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By Email Only (via rjfielden1@btinternet.com)

Robert Fielden
Lodgelands
Ardingly
West Sussex
RH17 6SD

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Lodgelands, Ardingly: Ecological Scoping Assessment

JWK Wildlife Surveys Ltd was commissioned to assess the onsite habitats within the proposed development area at Lodgelands, Ardingly, West Sussex (hereafter referred to as “the site”), in regard to protected and notable species and habitats.

This letter serves as a summary of the ecological assessment and serves to address comments from Mid-Sussex District Council (Place Services, January 2025).

Survey

A site wide survey was undertaken across the proposed working area and wider site on 19th December 2024. The site is dominated by two detached garage structures with associated hardstanding, the western extents of Lodgelands Road and derelict, unmanaged garden habitats with a single mature tree. The survey site is bound to the north, south and west, beyond College Road, by private residential land with a garage block to the east. Specific details of the onsite habitats are provided below in Table 1.

Table 1: Proposed Working Footprint

Picture	Details
	Looking northeast across the site showing Building 1 and hardstanding areas.

	A view south across central site areas showing limited onsite habitat.
	Looking northwest along the existing access track and showing the single onsite mature Ash tree.
	A view of Building 1 within central site areas showing lack of any roof feature.
	A view of onsite Building 2 within the north-eastern site extents.

Assessment

The proposed construction zone was dominated by buildings, hardstanding and predominantly bare, derelict ground with the only significant onsite habitat being restricted to a single mature Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) within the central southern extents. A narrow strip of tall forbs ran parallel to the main access point; however this area falls outside of the proposed working area.

Due to the limited extent and type of onsite habitats and discrete size of the site it is not considered any notable or protected species will utilise features within the proposed working footprint in significant numbers or on a regular basis, nor is the site considered likely to provide a key foraging or commuting resource for any species.

Reptile and Amphibians

The site lacks any foraging or sheltering opportunities with limited connections to offsite optimal habitats. The closest known pond lies over 450m east of the site. Overall the site provides negligible potential for these species groups.

Breeding Birds

Features associated with both onsite buildings may be utilised by low numbers of nesting birds, however, no other onsite features within the working footprint were considered to provide breeding sites for birds. The single tree was mature but lacked a dense canopy or any cavities that could be utilised by smaller nesting species and no evidence of historic nests were present of larger species. It is considered the working site provide low potential for nesting birds restricted to the onsite structure.

Bats

No onsite building or tree were noted to provide suitable features for use by roosting bats. Both onsite structures lacked a roof and therefore had fully exposed internal areas with no internal roosting features noted. The single Ash tree lacked any features suitable for roosting bats.

The limited nature of onsite habitats is considered to reduce the suitability for foraging bats, however low numbers of light tolerant species may commute through the site between more key foraging areas in the wider landscape.

Hazel Dormice

No onsite features were present for use by this species.

Badger

The areas of bare ground provide some foraging habitat for badgers, however the limited extent and extensive offsite areas in the wider landscape are considered to reduce the likelihood of onsite areas being used. Overall the site has low potential for use by foraging badgers.

Recommendations

Due to the limited extent of onsite habitats and low potential for use by any protected species groups no further survey is considered necessary, instead precautionary working methods in relation to breeding birds, foraging bats and badger are appropriate to ensure these species groups are safeguarded during works. These are detailed below.

Breeding Birds

Some potentially suitable bird nesting habitat was recorded within the onsite structures, however limited. All wild birds in the UK are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) which makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or take, damage or destroy the nest (whilst being built or in use) or its eggs.

Recommendations

Development activities that may impact upon features considered to provide potential breeding bird habitat must consider the potential for nesting birds. Therefore, such works should avoid the bird nesting season which typically runs from March to August inclusive. If works during the bird nesting season cannot be avoided, a precautionary nesting bird check will be required no more than 24hrs in advance of works. This would involve ecologists monitoring potential nesting habitat to determine whether they are used by nesting birds. If nesting birds are discovered, the nest must be left in situ until no longer in use with a suitable buffer zone setup to protect the nest

Foraging Bats

Current proposals do not involve the removal of any natural features that are considered to provide significant commuting or foraging routes for bats and limited external lighting, above the current levels, is proposed.

Should proposals change and significant external lighting levels increase the below details in regard to a sensitive lighting design should be followed.

Recommendations

Due to the assumed presence of bats within the wider landscape the proposals should aim to incorporate a sensitive lighting design to minimise light spill on surrounding linear features that could be used by foraging and commuting bats.

Different species of bat have been found to react differently to night-time lighting, however research has found that generally, all species of bats are sensitive to artificial lighting and that excessive lighting can delay bats from emerging, thus shortening the time available for foraging, as well as causing individuals to move away from suitable foraging grounds or roost sites to alternative dark areas (Jones, 2000). Bats can also become isolated from their foraging grounds if the linear features they use for commuting are suddenly illuminated, creating a light barrier (Fure, 2006).

New development should aim to minimise indirect impacts from lighting associated with the proposals. This can be achieved by following accepted best practice (Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management 2006, Institute of Lighting Engineers 2009, Bat Conservation Trust, 2014):

- low pressure sodium lights are a preferred option to high pressure sodium or mercury lamps, and lights should be directed low with minimal light spillage;
- ideally, some parts of the site (boundary habitats) should be kept dark, preferably at bat emergence (0-1 hour after sunset) and during peak bat activity periods (e.g. 1.5 hours after sunset and 1.5 hours before sunrise); and
- artificial lighting should not directly illuminate any potential bat commuting areas such as tree lines or vegetative linear habitats.

Badgers

The bare ground habitats are considered to provide some suitable foraging habitat for badgers with connections to offsite habitats.

Recommendations

The potential for badgers to pass through the site must be taken into account during works. Materials must be stored safely at night with lids securely fitted. If trenches are required as part of the works these must be closed over night or ramps installed to enable badgers, and other mammals, to escape. The ramps must be substantial enough for badgers to use therefore these should comprise planks of wood or similar.

Conclusion

It is considered that based on the discrete nature of the proposals and limited onsite habitat the above detailed precautionary approaches are appropriate to ensure any protected species are safe guarded throughout works.

I trust the above summary relating to ecology at the site is satisfactory, however if you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Jack Kellett
Principal Ecologist