

PLANNING APPLICATION ASSESSMENT

FIELD AT CAIA FARM, GRSEFORD, WREXHAM.

Site: Field at Caia Farm
Old Wrexham Road,
Gresford
Wrexham
LL12 8UL

Clients: SG Estates
The Croft
Old Wrexham Road
Gresford
Wrexham
LL12 8UA

Job Ref.: 1040 – Caia Farm – Eco Report-V2

1.0 INTRODUCTION

We have been instructed to undertake a planning assessment survey with regard to the proposed change of use from agricultural arable field to a dog walking pasture to the east of Caia Farm, Gresford. The report will address the requirements as set out in Planning Policy Wales-Edition 1, 2021, Environment (Wales) Act 2016, (Section 6 Duty) and (Section 7) and the Welsh Assembly Government Technical Advice Note 5, 'Nature Conservation and Planning' and local development policy, to enable an assessment of impacts and mitigation to negate impact as a consideration, material to the determination of planning consent and active protected species and habitat legislation at the time of survey

The survey was undertaken by a competent ecological surveyor and assistant to conform to the planning requirement on the 4 May 2022

2.0 SUMMARY

- The field is classed as arable rotation, dominant single crop species.
- The field is classed as species poor.
- The local area records the protected species Great Crested Newt
- A main badger sett is recorded within the field boundary
- The field boundary hedgerows are broad with a good under store, recording the greater biodiversity, offers potential for nesting birds, small mammals and moderate floral value.

- A seasonal wet area is recorded within the field boundary
- No invasive none native species have been recorded within the development zone.

3.0 SITE

The field is located approximately 250 m east of the Old Wrexham Road. The field is approximately 2.4 Ha in area and roughly has a rectangular plan. The field boundaries are formed by hedging with standard width field access points through the hedgerow. Caia Farm complex stands approximately 100 m to the west of the field. Existing dog walking paddocks abut the eastern boundary, with a mix of arable and grazing pasture abutting the northern, eastern and southern boundaries. The township of Gresford is located approximately 100 – 300 m to the west and north of the site.

No designated sites are located within the development area or abut the development area.



Fig 1: Aerial Photograph of the survey area

4.0 EXISTING DATA

Surveys:

No Previous surveys are available for the site.

Data search:

AMPHIBIAN: - No data is available for the immediate site. Several water bodies are recorded in the proximity to the site,

Small field pond located 90 m to the west of the site, this pond does not appear on the historical OS maps circa 1874 to 1938 – No GCN records

Small pond within the farm complex 180 m to the west of the site, historic – No GCN records

Small field pond west of Old Wrexham Road – 300m to the west – GCN records

Large lagoon (The Flash) located south west of the site, 500m to the south west – GCN records

Small field pond located to the south east of the site, historic, 350 m to south east – No GCN records

A series of ponds and lagoons at Borrass Hall, 670 - 800 m to the east of the site.

MAMMAL: - No data was available at the time of survey for the immediate site for either, Badger, Bat, or Hedgehog. It is to note that the data sets record 30 mammals locally , however the majority of the records are attributed to one recorder with the actual specific site record location being withheld other than the grid square SJ 35. The records have been verified and are held on both the COFNOD and NBN Gateway data sets.

However, the following species are to be found within the locality:-

Badger – *Meles meles* – records within 430 m to the north east of the site and 780 m to the north of the site.

Hedgehog - *Erinaceus europaeus* – records within 430 m to the north east of the site and 600 m to the north west of the site.

Bat *Chiroptera* – two field records exist for the site, both records are transect records attributed to Mr Paul Day, retired senior conservation officer CCW (NRW). The flight observations circa 1993 are for Brown Long-eared and Common Pipistrelle bats.

The following species have been recorded locally and at a county level

Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus/pygmaeus*

Brown Long-eared *Plecotus auritus*

Lesser Horseshoe *Rhinolophus hipposideros*

Daubenton's *Myotis daubentonii*

Whiskered/Brandt's *Myotis mystacinus/brandtii*

Natterer's *Myotis nattereri*

Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*

REPTILE: – no site records for this species, no area specific records for the locality, records are as noted in mammal.

BIRD: – approximately 203 species are recorded within 1km of the site with an estimated 10 species that could potentially nest within the habitats identified inside the development

boundary. It is to note that the majority of the records are attributed to a single grid square SJ 35 as per the mammal records

Designated Sites –

SSSi:- Vicarage Moss SSSI – nearest boundary 465 m to the east of the site. The site has no direct lines of connectivity with the SSSI.

5.0 SURVEY AREAS

As outlined in Fig 1

6.0 LEGAL PROTECTION

Under the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside, and the 2000 Countryside Rights Of Way (CROW) Act, it is an offence to “intentionally” or “recklessly” kill, injure or take any legally protected species. In some cases, even the species' habitat and places of shelter are protected.

6.1 GREAT CRESTED NEWT/BAT:

Both British and European laws protect the species and its habitat. In Britain it is protected under Section 9 (Schedule 5) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and by The European Union's “Habitats Directive” (Council Directive 92/43/EEC (a) on the Conservation Of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora. The Habitats Directive is implemented in Britain by the Conservation Regulations 1994. Under this legal protection (and with the minor amendments of the CROW Act 2000 in England & Wales), to be superseded by the introduction of “The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010” which came into force on the 1 April 2010, it is an offence to:

- Intentionally or deliberately capture, kill or injure.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb them in a place used for shelter or protection.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place.
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection.
- Possess an animal, or any part of it, unless acquired legally.
- Sell, barter, exchange or transport or offer for sale or parts of them.

6.2 BIRDS:

All British birds, their nests and eggs are protected in law. It is an offence under Part 1 of The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 *as amended* (and with the minor amendments of the CROW Act 2000 in England & Wales) to intentionally or recklessly kill or injure any wild bird or to take, damage, or destroy any nest or egg of any wild bird. However, Schedule 1 of the Act provides an additional tier of protection so that rare species (e.g. barn owl) are specially protected by increased penalties and cannot be intentionally or recklessly disturbed when nesting.

6.3 MAMMALS:

All of the British species of bat are protected under the W&C Act 1981 (as amended). This protection is also extended to the otter (*Lutra lutra*), and the water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*). The badger (*Meles meles*) is protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Included in

the Act it is an offence to damage any part of a sett or destroy it; obstruct access to any entrance of a sett; or to disturb a badger when it is in its sett.

7.0 LIMITATIONS

7.1 None recorded access gained to all areas.

8.0 METHODOLOGIES

8.1 GREAT CRESTED NEWT:

A walkover survey to identify any potential breeding pools and refugia sites within the survey area, followed up by a desktop survey to identify any local records for this species within 500m of the site.

8.2 BADGER:

Search for field signs (paths, latrines, foraging) indicating the presence of this species and if discovered an extended search up to 30m beyond the survey boundary for the presence of a sett(s).

8.3 BATS:

Walkover and internal survey to identify any potential roost sites, evidence of use or foraging habitats within the survey area.

8.4 BIRDS:

An assessment of habitat suitability for nesting sites.

8.5 REPTILE:

A walkover survey to identify any potential refugia sites within the survey area, followed up by a desktop survey to identify any local records for this species within 500m of the site.

8.6 FLORA:

Walkover survey to record floral species and classify the habitats in accordance with the JNCC Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodologies

9.0 RESULTS

9.1 GREAT CRESTED NEWT:

An area within the south eastern corner of the field shows signs of early season water retention, however there is no evidence of historic ponds etc in this area being recorded on Ordnance Survey Maps circa 1874 to 1938 for a pond in this location. The area had dried out and no standing water was recorded at the time of survey.

The desk top survey records pond sites within 500 m of the site, some of which have records for GCN, with others having no recent records. The immediate habitats are dominated by single crop species; however, the fields do record hedgerow boundaries with some connectivity. The survey site falls into the same category, of single arable crop species on rotation. Species poor habitats record reduced foraging and refugia potential for amphibians, with any populations present being restricted to the hedgerow boundaries.

Extensive surveys were undertaken circa 1982 of Wrexham, Flintshire and parts of northern Denbighshire. A total of approximately 4000 pond sites were visited with approximately 2000 of the sites recorded a positive presence for GCN.

9.2 BADGER:

The site records a main sett within the north western boundary of the site and individual outlying setts within the northern, eastern and western boundaries. The setts are generally within the cover of the hedgerow boundaries with some encroachment into the field areas. The main sett recorded 3 active holes at the time of survey and recently used tracks as demarked on the attached phase 1 plan. The tracks are generally parallel to the field boundaries.

The local records record badger activity to the north east of the site.

9.3 BATS:

No buildings or semi to mature tree stock is recorded within the survey area. The habitats recorded offer low potential for foraging bats due to the area being classified as species poor.

The data sets do record transects for Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared circa 1993, the data set does not classify the type of record, so it cannot be established if the recorded bats were on passage or foraging. It is recorded that bats will utilise hedgerows for both passage and foraging, especially in breezier conditions which forces small flying insects to be active on the leeward side of hedgerows.

9.4 BIRDS:

There is a potential for nesting birds within the boundary scrub/hedgerows that form the boundaries of the survey area. The data search recorded approximately 203 species within 1km of the site. Of the 203 species recorded approximately 10 species could potentially use the boundary hedgerow for nesting. At the time of survey, little evidence of seasonal nests was recorded.

9.6 REPTILE:

No local records are available for the site or adjacent sites at the time of survey. Again, due to the level of agricultural use the site is considered to offer reduced potential for use by this taxon group.

9.7 HABITATS:

The site is dominated by the single species arable crops on rotation classifying the site as species poor. The hedgerows boundaries record 11 woody species, classifying them as species rich. The hedgerows are broad with generally good cover to the ground and a dense under store of

hedgerow fauna. The field headlands are narrow with an average width to hedge face of about 1 m width, thickening to the corners of the site and the wet ground area. The hedge rows record hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, elder, oak, willow, hazel, sycamore, dog rose, ivy, and wild cherry.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 GREAT CRESTED NEWT:

The site is within 500 m of recorded GCN breeding sites. Some of the sites are separated by roadways and the large areas of arable land, with only the hedgerow boundaries offering habitats suitable for connectivity, foraging and refugia. Due to the location of the site, the dominance of the arable use, the existing potential for presence for this species is considered to be low. The proposals are considered to be majorly beneficial for this species if undertaken in such a way that the habitats become more diverse.

The following recommendations are therefore being put forward

- a) The existing hedgerows are retained, gaps to be planted and a manage plan to show rotational hedge cutting i.e., hit and miss, this to retain seasonal fruit and berry retention.
- b) The field area is retained in its sterile species poor condition until the works start, this is to reduce the possibility of migration into this area by both flora and fauna.
- c) The field margins are increased to a minimum offset width of 5m, these areas are to be seeded with a mixed species grasses and wildflower mix.
- d) The dog paddock fencing is to be set 5m from the hedgerow boundaries, this is so that the headlands can develop more rank grass and scrub, but still allow mechanical access for hedgerow management and periodic grass management. This is to promote seasonal flowering and thickening of the hedgerows.
- e) The hedgerows are to be cut to form an 'A' shape profile to widen the base.
- f) Habitat piles are to be formed from hedgerow management to the base of the hedge line.
- g) A small ditch/swale is to be dug parallel with the field boundary to existing wet field corner to manage the seasonal water flows within this area. The paddock fencing is to leave a 5 m buffer to the ditch line.
- h) It is understood that the area will be put to grass for the dog paddocks. The grassland will be managed as a matter of course, it is therefore recommended that grassland corridors with greater seed diversity is allowed to develop across the centre of the site from east to west, to improve connectivity. This grassland strip is to include individual plantings of oak, wild cherry, rowan.
- i) As a precautionary measure a Reasonable Avoidance Statement is to be produced to cover the planting and fencing works. It is to note that all of the proposed planting and fencing works have an impact no greater than the existing agricultural practices on the

site. i.e., tilling and seeding of soils, erecting fencing using a tractor mounted post knocker or similar. The RAM statement should include a pre works terrestrial search, demarcation of sensitive areas, watching brief as required.

- j) Prior to undertaking the works the works team are to receive an ecological tool box talk to familiarise them in regard of the potential and actual protected species issues within the site.
- k) If at any time Great Crested Newts are identified on the site then the works must cease and further guidance sort from either an experienced field ecologist or NRW's conservation team.

10.2 BADGER:

The site records a main sett for this species within the north western hedgerows and individual outlying setts within the eastern, western and northern boundaries. The survey recorded the tracks being used at the time of survey, these may however change during the season deepening on foraging requirements and food availability. The tracks presently are recorded parallel with the field boundaries.

The following recommendations are therefore being put forward

- a) Prior to undertaking the seeding, planting and fencing works, the area is to be resurveyed to map any variation to the survey. Sensitive areas and offsets are to be clearly marked and all site operatives are to receive an ecological tool box talk.
- b) Similarly to GCN, an offset of 5 m from the existing hedgerows are to be developed to form a species rich grassland border. The border is to be interplanted with specimen fruit bearing trees and shrubs, crab apple, cherry, blackberry etc.
- c) A buffer of 10 m is to be developed adjacent to the main sett in the north western corner of the site. The paddock fencing is to be set at this minimum distance in this area. The fencing that has been installed in the adjacent dog walking paddocks would seem to be suitable in association with the recorded badger activity. It is to note that if fencing crosses any recorded badger tracks, there is a likely hood that badgers will attempt to breach the fencing to maintain the historic access tracks, either by digging under or climbing over.
- d) Shrub planting is to be introduced within a 5 m strip of the hedgerow adjacent to the main sett in the north west corner of the site, this is to provide greater cover for the sett in this area., but still leave a minimum management strip.
- e) Prior to undertaking the seeding and fencing works adjacent to the main sett and outliers, the areas are to be checked for variation by competent field ecologist. This is to ascertain potential, impact/disturbance, whilst undertaking the fencing works in this area. It may be found that the sett has moved further into the field requiring the buffer to be increased in this area, and it will also allow an assessment on whether a license to disturb badgers is required to be applied for in this case. The greater the offset, the less of need to apply for a badger license to undertake the works.

10.3 BAT:

The site recorded no structure or trees suitable to support roosts for this species. The site is generally species poor with little foraging opportunity for bats. The introduced enhancements and widening of the headlands proposed for GCN and Badgers will also increase the flying insect diversity for bats. The nature of dog walking paddock proposal is that most of the activities will be in the daylight hours, alleviating the requirement of introducing an artificial lighting scheme.

The recommendations are therefore as recommended for GCN and Badger

10.4 BIRDS:

The hedgerow boundaries within the survey area have the highest potential for use by nesting birds. The introduction of the 5m buffer zones to the hedgerows will enhance the under store to the hedgerow and develop secondary nesting areas for the likes of ground and low-level nesting birds, chaffinch, yellowhammers, pipits, duncock etc.

The recommendations for this group are:-

- a) Any scrub clearance or hedge works are undertaken outside of the nesting season. If works are undertaken within these periods, then it is recommended that advice from a suitably qualified ecologist must first be sought and check surveys undertaken.
- b) It is recommended that the hedgerow boundaries are managed and retained on site and enhanced where required. In positions where it is feasible, hedges of native species should be planted and any standard trees planted should be selected to provide foraging opportunities for insects (blossom) and birds (berries), and year-round cover and nesting sites for birds.
- c) As a general note, all wild birds, their nests and their eggs are protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence (with certain exceptions), to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird (this includes chicks); to take, damage or destroy any wild bird's nest while it is in use or being built; and to take or destroy the egg of any wild bird. The definition of a wild bird is 'any bird of a kind which is resident in or a visitor to Great Britain in a wild state'.
- d) Generally, the guidance given within the UK with regards to the nesting season is set from March 1st to 31st July each year. Due to climatic change this advice is now seriously out of date. Nesting birds are now recorded as early as January through to late September and in some cases outside of this period. Owls, Doves, Pigeon, regularly nest outside of this period. Brood no's have also seen an increase, in the case of Swallow, Sparrow, 4 broods per year is now quite common.
- e) As a general rule any tree, shrub, plant that retains leaves (evergreen) offers cover for nest sites should be removed/managed with care. A large percentage of British birds are ground nesting and choose to nest within, bramble, nettle, tall ruderal plants etc. these areas provide important nest sites and should also be retained/managed with care.
- f) If works are to be undertaken within these periods, then secondary check surveys should be undertaken immediately prior to undertaking the works, i.e., within 24 hrs.

to ensure no nests have been built since the survey. Potential nesting areas, deemed clear of activity should be protected to prevent access during the construction phase by birds, where feasible, the use of netting is to be condoned as many species can be inadvertently trapped.

10.5 REPTILE:

No records for this species have been identified local for this taxon group, and the survey recorded a low potential for this group due to the dominant single species rotational agriculture. The enhance of the habitats and the introduction of managed grassland will potentially enhance the potential for use by this group going forward, however no specific recommendations are being given for this group.

10.6 HABITATS:

None of the habitats or floral species recorded on site are considered to be of local or national importance. The main area of arable crop rotation offers a low biodiversity due to being a single crop species.

The features of merit are the hedgerow boundaries which presently support a wide species mix and would be considered to be of some age. The field boundaries are as identified on the 1872 OS map of the area.

The recommendations are therefore as recommended for GCN and Badger.

- a. The boundary hedgerows are also considered to offer wildlife corridors, refuge, nest sites and foraging for multiple species. Any re-profiling of the site should be done so as not to affect the hydrology to the retained features.
- b. The reseeding should be selective to produce the habitats required, the buffer zones should be seeded with a hedgerow/headland mix similar to Boston Seed mix BS7M 80/20 Hedgerow and light shade wildflower
- c. The introduced grassland generally will be selected to support the activities identified, however the suggested connecting grassland strips should be of a mix similar to Boston Seeds BS1M Traditional Wildflower Meadow.
- d. The selected tree planting should include the following species, Oak, Rowan, Wild Cherry, Crab Apple, other native species to consider are Small Leaved Limes, Black Poplar and Walnut.

The biodiversity species Hedgehog are recorded locally and are a species that are at threat both locally and nationally. Due to the nature and potential interactions between dogs and hedgehogs, it is advised that the paddock fencing and the gated access points are hedgehog proof. The boundary buffer zones will maintain passage for this species to the wider habitats.

Careful consideration to the landscape plan is to be undertaken, to ensure that no INNS (Invasive Non-Native Species) species are inadvertently introduced as part of the scheme.

As part of the biodiversity enhancement, it is recommended that a grass/habitat management plan is developed to enhance and support the habitats created, to include hit and miss mowing

regimes to increase seasonal biodiversity, a similar cut and miss hedge management should be considered, i.e., if sections are retained uncut this will retain berry, fruit, hips etc. into the autumn winter period, the cutting of these sections can be rotated to maintain the hedge profile and promote new growth.

11.0 CONCLUSION

Although a slight potential for presence of the species GCN has been identified within the survey area, and an actual presence of an active Badger sett on site, it is considered that the proposed change of use from arable to dog walking paddocks will greatly enhance the biodiversity of the field. The introduction of the buffers, selected seeding and planting, and an appropriate management plan is considered to have a negligible impact during the transition period and the short term and a beneficial improvement on the biodiversity of the site in the medium to long term.

It is therefore the surveyor's opinion that the proposed change of use proposal is considered if carried out in accordance with the recommendations given in this report will have no long-term impact on the favorable conservation status of locally recorded protected species, or their ecological functionality.

Tim Hodnett
May 2022

APPENDICES

12.0 APPENDICES

12.1 APPENDIX 1:



Photo 1 – Site looking west



Photo 2 – Seasonal wet area south western corner of the site



Photo 3 – Site looking north west



Photo 4 – Fresh Badger print



Photo 5-6 – Badger tracks crossing the hedgerows



Photo 7-8 – Badger tracks crossing the hedgerows



Photo 9 – Sett starting to encroach into the field



Photo 10 – Sett entrance on the western side of the boundary hedgerow adjacent to existing dog walking paddocks



Photo 11 – Badger track running parallel with western hedgerow adjacent to existing dog walking paddocks