

MEMORANDUM

From:	Tina Cuss		
Service	WBC Ecology	App No:	241828
Address:	58 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, Wokingham, RG40 2NS.		
Proposal:	Full application for proposed erection of 4no detached dwelling houses following demolition of the existing dwelling and associated outbuildings.		
Type of Development:	Minor Dwellings (1-9)		
Site Visit Made:	No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
- ☐ No objection
- ☐ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
- ☒ **Request further information before determination as stated below**
- ☒ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

I have read the Preliminary Ecological Assessment (Plan Ecology, Ref 811, 13 March 2024 (reviewed 27 August 2024)), Preliminary Roost Assessment (Plan Ecology, Ref 811, 22 November 2023), Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Abrtech, 18 June 2024) Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (Arbtech, 17 June 2024) and the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (Mark Welby, Ref MW20.0919.AIA, 19 March 2024). I have also reviewed the Planning Statement (Davis Planning), application form, Non-licensed Avoidance Measures for Great Crested Newts and plans and elevations submitted in support of the application.

According to the application form works have not started on site. However, from the Preliminary Ecological Assessment habitat and species assessment and photos and target notes in Appendix B that the site has been degraded and trees and habitats cleared to facilitate development. The relevant date agreed by the LPA must therefore take this degradation and loss of biodiversity in addition to the impacts to notable and protected species populations into account and compensation secured in line with the NPPF, local plan policy and the requirement of a Biodiversity Net Gain condition.

Biodiversity Net Gain Metric

According to the application the applicant claims there has been *"no loss (or degradation) of any onsite habitat(s), resulting from activities carried out before the date the onsite pre-development biodiversity value was calculated. Either: - on or after 30 January 2020 which were not in accordance with a planning permission; or*

- on or after 25 August 2023". This contradicts my understanding of the photos and assessment in the Preliminary Ecological Assessment. As the tree which has been felled is not including in the tree schedule or assessed in detail by the Ecologist, it is not possible to conclude whether it was potentially a veteran tree and therefore irreplaceable habitat has also been lost. The Metric and calculation of baseline habitat value should be revised to take account that habitat has been lost/the site degraded since 30 January and potentially after 25 August 2023.

According to the Arboricultural Assessment just one tree and two groups which are of low quality and value are to be removed to facilitate the proposals. The Arboriculturist does not provide an assessment of the trees which have already been felled. I therefore must disagree with their conclusion that the application is of low Arboricultural impact and acceptable according to the NPPF which protects irreplaceable habitats including ancient and veteran trees and according to local plan policies, SPD and Design Guide.

The Survey Map in BNG Assessment Appendix 1 does not show the pond that is seen in the MW.20.0919.TPP. Whether this off-site pond still exists is not clearer and the loss of the on-site pond is not assessed. It is not certain if an on-site pond was infilled before 30 January 2020 and must therefore be included in the metric. However, according to PEA paragraph 5.2.16 *historically "there appears to have been a pond at the Site. TN 28 photograph show that this appear is currently bare ground"*. In addition, the Appendix 1 Survey Map is not consistent with the redline plan inset in the Site Plans. According to the metric the site is 0.54ha and there are no irreplaceable habitats. The trees in the south of the site in Appendix 1 Survey Map are not included Site Plans 2560 Dwg09C and the buildings on the east side of the site in the Block Plan as Existing (Paul Edwards Architecture, 2560 Dwg 11, July 2024) are not shown as buildings. The ditch on the southern boundary has been omitted from the on-site water baseline sheets in the metric and is not assessed in the BNG report. I do not agree that all of the habitat shown as vegetated garden (U1) in Appendix 1 Survey map should be considered urban and I request a habitat map and detailed assessment of the habitat condition on the relevant date to be agreed with the LPA should be provide in the revised BNG Assessment and reported in the PEA. Confirmation of the blueline boundary and land in the applicant and the owner's control should be provide as part of the revised assessments.

According to the BNG Assessment Discussion section *"A post-development assessment will also be required in order to show what percentage net gain or loss the development will achieve"*. However, the application BNG Assessment and Metric have been submitted without this assessment and the PEA does not provide a plan or reliable assessment of what habitat is proposed to be retained.

There are no or minimal user comments in the metric therefore it is difficult in the absence of a separate BNG assessment report and habitat maps (including in Plan Ecology's PEA) to assess if there are other errors in the metric which appears to have been prepared by Arbtech BNG Assessors as well as to verify the habitat condition and habitat area and calculate the area of rural and urban individual trees and biodiversity habitat unit and hedgerow which have been lost or degraded. There is no Post-development Habitat Plan in either the BNG Assessment or the Metric. I request a Baseline Habitat Plan which provides an accurate assessment of

biodiversity habitat undertaken in line with UK Habs guidance including hedges and rural or urban trees (including the treeline or hedge which was removed to the west of the outbuilding which is shown in the west half of the site seen in Appendix A of the PEA. I am not satisfied that the PEA, BNG Assessment, the Metric or the PRA therefore have assessed all of the site or the impacts of development and mitigation and compensation and all three should be revised and consistent with the development redline and any blueline land.



Irreplaceable Habitats

Neither the Plan Ecology and Arbtech's ecologists, nor the applicant, have reported the irreplaceable veteran tree (Ancient Tree Inventory Veteran Tree Id 218211) which existed on 30 January 2020 but was felled prior to November 2023. They fail to demonstrate whether this oak and a further notable Oak tree (WDVTA ref 658 Ancient Tree Inventory Id 218269) were felled before or after 23 August 2023. There are no Oaks of similar girth shown in the Retained Trees/Groups in the Tree Protection Plan Dwg MW.20.0919.TPP, so I must assume the irreplaceable veteran and notable tree have been lost and the metric, BNG Assessment, PEA and application form need to be revised to take this into account. Compensation for veteran trees must be agreed separately with the LPA as metric trading rules don't cover irreplaceable habitat.



Tree Record 657

COMMON NAME	Oak	SCIENTIFIC NAME	<i>Quercus sp.</i>
GRID REFERENCE	SU 81077 67996	RECORDER CODE	WT08
GIRTH [DBH]	3.9m [1.24m]	HEIGHT OF GIRTH	1.5m
TREE FORM	Maiden	ALIVE OR DEAD	Alive
SETTING	Roadside, Railway	STANDING OR FALLEN	Standing
LOCATION	In lane leading to Orchard House, near Tesco, backing onto railway line to Waterloo.		
ACCESS		EVIDENCE OF BATS	None recorded
LOCAL TREE NUMBER		LOCAL AREA CODE	45
PHOTOS	1265.jpg	RECORD CREATED	10-Jan-08
ANCIENT TREE INVENTORY NUMBER	218211	RECORD LAST MODIFIED	11-Feb-21
		ANCIENT TREE INVENTORY CLASSIFICATION	Veteran



Tree Record 658

COMMON NAME	Oak	SCIENTIFIC NAME	<i>Quercus sp.</i>
GRID REFERENCE	SU 81053 67978	RECORDER CODE	WT08
GIRTH [DBH]	3.65m [1.16m]	HEIGHT OF GIRTH	1.5m
TREE FORM	Maiden	ALIVE OR DEAD	Alive
SETTING	Garden (Domestic)	STANDING OR FALLEN	Standing
LOCATION	Far end of Eyre Court garden, boundary with Orchard House.		
ACCESS		EVIDENCE OF BATS	None recorded
LOCAL TREE NUMBER		LOCAL AREA CODE	45
PHOTOS	1266.jpg	RECORD CREATED	10-Jan-08
ANCIENT TREE INVENTORY NUMBER	218269	RECORD LAST MODIFIED	11-Feb-21
		ANCIENT TREE INVENTORY CLASSIFICATION	Notable

Habitat assessment and mitigation

BS42020 Code of practice for planning and development paragraph 6.4.8 states that where relevant, any survey report should also include reference to any evidence of material events occurring on site, either before or after ecological surveys have been carried out. *“Such events should be described and the cause explained where known along with the implications, if any, for the main findings of the ecological report”*. The PEA fails to assess the implications of the removal of trees, shrubs and destruction of grassland and the infilling of the pond. As stated above the loss irreplaceable habitat of the veteran and notable trees recorded by the Ancient Tree Forum and Wokingham District Council Veteran Tree Association should be evaluated in full in both the PEA and BNG Assessments.

There is no habitat plan in the PEA, so the location of Target Notes is unclear. The aerial photo in Appendix A only shows the middle part of the redline application site and does not include the sur. No detailed landscaping scheme or proposals for habitat enhancements and compensation are submitted in support of the application. I am not satisfied that the recommendation for ecological enhancements have been included in the development proposals or that the recommendations made in 5.3.6 are adequate to address the requirements of local plan policy and ensure maintenance and enhancement on site of features and habitats and that tree and habitat clearance is proposed to be compensated.

Protected Species assessment and Mitigation

I am concerned that the references in section 5 of the Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) are all out-of-date, and that the Ecologist has failed to demonstrate that bat roost surveys of the building follow best practice. The Ecologist has not surveyed trees for bat roost potential and the survey results to do assess the foraging and commuting habitat or the impact clearance which took place before the site survey and bat roost assessment took place. No reference is made to the ivy growing on the building and how the ecologist ruled out presence and impacts to resting places removal of climbers would cause.

I disagree with the assessment of potential impacts on bat foraging and commuting habitat' in the PRA report that the works proposed *“are small and localised and will not be detrimental to foraging or commuting bats”*. In the absence of consideration of the loss of the veteran and notable tree and the other scrub, shrubs and the infill of pond/s, the ecological reports do not demonstrate that local bat populations will be maintained or enhanced, and that development of 4 properties and improvements to site access will not have direct or indirect detrimental impacts. Bat surveys should only be considered to be valid for 12 months and as suggested in PRA section 3.1.10 WBC Ecology may ask for updated surveys prior to demolition if the application were to be approved.

While the report refers to infilling of the on-site pond, it is uncertain if this is the pond shown in the Tree Protection Plan (Dwg MW.20.0919.TPP). The off-site pond is also visible in the photograph of Ancient Tree Id 218269 (WDVTA ref 658). The Existing Site Plan doesn't include details of boundaries and landscape features and there is no key on the Site Plans (Paul Edwards Architects 2560 Dwg09C). It is therefore unclear whether or not there is a pond in the Zone of Influence and whether either Plan Ecology and/or Arbtech have surveyed the off-site pond and amphibian

surveys need to be undertaken to demonstrate that Great crested newts are unlikely to be present and whether mitigation and compensation measure are needed for protected common amphibians and for GCN. The log piles show in PEA appendix photographs provide suitable resting places and refugia for reptiles and amphibians and method statements to prevent injury and avoid offences under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation and Species Regulations 2019 (as amended).

The data search which was received from TVERC is not included in full in the PEA and it is not clear how old the data is. The Ecologist has not undertaken a search of local planning history and TVERC records for Stag beetle and Tawny owl on the site or in the Zone of Influence have not been considered and mitigation and enhancements recommended. In line with local plan policy, I therefore request detailed landscaping proposals and assessment by the Ecologist are provided to demonstrate how the site will maintain and provide enhancements for reptiles, mammals, birds, amphibians and Stag beetle and increase in disturbance and predation have been mitigated in addition to construction impacts and habitat loss has been compensated.

Summary

Awaiting revised Biodiversity Metric, BNG Assessment and complete Ecological Impact Assessment to take account of habitat condition and baseline value of the whole redline site on agreed relevant date. The PRA should be updated to take account of detrimental impacts to foraging and commuting habitat and assess trees which cannot be retained. To compensate for the loss of the irreplaceable veteran tree/s replacement must be agreed with the LPA as irreplaceable habitat can't be calculated using trading rules and compensation to address the need to be negotiated with the Council if the application approved

I would be willing to discuss the revision of the PEA and Metric and reporting of the degradation of the site with Plan Ecology and Arbtech Ecologists. I can provide a contact for the applicant to discuss off-site compensation and the Biodiversity Gain Plan.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Awaiting a revised application form, degradation statement, Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Statutory Metric, BNG Assessment, tree bat roost assessment and detailed landscaping proposals.

Date:	4/11/24	Signed:	T Cuss
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Appendix B Photographs/ Target Notes



TN 1: Timber clad shed.

TN 2: Muddy terrain



TN 3: Rear elevation of house.

TN 4: Interlocking roof tiles in good condition no lifting or gaps.



TN 15: Wooden outbuilding.

TN 16: Small wooden shed.



TN 23: Muddy terrain.



TN 24: Log pile.



TN 25: Small ditch.



TN 26: Muddy terrain.



TN 27: Pile of wood chips.



TN 28: Large felled tree.