

3 August 2018

Our ref: 183235/ARB

Mr C Neate
TILCO Limited
9 Jubilee Lane
Farnham
Surrey
GU10 4SZ

Dear Mr Neate

LAND AT ABBOTSMEAD PLACE, CAVERSHAM

Introduction

In accordance with your instructions, AA Environmental Limited (AAe) carried out an ecological survey of the above site on Friday 20 July 2018. The purpose of the survey was to determine the existence and location of any ecologically valuable areas and to record any evidence of protected species. This information will serve to assess the ecological impact of the proposals and identify any ecological constraints and/or mitigation measures that may be required. A series of photographs has been attached for reference.

The proposals are for residential development (2 flats) with associated hard and soft landscaping, requiring the clearance of some of the existing vegetation.

Methodology

Baseline Data

As certain baseline data is now readily available on the internet, the Multi-agency website (www.magic.defra.gov.uk) was consulted to determine whether any part of the site or nearby habitats have been statutorily or otherwise designated and a review of Google Earth's satellite imagery (http://www.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/earth/index.html) was completed to determine past land uses of the site and surrounding land.

Walk-over Site Survey

During the walk-over survey, particular attention was paid to record the presence of badgers, bats and herpetofauna (amphibians and reptiles) that may be using the site or present in adjacent habitats, in accordance with the following survey methodologies:

Badgers

Badgers (*Meles meles*) and their setts are protected by the *Protection of Badgers Act 1992*, under which it is an offence to harm badgers or their setts. A sett is defined as "any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a badger". Natural England has provided the following guidance on the interpretation of current use:

A sett is defined as such (and thus protected) as long as signs indicative of 'current use' are present. Thus, a sett remains protected by the Act until such times as the signs (i.e. 'field signs') have deteriorated or decayed to such an extent that they indicate that the sett is no longer in 'current use'.

A thorough survey of the whole site and adjacent habitats, where access was available, was carried out. Particular attention was paid to dense areas of vegetation to check for any evidence of badger activity, which is usually detected by any one or more of the following signs:

- presence of holes with evidence of badger, such as footprints, discarded hair, etc.;
- presence of dung pits and latrines;
- presence of well-used runs with subsidiary evidence of badger activity; and
- presence of other indications of badger activity, such as signs of foraging and footprints.

Bats

Currently there are 17 species of bat known to breed in the UK. All species and their roosts are protected under Regulation 41 of *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)*. As a signatory to the *Bonn Convention (Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe)* the UK is also required to protect their habitats. This legislation makes it illegal to kill, injure, capture or disturb bats, or to obstruct access to, damage or destroy bat roosts. Under the law, a roost is any structure or place used for shelter or protection.

A visual survey of the site was completed to record any evidence of bats or features that could provide potential roosting opportunities. The survey was carried out following the guidelines provided by the Bat Conservation Trust¹. A careful inspection of each tree on the site was carried out to identify those features that are important for roosting bats. Surveying trees presents particular problems at any time of the year as bats will use a wide variety of roost sites in cavities, splits, cracks, knotholes and under loose bark, many of which are not easily detected from the ground.

Each tree was assessed in accordance with the following criteria:

- **Negligible** – negligible habitat features likely to be used by roosting bats.
- **Low** – a tree of sufficient size and age to contain potential roosting features (PRFs) but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.
- **Moderate** – a tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.
- **High** – a tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.

The surrounding habitat was also surveyed to identify any important features such as mature trees with suitable features for roosting bats and any established lines of vegetation that might provide important flightlines.

Evidence of bats is usually detected by any one or more of the following signs:

- the presence of bat droppings, which tend to accumulate under established roost sites or at roost entrances;
- the accumulation of large numbers of moth wings, which have been discarded by feeding bats;
- areas of staining by urine or from fur rubbing; and
- the presence of bats themselves or their corpses.

The visual survey was facilitated by the use of binoculars, ladders, powerful torches (1M candlepower) and a Visual Optics VO36-10ww endoscope. A heterodyne bat detector (Pettersson D200) was also used during the inspection to record any bat calls.

¹ Collins, J. (ed) (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (3rd edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

Herpetofauna

Amphibians

All amphibian species have some level of protection under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2004*. Great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)* and *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)*. The intentional or reckless killing, injury or taking, and intentional or reckless disturbance of great crested newts whilst occupying a 'place used for shelter or protection' is prohibited, as is the destruction of these places.

Reptiles

All reptile species are protected at some level under Schedule 5 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)* and *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)*. The more common species of reptiles, which include slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*), common or viviparous lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), adder (*Vipera berus*) and grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*) are protected by the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)* by part of Section 9(1) and all of Section 9(5). This means that they are protected against intentional or reckless killing and injuring (but not 'taking') and against sale and transporting for sale.

An assessment of the site was carried out to determine its suitability for herpetofauna by recording the habitats present. In addition, any natural/artificial refugia present on the site was lifted to check for any sheltering animals or evidence of animals, such as sloughs (shed skins).

Other Wildlife

In accordance with good practice, the site was checked for any evidence of other protected species or species of particular note.

Results

Baseline Data

According to the Multi-agency website, there are no ecological statutory designated sites located within 2 km of the site. The nearest statutory designated site is Clayfield Copse Local Nature Reserve (LNR), located 2.41 km north-north-east of the site. In addition, according to the Multi-agency website, there are no priority habitats located on or adjacent to the site. The closest priority habitat is an area of Priority Habitat Inventory (PHI) 'Deciduous Woodland' located 0.46 km to the north-west.

Google Earth Imagery shows that the site remained largely unchanged since at least 2003, being dominated by a derelict parcel of land, which was subject to some clearance works sometime after March 2017.

Site Description (Photographs 1-4)

The site is located off Abbotsmead Place in Caversham, centred at National Grid Reference: SU 714746 and covers approximately 0.03 of a hectare. The site is bordered by Abbotsmead Place to the north with a carpark beyond, a public footpath to the east, individual trees to the north-west and residential properties and associated gardens and hardstanding on all other sides.

The site had been recently cleared and as such was dominated by low bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) scrub, with common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), smooth sowthistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*), silverberry (*Elaeagnus commutata*) and regenerating sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) saplings also recorded. Areas of grassland were present around the margins of the site with species recorded including false oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), rough meadow-grass (*Poa trivialis*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), common couch (*Elytrigia repens*) and cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*). Two semi-mature Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) trees were also recorded along the southern boundary.

Although located off-site, there were several mature sycamore trees adjacent to the north-west of the site.

Badgers

No evidence of badger or their setts was recorded on the site or in the surrounding area.

Bats

There were no buildings present on the site. The two Norway maples, due to age and condition and lack of any obvious PRFs, were assessed as providing **low** roosting opportunities for bats.

The site being recently cleared with the lack of established vegetation and located in a built up urban location only offers limited foraging habitat for bats.

Herpetofauna

There were no ponds present on site and therefore no opportunities for breeding amphibians. The site, being dominated by newly established bramble scrub and isolated by its urban surroundings does not provide suitable terrestrial habitat for any species of herpetofauna. In addition, despite a careful search of the site, no species of herpetofauna was found sheltering under any refugia lifted.

Other Wildlife

Apart from a few common species of birds, either recorded on the site or within the adjacent habitat, no other species of any note were recorded.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The proposals are for residential development (2 flats) with associated hard and soft landscaping, requiring the clearance of some of the existing vegetation. The species recorded on the site can be described as common or abundant and are found in similar places across much of Britain, with no evidence of protected species recorded.

Although there are considered to be ecological constraints to the proposals, a series of generic mitigation measures, as detailed below, could be implemented to reduce any impact the development proposals would have on local wildlife. There is also an opportunity to implement some enhancement measures to increase the nature conservation value of the site in the long term in accordance with Government guidance as set out in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012².

It should be noted that all species of wild bird and their nests are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)*. Although there are unlikely to be any nests, a check should be carried out prior to any clearance works to ensure there are no active nests present.

In order to protect the on-site and adjacent trees, suitable fencing may be required at certain locations to reduce the possibility of any damage that could be caused during the works. To minimise accidental damage, any overhanging branches should be pruned back to suitable live growth points. All works should be undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced specialist contractor and should conform to current industry best practice, i.e. BS 3998: 2010 '*Tree Work - Recommendations*'.

As part of the proposals, soft landscaping will be carried out. Where any new planting is proposed it should aim to use native species, but where this is not practicable then species of known value for wildlife can be used. In particular, flowering plants will be of benefit to invertebrate species and shrubs and trees may provide nesting opportunities for birds once they become established.

² Department for Communities and Local Government (2012). *National Planning Policy Framework*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

A series of bird/bat boxes could be installed on some of the existing vegetation or incorporated into the new build to provide enhanced nesting/roosting opportunities. Any boxes installed should be positioned in accordance with good practice.

The effects of lighting on plants and animals are difficult to assess, but it is thought that lighting can adversely affect invertebrates, birds and bats. Although the site currently experiences high levels of light spillage from neighbouring properties and roads, in accordance with good practice, any new lighting to be introduced should be designed to minimise light spillage and pollution and not directed onto any bird/bat boxes installed.

The recommendations provided above try to pre-empt any issues that may arise as well as provide some mitigation and enhancement measures.

I trust this is of interest to you and provides the Council with enough information to determine the application but let me know if further clarification is required.

Yours sincerely



Alan Beaumont
BSc (Hons) MSc MCIEEM

Encl. Photograph Record Sheet (Drg. No. 183235/01)



Photograph 1: Showing the site.



Photograph 2: Showing the site with the two Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) trees in the background.

Rev.	Details				Drawn Chkd.	Date
 AA Environmental Ltd Units 4-8 Cholswell Court Shippon, Abingdon Oxon OX13 6HX T: 01235 536042 F: 01235 523849 info@aae-llp.com www.aae-llp.com		Project 183235 Land at Abbotsmead Place Caversham		Title Photograph Record Sheet		
Scale NTS		Date 03.08.18		Drawn MB	Chkd. ARB	Drg. No. 183235/01 Rev.