

Radstock Rail Land Ecology Fact Sheet

1. Previous land usage has led to a habitat unique to the area, which supports its own diverse species of flora and fauna including exceptional plant and animal communities. There are only three sites of this type (grassland with scrub) known in the Region of higher quality for invertebrates, all large protected sites. It qualifies as of International significance (European importance) using the IEEM guidelines recommended by Government, and is certainly of national significance (UK important).
 2. It has developed into one of the top invertebrate sites in the South West and one of the best wildlife sites in B&NES supporting an estimated 6000 species including many that are nationally rare and endangered. Results of the 2006 bat surveys have not been released, but surveys show the site is used by over 140 B&NES Priority species including at least 24 red list/data book species:
 - 70 insects of national conservation importance/concern, including 12 Red Data Book species
 - 11 Regionally rare insects
 - 2 (insect) species new to Britain
 - 1 (insect) second record for Britain
 - species of plant including 3 Red Data Book species and Red List birds;
 - 24 UK Biodiversity Action Plan species including Otter, White-clawed Crayfish, bats including Greater Horseshoe*, bird species, common lizard, slow worm, Fine-leaved Sandwort and butterflies;
 - charismatic species including Kingfisher and Nightingale;
- * Independent data indicates that Lesser Horseshoe bat (UK BAP Priority Species) is also present.
3. It is not just the rare species which inhabit the site that make it important, although one species could be lost to the Region and another potentially to the country. It supports 4 UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority habitats and is an easily accessible area where residents can enjoy an area inhabited by Glow worms, Kingfishers, Butterflies, Birds of Prey hunting, Bats foraging, Birds breeding, Mammals, Otters hunting, Reptiles, a varied flora and so much more. It is a 'Wildspace' of high educational value at all levels.
 4. It is an important element of the local ecological network and of a wider ecological network that is vital not only to repopulating the countryside with species that have been lost, but also in responding to the challenge of climate change by enabling species to move from their present climate spaces to those of the future. The need to maximise the biodiversity resource in the face of an uncertain ecological future is more important now than ever. In the medium term at least, many of the species on the rail land site will be those that will best adapt to the warmer and drier climate of the future in this area. It is also essential to populations of wide ranging rare species found also on protected sites in the region (metapopulations).
 5. The opinion of Wessex Ecological Consultancy, the original consultants employed to report on the site, was that only three areas of the site totalling about 20% of its area could be developed within a sustainable development framework without significant biodiversity losses given appropriate management of the remainder of the site. Further survey data has revealed the presence of further rare species and national Biodiversity Action Plan species, including in areas not surveyed in 1999.
 6. The view of Wessex Ecological Consultancy was supported by the Government Planning Inspector, and the Inspector's comments have been endorsed by English Nature.
 7. Buglife, The Invertebrate Conservation Trust has stated that the development will result in a significant negative impact upon a site of national importance for invertebrates and that the net loss of biodiversity resulting from this development runs contrary to the Government's Public Policy Statement 9, local and national biodiversity guidelines, and the provisions of the new NERC Act.
 8. English Nature has pointed out that substantial areas on the Radstock Railway Lands are clearly of importance to nature conservation, including not only existing SNCIs but other parts of the site such as the track bed, that merit the status even if they lack the formal designation
 9. English Nature has said "English Nature have considered the site of 'borderline' quality for recognition as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for some time" They have also recommended that the most sensible way forward would be to ensure that the site is treated as an exceptional Site of Nature Conservation Importance and as a Local Nature Reserve, both for planning purposes and in general day to day management.
 10. B&NES has recognised that the mitigation and compensation put forward by the developers will not replace the losses to wildlife and biodiversity. Mike Lush, independent consultant ecologist and entomologist has said that if the development goes ahead it will be a "national travesty".