

Summary

The main ecological issue is the overall loss of biodiversity that will occur due to the development. Issues relating to bats, badger, hedgehog, nesting birds and invasive species can be dealt with via condition.

Bats

The building on the site was assessed as having negligible bat roosting potential as were trees that could be assessed. Parts of the site were however inaccessible with trees present that could provide low bat roosting potential. Precautionary measures have therefore been recommended for the removal of these trees. This is acceptable under current guidance for low potential trees. I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

The removal of trees on the site may have the potential to cause harm to bats as identified in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Arbtech dated 7th February 2023 table 4 and shall not in any circumstances occur unless further assessment and or precautionary measure for felling have been provided to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority

The development site also has the potential to negatively impact on the metrolink wildlife corridor as a commuting and foraging area for bats if illuminated. This appears unlikely given the access road is away from the metrolink boundary, however as a precaution I recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Prior to development an external lighting design strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the LPA. The strategy shall:

- show how and where street lighting will be installed and through appropriate lighting contour plans demonstrated clearly that any impacts on the functionality of the Metrolink as a dark corridor for bats is negligible;*
- Specify frequency and duration of use.*

All external lighting shall be installed in accordance with agreed specifications and locations set out in the strategy.

Badger

No evidence of badger was recorded on the site. Precautionary measures have however been recommended due to the dense vegetation on the site and proximity to the metrolink that could act as a corridor for this species. See below under hedgehog.

Nesting Birds

The site has high potential for nesting birds due to the trees, hedge and scrub on the site. 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, hedge 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.

Hedgehog

The dense bramble scrub is ideal habitat for hedgehog to nest and hibernate. Hedgehog is a UK Biodiversity Priority Species and therefore a material consideration. I agree with the consultant that reasonable avoidance measures should be utilised during site clearance to ensure any hedgehog present are humanely displaced. These measures will also ensure that badgers and other mammals utilising the site are safeguarded. Whilst the reasonable avoidance measures outline in the report are likely adequate, I recommend a more detailed method statement is provided via condition, if permission is granted, prior to site clearance along the following lines.

Prior to any vegetation clearance or earthworks a reasonable avoidance measures method statement for hedgehog, badger and other mammals covering site clearance and the construction phase will be provided to and agreed in writing by the LPA

Invasive Species

No evidence of invasive species was recorded by the consultant, however not all the site could be accessed with Japanese knotweed present on the Metrolink embankment nearby. 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 site is currently primarily dense scrub a widespread but medium value habitat, which will be replaced with buildings, hardstanding and possibly some small gardens a low value habitat. There will therefore be a net loss of vegetated habitats at the site level contrary to the NPPF. There will also be a negative impact on birds and potentially hedgehog.

Whilst some mitigation could be achieved on the site for nesting birds, through provision of nest on the new buildings, it will not be possible to mitigate on site for the loss of scrub and trees. *In order to quantify these losses I recommend a Defra metric is provided, with the developer outlining how they will provide adequate mitigation for these losses, once quantified.* Eg financial contribution or mitigation off-site on other land in their ownership.