

HERTFORDSHIRE ECOLOGY

Providing ecological advice to Hertfordshire's Local Authorities and communities

Environmental Resource Planning
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Mr D Elmore
Case Officer, Planning Dept,
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council,
The Campus,
Welwyn Garden City,
Herts. AL8 6AE.

Your Ref: 6/2017/0624/MAJ
Ask for: M J Hicks
Tel: 01992 556158

Date: 18/7/17

Dear Mr Elmore

Application: Erection of a 3 storey building for B8 (storage and distribution) (4,878 sq metres) and B1 (office/light industrial) (1,550 sq metres) use, together with 100 car parking spaces, 10 cycle parking spaces, boundary treatment, landscaping, lighting and access. Amended details.

Address: Plot 5000, Hatfield Business Park, Hatfield, AL10 9EZ

Application No: 6/2017/0624/MAJ

Thank you for consulting Hertfordshire Ecology on the above application, for which I have the following comments:

1. The amendments concerning this application relate to the proposed management of the landscaped areas, in particular the grassland meadow area. Survey data from the 2015 and 2017 reports demonstrate that 8 indicator species are present on the site, sufficient to meet Local Wildlife Site status and reflecting the original grassland communities on the airfield which have probably remained relatively undisturbed, other than the removal of hardstanding areas such as runway areas. Unfortunately the ecological surveys are poor in that there is no indication of relative species abundance which should have been provided. Consequently there is no means of assessing the grassland habitat properly and without further survey data I have no means of knowing whether the grassland is generally of a reasonable quality or if the indicator species are all rare. I suspect, however, it is likely that the grasslands are generally of relatively low quality, which would not represent a constraint on the proposals.

2. However, if the grassland along the SW edge retains some natural interest, then it does not need to be reseeded as appropriate management should secure surviving interest and enhance what will be left. Alternatively the existing grassland could be left to grow and then be cut to provide a seed crop to enhance the strip, although I imagine the grassland has been cut several times already during 2017. In any event, the existing survey data is, however,

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insufficient to determine the quality of the grassland community along this edge so I have no reason to consider the reseeding is inappropriate.

3. The proposed EM4 seed mix is acceptable, a slightly better mix for neutral grassland on clay soils and including several of the indicator species already recorded on site.

4. The proposed mowing regime outlined in the Landscape Design and Access Statement July 2017 is also acceptable but I consider should include two overwintering areas, one of which remains uncut in any one year to provide some further structural habitat diversity within the grassland. Uncut areas could easily be incorporated into 15m long sections either end of the full width of the strip (c 8m) which are then cut as normal in alternate years, or two strips along the boundary of the site adjacent to the school, each about 60m long and 2m wide. Each approach would give an uncut area of 120sqm in any one year. I consider the 'meadow' area of approximately 8m x 120m to be sufficiently large enough to incorporate such management without complicating management whilst providing genuine ecological benefit at the site level.

5. The meadow area and its management should also be included within Section 3.2 - the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan – currently this area is not defined in any way.

I trust these comments are of assistance,

Regards,

Martin Hicks MCIEEM
Ecology Advisor, Hertfordshire Ecology