

70002 – Site of Radcliffe Leisure Centre, Spring Lane, Radcliffe

Thank you for consulting the GMEU

Summary

The developer's ecological consultant identified no significant ecological issues. Issues relating to bats, amphibians nesting birds, invasive species and biodiversity enhancement measures can be resolved via condition and or informative.

Bats

A valid bat report has been provided, this included an assessment, dawn and dusk surveys of the building proposed for demolition and activity surveys around the wider site. No evidence of bats roosting in the building and only low levels of bat activity were recorded around the wider site. I have no reason to doubt the findings of the report. It therefore appears very unlikely that the development will have any adverse effect on the conservation status of bats in the locality. 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 been found to very low 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).

Great Crested Newts (gcn)

One pond was surveyed late in the season using a hybrid approach of eDNA and netting no evidence of gcn was found. Whilst the survey methodology was non-standard, I am aware that this pond has been surveyed extensively as a result of the Places for Everyone strategic allocation of the land between Elton Reservoir and Radcliffe for housing and to date no evidence of gcn in this pond recorded by the developer or opponents, that I am aware of, whereas records in other ponds have been reported to the GMEU the nearest around 300m to the north on the other side of the canal. I am also aware that surveys in the past have failed to record gcn in this pond, prior to places for everyone. Taking on board that this phase of the development is around 180m from the pond and located primarily on hardstanding and amenity grassland, I am satisfied that it is very unlikely that the proposed development will have an adverse effect on great crested newts. Common toad may however be at risk a UK Biodiversity Priority Species during demolition and construction.

I therefore recommend that the reasonable avoidance measures proposed in section 7.1 of the Great Crested Newt Survey Report by Amenity Tree Care dated August 2023 is conditioned as part of any permission.

Other Protected Species

No evidence of any other protected species likely to be present in the wider locality such as badger was recorded or they were discounted owing to a lack of suitable habitat on the site. I have no reason to doubt the findings of the report, given the development site is primarily building and hard standing. Whilst I note the recommended pre-cautionary check for badger prior to development, I would take this to be a reference to the wider site where such a request would be reasonable. For this phase given it just applies to the building and hard standing area well away for the site boundary, no further information or measures are required.

Nesting Birds

Trees within this phase of the development appear to be retained, though this may change and I may be mistaken. There appears to be no mention of nesting birds in the bat assessment, so they are presumably absent from the building but again I may have missed reference to nesting birds in the report. I therefore recommend as a precaution a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

No works to trees or shrubs shall occur or demolition commence 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

Himalayan balsam was recorded along the northern boundary of the wider site. The stand whilst extensive is located well away from this phase of the development and therefore avoidable. I therefore recommend an informative along the following lines is applied to any permission.

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 and Himalayan balsam 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 will result in the loss of buildings and hardstanding to new temporary buildings covering a smaller footprint and unspecified habitats/landscaping over the footprint of the existing building.

A net gain calculation has been provided that indicates a net gain is feasible but this references the entire site not the footprint of this phase. Whilst I do not necessarily agree with the baseline characterising the wider field as modified grassland, because though this was a playing field it has been abandoned for many years and would in my opinion be better described as other neutral grassland, this is not relevant to this particular phase as the field is not included in the development proposal.

I am satisfied that this phase is capable of achieving full mitigation through the temporary landscaping of the footprint of the existing building as wildflower grassland or other habitat, as it will result in an increased percentage of the site being under a vegetated habitat. With regards wildlife, there appears to be no need for this phase to provide any mitigation and whilst enhancement in the form of bird and bat boxes could be provided as these are temporary buildings, I am willing for such measures to be deferred to the final proposals for the site. I would however also not object to a couple of bird boxes on the retained trees.

Temporary landscaping and biodiversity enhancement of the site can be dealt with via condition.

Ecologist

GM Ecology Unit