Mayer Brown Ltd
Zellig 204
The Custard Factory
Birmingham
B9 4AU

5th January 2016

2015-10(15)

Dear Sirs,

Re: Updated Ecological Appraisal for land off Thorley Drive, Cheadle, Staffordshire,

Ecolocation were instructed by Mayer Brown Ltd to undertake an Updated Ecological Appraisal of an area of land off Thorley Drive, Cheadle, which is understood will be subject to a future planning application for the erection of up to 60 residential dwellings. The site (grid ref. SK 0195 4285), was visited on the 17th December 2015, by suitably experienced ecologist, Casey Griffin.

The first Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was undertaken by Jackie Underhill on 17th April 2014 (Extended Phase 1 Survey at Land off Thorley Drive, Cheadle for Mayer Brown, April 2014) on a larger site boundary. This report did reveal habitats within the site to be comprised of grazed, semi-improved and species poor grassland with occasional stands of ruderal vegetation bordered by hedgerows and fence-lines. The updated site boundary is illustrated below:

Site Boundary

This letter provides an update from the previous ecological appraisal (17th April 2014) and summarises the December 2015 site visit regarding habitat types, likely presence of protected species and any potential impacts expected from the proposed development.

Site Description - December 2015

Perennial rye grass, cock's-foot, false oat-grass and Timothy grass were present in all the fields. The northern field contained abundant ribwort plantain and creeping buttercup, frequent dandelion and white clover and rarely occurring lesser celandine, common knapweed and bush vetch. Locally abundant soft rush and occasional reed canary-grass was noted around the edge of the pond.

Interspersed within the grassland were areas of tall ruderal vegetation comprised of frequent broad-leaved dock, creeping thistle, hogweed, common nettle and occasional rosebay willow-herb and cow parsley. Bramble was also rarely occurring within this vegetation. This grassland habitat was classified as species poor, semi-improved grassland as a result of its low floristic diversity. At the time of the December 2015 survey, the grassland was grazed by two horses and a donkey with poaching in areas of heavy use.

The boundaries of the site were composed of both hedgerows and fence-line.

Hawthorn and blackthorn were the main hedgerow components but holly and elder were also frequent. Dog rose and honeysuckle were occasionally present. A number of mature pedunculate oak trees were noted within the hedgerows. These mature trees and hedgerows were considered to offer suitable value to nesting birds and roosting bats as a result of the suitable features offered, as well as offering ecological value to other commuting and foraging species.

Mature oak tree located within hedgerow offering suitable bat roosting features

The pond located on site was ranked as “average” by a Habitat suitability Index (HSI) assessment; however, previous surveys by an unknown consultancy (whose report was not available at the time of writing) revealed that no great crested newts were present in the pond. No evidence of any other protected species was found on site during the preliminary survey.

Pond located within bounds of the site

Any proposed development on site was deemed to result in the permanent loss of an area of semi-improved low biodiversity grassland and tall ruderal vegetation. Based on the previous indicative site layout (date: 02/06/2014) it was unclear whether the pond would be directly impacted. Recommendation for further hedgerow surveys as well as bat and great crested newt surveys were made in the Jackie Underhill report in 2014.

Changes between April 2014 survey and December 2015 survey

Habitats on the site remained largely unchanged from the visit in 2014 and there was no change to the floral biodiversity value of the site, which remained poor. As a result of this low floristic diversity, there remained low potential within the site to support invertebrates.

The potential of the site to support protected species, including badgers, water vole, reptiles and hedgehogs remained low-medium with no evidence of these species found during either of the site visits.

An updated HSI assessment of the pond, located within the site, revealed its potential to remain as “average” as detailed within the 2014 survey. As such, the potential within the site for great crested newts remained the same and recommendations for an updated investigation of this pond for great crested newts is noted, in line with the 2014 report.

An updated inspection of the hedgerows and mature trees revealed suitable features for nesting birds and roosting bat, in line with the results of the 2014 survey. As such, potential for use of the site by these species remained medium-high and suitable further survey effort in respect of these species has been recommended. These recommendations remain the same as those detailed within the 2014 survey report. by Jackie Underhill.

Summary

In summary, the potential of the site to support protected species remained unchanged since the previous assessment in April 2014. The habitat composition had not changed and the site remained grazed by a small number of livestock. Suitable recommendations for further survey effort in line with those made in the 2014 report have been outlined below in addition to suitable timings of works and precautionary measures.

Recommendations

Avoidance, mitigation and legal obligation

The National Planning Policy Framework para 117 states that "To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should...promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations". In order to ensure no net loss of biodiversity in accordance with NPPF & Circular 06/2005 recommendations are made below:

Further survey work

- If the proposed development works foresee any direct impacts to existing hedgerows, further hedgerow surveys should be carried out in accordance with the hedgerow regulations methodology. These surveys will aim to identify those hedgerows that would qualify as important under the under the hedgerow regulations. Such surveys should be carried out between April and September inclusive.

- As potential for roosting, foraging and commuting bats has been identified within the hedgerows on site, a total of three bat transect surveys should be carried out to encompass these habitats if they will be impacted by removal or lighting. These surveys should be carried out between May to September and should be evenly spread across the spring, summer and autumn seasons. These surveys would aim to establish any areas of particular interest to bat species as well as allow for a general insight as to how bats are using the site prior to the proposed development work. The result of this survey effort will aim to inform appropriate mitigation and compensation measures.

- In view of the findings of the HSI assessment of the pond, and as the 2013 negative newt survey data is not available as well as being no longer valid, it is recommended that surveying in accordance with the "Herpetofauna Workers Manual, Chapter 1, Surveying, JNCC 2003" should be carried out between **mid March and mid June** to determine, initially, presence of great crested newts and, if present, to assess the population and design mitigation from ensuing results as recommended in the Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines (English Nature, 2001). **Full presence/absence surveying** using a minimum of 3 of 4 available survey techniques over 4 dusk/dawn sessions with a further 2 such sessions for those ponds in which great crested newts are identified, to establish population class is necessary. The presence of great crested newts would result in a requirement of a licence from Natural England to allow the works to commence post grant of planning consent with the proposed building being within the 500m range of newts during their terrestrial phase.

- An alternative to detailed great crested newt surveys may be to carry out an eDNA assessment of the pond with the aim of establishing whether great crested newts may be using this pond. Such assessments may only be conducted between mid April and the 30th June inclusive. If such an assessment should reveal a positive result for the presence of great crested newts further detailed surveys, as outlined in the above bullet point, would be required to estimate population size and inform a degradation licence application.

General recommendations

- **The hedgerow and trees should be retained, where practicable and protected during works in accordance with BS5837:2012** 'Trees in relation to construction' for the purposes of ensuring that potential bird nesting habitat and sheltering habitat for other notable species such as amphibians and reptiles as well as potentially valuable connective corridors through the landscape are maintained.

- Lighting during works and permanent lighting once the development has been completed, should **be cowled to direct light towards the ground and away from potential bat foraging, commuting and roosting areas such as trees and hedgerow.** Further mitigation may be required should surveys identify important flight lines for bats along hedgerows and may, for example, require that tall hedgerows are not significantly reduced in height.

- **Any mature trees to be subject to felling or lopping works should be surveyed for bats by a suitably experienced ecologist. This may involve further inspection by a certified tree climber under the instruction of a licensed ecologist or may involve bat activity surveys at dusk and dawn**

during the active bat season of May-August. The results of these surveys should form the basis for further recommendations and mitigation, where required.

- The pond on the south side of the site should be protected from pollution, silting and erosion resulting from development works. Should surveys indicate the presence of great crested newts in the pond, a Natural England European Protected Species mitigation licence would be needed before commencement of works on the site.

Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Casey Griffin

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