

Ecology response for F/24/97943 ROPLEY, BOTLEY ROAD, WEST END, SOUTHAMPTON, SO30 3HA

Construction of 2No. three-bedroom detached dwellings to rear with ancillary parking, amenity space, and shared access from Botley Road

Gary Osmond

3/9/24

I have reviewed the documents submitted for this application.

Two ecology reports by Arbtech, the PEA and BERS have been submitted, but they have been labelled superseded, with no replacements provided. If these documents have been superseded, the updated documents must be submitted for review. There is no data validity date with either of these documents (as required by best practice), so it must be assumed that the data will only be valid for 12 months.

Protected species

This site is in a green impact risk zone for great crested newts. There are nearby records of common reptiles, and bats, with records of hedgehogs and nesting swifts in the vicinity.

The PEA/PRA by Arbtech (no date but survey dates in February 2024), recommended two bat emergence surveys, an eDNA test for great crested newts and a reptile survey. The bat surveys were reported in the BERS (July 2024), with no emergences and very low bat activity.

The Design and Access Statement by BPS Design Consultants Ltd. (July 2024) states that *The site is an area identified to have newts, a newt license and survey will be secured and undertaken once planning has been granted, this will need to be conditioned.*

This is not accurate. The green impact risk zone means that there could be great crested newts present, so a survey must be done to determine whether or not they are present on site. An ornamental pond on site was assessed with the rapid risk assessment tool as *amber: offence likely*. This means there is suitable habitat on site, so if the pond needs to be moved or altered an eDNA survey for great crested newts will be required. This can only be done between mid-April and June. Since great crested newts only spend part of their life cycle in ponds, the terrestrial habitat around the pond must also be identified and protected if great crested newts are present.

The presence of protected species is a material consideration and must be established before determination. The eDNA survey cannot be conditioned.

Suitable reptile habitat has been found on site with a report of slow worms on site previously. Reptile surveys will be required, these can be done during the active reptile season in the spring and the autumn. If reptiles are present on site, this must also be established before determination and specific mitigation for reptiles will be required.

Trees, scrub and the attached garage have potential to support nesting birds. The trees may also have potential bat roost features, this was not clarified in the report.

The precautionary working methods listed in these reports for bats, dormice, hedgehogs and nesting birds are appropriate and should be included in a CEMP. These statements must also be included:

In the unlikely event of any bats being found during demolition or construction, all work must stop immediately, and Natural England must be called. Additional information is available on the Bat Conservation Trust website at <https://www.bats.org.uk/advice/im-working-on-a-building-with-bats/ive-found-a-bat-during-works>

Vegetation affected by the proposal must be cleared outside of nesting bird season (which is usually March-August inclusive). If this is not possible, a suitably qualified ecologist must check for nesting birds no more than 24 hours before vegetation clearance. If evidence of an active bird's nest is found during construction, work must stop, and a 5 m buffer must be erected around the nest to protect it from disturbance until after the chicks have fledged and left the nest.

Biodiversity Net Gain

The site is required to provide 10% Biodiversity Net Gain as required by the Environment Act 2021.

The site area is listed as 0.15 ha on the application form, dated 31/7/24. The biodiversity net gain section of the application form states that the pre-development biodiversity value of on-site habitats is 0.45 and that this was calculated on 31/7/24 using a version of the metric published on 31/7/24. It cites the Design and Access Statement as the reference document for the Biodiversity metric calculation.

This is not accurate. The Design and Access Statement contains a copy of parts of the user guide for an earlier version of the Biodiversity Metric (v 3.1, published in April 2022) which is no longer valid and three tables with no information on how this information was compiled. It is not clear that the person completing this has an understanding of the process because they have not listed the specific habitats on site, how the biodiversity units were calculated or how distinctiveness (of these unspecified habitats) was proposed to be increased from low to high and condition was proposed to be increased from poor to good. There is a map of the habitats on site in the PEA Appendix 1 Survey/Habitat Map. This is the information I would expect to see in the Biodiversity Metric along with their areas and conditions. Hedgerow habitat must be considered separately from area habitat.

The Local List for Validation of Planning Applications (February 2024), items 6-8 (pages 12-16) explains the documents that must be submitted prior to validation. Item 8 specifically explains what is needed in a Biodiversity Net Gain Strategy.

The Statutory Metric is available using the following web link [Statutory biodiversity metric tools and guides - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guides/statutory-biodiversity-metric). Either the full Statutory Biodiversity Metric or the Small Sites Statutory Biodiversity Metric can be used for this site. The most recent version of the Statutory Metric is Version 1.0.3 updated on 23.07.2024. The most recent version of the Small Sites Metric is Version 1.2.2, release date 24.07.24.

The full Statutory Metric must be completed by a suitably qualified ecologist. The Small Sites Statutory Biodiversity Metric can be completed by a named “competent person” but in either case the LPA will have to be satisfied that this identified person has the qualifications to be considered competent to complete the metric. The metric must be submitted in full as a stand-alone excel document and not abstracted into the Design and Access Statement. The Biodiversity Gain Strategy must also be submitted. **The application should not have been validated without this information.** It cannot be provided once planning permission is granted as stated in the Design and Access Statement, it needs to be provided before determination to ensure that 10% Biodiversity Net Gain is possible to achieve on this site.

The tree survey and arb impact assessment by Hayden’s Arboricultural Consultants (July 2024) lists 18 trees and 1 group of trees to be felled, and 1 tree to be trimmed. Also 1 hedge to be felled, 1 to be part felled and one to be cut back. These represent a loss of biodiversity and will need to be accounted for.

The Design and Access Statement states *regarding biodiversity net gain there are many opportunities on the site to enhance, with new planting of native hedging, removal of no native plants and planting with native ivy on the acoustic wall.* This must be demonstrated clearly by use of the metric as required by the Environment Act and the local validation list.

Surface water drainage

The only information on surface water drainage was provided in the Design and Access Statement: *Storm drainage will be direct to ground via drainage grates suitably sized to suit the percolation tests of the current ground. These grates will be highway quality to allow them to be placed in the parking area and rear gardens where necessary. A fall (full?) drainage design will follow once grant of planning.*

Surface water drainage must show that it conforms to local plan policy DM6 which states that on sites of less than 0.5 ha non-naturalised SuDS e.g. permeable paving will be considered where justified. At least one form of filtration is required for all surface water drainage on site.

The Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment by Hayden’s Arboricultural Consultants (July 2024) states: *The soil type(s) commonly associated with this site are slowly permeable and seasonally wet, slightly acid but base-rich loams and clays.*

Percolation/infiltration test data must be provided to demonstrate that infiltration (as proposed) is a suitable strategy for this site. This must be provided before determination to ensure that the proposed drainage strategy can be achieved.

I may have additional questions once this information has been provided.

Lisa Malter

Ecologist

