

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

ALTHREY WOODHOUSE

Overton Road, Bangor-on-Dee LL13 0DA



GRID REF: SJ38224398

FOR

MOSS AND CO.

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ARBOR VITAE
ECOLOGY • FORESTRY • LAND USE

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO DEVELOPMENT

A planning application will be submitted for significant modifications to the main house including demolition of a modern extension, construction of a two storey extension and changes to the roof.

Such operations have the potential to disturb protected species, if present, and therefore Arbor Vitae were commissioned by Moss and Co. to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

1.2 SCOPE OF SURVEY

The survey is primarily designed to evaluate the potential of the proposed development site to provide opportunities for protected species and to determine any likely impact which the development and landscape proposals may have on these.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 LOCATION, LANDSCAPE, AND BACKGROUND

Althrey Woodhouse is a detached property lying in a rural location approximately 1.5 kilometres south west of the village of Bangor on Dee. It is reached by a long access track from a nearby road and is otherwise surrounded by agricultural fields and small areas of woodland. The River Dee flows approximately 600 metres to the west and south of the property.

The large detached house was a former farmhouse and occupies the western section of a large yard within which also lies a renovated half-timbered barn. Lawns and shrub beds lie to the west and south whilst an area of tarmac forms a parking area to the east of the house.

A small paddock to the south east of the garden contains a small pond which is 53metres from the house at its nearest point.

3 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

3.1 DESK STUDY

An initial desk study was carried out to gain background information regarding any protected species or designations within the area. The main sources of information were Magic Map and NBN Atlas.

3.2 SITE SURVEY

A visit was made to survey the proposed development site on 30.08.2019. The buildings and site were surveyed and any habitat features present were noted. The objective of the survey was to find and record any signs of use by protected species.

An assessment of the available habitats both on and adjacent to the site led to consideration of the potential of the site for the following protected species:

- Bats
- Breeding birds
- Great crested newts

The survey methodology was tailored to evaluate the area for these species:

Bats

The site/buildings on site were evaluated based on a preliminary roost assessment. The objective of the survey was to find and record any signs of use by bats, for example:

- Droppings
- Feeding remains
- Grease staining/urine marks
- Potential access points to internal roosts
- Potential roost sites

The site was assessed in terms of nearby connecting habitat and other features which could be of value to bats.

Breeding birds

The site was assessed in terms of its suitability to support breeding bird populations.

Great crested newts

A desk study and a ground search were conducted to search for any areas of open water within 250 meters and to assess the habitat suitability of any ponds present.

3.2 PERSONNEL

The survey was carried out by Will Prestwood BSc: an experienced ecologist with NE licences to survey bats and GCN and NRW licence to survey GCN.

3.3 CONSTRAINTS

There were no constraints on the survey being carried out according to accepted best practice guidelines and standards. At the time of year of the survey, no birds would be nesting but evidence of previous nesting would be apparent.

4 SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 DESK STUDY

Results from the desk study revealed that there is one Site of Special Scientific Interest within one kilometre, this being the River Dee which is situated approximately 600 metres to the west.

The NBN Atlas indicates that there are no protected species of mammal or amphibian recorded within one kilometre.

4.2 SITE SURVEY

The existing house is originally brick built with all external walls rendered and painted. Each corner of the house features stone quoins.

The roof structure is complex with three hipped roofs and a central valley. All roofs are slated and support clay ridge tiles. The eaves of all roofs are sealed.

The southern elevation supports extensive growth of *Wisteria sinensis*.

The small area which will form the footprint of the proposed extension on the northern elevation consists of flower beds and/or gravel paths.

4.3 ADJACENT HABITATS

A pond lies just outside the bounds of the garden in an adjacent meadow approximately 53 metres to the south east of the house. This appears to be a natural pond although it contains a number of ornamental species such as white water lily and extensive *Crassula helmsii*.

5 EVALUATION OF RESULTS AND POTENTIAL ECOLOGICAL IMPACT

5.1 POTENTIAL FOR BATS

The house roof is clad with slates which are closely and evenly bedded with no crevices. Soffits and eaves are well-sealed with no potential access points or crevices.



The PBRA concluded that the building held no potential to provide bat roosts either internally or externally. The style of construction of the house results in a total lack of access points for bats and no external crevices.

5.2 POTENTIAL FOR BREEDING BIRDS

The Wisteria on the southern elevation offers potential nest sites for birds such as wrens, blackbirds and dunnocks.

5.3 POTENTIAL FOR GREAT CRESTED NEWTS

The survey revealed that there was only one nearby pond (Pond 1) which had potential to support great crested newts. An HSI assessment resulted in a score of 0.877 which indicates that the pond has 'excellent' potential for GCN:

However, the Natural England Risk Assessment indicates that the proposed works are 'highly unlikely' to cause an offence and do not constitute a risk to this species. This assumes that no harm will be caused to individual GCN and this can be achieved through adoption of Reasonable Avoidance Measures (see below).

The footprint of the proposed extension largely occupies an area of flower beds. These areas are isolated from possible migration of GCN by a large tarmac yard and mown lawn. These features (flower beds, tarmac, lawn or gravel drive) do not represent optimal terrestrial habitat for GCN.

6 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT

6.1 HABITAT MITIGATION

The only habitat to be impacted by the proposed development will be existing hardstanding and a small area of flower beds. No habitat mitigation will therefore be required.

6.2 PROTECTED SPECIES MITIGATION

The survey found no evidence of potential roost sites for bats. Mitigation will not be required and no further survey work required. However, a precautionary approach should be undertaken when removing roof tiles or slates which should be by way of a 'soft strip'. Roofing contractors should be reminded that work must stop if a bat is found and the project ecologist or NRW contacted for advice.

Mitigation to avoid disturbance to nesting birds should be as follows: removal of Wisteria should only be undertaken from September to the end of January outside of the nesting season. Alternatively, the site should first be checked by an ecologist to confirm that no birds are currently nesting. It is an offence to disturb breeding birds.

In order to remove any residual risk of individual GCN being damaged, it is recommended that Reasonable Avoidance Measure (RAMS) are adopted as part of a GCN Method Statement.

Measures to be adopted will include:

- 1. Ground clearance, including lifting of garden shrubs/ plants etc will be overseen by a licensed ecologist. If any GCN are found, the groundworks element of the scheme will be stopped until such time as a Development Licence has been gained from Natural Resources Wales.*
- 2. Clearance works to be carried out in the active season for GCN (March-September) to avoid the hibernation season.*
- 3. Any footings and trenches needed for construction will be covered at night to avoid trapping GCN (or other amphibians).*
- 4. Building materials should be stored off the ground on pallets to avoid creating GCN refuges/resting places.*

6.3 ECOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENT

It is recommended that, in order to provide potential roosting sites for bat species using surrounding habitat and landscape features, two bat boxes are attached to either the finished house or nearby trees. Recommended models include Schwegler 1FE and 2F.

7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A planning application will be submitted for modification of a large country house, Althrey Woodhouse. Such operations have the potential to disturb protected species, if present, and therefore Arbor Vitae were commissioned by Moss and Co. to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

The protected species considered during the survey were: bats, great crested newts and breeding birds.

The site was considered as providing negligible roost potential for bat species.

The Wisteria growing on the south-facing elevation could provide suitable nesting habitat for breeding birds. Removal of the Wisteria should be carried out outside the nesting season OR the site should first be checked by an ecologist.

A small pond lies 53 metres to the south west of the house. This provides 'excellent' potential breeding habitat for GCN. However, the development will have no impact on GCN as the area of land involved in the proposed works provides unsuitable terrestrial habitat for this species. However, in order to avoid any residual risk, it is recommended that RAMS are adopted as part of a working Method Statement.

Ecological enhancement is recommended in the form of bat boxes to provide potential roosting sites for any bats using the surrounding landscape and habitat features. Recommended models include Schwegler 1FE and 2F.

FIGURE 1 LOCATION



APPENDIX 1 PHOTOGRAPHS



Aerial



Northern elevation



Southern elevation



Eastern elevation



Detail of roof, verge and eave design



Pond 53 metres to the SW of house