

Proposed Barn Conversion (P/2021/0059) Tyddyn Dedwydd, Fron-deg, Wrexham

Ecology Statement

Introduction

This document has been produced in response to comments from Wrexham's County Ecologist (CE) in relation to the planning application for the proposed barn conversion at Tyddyn Dedwydd (P/2021/0059).

Etive Ecology Ltd undertook a Preliminary Roost Appraisal (PRA) of the existing disused barn in December 2020. The PRA included information a desk study of the area within 1km and an internal and external appraisal/inspection for potential and evidence of roosting bats and nesting birds.

The existing barn was found to be of Negligible Bat Roost Potential and it was concluded that roosting bats were currently absent from the site. The potential for nesting birds was also found to be very low.

The CE's comments state:

"I agree with the conclusions of the submitted bat report that the building has a low potential for bats. However, there is a lack of ecology information on the site as whole and how conversion to a dwelling and associated access, car parking and gardens will impact on ecology. The submitted survey should have had a wider scope than simply the building and should assess habitats and species externally to the building."

Welsh Government Planning Policy Wales and subsequent letter to LPAs requires development to provide a net benefit for biodiversity (NBB) i.e. a better outcome than if the site was left undeveloped. Failing to provide such a benefit is a valid reason for refusal. There are no enhancement measures included within this proposal."

This document provides a summary of the ecological features of the red-line application site, their condition and value. An assessment of any potential impacts is made and recommendations for mitigation and/or enhancements are made.

Ecological Baseline

Desk Study

There are two statutory sites for nature conservation located within 1km of the site:

- Ruabon / Llantysilio Mountains and Minera Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); located 700m to the west of the site and designated due to its heather moorland, limestone and neutral grassland habitats and for its species interest including upland breeding birds, rare and uncommon plants and the use of mines and caves by hibernating lesser horseshoe bats.
- Berwyn a Mynyddoedd De Clwyd / Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC); located 700m to the west of the site and designated on the

basis of the Annex I habitats that it supports, including blanket bog, dry heath and transitional mires.

Protected species records for the area known to the surveyor include:

- Amphibians; GCN (1km south)
- Birds; numerous species including swift, little owl, jackdaw, house martin, swallow and house sparrow.
- Terrestrial Mammals; hedgehog, common pipistrelle bat, brown long-eared bat and lesser horseshoe bat.

The land immediately surrounding the site is comprised of improved grassland pasture with hedgerows and trees. The site is at an altitude of 250m. The nearest pond is located 330m to the west of the site (300m altitude). The site is also set within the existing farmyard complex of Tyddyn Dedwydd.

Habitats on Site

The red line site boundary is comprised entirely of hard-standing and bare ground, with occasional detritus such as pallets, rocks and roof slates.

The absence of any semi-natural habitats within the red-line boundary means that it is considered to be of negligible ecological value.

Protected Species Potential

As concluded within the Bat Report, there is Negligible Bat Roost Potential associated with the existing building and very low nesting bird potential. The composition of the rest of the red-line site is of such low value that there is also negligible value for other protected species such as amphibians, foraging/commuting bats, foraging birds, reptiles or any terrestrial mammals. The occasional piles of detritus and building materials hold low potential to support sheltering amphibians.

Overall Ecological Value

In summary, the red line application site that includes the disused barn at Tyddyn Dedwydd is found to be of negligible ecological value and to hold very low potential value to support any legally protected and/or notable species.

Ecological Impacts

Given the low – negligible ecological value of the site, no significant ecological impacts are anticipated as there are no ecological receptors identified.

The use of the site as a residential plot rather than as an agricultural building will mean that the site will be occupied more permanently and that there will be potential disturbance from artificial lighting. This is compared to the presence of agricultural activities, materials and machinery. The actual change in disturbance levels is considered to be negligible.

The proposed conversion works pose a potential risk of harm to any nesting birds that are unlikely to be present and to any amphibians that are also unlikely to be present within the occasional detritus piles. Any such impacts would be minor and can be mitigated, as described below in the recommendations section.

The ecological value of the site is also likely to change as a result of the proposed scheme. The continued use of the site for agricultural purposes would mean continued disturbance and an absence semi-natural vegetation or habitats. Whereas the proposed development for residential use is likely to result in the creation of soft landscaped and/or garden areas, of marginally greater ecological value.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in relation to the proposed development:

- Site clearance works are commenced outside of the nesting bird season to avoid the risk of nesting birds being present and potentially harmed during the works.
- The clearance of all detritus from the red-line area by hand and with care, prior to the use of any mechanical plant.
- The provision of one integrated bat box (Schwegler bat tube or similar) and one integrated bird nest box (swift box) should be provided in the converted building to deliver biodiversity net gain.
- Any landscaping should comprise predominantly of native species.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the current value of the site is low to negligible, based on the absence of semi-natural habitats or vegetation. The potential ecological impacts resulting from the proposed scheme are also therefore negligible and certainly not significant. All such impacts can be adequately mitigated through recommendations given herein.

The anticipated change in ecological value as a result of the proposed development is considered to be neutral. In order to achieve a net gain in biodiversity value to the site, bat and bird boxes are to be provided on site and a scheme of native landscaping is to be implemented.

Overall, provided the recommendations given herein are implemented in full, there should be a net-gain in biodiversity value on site as a result of the proposed development.