

Our ref: 4355 / SJN

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Dear Matt

JOHNSTOWN ECOLOGY ADDENDUM – S73 AMENDMENT

Introduction

This report has been prepared on behalf of Gladman Developments Ltd and provides an update assessment of the nature conservation interest of a site located off Bangor Road, Johnstown (Central OS Grid Ref: SJ 310 460). This update assessment has been prepared for a Section 73 amendment to planning permission APP/H6955/A/15/3135730 for the development of up to 300 dwellings over 6.70ha, a small area (0.40ha) of employment with associated infrastructure, including drainage and highways, a GCN (great crested newt) reserve (5.85ha) and amenity space (3.71ha).

The site as a whole is approximately 16.99ha and consists of the former Ruabon Brickworks. Factory buildings and associated areas of hard-standing occupy the site's northern extent, whilst the majority of the remaining site comprises disturbed ground and secondary habitats, such as neutral semi-improved grassland, ephemeral/short perennial vegetation, scrub and self-set broad-leaved woodland, which have established following the cessation of works. Established habitats are rare, but include a compartment of abandoned pasture, Aberderfyn Brook which flows south-east across the site, a small area of broad-leaved woodland located within the site's southern extent and a small number of boundary hedgerows.

The revised masterplan (4355-L-05 Rev L, FPCR 2020) which forms the basis of the S73 Amendment has subtle changes relating to a small reduction of the site area along the northern boundary and a change of access along the southern boundary, with removal of the previously proposed roundabout to be replaced with a central reservation turn / junction.

The following will therefore focus on the impacts to ecology in relation to the aforementioned changes in scheme design. Please see Ecological Appraisal (FPCR 2013) for full details of the site.

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Methodology

Habitats / Flora

The site was initially surveyed on 14th of December 2011 using the standard Extended Phase I Habitat survey methodology (JNCC, 2010), as recommended by CCW (now NRW) to identify specific habitats of ecological interest. Whilst the survey was undertaken outside the optimum period (April to September), sufficient information was gained during the survey to enable classification of broad habitat types. The site was subsequently re-visited in 2012, 2013, 2016 and 2017.

Fauna

During the survey of the site, signs of or suitable habitat for any species protected under part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (now replaced by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)) and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, were recorded. Consideration was also given to the existence and use of the site by other notable fauna such as Species of Principal Importance, Wrexham BAP or RDB species.

Results

Flora

During the most-recent site visit it was considered that the whole site habitats had remained relatively similar to when initially surveyed (full details provided in the 2013 report). The lack of management and / or working within the site had left much of the habitats exhibiting signs of natural succession. The changes noted in 2017 from the initial survey are summarised as:

- Additional areas of scrub within the central and eastern SI grassland
- Additional scrub and tall ruderal species adjacent to W2
- Additional scattered scrub within the SI grassland to the south of W2
- The area in-between W1 and W2 was rabbit-grazed ephemeral/short perennial on disturbed ground compared to bare ground previously
- Areas of scrub were developing into birch woodland within the SW corner of site
- Small-scale tree removal had taken place along the footpath running north from the southern boundary.

The area now emitted from the redline along the northern boundary was found to contain three newly-created waterbodies and an expanse of hardstanding utilised by the adjacent brickworks. All three ponds were found to be approximately 100m² in size and contained minimal vegetation and low water levels.

With regards to the habitats to be impacted by the proposed S73 amendment hedgerow H4 was dominated by hawthorn, outgrown and unmanaged having received little management. The woodland along the southern boundary provided extensive areas of cover with the majority of species self-set with specimens typical examples of their respective species (full details see Aboricultural Assessment - FPCR 2020).

Fauna

Full details of the potential for, and evidence of fauna on the site are detailed in the 2013 Ecological Appraisal. In addition to this during the most-recent visit the three newly-created waterbodies located adjacent the northern boundary were found to be suitable for great crested newts but at the time of

survey were not well vegetated. Over time the waterbodies have the potential to naturally vegetate and become further suitable.

During the survey badger prints were found to be present within the southern part of the site. At the time of survey, no other fields signs were found to be present within the site.

No other evidence for any further protected species were identified at the time of survey with the site continuing to provide habitats of suitability for both GCN and bats as previously detailed.

Discussion

Flora

Habitats on-site are considered to have remained similar during the suite of surveys undertaken at the site from 2011. The main difference being the increase of scrub within the grasslands due to a general lack of active management and habitat succession with scrub developing into birch woodland towards the south-western extent of the site. Small areas of the hard standing are also starting to vegetate due to the lack of disturbance with ephemeral/short perennial vegetation.

The proposed changes to the masterplan result in a smaller land take in the southern extent of the site compared to the agreed scheme. The new proposals will result the loss of less woodland and hedgerow H4 along the southern boundary.

The habitat creation being proposed within the scheme including the extensive areas of newt reserve and public open space will adequately mitigate the impacts of habitat loss on site with residual effects predicted to be negligible in most habitat types. Hedgerows and standing water are both predicted to have residual effects of local beneficial due to proposals.

Fauna

During the most recent survey of the it was deemed that the recommendations found with the original Ecological Appraisal (FPCR 2013) to hold true as the same potential features originally identified such as the buildings and waterbodies are still present and offer the same potential to bats and GCN respectively.

Although no badger setts were present at the time of survey or identified during the suite of surveys undertaken at the site, due to the known presence of badgers in the vicinity, there is potential for new setts to be created within the site. It is therefore recommended that a pre-commencement badger survey is undertaken prior to any works taking place on the site to check for any recent occupation. If a new sett is found, measures would be required to ensure their protection and/or a licence may be required to close a sett.

With regards to the proposed amended access, this area was considered to provide limited suitability for protected species and the proposed green space has been designed to have an overall net gain for biodiversity.

Yours sincerely



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Attached: Phase 1 Habitat Plan 2016

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