

Thank you for consulting the GMEU

Summary

Further bat emergence surveys are recommended. Other ecological issues relating to great crested newts, nesting birds and ecological enhancement measures can be dealt with via condition.

Bats

A valid daytime visual bat survey of the exterior and interior of the building has been provided. Owing to the number of potential access points and locality the building has been assessed as moderate risk. In line with best practice guidelines two further dusk and or dawn surveys have been recommended. I agree that further surveys are required. These should be carried out prior to determination as:

Current guidance states it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development is established before the planning permission is granted otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision (UK Government Guidance within the ODPM Government Circular 06/2005)

It should also be noted that the bat activity season is drawing to a close. At least one survey should occur in August. If not already commissioned I would recommend these are requested asap, to avoid potential delays in processing the application. ie until April or May 2023.

Great Crested Newts

At pre-application I noted that a great crested newt assessment should be provided, due the presence of this species being recorded in a pond less than 100m to the south in 2016. This has not been provided. However this recommendation was based on the redevelopment of the entire land holding. The current proposal appears to be for the simple demolition of the existing dwelling and rebuild. The dwelling is around 130m from the pond. If this is the case then the risks are significantly lower and likely achievable under reasonable avoidance measures. I therefore recommend that prior to determination:

Clarification on the scale of likely disturbance on the site is provided and confirmation sought from their ecological consultant that the level of risk is very low.

Nesting Birds

The bat and bird assessment identified probable nesting of house sparrow on the building to be demolished. There is also significant areas of potential bird nesting habitat on the wider site. All British birds nests and eggs (with certain limited exceptions) are protected by Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended. I recommend a condition along the following lines be applied to any permission.

No demolition shall commence or works to trees or shrubs shall occur between the 1st March and 31st August in any year unless a detailed bird nest survey by a suitably experienced ecologist has been carried out immediately prior to clearance and written confirmation provided that no active bird nests are present which has been agreed in writing by the LPA.

Invasive Species

I noted at pre-app that the site was at potential risk from invasive species such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. No information has been provided as part of this application. This was however, as for amphibians based on the redevelopment of the entire site. The risks are much lower if development is restricted to the approximate footprint of the existing dwelling. I am therefore satisfied that an informative is all that is required for this particular development proposal.

It is an offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended to introduce, plant or cause to grow wild any plant listed in Schedule 9 part 2 of the Act. Species such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, rhododendron and monbretia are included within this schedule. If any such species will be disturbed as a result of this development a suitably experienced consultant should be employed to advise on how to avoid an offence.

Contributing to and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Section 174 of the NPPF 2021 states that the planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The development appears to result in the minimal loss of vegetated habitats, though trees appear to be present on aerial photographs adjacent to the building, not shown on the existing or proposed layout. In terms of species issues, loss of house sparrow nesting habitat and bat roosting opportunities will occur. Whilst premature to detail the level of bat mitigation required a condition requiring house sparrow nest boxes and bat boxes is likely to be required.

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Planning

Planning and Transportation

Place