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ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

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Client: Elder Developments (Greyfriars) Ltd

Project: Co-Living Scheme at 20-30 Greyfriars Road

Report: Ecological Appraisal

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Greengage Environmental Ltd was commissioned to undertake an Ecological Appraisal by Elder Developments (Greyfriars) Ltd of a site at 20-30 Greyfriars Road.

This report has been produced to support a planning submission for the site which seeks:

'Demolition of the existing building and the erection of a part-7, part-13 storey building comprising 266 co-living units (Sui Generis) and associated communal amenity facilities, refuse storage, cycle parking and plant equipment.'

The site survey aimed to establish the ecological value of this site and the potential presence of notable and legally protected species in order to inform appropriate mitigation, compensation and enhancement actions in light of development works.

The survey area encompasses the site boundary and extends to approximately 0.12 hectares (ha) area, principally made up of buildings and hardstanding. The only vegetation present is ornamental introduced shrub planting in addition to three small trees.

No protected or notable species were recorded on site, and no negative ecological effects are anticipated. There is some limited potential for common nesting birds to be present within the trees and shrubs that are located at street level. Consequently, the only ecological protection recommendations relate to seasonal timing of clearance of this vegetation/or after a nesting bird check has been completed. There may also be opportunities for nesting pigeons (and other birds) on the building, although none were observed during the survey. A pre-demolition check is therefore recommended.

Proposals will achieve a net gain in biodiversity. The following enhancement measures have been included in the landscaping proposals or will be included at further detailed design.:

- Tree planting;
- Vertical greening in the form of climbers on wire mesh;
- Climate resilient shrub and herbaceous planting;
- Bird and bat boxes; and
- Bee posts/invertebrate features.

Further details of the proposed enhancements should be provided in an Ecological Management Plan/Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan that could be secured by planning condition.

A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been undertaken which demonstrates proposals within the site boundary have potential to achieve a net gain of 0.14 biodiversity units (146.40%) associated with area-based habitats.

Should the mitigation and enhancement recommendations be effectively incorporated then the proposals will comply with all relevant legislation and policy.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Greengage Environmental Ltd was commissioned to undertake an Ecological Appraisal by Elder Developments (Greyfriars) Ltd of a site at 20-30 Greyfriars Road.

This report has been produced to support a planning submission for the site which seeks:

'Demolition of the existing building and the erection of a part-7, part-13 storey building comprising 266 co-living units (Sui Generis) and associated communal amenity facilities, refuse storage, cycle parking and plant equipment.'

The site survey undertaken to inform this report aimed to establish the ecological value of this site and the potential presence of notable and legally protected species in order to inform appropriate mitigation, compensation and enhancement actions in light of development works.

2.1 SITE DESCRIPTION

The survey area comprises the site boundary which extends to approximately 0.12 hectares (ha) and is centred on National Grid Reference SU711737, OS Co-ordinates 51.457948, -0.97696290.

The existing site comprises 20-30 Greyfriars Road, a former office building with glazed/stone façade and flat plant covered roof. Vegetation on site is limited to introduced shrub and small street trees. Greyfriars Road runs to the west with Garrard Road to the north. Buildings abut to the east and the south.

The site is set in an urban context with greenspace in the immediate vicinity is limited to private gardens and landscaping to the west.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The site assessment was undertaken in accordance with guidance in the UK Habitat Classification System (UKHab)¹ and the Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (2017) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal², in accordance with BS42020:2013: Biodiversity³. The overall site assessment consisted of:

- Site specific biological information gained from statutory and non-statutory consultation; and
- A site walkover with classification of habitats and a protected species scoping assessment.

The site-specific consultation provided the ecological context for the site survey.

Greengage undertook the site walkover on 13th August 2024 during overcast weather conditions. Features within the site boundary and accessible features immediately bordering it were evaluated and the extent and distribution of habitats and plant communities were recorded and supplemented with target notes on areas or species requiring further commentary. Fauna using the area were recorded and areas of habitat suitable for statutorily protected species were identified where present, with an active search carried out for evidence of such use.

3.1 DESKTOP REVIEW

A review of readily available ecological information and other relevant environmental databases (included Defra's Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website⁴) was undertaken for the site and its vicinity. This provided the overall ecological context for the site, to better inform the survey.

3.2 ON SITE SURVEY

Flora

The extent and distribution of different habitats on site were identified and mapped according to the standard UKHab methodologies, supplemented with target notes describing the dominant botanical species and any features of interest. Any present protected plant species and invasive/non-natives were also noted.

Fauna

The survey specifically included assessments to identify the potential value for notable, rare and protected species at site. This involved identifying potential habitats in terms of refugia, breeding sites and foraging areas in the context of species known to be present locally and regionally.

The likelihood of occurrence is ranked as follows:

- Negligible - While presence cannot be absolutely discounted, the site includes very limited or poor-quality habitat for a particular species. The site may also be outside the known national range for a species;

- Low - On-site habitat is poor to moderate quality for a given species, with few or no information about their presence from desk top study. However, presence cannot be discounted due to the national distribution of the species or the nature of on-site and surrounding habitats;
- Moderate - The on-site habitats are of moderate quality, providing most or all of the key requirements for a species. Several factors may limit the likelihood of occurrence, habitat severance, habitat disturbance and small habitat area;
- High - On-site habitat of high quality for given species. Site is within a regional or national stronghold for that particular species with good quality surroundings and good connectivity; and
- Present - Presence confirmed for the survey itself or recent, confirmed records from information gathered through desk top study.

The species surveyed for are set out below. All other species were scoped out given the nature of the site.

Bat Species (*Chiroptera*)

The site visit was undertaken in daylight and the evaluation of bat potential comprised an assessment of natural features on site that aimed to identify characteristics suitable for bat roosts, foraging and commuting. In accordance with Bat Conservation Trust's Good Practice Guidelines⁵ and methods given in English Nature's (now Natural England) Bat Mitigation Guidelines⁶ consideration was given to:

- The availability of access to roosts for bats;
- The presence and suitability of crevices and other places as roosts; and
- Signs of bat activity or presence.

Definite signs of bat activity were taken to be:

- The bats themselves;
- Droppings;
- Grease marks;
- Scratch marks; and
- Urine spatter.

Signs of possible bat presence were taken to be:

- Stains; and
- Moth and butterfly wings.

Features with potential as roost sites include mature trees with holes, crevices or splits (the most utilised trees oak (*Quercus* sp.), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), beech (*Fagus* sp.), willow (*Salix* sp.) and Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)), caves, bridges, tunnels and buildings with cracks or gaps serving as possible access points to voids or crevices.

Additionally, linear natural features such as tree lines, hedgerows and river corridors are often considered valuable for commuting and semi-natural habitats such as woodland, meadows and waterbodies can provide important foraging resources. Consideration was given to the presence of these features both immediately within and adjacent to the assessment area.

Birds

During the walkover survey, the potential for breeding, wintering and migratory birds was assessed. In particular, this includes areas of trees, scrub, heathland and wetlands that could support nests for common or notable species.

Biodiversity Action Plan priority species/ Species of Principal Importance

Where consultation and desk-study indicates the presence of BAP priority species (Species of Principal Importance) not protected by statute, effort was made to establish the potential for the site to support these species.

3.3 SURVEYORS

James Bumphrey, who completed the survey and wrote this report, has an undergraduate degree in Environmental Sciences (BSc Hons), a Master's degree in Environmental Consultancy and a Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence. James has over 11 years' experience in ecology survey and consultancy.

3.4 CONSTRAINTS

Species data collated during the desk study is mainly derived from records submitted by members of the public and ad-hoc surveys undertaken by volunteers. Therefore, it should not be taken as a definitive list of the protected or species of conservation concern that occur in the local area.

No significant constraints that stand to impact conclusions drawn in this report therefore presented themselves.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 DESKTOP REVIEW

Designations

Consultations with TVERC and the MAGIC dataset have confirmed that there are no statutory designations of national or international importance within the boundary of the site or within 2km.

There are also no Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) within 2km of the site boundary.

Biodiversity Action Plans

UK Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) have been developed which set priorities for nationally important habitats and species. To support the BAPs, Species/Habitat Statements (otherwise known as Species/Habitat Action Plans) were produced that provide an overview of the status of the species and set out the broad policies that can be developed to conserve them. A list of priority species of conservation importance was also developed.

The UK BAP was succeeded in 2012 by the UK-Post 2012 Biodiversity Framework which informed the creation of the Biodiversity 2020 strategy; England's contribution towards the UK's commitments under the United Nations Convention of Biological Diversity.

Despite this, the UK BAP priority species lists and conservation objectives still remain valid through integration with local BAPs (which remain valid), and in the form of the Habitats and Species of Principle Importance list (as required under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act).

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) ensure that national action plans (the UK BAP/Biodiversity 2020) are translated into effective action at the local level and establish targets and actions for locally characteristic species and habitats.

Reading BAP

The following species specific actions are referenced in the Reading BAP and have informed the recommendations within this report:

- Swift bricks Sand martin nesting tubes
- Bat boxes
- Stag beetle loggeries
- Black redstart nesting sites and habitats
- House sparrow terraces and planting to provide invertebrates and seed

Species Record

The information provided in the biological data search from TVERC identified records of a number of protected and BAP priority species within 2km search radius of the site within the last 10 years:

- Birds - peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), swift (*Apus apus*) and starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*).
- Bats - noctule (*Nyctalus* sp.), Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*).

The species listed above are primarily those known to be in the area that may be impacted by any proposals at the site, or that stand to benefit as a consequence of potential ecological enhancements at the site and inform site-specific mitigation and enhancement recommendations described in the following chapter.

4.2 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SITE: HABITATS

The habitats presented across the assessment site consist of the following UKHab categories:

Buildings (u1b5) and Developed land; sealed surface (u1b) with Introduced shrub (1160) and Scattered trees (11)

The site largely comprises the existing 20-30 Greyfriars building with associated hardstanding. There are some small areas of ornamental planting with trees along the frontage and at the entrance to 20 Greyfriars.

Figure 4.1 Building viewed from southern end



Figure 4.2 Trees along frontage



4.3 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SITE: SPECIES

Bats

Foraging and commuting

The site is unlikely to attract bat species due to the lack of foraging resources and high levels of disturbance and light pollution. In addition, the site is isolated from attractive foraging areas through roads and other extensive urbanisation. Therefore, the site is considered to have **negligible** suitability to support foraging and commuting bats.

Roosting

The exterior of the building included a significant coverage of glazing and stone which appeared to be unsuitable for roosting bats, lacking in gaps or crevices. The car park at the base of the building was inspected with no suitable features identified. There were bird nesting deterrents present and security lighting. The roof was flat and covered with plant. Overall, the site was deemed to have **negligible** suitability to support roosting bats.

Birds

There were areas around the roof, and ground level car park which contained bird netting to discourage nesting by birds. In addition, there were no suitable ingress points into the buildings for birds to enter any internal cavities.

The existing tree and shrub vegetation was considered to have **low** potential for nesting birds given its limited extent and urban location.

No evidence of species associated with nesting on buildings (e.g peregrine falcon and pigeon *Columba livia domestica*) was noted on-site although full access was not available to all areas of the roof.

Other Protected/Notable Species

The potential for all other notable and protected species is considered **negligible**.

5.0 EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion is provided below on the key ecological receptors that stand to be impacted/benefit from proposed works; high level commentary on appropriate mitigation, compensation and enhancement actions is also provided.

An Ecological Management Plan (EMP)/Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) should be produced and implemented for the site providing greater detail on the below, which should be secured through planning condition in accordance with BS 42020: 2013 Biodiversity.

Mitigation

Nesting Birds

Vegetation clearance should be timed to avoid nesting bird season (March to August inclusive) or after an ecologist has confirmed likely absence of nesting birds.

A pre-construction check is recommended for the building to confirm that the no pigeons (or other birds) have started nesting in/on the building.

Enhancement

The following enhancement measures have been included in the landscaping proposals or will be incorporated at detailed design stage:

- Tree planting will be incorporated at multiple levels to provide foraging opportunities and habitat structure.
- Trellis based green wall will be incorporated at ground level to provide vertical greening.
- Wildlife friendly, climate resilient, trees/shrubs and herbaceous planting will be incorporated including species taken from the RHS plants for pollinators guide⁷.
- In accordance with the recommendations within the Reading BAP, bird nest boxes should be incorporated into the design of the buildings. This should include a generalist boxes/bricks which are suitable for multiple species including swift and house sparrow. Boxes suitable for black redstart should be incorporated at roof level.
- In accordance with the recommendations within the Reading BAP, bat boxes should be incorporated into the design of the buildings. These should be positioned on south or east-facing aspects of the building and hung at least 3m above ground level.
- Invertebrate features such as bee bricks, bee posts and habitat panels should be located on suitable external landscaping areas.

A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been undertaken which demonstrates indicative landscaping proposals within the site boundary have potential to result in a net gain of 0.14 biodiversity units associated with area-based habitats which equates to a net gain of 146.40%.

6.0 SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Greengage was commissioned to undertake an Ecological Appraisal by Elder Developments (Greyfriars) Ltd of a site at 20-30 Greyfriars Road in Reading.

The site was of limited existing ecological value and consequently there is significant opportunity to deliver a net gain in biodiversity on site. Landscaping proposals incorporate tree planting, a trellis based green wall and climate resilient/pollinator friendly shrub and herbaceous planting, with opportunities to incorporate bird and bat boxes, and invertebrate features. Further details of these enhancements should be provided in an EMP/HMMP (secured by planning condition).

A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been undertaken which demonstrates indicative landscaping proposals within the site boundary have potential to result in a net gain of 0.14 biodiversity units associated with area-based habitats which equates to a net gain of 146.40%.

Should the enhancement recommendations be incorporated then the proposals will comply with all relevant legislation and policy.

APPENDIX A EXISTING SITE

Figure A.1 Existing Site (Redline indicates approximate survey boundary)



APPENDIX B RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND POLICY

B.1 LEGISLATION

Current key legislation relating to ecology includes The Environment Act⁸ Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)⁹; The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019 ('Habitats & Species Regulations')¹⁰, The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act)¹¹, and The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006¹².

The Environment Act, 2021

The Environment Act, 2021 will mandate the requirement for new development in England to deliver a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG), as measured by the agreed metric (the current relevant version being the Natural England metric 4.0), secured through planning condition as standard (as per schedule 14 of the Act). Approach to the delivery of BNG must follow the mitigation hierarchy, with avoidance of impact and on-site compensation/gains prioritised, ahead of the use of offsite biodiversity unit offsets, or the purchase of biodiversity credits.

The Act introduces the condition that no development may begin unless a biodiversity net gain plan has been submitted and approved by the local planning authority (LPA).

The Act also amends requirements of the NERC Act, 2006, adding the need to not just conserve, but enhance biodiversity through planning projects. Furthermore, it introduces the need for the LPA to have regard to relevant local nature recovery strategies and relevant species/protected site conservation strategies, when making their decision.

Under the Act, the enhancements must be maintained for at least 30 years.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

The Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations replace The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994 (as amended)¹³, and transpose Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora ('EU Habitats Directive')¹⁴, and Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds ('Birds Directive')¹⁵ into UK law (in conjunction with the Wildlife and Countryside Act).

Regulation 43 and 47 respectively of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations makes it an offence (subject to exceptions) to deliberately capture, kill, disturb, or trade in the animals listed in Schedule 2 (European protected species of animals), or pick, collect, cut, uproot, destroy, or trade in the plants listed in Schedule 5 (European protected species of plant). Development that would contravene the protection afforded to European protected species requires a derogation (in the form of a licence) from the provisions of the Habitats Directive.

Regulation 63 (1) states: 'A competent authority, before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which —

(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects); and

(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site;

must make an appropriate assessment of the implications for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives.'

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) is the principal mechanism for the legislative protection of wildlife in Great Britain. This legislation is the means by which the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats¹⁶ (the 'Bern Convention') and the Birds Directive and EU Habitats Directive are implemented in Great Britain.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

The Wildlife and Countryside Act has been updated by the CROW Act. The CROW Act amends the law relating to nature conservation and protection of wildlife. In relation to threatened species it strengthens the legal protection and adds the word 'reckless' to the offences of damaging, disturbing, or obstructing access to any structure or place a protected species uses for shelter or protection, and disturbing any protected species whilst it is occupying a structure or place it uses for shelter or protection.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 states that every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Biodiversity Action Plans provide a framework for prioritising conservation actions for biodiversity.

Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of species of flora and fauna and habitats considered to be of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The list, a result of the most comprehensive analysis ever undertaken in the UK, currently contains 1,149 species, including for example, hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*), and 65 habitats that were listed as priorities for conservation action under the now defunct UK Biodiversity Action Plan¹⁷ (UK BAP). Despite the devolution of the UK BAP and succession of the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework¹⁸ (and Biodiversity 2020 strategy¹⁹ in England), as a response to the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD's) Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020²⁰ and EU Biodiversity Strategy (EUBS)²¹, this list (now referred to as the list of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance in England) will be used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 'to have regard' to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.

Biodiversity Action Plans

Non-statutory Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) have been prepared on a local and regional scale throughout the UK over the past 15 years. Such plans provide a mechanism for implementing the government's broad strategy for conserving and enhancing the most endangered ('priority') habitats and species in the UK for the next 20 years. As described above the UK BAP was succeeded in England by Biodiversity 2020 although the list of priority habitats and species remains valid as the list of Species of Principal Importance for Nature Conservation.

Regional and local BAPs are still valid however and continue to be updated and produced.

Detail on the relevant BAPs for this site are provided in the main text of this report.

Legislation Relating to Nesting Birds

Nesting birds, with certain exceptions, are protected from intentional killing, destruction of nests and destruction/taking of eggs under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the CROW Act. Any clearance of dense vegetation should therefore be undertaken outside of the nesting bird season, taken to run conservatively from March to August (inclusive), unless an ecologist confirms the absence of active nests prior to clearance.

Legislation Relating to Bats

All UK bats and their roosts are protected by law. Since the first legislation was introduced in 1981, which gave strong legal protection to all bat species and their roosts in England, Scotland and Wales, additional legislation and amendments have been implemented throughout the UK.

Six of the 18 British species of bat have Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) assigned to them, which highlights the importance of specific habitats to species, details of the threats they face and proposes measures to aid in the reduction of population declines.

Although habitats that are important for bats are not legally protected, care should be taken when dealing with the modification or development of an area if aspects of it are deemed important to bats such as flight corridors and foraging areas.

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) was the first legislation to provide protection for all bats and their roosts in England, Scotland and Wales (earlier legislation gave protection to horseshoe bats only.)

All eighteen British bat species are listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 and under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive, 1992 as a European protected species. They are therefore fully protected under Section 9 of the 1981 Act and under Regulation 43 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, which transposes the Habitats Directive into UK law.

Consequently, it is an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats;

- Damage or destroy a bat roosting place (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time);
- Possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat (dead or alive) or any part of a bat; and
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost.

This legislation applies to all bat life stages.

The implications of the above in relation to the proposals are that where it is necessary during construction to remove trees, buildings or structures in which bats roost, it must first be determined that work is compulsory and if so, appropriate licenses must be obtained from Natural England.

B.2 PLANNING POLICY

National

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023²² sets out the Government's planning policies for England, including how plans and decisions are expected to apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Chapter 15 of the NPPF focuses on conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, stating plans should 'identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity'.

It goes on to state: 'if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused'. Alongside this, it acknowledges that planning should be refused where irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland are lost.

Local

Reading Local Plan

EN12 Biodiversity and the Green Network

On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. Development should:

- Protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and
- Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable.

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