

The strawberry field lapwings: May 2013 statement by Henry Adams for Dennis Reed of the TOG

(improved version of my contribution to TOG statement to Planning Inspectorate re OXENHOLME ROAD proposed HOUSING ESTATE)

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The full-length version of this Strawberry field lapwings statement is available as a pdf on my website here:
<http://www.dragonfly1.plus.com/LapwingsStrawberryFieldKendal.pdf> - this may be updated if I come across further relevant evidence. I have had too little time recently to track down all the birdwatchers who record at this site.



Lapwings have faithfully 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. 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 birdwatchers and passersby enjoy hearing them call while performing their amazing tumbling flights. No other British bird species matches their unique appearance and behaviour. [\[1 minute clip at this site\]](#)

The lapwing is also here maintaining its reputation as a “farmers’ friend”, as it eats invertebrate pests such as wireworms and leatherjackets (though it also eats earthworms). Its food is mainly insects, also worms, spiders etc.

But this visually and vocally attractive 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 BTO BBS graphs so clearly show below:

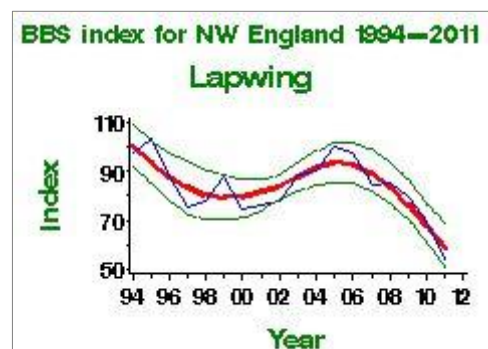
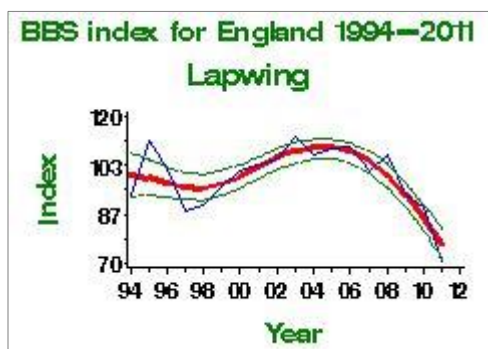
Lapwing population trends - national and regional: (refs appended)

BTO BirdFacts - **Lapwing**: Conservation Status: UK: **RED** (BTO British Trust for Ornithology)

Conservation Status: **RED** because Recent Breeding Population Decline (1981-2007), 📉

Previous Assessments: 2002-2007 **AMBER** 📊 1996-2001 **AMBER** 📊

BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) in **The Breeding Bird Survey 2011** write: “Breeding waders showed marked declines between 2010 and 2011, and four waders **reached their lowest level since the start of the survey [in 1994]: Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Snipe and Curlew.**”



Worrying pictures: the trends don't look promising for 2013 and beyond ...

Lapwing breeding evidence for the Strawberry field

Birdwatchers who live along Oxenholme Road with a good view of the Strawberry field say there are usually **about 3 nesting pairs** there in the Spring-early Summer, i.e. c.6 **adults**. It is normal for lapwing pairs to have **4 chicks**, thus there is the potential for $6 \times 4 =$ 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 - ~~which is consistent with the site being possibly more productive of chicks than what is average nationally~~ (though a sample size of 1 nest out of the 3 or so is inconclusive). [update: film also shows a 4 and a 3 egg nest: fitting UK average of 4]
[More data on nesting pairs to me please if you have it!]

Other birdwatchers have recorded the following numbers of lapwings in past years (data via e.g. Martin Baines, RSPB, Kendal in 2011 over the phone), but present time restrictions have prevented me tracking down and confirming sources:

"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: 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."

This year the weather does not bode well for lapwing chicks (< an *a priori* prediction - the "jury's still out"). Lapwing chicks are likely to depend on insects being plentiful and easily available on the soil or plant surfaces - a requirement that is likely to be partly weather-dependent. Thus the extreme weather that climate change is increasingly giving us may also increase year to year variability in breeding success. Thus long cold periods like during this spring will be poor for surface insects, and thus may be unfavourable for chicks.

NB: other attractive and beautifully vocal wader species of interest also use the Strawberry Field - such as **Oystercatchers** and **Curlew**.

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

Due to shortage of time I have 'pasted' the following extracts from my [10dec11 letter to SLDC planning](#) (& see pdf link below in References section below). Please read this letter as part of this submission as it gives the wider context of the lapwings and their Strawberry Field setting.

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The proposed development [re Rugby club plan] would result in the loss of over half of the Strawberry field and would make the site no longer suitable for the colony of lapwings which regularly breed here. The lapwings are important to those who appreciate their attractive appearance, spectacular tumbling display flights and evocative calling. Such pleasures that can be had for free are often dismissed by people in power who are focussed more on aspects of money, 'growth', status and aggrandisement.

[..... other text.....]

The breeding lapwings

Lapwings have been nesting in the strawberry field for many years, and seeing and hearing them there has given delight to me and no doubt many other people. The uniqueness here is their proximity to the town-edge – and thus



Lapwing photographed on the Strawberry field in April 2011

they can be seen and heard without the carbon-footprint and time-constraint of having to drive a car to see them. Thus they are a big asset to the quality of life here.

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 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."

Although lapwings are not at present scarce in South Lakeland they have become so over large areas elsewhere in England and Wales due to loss of suitable habitat.

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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 this site for the lapwings especially for breeding.

The location of the proposed new roundabout and access road to the estate within the Strawberry field will:

1. totally remove part 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,
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. (There is a fenced-off buffer strip between much of the rest of the Strawberry field and Oxenholme Road which serves good purpose there).
4. The proximity of the estate also significantly reduces the extent of adjacent-field feeding area.

Because 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.

There would need to be an Environmental Impact ~~Statement~~ Assessment (EIA) produced if the developers or SLDC want to try and show that the proposal (in any of its several extents put forward) will **not** have a significant undesirable impact on the lapwing breeding colony.

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 and rugby facilities 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.

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References

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10dec11 Letter from Henry Adams to SLDC Planning in response to LAND AT OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, including the "Strawberry Field" – a lapwing breeding site, re DEVELOPMENT: EXTENSION TO TIME CONDITION ON PLANNING PERMISSION SL/2008/1220 (engineering ops re Rugby Club's plans), REF. NUMBER: SL/2011/0896

<http://www.dragonfly1.plus.com/LetterHenryAdamsToSLDCreStrawberryFieldandLapwings2011.pdf>

BTO BirdFacts Lapwing <http://blx1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob4930.htm> - from where I obtained:

Conservation Status: UK: **RED**

Conservation Status: **RED** because Recent Breeding Population Decline (1981-2007), 

Previous Assessments: 2002-2007 **AMBER**  1996-2001 **AMBER** 

BBSreport2011 - **The Breeding Bird Survey 2011** - The population trends of the UK's breeding birds

<http://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u16/downloads/reports/bbsreport11.pdf>

'The Breeding Bird Survey is run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and is jointly funded by the BTO, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) (on behalf of the statutory nature conservation agencies: Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, the Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England and Scottish Natural Heritage), and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)'

'Breeding waders showed marked declines between 2010 and 2011, and four waders reached their lowest level since the start of the survey: Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Snipe and Curlew.'

Summary of BBS report 11 by CJS - Countryside Jobs Weekly:

Lapwings hit new low; further declines in breeding waders revealed - BTO

The latest figures from the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) show that four of our breeding waders have reached their lowest levels since the survey started in the early 1990s. Volunteer birdwatchers reported **particularly low numbers of Lapwing**, Oystercatcher, Snipe and Curlew during the spring of 2011.

These birds breed on wet grassland and upland habitats throughout the UK, where they rely on earthworms and other invertebrates for food, and previous declines have been blamed on habitat loss, land drainage and potential increases in predation pressure. All four species, however, **saw sharp declines** between 2010 and 2011, of 19% for Oystercatcher, **18% for Lapwing**, 40% for Snipe and 13% for Curlew, which may have been due to unfavourable weather conditions during the year **exacerbating long-term declines**.

Kate Risely, BBS organiser at the British Trust for Ornithology, said "It is very worrying to see sharp declines in numbers of breeding waders such as Lapwing and Snipe, typical birds of open country. The long-term decline in breeding Curlew has contributed to the species now being listed as globally near-threatened. BBS results are crucial in understanding the causes behind bird declines, and we owe this information to dedicated volunteer birdwatchers across the country."

The BBS produces annual population trends for over one hundred of our widespread bird species. While many birds are thriving, ten species have declined by more than 50% since the start of the survey in 1994, including Turtle Dove, which has declined by a staggering 80%. Since the start of the survey we have lost more than half of the following ten species: Turtle Dove -80%; Willow Tit -79%; Wood Warbler -65%; Whinchat -57%; Grey Partridge -55%; Nightingale -52%; Yellow Wagtail, Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Starling all -50%

This list emphasises declines in farmland and woodland birds, and of migrants; all but three of the birds in this list (Willow Tit, Grey Partridge and Starling) migrate to Africa for the winter.

For a PDF of the full report visit www.bto.org/bbs/results/BBSreport11



The Precautionary Principle - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precautionary_principle

NB: the prophylactic use of pesticides such as neonicotinoids has decreased the insect food supply for birds, and research has shown that farmland bird numbers have reduced accordingly. This was done without prior testing of their effect on non-target insects in the field (such as pollinating insects), thus ignoring the Precautionary Principle that UK signed up to.

*NB: I added these very relevant references to this document **after** I had submitted the rushed 'final' to go to Gov. Inspector:*

[1 minute video clip of Kendal's Strawberry field lapwings by Dave Weatherley](#)

Britain's birds facing extinction as climate change leaves them with nowhere to go Environment The Observer As temperatures rise and European breeds arrive, native species such as the **lapwing** and Scottish crossbill are being forced out. Soon, say the RSPB and Durham University, many of our rare birds will disappear **Robin McKie**, science editor *The Observer*, Sunday 1 March 2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/mar/01/british-birds-extinction-climate-change>

NB: Other relevant lapwing references I later collated are here: <http://www.dragonfly1.plus.com/Lapwings.html>

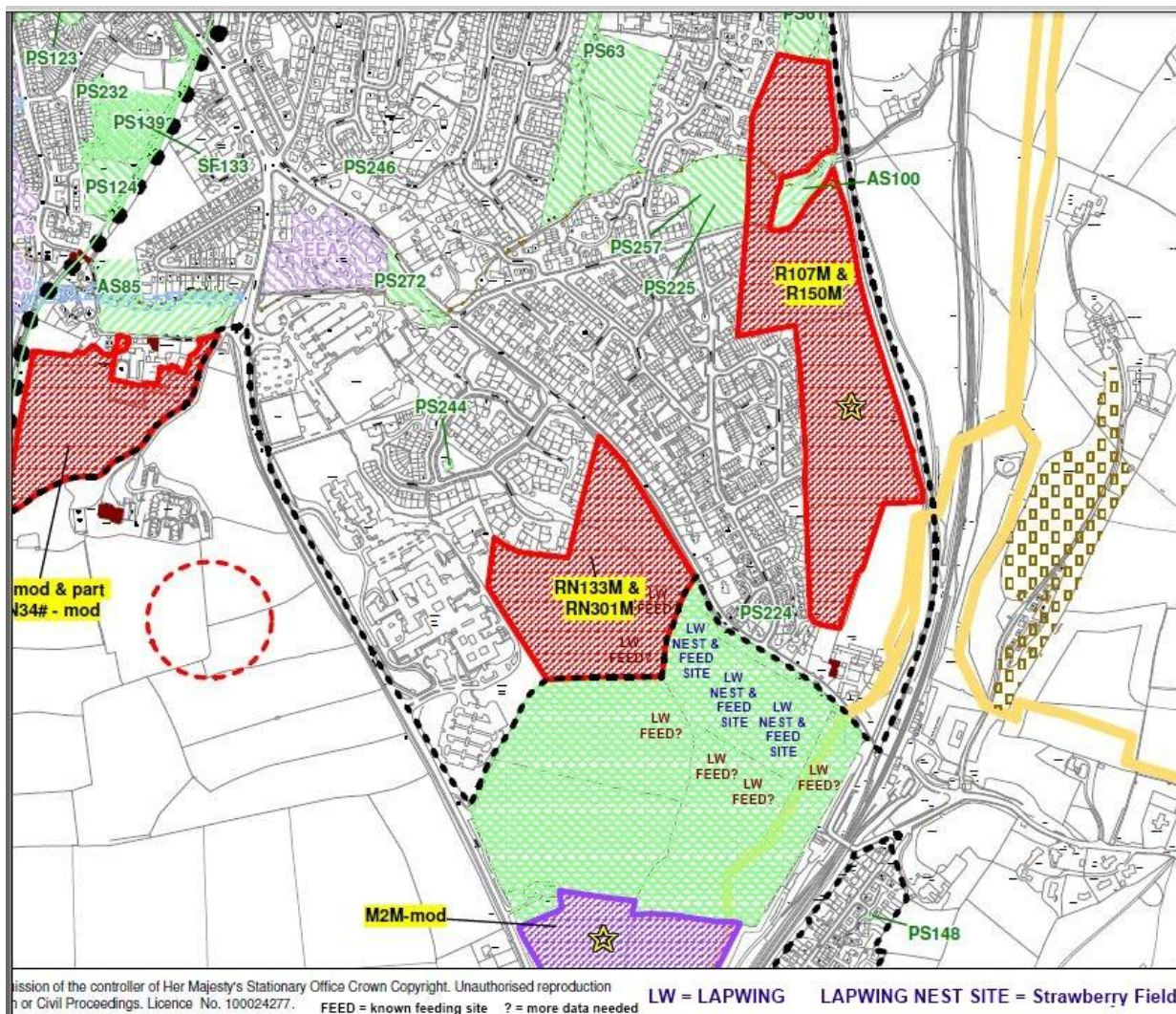
EU document on lapwings:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/hunting/docs/Lapwing%20EU_MP.pdf

Lapwing on front of BBSreport2011:



Location of Strawberry Field Lapwing nesting site in SE Kendal



I have not researched into the extent of the lapwing feeding area, hence the question marks in the adjoining field - added there as a reminder that they are likely to use the surrounding fields too.

The lapwings that depend on the **Strawberry field** are one of Kendal's unique assets – but are wrongly under-valued by those who cannot appreciate those living things around us that cannot easily be priced, as they are *free* contributors to our well-being (until lost).



View of Kendal's **Strawberry Field** looking West from Oxenholme Road.

