

From: Dan McAndrew
Sent: 29 June 2018 14:48
To: Helen Goulden; Planning Consultations
Cc: 'Derek Whitcher'
Subject: Almsford Bank Stables, Pannal, 18/00912/OUTMAJ

Initial Internal Ecological Consultation Response

18/00912/OUTMAJ

Outline application for the erection of up to 65 dwellings with access considered.
Almsford Bank Stables Leeds Road Harrogate HG2 8AA

There is currently an objection to the application pending the provision of more detailed ecological survey information, some of which (see below) is required in order to inform the principle of development.

The Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey (Whitcher Wildlife 28.06.2017) characterised the area as comprising woodland (semi-natural and plantation) with semi-improved grassland running along the tree-lined corridor of the River Crimple. There are a number of species-poor boundary hedgerows with scattered mature trees along some of the hedgerow and defunct hedgerow boundaries. There are a small number of modern stable or storage buildings near the site entrance and piles of stones, wood and stored materials.

The semi-natural woodland does not appear to be ancient (despite the presence of bluebells) and is shown as rough ground on older maps. The plantation is made up of a number of species and includes a large stand of aspen. The fields appear to be mostly species-poor semi-improved grassland with occasional slightly richer damper areas towards the river. The boundary hedges are species-poor, dominated by hawthorn but are shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey maps. The most notable feature are the surviving mature hedgerow trees – some of which would undoubtedly be classed as 'veteran' and therefore protected in the NPPF, although aspect this has not been assessed in the report. These were recognised as providing the potential to support bat roosts. The tree report (David Houldershaw, November 2017) includes an Arboricultural Impact Assessment. Based on the "proposed site plan", this makes recommendations for the retention of the most significant mature trees but identifies a requirement for tree surgery on a number of these mature/veteran trees e.g. T18, 24 and 25, 29, and possibly E3 and E10. The retained trees might also be impacted by lighting as a result of the development. These trees will require a more detailed bat survey prior to the submission of any full planning application. Such a survey should also include checks for barn owl. An early mature sycamore in group G3 also shows bat roost potential (photo 22). The proposed loss of significant numbers of less important trees will require to be mitigated for and this could perhaps be most effectively achieved by strengthening the wooded corridor of the Crimple.

Nesting birds could be impacted by removal of the buildings and of trees or woody or scrubby vegetation and measures should be taken to protect breeding birds during the course of construction and to provide for their continued ability to utilise the site, following development.

The tree-lined corridor of the River Crimple/Crimple Beck forms the southern boundary of the site. It has been identified by Natural England as 'S9' - a Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor of Subregional Importance. (<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140605112209/http://www.naturalengland.>

org.uk/regions/yorkshire_and_the_humber/ourwork/yandhgreeninfrastructuremappingproject.aspx).

The regional Green Infrastructure network provides vital multifunctional ecosystem services across the District and is referred in the Council's Green Infrastructure SPD as underpinning the Council's approach. The river does not appear to be directly impacted by the development but could be impacted by increased recreational disturbance by people and pets and pollution mitigation measures will require to be implemented during construction and there may be an opportunity to ecologically enhance the grassland and woodland as part of overall mitigation for the site.

The substrate of the beck appears ideal for crayfish although invasive signal crayfish (which displace native white-clawed through competition and disease) have been recorded within the catchment recently. The habitat of the mostly dry ditches and the wooded Crimple do not seem particularly suitable for water voles and no signs have been recorded. Surveys for crayfish may be required if any works are proposed to directly impact on the beck but are otherwise unlikely to be impacted by the development providing the full pollution prevention control measures are implemented.

Otters have been recorded by Smeeden Forman ecologists at Almsford Bridge in April 2018 and an old otter spraint was present on a rock in the river along the river around the middle of the site during my visit of 22nd June 2018. Otters are European Protected Species which are potentially subject to disturbance by people and dogs and susceptible to increased dangers from traffic. There appears to be some potential for otter holts on the near bank of the river and numerous opportunities on the far bank. Some assessment of the potential presence of breeding otter along the river is therefore required, together with any proposed mitigation measures that may be necessary. This might for example include fencing and strengthening the treed buffer in the zone around the Crimple, perhaps moving back the development from the closest point to the river. This information is required in order to establish the principle of development. There is also some potential for kingfisher to nest in some of the earth banks on the outer meanders of the Crimple but mitigation for otter would be also likely to mitigate against disturbance to kingfishers.

The appraisal noted the presence of six ponds within 500m of the site. Natural England Standing advice is to "survey for great crested newts if:

- distribution and historical records suggest newts may be present
- there's a pond within 500 metres of the development, even if it only holds water some of the year
- the development site includes refuges (eg log piles or rubble), grassland, scrub, woodland or hedgerows"

The report states that "access was not possible to any of these ponds during this survey [for GCN] as they all lie within private land". However there no indication that any attempt has been made to obtain permission to access these ponds. I would expect some further effort to be made to gain access – the closest of which (Pond 1) is on land owned by Harrogate Borough Council (although access permission may be required from the tenant). The report states that the Crimple forms a barrier to amphibian movements but this is unlikely to be a total barrier as the top of the weir near the bridge was almost dry on the day of my visit, with most of the flow percolating below this level. Smeeden Foreman identified an additional pond 60m north of the site but this appeared to dry (as viewed from the footpath) during my site visit (22.06.2018). Access permission should be sought, particularly for ponds within 250m of the site boundaries and there needs to be a recognition that suitable terrestrial habitat exists on site, including scrub, woodland, piles of stones, wood etc. A Habitat

Suitability Index appraisal should be undertaken for those ponds for which access permission is granted (pending a presence absence/eDNA survey between April and June) to inform a method statement for the avoidance of harm to great crested newt and other herpetofauna during construction.

Four buildings were noted to be present on site. I disagree with the report's conclusions that the buildings offered no opportunities for roosting bats as a suitable gap appears to exist between the eave boxes and the wall of the building at the front. A more thorough survey of this building will be required prior to the determination of a full application. At the time of my visit, a pied wagtail nest was present in the covered walkway between the buildings and a swallow was nesting in building 3 where the top of the stable door had been left open to provide access.

Himalayan balsam, an invasive alien species occurs extensively along the river, ditches and in the woodland. A program of control will be required to be agreed with the local planning authority prior to commencement of works on site, including site clearance as plant and machinery is otherwise likely to inadvertently spread the seeds.

Conclusion

A further bat transect survey would be required for late summer in order to cover the full activity season prior to the determination of the outline application, which should provide sufficient information to establish the principle of development in relation to bats. More detailed surveys of existing buildings and mature trees identified for felling or tree surgery or that would be impacted by lighting will be required for any reserved matters application. An appraisal should be made of the potential for otter to breed along this section of the river and of indicative mitigation measures, again in order to establish the principle of development. Some further information on mitigation proposals for great crested newts will also be required at this stage, although presence/absence surveys cannot now be undertaken before April. Other survey work will also be necessary along the lines indicated above, largely in accordance with the recommendations of the extended phase 1 habitat survey but most of this will be capable of being undertaken by condition prior to the submission of a reserved matters application. Recommended conditions would also include the provision of might then include an ecological mitigation and enhancement scheme for the site, including measures to avoid harm to wildlife during construction and for biodiversity enhancements to be incorporated within the new development. These should include a woodland and riverside and riverside management plans and a scheme for the eradication or control of Himalayan balsam.

Dan McAndrew BSc (Hons) MSc.
Principal Ecologist
Planning and Development Services
Harrogate Borough Council
PO Box 787
Harrogate
HG1 9RW

Email: dan.mcandrew@harrogate.gov.uk
Telephone: 01423 500 600 ext. 56594
www.harrogate.gov.uk/planning

