

Paddock to the South of Boundary House
Horsemans Green, Wrexham

Extended Phase 1 Survey Report

13th February 2017

Produced by  Wildbanks
Conservation

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Wildbanks Conservation was commissioned by Mrs Shiela Griffiths and Mr Robert Forrester, to undertake a detailed Phase 1 Ecological Survey and an initial Protected Species Survey on a site located to the south of the village of Horsemans green, Wrexham, prior to seeking planning permission for the development of one domestic property; a single storey dwelling with associated gardens, and garage. The survey was undertaken to assess for any potential impacts or constraints of the development with regards to protected habitats and species. This report provides details of the above surveys and additionally, any recommendations and mitigation required to prevent any adverse impacts with regards to habitats and species.
- 1.2 The application site is located to the south of the village of Horsemans Green (central OS grid reference SJ 44514110). The site comprises of a single field (paddock). An area of hardstanding is present approximately 25m from the western boundary which is the footings for a timber stable block building. The site is surrounded on all sides by mature hedgerows. Wider habitat includes residential dwellings to the north and east, and farmland fields with hedgerows and field ponds present to the east, south and west.
- 1.3 Development proposals are to gain planning consent to build a single storey bungalow and garage, therefore having the potential to impact on any notable species using the habitat within the site footprint. This report details the findings of these surveys, recommendations for additional surveys and potential constraints to the development. This report is prepared in accordance with the Planning Policy Wales 2016 and TAN 5, Nature Conservation and Planning.
- 1.4 The survey was conducted by Emma Hankinson; a suitably qualified senior ecologist with 10 years' experience within the ecological consultancy sector. Emma also holds bat and great crested newt licences.

2.0 **RELEVANT LEGISLATION & PLANNING POLICY IN RELATION TO PROTECTED SPECIES**

2.1 *Bats*

Due to recent declines in bat species' populations within the United Kingdom, all bat species and their roost sites in Britain are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). They are also included on Annex IV of Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21st May 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (known as the Habitats Directive). As a result of the United Kingdom ratifying this directive, all British bats are protected under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Under this legislation it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or capture or intentionally (or recklessly in England and Wales) disturb bats or obstruct access to, damage or destroy bat roosts.

2.2 *Great Crested Newts*

Great Crested Newts are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1994 (Regulation 38). Because of their rarity, they are also protected under Annexes IIa and IVa of the Habitats and Species Directive and under the Berne Convention. Under this legislation, it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or capture or intentionally (or recklessly in England and Wales) disturb great crested newts, or obstruct access to, damage or destroy a breeding or resting site.

2.3 *Birds*

All bird species, their nests and young are protected during the breeding season under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

3.0 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Desktop Study

- 3.1 The Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website has been reviewed for the presence of any sites with statutory designations of international (Special Conservation Area (SAC), Special Protection (SPA) or Ramsar Sites), national (Site of Special Scientific, (SSSI)) or local nature conservation importance (Local Nature Reserves (LNR)) within 1km of the survey site. A number of non-statutory nature conservation bodies were also contacted for existing ecological records (National Biodiversity Network (NBN) gateway).
- 3.2 Further inspection, using colour 1:25,000 OS base maps (www.ordancesurvey.co.uk) and aerial photographs from Google Earth (www.maps.google.co.uk) was also undertaken in order to provide additional context and identify any features of potential importance for nature conservation in the wider countryside.
- 3.3 A COFNOD data search has not been completed at this time.

Walkover Habitat Assessment

- 3.4 The site was surveyed on 10th February 2017 using the standard Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology (Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 2010). This involved a systematic walk over of the site to classify the habitat types present, marking them on a base map. If required target notes were used to record features or habitats of particular interest, as well as any sightings or evidence of protected or notable species. The weather was clear and dry, with a maximum temperature of 6°C.

Preliminary Protected Species Survey

- 3.5 Consideration was also given to the potential presence of species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). Such species included, but was not limited to badger, bats, reptile and bird species. Evidence of any invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) was also recorded where present.

Other Protected/Notable Species

- 3.6 During the surveys consideration was also given to other protected or notable species, in particular but not restricted to barn owls *Tyto alba* and other nesting birds.

3.7

Survey Constraints

The whole site was suitably accessible for the survey to be undertaken to a satisfactory level.

4.0 RESULTS

Desktop Study

- 4.1 No statutory or non-statutory important sites are present within 1km of the site boundary. The nearest site is Hanmer Mere located 1.5km south-east of the site. In addition, NBN Gateway holds a number of field records of great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* within 1km of the site to the north and west. No other records for other protected or notable species were obtained on the site or within 1km of the site boundary.

Walk-over Habitat Assessment

- 4.2 The development site (Figure 1) is located within a rural setting within Horseman's Green Village. It is immediately bordered by agricultural fields and residential properties with paddocks and more widely by grazed fields with mature hedgerows forming field boundaries. The proposed development site itself comprises of a poor semi improved grassland field, containing a 3m x 6m area of hardstanding. Dominant vegetation was poor semi-improved grassland, with mature tall hedgerows present forming the field boundaries, and a single mature oak tree and a dead oak tree in the northern hedgerow (plates 1-9). No buildings exist on the site.

4.3 Habitats present on site

4.3.1 *B6. Poor semi improved Grassland*

The most abundant habitat type on site comprised of the poor semi-improved grassland field. Species recorded included; nettle *Urtica dioica*, rose bay willow herb *Chamerion angustifolium*, broad leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, soft rush *Juncus effusus* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. The most easterly side of the paddock contained more unmanaged tussocky grassland with tall stands of rose bay willow herb, nettle and broad-leaved dock.

4.3.2 *Boundaries and Hedgerows*

Mature hedgerows are present on all four sides of the paddock and are approximately 2m in height and 0.5 to 1m wide. Dominant species in all four hedgerows include; blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and elder *Sambucus nigra*. The western hedgerow forms a boundary with the road and contains the gateway access to the paddock. A flowing ditch is present along its length of the road side of the western hedgerow. The northern hedgerow forms the boundary with a residential paddock and contains two trees; one single mature oak *Quercus robur* and a dead oak tree with no crown to the east. The eastern and southern hedgerows form the boundaries to a

residential paddock and adjacent fields. None of the hedgerows were classified as important under the Hedgerow Regulations, 1997.

4.3.3 *Trees*

The only trees present on site are those located within the hedgerow (described above). The dead oak tree may provide low potential for roosting bat species.

4.3.4 *Ponds*

Although there are no ponds present on site, 9 ponds are present within 250m of the site boundary (Figure 2). A pond due north of the site shown on the map no longer exists. Pond 4 is confirmed to possess great crested newts by the owner of the pond (person comms by Mr Forrester, 10th February 2017) from surveys undertaken on the pond prior to a previous development. Additionally, NBN gateway provided records of great crested newts in the vicinity of Pond 3, 2 and 5 and ponds further to the south and west. Due to the close proximity of these ponds to the proposed development site and the suitability of terrestrial habitat there is a high chance of great crested newts being present on the site in their terrestrial phase.

4.3.5 *Invasive species*

No invasive plants as listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 were observed at the time of survey.

4.4 Protected/Notable Species

4.4.1 *Badger*

No evidence of badger was observed, no runs or latrines or excavations were seen and no sett present. Mr Forrester said he knew of a badger sett located approximately 2km west of the site.

4.4.2 *Bats*

The old dead oak tree present on site could offer low roosting potential for a small number of bats. Additionally, the mature hedgerows bordering the site and adjacent fields offer suitable foraging habitat for bat species.

4.4.3 *Reptiles*

An assessment of the suitability of habitat for reptiles was undertaken. The habitats were classified as of low potential for reptiles; lacking any suitable basking/sheltering areas. Furthermore, there are no records of reptiles species within the local area.

4.4.4 *Amphibians*

Habitats on site provided suitable habitat for terrestrial amphibians in the form of tussocky grassland and overgrown areas within the field and at the base of hedgerows. These areas could provide potential refuge areas and commuting areas for amphibians within their terrestrial stage. No amphibians were seen during the survey, however February is an unsuitable time to survey for the species due to their hibernation period. Additionally, there were 9 suitable amphibian breeding ponds located within 250m of the development site (described above).

4.4.5 *Birds*

No evidence of any nesting birds within the development site were located during the time of survey, as the survey was undertaken outside of the bird breeding season. However, the mature hedgerows present on site provides significant opportunities for nesting birds. The development site offers no potential for barn owls in the form of nesting and limited hunting/foraging opportunities due to the small area of land being developed.

4.4.6 *Other notable species*

Several mammal paths were identified within the boundary hedgerows surrounding the site. These were identified as rabbit and fox due to footprints and field signs identified at the time of survey.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 *Habitats*

The initial phase 1 habitat and protected species survey undertaken at the site identified no habitats of note that will be significantly affected by the proposed development. The hedgerows present on site are mature and contain native species but are not classified as being of historic importance. Only a small part of the hedgerow on the western boundary will be removed to enhance access to the site, and no other hedgerow on site is to be removed as part of the proposed development.

- 5.2 A new native species hedgerow will be planted to the rear of the site (between the new residential building and the stable. This is considered to enhance the site for wildlife by creating further connectivity for faunal species and nesting opportunities for birds.

5.3 *Great Crested Newts*

Although no amphibians were recorded during the survey, a number of ponds within 250m of the site are present and great crested newt presence has been identified within the area. A total of 22 ponds have been identified within 500m of the development. Furthermore, suitable terrestrial habitat exists in both the wider area and within the development site, and no significant barriers to dispersal occur between the ponds and the site. Great crested newts are known to travel up to 500m between breeding ponds. It is therefore considered that there is a small chance that great crested newts will be utilising the proposed development site in their terrestrial phase. This development therefore has the potential to impact upon individual newts. Great crested newts are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1994 (Regulation 38). Only habitat on the westerly edge of the site is to be lost due to the erection of the residential dwelling and stables and no hedgerows or trees are to be removed. The development is therefore not considered to inversely impact the local population in the long term. However, within the construction phase, especially during initial clearance and ground works, there is a chance great crested newts may be harmed. However, the risk to great crested newts within this phase of works is considered to be low. Due to the small scale of the development and no standing water or breeding ponds present on site, an EPS licence is not considered necessary. Alternatively, it is recommended that the above described development is undertaken under a strict Method Statement for great crested newts to prevent any inverse impacts on this species. If a great crested newt is found at any time, all works must stop immediately and Wildbanks Conservation or Natural Resources Wales contacted immediately.

5.4 *Breeding birds*

All bird species are protected whilst on the nest under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). A small proportion of the western hedgerow is to be removed as part of the development to provide access to the property. If for any reason this removal is to occur during the bird breeding season (March to September), a nesting bird survey is required prior to vegetation removal. It is recommended all vegetation is to be removed outside of this period. As only a small portion of the existing hedgerow is to be removed, this will not significantly impact on bird nesting opportunities. The proposed planting of a new hedgerow on site will be beneficial to breeding birds and significantly increase nesting opportunities in the future.

5.5 *Other protected/notable species*

There are no constraints to the proposed development in relation to protected species. However, the National Planning Policy Framework recommends the local planning policy should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains on biodiversity where possible. It is recommended that 1 bat box and 2 bird boxes are installed on the proposed building to contribute to wildlife enhancement.

- One x Schweglar Bat Access Panel 1FE installed within the wall of the southern gable end
- Two x Schweglar bird boxes 1B. – with 26mm and 32mm diameter entrance holes installed within the site.

5.6 *Trees*

A single mature oak tree exists on the boundary of the development site. Although the tree is not being removed, it is recommended that a 'Minimum Protected Area' (MPA) is created around the tree prior to works, to prevent any damage to the tree itself or the root system. The location of the MPA of the tree must be either equal to the branch spread plus 1m or half the height of the tree plus 1m, whichever is greater. Erection of protective fencing must be undertaken before any site works commence, and remain in place and be maintained in good condition for the duration of the site works.

6.0 REFERENCES

Bat Conservation Trust (2012) Bat Surveys and Good Practice Guidelines, BCT

English Nature (2001) Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines. English Nature.

Franklin, P.S. (1993). The migratory ecology and terrestrial habitat preferences of the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) at Little Wittenham Nature Reserve. De Montford University unpublished thesis.

Gent, T and Gibson, S (2003). Herpetofauna Workers' Manual, JNCC.

Oldham R.S., Keeble J., Swan M.J.S. & Jeffcote M. (2000). Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). Herpetological Journal 10 (4), 43-155

A1. APPENDIX – SITE PHOTOGRAPHS – PLATES 1 – 9



Plate 1. Development site looking East



Plate 2. Development site looking west



Plate 3. Western hedgerow adjacent to road.



Plate 4. Ditch present at western hedgerow.



Plate 5. Southern boundary hedgerow.



Plate 6. Eastern boundary hedgerow.



Plate 7. Mature oak tree located on northern hedgerow.



Plate 8. Dead oak tree located in northern hedgerow.



Plate 9. Area of hard standing for construction of timber stable building.

A2. APPENDIX – SITE LOCATION PLANS



Figure 1. Site Location bordered in red.

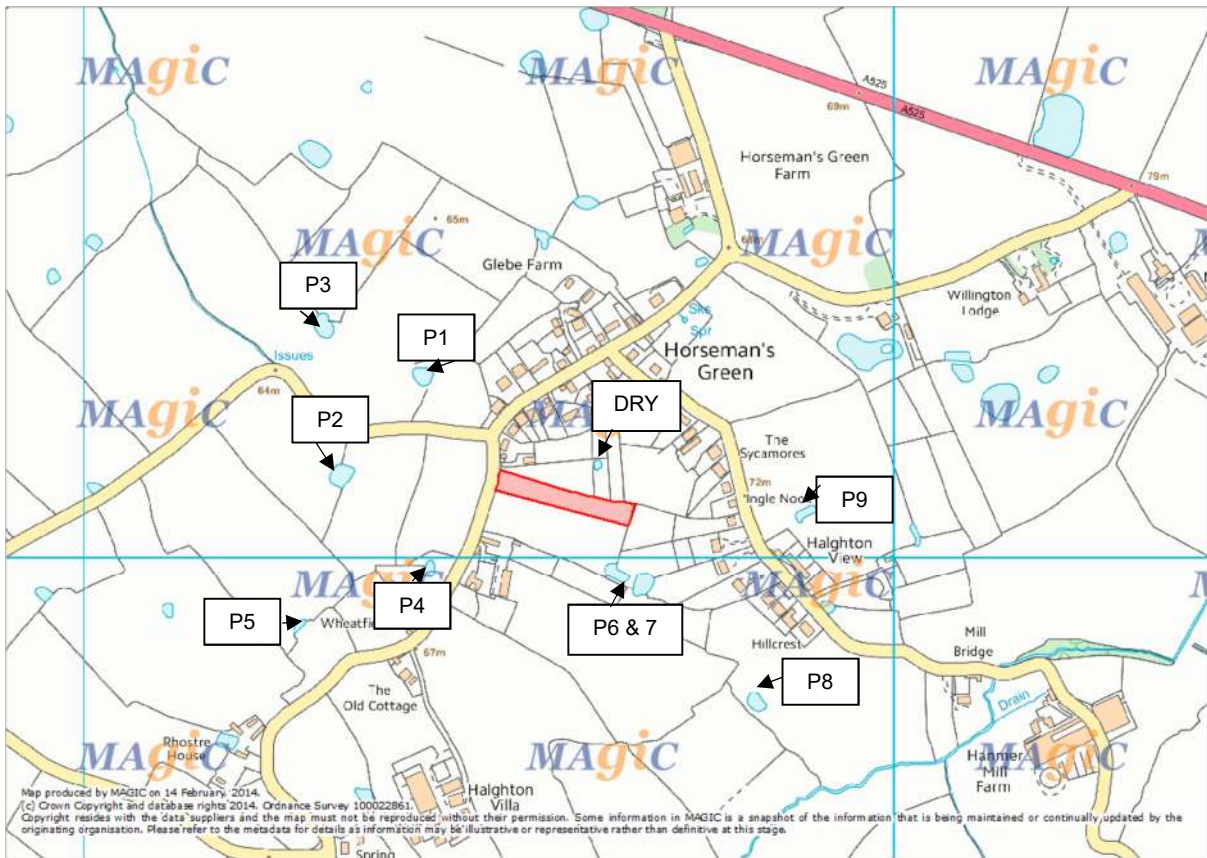


Figure 2. Pond Location Plan within 250m of site.

