

The Biodiversity of LG1

The proposed housing development North of the Grange Estate, Letchworth (LG1 in the NHDC Local Plan) will devastate one of the most important historical and biodiverse sites in the county. It is traversed by ancient hedges, banks, ditches and majestic oak mini-pollards over 400 years old: an archeological site of human occupation and land-use dating back to medieval times and beyond. 114 species of bird feed, breed, roost and rest here, of which 28 are red-listed (severely endangered) many subject to Species Action Plans, among them *cuckoo*, *corn bunting*, *reed bunting*, *grasshopper warbler* and *bittern*. Moreover, *house sparrows* (in catastrophic decline nationally) have their biggest roost in Hertfordshire here. Three red-listed butterfly species are to be found: *small heath*, *small blue* and *wall*. Of the significant plant species are *corn cockle*, *corn marigold* (both county rarities), *cornflower* (a 'priority' species with a National Species Action Plan) and two recently recorded national rarities: *lesser tare* and *field scabious*. There are reasons for this exceptional richness: the unbroken green corridor running from Standalone Farm to Norton Pond; the stream of unpolluted air, there being no major polluting industries in a due-westerly direction right over to the Irish Sea; the soil diversity (outcrops of chalk overlain with boulder clay, gravels and sand: glacial deposits laid down 500,000 years ago, known to geologists as 'The Letchworth Gravels') and the recent history of good stewardship by the local authority in promoting such initiatives as Agenda 21 of the Biodiversity Action Plan (1998), The Green Infrastructure Plan (2009) and the adoption of a Landscape Sensitivity Study in 2013, all resulting in such measures as the protection of banks and ditches, the creation of broad field margins and the limiting of the use of chemicals.

In this context, the proposal LG1 represents **a flagrant U-turn and will nullify 20 years of sensitive conservation**. Apart from the detriment to physical and mental health of the whole community, **such habitat destruction is nationally irresponsible when 60% of our wildlife species is in sharp decline**, despite policies and actions (local and national) presumed to be still in force

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