

Memo

To: Sian Hickey

From: Cathy Holwill (RBC Ecology Consultations)

CC:

Date: 20 January 2024

Re: Application ref: 231815

Address: Hamilton Academy 40 Christchurch Road Reading RG2 7AY

Description: Discharge of conditions 5 (arboricultural method statement), 6 (landscaping scheme), 7 (biodiversity enhancements), 8 (muga fence) and 11 (construction method statement) of planning application 231025

The application is for discharge of conditions 5 (arboricultural method statement), 6 (landscaping scheme), 7 (biodiversity enhancements), 8 (muga fence) and 11 (construction method statement) of planning application 231025 [Demolition of existing single storey rear extension, steps, and ramps. Recladding and upgrade of existing single storey building. Upgrade to all hard and soft landscaping with new MUGA enclosure at the rear of the site.]

Condition 7 reads:

The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until details of biodiversity enhancements, including bird nesting and bat roosting opportunities on the buildings have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme is to include a programme for implementation and ongoing maintenance. The habitat enhancement scheme shall thereafter be implemented and adhered to in accordance with agreed programme.

REASON: In the interests of avoiding harm to habitats and species whilst securing biodiversity enhancement in the long term. This accords with Paragraph 175 of the NPPF (2019), Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

The applicant has submitted a report (Ecology Works, Ltd, October 2023) by way of discharging the condition. This report includes a bat mitigation strategy which states that two Schwegler bat boxes on mature trees will be installed during works. The document also states that the 'renovated building will provide new roosting opportunities for bats in the form of three wall-mounted bat boxes in the eastern elevation, such as the Beaumaris Woodstone Bat Box Maxi, or equivalent.'. These boxes are not shown on any plans and to discharge this aspect of the condition, these will need to be provided along with elevations and specification of the bat boxes will need to be supplied.

The report states "The site will also be enhanced for breeding birds with the installation of four swift nest boxes (such as the Vivara® Pro Woodstone, Burgos® or Schwegler® 17, or equivalent). This species is recorded within 1km of the site. The boxes will be installed by contractors at the eaves of the

old part of the building, and will provide net gain in accordance with policy and will support the declining local swift population by providing valuable nesting and roosting habitat. In addition, an NHBS Hedgehog Nest Box (or equivalent) will be installed in the southern boundary hedgerow in a discrete location, to enhance the available nesting habitat”

As with the bat boxes, details of the locations, elevations as well as full specifications of these bird boxes will need to be provided. Furthermore and as per the condition, the details should also ‘include a programme for implementation and ongoing maintenance.’”

As a ‘habitat enhancement scheme’, details should be provided of the other biodiversity enhancement recommendations described in the ecology report to provide species rich habitats for a range of wildlife and invertebrates. The report states:

“Habitat protection, creation and enhancement measures will be implemented as follows:

- Appropriate root protection measures will be installed in line with BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations around retained trees during the construction period to ensure they are not damaged by heavy plant or stored materials.*
- There will be planting of at least 10 trees in the central area of the site, and at least two in the northern parking and driveway area. Use of saplings (rather than more mature trees) for habitat creation is encouraged, as this can increase long-term tree survival and reduce risks of root problems. At least five tree species will be selected using the following or equivalent native species to suit local soil conditions: pedunculate oak, silver birch Betula pendula, cherry Prunus avium, beech, field maple Acer campestre, smallleaved lime Tilia cordata, rowan Sorbus aucuparia, holly or hazel.*
- Landscaping will use diverse planting mixes throughout, with native species selected as far as possible.”*

The planting plans submitted along with the planting schedule do not align with the above statements and do not include any of the trees listed above. Furthermore, the perennials and shrubs listed within the schedule appear to be predominantly non-native. Native species generally have much greater wildlife value than non-native species, and are generally agreed to be better for biodiversity than non-native species as they have a greater number of invertebrates, fungi etc., associated with them. As such, the planting schedule and plans should be updated to include a larger range of native species as recommended within the ecology report.

Condition 6 reads:

No works or development shall take place, except for demolition and recladding, until a comprehensive scheme of hard and soft landscaping has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These details shall include:

- a. Proposed finished ground and floor levels or contours, means of enclosure (including mammal gaps where appropriate), car parking layouts, other vehicle and pedestrian access and circulation areas;*
- b. Hard surfacing materials and minor artefacts and other ancillary structures (e.g. furniture, play equipment, refuse or other storage units, signs, lighting, external services, etc);*
- c. Soft landscaping details shall include planting plan, specification (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment), tree pit specifications, schedules of plants and trees, to include large canopy, native and wildlife friendly species, and species likely to prove adaptable to climate change, noting species, planting sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate, and implementation timetable;*
- d. A maintenance programme detailing all operations to be carried out in order to*

allow successful establishment of planting; and

e. routes and details of proposed and existing functional services above and below ground including foul and surface water drainage, soakaways and SUDs details, power, communications cables and water and gas supply pipelines, including access points.

The approved hard and soft landscaping scheme shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with a timetable approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the date of planting, die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, to be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: These details are required prior to commencement of development because of insufficient information contained within this submission and in the interest of ensuring that the landscaping of the development enhances the visual local environment and in accordance with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Please see comments for the habitat enhancement scheme above particularly in relation to part c of this condition as the planting supplied appears to be mostly non native.

Conditions 5 (arboricultural method statement), 8 (muga fence) and 11 (construction method statement) are unrelated to ecology and there are no objections to these conditions being discharged.