

# HERTFORDSHIRE ECOLOGY

Providing ecological advice to Hertfordshire's Local Authorities and communities

Environmental Resource Planning  
Hertfordshire County Council, County Hall, Hertford, SG13 8DN  
[ecology@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ecology@hertfordshire.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01992 555220

Clare Myers  
Planning Department,  
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council,  
The Campus, Welwyn Garden City,  
Herts AL8 6AE

Ask for: Simon Richards  
Tel: 01992 588483  
Date: 09/04/2019

Dear Clare

**Application:** Conversion of Northaw House to form 11 apartments (including refurbishment of existing single caretaker's flat) and underground parking area, the Ballroom Wing to form 2 dwellings, the Stable Block to form 1 dwelling, refurbishment of existing dwelling at Oak Cottage, construction of 2 Gate Lodge dwellings, 3 dwellings within the Walled Garden, 7 dwellings within the Settlement Area, refurbishment of the Walled Garden, refurbishment of access routes and reinstatement of old route, provision of hard and soft landscaping, car parking and supporting infrastructure

**Address:** Northaw House Coopers Lane Northaw Potters Bar EN6 4NG

**Application No:** 6/2019/0217/MAJ

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

The site consists of a 17 century house with associated outbuildings, structures and 10 hectares of grounds. The buildings have been disuse since 2014 and are in various states of disrepair.

Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) has various records of bats from the application site including evidence of roosts for Pipistrelle and Natterer's Bat in buildings in 2004, a Brown long eared bat was seen flying in the stable block in 2007 and there are records of Noctule Bats using the grounds. There are also records of badger in the vicinity of the application site.

The application is accompanied by an number of ecological reports dated July 2017 by Environmental Buisness Solutions including a: Bat Roost and Breeding Bird Survey, Ecological Impact Assessment and Reptile Survey Population Assessment.

## Bats

The accompanying Bat Roost survey included a Preliminary Roost Assessment which identified likely bat roosts in all of the buildings and assessed them as having a high potential. Despite this, 33 dawn and dusk activity surveys repeated 2 years in succession over the summers of 2016 and 2017 found no evidence of bats roosting in the buildings. The survey methods and effort are adequate to reach this decision and I have no reason to dispute this result.

Since there was no evidence of bats roosting in the buildings, the three tests of the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010* do not need to be considered; and a European Protected Species Licence will not be required for this project.

However bats were detected foraging in the vicinity and the since the ecological consultants identified the building as being high potential. I would advice that the recommendations of the report are followed, and if works are delayed beyond the end September 2019, then a preworks activity survey should be a **Condition** of approval.

*“If 2 years have passed since the September off the year of the last bat survey and development has not commenced, before these works can start a bat activity survey of the buildings shall be carried out by a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist. Details including an assessment of the impact of the proposed development and any appropriate mitigation measures to alleviate such impacts shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for written approval.”*

## Biodiversity gain and ecological enhancements

The planning system should aim to deliver overall net gains for biodiversity where possible as laid out in the National Planning Policy Framework and other planning policy documents. The site consists of 10 hectares of grounds and agricultural fields currently used for grazing, wooded areas and hedges. This provides considerable space and opportunity to accommodate ecological enhancements. The Ecological Impact Assessment lists a wide range of ecological enhancements that are proposed for the site, some of which are shown on the accompanying landscape master plan. This plan details the location and provides a species list of new native; hedging, tree planting and an orchard. These features are welcomed; however the EIA also implies that further measures will be implemented which are not clearly shown on the master landscape plan. These include:

- The creation of areas of thicket / edge planting.
- Filling in of the entire boundary hedge.
- The set-aside of areas of low maintenance grassland, to allow floral succession, leading to the creation of areas of natural scrub.
- The creation of extra woodland blocks.

- The creation of rough grassland and wetland areas.
- The planting of wild areas and “thousands of new trees”.
- The erection of bat and bird boxes in suitable locations
- The creation of log pile refugia/hibernacula for invertebrates, reptiles and Amphibians.
- The ‘planting’ of semi-buried wood for invertebrates such as stag beetle.

These measures could provide considerable biodiversity gain to the site. However a greater level of detail is required regarding their location, scale, and specification in order for the LPA to fully ascertain their contribution to biodiversity gain. For example, if the wetland areas refer to, is represented by the proposed period water feature with in the formal gardens (ref picture 9), then its actual ecological value is quite small. Furthermore the ecological contribution of many of these measures is dependent on their appropriate management.

In order for the LPA to make a true assessment of the biodiversity gain being proposed a Landscape Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) is required. This should include a map showing the location of ecological enhancements such as bird, bat boxes and refuge areas and areas of new planting. It should also show the location and size of areas being managed for wildlife. The plan needs to specify the ecological objectives and the management prescriptions proposed to achieve them, including detailed annual and five year work plans. Where natural processes such as succession are being utilised to create habitat, such as natural scrub and rough grassland, details of how these will be maintained at the intended end point need to be specified. If the agricultural use of the fields for grazing or mowing is to be continued, then details of how this will impact or contribute to the ecological management of the site, need to be included with in the plan. If this agricultural use is to be on a commercial basis then the plan should demonstrate how the needs of modern commercial agriculture are being balanced against the plans ecological objectives. This ecological management plan should be secured by **Condition** and **submitted in writing to the LPA for approval.**

### Breeding Bird

Evidence of the use of the buildings by breeding birds was found during the Bat Roost And Breeding Bird Survey. In order to prevent harm to these protected species the following **Informative** should be included with any consent granted.

*“Any vegetation and building clearance should be undertaken outside the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive) to protect breeding birds, their nests, eggs and young. If this is not practicable, a search of the area should be made no more than two days in advance of vegetation clearance by a competent Ecologist and if active nests are found, works should stop until the birds have left the nest.”*

## Badgers

No sets or signs of badgers were found during the Ecological Impact Assessment. However there are records from the area, badgers are protected by the badger act 1992 and sensible precautionary measures should be adopted to prevent an offence being committed. I would therefore advise that the following **Informative** is added to any consent granted:

*“Any excavations left open overnight should be covered or have mammal ramps (reinforced plywood board >60cm wide set at an angle of no greater than 30 degrees to the base of the pit) to prevent entrapment. / ensure that any animals that enter can safely escape. Any open pipework with an outside diameter of greater than 120mm must be covered at the end of each working day to prevent animals entering / becoming trapped.”*

## Reptiles

Reptile Survey Population Assessment was carried out between April - August 2016 temperatures during visits were within expected limits to gain valid results. 14 separate visits failed to observe any reptiles or find any signs of their presence. Consequently reptiles should not be considered a constraint to determination of the application.

Notwithstanding the above I am not aware of any significant ecological constraint resulting from the proposed application.

I trust these comments are of assistance,

Yours sincerely

Simon Richards  
Ecology Advisor, Hertfordshire Ecology