

Summary

The developer's ecological consultant identified no significant ecological issues. Further survey for bats is recommended for one tree. Other ecological issues relating to bats, nesting birds, amphibians, hedgehog, invasive species, proximity to Hollins Vale LNR and biodiversity enhancement measures can be resolved via condition and or informative.

Bats

The buildings and trees on site were assessed for bat roosting potential. Both buildings were assessed as negligible risk, with two trees assessed as low risk and one tree as moderate risk. All three trees fall within zone 1 ie the full application site. Of these three trees one appears to be retained, though there is some disparity between drawings and arboricultural report relating to tree retention with some plans showing retention of T14 and T34 and the arb report recommending removal of T35 even though shown as retained on all proposal plans.

Further surveys are recommend by the consultant for tree T34 the moderate risk tree assuming not retained. These should occur prior to determination. T14 and T35 can be protected or felled via condition following clarification on whether or not they are to be retained or removed.

I therefore recommend that prior to determination further surveys are carried out for T34 as recommended by Urban Green.

Both buildings and a number of trees are located within the zone 2 the outline application are negligible risk. It is however possible that the ecological report may no longer be valid by the time a reserved matters application comes forward for phase 2.

I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any outline permission for zone 2.

As part of reserved matters relating to zone 2 an updated ecological report will be provided to and agreed in writing by the LPA.

The ecologists have assessed the lines of trees as having low value for foraging and commuting bats. I would tend to agree with this assessment, the corridors not linking significant habitats, with the Hollins Brook to the south a much high value habitat for bats, linking the SBI to the River Roch. The line of trees along the southern boundary and northern boundaries are to be primarily removed, with the western boundary primarily retained.

External lighting is also proposed including around the perimeter of the site along a running track. This is to be set at 10 lux and only in use when the centre is in use. I am satisfied that the lighting levels will not have a significant impact on the retained trees. No further information or measures are required at this stage.

Other Protected Species

All other species have been reasonably discounted. Based on my local knowledge of this site I would agree. ***No further information or measures are required.***

Nesting Birds

The development will result in the loss of trees and scrub, potential bird nesting habitat. 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 outline or full permission.

No 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.

Amphibians and Small Mammals

Habitats on site are suitable for providing shelter for species such as common toad and hedgehog, both UK Biodiversity Priority Species. The consultant has recommended reasonable avoidance measures during site clearance. This would apply primarily to the full permission, the outline area currently lacking much in the way of cover though this may change by the time any reserved matters application came forward. I am satisfied however that only the full application requires a condition at this time along the following lines.

Prior to any earthworks a reasonable avoidance measures method statement for amphibians, hedgehog and any other small mammals, will be provided to and agreed in writing by the LPA.

Invasive Species

Four species (including two different Cotoneaster) listed under schedule 9 part 2 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were recorded across the site. All are relatively easy species to deal with. Only two are present on the outline site. I recommend conditions along the following lines are applied to any permissions.

For the full application.

Prior to any earthworks a method statement detailing eradication and/or control and/or avoidance measures for rhododendron, monbretia and Cotoneaster spp should be supplied to and agreed in writing to the LPA. The agreed method statement shall be adhered to and implemented in full unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.

And for the outline

As part of reserved matters a method statement detailing eradication and/or control and/or avoidance measures for Cotoneaster spp should be supplied to and agreed in writing to the LPA. The agreed method statement shall be adhered to and implemented in full unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.

Proximity to Hollins Vale Local Nature Reserve

The full application is immediately adjacent to Hollins Vale LNR along its southern boundary. The outline permission will be buffered by the full application from the LNR. Whilst the area of the LNR adjacent to the site is not a core habitat area ie less sensitive, measures during construction are still justified as part of the Construction environment management plan. The details can be conditioned as a bullet within any proposed CEMP condition along the following lines.

- Measures to protect the LNR from dust, debris, run-off and pollution.

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 site is primarily of negligible ecological value with habitat losses restricted to lines of trees and scrub along with associated bat and bird habitat.

A net gain assessment has been provided that claims that there will be a significant gain. Whilst the metric has not been provided and therefore it not possible to analyse how this is being achieved, at pre-app I was satisfied that given the site is largely hardstanding and building net gain would be relatively simple to achieve. The net gain report also seems fair in terms of condition assessments and net gain is also not as yet mandatory. Therefore based on the landscape proposals. I am satisfied that section 174 can be complied with.

It is however noticeable that the major tree loss is within the full application, with the main gain in the outline application. ie a net loss of trees in the full application and net gain within the outline. ***The full and outline layouts should be conditioned with the requirement that 70% or more of the urban trees are native in order to ensure compliance with the net gain assessment as should all other planting schedules.***

A condition should also be applied requiring provision of bird and bat boxes. This is more applicable to the full application where the bat and bird habitat occurs. It is also easier to provide mitigation within this phase as some tree retention is proposed within this section where bird and bat boxes could be mounted adjacent to the LNR.

I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines be applied to the full application.

Prior to development a bird and bat box plan should be provided to and agreed in writing by the LPA

No condition is required for the outline application is adequate measures are provided within the zone 1, but if the developer prefers to put some bird and bat boxes on the new build I would have no objection.