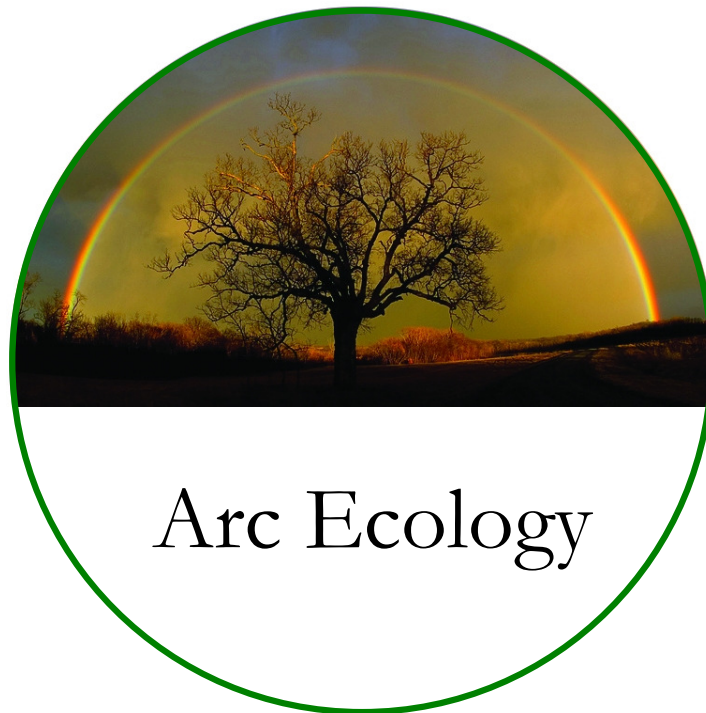




LAND OFF BOTTOM LANE, LEEK - UPDATE ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

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INTRODUCTION

Arc Ecology were commissioned to undertake an updated Ecological Appraisal of an area of land off Bottom Lane, Bottomhouse, Leek, Staffordshire to attempt to determine any change in the status of protected or notable flora and fauna within the site after a previous report became outdated (report reference ARC/LBL0521/RLA) and prior to a new planning application being submitted for its development.

Given the habitats present within the site, particular emphasis was given to the potential for the site to support badger (*Meles meles*), bats and nesting birds.

NOTE: Where descriptions and recommendations remain the same as the previous report the text has been unchanged. Any significant changes are prefaced with bold text. Site photographs and aerial image have been updated.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site lies off Bottom Lane at OSGR SK 04035 52693 and consists of an area of land of approximately 0.7ha in size. (see Plate 1).

Plate 1 - Aerial view of site with boundary in red.



The site is primarily rank grassland with scrub and ruderal flora species including bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*), rosebay willowherb (*Chamerion angustifolium*), hogweed (*Heracleum*

sphondilium), broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), cleavers (*Gallium aparine*) and small amounts of soft rush (*Juncus effusus*).

There are a number of young trees and shrubs within the site including hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), goat willow (*Salix caprea*), Leyland cypress ($\times$ *Cuprocyparis leylandii*), cherry (*Prunus* sp.), oak (*Quercus robur*) and ornamental conifer species. The majority of these are across the middle of the site and form part of a gappy hedgerow which extends outside the site boundary.

There are two derelict wooden storage sheds and metal storage containers in the eastern section of the site.

The site is bounded on the east and west with dry stone walls, a wood panel fence on the northern boundary and a post and wire fence on the southern boundary (a general overview of the site in its current state is shown in Photograph 1).

Habitats in the vicinity of the site consist of arable and pastoral fields with scattered built environment in all directions.

UPDATE: Since the previous survey, the floral assemblage within the site remains the same, but soft rush has become much more prevalent and is now dominant in areas, particularly the east of the site.

Photograph 1 - General overview of site showing increased soft rush



METHODOLOGY

The update appraisal of the site was undertaken on the 5th April 2024 by a suitably qualified ecologist.

Appraisal of the site for badgers was undertaken according to guidelines given by Harris *et al* (1989) and consisted of searches of the route and up to approximately 50m from the boundary (where access was permitted) for sett entrances, pathways, latrines and snuffle holes (feeding evidence).

The appraisal of habitats and features within the site for their suitability to support bats was undertaken following guidelines published by the Bat Conservation Trust (2016) and Mitchell-Jones (2004) and consisted of searches for suitable features on trees present such as cracks and rot holes in branches and stems, dense ivy covering or areas of raised bark and assessment of the general habitats present within the site and the wider area for their suitability for use by foraging or commuting bats.

Appraisal of habitats suitable for nesting birds followed guidance given by Bibby et al. (2000).

CONSTRAINTS

There were no constraints to the survey and all areas of the site were accessible.

SURVEY RESULTS

VEGETATION AND HABITATS

The site as a whole has low species diversity, lack of structural heterogeneity and minimal connectivity to areas of higher ecological value in the wider area.

As such, the proposed development of the site is assessed to have an ecological impact at site level only and would not be expected to have any detrimental effect on species or habitats in the wider area.

BADGERS

No evidence of the current or historic presence of badgers was found within or adjacent to the site during the survey.

Due to lack of evidence found, badgers are not currently considered to pose a constraint to the development of the site and no further survey for badgers is considered necessary.

Badgers are therefore discounted from the remainder of this report.

BATS

None of the trees within the site had any features suitable to support roosting or resting bats evidence and the derelict sheds have no suitability to support roosting or resting bats.

While the site has some potential to be used by bats for foraging or commuting, the lack of connectivity to areas of higher value for such activity reduces the potential for the site to have any particular importance for bat populations in the wider area and it is considered highly unlikely that the sites development would have a negative impact on any nearby bat populations.

Given these factors, bats are not considered to pose a constraint to the proposed works and no further survey for bats is recommended.

Bats are therefore discounted from the remainder of this report

NESTING BIRDS

No current evidence of nesting birds was found during the survey, but the trees and hedgerow have potential to support such species and could be utilised by nesting birds at any time in the current breeding season.

UPDATE: Since the previous survey, anecdotal evidence was received from a local landowner of curlew (*Numenius arquata*) and hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) nesting in the vicinity of the site as well as barn owl (*Tyto alba*) foraging. Records within 1km of the site were found for curlew and barn owl during a basic data search of the NBN Atlas website (www.nbnatlas.org) but no records were located for hen harrier, which prefers heather moorland for nesting so it is unclear how far from the site this species is present.

Due to the landowner comments, the site was scrutinised more closely for habitat suitable for ground nesting species and it was assessed that the new prevalence of soft rush would significantly reduce the amount of the site with suitability for such species.

Similarly, the site suitability for foraging barn owls has been reduced as the grassland habitat favoured by common vole (*Microtus arvalis*) which is their primary prey species is now less dominant within the site.

OTHER PROTECTED AND NOTABLE FLORA AND FAUNA SPECIES

There was no evidence of the presence of any other notable flora and fauna species noted during the survey and there are no habitats present within the site considered particularly suitable to support such species.

CONSTRAINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NESTING BIRDS

All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird or take, damage or destroy its nest whilst in use or being built, or take or destroy its eggs. In addition to this, for some rarer species (listed on Schedule 1 of the Act), it is an offence to disturb them while they are nest building or at or near a nest with eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

A number of bird species are also listed as Species of Principal Importance under the provisions of the NERC Act 2006. The National Planning Policy Network document 'ODPM Circular 06/2005' gives guidance on the treatment of Species of Principal Importance and states that local authorities should ensure that they are protected from the adverse effects of development, where appropriate, by using planning conditions or obligations.

There was no current evidence of nesting birds found within the site during the survey, but there were suitable features for nesting birds present that could be used by nesting birds at any time during the current breeding season.

Additionally there are some small areas of the site which could provide suitable habitat for ground nesting birds, and the potential presence of such species in the small pockets of grassland present should also be considered during works within the site

Due to this, if possible, any tree, shrub or grassland removal, or works likely to cause disturbance to such features should ideally avoid the nesting season for birds (February to September inclusive).

If this is not possible, then an appropriately experienced ecologist should conduct an investigation of the areas to be affected to determine whether they are in use by nesting birds immediately prior to work commencing. If nesting birds are found to be present at this time, all work likely to cause disturbance should cease until the young have fledged and the nest is no longer in use.

SUMMARY

- An update Ecological Appraisal was carried out on an area of land off Bottom Lane, Bottomhouses, Leek by Arc Ecology on the 5th April 2024.
- Habitats within the site were assessed to have low species diversity and the ecological effects of the proposed development would have an ecological impact at site level only.
- No evidence of the current or historic presence of badger was found within the site and its surrounds. Badgers are therefore not considered to pose a constraint to the proposed development of the site and no further survey for this species is required.
- There were no features within the trees and derelict sheds within the site for roosting or resting bats and the habitats present were not assessed to be likely to have any particular significance for commuting or foraging bats.
- Bats are not considered to pose a constraint to the proposed works and no further survey for bats is required.
- There was no evidence of current bird nesting found during the survey, but there are features present suitable for use by such species in the current breeding season.
- As such, if possible, any tree, shrub or grassland removal, or works likely to cause disturbance to such areas should ideally avoid the nesting season for birds.
- If this is not possible, then a suitably qualified ecologist should check the features prior to work commencing to see if they are in use by nesting birds.
- If nesting birds are found to be present at this time, all works likely to cause disturbance should cease until the young have fledged and the nest is no longer in use.
- There are not considered to be any ecological constraints to the development of the site with regard to any other protected or notable flora and fauna species.

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