Ecology response for H/25/99756 50 GRANGE ROAD, NETLEY ABBEY, SOUTHAMPTON, SO31 5FE

Proposed vehicular access from Grange Road for Existing Dwellings 48, 50 and 52 Grange Road together with gates and piers.

Charlie Vallis

5/8/25

Summary

I raise a holding objection to this proposal due to removal of hedgerow along Grange Road which would be a net loss of biodiversity and contrary to DM 11 and NPPF paragraphs 187d and 192 b. Suitable enhancement of retained habitat and the use of reasonable avoidance measures for protected species would enable this application to progress.

Ecology

This site is in an amber impact risk zone for great crested newts. The newt officer should also be consulted on this application. There are records of bats and hedgehogs nearby. There are no records of great crested newts in the immediate area, but there is habitat connectivity with an allotment at the rear of these properties which could provide habitat for wildlife including hedgehogs, common reptiles and amphibians.

The hedgerow along Grange Road is visible in the photos available on Google maps. It appears to contain a mixture of conifer (possibly Leylandii), garden and native hedgerow species. I can see plants that appear to be privet, holly, ivy, bramble, and rhododendron with a few other species that are not clear enough to identify from the photos. There are also ash, oak and birch trees in this area although it is not clear whether they would need to be removed.

Photos of the areas of hedgerow proposed to be removed are required to determine whether any trees would be affected by this proposal. If so, the tree officer should be consulted.

The hedgerow could provide habitat for nesting birds, hedgehogs, possibly reptiles, amphibians and other small animals and foraging habitat for bats. It is not clear from the Google map photos which parts of the hedgerow would need to be removed to enable this proposal, and what would be retained, but removal of the hedgerow with no gain of habitat elsewhere on site would represent a net loss of biodiversity. The hedgerow is approximately 43 m long and 2 m wide. One gap would be approximately 7 m wide, and the other gap would be approximately 12 m wide. This would result in only approximately 24 m of hedgerow remaining.

If this application were to be approved for numbers 48, 50 and 52, it is possible that the three adjacent houses (46, 44 and 42) along the shared drive would make the same request, resulting in an (in combination) increased hedgerow loss.

Enhancement of the remaining hedgerow could be a potential solution. This could include widening the remaining planting, removing non-native species and planting flowering and fruiting native species, and maintaining the hedgerow for the benefit of wildlife. At least three bird nest boxes and replacement hedgehog habitat in the back gardens of the three houses would also be required.

If the application is able to progress, a Biodiversity Enhancement and Management plan (BEMP) with the locations of all enhancements would be required before determination. Hedgerow management must be done on a 3 year cycle (trimming the front, top and back in successive years in the autumn) to ensure a continuous supply of flowers, fruit and seeds for wildlife including pollinators.

Reasonable avoidance measures to protect nesting birds, hedgehogs, reptiles and amphibians would also be required. This could be included in the BEMP or provided as a precautionary working method statement.

This would include:

A two-stage clearance method would be required for removal of parts of the hedgerow. The upper two thirds of the hedgerow which would be used by nesting birds must be removed outside of bird nesting season (birds usually nest between the beginning of March and the end of August), leaving the lower 30-50 cm in place to avoid disturbing hedgehogs, reptiles and amphibians which would be hibernating at this time. If it is not possible to remove the upper part outside of bird nesting season then it can only be removed after being checked for nesting birds by a suitably qualified ecologist up to 24 hours before the start of works. If any active nests are found, work must stop, and a 5 m buffer must be erected around the nest to protect it from disturbance until after the birds have fledged and left the nest.

The lower third (approximately 30-50 cm high) must only be removed when hedgehogs, reptiles and amphibians would be active and no longer hibernating, in warm weather, between April and September.

The lower hedgerow areas which could shelter small animals must be dismantled/cleared by hand to ensure that no animals become trapped. If this is not possible then ecological supervision will be required, with a fingertip search done by a suitably qualified ecologist before clearance.

If any protected species such as great crested newts or any reptiles or amphibians are found all work must stop and Natural England must be contacted for advice.

If hedgehogs are found on site, they must be allowed to move away to safety. If any hedgehogs appear to be in distress, a hedgehog rescue worker should be contacted. Information is available on the website of the British Hedgehog Preservation society at https://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/found-a-hedgehog/.

All site personnel must be given an induction by the site manager so that they understand the reasonable avoidance measures and the legal protection for these protected species.

In addition:

Any excavations must be covered at night or be fitted with a small animal escape ramp.

No fires can be lit on site.

Waste must be stored in a skip and not be allowed to accumulate in piles which could be used by wildlife.

Any chemicals and fuels must be stored carefully and away from potential wildlife habitat.

The following resources may be helpful:

The Wildlife Trusts https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/uk-wildlife-law

Bat Conservation Trust https://www.bats.org.uk/

CIEEM https://cieem.net/i-need/finding-a-consultant/

https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/nestboxes/nestboxes-for-small-birds/

https://www.swift-conservation.org/OurLeaflets.htm

https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/hedgehog-homes/

https://ptes.org/my-garden/

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