

GMEU response

Summary

Ecological issues include barn owl, nesting birds, Himalayan balsam and mitigation for loss of trees shrubs and nesting bird habitat.

Bats

A valid bat assessment was carried out, resulting in one dusk survey at an appropriate time of year. No evidence of bats roosting was detected. I have no reason to doubt the findings of the report, based on the condition of the building and presence of barn owl. The building is however in a high risk location and therefore use by individual bats on occasion cannot be ruled out. I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Whilst the building to be demolished has been assessed as 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). Natural England should also be informed

Barn Owl

Evidence that the building was a well used roosting site was recorded, though no evidence of this species nesting was evident. Barn owl are protected under schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to take, injure or kill a barn owl or destroy its nest, eggs or young. It is also an offence to recklessly disturb the birds close to their nest during the breeding season.

As no evidence of nesting was recorded, I am satisfied that it is very unlikely that the development would result in the loss of a nesting site. Given how well the building appears to be utilised however there is a risk that it may in the future be utilised as a nest site and that as barn owl may roost in the building during the day, ie one could be present in the building during demolition. I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Prior to demolition at any time, the building will be checked for barn owl immediately prior to demolition by a suitably experienced ecologist. If demolition is delayed beyond 1st March 2023, the building will be checked for nesting barn owl and the findings supplied to and agreed in writing by the LPA.

Other Protected Species

No other protected species are likely though badger may forage across the site on occasion. No further information or measures are required.

Other Nesting Birds

Scrub on the site was identified as providing bird nesting potential. 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 Mammals and Amphibians

The mill ponds nearby likely provide habitat for species such as common toad a UK Biodiversity Priority Species, hedgehog may also forage across the site. I recommend reasonable avoidance measures for small mammals and amphibians are put in place to cover the site clearance and construction phases. The details can be conditioned along the following lines.

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

Himalayan Balsam

This species covered by schedule 9 part 2 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) is present on the site. It is an offence to introduce or cause to grow wild any plant listed under this schedule. Given this species is present beyond the boundaries of the development, eradication would be unreasonable, but measures to prevent the spread of this species off-site and control within the boundaries of the site should occur. I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Prior to any earthworks a method statement detailing control and biosecurity measures for himalayan balsam 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 of Development to Watercourse and SBI's

The consultant notes the proximity of the development to a watercourse and two SBI's. The consultant's survey brief however covered a wider area. The footprint of the actual development, restricted to one dwelling is over 50m from either SBI and over 30m from the watercourse. I am satisfied that the risks of negative impacts are negligible to either SBI and low with regards the Brook, dependent on whether any surface water discharge from the site or from a septic tank is proposed. I therefore recommend a condition regarding drainage post development along the following lines.

No development shall take place until it can be demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the ecological status/potential of the Brook resulting from the disposal of foul water and surface water post-development submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details, as approved, shall be implemented in full in accordance with a timetable which has first been agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

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 site consists primarily of negligible and low value habitats, interest restricted to some native shrub. In terms of species the site is of importance to barn owl. The proposed layout indicates a similar balance of low and negligible value habitats. I am therefore satisfied that mitigation can be achieved on the site, if some native tree and shrub planting is incorporated in to the garden design, bird and bat boxes/bricks incorporated in to the new build and two barn owl boxes provided for the loss of roosting habitat. ***The details can be conditioned.***