



# **GREAT GROVEHURST FARM, SITTINGBOURNE**

**G H Dean & Co Ltd**

Date of Report: March 2018



## Wintering Bird Surveys for Great Grovehurst Farm

Client: G H Dean & Co Ltd

Reference: J006475

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**NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

Site location and size	Great Grovehurst Farm, Sittingbourne; TQ 904 666 ; 4.8ha
Scope and purpose of Works	Wintering Bird Survey to inform a planning application for the site
Dates of site visits and names of surveyors	January – March 2018; Dan Sullivan
Overview	The survey found five species of conservation value flying over site, on site or at site boundaries. The value of the wintering populations of these species was considered of only site/local value due to low numbers seen. Nine common species not of significant value were also observed on site. No birds of species forming designated features of either Medway Estuary Marshes SPA or Swale SPA were seen during the survey
Action Required for Planning and/or Legal Compliance	No further works required

**CONTENTS**

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	Objectives of Study.....	1
	General Description of Site .....	1
	Nomenclature .....	1
	The Swale SPA .....	1
<b>2</b>	<b>Methods.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Results .....</b>	<b>4</b>
	Assessment .....	4
<b>4</b>	<b>Ecological Considerations and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Limitations of Survey and Report .....</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>REFERENCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>I</b>
	<b>Appendix I: Results for all Bird Species Seen on Site .....</b>	<b>II</b>

**1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 In January 2018, Ecosulis was commissioned by G H Dean to undertake a wintering bird survey for land at Great Grovehurst Farm, Sittingbourne. It is understood that development proposals for the site include new housing with associated gardens and roads.

1.2 Ecologists from Ecosulis visited the site between January and March 2018 to undertake the survey. Access was provided by the landowner.

**Objectives of Study**

1.3 The objectives of this study are: to provide information on the existing ecological conditions at the site with regards to wintering birds; to identify potential constraints and opportunities that wintering birds may pose to the development plans; and to identify further ecological studies that may be required to ensure that wintering birds are fully considered within the proposals.

**General Description of Site**

1.4 The site is located on the northern outskirts of Grovehurst and is centred on OS grid reference TQ 904 666. It covers an area of 4.8 ha about 22% of which includes previously developed land comprised of a former farm building complex now removed.

1.5 The site is surrounded by transport infrastructure to three sides including a railway line to the east and with an established residential estate to the south.

**Nomenclature**

1.6 The common name only of flora and fauna species is given in the main text of this report; however, Latin names are used for species where no common name is available. All plant names follow the nomenclature of Stace (2010).

**The Swale SPA**

1.7 The Swale SPA is located south of the Thames Estuary within the south-east of England, and is located 880m to the north-east of the development site. It consists of a complex of brackish and fresh water floodplain, ditches, saltmarsh and mudflats. Together they provide great habitat for a wide variety of invertebrate and algae species which, in turn, support a wide range of bird species including waders. During the summer months the area supports species such as marsh harriers, breeding waders and mandarin gulls, and during the migration and winter seasons supports a variety of ducks, geese and waders. The Swale provides crucial habitat for these species and supports large percentages of the UK's populations including 12 breeding pairs of Mediterranean Gull which represents 12% of the breeding population in Great Britain.

1.8 Overwintering birds associated with the SPA include:

- Black-tailed godwit

- Grey plover
- Knot
- Pintail
- Redshank
- Shoveler

## 2 METHODS

2.1 A total of three site visits were undertaken on the site on 9 January, 11 and 27 February 2018. The survey on the 9 January comprised a habitat assessment. The site was walked by an experienced ecologist in the early morning. A route was walked which allowed parts of the site to be observed. All birds seen or heard within the survey area were identified and recorded. Surveys were undertaken during suitable weather conditions, with no heavy rain or strong winds.

2.2 The value of the winter bird assemblage present on site has been assessed by looking at the conservation value of the species present and the number of each species found using the site. Where significant numbers of a particular species are found this may indicate an important population on site. Based on the combined information on species found and numbers present as well as habitats on site it is possible to make an assessment of the overall value of the wintering bird population on site.

- Assessment of the conservation value of species has been made using the following criteria, with bird species included in the lists described below being considered to have conservation importance:
- Species of recognised international conservation importance - species listed on Annex 1 of EC Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds 1979.
- Species on Red and Amber lists of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) in the UK
- Species listed in the NERC Act (2006), Section 41: Species of Principal Importance in England – This lists bird species which must be considered when determining planning applications. Species considered of importance include those previously considered priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and still considered to be of priority in post 2010 UK Biodiversity Framework. Local Biodiversity Action Plans also have priority species considered of importance within counties.

2.3 The surveys were undertaken by Peter Howarth and Dan Sullivan MCIEEM, both experienced ecologists representing Ecosulis.

### 3 RESULTS

3.1 A total of 14 bird species were noted on site, at boundaries or over the site during the survey. The species flying over or at site boundaries were all considered likely to enter the site at least occasionally. Of the species seen, five are of conservation interest. These five species are either on the RSPB Birds of Conservation Concern Red or Amber lists, listed as Species of Principal Importance in the NERC Act (2006), Section 41 or listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981). A table including all species seen is attached as Annex 1. Maps showing locations of sightings are shown on Figure 1.

Table 1: Bird species of conservation interest observed during the survey

Species	Conservation status	Location seen	Survey 1 (Feb 11th)	Survey 2 (Feb 27th)	Max. count / Days seen
Black headed gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> )	Amber list	Flying over, likely to land on site to forage or loaf	0	1	1/1
Dunnock ( <i>Prunella modularis</i> )	Amber list NERC S41	On site boundary	1	0	1/1
Fieldfare ( <i>Turdus pilaris</i> )	Red list Schedule 1 WCA	In woodland strip at boundary	0	23	23/1
Lesser black-backed gull ( <i>Larus fuscus</i> )	Amber list	Flying over, likely to land on site to forage or loaf	1	1	1/2
Starling ( <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> )	Red list Herts Red List NERC S41	In eastern half of site.	0	3	1/3

#### Assessment

3.2 The survey area is an arable field bordered by a railway and two busy roads with remaining edges bordered by housing. In the local area, Sittingbourne and Iwade are surrounded by large areas of arable land with no roads crossing them and well away from residential areas. The survey although only covering part of winter found no important bird species assemblages using the site. It seems likely that this would also be the case earlier in the winter also given the presence of much larger areas of farmland locally away from housing and busy roads. Wetland birds may be more



likely to forage away from roads and housing as noise and activity in these areas may deter them.

Table 2: Assessment of value of populations of notable species on site

Species	Comments	Value
Black headed gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> )	One seen flying over on one visit. Likely that small numbers may forage or loaf on site during winter. Larger numbers may forage in the field during ploughing.	Site/Local
Dunnock ( <i>Prunella modularis</i> )	Single dunnock seen on western site boundary. Small numbers likely to be present year round. Likely to remain in areas of dense cover around site edges.	Site/Local
Fieldfare ( <i>Turdus pilaris</i> )	23 seen on second visit foraging in trees on eastern site boundary. Roaming winter flocks likely to forage in scrub and trees on site boundary during winter. Numbers seen were not unusual for farmland habitat with hedgerows in winter	Site/Local
Lesser black-backed gull ( <i>Larus fuscus</i> )	One seen flying over on each visit. Likely that small numbers may forage or loaf on site during winter. Larger numbers may forage in the field during ploughing.	Site/Local
Starling ( <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> )	Several starling seen on site close to eastern boundary. May forage on site larger numbers in roaming flocks at times during winter.	Site/Local

- 3.3 Based on the results from the survey visits, the wintering bird assemblage on site seen during the visits is considered to be of at most local value only. Although some species of conservation interest were present, these were found only in low numbers. Of the common species, numbers seen indicated typical density of populations for the habitat types found on site. The assemblage is considered typical of lowland arable land with boundary scrub/woodland or hedgerows.
- 3.4 The majority of bird species were observed in boundary habitat in scrub and woodland. The arable fields themselves contained few species being used by only very small numbers of birds during the visits.

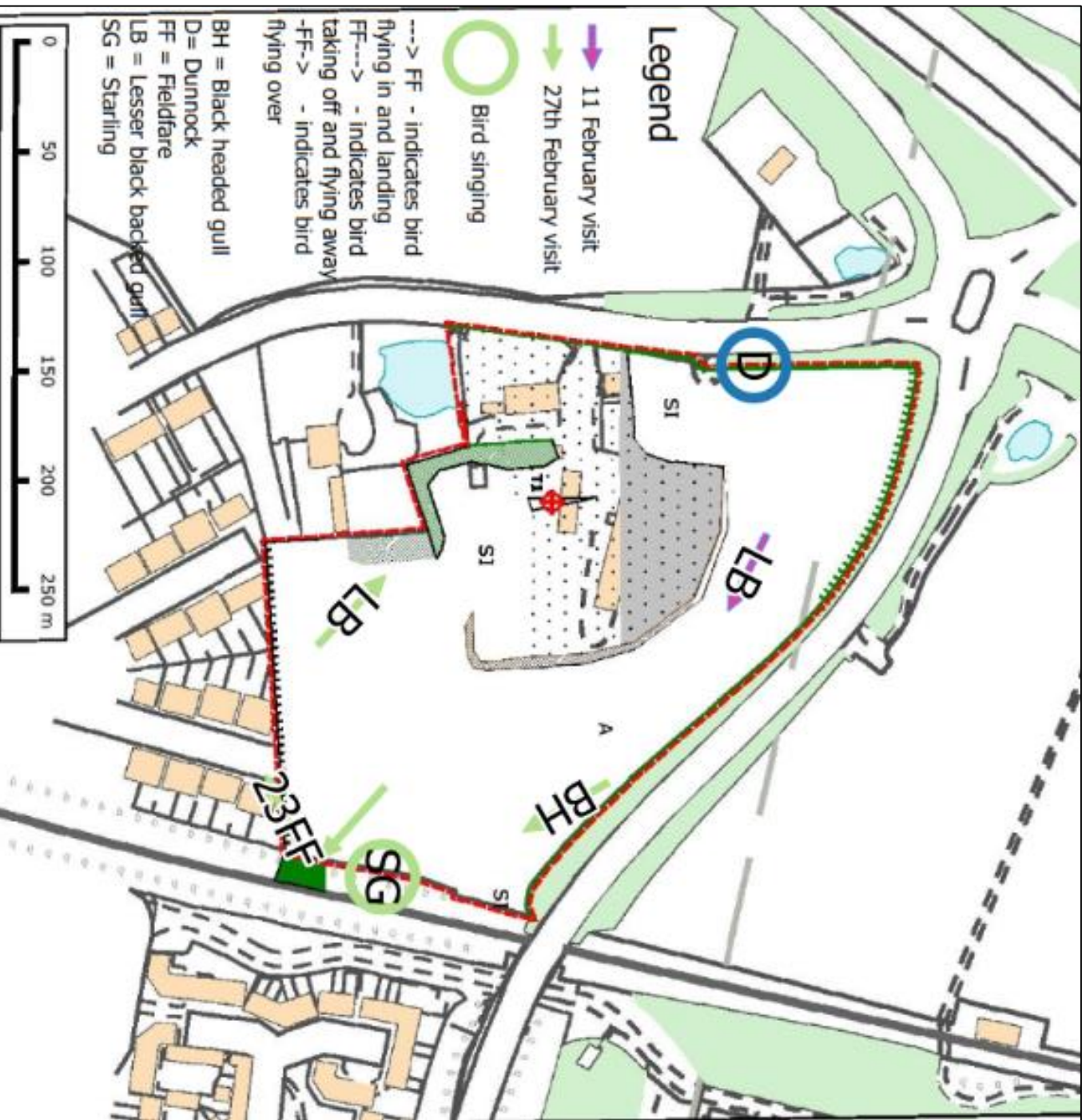
#### **4 ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 This section provides considerations in relation to the ecology of the site and any adjacent habitats that should be considered within development proposals to ensure that impacts on ecology are avoided and / or mitigated within the scheme. It is recommended that a review of local planning policies and objectives set out within the UK and local Biodiversity Action Plans for habitats and species is undertaken to ensure that these are taken into consideration within any detailed design.
- 4.2 Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) it is a criminal offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird (with some exceptions), to take or destroy any eggs and to take, destroy or damage a nest which is being built or is in use by nesting birds. Even nesting birds commonly believed to be pest species, such as feral pigeons are protected under this legislation. The breeding season for most species is generally considered to extend between 1st March and 31st July inclusive, although some species such as pigeons may breed over an extended period, often into winter. Outside the breeding season nesting birds are unlikely to be found during clearance, although if nesting birds are found the law still applies. Within the nesting season it is best to have any vegetation or buildings checked for nesting birds before clearance due to a high risk of active nests being present.
- 4.3 For birds listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (such as the black redstart, kingfisher, red kite among others) the protection is increased and it is also an offence to disturb them whilst in the process of nest building or at a nest containing eggs or young. It is an offence also to disturb dependent young.
- 4.4 The Swale Special Protection Area (SPA) is located 880m north-east of the site and supports the following overwintering species:
- Black-tailed godwit
  - Grey plover
  - Knot
  - Pintail
  - Redshank
  - Shoveler
- 4.5 None of these birds were recorded using the site during the wintering bird survey.
- 4.6 The proposed development will remove an area of field which appears to be of only local value for wintering birds and appears not to be used by any species important to the nearby SPA site. It seems likely that there would be no significant impact on the SPA area due to development of the site, and as a result no further surveys are recommended. Based on the distance to the SPA, it is also unlikely that the works will cause direct or indirect disturbance to birds utilising the SPA. A Construction


Environmental Management Plan will be compiled for the site to ensure that the works minimise their impact on the local environment.

**5 LIMITATIONS OF SURVEY AND REPORT**

- 5.1 This report records wildlife found during the survey and anecdotal evidence of sightings. It does not record any plants or animals that may appear at other times of the year and were therefore not evident at the time of visit. Some species that might use the site or be apparent at other times of year, or only in certain years, would not have been detected.
- 5.2 The behaviour of animals can be unpredictable and may not conform to standard patterns recorded in current scientific literature. This report therefore cannot predict with absolute certainty that animal species will occur in apparently suitable locations or habitats or that they will not occur in locations or habitats that appear unsuitable.
- 5.3 The advice contained in this report relate primarily to factual survey results and general guidance only. On all legal matters you are advised to take legal advice.



**Key**

 Site Boundary



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Client	G H Dean	
Project	Great Grovehurst Farm	
Title	<b>Wintering Bird Survey</b>	
Date	Scale	Figure
March 2018	SCHEMATTC ONLY	1

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**Appendix I: RESULTS FOR ALL BIRD SPECIES SEEN ON SITE**

Species	Conservation status	Survey 1 (Feb 11th)	Survey 2 (Feb 27th)	Max. count/ Days seen
Blackbird ( <i>Turdus merula</i> )	Green list	1	4	4/2
Black headed gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> )	Amber list	0	1	1/1
Blue tit ( <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> )	Green list	2	1	2/2
Carrion crow ( <i>Corvus corone corone</i> )	Green list	1	2	2/2
Dunnock ( <i>Prunella modularis</i> )	Amber list NERC S41	1	0	1/1
Fieldfare ( <i>Turdus pilaris</i> )	Red list Schedule 1 WCA	0	23	23/1
Goldfinch ( <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> )	Green list	0	1	1/1
Great tit ( <i>Parus major</i> )	Green list	1	1	1/1
Lesser black-backed gull ( <i>Larus fuscus</i> )	Amber list	1	1	1/2
Magpie ( <i>Pica pica</i> )	Green list	1	2	2/2
Robin ( <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> )	Green list	1	1	1/1
Starling ( <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> )	Red list Herts Red List NERC S41	0	3	3/1
Woodpigeon ( <i>Columba palumbus</i> )	Green list	1	10	10/2
Wren ( <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> )	Green list	0	1	1/1