

GMEU response

Summary

An updated ecological assessment has been provided. This found no significant ecological issues or material changes to the site. Issues relating to invasive species, nesting birds and ecological mitigation can be resolved via condition.

Protected Species

No evidence of any protected species was again found on the site, with no suitable habitat present for any such species. Whilst otter will utilise the River Roch, approximately 40m to the west, this is sufficiently distant to make an offence very unlikely. The Roch Valley is also likely utilised by bats for foraging and commuting but given the nature of the development it is very unlikely that the development would have any negative impact. No further information or measures are required.

Nesting Birds

Trees and scrub are present, 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 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.

Invasive Species

Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam are still present on the site. Both are included within this schedule 9 part 2 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended. It is an offence to introduce or cause to grow wild any plant listed under this schedule. I recommend a condition along the following lines be applied to any permission.

Prior to any earthworks a method statement detailing eradication and/or control and/or avoidance measures for himalayan balsam and japanese knotweed, 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.

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 is primarily restricted to hardstanding with the vegetation around the boundaries, retained and enhanced. I am therefore satisfied that mitigation for any loss of vegetation could and is likely to occur on site. It should however be noted that 10% biodiversity net gain now has more material weight, since the Places for Everyone regional plan went through public enquiry and likely to become mandatory in autumn of this year. There is therefore an argument for additional information demonstrating that 10% net gain is achievable on the site. I have however no strong views on whether this should be applied for this site given I have previously accepted mitigation is achievable on the site.

Given the development is on the edge of the Roch Valley a Wildlife Corridor, I recommend that all tree and shrub planting is of suitable locally native species. I also recommend the provision of bird boxes as mitigation for loss of nesting habitat.

The details can be conditioned.

Ecologist

Planning

Planning and Transportation

Place