

Summary

The main ecological issue is biodiversity net gain.

Bats

A bat report has been provided. Whilst this report is dated given the negligible value of the building and only partial works to façade, I am in this instance willing to extend the validity of the report to three years ie until 2026. No further information is required at this time.

Nesting Birds

There may be some loss of the existing shrub planting around the site, 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 precautionary working method statement for nesting birds by a suitably experienced ecologist has been supplied to and agreed in writing by the LPA.

Contributing to and Enhancing the Natural Environment & Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Section 180 of the NPPF 2023 states that the planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. 10% BNG is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). The site is primarily developed land, with small areas of ornamental shrub planting. This is to be replaced by a significantly larger area of soft landscaping. I am therefore satisfied that mitigation can be achieved on the site. Wildlife mitigation in the form of couple of bird boxes is also recommended.

With regards biodiversity net gain, I note the developer has ticked yes for the development being subject to the mandatory general biodiversity gain condition. I assume this is because more than 25sqm of the existing soft landscaping is to be lost, given how little landscaping is currently present. No biodiversity net gain assessment has however been provided and no metric. Therefore whilst I am satisfied that the developer should be able to meet the requirements of the statutory condition on the site, it would be helpful to understand what habitats are being lost and what habitats are being created in order to inform the requirements of any condition or if the LPA prefers legal agreement.

I therefore recommend that prior to determination information is provided on the habitats to be lost and created and ideally the statutory metric.