

Planning application 69985 Whitehouse Farm

Summary

There are unlikely to be any significant ecological issues associated with this development.

1. Bats

A bat report has been provided, whilst late in the bat activity season, I am satisfied that adequate survey has occurred. No evidence of bats roosting was recorded and only low bat activity levels. 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 converted has been found to be a 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 all work should cease immediately and a suitably licensed bat worker employed to assess how best to safeguard the bat(s).

2. Great Crested Newts

There is a pond in very close proximity to the proposed development. The nature of the development however involves minimal ground disturbance and the pond has been surveyed historically and no evidence of great crested newts found or any of the other ponds within 250m. There is a historic record of great crested newts approximately 1km to the SE with potential poor habitat continuity. I therefore recommend an informative along the following lines is applied to any permission.

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

3. Nesting Birds

There is no mention of nesting birds in the bat assessment, I therefore assume they are absent from the former stables. No vegetation appears to require removal. As a precaution I recommend an informative along the following lines is applied to any permission.

The applicant is reminded that, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended it is an offence to remove, damage, or destroy the nest of a wild bird, while the nest is in use or being built. Planning consent does not provide a defence against prosecution under this act. If a birds nest is suspected work should cease immediately and a suitably experienced ecologist employed to assess how best to safeguard the nest(s).

4. 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 includes a change of use of the land to domestic curtilage (retrospective) and based on aerial photographs there has been minimal change in the habitats available, with if anything an increase in vegetation in proximity to the stable, which at one time appears to have been bare ground. There appear to be no wildlife issues. I am therefore satisfied that the change of use has enhanced the overall ecological value of the site and that no mitigation is required for wildlife. As enhancement, I recommend provision of a bird box on the converted building. *The details can be conditioned.*