

Request to Provide Mitigation for development

Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust (MGET) have been approached to offer a solution for some lost habitat as part of a development in nearby Grappenhall. They are looking to mitigate for is the loss of habitat for circa 3 breeding pairs of skylark (breeding never confirmed, but assumed) and over-wintering habitat for lapwing. The max count we had was 200 birds on one visit, but on other visits less than 50.

The development site itself is very large (20ha loss of arable habitat, 59ha of improved grassland but the breeding/over-wintering bird habitat did not constitute all of this) and quite a substantial mitigation is already proposed, but not suitable for lapwing or skylark. The planning authority's representative is looking for a 20 year commitment.

Summary Proposal

Together with the developer representative we have determined that Upper Moss Side may be a suitable location for off-site mitigation. It's within the same planning authority, is within suitable migration for any existing individuals and offers appropriate room for habitat improvement. It's a 30HA site that can be apportioned down within existing compartments.

We believe the best intervention is an autumnal graze of 10-18 cattle that might deliver suitable breeding for Skylark on approx. 20HA of the site, with the opportunity for the foraging (and possibly breeding too) for multiple Lapwing. There may be benefits for other rare birds too on this site. In principle we would aim for less cattle over longer periods as a preference.

Initially to get the site going this would be intensive for the first 3 years but then reduced over the next 17 years. We expect that the areas we are looking at are compartments 1 and 3 (see aerial photos below). Because of the long time frame we need a significant contingency allowance and we are also including a Management fee to ensure its longevity. To deliver this over 20 years, we believe a sum of £232,096.48 is required.

Key points of conservation grazing at Upper Moss Side

Total area available for management: 30ha (16ha saltmarsh, 12ha grassland, 2ha grassland)

Previous management: for BAP bird species – skylark (red), lapwing (red), meadow pipit (amber), redshank (amber), curlew (amber), reed bunting (amber).

MGET has a previous relationship with the landowner who shares some similar objectives. However a legal agreement ensuring land management rights for 20 years would be needed, between MGET and landowner, to ensure this proposal is deliverable for the client. Discussions with the landowner have started and are not expected to cause any delays to the project.

Management intervention to support saltmarsh conditions:

- Conservation grazing
 - o Low density grazing (1-1.25 head/hectare), start of grazing preferably in autumn/winter to let herd establish roaming regime (birds choose nesting sites avoiding popular paths of cattle); creates different grass heights and some disturbed ground, prevents shrub growth.
 - o Year long grazing possible – reduction in herd size might be necessary
 - o Rotational grazing can add benefits to habitats and farmer
- Validation of management interventions:
 - o Need for regular surveys of at least birds to determine breeding success/failure and therefore improvement of habitat structure, added to MGET's regular Common Bird Census and Wintering Birds Surveys.
 - o Need to concentrate on Skylark breeding and lapwing foraging.

Infrastructure:

- Fences: have been installed 5-7 years ago and should be in overall good condition but will need renewal throughout the course of the project. Improvements to fences might be necessary, especially near the estuary edge due to erosion.
- Freshwater supply (issues with pressure known in the area) and hence need for bowsers to be brought in as well as water troughs.
- Holding pens (essential for safe transfer of animals and protection from high tides/high waters).
- Animal welfare (daily checks, particularly on Saltmarsh, veterinary cover)
- Access to land is through a private road – permission from landowner needed for vehicle access.

Estimated Costs:

DETAILED COSTS	TOTAL
GRAZING (CATTLE HIRE, SUPPLY OF BREEDS, LICENSES, TOP UP FEED AND ANIMAL WELFARE)	£ 159,190.49
FRESHWATER SUPPLY	£ 16,310.50
HAULAGE COSTS	£ 6,524.20
FENCING AND MAINTENANCE	£ 46,209.05
MONITORING & REPORTING	£ 52,193.60
CAPITAL COSTS	
WATER TROUGHS	£ 17,916.39
HOLDING PEN REPLACEMENTS	£ 23,014.06
TOTAL	£ 321,358.30

Pro rata costs			
	Area (HA)	%	Costs
Compartment 1	16	53%	£ 171,391.10
Compartment 2	12	40%	£ 128,543.32
Compartment 3	2	7%	£ 21,423.89
Total	30	100%	£ 321,358.30

PROJECT COST

Compartment costs (1+3)	£ 192,814.98
10% contingency	£ 19,281.50
20 yr Management fee	£ 20,000.00
Total	£ 232,096.48

Caveats:

Whilst it is MGET's best intention to deliver this as described there are a number of issues outside of our control that could impact the ambitions of the project, such as climate change, natural events (i.e. flooding), disease impacts (i.e. avian flu, Covid 19) and similar factors that will mean, despite best endeavours, ambitions are not met. However MGET has a remit in its articles of association to;

- Increase biodiversity in its area of operation
- Monitor biodiversity in its area
- Research impacts on biodiversity.

Hence should MGET deviate from those objectives not only can stakeholders challenge MGET, but any member of the public can challenge it too, through the Charity Commission too. We hope this gives assurances of MGET as an actor in good faith. MGET will also reserve the right to increase environmental gain on any project in additional ways should the opportunity arise.

Prepared September 2021 by AD/DC

