

The strawberry field lapwings: My TALK TEXT for June 2013 inquiry session

(I wrote this on 19jun13 (based on my submission - adapted for reading out) and read it out that afternoon in Kendal Town Hall)

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[LINK to my submission to The Inspector](#)

Start with photo view of Strawberry field

[[LINK to 1 minute clip filmed at this site](#) < not shown. projector etc not set up]

I promised **Alister Scott - Professor of Spatial Planning at Birmingham City University**, that I would quote his concluding advice to decision-making on the much-contested issues that affect the **Rural-Urban Fringe** [of which this is an example]:

“There is a danger - that in decision-making we only value what can be easily measured, as opposed to measuring what people really value.”

This is especially relevant here to Kendal’s Strawberry field lapwings - whose special value cannot easily be measured by monetary means, or such measures as used here, like the number of houses that can be built - which can be politicized with false portrayal as if mutually exclusive to other, or implied “lesser” values.

As you can see from this view of the Strawberry field - we have a very attractively rural foreground landscape - definitely not an urban-looking landscape of lowish landscape value - as it has been falsely portrayed (for example in a landscape assessment for the Town Council).

The Strawberry field clearly has much vegetation diversity within it - and this in turn gives an invertebrate biodiversity sufficient to provide food for its high diversity in bird species - which includes waders of open ground such as lapwings, oystercatcher and curlew as well as catchers of flying insects such as martins and swallows.

This type of horticultural habitat is fairly unique and scarce around Kendal and hardly abundant in the district either, and has higher biodiversity than the average green field.

Now to focus on the lapwing. **pick up lapwing picture**

I would like to remind you of why lapwings are of special value to us. **hold up lapwing picture**

They are an absolutely stunning and unique species - and attractive not just **visually** but also **vocally** - that together with the calls of curlew and oystercatcher are highly evocative of the open wildish areas of coast and upland where they also occur. Furthermore - their third characteristic attribute is their interesting and highly **entertaining behaviour**, such as their amazing **tumbling displays** and defensive reactions.

No other British bird species matches their unique appearance and behaviour.

Lapwings have faithfully (they tend to be faithful to a breeding site), and successfully bred in Kendal's Strawberry field for many years, making it a uniquely valuable site due to its proximity to the edge of Kendal and visibility from footpaths along Oxenholme Road - so giving us a wonderful source of interest and entertainment for free while simply passing by - and without having to produce car exhaust emissions to get to see them in their coastal sites (where they can be more abundant).

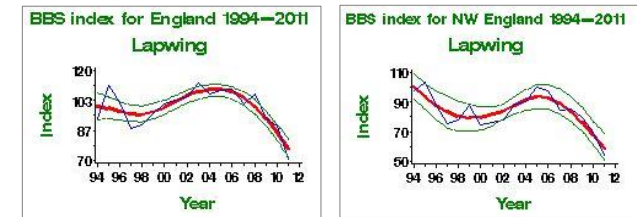
I and others have reported seeing excited tourists taking photographs towards them while walking into town from the mainline station, and a number of local and visiting birdwatchers and passersby enjoy seeing and hearing them.

Also they are of huge value to people living nearby - especially along Oxenholme Road.

Lapwings are also doing a job that pesticides try to do - killing insect pests - but without the bad-side effects on other wildlife - and us - such as those that neonicotinoids are having against non-target insects such as the important crop pollinators, as well as, in consequence, on farmland birds that feed on invertebrate food.

Lapwing population trends - national and regional:

Unfortunately this wonderful species has been showing dramatic declines in numbers over the past decade or two both nationally (e.g. in both England and Wales) and regionally - including NW England - as The Breeding Bird Survey graphs so clearly show: [show charts](#)



The British Trust for Ornithology state that their present conservation status has changed from AMBER to **RED** because of these declines.

They write for the year 2010 to 11 that “Breeding waders showed marked declines [nationally], and four waders **reached their lowest level since the start of the survey [in 1994]: Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Snipe and Curlew.**” Now at least 3 of these species occur at the Strawberry field with both lapwing and Oystercatcher with chicks there this year. Right on our door-step.

Lapwings also breed in rough damp upland areas such as in the Lake District:

A paper on upland breeding bird populations stated for the Lake District’s unenclosed land that “Lapwing declined by **63%**” over the 20 year period 1980 to 2000 - thus already there has been a long-term decline.

And the RSPB report for the Lake District National Park in referring to the distribution maps in the **Cumbria Breeding Bird Atlas** for breeding wading birds in Cumbria (**Cumbria Bird Club, 2001**), wrote that (I quote:) “it is clear that the decline in the species listed below has been most severe in the Lake District National Park:” These 4 species including Lapwing and Curlew.

So surely we don't want to contribute to the decline under our noses - especially as our faithful Kendal lapwings are like ambassadors to us for their species as a whole - and I'll illustrate that point in a while.

Lapwing breeding evidence for the Strawberry field

So how many lapwings breed in the Strawberry field?

Firstly let's show where this field is: [show map of SE Kendal](#) (version *without* the land grab of part of Strawberry field)

And here is a summary of the data: [now show tetrad map](#)

Birdwatchers who live along Oxenholme Road with a good view of the Strawberry field (such as the Weatherleys) say there are usually **about 3 nesting pairs** there in the Spring-early Summer, that is - about **6 adults**. It is normal in the UK for lapwing pairs to have **4 chicks**, thus there is the potential for 6 plus 12 = about **18 birds** of this species there in the summer - if there is zero mortality.

Dave Weatherly of Oxenholme Road has [filmed](#) 5 chicks at a nest location in the field several years ago. His film also shows a 4 and a 3 egg nest: fitting the UK average of 4.

I've been told that "A local keen birdwatcher said: 'In the breeding season: 2 to 4 breeding pairs'" - thus corroborating the data above from a different birdwatcher. Local keen birdwatcher again: 'In the past there were up to 12 pairs in the winter, 10 to 12'.

In 2009 I spoke to someone who has worked in the Strawberry field and obviously has good feelings for the lapwings: he told me about 9 pairs of lapwings nest there, and curlews too.

Also, back in 2008 or 2009 I read a submission by a Howe Bank resident to a 2008 planning consultation relating to 'LAND BETWEEN OXENHOLME ROAD AND HOSPITAL'. She wrote: "Very importantly, I have lived at Howe Bank Close for 10 years now and notice that without fail lapwings nest annually on the strawberry fields, **forty lapwings** can be seen in the air at any one time early in the season."

The Strawberry field also supports other attractive and beautifully vocal wader species of interest - such as **Oystercatchers** and **Curlew**, and Pat Weatherly told me that a pair of oystercatchers had at least one chick this year.

Last Sunday Pat Weatherley saw an **adult lapwing with a chick** on the Strawberry field. At least one pair of breeding lapwing nested and yielded offspring this year.

It's also a feeding ground for heron. She saw a lapwing chase off a heron last weekend. And swallows and martins find the air above very good for insect food.

Pat said that the Strawberry field is a vital feeding ground for a big variety of birds (and also good for nesting: waders nest in the field and its hedges add nesting sites for smaller species)

You might argue that 3 pairs is a small number of lapwings - but when you consider that this can result in about 18 lapwings by the summer if all survive - this latter figure is not bad for the size of the field.

Furthermore I must stress again that Kendal's lapwings are more important than an equal number of lapwings on a larger site - because they act as ambassadors to us for their species as a whole - highlighting their importance to us, and reminding us that we must ensure this species doesn't decline further in numbers. Thus our concern for these here can have a knock-on amplification to help us protect the larger numbers over the region as a whole.

An illustration of one avenue of this came up on BBC radio 4 just a few days ago, when I heard a keen birdwatcher being asked what started off her interest and enthusiasm for birds: Her answer: it was the lapwings near my house at the edge of town - but now sadly lost due to development.

The lapwings in the wider context of the Strawberry field and surrounds

Extract from a previous submission re Strawberry field

Regarding the lapwings, the 2003 Inspector's report states (extract from Para 2.1.49): "I am especially concerned about the possible adverse impact that the development [a different part of the Green Gap] could have on the lapwing breeding ground at the adjacent strawberry fields. These birds are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.... there would seem to be significant, possible wildlife constraints upon its development." It's illegal to damage or disrupt their breeding site during the breeding season.

The impact of the housing proposal on the Strawberry Field lapwings.

The housing estate proposal as it now stands will most definitely devastate if not totally wipe out the suitability of this site for the lapwings especially for breeding. [show map of SE Kendal](#) (version *with* the land grab of part of Strawberry field)

The location of the proposed new roundabout and access road to the estate together with part of the estate itself within the North end of the Strawberry field will:

1. totally remove about a fifth or more of the lapwing nesting and chick-feeding site,
2. increase the disturbance factor of traffic noise generally over the breeding site - to possibly exceed threshold levels of tolerance for lapwing breeding. Also it will be a new unaccustomed change.
3. will make an adjacent strip of the Strawberry Field unusable for nesting, not just due to increased noise disturbance from traffic but also because of the proximity of houses and cats and other predators - which will also have an overlooking view onto their potential prey (e.g. corvids such as jackdaws and crows on roof-tops. (There is a fenced-off buffer strip between much of the rest of the Strawberry field and Oxenholme Road which serves good purpose there - as a bordering band of open land. Lapwings are birds of open land - they need to be able to see predators from a distance).

4. The proximity of the estate also significantly reduces the extent of adjacent-field feeding area for adults and juveniles.

Because in summary: 1. the Lapwing is a legally protected species at its breeding site, and 2. its numbers are rapidly declining (status RED alert), its importance cannot simply be ignored. If we now consider The Precautionary Principle we should turn the argument this way round: That the developers have not provided any convincing reasons why their proposal will **not** have a significant undesirable impact on the lapwing breeding colony. They and the Council have turned a blind eye to the well-known fact that this important species has been breeding on this site for decades. There has been no independent and adequate survey done of the wildlife interest here - no E.I.A. done. I do not count a commercially-biased assessment that conveniently omits species of particular interest that might prove troublesome to the development proposal as being an adequate ecological survey.

The [Precautionary Principle](#) - to which UK signed up to (but the present Government prefers to ignore), puts the onus on the company or government to show that there will *not* be an adverse effect before the proposal is agreed to. The absence of existing evidence that there will be an adverse effect is no excuse for proceeding with the proposal, as such absence can be due to insufficient investigation. (The ignorance of the P.P. was recently shown re neonicotinoid insecticides, which have been in use for over a decade

without adequate prior field-testing as to their effect on pollinating insects (and thus in turn on insectivorous birds such as lapwings).

Pre-emptive points (notes)

Three pairs of nesting lapwings “versus” houses for humans:

1. This is not a ‘zero-sum game’ - as houses can be built elsewhere.
2. Each asset of the Strawberry field and its green surrounds should not just be weighed up individually against the aim for housing here (rather than elsewhere), but also considered as a whole including the other assets (such as the green open scenery, pick-your-own, native crayfish etc, etc). Furthermore - when there is such a combination, “the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts” as here - for instance in giving a sense of uniqueness of ‘**place**’ - a unique combination that cannot be “commodified” and “offset” elsewhere.
4. This expression can also be applied to all the wildlife here in the habitat that makes up the Strawberry field, as the plants, insects and birds are interlinked as an ecosystem web of interdependent species and attributes.
5. [summarized by Dennis Reed later the same day - but the lapwing consequences need stating here] The Rugby Club / Night Club facilities have not been built here yet, and I hope people in power see sense and it does not happen - as it

would amongst many other negative impacts, be **disastrous for the lapwings** and wildlife. It was an arrogant very “dodgy decision” that **ignored the existence of the lapwings** and the majority views of the neighbourhood here (and thus local democracy), with a callous zero-empathy attitude to neighbours who would lose what should be a human right - an adequate night’s sleep - due to sound pollution expected from the night-club. It is deceitful to claim that these very much urbanizing proposals are ‘green’ features - as they comprise tarmac (painted green?!), a 2-storey building noisy at night, and man-made playing fields that would only be green in colour - a green desert as regards biodiversity, and if screened from the road that would deny any sight of any green space beyond. If built this would be a PR disaster for the Rugby Club.

END with quote again (as written on view of the Strawberry field):

I’ll now end by re-quoting what Professor Alister Scott wrote at the end of his web-page to conclude his advice to decision-making on the much-contested issues that affect the **Rural-Urban Fringe**:

“There is a danger that in decision-making we only value what can be easily measured, as opposed to measuring what people really value.”

A large number of people hugely value the lapwings and the Strawberry field on which they depend.

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