

Dear Sir/Madam

SMD/2024/0371

Outline Permission with details of access (all other matters reserved) for demolition of existing dwelling and redevelopment of site to provide four detached dwellings

Dane Heights, Clay Lake, Endon, Staffordshire, ST9 9DD

0.2943 hectares

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been asked to review the above application as part of a service level agreement with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to provide ecology advice regarding planning and development management functions.

The application is an Outline (Minor) application for the demolition the existing dwelling known as Dane Heights and associated outbuilding and redevelopment of the site to provide four detached dwellings. Outline consent has been given for demolition of an existing garage on site and erection of a single new dwelling (SMD/2023/0580, approved 24/01/2024) and this current application seeks to reposition this new dwelling to allow room for two further dwellings.

We have viewed the following documents:

- 2023-2818-04 Outline Planning Proposal Location Plan;
- 2023-2818-05 Outline Planning Proposal Site Block Plan;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment (Peak Ecology dated July 2024);
- Statutory Biodiversity Metric - baseline calculations only (dated 01/07/24); and
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Plan V2.0 – baseline habitat (Peak Ecology dated 14/08/24).

SUMMARY – Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, having reviewed the information provided, recommends a **holding objection** until further information is obtained, as follows:

1. Clarification of the potential for the scheme to impact upon any Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) on or near to the site;
2. Completion of a Watercourse module/RCA for the stream within Westfield Wood Retained Biodiversity Action Site (BAS) or justification as to why this part of the Biodiversity Metric is not required for this scheme;
3. A full (draft) Biodiversity Metric should be submitted which should account for any European Protected Species (EPS) impacts/measures as identified through further required surveys (see below);
4. The dwelling (Building B1) and garage (Building B2) should be assessed for any bat hibernation potential following the guidance Collins (2023);
5. Bat emergence surveys should be undertaken on the dwelling (building B1) and garage (building B2 – within which bat droppings were present) following appropriate guidelines, as recommended in the Peak Ecology (2024) report;
6. Suitable measures to protect Westfield Wood BAS and any trees - to retain the integrity of the BAS site and to maintain a suitable commuting corridor for local bat populations. If trees are likely to be impacted, Ground Level Tree Assessments (GLTA) should be undertaken to identify any potential for roosting bats to be present;

7. Habitat of Moderate value to foraging/commuting bats should be further assessed for bat activity using appropriate survey methods, or a justification for not undertaking this approach should be provided;
8. Following the above assessments, suitable bat mitigation/compensation measures should be included as required in the design. Any licensing requirements should also be identified;
9. eDNA analysis of the two off-site ponds (within Westfield Wood BAS) should be undertaken following appropriate guidelines, to confirm presence/absence of great crested newt (GCN, *Triturus cristatus*) as recommended in the Peak Ecology (2024) report; and
10. Following the above GCN assessment suitable mitigation/compensation measures should be included as required in the design. Any licensing requirements should also be identified.

We also recommend that the following are secured via condition should approval be granted:

1. Suitable low impact lighting strategy to retain dark corridors for wildlife/biodiversity;
2. Reasonable avoidance/precautionary working measures for badger (*Meles meles*), hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*), commoner reptiles and nesting birds (Note – similar measures will need to be separately assessed for bats and GCN as part of the above further information request);
3. A plan presenting the locations and specification/numbers of any habitat features required for protected species, such as bird boxes, bat boxes, insect refugia, etc., as identified in Section 6.4 Ecological Enhancement of the PEA report (Peak Ecology 2024) and including features suitable for reptiles; and
4. A landscape plan presenting the habitats types and specifications as identified in Section 6.4 Ecological Enhancement of the PEA report (Peak Ecology 2024) and also suitable for achieving the required BNG.

DESIGNATED WILDLIFE SITES

Several designated wildlife sites are within the local area, the majority of which are assessed as unlikely to be impacted by the proposals. One site, Westfield Wood Retained BAS, is adjacent to the application site. The recommendation to protect this site using a suitable approach both during construction and in the longer term is welcomed and details should be secured by a suitably worded planning condition (but also relates to potential impacts on bats and trees – see below).

HABITATS

Habitats are described as grassland areas, introduced shrubs and non-native hedgerows alongside the buildings and hardstanding areas. Trees within Westfield Wood BAS have canopies and roots extending into the site and measures to protect these trees should be included in both construction and operational. A number of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO)¹ appear to be present in the local area and any potentially affected by the scheme should be reviewed and assessed.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

The BNG report provided presents the minimum information required under the Statutory BNG process. However, given the potential need to accommodate compensation measures for EPS within the scheme (which has a bearing on the BNG process) and the relatively high number of units

¹ <https://www.staffs Moorlands.gov.uk/article/6300/Interactive-local-plan-map>

identified in the baseline (0.62 area units and 0.15 linear units), it is recommended that a full draft BNG Metric is submitted at the application stage. This is to ensure appropriate measures to secure the required +10% net gain can be achieved as part of the scheme and that the presence of any EPS can be accounted for.

The stream that feed the ponds within Westfield Wood BAS is close to the boundary of the proposed development site. A RCA and BNG Watercourse assessment may be required if the top of the bank of the stream is within 10m of the application site boundary. A RCA and watercourse assessment should be completed for this stream or a justification provided as to why this is not a requirement for this site.

SENSITIVE LIGHTING STRATEGY

We note and welcome the recommendation in the PEA report (Peak Ecology 2024) for a sensitive low impact lighting strategy to minimise disturbance to wildlife and this should be secured via a suitable planning condition.

PROTECTED SPECIES

Bats

Two buildings are present on site. The existing dwelling house (Building 1) is identified as holding Moderate potential for roosting bats. The existing garage (Building 2) has a small number of bat droppings present within the building and was also classed as holding High potential for roosting bats.

The PEA report (Peak Ecology 2024) recommends further bat emergence surveys on both buildings as this is required. In addition, the hibernation potential for each building should be presented, in line with Collins (2023).

The report indicates there are no trees on site, however, trees are directly adjacent to the site, and there is a recommendation for these trees/woodland edge to be protected. If a suitable protective buffer cannot be maintained along this edge, trees should be subject to a GLTA and any further surveys/measures required should be identified.

The habitat on site is assessed as Moderate value for bats, in terms of foraging and commuting. Moderate value habitats typically require further assessment of bat activity to inform the scheme (see Table 8.3 of Collins 2023). This further assessment should be undertaken or a justification as to why this approach is not required for this scheme given.

Other Mammals

The habitats on site are also likely to provide suitable shelter for hedgehogs to be commuting across and foraging on the site (the latter noted in the PEA report). We would also recommend that reasonable avoidance measures/precautionary working methods are developed to account for the potential for hedgehog to be present on site during construction.

Furthermore, detailed design should consider how access to the site for these mammals is maintained post-development.

Both construction precautionary working methods for hedgehog and post-development measures to retain mammal access across the site can be secured by appropriately worded planning conditions.

Great Crested Newt

Two ponds within the adjacent Westfield Wood BAS, both within 8 to 12m of the site boundary, are reported as being of Good (Pond 1) and Average (Pond 2) suitability for GCN. Completion of the

Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool for these ponds identifies that an offence is likely should GCN be present in the ponds, if the scheme were to proceed. Therefore, an eDNA survey of both ponds is recommended in the PEA report (Peak Ecology 2024) and this survey should be undertaken to ensure suitable mitigation and compensation measures can be integrated into the scheme if required.

Reptiles

The PEA report assesses that there is some potential reptile habitat (other neutral grassland) and otherwise suboptimal habitat with limited refugia on site. While this evaluation appears suitable (given the information provided) we note that the presence of adjacent woodland and nearby ponds increases the risk of commoner reptile species such as slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*) and grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*) being present on site. The garden is also mature and linked to wider green areas which increases the potential for small populations of reptiles to be present. We would, therefore, recommend that reasonable avoidance measures for reptiles are included for the construction period. This can be secured by planning condition.

Breeding Birds

We note that the PEA (Peak Ecology 2024) identifies potential for breeding birds and agree that a reasonable avoidance method statement would be appropriate to avoid risk of disturbance or harm to these species. This can be secured by planning condition.

Ecological Enhancement

Section 6.4 of the PEA report provides a series of ecological enhancement proposed for the scheme. These are very much welcomed and should be integrated into the landscape plan alongside a plan showing habitat features for protected species including bird boxes, bat boxes, insect refugia etc.

We also recommend that refugia for reptiles is also included in the list of features for ecological enhancement.

Furthermore, the additional assessments required for bat and GCN may identify further measures that should be incorporated into the scheme's design (see earlier section).

A plan showing the locations and types of all these biodiversity features can be secured by planning condition.

Regards,

Dated 10th September 2024