Regarding: Core Strategy Examination in Public: Hearing Matter 7.1

In relation to the above matter I have summarised below the background to the ecological work undertaken at LDF0612 (Dinnington West) to inform Local Plan site allocation decision making. I have also attached a memo dated 01/05/2013 to Helen Sleigh that summarises the results of the Wintering Bird survey element of the ecological work, including site LDF0612. Also attached is an extract from a memo dated 09.09.2013 to Helen Sleigh; the extract summarises the results of the full extent of ecological survey work undertaken at site LDF0612.

Background to Ecological Survey
In-house ecological desk study assessment undertaken during 2011/2012 included:

- Assessment of all potential allocation sites for proximity to statutory and non-statutory wildlife sites
- Assessment of all 'preferred' allocation sites for the recorded presence of protected or prioritised species and for mapped priority habitat presence

In addition Habitat Regulation Assessment scoping was undertaken by Jacobs as part of the Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy Publication Version. This work identified those potential allocation sites that may support species connected to the designation of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. This work highlighted 5 sites that maybe supporting populations, or parts of populations, of Golden Plover that could be linked to the Peak District Moors (South Pennines Moors Phase 1) Special Protection Area.

The results of these two areas of assessment were used to prioritise the provision of new ecological field study to inform the detailed site allocation selection process within the preparation of the Draft Sites & Policies document. Priority was given to data collection on those 5 sites where the HRA work had recommended that ecological assessment and Golden Plover study should be undertaken. Ecological survey work was also proposed for potential allocation sites where specific ecological issues had been identified in desk study work.

In September 2012 a tender document was prepared to engage ecological consultants to survey 13 sites that, based on the above assessment work, were considered to “require early ecological assessment to establish whether there would be any ecological constraint to development that would suggest that a development allocation may be unsuitable or constrained”. The specific survey requirements for LDF0612 are as follows:
Following the RMBC Procurement procedures Wildscapes were selected to undertake the survey work in two phases; wintering bird survey work from October 2012 to March 2013 and habitat and other species specific survey work from March 2013 to July 2013. Reporting was submitted at the end of each phase to the RMBC Ecology Development Officer for review.

Appendix One contains a memo (01.05.2013) summarising the results of the Wintering Bird Survey results from Carolyn Jones to Helen Sleigh.

Appendix Two contains an extract from a memo (09.09.2013) that summarises the results of the full range of ecological survey work undertaken. The extract includes the full content of the memo excluding potentially sensitive information on sites other than LDF0612.

Carolyn Jones
Ecology Development Officer

In connection with the 2012/13 ecological survey contract between RMBC and Wildscapes I have received the reports of the five sites surveyed for winter bird use. These sites had undergone Habitat Regulations Assessment screening (Jacobs, 2011) as part of the Rotherham Local Plan Core Strategy production; the screening recommended that if the sites were preferred for development then ecological assessment and Golden Plover study should be undertaken in relation to the potential for impact on the Peak District Moors (South Pennine Moors Phase 1) Special Protection Area (SPA).

The five sites surveyed for use by wintering birds are:
- LDF0469 Keeton Hall Road
- LDF0470 Former Colliery (Kiveton) North
- LDF0472 Kiveton Lane
- LDF0475 Chapel Way
- LDF0612 Dinnington West

Summary of Results
The key aim of establishing use of the above sites by Golden plover has been hampered by an unusually cold and protracted winter. A general absence of this species has been noted across south Yorkshire. However, the site visits have enabled consideration of each site and its suitability for this species. A number of sites are felt to be unattractive either due to small size, lack of visibility and levels of disturbance and this assessment can be fed into any future HRA work. The sites still considered to be attractive to this species will require further monitoring.

The survey work has identified those key features within each site that are supporting bird species during the winter and that are likely to support breeding activity. This information should be used to inform allocation decision making and any future development extent and layout design.

A number of sites have been highlighted as being of potential high interest; sites will be surveyed for habitat quality during spring / summer 2013 and the results of this information, alongside any additional survey work, will be used to make recommendations on suitability for development or for wildlife designation. An indication of potential for each site is provided below:
Summary of survey work undertaken
The survey methodologies used are appropriate and the level of survey effort is considered adequate to provide the data needed for the purpose of the surveys. There were no ecological constraints to the survey work; specific nocturnal survey work was not undertaken as this was not requested. In addition to expected overwintering / migrating bird species the survey work also collected data on winter use by non-migratory species. This additional data provides a better year-round picture of the use of the sites by all bird species. The reports include assessment at a national and local level providing an in depth level of understanding of how use of each individual site relates to wider population numbers and changes.

Recommendations arising from survey results
Three of the sites (LDF0472, LDF0475 and LDF0612) have recommendations for breeding bird survey work to inform future development decision making.

Site Summary Information
Comments are provided below on the results of each site surveyed; the full survey reports are also available.

- LDF0469 Keeton Hall Road
Report conclusion extract:
“As far as the field itself is concerned, little was found in terms of wintering birds. Most bird activity occurred on the eastern border of the plot in garden hedges. The single Ash tree plays a role in the wider locality as it provides a perch, and, presumably, nesting site bordering a larger completely open field. Any proposed development should take safe guarding these features into account. The presence of Grey Partridge during March does, however, raise the possibility of a significant breeding species using the site.”

15 bird species were recorded in total; none of which are visitor / migrant species associated with nearby protected sites. However, the site provides winter foraging and all of the species recorded could be expected to breed within the site. The majority of the breeding / nesting activity is likely to be concentrated in the hedgerow boundaries, the exception being Grey partridge, which are a ground nesting species. Five of the species are considered to be significant in terms of designation.

Golden plover were not recorded at this site but there has been a recorded absence of this species in south Yorkshire believed to be a result of the extended winter climate conditions that have occurred. However the site assessment indicates that this specific site may not be attractive to Golden plover due to lack of extended visibility.
This site currently falls within Local Wildlife Site LWS009 Axle Lane; the wider LWS qualifies as an important site for Golden plover and for the presence of *Euphrasia* spp. If this element of the LWS is now considered to be unsuitable for use by Golden plover it may be appropriate to reassess the LWS boundary.

Based on the survey work and the assessment of the results the future development of this site would not be prevented by wintering bird constraints. In relation to bird use of the site elements that would need to be considered and incorporated into development design would include the need to buffer the adjacent land of higher interest to overwintering bird species, the need to retain and enhance the boundary features and garden hedgerows and the need to avoid any disturbance to the entire site during the bird breeding season (March – July inclusive). Mitigation may also be needed to enhance nearby / adjacent land to ensure the long term provision of land attractive to Grey partridge. The site may support other species or taxonomic groups which receive protection or are priority species; additional information would be necessary to make a full ecological impact assessment if a development allocation is applied.

- **LDF0470 Former Colliery (Kiveton) North**
  
  Report conclusion extract:
  
  "*If this site is considered for development some effort should be made to preserve the regenerating strip of woodland on the northern border where much of the significant bird activity was located. Similarly the scrub and trees at the eastern end have utility for the local bird population and ideally should be preserved.*"

  
  A total of 36 species were recorded at the site; 33 of these using the site for roosting or feeding. Ten of the species recorded are of conservation concern or are nationally prioritised. The site provides winter foraging for a significant number of species and the report indicates that a good number also have the potential to use the site during the breeding season particularly in the areas of scrub / woodland regeneration and in adjacent wetland habitats.

  There were no ground nesting species recorded at the site and the report confirms that there are high levels of public use which will deter such species.

  Golden plover were not recorded at this site but there has been a recorded absence of this species in south Yorkshire believed to be a result of the extended winter climate conditions that have occurred. However the site assessment indicates that this specific site may not be attractive to Golden plover due to its small size and the high levels of disturbance.

  The site is within a candidate Local Wildlife Site with potential for qualification under habitat, bird assemblage and mammal criteria. Data collected within this survey contract will be used to support LWS assessment.

  Based on the survey work and the assessment of the results the future development of this site would not be prevented by wintering bird constraints. In relation to bird use of the site elements that would need to be considered and incorporated into development design would include the need to buffer the adjacent land of higher interest to overwintering bird species, the need to retain and enhance features supporting foraging and nesting bird species and the need to avoid any disturbance to the entire site during the bird breeding season (March – July inclusive). The site may support other species or taxonomic groups which receive protection or are priority species; additional information would be necessary to make a full ecological impact assessment if a development allocation is applied.

- **LDF0472 Kiveton Lane**
  
  Report conclusion extract:
  
  "*Limited use of the interior of the plot by wintering birds was noted during the surveying, with the vegetated fringes proving more attractive. The presence of singing Skylark during the last visit*"
and the presence of both Grey Partridge and Yellowhammer on the edges of the plot, or just beyond it, however, give some indication that the site may hold significant species during the breeding season, and the site also seems likely to hold a breeding pair of Mistle Thrush. The absence of one significant species, Golden Plover, should not be taken as indicative, as there seems to have been a general absence from the area during the survey period. A breeding bird survey is worth considering before any development decisions are made. If development is decided upon efforts should be made to preserve the border hedge system on the southern side. Mitigation could be provided by an enhancement of the quality of hedgerows on the northern side."

The survey found 31 species of bird at the site with 21 species actively using the site for feeding, resting or roosting. Detailed consideration is provided of use of the site by seven species which receive designation or are of conservation concern. The site should be considered of importance to these species for winter foraging but also, for the majority of these species, as a breeding site. The site has significance for ground nesting bird species (Grey partridge and Skylark) but other features, hedgerows and naturally regenerating land, will support other nesting activity.

Golden plover were not recorded at this site but there has been a recorded absence of this species in south Yorkshire believed to be a result of the extended winter climate conditions that have occurred. However, the report notes that the site is suitable to support a winter flock; it should be considered a significant species at this site.

The site is adjacent to a large LWS (LWS009 Axle Lane) that is known to support significant numbers of wintering Golden plover.

Based on the survey results and assessment the future development of this site could have a significant negative impact on bird species both in terms of over-wintering species and for breeding bird assemblages. Future development could incorporate mitigation for some species via the retention of hedgerows, boundary features and some semi-natural habitats; mitigation for loss of open habitat supporting over-wintering bird populations and ground nesting species would not be possible on-site. Consideration of the wider area, including additional survey work, and capacity for these species groups is needed to inform development allocation decisions. The site may support other species or taxonomic groups which receive protection or are priority species; additional information would be necessary to make a full ecological impact assessment if a development allocation is applied.

• LDF0475 Chapel Way

Report conclusion extract:
“This represents a small but rather good piece of farmland habitat. The numbers of Dunnock and Bullfinch are particularly noteworthy with the ‘central hedge’ playing a key role particularly for the latter species. The thick hedges on the northern side support good numbers of House Sparrow whilst the ditch on the eastern side, including the area of Willow, provides for extra species with a fondness for wetter habitats such as Willow Tit and Reed Bunting. With the probable exception of Woodcock all the species found during the surveying could also potentially breed on the site. With this in mind a breeding bird survey is likely to prove worthwhile and should be considered before development decisions are made.”

The survey recorded 42 species of bird at the site with 32 species actively using the site for feeding, resting or roosting. Detailed consideration is provided of use of the site by ten species which receive designation or are of conservation concern. The site should be considered of importance to these species for winter foraging but also, for the majority of these species, as a breeding site.
Small numbers of over-wintering Woodcock were recorded; Golden plover were not recorded at this site but there has been a recorded absence of this species in south Yorkshire believed to be a result of the extended winter climate conditions that have occurred. The report notes that the nearby larger fields may be more attractive to Golden plover but there are no constraints to this species using the surveyed site as well.

The site is adjacent to a candidate Local Wildlife Site with potential for qualification under habitat, bird assemblage and mammal criteria.

Based on the survey work and the assessment of the results the future development of this site may be constrained by wintering bird presence; additional survey and assessment of the site and the wider area and use by Golden plover is recommended to inform this position. Future development could also have a negative impact on breeding bird assemblages; mitigation could be incorporated to address this impact including the need to enhance and buffer any adjacent land of higher interest to overwintering bird species, the need to retain and enhance features supporting foraging and nesting bird species and the need to avoid any disturbance to the entire site during the bird breeding season (March – July inclusive). The site may support other species or taxonomic groups which receive protection or are priority species; additional information would be necessary to make a full ecological impact assessment if a development allocation is applied.

- **LDF0612 Dinnington West**

Report conclusion extract:

“Clearly, though far from perfect in terms of such aspects as overall hedgerow quality, the site supports a large number of species with high conservation designations. Certain areas, such as NW edge of the plot, have particularly diverse bird communities and contain a locally rare habitat; orchards. The presence of high numbers of Grey Partridge, Willow Tit, the colony of Tree Sparrows, and the presence of the specially protected Barn Owl merit particular attention. The latter species requires that no deliberate or reckless disturbance (i.e. with forewarning) is undertaken close to the nest site during the breeding season to comply with Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). Whilst the more heavily vegetated margins of the plot hold the highest number of rarer species, the open fields also support a number of species suffering both national and local declines. Though the hedgerows may not be of the highest standard in places this is somewhat offset by the presence of scrub and woodland on the adjoining margins providing suitable nest sites for such species as Grey Partridge.

The lack of Golden Plover on site during the surveying seems likely to be due a general absence in the area caused by prevailing weather conditions and should not be taken as an indication of the site’s true merit in regard to this species.

The site’s potential as a significant breeding area for several species with a high conservation designation would appear to warrant a breeding birds survey before any development decisions are made. An alternate to development would be promotion of more conservation based land use (through such schemes as Higher Level Stewardship) which could potentially create a farmland site of the highest order.”

The survey recorded 52 species of bird at the site with 49 species actively using the site for feeding, resting or roosting. Detailed consideration is provided of use of the site by 15 species which receive designation or are of conservation concern. The site should be considered of importance to these species for winter foraging but also, for the majority of these species, as a breeding site. Communication with landowners suggests that there are additional species (including species that are protected or priority species) using the site throughout the year.
The large site and mosaic of habitats support a significant range and number of bird species. It is felt that additional breeding bird data could suggest that the site is of a quality suitable for designation as a Local Wildlife Site.

Golden plover were not recorded at this site but there has been a recorded absence of this species in south Yorkshire believed to be a result of the extended winter climate conditions that have occurred. The site is considered suitable for supporting this species.

The site is adjacent to a large LWS (LWS009 Axle Lane) that is known to support significant numbers of wintering Golden plover.

Based on the survey results and assessment the future development of this site could have a significant negative impact on bird species both in terms of over-wintering species and for breeding bird assemblages. Additional survey work is recommended to inform future allocation; there is the potential that the site may meet Local Wildlife Site standards which would suggest that development is inappropriate. The site may support other species or taxonomic groups which receive protection or are priority species; additional information would be necessary to make a full ecological impact assessment if a development allocation is applied.

**Carolyn Jones**  
Ecology Development Officer
Appendix Two

memorandum

To: Helen Sleigh
Date: 9 September 2013

Contact: Carolyn Jones

Regarding: Local Plan Allocation Sites Ecological Survey work results (August 2013)
Ecological survey and assessment of a number of sites has been undertaken to inform decisions on future development allocation in the Rotherham Local Plan. The selection of sites for survey was based on the Core Scenario selection of sites provided by RMBC Planning Policy in mid 2012. The Core Scenario sites were reviewed in early 2013 in the final preparations of the draft Sites and Policies document, which meant that some of the sites are no longer proposed for development allocation.

The results of the ecological survey work and assessment (including the winter bird surveys) have been reviewed and are summarised below. The summary for each site considers key ecological interests, whether the current allocation proposal is wholly or partially appropriate and any recommendations for boundary change, allocation type or designation. In each case the full survey reports should be read alongside the summary provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site No.</th>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Surveyed</th>
<th>Proposed allocation 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0612</td>
<td>Dinnington West</td>
<td>Yes (habitats &amp; wintering birds)</td>
<td>Not included in 2013 sites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ecological assessment was required due to the site’s significant size and diversity and its proximity to two LWS; Habitat Regulation Assessment screening issues had also been raised.

The habitat assessment confirms the presence of a number of priority habitats within the site forming a valuable farmland mosaic. The site is likely to support a range of wildlife including bat species.

The wintering bird survey recorded 52 species with 49 species actively using the site for feeding, resting or roosting; 15 of these species are designated or are of conservation concern. The site should be considered of importance to these species for winter foraging but also, for the majority of these species, as a breeding site.

The large site and mosaic of habitats support a significant range and number of bird species. It is felt that additional breeding bird data could suggest that the site is of a quality suitable for designation as a Local Wildlife Site.

The decision to retain the Green Belt allocation is appropriate and supported. Contact with the landowners should be made to discuss the results of the survey work to inform site management and agree future ecological monitoring with a view to LWS assessment.
Summary of Results

Constraints
The key aim of the wintering bird survey work to establish use of sites by Golden plover was hampered by an unusually cold and protracted winter. A general absence of this species has been noted across south Yorkshire. However, the site visits enabled consideration of each site and its suitability for this species. A number of sites are felt to be unattractive either due to small size, lack of visibility and levels of disturbance and this assessment should be fed into any future HRA work. The sites still considered to be attractive to this species will require further monitoring.

Summary of survey work undertaken
The survey methodologies used are appropriate and the level of survey effort is considered adequate to provide the data needed for the purpose of the surveys. All survey work has been undertaken in accordance with the contract and with best practice standards. The results of the survey work are accepted.

Recommendations arising from survey results
Three of the sites (LDF0472, LDF0475 and LDF0612) have recommendations for breeding bird survey work to inform future development decision making. A number of sites have features that are very likely to support commuting and foraging bat species, e.g. hedgerows, mature trees and watercourses, likely presence should be accepted but additional survey work would be needed to confirm population dynamics.

Carolyn Jones
Ecology Development Officer