Ecological Synopsis July 2019 LDP-EBD-HN1.7.7

Land at Ewloe Green

ERAP (Consultant Ecologists) Ltd reference 2019-049

Introduction, Scope and Objectives

This ecological synopsis has been prepared in advance of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) report for Sites A and B at Ewloe Green.

The PEA was carried out in June 2019 and the scope of survey comprised:

a. A desktop study and data search to obtain any existing records of non-statutory designated sites and / or records of protected species within or adjacent to the site;

b. An extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey including a description and plan;

c. Survey of all habitats with reference to the National Vegetation Classification (NVC);

d. Detailed recording of plant species within any areas of ecological interest, if present;

e. Assessment of any hedgerows in accordance with *The Hedgerows Regulations 1997;*

f. Search for invasive plant species such as Japanese Knotweed;

g. Survey of the site and surrounds for relevant protected species namely badger; and

h. Assessment of the suitability of the site for other relevant protected species namely breeding birds including barn owl, roosting bats, great crested newt (including a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment at relevant ponds), water vole, otter and reptile species to inform the need for additional, more detailed, surveys to support a planning application.

The survey was carried out by an appropriately qualified and experienced ecologist and in accordance with recognised survey guidelines.

The PEA report will provides a comprehensive account of the ecological baseline and will inform the preparation of site masterplan and the development proposals.

Designated Sites for Nature Conservation

Site

The site and adjacent land have no statutory or non-statutory designation for nature conservation.

Wider Area

The site lies approximately 193 metres (minimum) to the south of the Deeside and Buckley Newt Sites Special Area for Conservation (SAC) and Connah's Quay Ponds and Woodland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The SAC and SSSI are designated for the presence of old sessile oak woodlands and the great crested newt.

A test of likely significant effect or appropriate assessment will be required as part of a planning application submission to demonstrate that the development will not significant affect the conservation features of the SAC directly or indirectly, refer to guidance under 'Great Crested Newt' below.

Habitats

None of the habitats are identified as Priority Habitat on MAGiC.

All fields within the site are characterised by cattle or pony grazed improved grassland with field boundary hedgerows with scattered mature trees. The plant species composition within the fields is very similar. Minor differences in the grassland plant species composition occurs, for example, at north-eastern corner of the site where an area of lower lying land supports plant species more indicative of temporary waterlogged soil conditions such as Soft Rush, Brooklime and Floating Sweet-grass.

None of the habitats within the site are of significant interest in terms of their plant species composition or are representative of semi-natural habitat. The NVC communities present are typical of the geographical area and conditions present. The site contains only common and widespread plant species.

All hedgerows are examples of Priority Habitat. The hedgerows will be assessed to determine if they qualify as 'important' in accordance with *The Hedgerows Regulations 1997* wildlife and landscape criteria in the PEA.

The hedgerows with scattered trees are of local value as they add structural diversity and are suitable for use by breeding birds and foraging and commuting bats. The retention and protection of the hedgerows and trees is recommended, with native planting as compensation for any loss to accommodate the development proposals.

No invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended) have been detected.

Animal Life and Protected Species

Badger

A single outlying badger sett was detected at the northern margin of the site. Mitigation (either avoidance or closure under an appropriate licence) is feasible and the proposals would not cause unacceptable harm to the welfare or conservation of badger in the local area.

Bat Species

A number of hedgerow trees at the site support features with suitability for use by roosting bats. Further survey will be required at individual trees scheduled for removal to inform a planning application. The PEA will outline a method statement to be applied if any of the identified trees are scheduled to be felled / pruned.

A comprehensive licensed bat survey of the buildings at the farmhouse / stables has not been carried out at this stage. Based on the preliminary external assessment, the timber kennels, sheds and stables are assessed to be of negligible suitability for use by roosting bats and the brick store and farmhouse are of moderate suitability; further survey will be required to either have confidence in a roost or to inform a mitigation strategy, should these buildings be affected.

The hedgerow and trees within and adjacent to the site are suitable for foraging and commuting bats. Recommendations relating to the retention of features suitable for use by foraging and commuting bats, and features to enhance habitats for roosting bats at the site will be described in the PEA.

Breeding Birds and Barn Owl

No evidence of use of the grasslands by ground nesting birds (lapwing, skylark etc.) was detected; it is considered that the undulating topography at the site is unsuitable for the attraction of the ground nesting bird species.

The trees, shrubs and hedgerows provide favourable foraging and nesting habitat for passerine species of birds detected within the site and the wider area, including Priority Species. Recommendations for the retention and protection of these habitats as part of the proposed development and compensation, where retention is not feasible, will be included in the PEA.

No evidence of use of the buildings by roosting / nesting barn owl was detected (however the internal areas of all buildings was not accessible).

Great Crested Newt

There are no ponds or habitats suitable for use by breeding great crested newt within or immediately adjacent to the site.

Consultation of the records provided by Cofnod confirms that known records of great crested newt are present at ponds over 250 metres from the site boundary.

Owing to the proximity of the site to the Deeside and Buckley Newt Sites Special Area for Conservation (SAC) and Connah's Quay Ponds and Woodland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) the mitigation for great crested newt and the designated sites will be in accordance with Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) 8a.

https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/PDFFiles/Planning/SPG-8a-Great-Crested-Newt-Mitigation-Requirements.pdf

The majority of the site lies within the SAC buffer as defined by SPG8a. In accordance with SPG8a it is understood that the following mitigation would be expected (highlighted yellow).

Table 3 - Development affecting designated sites with GCN as the main feature Refer to Table 1 and Appendix I

Development type	Major Development	Minor Development	
	Full, Outline, Approved Matters/etc *Mineral & Waste, Transport applications etc*	*Up to 10 dwellings*	*Extension/ Conservatory/ Garage*
A2 - Directly affects known SAC with GCN as key feature	Like for like principle; Need to provide replacement habitat capable of its purpose e.g. breeding pond and terrestrial habitats prior to destruction of existing, so that the "favourable conservation status" of the population is maintained. Also need to demonstrate through a "ToLS or AA that the development will not significantly affect the Conservation Features of the SAC directly or indirectly. As well as replacement habitat, this will involve measures to avoid indirect effects such as increased recreational pressures through the provision of informal recreational areas. This is referred to as the "thirds principle": 1/3 development, 1/3 mitigation, 1/3 informal recreation.		
B2 - Adjacent to, and up to 250m of GCN SACs	Mitigate for loss of habitat type on a like for like basis – Refer to management costs within appendix II. Also need to demonstrate through a ToLS or AA that the development will not significantly affect the Conservation Features of the SAC directly or indirectly. As well as replacement habitat, this will involve measures to avoid indirect effects such as increased recreational pressures through the provision of informal recreational areas.		Only need to undertake a ToLS dependant on suitability of site to be lost. Undertake Reasonable avoidance measures (RAMs) to prevent harm to GCN (see appendix 4). This depends on suitability of site if poor e.g. hardstanding / amenity grassland then a note to applicant might suffice.
C2 - 250m – extent of SAC Buffer (Appendix I) Refer to local knowledge, Cofnod and "likelihood maps" (see Appendix III)	Mitigate for loss of habitat type on a like for like/50% basis – Refer to Appendix II of management costs. Also need to demonstrate through a ToLS or AA that the development will not significantly affect the Conservation Features of the SAC directly or indirectly.		Unless the habitat lost represents key connecting habitat or important habitat type, test of significance is not required. Note to applicant will generally suffice.
D2 - Outside Newt Site Buffer (see Appendix I)	Mitigation generally not required unless key connecting habitats are affected. Indirect effects of large developments still need to be assessed through a ToLS	N/A	N/A

It is concluded that mitigation for great crested newt and the designated sites is feasible, however this will involve the allocation of an area of the site for recreation and habitat creation. This can be combined with the sustainable surface water drainage system. It is considered that this also provides a significant opportunity to enhance the habitat connectivity particularly along the northern margin of the site to enhance green infrastructure and function and satisfy relevant planning policy.

Other Protected Species / Considerations

Based on the habitats present and the results of the desktop study and data search it is considered at this stage that the need to consider reptiles, wintering birds, water vole and otter is reasonably scoped out.

Conclusion

The preliminary ecological appraisal demonstrates that a residential development at Ewloe Green is feasible and acceptable in accordance with ecological considerations *and Chapter 5: Conserving and Improving Natural Heritage and the Coast, Planning Policy Wales* (PPW Edition 9, November 2016) and *Technical Advice Note (TAN) 5: Nature Conservation and Planning* (September 2009). No significant ecological constraints on the development of the site have been identified.

In the presence of an appropriately designed scheme that takes into account the requirements of SPG8a it is concluded that the allocation and development of the site at Ewloe Green to residential properties can be achieved with no significant adverse direct effect on the integrity of the statutory designated sites and the conservation status of their features of interest.

Similarly, in accordance with SPG8a, appropriate and proportionate mitigation for indirect effects on the designated sites associated with recreational pressures, either alone or in-combination with other schemes, is achievable in the presence of an appropriately designed scheme (or through a combination of on-site provision and off-site contribution).

Significant adverse effects on other protected species namely badger and nesting birds (and possibly roosting bats (subject to the results of further surveys)) will be avoided and measures for Priority Species will be accommodated within the proposals.

Development at the site will secure an opportunity to implement beneficial measures such as habitat management and habitat creation that will conserve and enhance habitats for wildlife such as birds and bats, with the aim of complementing the habitats in the wider area and providing a measurable net gain in biodiversity.