

Wrexham ASFRC – Ecological Assessment (Update 2013)

1. Introduction

The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust (WAST) proposes to develop a combined Ambulance Station and Fire Resource Centre on a site ('the site') at Croesnewydd Road, Wrexham. The site is situated at National Grid Reference (NGR) SJ3194 5037. It is on the western side of Wrexham town centre and is bounded to the north by Wrexham Maelor Hospital (specifically the hospital car park on the disused railway); to the west by the Croesnewydd Road; and to the south by the River Gwenfro. This site is a component of the wider 'Western Gateway' development, which is part of ongoing development within Wrexham Technology Park.

BAM Construction Ltd, assisted by Nightingale Associates and AMEC Environment & Infrastructure UK Ltd, is preparing the planning application for the proposed development on behalf of WAST. AMEC completed an Ecological Assessment of the proposed development in 2012. The Ecological Assessment is detailed in a separate report (AMEC UK Ltd 2012¹), supported by plans and includes further details of the site and proposed development and describes the approach to and results and conclusions of the Ecological Assessment.

The Ecological Assessment (AMEC 2012) was informed by survey data collated in 2009 to inform the Ecological Impact Assessment of the wider Western Gateway development (Marches Ecology 2009) as well as a walkover survey in 2012. AMEC was commissioned to undertake a further site walkover in October 2013 and a review of the survey data to assess any changes in the structure and distribution of habitats at the site that could have led to changes in the status and/or nature conservation value of these habitats or the species they support. This Technical Note summarises this work and reviews the conclusions of, and should be read in conjunction with, the Ecological Assessment report (AMEC 2012). The purpose of this work was to determine whether or not the ecological assessment is likely to remain valid for the purpose of a planning application in 2013/14.

2. Approach

A walkover survey was completed by an experienced AMEC Ecologist on 4th October 2013 and included an assessment of changes in the structure and nature of the habitats within the site, with reference to the earlier (2009) Phase 1 Habitat map; a search for signs of badger activity, recognising that an outlier badger sett was previously recorded on a spoil mound within the site;

¹ AMEC (2012). Wrexham ARC Ecological Assessment. Technical Report Prepared for BAM Construction Ltd

and a search of accessible parts of the River Gwenfro corridor for signs of otter activity, recognising that this species has also previously been recorded within this part of the site.

3. Results

The survey data collected to inform the assessment of the Western Gateway development are now approximately 4 years old. A site survey in 2012 confirmed that the habitats within the site did not differ significantly from those recorded in 2009. The 2013 survey visit also recorded only a limited number of changes, which are described below and should be read with reference to the 2012 Ecological Assessment report (AMEC 2012):

- The waterbody within the northern corner of the site was previously surrounded by scrub. This scrub has been cleared and has been replaced in places by recent landscape planting (saplings). A new attenuation pond has also been created outside the site to the west, on the opposite side of the Gwenfro. These recent works appear to have been part of separate access/road improvements at the edge of the site as part of the wider Western Gateway development. Great crested newts have not previously been recorded within 500m of the site, including by surveys in 2002 and 2009. Therefore this species is unlikely to occur on the site.
- The site is bordered to the west by Croesnewydd Road, which crosses the River Gwenfro as it enters the site. A new box culvert encloses the Gwenfro, having been also constructed as part of the recent road and access improvements works at the western edge of the site, along with limited channel reprofiling where the Gwenfro enters the site. The box culvert contains an otter pass. No signs of otter activity were recorded along the section of the River Gwenfro that borders the site in 2013, apart from a possible partial footprint. However otter activity was previously recorded in 2009 and 2012 and therefore this species is likely to continue to use the Gwenfro adjacent to the site.
- No signs of badger activity were recorded. The previously recorded outlier sett has collapsed and is used by rabbits. As badger activity has previously been recorded on the site this species could use the site again in the future, particularly as the spoil mounds are potentially suitable badger sett locations.
- The habitats within the site continue to mature, with an increasing proportion of tall ruderal vegetation, particularly rosebay willowherb (*Chamerion angustifolium*) and increasing numbers of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) saplings. However the nature conservation value of the habitats remains similar to that previously recorded in 2009 and 2012.

4. Conclusions

Other than recent culvert and access works, which have taken place as part of other development at the western edge of the site, the habitats within the majority of the ASFRC site

have remained largely unaltered, other than becoming more mature, with an increasing abundance and density of tall ruderal vegetation and saplings. Therefore the status of species populations within the site is also unlikely to have changed significantly since 2009.

No evidence of otter or badger activity was recorded during the survey in 2013. However both species are likely to continue to use the site. The conclusions and environmental measures set out in the 2012 Ecological Assessment report (AMEC 2012) are therefore deemed to remain valid for the purpose of the planning application.

A further predevelopment site inspection will be undertaken by an Ecologist to verify that these conclusions remain valid and in particular to verify that no badger setts or otter holts become established on/adjacent to the site, which may necessitate a Natural England licence, before works commence.

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