

Proposed Dwelling Black Rock Farm, Sesswick Way, Wrexham

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Introduction

This document has been produced to support and inform the planning application for a proposed dwelling at Black Rock Farm off Sesswick Way, south of Wrexham Industrial Estate. The red-line planning application is shown in Plate 1 below and is centred upon National Grid Reference SJ 3732 4743.

Planning permission was granted upon appeal in 2017 for the construction of two poultry buildings in land adjacent to the north of the current red-line application site (P/2016/0533 and 17/3167412). The poultry sheds were completed and came into operation at the start of 2019.

The site is located within an area known to support a significant population of great crested newts (GCN). There are ponds both on site and within 250m to the north of the site, known to support GCN. As a result, a GCN Mitigation License (S086710/1) was obtained following planning consent and was implemented pre, during and post-construction of the poultry sheds. The license includes the provision of compensatory habitat within the land ownership of the applicant, and ongoing conservation management of said habitat.

The proposed application is to provide a permanent residence on site for the applicant, who own and operate the broiler enterprise.

Plate 1 – Red Line Application Site



Ecological Baseline

There are no statutory or non-statutory designated nature conservation sites located on site or within the immediate vicinity of the site.

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

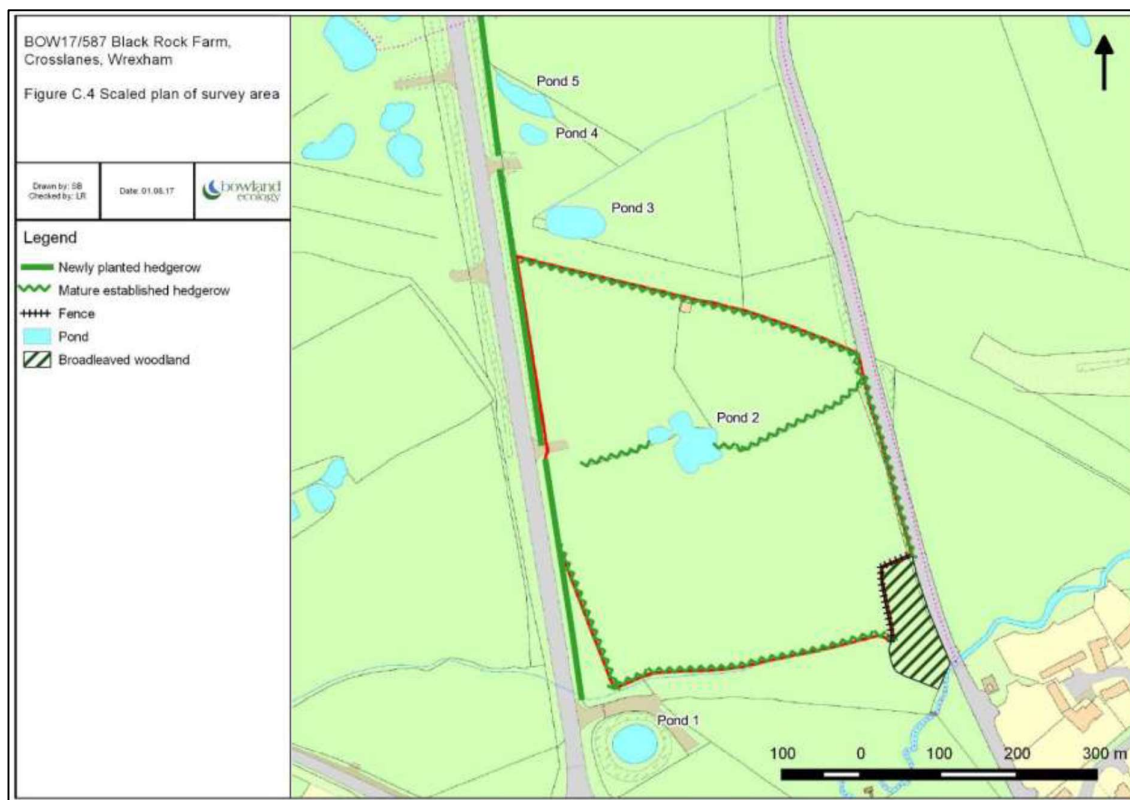
- Amphibians; GCN and smooth newt
- Birds; Sparrowhawk, sedge warbler, swift, lesser whitethroat, reed bunting, house sparrow, starling and song thrush.
- Mammals; hedgehog and common pipistrelle bat.

To inform the GCN Mitigation License, the site was subject to GCN surveys in 2015, to establish the population size class. The survey area is shown on Plate 2 and the survey results are summarised as follows:

- Pond 1; HSI = 0.74. 1 x GCN. Small population
- Pond 2; HSI = 0.86. 5 x GCN. Small population
- Pond 3; HSI = 0.80. 16 x GCN. Medium population
- Pond 4; HSI = 0.81. 13 x GCN. Medium population
- Pond 5; HSI = 0.94. 2 x GCN. Small population

In summary, the five ponds were assessed to support a medium sized meta-population of GCN.

Plate 2 – GCN Survey Ponds



A site survey by Russell Grey (BSc, MCIEEM, CEnv) of Etive Ecology Ltd on 17th September 2020 found the application site boundary to comprise:

- Improved grassland within the field to the south of Pond 2 and the chicken sheds. The grassland is improved by agricultural management and as such is species-poor and disturbed on a regular basis by cutting for hay and silage. Low ecological value.
- Species-poor hedgerow with trees forming the boundary between the chicken sheds to the north and the grassland to the south. There is an existing field access through this hedgerow, through which the red line application site runs. There is a sessile oak located to the west of the existing access that is in a poor condition.
- Bare ground forming the existing vehicle access off Sesswick Way and extending to the field access point.

Land outside of the red-line application site comprises standing water (Pond 2 and compensatory ponds), bare ground establishing scrub and ruderal vegetation, semi-improved grassland, newly planted hedgerows and wildflower bunds. All of these features have been created as part of the GCN mitigation/compensation package under the GCN License.

Plate 3 – Habitats on Site



Great Crested Newts

The red-line application site is comprised entirely of improved grassland (~0.7ha - low value to GCN) and bare ground (~0.3ha - negligible value to GCN). However, it is recognised that the close proximity of known GCN breeding ponds and a medium-sized meta-population means that it is reasonably likely that GCN could be found present within the grassland habitat and may even disperse across the bare ground. Overall, the site is considered to be of low value to GCN.

Following discussions with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Wrexham CBC's ecologist it is recognised that the proposed development has the potential to adversely impact the local population of GCN through;

- direct harm/disturbance during construction,
- habitat loss to the development footprint, and
- harm/disturbance during occupation.

The scale and magnitude of these impacts are likely to be relatively minor (local scale) but will require appropriate mitigation to ensure there are no significant effects on the favourable conservation status of GCN. The application site covers an area of approximately 0.1ha.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with regards to mitigating the likely ecological impacts of the proposed development:

- The development will require a GCN mitigation license in order for it to be approved. It is therefore recommended that the development be included within a revision to the existing GCN license for the broiler enterprise, so that the site can be managed as a coherent unit under one license. The red-line boundary will be subject to GCN fencing and pitfall trapping for a minimum of 30 days. Once trapping is complete, development works can take place within the exclusion fence. The 0.1ha of land lost to the footprint of the scheme will be compensated for by the conservation management of a 0.1ha area of improved grassland within the land ownership of the applicant, to create scrub and/or semi-improved rough grassland. This plot of land would be included in the revised GCN License.
- All vegetation clearance (including ground vegetation) should be undertaken outside of the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive) to avoid direct impacts on active nests. Where this is not possible the site should be checked by a suitably experienced ecologist prior to the start of any such clearance works.
- The sessile oak adjacent to the existing field access is to be retained but monitored as to its structural safety. The tree does have the potential to be used by roosting bats, but it is not anticipated that the works will significantly disturb any such roost that may be present. However, if the tree is required to be removed post-development it is recommended that it is subject to bat inspection and survey if necessary, to confirm the presence/absence of roosting bats prior to removal.
- To deliver biodiversity enhancement for the site it is recommended that one bat box is installed on to one of the mature trees present within the land ownership of the applicant.

Conclusions

The proposed dwelling at Black Rock Farm off Sesswick Way is for a single residential property, using an existing access of Sesswick Way. The red-line application site is approximately 0.1ha in size and sits within an improved grassland field, approached via existing bare ground and through an existing field access.

Black Rock Farm is operated as a broiler enterprise, with the start-up of the business covered by a GCN Mitigation License. The license commits the applicants to long-term habitat enhancement, management and monitoring to offset the impacts of the development.

The red line application site is assessed to be of very low ecological value, but with the potential to be used occasionally by GCN dispersing to/from breeding ponds. The potential for other protected species to be present within the red-line boundary is very low.

It is recommended that the proposed development is brought under the existing GCN Mitigation License by way of an update and revised submission to NRW. This will include the pitfall trapping and exclusion of GCN from the development footprint and the provision of compensatory 0.1ha of habitat within the existing land ownership of the applicant.

In conclusion, the proposed development poses a potential risk of harming GCN and will result in a permanent loss of habitat for the species. No impacts on other protected species are anticipated. Provided the existing GCN License for the site can be revised appropriately and agreed with NRW, there should be no residual impacts on biodiversity as a result of the scheme. Long term biodiversity gain should be achieved through long-term conservation management of the site as secured through the GCN License.

Site Photographs



Looking west towards the proposed dwelling, to be sited on far side of stock-fence.



Pond 2 – confirmed GCN pond.