

HERTFORDSHIRE ECOLOGY

Providing ecological advice to Hertfordshire's Local Authorities and communities

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Your Ref: 6/2021/0072/MAJ
Ask for: M J Hicks
Tel: 01992 556158
Date: 20/04/2021

Dear William

Application: Repair, refurbishment and 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 new Gate Lodge dwellings, 4 new dwellings on the East Drive, 3 new dwellings within the Walled Garden, 7 new 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: 6/2021/0072/MAJ

Thank you for consulting Hertfordshire Ecology on the above application. I apologise for the delay in responding, but I would like to make the following comments:

1. There is a limited extent of existing ecological information on this site. The House area was known for supporting bat roosts and activity of numerous species, whilst two orchard areas – within the walled garden and to the west of the main house – were known from the 1880s. Some of these – and possible further fruit trees – survived till 2010 but had all been grubbed up by 2016 which could have removed historic varieties. None of the adjacent grassland was known for its interest although the area to the south of the Northaw House is an ecosite, a site with old data within the Records Centre. Supporting cuckooflower, some remnant interest may survive.

2. The original ecology surveys are now dated – being initially undertaken in 2015/16, given the protracted subsequent planning history. They have been updated with a limited walkover survey which concluded the ecology has not

significantly altered. Despite the age of the reports, I have no reason to consider this view is invalid.

3. The surrounding grassland was considered to be agriculturally improved and managed by mowing and livestock grazing. The supporting list of species is consistent with this. Hedgerows do not meet the threshold for 'Important' under the Hedgerow Regulations. Small areas of woodland have been recorded and scattered trees, none of particular ecological significance although all are locally important features within the site.

4. Comprehensive bat surveys were undertaken and three presence/absence surveys of 22 locations undertaken in both 2016 and 2017, consistent with best practice. No evidence of roosting bats was found but some bat activity was recorded. No further surveys were recommended. A precautionary approach to proposed works is highlighted. However there seems to be an anomaly with existing data, as the Ecology Report states there are no existing records from within the site, and this would appear to be an error. However, the availability of records from HERC may be new, or existing records not copied or simply missed from the data search request. The more recent surveys would serve to update these records but without knowing the former presence of a roost would not contribute to a better understanding of the site. However, recommendations include the provision of bat boxes.

5. No evidence of badger was noted; further update survey was advised if development did not commence in the near future.

6. The potential for birds was considered but not apparently specifically surveyed, and the bat and breeding bird survey report contained no references to breeding birds. However, there was a list provided within the Ecological Impact Assessment reflecting birds seen on the site, and of these, barn owl is notable as are swifts and swallows feeding overhead. Other than potential nesting in buildings, the potential to impact upon a significant breeding bird population is negligible if the surrounding land has remained in relatively intensive agricultural use, but recommendations for supporting barn owl, swifts and swallows should be provided.

7. Other species considered included Great crested newts and reptiles. A presence /absence survey of the latter found no evidence – although the records sheet refers to a totally different site.....

8. It was considered that new planting and provision of new features etc. would provide net biological gain consistent with NPPF. Reasonable avoidance measures were proposed for species considered have the potential to use the site.

9. There are a number of anomalies associated with the ecological reports which are based on old information which could now be considered invalid. However, I am satisfied that, given the nature and apparent lack of change to the previously described ecology of the site as outlined within the Dec 2020

Ecological Statement, the limitations of the ecological information would not be sufficient to question my current view that the ecological interest of the site is limited and would not represent a constraint on the proposals.

10. The landscaping does provide considerable opportunity to enhance the biodiversity of the site, but it is very limited in detail and aspiration. The site has actively been degraded in recent years, and proposals for a new orchard, whilst welcome, is insufficient to recreate the original orchard extent and character associated with the site. The orchard area could easily be twice the proposed size to enable a robust contribution to the wider landscaping and biodiversity. Furthermore, ecological enhancements of the surrounding grassland which were suggested in the Ecological Impact Assessment, have not been proposed as part of the landscaping of the site.

11. Regarding Biodiversity Net Gain, sufficient details of this to enable measurable net gains are currently lacking. Furthermore, since the original surveys, the Government has made its intentions clearer with the publication of the NE Biodiversity Metric and proposed mandatory requirement for BNG as described in the Environment Bill. Whilst this position still does not represent a mandatory requirement as yet, it would now be expected for a development of this nature to demonstrate BNG by use of the metric.

12. This is a locally significant development, although the open land directly affected is relatively limited. There is also considerable potential for landscape / ecology enhancements given the surrounding land. I am of the opinion that there are no major ecological constraints associated with this proposal that would represent a justification for refusal on the grounds of ecology. Nevertheless, the supporting information is now old, whilst the recommendations for providing suitable precautionary guidance in respect of species protection and enhancements remain important.

13. On this basis, if this application was to be approved, I advise appropriate Conditions should ensure that:

13.1 A further inspection of the buildings prior to any works is undertaken to assess any evidence for subsequent bat roosting; this may necessitate further presence / absence surveys if evidence is found;

13.2 A Construction and Environment Management Plan is produced to ensure that all necessary ecological considerations are outlined in respect of protecting vulnerable species such as bats, birds, reptiles and mammals, during the course of any proposed construction works;

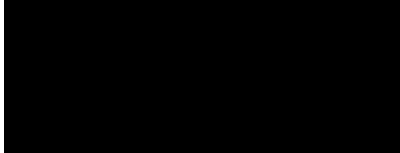
13.3 A detailed Landscape and Ecology Management Plan is produced which increases the orchard proposal, enhances the grasslands around the site and describes the compensation / enhancement proposals in detail. This should reflect the details associated with the recommendations outlined within 5.4 of the Ecological Impact Assessment.

13.4 The LEMP could be informed by a Biodiversity Metric (we advise NE Version 2) sufficient to demonstrate that measurable Biodiversity Net Gain can be achieved on the site, consistent with current Government expectations.

14. On this basis, I advise that the application can be determined accordingly.

I trust these comments are of assistance,

Regards,



Martin Hicks MCIEEM
Senior Ecology Officer, Hertfordshire Ecology