

GMEU response

Summary

I recommend a biodiversity net gain assessment prior to determination. Other potential ecological issues can be dealt with via condition and informative.

Bats

The buildings on site were assessed as having negligible bat roosting potential. I have no reason to doubt the findings of the report. No further information or measures are required.

Other Protected Species

I accept that it is very unlikely that there are any other protected species issues associated with this site. I am aware that the site has been well surveyed historically for such species and no evidence found. No further information or measures are required.

Nesting Birds

Tree and scrub will be lost, 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.

Other Wildlife

Evidence of fox and rabbit was recorded with the site assessed as suitable for hedgehog, a UK Biodiversity Priority Species. All mammals are protected under the Wild Mammal (Protection) Act 1996. It is an offence to inflict unnecessary suffering to wild mammals such as indiscriminate clearance with machinery. Common toad another UK Biodiversity Priority species have been recorded from the mill lodge to the south. I therefore agree with the consultant that the site should be cleared sensitively. I recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Prior to any vegetation clearance a reasonable avoidance measures method statement for mammals and amphibians, covering site clearance and construction phases, will be supplied to and agreed in writing by the LPA.

Invasive Species

Himalayan balsam was relatively abundant in the scrub, with rhododendron rare. Both species are listed under 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. Given the extent of earthworks and as himalayan balsam spreads by seed, there will be a risk of spreading this species further during the development. I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Prior to any vegetation clearance or earthworks a method statement detailing control measures for himalayan balsam and rhododendron 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 SBI and Local Nature Reserve

Whilst direct adverse effects are unlikely, there are risks during and post construction of overland flow in to the SBI, given the site is perched above the mill lodge. I recommend measures are put in place to ensure surface water is retained on the site. These measures should form part of the construction and environmental management plan, which can be provided via condition.

Contributing to and Enhancing the Natural Environment & Biodiversity Net Gain

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 primarily moderate ecological value habitats to building a negligible value habitat. Perimeter landscape planting in the form of native scrub and tree planting is proposed. It is unclear to me, whether this would be adequate to mitigate for the approximately 3 biodiversity unit baseline value of the site.

I therefore recommend that prior to determination a biodiversity net gain assessment is provided.

Adverse effects to wildlife appear restricted to nesting birds and mammals the latter not protected by wildlife legislation. I recommend provision of bird boxes on the few retained trees around the perimeter and brash piles for amphibians and hedgehog. The details can be conditioned, the final wording to be determined based on the findings of the biodiversity net gain assessment.