

## OBJECTION TO LOCAL PLAN - DEVELOPMENT ON THE PROTECTED GREEN BELT

**1. Objection:** NW LONDON RSPB GROUP are appalled at the suggestion that Vicarage Farm, Enfield should be turned over to development.

**2. Vicarage Farm:** RSPB members and local ornithologists have been monitoring the Wildlife, especially the Birds, at Vicarage Farm, Enfield, for a considerable number of years, because of its exceptional range of species more usually associated with traditionally managed less developed countryside.

**3. Ornithological Importance:** Vicarage Farm is one of the few remaining refuges for what used to be regarded as Common Countryside Birds e.g. Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*, Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, etc.

A remarkable 135 species have been recorded of which about a third regularly breed on or near the farm. In winter, the hedgerows may be thronged with Scandinavian Redwings *Turdus illacus* and Fieldfares *Turdus pilaris* and the fields abound with Finches & Pipits. Seasonal migrants such as Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*, European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*, Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* and Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* regularly stop off to reinvigorate. Rarer visitors have included Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*, etc. Raptors, including Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gentilis*, Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, are a common feature testifying to the richness of the habitats and profusion of feeding opportunities.

**4. Community Resource:** Consequently, Vicarage Farm is an important area for nature conservation and a Community Resource enabling local residents and visitors alike to reconnect with nature and enjoy the atmosphere of the by-gone countryside. Busy Local Authority Parks cannot fulfil this more subtle need.

**5. Health & Wellbeing:** Academic Scientific Studies show getting in touch with nature reduces stress and lowers the risk of developing mental problems or chronic illnesses - particularly important now more than ever in this Covid 19 pandemic era. Urbanising natural countryside and open green spaces exasperates such conditions, placing even greater strain on the overburdened health service.

**6. Ecological Importance:** Extensive long term, fully documented, observations reveal the farm to be biodiversity rich and thus ecologically important. The site is especially species rich, a strategic oasis for tired / exhausted migrant birds, and supports a wide range of threatened nationally declining farmland species.

**7. Rare & Scarce Breeding Birds:** Vicarage Farm hosts locally scarce Skylark and Swallow colonies (both of which are declining species nationally) and the assemblage of Birds of Prey includes regularly breeding Hobby Falcons – a specially protected Species under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to disturb breeding Schedule 1 species, their nest, eggs, nestlings, and their dependant young even after they have left the nest.

**8. Hobby Falcons:** In the summer months, Vicarage Farm supports at least one pair of secretive Hobby Falcons. These rare breeding birds are unique to the area and have been the focus of special protection by the local ornithologists over many years. By not drawing undesirable attention to the nest site, the Hobby Falcons successfully fledged three young in summer 2020. All three nestlings were uniquely ringed, under special licence, in July 2020 - BTO Ring Numbers: EA 601, EA 602 and EA 603. Confidentially, this year (2021) the Hobby Falcons have returned from Africa and we are sensitively monitoring their breeding progress. In 2018 (latest published figures) there were only 289 confirmed breeding pairs of Hobby Falcons in Britain.

**9. Loss of Undisturbed Natural Habitat:** Sensitive wildlife needs quiet undisturbed areas free from human pressure to survive. Planners have erroneously accepted Developer's arguments that threatened species can go "elsewhere". Now the "elsewhere" is under threat! Enfield has a legal responsibility to preserve Biodiversity.

**10. Ecology:** The overall ecology of the region will be substantially diminished if Vicarage Farm succumbs to development. The subtle and intricate mosaic of habitats that make up the unique ecological environment of the region will deteriorate. The combined effect of the diverse habitats is far greater in ecological terms than merely the sum of its parts. Fragmentation of habitats is hastening the drastic overall decline in species.

**11. Protected Green Belt:** This rural setting in the Protected Green Belt attracts many low impact visitors (not just local residents) to the area especially those seeking to enjoy the open

farmland atmosphere in largely unspoilt countryside. Politicians now have the chance to prove that the Green Belt is “safe in their hands”.

**12. Open Countryside Experience:** In both a local and regional context Vicarage Farm provides one of the few opportunities to experience the vista and suite of farmland habitats and species now sadly missing from the wider countryside due to more intensively managed modern agricultural practices.

**13. Landscape - Change in Nature & Historic Character:** The Rural Agricultural / Pastoral character, officially designated as an area of historic archaeological character with cultural associations, will be lost and drastically transformed into an urban environment, coalescing linear development contrary to one of the fundamental principles of the Green Belt legislation.

**14. Loss of Public Amenity, Panoramic Views & Openness:** The southerly public footpath and western bridle path provide unrestricted access affording panoramic views of an historic landscape. Although the fields are in private ownership there is little to preclude casual access. This enjoyment of the countryside and treasured characteristic “openness” as defined by the Green Belt Act will be lost if development is permitted.

**15. Important Farmland Fields:** Apart from the loss of farmland fields capable of producing cereals or fodder for farm animals for food production to feed an ever-increasing human population these fields support nationally declining threatened farmland species. At Vicarage Farm, these include Skylarks, which breed in the hay meadows. Linnets, Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita*, Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla*, Whitethroats, etc. all nest in the scrub or hedgerows. The fields abound with insects including over ten species of Butterfly.

**16. Equestrian Enterprise:** The stables, barns, horse grazing fields, hay meadows, ancient hedgerows with associated landmark trees, shelterbelts, brooks, ditches, nettle and bramble patches all form an important and crucial part of the multifaceted inter-related ecosystem supporting the all-important farmland species and offering sanctuary for tired migrants. The adjoining stables do not exhibit the same scale of diverse habitats.

**17. Biodiversity:** The ecosystems at Vicarage Farm support a wide array of nationally threatened BAP (Biodiversity Action Plan) habitats and species. Consequently, retaining the mosaic of habitats and ensuring environmentally friendly farming / equestrian practices are crucial to maintaining the area’s rich biodiversity. Planning legislation (NPPF) demands that any development must retain biodiversity and explicitly show biodiversity gain. Development on this site would clearly fail to meet such criteria.

**18. Trent Country Park:** Although designated as a Country Park, the richness of the various habitats has declined as human activity has invaded almost every aspect of the park. The fragile ecosystems cannot cope with the enormous human pressure now being exerted - particularly as a result of Covid 19. Wildlife has suffered from unrestricted access to habitats (e.g. Raves, drug users, and disturbance by people and dogs of ground nesting, feeding or roosting birds) and by

insensitive land management (e.g. reducing mixed Dog-rose *Rosa canina* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* patches frequented by European Stonechats) and apparent lack of resources for fully effective nature conservation measures.

**19. Conclusion:** Vicarage Farm is rich in biodiversity, contributes to carbon capture, and helps negate some of the harmful effects of Climate Chaos, including, clean air to breathe and safe surface water management. Situated in the protected Green Belt it affords Enfield residents with immediate access to nature and the countryside, providing “openness” with unhindered historic rural views. For all of these reasons (& those cited above) Enfield Council must reject speculative development and instead choose to retain and conserve the natural environment for the overall wellbeing of Enfield residents and the wider community.