WESSEX ECOLOGY



PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

LAND & BUILDINGS AT WHADDON LANE, HILPERTON TROWBRIDGE, WILTSHIRE, BA14 7RN

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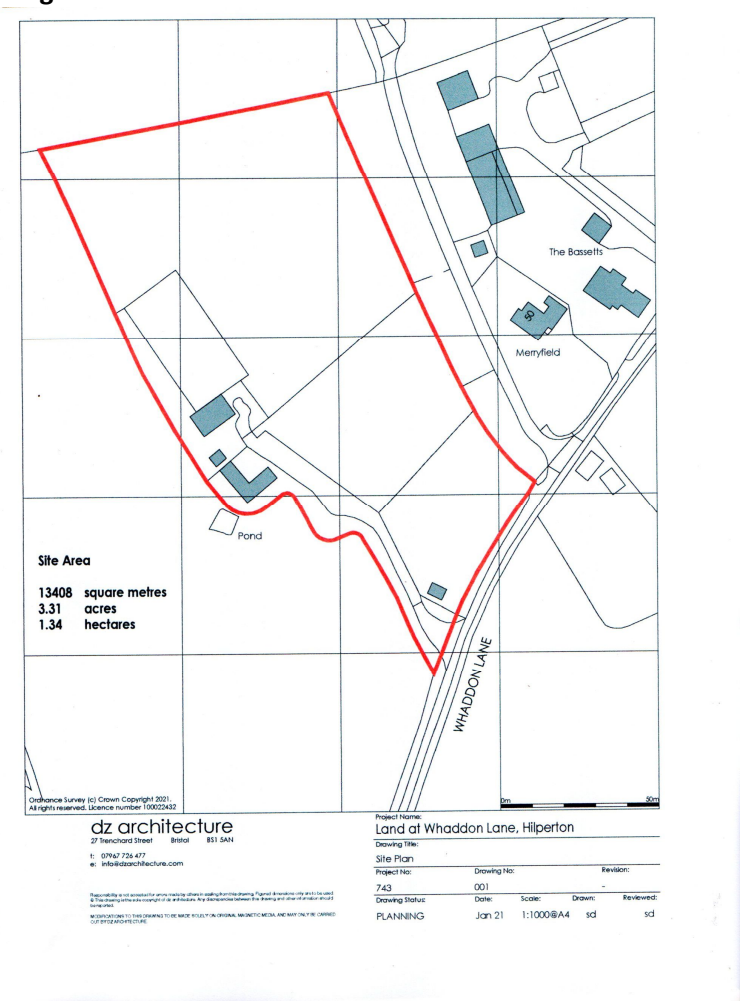
PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL
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1. Introduction

This Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was carried out at the request of Chris Popkin of Willis & Co on behalf of their client Mr. C Ball, the owner of the site. The site consists of a track leading from the road to a stable, barn and a ménage area along with some paddocks. Mr. Ball intends to apply for planning consent for change of use of the stable for conversion to a dwelling.

The Site is located near the village of Hilperton, near the town of Trowbridge, Wiltshire: OS grid reference – ST87655985. Please see site location plan below:

Figure 1. Site outlined with red line



2. Executive Summary

- No badger setts or signs were identified during a walk over of the site (please see Section 4, Methodology & Constraints below). The proposed conversion of the stable for domestic use should not affect badgers. No further survey for badgers was considered necessary.

- There were two relatively large buildings on the site (a hay barn and a stable block), along with a small open fronted field shelter. The hay barn was considered to have a negligible potential as a bat roost location, as was the field shelter. The stable block did offer some potential as a bat roost and a small number of bat droppings were found in part of that building. No trees on the site boundaries were identified with bat roost potential (please see Section 4, Methodology & Constraints below). Bats will likely forage/commute over the site and along the hedgerows. Recommendations in relation to bats are given in Sub-section 6.1 Bats, of Section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below.

- Signs of hedgehogs were found in a corner section of the stable building. Please see Sub-section 6.3 Hedgehogs, of Section 6. Below for recommendations in relation to hedgehogs.

- Two swallow nests were identified within the stable building. Hedgerows and trees on the site boundaries offered good nesting bird habitat. Please see subsection 6.2 Nesting Birds, of section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below.

- The vast majority of the site consisted of regularly grazed grass, along with hard standings around the buildings and an artificial surface of the ménage. The yard area around the stable building, and the building itself was not a habitat that would be used by reptiles; therefore, reptiles should not be affected by the proposal. No further survey for reptiles was considered necessary.

- There were no ponds or other still water bodies on the Site. A search of the OS 1:10,000 map identified two ponds within 250m of the Site, the status of which is unknown. The yard area around the stable building and the stable itself was not habitat likely to be used by newts; therefore, great crested newts should not be affected by the proposal. No further survey for newts was considered necessary.

3. Objectives

- Determine the presence or potential presence of protected & notable species.
- Identify any habitats of ecological interest.
- Assess any implications of the findings on the proposed future development and make recommendations further survey and/or for the production of mitigation/ enhancement plans if required.

4. Methodology & Constraints

The site was assessed on 20th June 2023 by an experienced ecologist and was assessed in terms of its suitability to support protected and notable species. This was a walkover appraisal of the site, therefore detailed searches for protected species & nesting birds were not carried out. Neither was a detail botanical survey carried out, although some plant species and general habitats were recorded.

A data search for protected and notable species within 1km of the site was carried out by the Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC). Please see section 5.3 Protected & Notable Species below for relevant records.

A search for wildlife sites within 1km of the Site was carried out using the Magic Maps website.

5. Results

5.1 Wildlife Sites

No statutory or non-statutory wildlife sites were identified within 1km of the application site.

5.2 Site Description

The Site, which was approximately 1.34 hectares in area, consisted of a track leading from the road to a yard area consisting of an L shaped stable building, open fronted metal barn and a ménage area. Surrounding the yard to the north, east and southeast was pastureland consisting of one large field (no dividing hedgerows), divided into four smaller fields with post and rail and wire fencing. These fields were being grazed by horses and sheep at the time of the appraisal. At the far southern corner of the pasture there was a small timber field shelter.

The site was bounded by deciduous hedgerows around its entire periphery. The hedgerows were not particularly species rich, consisting mainly of hawthorn, with bramble, elder, field maple and blackthorn. The hedgerow at the north end of the site was unmanaged and quite wide with a fair amount of bramble. At the western end of this hedge there was a mature oak and a mature ash tree. There were a

number of smaller ash and field maple trees growing in the hedgerow at the southeast end of the site, along with a few dead elm trees.
There were no ponds or watercourses on the site.
Beyond the boundaries of the site there was a mixture of pasture and arable land on all sides apart from to the east where there was houses and gardens.

Please see Figure 2. & photos 1-6 below.

Figure 2. Plan of site showing buildings & habitats



Photo 1. Showing access track heading northwest



Photo 2. Showing stable block at entrance to yard area looking southwest



Photo 3. View of yard area from entrance with open fronted barn In the middle distance



Photo 4. Showing ménage looking southeast



Photo 5. Looking northeast across pasture fields



Photo 6. Looking southeast across pasture fields



5.3 Protected & Notable Species

5.31 Badgers

No badger setts or signs were identified during the walk over appraisal (please see constraints in section 4. above). It is possible that badgers forage on the site. The proposal is not likely to affect badgers.

The data search found a large number of records of badgers within 1km of the site.

No further survey for badgers is considered necessary.

5.32 Bats

There were two significant buildings on the site: an open fronted barn and a stable block. There was also a small open fronted timber field shelter. These buildings were inspected as part of the walkover appraisal, but were not searched in detail for bat signs although any signs identified were recorded (please see constraints in section 4. Above). Please see details of buildings below.

There were several mature trees within boundary hedgerows but none were identified with obvious bat roost location (please see constraints in section 4. Above). These trees should not be affected by the proposal.

The Data Search found a large number of records of common pipistrelle, 4 records of soprano pipistrelle, 2 records of brown long-eared, 2 records of noctule, 11 records of bechstein's , 1 record of myotis, 5 records of serotine and one record of greater horseshoe bats from within 1km of the site.

Stable Block

This single story L shaped stable block was constructed of concrete block walls with an apex timber roof clad with concrete tiles. There was undelay beneath the tiles but there was no roof space. There were two stables on each section of the building along with a smaller room in the central section/corner of the building. There were sizable gaps under the eaves and between the roof timbers, which would allow access for bats
.
A search of the stable rooms found no signs of bats. A search of the corner room found a few scattered droppings on the floor and items in the building and one small accumulation of droppings on top of what appeared to be a long cushion covered with a pink blanket. This corner section did not have access under the eaves as the rest of the building did, and there were no obvious gaps to the outside of the building. However, there was a gap in the brickwork of the adjoining wall of the stable to the east, which would allow bats access. In addition, the door to the room was ajar and it appeared that it might be normally left open, which could also allow access.

Photos 7. Showing front & soffit of stable building



Photo 8. Showing interior of one stable room



Photo 9. Showing roof structure within stable



Photo 10. Showing small accumulation of bat droppings within corner section of stable block



Steel Framed Barn

This reasonably large steel framed barn was open fronted and clad with corrugated metal sheets on the walls and the roof. There was no roof void or underlay. No signs of bats were found in this building. This barn (which would not be affected by the proposal) was assessed as have a negligible potential as a bat roost.

Photo 11. Interior of open fronted steel framed barn



Field Shelter

This was a small open fronted timber field shelter for horses & sheep. It had corrugated onduline type roofing with no roof space or underlay. No signs of bats were identified within this structure and it was assessed as having a negligible potential as a bat roost. This structure would not be affected by the proposal.

Photo 12. Showing open fronted timber field shelter



Please see Sub-section 6.1 Bats of Section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below for Recommendations in respect to further survey, lighting and enhancement measures.

5.33 Hedgehogs

A number hedgehog droppings were found on the floor of corner section of the stable block (please see photo 13. below), indicating that a hedgehog or hedgehogs do/have nested and/or hibernated in this building.

The data search found a very large number of hedgehog records from within 1 km of the site.

Please see precautionary recommendations and mitigation advice in respect of hedgehogs in section 6.3 Hedgehogs of Section 6. Conclusions and Recommendations below.

Photo 13. Hedgehog dropping on floor of stable corner building



5.34 Nesting Birds

Two swallow nests were identified on roof timbers in the stable building (please see photo 14. Below). These nests were accessible via quite large gaps under the eaves. There were swallow droppings on the floor and stored items beneath the nests indicating relatively recent use. This was not an extensive search and more might have been present. Hedgerows and trees within the hedgerows, offered potential bird-nesting habitat.

Please see section 6.2 Nesting Birds of section 6. Conclusions and Recommendations below for precautionary advice to protect nesting birds along with mitigation & enhancement provision.

Photo 14. Showing a swallows nest on beam in stable



5.35 Reptiles

The stable building, for which the application applies, was surrounded by hard standings and as such, the stable and its immediate curtilage did not represent reptile habitat. The vast majority of the rest of the site consisted of regularly grazed grassland, which is generally unsuitable for reptiles and was not considered likely to support populations of reptile species. It is possible that small numbers of reptiles such as slow-worm and grass snake could be present within and around hedgerows and field edges.

The Data Search found 9 records of slow-worm and 7 records of grass snake from within 1km of the site. No further survey for reptiles is considered necessary.

5.36 Great crested newts

There were no ponds or other still water bodies on the site. The vast majority of habitat on the site was grazed grassland (sub-optimal terrestrial newt habitat) along with hard standings and the artificial surface of a ménage. Boundary hedgerows and habitat near the boundaries could potentially act as great crested new habitat/communing routes.
The proposal is for the development of the stable block for domestic use. This building and the yard area surrounding it was not habitat likely to because by newts, therefore, great crested newts should not be affected by the proposal.

A search of the OS 1:10,000 map identified 2 ponds within 250m of the site; this pond (the status/condition of which is unknown) one was just west of the sites western boundary and one was approximately 150m west of the site's western boundary.

The Data Search found one record of great crested newts from within 1km of the site. This record was from a domestic garden approximately 600m south of the Site.

Because the proposed conversion of the stable block is considered very unlikely to affect great crested newts or their terrestrial habitat, they are not considered a material consideration in this case, and no further survey is considered necessary.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Bats

Legislation

All species of British bat are listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of the European Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994. As well as giving full protection from intentional and deliberate killing, injuring, disturbing and taking of bats, the cited legislation protects bat breeding and resting places (roosts) from damage, destruction and preventing access to such places. The legislation regarding roosts applies irrespective of whether the bats are present or not. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 added the word "reckless" to existing protection against "intentional and deliberate" actions

Conclusion

The stable block had access for bats under the eaves. The corner section of the stable block did not have any access under the eaves, although there was a gap in the brick wall dividing the room from the stable to the east, which would allow access. In addition, the door was open to this room and it appeared as if it might normally be left open which could also allow access.
Evidence of bats, in the form of droppings was found within a corner section of the stable building. A small accumulation of droppings (probably common pipistrelle) likely associated with an occasional summer roost was found on top of a cushion (beneath roof timbers) within that part of the building. The droppings were dry and so appeared not to be particularly fresh. A few scattered droppings of a similar size and shape were also found within the same section of building. No droppings were found in the rest of the stable block.
No signs of bats were found in the hay barn or field shelter. The open fronted steel frame hay barn and field shelter were both assessed as having a negligible roost potential.

The stable building was assessed as having moderate roost potential, therefore a recommendation for further survey is given below:

Electric lighting associated with any new development could potentially have a negative impact on bats so a recommendation to produce a 'bat friendly' lighting plan is given below along with enhancement measures to give net gain for bats:

Recommendations

- **A detailed bat inspection/survey of the stable block should be carried out by ecologist licensed by Natural England to survey for bats. This might also include presence/absence surveys/dusk emergence and/or pre-dawn return surveys, which are normally carried out between May and September.**

- **If it is determined that a bat roost or roosts will be affected by the development proposals, i.e. by demolition, modification or disturbance, it is likley that a European Protected Species (bat) licence would be required prior to works commencing, issued by Natural England and subject to a suitable mitigation/compensation strategy.**

- **A lighting plan designed to minimise potential light pollution should be included as part of the design of the possible conversion. The lighting plan should reference latest 'best practice' guidance with regards bats such as that published by the Bat Conservation Trust (Bats and Lighting in the UK, 2009) and would be informed by the surveys outlined above.**

- **To give a net gain for bats, a small number of bat roost locations should be installed on both the stable block and other buildings. These bat boxes should be included on the design drawings with input from the bat ecologist in terms of type and siting.**

6.2 Nesting Birds

Legislation

It is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to damage or destroy the nests of breeding birds (with the exception of some pest species) and work should be done outside the months of mid-February to August which is the usual nesting season.

Conclusion

The stable block had access for birds under the eaves. Several swallow nests were identified on roof timbers inside the stable building with droppings indicating relatively recent use. There is potential bird nesting habitat around the site boundaries i.e. hedgerows and trees. The following precautionary recommendations are given to protect nesting birds from disturbance. Enhancement measures are also recommended to give net gain for birds:

Recommendations

- **Ideally, any building work affecting the stable building should be undertaken outside of the bird-nesting season *(*which is March-August inclusive *although birds can sometimes nest outside of this period*). It is important to remember that nesting birds can become trapped within a building or exclude from a nest site if existing gaps in walls, roofs and doors are blocked during the nesting season. However, if it is deemed essential to carry out work on the stable during the nesting season then the area of works should be checked by the ecologist prior to the work. If it is deemed likely that a nesting birds will be disturbed then the works will be delayed until the fledglings have left the building/nest.**

- **According to the plans hedgerows and trees should not be affected by the proposed development, however, if any works would affect hedgerows and/or trees this should be undertaken outside of the bird-nesting season *(*which is March-August inclusive *although birds can sometimes nest outside of this period*). If deemed essential to carry out work that will affect trees or shrubs during the nesting season the area of works should be checked by the ecologist prior to the work. If it were considered likely that nesting birds would be disturbed then the works would be delayed until the fledglings have left the nest.**

- **Mitigation & enhancement measures to replace the loss of swallow nests and give a net gain for birds should be included as part of the development, should it be given consent. We would recommend the installation of a minimum of five swallow nest boxes under the eaves of the converted stable. This would replace the existing nests with more nesting locations than would be lost. These boxes should be included on the design drawings with input from the ecologist in terms of type and siting.**

6.3 Hedgehogs

Legislation

The hedgehog is listed as a Priority Species for conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and protected from deliberate harm in the UK under Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Conclusions

A few hedgehog droppings where present on the floor of the corner section of the stable building, indicating use by hedgehogs, possibly for nesting and/or hibernation. The following precautionary recommendations should be followed if the proposal for conversion of the building is to take place-

Recommendations

- **To prevent hedgehogs being disturbed or harmed during any future development works on the stable building, prior to the start of any works all stored materials on the floor of the building should be removed with care under the supervision of the ecologist, outside of the hibernation period i.e. between mid-March and mid October inclusive. If any hedgehogs were found to be present, the ecologist would move them to suitable habitat in the local area.**