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BEECH COURT, HURST

Ecological Impact Assessment

February 2025

Report ref: SWE-P24-0098-R2

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PROJECT: Beech Court, Hurst

CLIENT: Moore Commercial Investments Ltd

PREPARED BY: Sam Watson BSc (Hons) MCIEEM

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Construction of extension to existing building

REPORT SCOPE: Ecological Impact Assessment - non-EIA. This report is not part of an Environmental Impact Assessment further to The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

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Drawings

0098-2402-1 - habitat map

Photos



1.0 INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Introduction

- 1.1 Sam Watson Ecology was appointed by Moore Commercial Investments Ltd to carry out an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) of a proposal to construct an extension to an existing building at a site known as Beech Court, Hurst.
- 1.2 Beech Court is located just to the southeast of Hurst, Berkshire (approximate central grid reference SU 80192 73173) and contains a building complex used as offices. Associated with this are areas used for parking, landscaping and infrastructure. The wider landscape contains residential properties along Workingham Road, as well as fields used for pastoral and arable farming.

Methods

Habitat survey

- 1.3 A Phase 1 habitat survey was carried out of the study area on 25th June 2024. The methodology for the survey was based on the Phase 1 approach devised by the former Natural Conservancy Council (now Natural England), and updated periodically by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee¹. This technique categorises and maps the broad habitat types present within the study area, with additional detail gathered in the form of representative lists of species compiled for each habitat (an 'extended' Phase 1 survey).
- 1.4 During the survey attention was also given to identifying any habitats of 'Principal Importance' (HPI) further to Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, (i.e. 'Priority Habitat' types). These were identified based on the descriptions set out by the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group².
- 1.5 Throughout the habitat survey, the potential for the study area to support protected and/or notable species, such as reptiles, was assessed. The study area was also searched for evidence of badgers *Meles meles*, including setts, latrines, 'push-throughs' and foraging evidence.

Bats – building survey

- 1.6 Concurrently with the habitat survey, the existing building, where it is to adjoin the proposed extension, was also surveyed for evidence of bats. The methodology used for this was based on that outlined in the 4th edition of the Bat Conservation Trust's (BCT) Good Practice

¹ JNCC, (2010), *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit*

² BRIG (ed. Ant Maddock) (2008). "UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions"



Guidance³. Internally it involved checking accessible areas such as roof voids, for evidence of bats including droppings, feeding remains, staining, and any bats themselves. Following this, features on the exterior of the building that bats could potentially exploit for roosting were also identified, and where accessible, searched for evidence of bats. Such features can include: gaps behind fascia/barge boards and soffits; loose, missing or hanging coverings such as roof tiles and lead flashing; cracks in brickwork or panelling; and where weatherboarding has warped allowing potential access behind.

- 1.7 An assessment of the overall suitability of the building to support roosting was then carried out based on the presence, number and suitability of interior and exterior features that bats might use for roosting.
- 1.8 The bat survey was carried out by Samuel Watson who is registered on Natural England's Bat Survey Class Licence WML-CL18 registration ref: 2015-1152-CLS-CLS.

³ Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.



2.0 RESULTS

Habitat survey

2.1 The following habitats were recorded within the study area.

- Hardstanding
- Ornamental
- Building

Each habitat is mapped on Drawing 0098-2402-1, with the characteristic species described below.

Hardstanding

2.2 By far the most abundant habitat within the study area is hardstanding, which forms the roads, paths and parking areas. This has an artificial surface and is largely devoid of vegetation, other than small, isolated pockets of grass dominated vegetation, and sporadic colonisation by species such as daisy *Bellis perennis*, annual meadow-grass *Poa annua*, procumbent pearlwort *Sagina procumbens* and greater plantain *Plantago major*.

Introduced shrub

2.3 The only vegetated habitat with the study area is the ornamental vegetation that forms the formal landscaping around the existing building. This contains non-native and/or cultivated varieties of species such as euonymus, variegated privet, spotted laurel *Aucuba japonica*, Wilson's honeysuckle *Lonicera ligustrina* var. *yunnanensis* and Mexican orange blossom *Choisya ternata*.

Buildings/structures

2.4 Part of the main Beech Court building complex is located within the study area, which is described further below.

Bats – building survey

2.5 The existing building is single storey and of red brick construction, with a modern, clay tiled roof. Internally, the first floor is located above eave height, resulting in a very shallow, inaccessible void along the ridge. There are also voids where the internal walls box in the eaves. These were accessible and were noted to be well sealed and lacked any visible points of potential bat access.



- 2.6 Externally, the building was found to be in good repair, lacking cracks or gaps in the brick work. The roof and ridge tiles, gables and eaves also lacked features that could provide opportunities for bats to roost being well sealed and intact.
- 2.7 Overall, the existing building was assessed to have negligible potential to support roosting bats, and no evidence of bats was found and no roosts were identified.

Other fauna

- 2.8 No evidence of other protected or notable fauna was found during the survey, and the study area was assessed to have negligible potential to support such fauna.



3.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Impact Assessment

Methodology

- 3.1 Ecological Impact Assessment is the process of identifying, quantifying and evaluating potential effects of development-related or other proposed actions on habitats, species and ecosystems. The point of reference for this process when evaluating the study area has been the Chartered Institute for Ecological and Environmental Management's guidelines for EclA⁴, with expert judgment used as required during this process. The findings of the assessment are intended to assist the competent authority in understanding the ecological effects arising from the proposal when determining an application for consent.

Habitats

- 3.2 Without exception, the plant species and assemblages of plant species found within the study area are common and widespread throughout much of lowland Britain and are typical of a site of this type. The only vegetated habitat recorded are areas of introduced shrub which are characterised by non-native and/or cultivated species that have very limited ecological value. As such, even in the absence of mitigation and/or compensation, the loss of any of the habitats as a result of the proposed development would not be considered likely to result in an ecological impact of significance at any geographic level.

Fauna

- 3.3 No protected or notable fauna or evidence of such fauna, was found; in particular no evidence of bats was found. In addition, the study area was assessed to have negligible potential to support such species, and no significant impact on fauna is assessed as likely to occur due to the proposed development.

Recommendations

- 3.4 Although not required for legislative compliance, the NPPF⁵ at paragraph 180(d) states '*opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design*'. The following enhancements are therefore recommended to meet this policy requirement:
- Install 1 bird boxes on new the building or a retained tree within the development.
 - Install 1 bat boxes on new the building or a retained tree within the development.

⁴ CIEEM (2018) *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine* version 1.2. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (last revision September 2023). National Planning Policy Framework.



4.0 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN STATEMENT

4.1 In England, BNG is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). Developers must deliver a minimum BNG of 10%, in order that development results in more or better-quality natural habitat than there was before development.

4.2 As part of the regulatory framework that underpins BNG, the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 set out specific exemptions from BNG for developments that meet certain conditions. Pertinent to this site is Section 4 of the regulations which relates to *de minimis* exemptions. This section states –

“4.— (1) The biodiversity gain planning condition does not apply in relation to planning permission for development which meets the first and second conditions.

(2) The first condition is that the development does not impact an onsite priority habitat.

(3) The second condition is that the development impacts—

(a) less than 25 square metres of onsite habitat that has biodiversity value(1) greater than zero; and

(b) less than 5 metres in length of onsite linear habitat.

(4) For the purposes of this regulation—

(a) “priority habitat” means a habitat specified in a list published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006(2);

(b) a habitat is impacted where the habitat is lost or degraded such that there is a decrease in the biodiversity value of that habitat;

(c) “linear habitat” means the types of hedgerow habitat or watercourse habitat identified for the purposes of the biodiversity metric(3) (which are measured by length (expressed in kilometres) rather than area).”

4.3 Based on the results of the habitat survey, the proposed development is assessed to meet condition 1 of Section 4 as no priority habitat will be affected. Indeed, there are no priority habitats anywhere within the study area.

4.4 In addition, the proposal is assessed to also meet condition 2 in that it does not impact greater than 25 square meters of habitat with a biodiversity value of greater than zero or greater than 5m of linear habitat. Whilst the study area contains 58.4m² of introduced shrub,



some 44.4m² ofr this habitat will be retained, with approximately 14m² removed, as illustrated on Drawing 0098-2402-1. This impact is below the 25m² threshold above which BNG would be required.

- 4.5 On the basis of the factors outline above, the development is assessed to meet the conditions for exemption from BNG.



-  Study area
-  Developed land, sealed surface
-  Building/structure
-  Introduced shrub - retained
-  Introduced shrub - removed

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Client - Moore Commercial Investments Ltd			
Title - Habitat map			
Date - February 25	Drawing - 0098-2402-1	Rev -	



PHOTOS

