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**Ecological Consultants
Environmental and Rural Chartered Surveyors**

Your Ref: P/2016/0953
Our Ref: AWG/3271

Wrexham County Borough Council
Planning Officer
16 Lord Street
Wrexham
LL11 1LG

Tuesday, 15 November 2016

Dear Sirs

RE: CHANGE OF USE OF CLASS LANES COUNTRY HOTEL (USE CLASS C1) AND THE LODGE (USE CLASS C3) TO CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY CENTRE (USE CLASS C2) TO INCLUDE EXTENSION TO EXISTING HOTEL BUILDING, ERECTION OF BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT FOR CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES WITH ASSOCIATED CAR PARKING, COACH PARKING, LANDSCAPING AND RAILINGS FORMER CROSS LANES HOTEL BANGOR ROAD CROSS LANES WREXHAM

The survey revealed that a small sized GCN population is present at the site, therefore any development of the site will need to be undertaken under a Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Great Crested Newt Development Licence.

It is unlikely that an off site translocation of great crested newts will be required in this case.

The surrounding area has not been developed and there are few significant barriers to migration.

Before a licence is granted, NRW must be satisfied that the development meets their three test criteria as follows:

1. The consented operation must be for "preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment";
2. There must be "no satisfactory alternative"; and
3. The action authorised "will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their range".

Mitigation Key Points

Key mitigation points are included below to assist in the decision making process with respect to GCN and the development site. The following are taken from Natural England's Standing Advice Species Sheet: Great crested newt (February 2011) and are points for consideration with respect to the development at Cross Lanes Hotel.

It should be noted that the construction methods and timing of works are unknown as the site is still at the planning stage. A more detailed methods statement must be prepared and submitted with the licence application when these details are known.



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Impacts on breeding sites or resting places

1. Can the impacts be avoided through careful design of the scheme? Can breeding sites and/or terrestrial habitats be avoided, thereby securing them and avoiding direct impacts?
Not in this case but ground works are concentrated on lower value terrestrial habitat to minimise impacts.

As per the submitted Masterplan (drawing reference 007502-UV-EW-XX-DR-101) it is important that two buildings (4 and 9) will remain unaltered (externally). Building 9 will continue to be used as storage and only internal changes are proposed to building 4, required to convert it from a double garage to a toilet block. During pre-application discussions these two buildings were previously earmarked for extension but now they will remain in-situ. Furthermore, on a wider point, the proposed development will result in 18m² less floorspace than that which is already permitted at the site which will assist reducing the impact on breeding sites or resting places.

Impacts are therefore minimised but not avoided.

2. Could the direct impacts be reduced? Can the works be carried out at a time to avoid direct impacts upon newts? For example, pond enhancement works should generally be undertaken during the winter months when newts are unlikely to be within the waterbodies.

The timing of works will span more than one active season for GCN. Works to waterbodies will be undertaken over the winter months. Direct impacts have therefore been minimised but not avoided.

3. If there are still residual impacts after undertaking avoidance and minimisation measures, have suitable mitigation and compensation measures been proposed? For example, if a minor impact is unavoidable, mitigation on-site, or in the immediate surrounding area, should be provided, entailing small scale relocation and exclusion of newts combined with suitable habitat creation

It is proposed that at this site translocation within site can be effected from the working areas, along with habitat creation/ enhancement. This will be undertaken through trapping and removal of GCN from the working area through the use of a fence (TAF). Post development the fence will be removed.

4. If a major impact is unavoidable and mitigation cannot be carried out on site, newts should be translocated away from the site to a suitable receptor area. It is important that any new habitats are made suitable prior to translocation.

Major impacts are not predicted at this site.

5. Can enhancements be secured? Suitable post-development management such as aquatic vegetation management and de-silting of ponds.

The site will be owned and operated by the applicant, post development management can therefore be secured both via planning condition and NRW licence.

Impacts on great crested newts

There are a number of development activities which can affect great crested newts, which should be fully considered at the application stage. In general, the greater the predicted impact, the greater the level of mitigation will be required. Great crested newts can migrate more than 500 metres from their breeding ponds in areas of suitable terrestrial habitat. However, generally the scale of potential impacts will decrease as the distance from the breeding pond increases. Impacts on great crested newts could include:

1. Habitat loss: Both the loss of breeding ponds and terrestrial habitat can have significant impacts upon great crested newts since newts live on land for the majority of their lives. Populations can be reduced or even go extinct where there is a major loss of habitat due to reduced foraging, breeding and refuge opportunities. Consequently, the mitigation strategy must ensure that there is no net loss of GCN habitat (be it breeding ponds or terrestrial habitat).

At this site there will be loss of some low value terrestrial habitat comprising amenity grassland but this will be offset with the creation of higher value habitat and improvement to the existing ponds (not used for breeding) on site.

2. Habitat modification: Although some development may not replace newt habitat with built land, it can be made less suitable. For example, changing an area of rough grassland used by newts as terrestrial habitat into amenity grassland could have a negative impact on the population. Therefore the mitigation strategy should ensure that there is no net loss in quantity and quality of habitat.

We predict a net gain in suitable habitat at the site.

3. Habitat fragmentation and isolation: Habitat fragmentation and isolation of great crested newt populations can be caused when development imposes barriers to newt dispersal. These barriers can include built land, fast flowing water bodies or extreme landforms. Isolation of great crested newts can result in population number declines and a decrease in genetic viability. Therefore the mitigation strategy should include measures to maintain habitat linkages and preferably reconnect fragmented areas.

There will be no habitat fragmentation as a result of the proposal

4. Miscellaneous: Other more indirect impacts caused by development also need to be fully considered, such as increased shading and siltation of ponds, water table alteration and potential for increased chemical run-off into waterbodies. Great crested newts can also be impacted by interference following a development, such as the introduction of fish to breeding ponds. Fish will predate the young life stages of newts. In addition, the built environment can present significant barriers to newts through inappropriate design.

The creation of a new lake should stabilise the water table locally due to it acting as a sink, attenuating rapid rising and lowering of the water table locally. The site is to be operated as a children's activity centre, the use of toxic chemicals at the site will therefore be avoided/ minimised as this may also compromise use and safety of the site.

Use of Temporary Amphibian Fencing (TAF)

In the majority of cases, a mitigation licence is required to install TAF, as the fencing acts as a barrier to movements of great crested newts in their terrestrial phase. If the TAF obstructs access to places used for shelter or protection, this would be deemed an offence without an appropriate licence. Fencing is usually used in conjunction with pitfall traps in order to clear a site of GCN. The following trapping effort is expected with respect to the three population classes:

- Small population – 30 days
- Medium population – 60 days
- Large population – 90 days

In this instance it is likely that a minimum of 30 days trapping effort will be required. Trapping and exclusion exercises may only be undertaken during the active season from February until the end of October. It is unacceptable to capture newts once they have begun to hibernate; typically this occurs as temperatures tend towards zero before the first frosts.

We envisage that the areas in which major ground works will occur will need to be trapped clear of GCN. An indicative fence line is shown on Figure 1. This is to be backed up with pitfall traps and refuge tiles at least every 4m. Internal cross fences will be used to maximise the potential for GCN to intersect the fence lines and traps.

Trapped GCN will be moved to the woodland to the South side of the site.

TAF Lines in yellow with pitfall traps and refuges at 4m centres

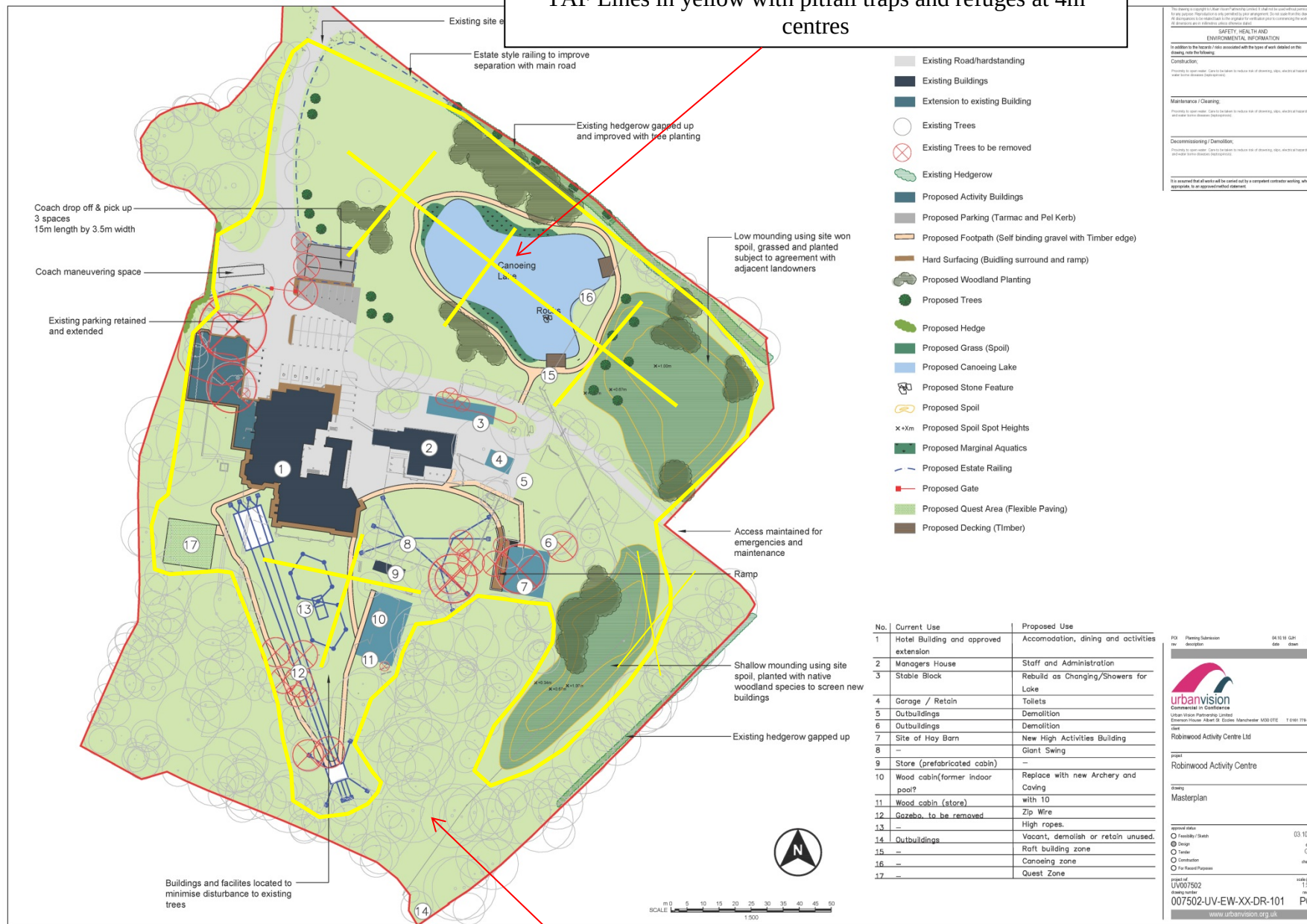


Figure 1 -Proposed TAF

Trapped GCN deposited here

Proposed development

The proposed development is shown on Figure 2.

Habitats- No mitigation

There will be the loss of 168m² of amenity grassland which is short mown for the creation of a new coach park and paths around the site.

This represents a net loss of habitat of very low value with replacement of habitat which is of negligible value. There will be slight ground disturbance on an area of amenity grassland for a high ropes course and zipline in an area of 300m². This does not represent a net loss of habitat but a slight increase in disturbance. Both are activities at height so limited ground based impacts are predicted.

There will be the creation of a new 1500m² area of standing water/ lake on an area of amenity grassland which is short mown. This represents the net loss of habitat of very low value with the creation of habitat of moderate value. Marginal aquatics provided will create a suitable environment for GCN but there is also the potential for disturbance of this habitat through use of the lake.

There will be deposition of spoil from excavation of the new lake into area of tall ruderal vegetation and short mown amenity grassland where this work will create a raised bank over 2400m² by the lake and 2000m² by the high activities building. This represents the loss of habitat of very low to good value with the replacement of habitat which is to be planted and landscaped so of good to excellent value.

Overall without specific compensation for GCN in respect of habitat loss and gain, there will be a net gain in the value of habitats at the site as a result of the proposal.

Habitats- with mitigation

Cut wood from felled trees will be buried within the spoil heaps from lake creation to provide enhanced hibernation sites for amphibians.

Additional tree and scrub planting is proposed around and on the spoil heaps providing root structures which will facilitate ingress and egress by amphibians.

The pond to the south of the site will be partly de-silted over the winter period to allow for open water to develop. Regressing the pond to an earlier successional stage more favoured by amphibians, particularly GCN.

This additional habitat works proposed further result in a net gain in the potential value of the site to as existing site conditions.

Disturbance

The existing grounds are already frequently disturbed through use of the hotel. Guidance structures such as fences and signs will be used to concentrate activity around built structures rather than the wider site. The pond in which GCN were recorded (not breeding) will be fenced to prevent access.

The pond, to be improved, to the south of the site will also be fenced to prevent access.

Interpretation boards will be provided at the waters edge detailing the habitats and species present.

Site staff will act as wardens. All site staff being briefed on the presence of GCN as well as their protected status and value of the site.

Construction

Construction will commence within GCN free areas, trapping having been completed. Contractors will however be briefed as part of their site induction on the presence of GCN in the wider site. They will be briefed to maintain the boundary TAF fences. They will be given a toolbox talk by an ecologist on how to deal with unexpected finds of GCN during work.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the ponds on site will be required post construction for a period of 2 years to confirm if breeding occurs and GCN are still present.

Site staff will monitor the condition of ponds, including fences and landscaped areas to ensure they remain fit for purpose on at least a bi-monthly basis.

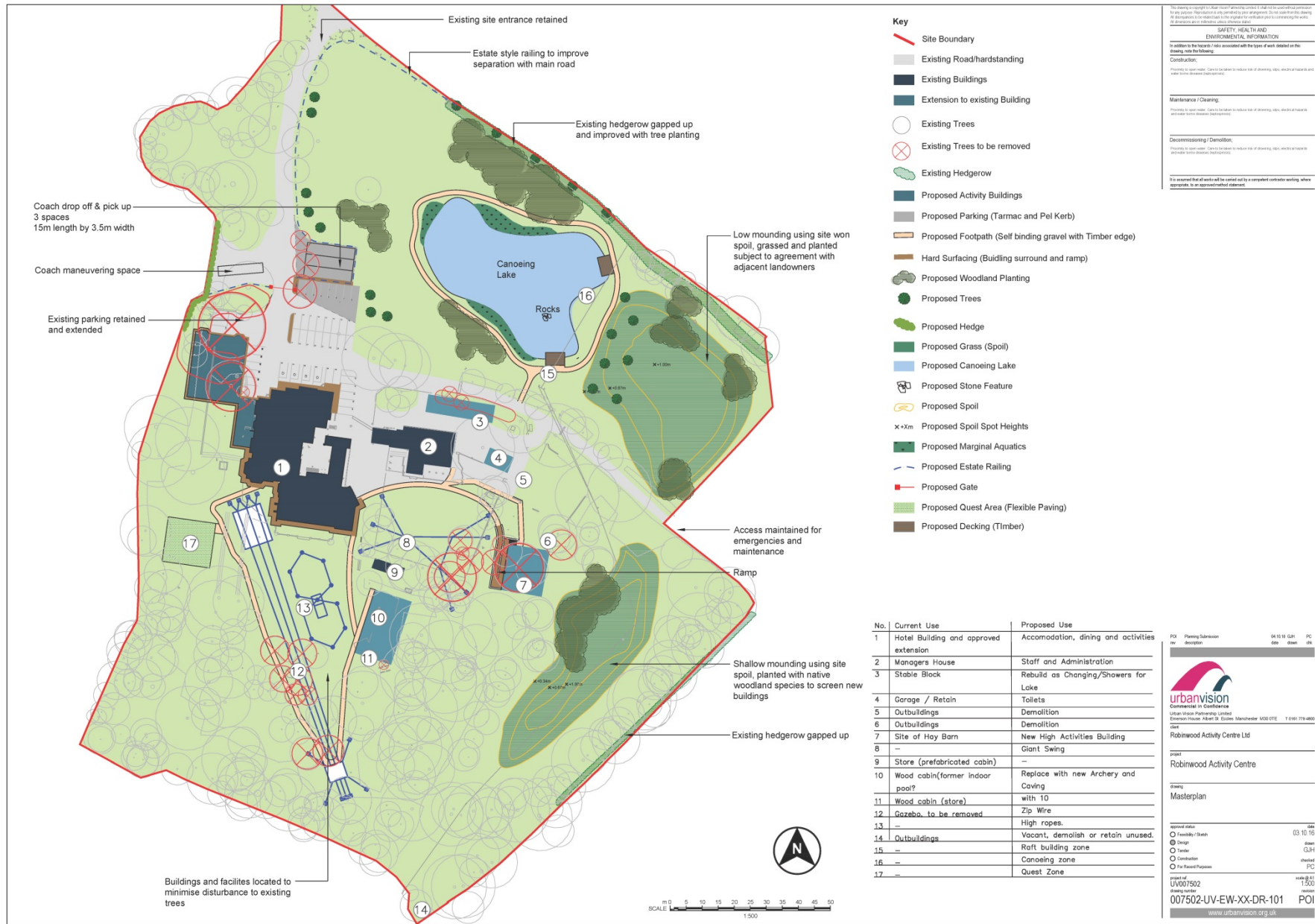


Figure 2 -Proposed development

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Gardner'.

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