

70071 – Site of Radcliffe Leisure Centre, Spring Lane, Radcliffe

Thank you for consulting the GMEU

Summary

Further information on biodiversity net gain is recommended. Other ecological issues can be dealt with via condition and or informative.

Bats

Valid bat reports including roost and activity surveys have been provided. No evidence of bats roosting on the site were detected and only low levels of bat activity recorded on the site. I have no reason to doubt the findings of the report. As individual bats can on occasion turn up in unexpected locations, I recommend an informative along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Whilst the building to be demolished has following surveys assessed as negligible risk for bats, the applicant is reminded that under the 2019 Regulations it is an offence to disturb, harm or kill bats. If a bat is found during demolition all work should cease immediately and a suitably licensed bat worker employed to assess how best to safeguard the bat(s). Natural England should also be informed.

Great Crested Newts (gcn)

An amphibian survey has been provided. This has carried out an inadequate desk top survey as it, notes the nearest gcn record found through the data search was 1.5km from the site, whilst as noted in my pre-application response of August 2022, gcn had been recently recorded in a pond within 250m (actually 150m to the north at its nearest point). There are also numerous records associated with Black Lane SBI just over 600m to the north, designated for its amphibian assemblage. This is also slightly surprising as they appear to have actually contacted the local record centre and included maps of other potential ecological constraints in the PEA.

However, the nearest pond within the Radcliffe Wetlands SBI was adequately surveyed and no great crested newts located. This is in-line with the numerous surveys of this pond that have occurred both recently through Places for Everyone and historically. I therefore have no reason to doubt that gcn are not present within this pond.

The outstanding issue is therefore whether the gcn population discovered in the ponds to the south of Coney Green Farm, 150m to the north at the nearest point and separated by the Manchester Bolton and Bury Canal utilise the site.

Approximately 0.8ha of the site are within 250m of the recently recorded gcn population. When put through Natural England's rapid risk assessment this gives an amber warning. This does not however take in to account any physical barriers to dispersal, such as the canal which is a fairly effective barrier to dispersal, though one bridge is present, which provides a relatively direct route to the site i.e. would not add much to the distance separating the pond from the site. The bridge is however unvegetated and generally hostile to gcn dispersal. There is also significant areas of good cover for gcn between the pond and the canal.

I am therefore satisfied that the risks are very low for the combination of reasons noted and can be dealt with via reasonable avoidance measures would be required for species such as common toad.

No further survey information is required.

Other Protected Species

No evidence of any other protected species was recorded or assessed as likely on or within the zone of influence of the development. I would tend to agree that risks to other species are very low but would note that badger and otter cannot be totally ruled out of on rare occasion visiting the site. I therefore recommend informatives along the following lines.

The applicant is reminded that under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly interfere with a badger sett. If a badger sett is found on or near the developments site work should cease immediately and a suitably experienced ecologist employed to advise on how best to proceed.

Whilst there is only a low risk of otter being present, the applicant is reminded that under the 2019 Regulation it is an offence to disturb, harm or kill otters. If an otter is found during the development all work should cease immediately and a suitably licensed ecologist employed to assess how best to safeguard the otter(s).

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.

Reasonable Avoidance Measures

Whilst the site is generally sub-optimal for most protected and priority species, species such as badger, hedgehog and amphibians such as common toad could forage across the site at night and be at risk during construction. I therefore recommend that as part of any permission a condition along the following lines is applied.

Prior to any vegetation clearance and or earthworks a reasonable avoidance measures method statement for mammals and amphibians will be provided to and agreed in writing by the LPA

Invasive Species

Himalayan balsam was recorded along the northern boundary and Japanese knotweed recorded just off the site. It is an offence under schedule 9 part 2 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to cause such species to be spread in to the wild. Whilst the Japanese knotweed appears avoidable, Himalayan balsam seed is likely to be present within the footprint of the development. I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Prior to any earthworks an invasive species management strategy for Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed should be supplied to and agreed in writing to the LPA. The agreed management shall be adhered to and implemented in full unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.

Proximity to Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Site of Biological Importance (SBI)

No development appears to be occurring along the boundary with the canal. I am therefore satisfied that the risks of any adverse impacts to the canal are very low and can be dealt with via a bullet point within a construction and environmental management plan condition.

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 will result in the loss a fairly large area of grassland, that in my opinion has been inaccurately portrayed as amenity grassland. Whilst I am aware it was historically managed as playing fields, regular mowing has not occurred for many years. Whether this changes the ecological value of the grassland is a separate issue, it may still be best described as modified grassland a low value habitat, but could potentially be other neutral grassland a moderate value habitat.

A net gain assessment has been provided that indicates a significant net gain, which may be sufficient to buffer any potential undervaluing of the baseline habitats. The full metric does not however appear to have been made available, therefore I am unable to run alternative scenarios to see how resilient the proposals are to achieving net gain. *I therefore recommend that prior to determination a full copy of the defra excel spreadsheet is provided.*

With regards mitigation for any potential wildlife issues, given the apparent lack of wildlife interest, I am satisfied that measure for nesting birds and bats can be achieved on the site via condition.

Ecologist
GM Ecology Unit