The site may, however, provide suitable habitat for barn owls. The data search found three records of barn owl, two tetrad level records dated between 1997 and 1999, located between 1.1km and 3.95km to the west and south west and one record dated 2003 from a 1km grid square located approximately 1.75km to the south west of the site at the nearest point, dated 1999. The desktop study also identified a range of bird Species of Principal Importance and three Halton BAP species (song

thrush, reed bunting and skylark) and the site contains potentially suitable habitat to support some of these species.

- 4.9 The site contains a mix of habitats including: improved and poor semi-improved grassland (mostly grazed), species-rich and species-poor hedgerows, wet and dry ditches, two ponds, scattered trees and buildings. The land to the north and west of the site is largely under arable cultivation crossed by hedgerows and ditches with further ponds and an area of broadleaved woodland. Broadleaved woodland also adjoins the site to the east.
- 4.10 The site supports a reasonable diversity of bird species typical of farmland and woodland habitats, including eight species of conservation concern (excluding greylag goose observed flying over the site). No breeding Schedule 1 bird species were recorded within the site. Birds were generally associated with the outer boundary habitats plus the east-west hedgerow running along the public footpath in the centre of the site and around the perimeter of the farmyard (there was no access within the farmyard due to COVID-19 restrictions).
- 4.11 Breeding density is relatively low with a maximum of six singing males observed per site visit, with the exception of wren, where 12 males were recorded singing on both site visits. One third of the species were recorded as confirmed/probable breeders with half the species recorded as possible breeders only (the remaining species being non-breeders or recorded flying over the site). A large number of magpies (c. 55) were observed within one of the fields during the June site visit.
- 4.12 Of the species of conservation concern, none were confirmed as breeding, with two as probable breeders (dunnock and yellowhammer), the remainder being possible breeders (excluding greylag goose and tawny owl recorded flying over the site). The species of conservation concern include declining farmland species such as linnet and yellowhammer, declining urban species including house sparrow and starling.
- 4.13 Due to the range of bird species present (albeit at relatively low breeding density), including a number of species of conservation concern, the site is considered to be of value for birds at the District level.

5.0 Impacts and Recommendations

- 5.1 In brief the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) asks the Local Planning Authority to protect and enhance biodiversity and that any new developments should minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains.
- 5.2 S.40 of the NERC Act 2006 sets out the duty for public authorities to conserve biodiversity in England. Habitats and Species of Principal Importance for the conservation of biodiversity are identified by the Secretary of State in consultation with NE, under S.41 of the NERC Act for England. The Local Planning Authority and Government Conservation Organisations (e.g. Natural England and the Environment Agency) will expect account to be taken of these habitats and species in the overall layout and landscape strategy for the development.
- 5.3 Potential impacts on breeding birds resulting from the proposed development include loss or modification of habitat, disturbance during construction and operation and increased predation from domestic cats.
- 5.4 Habitats around the site boundary will be retained and protected during construction. Retained hedgerows and trees within and adjacent to the site must receive adequate provision for root protection in accordance with BS 5837:2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction' or the advice of a suitably qualified arboriculturalist. This may involve the use of appropriate tree/ hedgerow protection fencing to exclude construction works from root protection zones. A buffer of at least 5m should be maintained along retained

hedgerows which prohibits storage of materials or machinery within these areas. It is recommended that as many of the internal trees and hedgerows as possible are retained and protected during construction with any loss kept to a minimum. Short sections of four hedgerows will be removed to facilitate access through the site. Where there are existing gaps in hedgerows and where possible, these should be utilised for road accesses to minimise the loss of hedgerow.

- 5.5 Both ponds within the site will be retained providing an additional habitat type, foraging resource and source of water for birds. An additional two areas of permanent water will be created within the attenuation features within the site.
- 5.6 Gardens and areas of public open space within the proposed development will provide some compensatory habitat in the long term. There will also be a minimum 8m easement within the site along the watercourse which runs along the northern boundary of the site.
- 5.7 It is recommended that any habitat lost to the proposed development is compensated on a minimum like for like basis. Compensatory habitat could include planting up of gaps within retained hedgerows with native species of local provenance. Compensatory habitat will comprise native species of local provenance or wildlife friendly berry/nectar rich shrubs. To negate interim losses while new habitats establish, several bird boxes of various types will be located within adjacent woodland or on retained mature trees within the site.
- 5.8 It is considered likely that, with retention of the boundary habitats and the two ponds within the site, the 8m easement along the northern boundary and planting provided within gardens and areas of public open space, the site will continue to support a similar range of species to that currently recorded.
- 5.9 To mitigate potential impacts on declining farmland species yellowhammer and linnet, it is recommended that the hedgerow along the northern boundary of the site, bordering fields to the north, is enhanced by planting gaps and increasing species diversity. The 8m wide habitat buffer within the site to the brook along the northern boundary will be managed as species-rich rough grass to provide food in the form of insects and seeds for yellowhammer and linnet. The largely arable fields to the north of the site will provide continued foraging and breeding habitat for these species.
- 5.10 Subject to the design of the development, there may be increased nesting opportunities for declining urban species such as starling and house sparrow.
- 5.11 To avoid offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and to minimise disturbance to breeding birds, ideally any site clearance works (including building demolition) should be undertaken outside the breeding bird season (March through to August/September inclusive). However, it should be noted that if weather conditions are favourable i.e. after a particularly mild winter, this period can start earlier. If habitat clearance works are expected during or near to the breeding season, then the impacted zone should be checked by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to any works taking place. Should a nest be identified and depending on the species and or location, a suitable buffer zone would be required to ensure the birds are allowed to continue their breeding cycle. This approach is only suitable for relatively small areas of habitat.
- 5.12 It is considered likely that the majority of bird species present will become accustomed to general disturbance levels during operation of the development, most of the species recorded being typical garden birds or species associated with the woodland which will be retained. The arable land to the north in conjunction with the enhancement of the northern hedgerow and appropriate design and management of the minimum 8m easement should provide continued habitat for declining farmland birds such as yellowhammer and linnet. Future

habitat management within the site must avoid the breeding bird season to safeguard nesting birds.

- 5.13 The proposed residential development is likely to result in an increase in the number of domestic cats with a potential increase in predation of local wildlife. The most recent figures of how many creatures are killed by cats are from the Mammal Society which estimates that cats in the UK catch up to 100 million prey items over spring and summer, of which 27 million are birds. This is the number of prey items which were known to have been caught; it is unknown how many more the cats caught, but did not bring home, or how many escaped but subsequently died.
- 5.14 Despite the large numbers of birds killed by cats in gardens, there is no clear scientific evidence that such mortality is causing bird populations to decline. Many millions of birds die naturally every year, mainly through starvation, disease or other forms of predation. There is also evidence that cats tend to take weak or sickly birds.
- 5.15 Of the millions of baby birds hatched each year, most will die before they reach breeding age. This is quite natural and each pair of birds needs only to rear two young that survive to breeding age to replace themselves and maintain the population.
- 5.16 It is considered likely that most of the birds killed by cats would have died anyway from other causes before the next breeding season, so cats are unlikely to have a major impact on populations.
- 5.17 Gardens may provide a breeding habitat for at least 20 per cent of the UK populations of house sparrows, starlings, greenfinches, blackbirds and song thrushes, four of which are declining across the UK. For this reason the RSPB advises it would be prudent to try to reduce cat predation as, although it is not causing the declines, some of these species are already under pressure¹. The RSPB's website includes advice on stopping cats catching and killing birds² and also on how cats can be deterred from gardens³. A leaflet could be included in home buyers packs to raise awareness and help reduce the risk of cat predation.

Enhancement Recommendations

- 5.18 In line with national planning policy new developments should ensure that there is a minimum of no net loss of biodiversity at a site and result in an overall biodiversity gain.
- 5.19 Further potential recommendations to ensure that there is an overall biodiversity gain for birds are as follows:
- Installation of additional nesting bird boxes, including within new buildings. Provision of sparrow terraces and starling boxes within new buildings would provide additional nesting opportunities for these species within the site.
 - Creation of a habitat buffer to the woodland to the east of the site designed to provide a more structured and sinuous edge to the woodland to provide enhanced nesting and foraging opportunities for birds.
 - Increase links between the garden areas by planting up front and rear gardens with native or wildlife friendly berry/nectar rich shrubs.
 - Trellis on fencing and on walls for nectar rich wall climbers providing nesting and foraging opportunities for birds.

¹ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/animal-deterrents/cats-and-garden-birds/are-cats-causing-bird-declines/>

² <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/animal-deterrents/cats-and-garden-birds/stop-cats-catching-and-killing-birds/>

³ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/animal-deterrents/cats-and-garden-birds/cat-deterrents/>

- The use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) providing additional foraging habitat for birds.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The breeding bird survey on the land off Chapel Lane, Widnes was undertaken at a suitable time of year by an experienced ecologist in accordance with best practice guidelines. The survey identified a range of common and widespread bird species to be using the site along with, six species of Species of Principal Importance, one LBAP species and nine Birds of Conservation Concern.
- 6.2 The habitats around the boundaries of the site, the majority of the trees and hedgerows within the site and the two ponds will be retained and protected during construction. Gardens and areas of public open space within the proposed development will provide some compensatory habitat in the long term. There will also be a minimum 8m easement within the site along the watercourse which runs along the northern boundary of the site which will be managed and enhanced to provide continued habitat for declining farmland birds.
- 6.3 It is recommended that any habitat lost to the proposed development is compensated on a minimum like for like basis. To negate interim losses while new habitats establish, ideally several bird boxes of various types should be located within adjacent woodland or on retained mature trees within the site. Subject to the design of the development, there may be increased nesting opportunities for declining urban species such as starling and house sparrow
- 6.4 It is considered likely that, with retention of the boundary habitats, the minimum 8m easement along the northern boundary and planting provided within gardens and areas of public open space, the site will continue to support a similar range of species to that currently recorded. In line with current planning policy recommendations are made to deliver ecological enhancement.

7.0 References

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**Figures 1a & 1b:
Breeding Bird Survey Activity Maps, Rounds 1 & 2**

BTO Species Codes:

B.	Blackbird
BC	Blackcap
BT	Blue tit
BZ	Buzzard
C.	Carrion crow
CG	Canada goose
CH	Chaffinch
CC	Chiffchaff
D.	Dunnock
FP	Feral pigeon
GJ	Greylag goose
GO	Goldfinch
GR	Greenfinch
GT	Great tit
HS	House sparrow
J.	Jay
LI	Linnet
LT	Long-tailed tit
MG	Magpie
MH	Moorhen
R.	Robin
SG	Starling
ST	Song thrush
WH	Whitethroat
WP	Woodpigeon
WR	Wren
WW	Willow warbler
Y.	Yellowhammer



Chapel Lane, Widnes

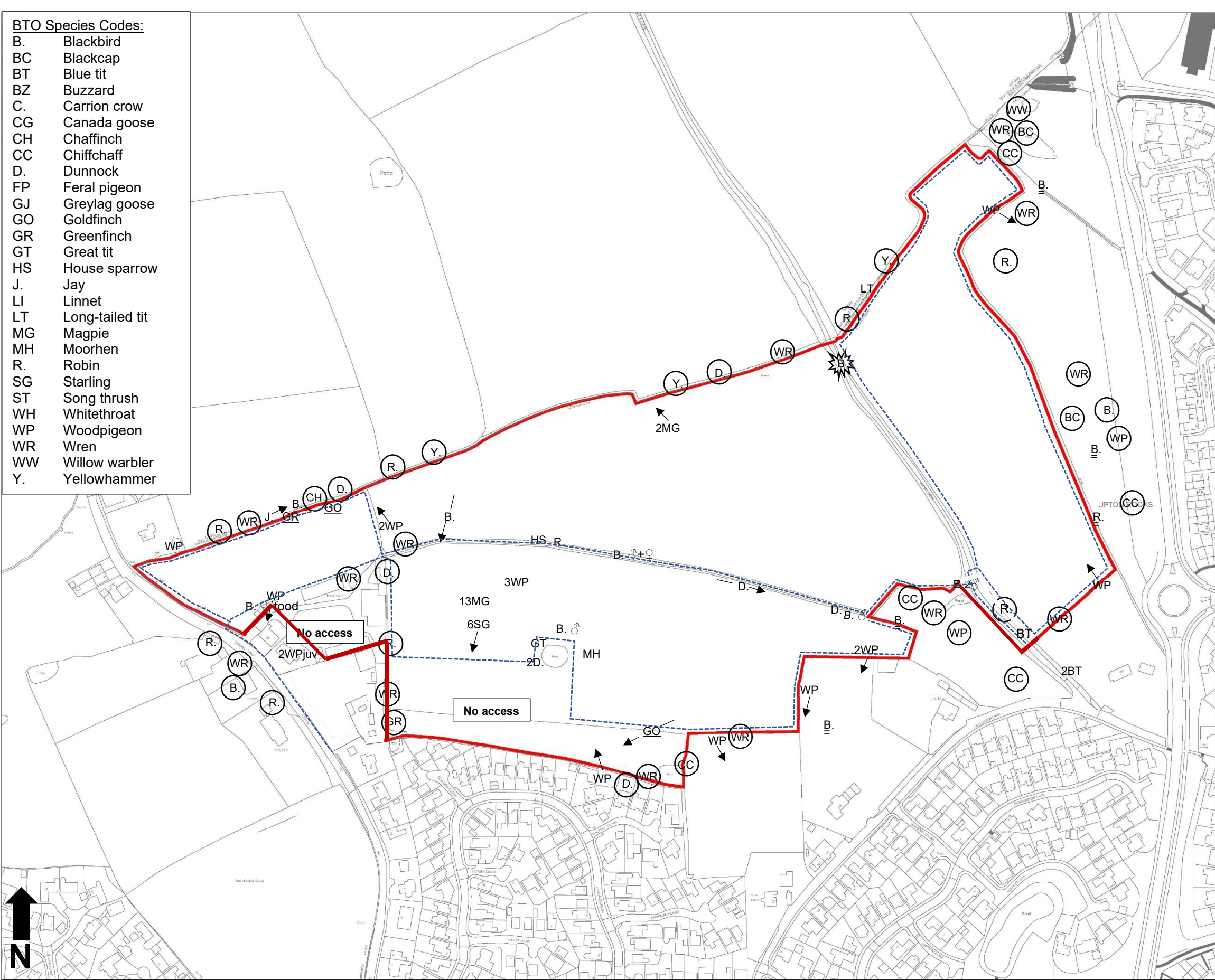
Figure 1a:
Breeding Birds Survey
Results Map
Round 1 – 11.05.2020

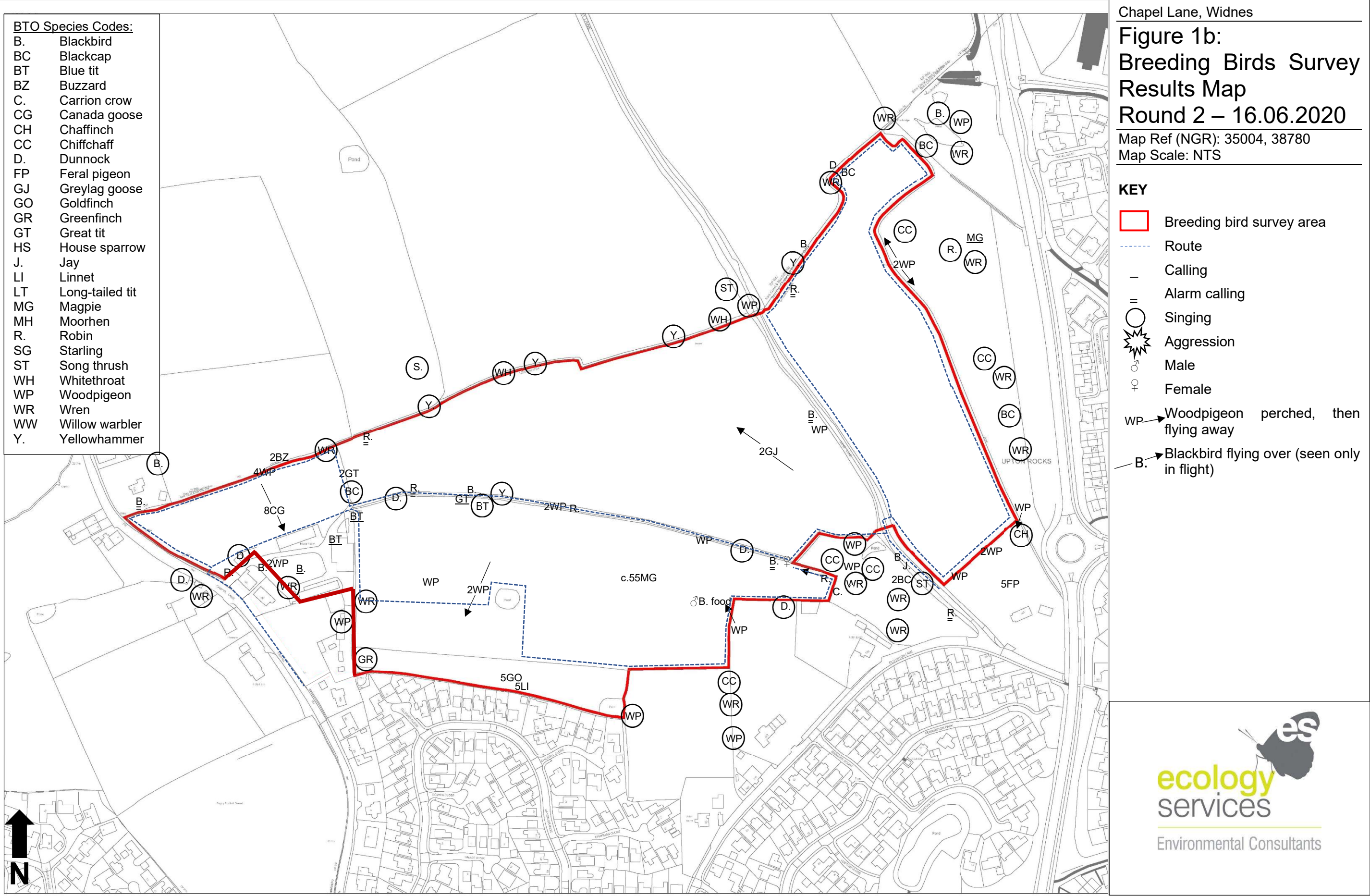
Map Ref (NGR): 35004, 38780

Map Scale: NTS

KEY

- Breeding bird survey area
- Route
- Calling
- Alarm calling
- Singing
- Aggression
- Male
- Female
- Woodpigeon perched, then flying away
- Blackbird flying over (seen only in flight)





Appendix 1: List of Bird Species Recorded

Common Name	Scientific Name	Indicative Breeding Status	Comments
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	CO	At least one singing male present on both visits within woodland to east of site. Alarm calls heard and two males exhibiting aggression. Pair observed in suitable habitat. Male blackbird seen carrying food on second visit.
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	PR	2 males heard singing on both visits in woodland to east of site.
Blue tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	PO	Species observed in suitable breeding habitat in breeding season; 1 singing male on second visit.
Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	PO	Two buzzards present at western end of site during second survey visit in possible nesting habitat.
Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	FO	8 geese flew over western end of site during second visit.
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	PO	Single males heard singing at opposite ends of the site on first and second visits.
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	PR	At least 4 males heard singing in similar locations on both site visits.
Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	PO	Single bird present in possible nesting habitat on second visit.
Dunnoek	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	PR	4 males singing on both visits with one registration in similar location. Possible juvenile observed during second visit.
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	PO	Bird calling and calling bird flying over western end of site on first site visit. 5 birds in flock with 5 linnet on southern boundary on second visit.
Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	PO	Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat.
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	PR	Male singing in same location at western end of site on both survey visits.
Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	FO	2 birds flew over the site on second visit.
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	PO	Single bird observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat.
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	PO	Single bird observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat.
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	PO	5 birds in mixed flock with 5 goldfinch on second survey visit.
Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	PO	Single bird seen at eastern end of site on first survey visit.
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	PO	13 magpies present in central field on first survey visit with c. 55 in same field on second visit. One or two birds observed elsewhere within the site. Magpie/corvid nest noted on second visit, uncertain whether occupied.
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	PO	Single bird observed during first survey visit near pond in centre of site.
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	PR	6 singing males recorded during first visit with a singing male or alarm-calling birds present in four of the locations on the second visit.
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	PO	Single singing male during first visit and two during second visit in 3 different locations.
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	PO	6 birds feeding in central field on first visit.
Tawny owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	FO	Seen flying from the woodland to the east of the site on the bat survey on 16 th September 2020.
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	PO	Two males singing on second site visit.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Indicative Breeding Status	Comments
Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	PO	Single male singing in woodland east of site on first visit.
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	PR	Up to four singing males recorded during second visit, one in same location as on first visit. Two juveniles observed at western end of the site during first visit.
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	PR	12 males recorded singing on both site visits including several individuals at similar locations.
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	PR	Up to five males singing on second visit, three in similar locations to first visit. Mostly along northern site boundary with one on central hedgerow.

PR = Probable breeder. PO = Possible breeding. CO = Confirmed breeder. FO = Flying over site. NB = Non-breeder