SLWP HEARING: REPRESENTATION BY THE BEDDINGTON FARM BIRD GROUP

I am writing on behalf of the Beddington Farm Bird Group (BFBG) in response to the South London Waste Plan (SLWP) Inquiry Consultation. Our representation relates specifically to the question raised by the Inspector under Issues and Questions, Issue 2: Sites in Sutton 4.5,

“Are the nature conservation issues identified by the Beddington Farm Bird Group in relation to sites 17 and 18 'showstoppers' or are they capable of being addressed with mitigation measures as necessary through the planning application process?”

2. In the BFBG’s earlier representations, at Stage 2 and 2a of the SLWP Consultation, we confirmed Beddington Farmlands’ status as a major area of remaining MOL in South London, a Metropolitan Site of Interest for Nature Conservation, of local and regional importance to wildlife (as reflected in the amended SLWP WPs) and which meets the criteria for SSSI status. At this point in the consultation we wish to help inform the Inspector’s question, by providing further clarity on the nature conservation issues affecting the site. These inextricably link the temporary status of existing waste facilities at the Farmlands with the renovation and rehabilitation of the site’s wildlife.

3. Our primary concern is that the SLWP identifies, ‘one permanent site and one temporary waste site for possible redevelopment within the existing site area [at Beddington Farmlands]’. This appears to run counter to the findings of the 1995 Planning Inquiry, i.e. that the site should be restored to create a nature reserve, as the central focus for the Wandle Valley Regional Park. As mitigation for the temporary waste management facilities at Beddington Farmlands, the Inquiry Inspector directed that a substantial sum be invested to develop the site for nature conservation, once sympathetic renovation had been completed. However, the subsequent decision to extend waste disposal operations on site, from 2015 to 2023, has directly impacted on the timeframe for the promised renovation (which lags far behind the original schedule) and therefore the investment sum promised for nature conservation is still awaited and the Section 106 has not been signed.

4. Given its area - and taken together with (the contiguous) Beddington Park to the south and Mitcham Common to the north - Beddington Farmlands constitutes a resource larger than Hyde Park. And Beddington remains of special significance. Although in recent years the Farm's environment has suffered as on-site waste disposal operations have enveloped parts of the site, it has steadfastly remained home to a range of wildlife, including a flourishing flora, with the rich invertebrate life which this biomass supports. In turn, this helps explain the healthy populations of
mammals, including bats, of which six species can be encountered. It regularly records one of the highest bird lists in the whole of London (and compares favourably with managed sites elsewhere) and is one of the main breeding colonies of tree sparrow in the UK.

5. Beddington Farmlands was recently coined the ‘sleeping giant’ by leading urban naturalist, David Lindo, but more development will risk eroding the very fabric of this unique place. Since the mid-90s several ‘target’ species have been monitored as ‘barometers’ for the health of the Farm’s environment; to gauge the effect of waste disposal operations on numbers and the effectiveness and timeliness of mitigation measures. A number of these show not unexpected declines. Sympathetic renovation is part of the answer, but it has not always been ideally implemented. Moreover, the period over which renovation of ‘lost’ habitat takes place means recovery of certain species may be equally long-term if nothing can be done to ensure their continued presence on site, even in reduced numbers. This is the basis for our opposition to an extension of waste facilities at the Farmlands and a commitment to ensure that the existing facilities are deemed temporary structures, as per the conditions of the revised planning application in 2008.

6. A re-designation or development encroachment for non-wildlife use at Beddington Farmlands compromises the key strategic framework for biodiversity, as described in the GLA London Plan, of which this site is recognised as an integral part. The GLA also notes that the area surrounding the Farmlands is one of significant ‘green space deficiency’ within South London. With over one million people living within four miles of its boundaries, intact preservation of the site would guarantee its potential for biodiversity, as well as being a significant future leisure attraction.

7. The RSPB Chief Executive commented recently on his vision for nature:

“Nature needs a network of sites to help species survive and to shift distribution in the face of climate change…but the current network of protected areas is too small and may not [meet] nature’s needs in the future. We need more sites, bigger sites and better managed sites”.

We believe that Beddington Farmlands as an important link in this network, but a continuing industrial presence at the Farmlands will only act as a catalyst for further possible development threatening this vision as well as the ambitions of LBS Sutton and the hopes of local people:

“Sutton Council is working… to turn Hackbridge into the UK’s first truly sustainable suburb… An ambitious vision to make Sutton the greenest place to live, with the flagship Hackbridge project intended as a leading example for the rest of the Borough and the UK to follow.”

8. Wildlife conservation has been squeezed between commercial interests and competing priorities for the local authority and this, despite meeting the criteria for SSSI status. Every development proposal on the Farmlands potentially erodes its value as a premier site for nature in South London. We have reached a crossroads: either this landscape will be transformed into a premier nature conservation resource, for this and future generations, or become a patchwork of industrial and commercial facilities, around which a sterile country park may eventually be created.

9. I would like to thank the Inspector for the opportunity to make these further points.

10. A copy of this letter goes to Sophie Flax, Conservation Planning Officer, RSPB and Mathew Frith, Deputy CEO London Wildlife Trust.

{signed on original}

KEITH MILLAR
Chairman Beddington Farm Bird Group