WESSEX ECOLOGY



PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

LAND OFF MILL LANE, CORSTON MALMESBURY, SN16 0HH

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Clients: Mrs. Linda Dolman & Mr. Chris Mann
Survey Date: 22/01/2024
Surveyor: Iain Donald
File: Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Land off Mill Lane, Corston, Malmesbury, SN16 0HH
Contract No: 14-23

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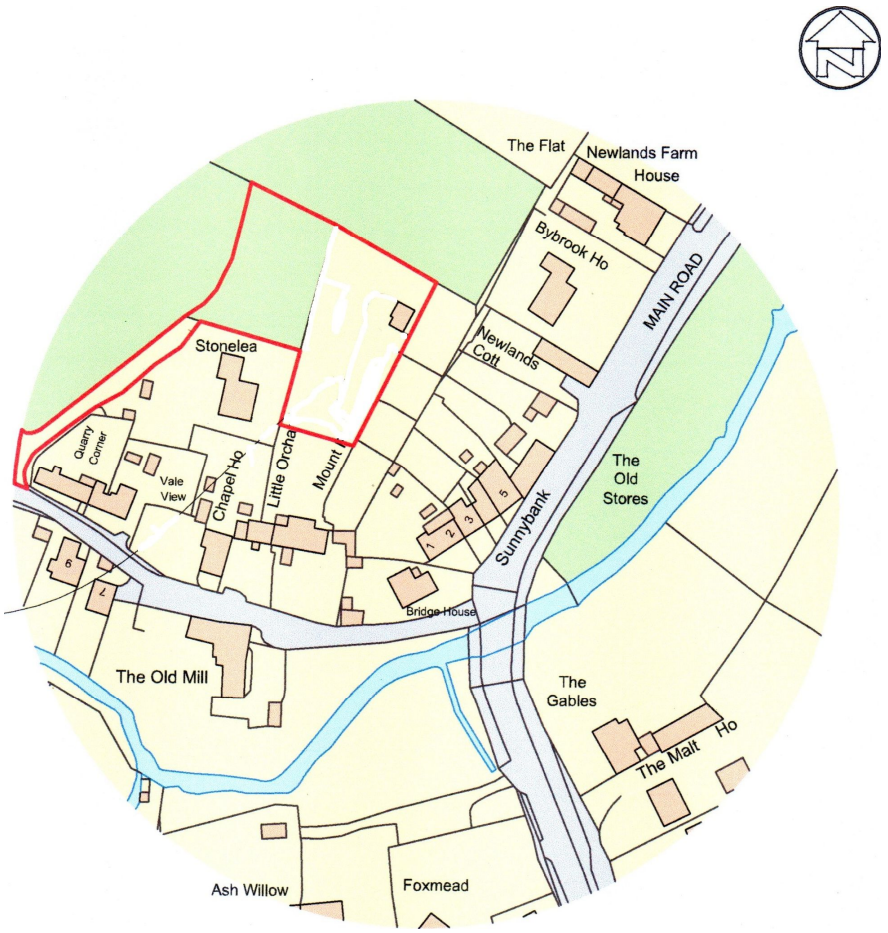
PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

LAND OFF MILL LANE, CORSTON MALMESBURY, SN16 0HH

1. Introduction

This Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was carried out at the request of Marc Willis of Willis & Co on behalf of their clients Mrs. Linda Dolman & Mr. Chris Mann who have applied for planning consent for a dwelling on the site. The Site is located in the village of Corston near Malmesbury, Wiltshire at national grid reference ST92358420 (Please see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Site shown within red line.



2. Executive Summary

- No badger setts or signs were identified during the walk over search of the site. No further survey for badgers was considered necessary.

- There were four small timber sheds on the site. No signs of bats were found in the sheds and they were all considered to have low/negligible bat roost potential. There were no mature trees with bat roost potential on the site. Recommendations in relation to bats and lighting and enhancement provision are given in Sub-section 6.1 Bats, of Section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below.

- Although no signs were found, there were numerous records of hedgehogs in the area. Sheds on the site could potentially be used by hedgehogs for nesting and/or hibernation. Please see subsection 6.2 Hedgehogs of section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below for precautionary advice .

- Trees, shrubs and sheds on the site represented potential nesting bird habitat. Please see subsection 6.3 of section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below.

- The site was not considered likely to support populations of reptile species. However, small numbers of reptiles such as slow worm could be present on the site and grass snake could use the site as part of a larger territory. No further survey for reptiles was considered necessary. Please see subsection 6.4 reptiles of section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below for precautionary advice.

- There were no ponds or other still water bodies on the site. Habitat on the site was considered sub-optimal great crested newt terrestrial habitat. Please see subsection 6.5 Great Crested Newts (and other amphibians) of section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below for precautionary advice in relation to great crested newts and other amphibians.

3. Objectives

- Determine the presence or potential presence of protected & notable species.
- Identify any habitats 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 appraised on 22nd of January 2024 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 with searches made for signs of protected and notable species. Trees and buildings on the site were assessed in terms of their bat potential following The Bat Conservation Trust 'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 3rd addition (2016). Please note that detailed searches for protected & notable species were not carried out during this appraisal. 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 and Swindon Biological Records Centre (please see section 5.1 Wildlife Sites and 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 wildlife sites were identified within 1km of the site. One non-statutory wildlife site was identified within 1km: this was Corston Quarry & Pond local nature reserve (LNR). This small nature reserve was approximately 40m to the north of the site, with, we understand a disused quarry between. The LNR is a disused quarry that contains a pond surrounded by limestone grassland with associated herbs and wildflowers. A brochure about the site states that the pond supports a breeding population of toads and newts. The proposed construction of one house on the site, the boundary of which is around 40m from the LNR, is not considered like to have any direct impact on the LNR.

5.2 Site Description

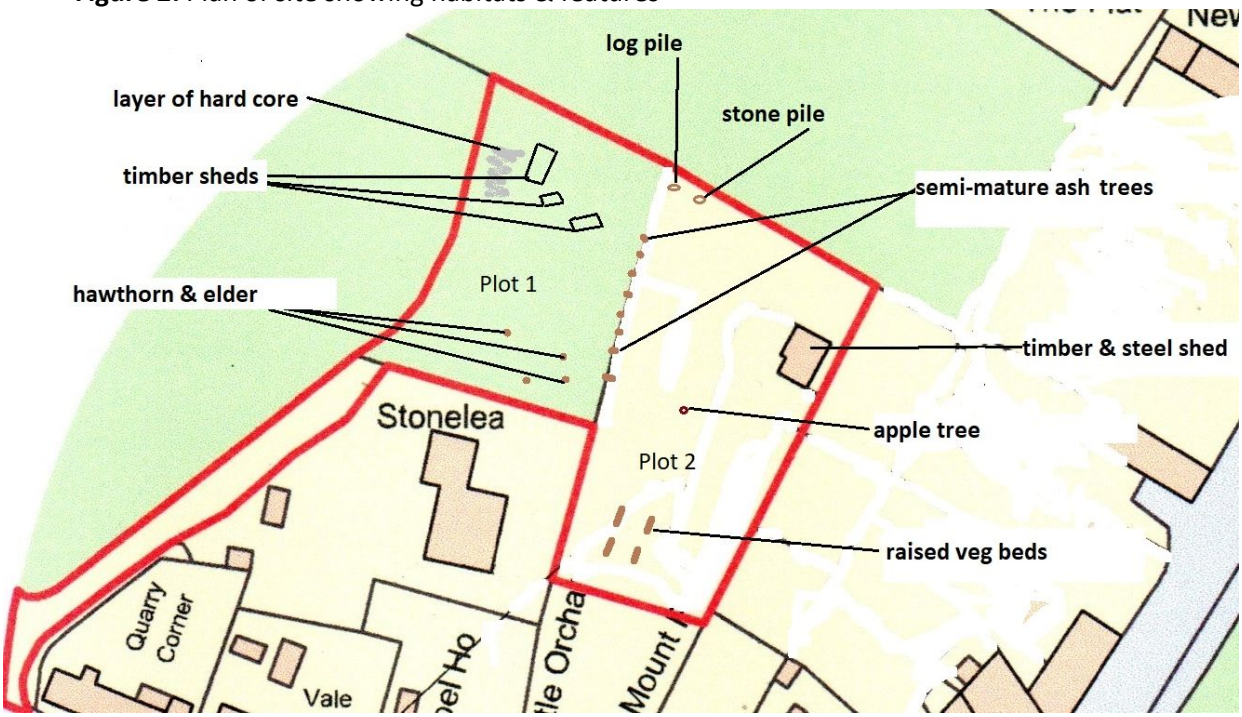
The site, which was approximately 0.20 hectares in area (not including the track), consisted of an existing gravel track giving accesses to the site from the southwest. We understand this track should not be affected by the proposal. The site consisted of two distinct plots, the first one to the east (which will be called Plot 1) was accessed from the track via a five bar gate. This plot consisted of an area of land which we understand has been used as a builders storage yard for more than 10 years. It consisted of an area of cut brambles, bare earth and an area of spread out hardcore. There were three timber sheds on the plot, one of medium sized and one small and one very small (please see details in section 6.2 Bats below). There were some semi mature ash trees and hawthorns growing along the boundary of the plot abutting the second plot to the east. The plot to the south (Plot 2) was vegetated mainly with short/cut herbs including stinging nettle, burdock and willowherb along with cut bramble. There was a medium sized timber shed close the northeast corner (please see details in section 6.2 Bats

below). There were some raised vegetable beds close to the west end of this plot with short herbs around the beds. It appeared that Plot 2 had been quarried for stone to some extent in the past as there was a vertical stone face on the eastern boundary. There were no obvious cavities in this stone face. There were some shrubs and small trees growing on the stone face.

There were no ponds or watercourses on the site.

The site was surrounded by houses and gardens to the south and east, and we were informed by the client, a small-disused quarry to the north (between the site and the LNR) and an area of shrubs and trees to the west. Please see Figure 2. & photos 1-5 below.

Figure 2. Plan of site showing habitats & features



Photos 1. View of west part of the site looking southwest towards the gated entrance (Plot 1)



Photo 2. Plot 1 looking southeast with three small sheds visible



Photo 3. Plot 1 looking east with two smaller sheds shown



Photo 4. Showing timber shed at northeast corner of (plot 2)



Photos 5. Showing site from southern end looking north (Plot 2) with raised vegetable beds in foreground, apple tree and timber shed beyond





5.3 Protected & Notable Species

5.31 Badgers

No badger setts or signs were identified on the site. It is possible that badgers forage on the site.

The Data Search found 9 records of badgers from within 1km of the site.

No further survey or mitigation for badgers was considered necessary.

5.32 Bats

There were four timber and corrugated steel sheds on the site; three were in plot 1 and they consisted of a larger shed with two separated rooms/sections, a very small timber shed and another small timber shed. All three sheds were constructed of timber boards with a corrugated streel roofs with no roof voids, underlings or cavities. The two smaller sheds were empty and one of the two rooms in the larger shed was empty and the other room contained a various items (please see photos 6-8 below).

The shed in Plot 2 was constructed of corrugated steel sheet walls on a timber frame and the roof was clad with corrugated steel sheets. This shed contained logs.

Three of the four sheds had glass windows allowing natural light inside (the smallest shed did not have a window).

No signs of bats were found in any of the sheds. All four sheds were assessed as having low bat roost potential (please see photo 9 below). No trees were identified with bat roost potential.

Bats will no doubt commute and forage over the site.

Photo 6. Interior of larger shed in plot 1



Photo 7. Showing unlined corrugated steel roof of larger shed in plot 1



Photo 8.showing second section/room of larger shed in plot 1



Photo 9. Showing interior of shed in plot 2. Corrugated steel walls and roof with no lining. Logs being stored within.



The Data Search found 1 record of a noctule bat, 6 common pipistrelle, 1 soprano pipistrelle, 1 serotine and one 1 myotis (Sp) from within 1km of the site.

Please see Sub-section 6.1 Bats of Section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below for Recommendations in relation to bats and lighting, along with enhancement suggestions to give a net gain for bats.

5.33 Hedgehogs

The sheds were searched for signs of hedgehogs and none were found. The two larger sheds both contained items such as logs that could potentially be used by hedgehogs for nesting and/or hibernation. Hedgehogs can also nest & hibernate beneath the floors of sheds.

The Data Search found a large number of hedgehog records from within 1km of the site (within 200m).

Please see section 6.3 Hedgehogs of section 6. Conclusions and Recommendations below for precautionary advice in relation to hedgehogs

5.34 Nesting Birds

Shrubs and trees on the site represented potential bird-nesting habitat. All four timber sheds had the potential to support some species of nesting birds although no nests were identified. The larger shed within plot 1 had two nest boxes installed on the walls.

Please see section 6.2 Nesting Birds of section 6. Conclusions and Recommendations below for precautionary advice to protect nesting birds and to install nesting provision to give a net gain for birds.

5.35 Reptiles

The majority of the site consisted short herbs and cut herbs, cut bramble along with areas of bare ground. This habitat was considered sub-optimal reptile habitat and as such not likely to support populations of reptiles such as slow worm. However, it is possible that small numbers of reptile species such a slow worm and grass snake could be present on the site. There was a pile of stone and a pile of logs on the site, which could potentially be used by such reptiles as habitat piles / hibernacula.

The data search found 2 records of slow worm and one of grass snake from within 1km of the site.

Please see section 6.4 Reptiles of section 6. Conclusions and Recommendations below for precautionary advice in relation to reptiles.

5.36 Great Crested Newts

There were no ponds or other still water bodies on the site. Habitat on the site was considered sub-optimal foraging habitat for newts.

A search of the OS 1:10,000 map identified one pond within 250m of the site. This pond was approximately 60m north of the site within the local wildlife site. There was another pond approximately 260m to the northwest.

The data search found 1 record of great crested newts from within 1km of the site (DNA analysis: confirmed presence) this was from Corston Quarry pond (60m to the northwest).

No further survey for newts was considered necessary. Please see section 6.5 Great Crested Newts (and other amphibians) of section 6. Conclusions and Recommendations below for precautionary advice in relation to newts.

Common Toad & Common Frog

The data search found 3 records of common frog and 1 common toad from within 1km of the site (Corston Quarry & Pond LNR). It is possible that frogs and/or toads could use the site although the habitat was not optimal. Precautionary advice is given in section 6.5 Great Crested Newts (and other amphibians) of section 6. Conclusions & Recommendations below.

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

No signs of bats were found within the sheds and the sheds were assessed has having a low/negligible potential as bat roosts.

It is likely that bats forage over the site, therefore new exterior lighting associated with any new development could potentially have a negative impact on that foraging activity. The following recommendations are given to mitigate the potential effects of exterior lighting. Enhancement measures are also given to give a net gain for bats:

Recommendations

- **Any exterior lighting associated with a new development should be kept to the minimum which meets the needs of health and safety and should be directed only on the area to be lit and not upwards or sideways in order to avoid deterring bats from foraging & roosting in the area. Exterior lighting should be designed in accordance with the latest best practice guidance in accordance with best practice guidance given by the Bat Conservation Trust (Bats & Lighting in the UK).**
- **Bat roost locations should be installed on any new buildings. These bat tubes/boxes should be included on the design drawings with input from the ecologist in terms of 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 March to August which is the usual nesting season.

Conclusion

There was potential bird nesting habitat on the site (shrubs, trees and timber sheds). There were two nest boxes installed on the larger shed in plot 1.

The following precautionary recommendations are given to protect nesting birds from disturbance. Enhancement measures are also recommended to give net gain for birds:

Recommendations

- **If any works affecting trees, shrubs or the sheds should be undertaken outside of the bird-nesting season *(*which is March-August inclusive *although birds can sometimes nest outside of this period*). If it is deemed essential to carry out work that will affect trees, shrubs or sheds during the nesting season then the area of works should be checked by the ecologist prior to the work, including the nest boxes on the larger shed in plot 1. If it were deemed likely that nesting birds will be disturbed then the works would be delayed until the fledglings have left the nest.**
- **Enhancement measures should be included as part of any development. This would involve the installation of a small number of appropriate bird boxes on new buildings. These bird boxes should be included on the design drawings with input from the ecologist.**

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

Although no signs of hedgehogs were found during the appraisal, the data search identified a large number of records of this species from within approximately 200m of the site. Sheds on the site could potentially be used for nesting and/or hibernation. The following precautionary recommendations should be followed:

Recommendations

- **To prevent hedgehogs being disturbed or harmed during the removal of the sheds all stored materials on the floor of the two larger sheds, and the flooring itself, 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 are found the ecologist would move them to suitable habitat in the local area.**

6.4 Reptiles

Legislation

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) protects all reptiles in Britain from killing, injury and sale.

Conclusions

Habitat on the site consisted of mainly short herbs, cut bramble and areas of bare ground and as such represented sub-optimal terrestrial habitat for reptiles. There are records of slow worm from within 1km of the site and one records of a grass snake from Corston Quarry & Pond (LNR) 40m north of the site. The following precautionary recommendations should be followed:

Recommendations

- **Clearance of the site (including the sheds, log and stone piles) should be carried out under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist who will carry out a search searched for slow worms and grass snakes. In the unlikely event that any reptiles are found they would be retained by the ecologist and released in suitable habitat in the local area.**

6.5 Great Crested Newts (and other amphibians)

Legislation
The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the European Habitats Regulations (1994) protect great crested newts. It is an offence to kill, injure, capture or disturb them; or obstruct the access of great crested newts to areas they use for protection, resting and breeding as well as damage or destroy these areas.

Legislation (common toad & common frog)
The Common Toad a Species of Conservation Concern under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The smooth and palmate newts, the common frog and common toad are all protected only by Section 9 (5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This section prohibits sale, barter, exchange, transporting for sale and advertising to sell or to buy.

Conclusions
One record of great crested newts (DNA analysis: confirmed presence) from a pond 60m northwest of the site. Habitat on the site that would consisted of mainly short herbs, cut bramble and areas of bare ground and as such represented sub-optimal terrestrial habitat. Therefore, in this case the risk to newts is considered negligible and the habitat that would be lost sub-optimal. However, low residual risk to transient GCN would be reduced to a minimum by the following recommendations (this also applies to frogs & toads).

Recommendations

- **Clearance of the site (including the sheds, log & stone piles) should be carried out under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist within the GCN breeding season (mid-March to mid-June) following a fingertip search for newts, frogs and toads. In the unlikely event of GCN's being found works would cease and the methodology revised. If frogs or toads are found they should be retained by the ecologist and released in suitable habitat in the local area.**