Site walk over summary :

Habitat and protected species assessment at the site on Swallow House Lane, Hayfield

A walk over site assessment was conducted by Elizabeth Barratt on 19th July 2010.

Dr Elizabeth Barratt is an ecologist and bat specialist. She is a professional consultant with over 24 years experience in conservation and survey work, specializing in bat ecology. She has been a licensed bat worker and member of the Cheshire Bat Group since 1986, and is a Voluntary Bat Warden for Natural England, participating in the annual National Bat Monitoring Programme of the Bat Conservation Trust. Dr Barratt is a full member of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site is a pasture field, previously used to graze sheep but unused for 6+ months. It is sited on the outskirts of Hayfield in a rural setting with a woodland to the south; housing with mature gardens to the north and east; school and amenity grassland to the west. The site boundaries are marked by dry stone walls and rail/post fencing. The Ordnance Survey co-ordinates are SD.032872





The river Sett runs through the woodland the south of the site.

Site habitat assessment

The habitat value was assessed as poor. The field has been used as sheep pastureland, but the sheep have been absent for 6+ months so the flora has developed into that of rank improved grassland (JNCC Phase 1 habitat classifications) with low species biodiversity. Grasses (eg Yorkshire fog, cocks foot and timothy), herbs (eg sorrel), flowering plants (birds foot trefoil, ragwort, foxglove (garden escapee), and cranesbill were the dominant species within the sword. Along the field boundaries were areas of tall ruderal where the dominant species were thistle and nettle with willowherb following in succession.

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Although limited in number of species the sword supported a diverse insect flora which would provide an excellent food source for foraging bats. Retention of this food source should be considered when planning the landscaping design for the site and the inclusion of insect attracting plants should be of high priority (see list in Appendix 1)

Tree Assessment

Four trees are present within the site boundary. These were assessed for potential bat roost sites and signs of bat activity:

1. Silver Birch ~ no evidence of bat activity or presence. No suitable roosting sites identified in association with this tree
2. Mature Hawthorne ~ no evidence of bat activity or presence. No suitable roosting sites identified in association with this tree
3. Ash ~ potential roost site identified in a broken limb. This section showed signs of damp and probably retains water when it rains as it was exposed to the elements. There was no evidence of staining, fur rubbing or droppings in association with feature. It is recommended that this area be checked immediately prior to felling but is considered low potential.
4. Mature Oak ~ this tree was difficult to survey due to the presence of foliage. However no holes/cracks were evident on the main truck or substantial branches. In the case of this tree it is recommended that the tree be checked again immediately prior to felling and that it is felled onto the crown and left overnight, propped up on the crown.



There is potential for nesting birds in association with the oak, ash and hawthorne and therefore work on the trees should be carried out outside the nesting season.

When carryout a work on trees contractors should be aware that if bats or signs of bats are found during works, all work should cease and Natural England or a licensed bat consultant contacted immediately and their advice followed. Failure to do so may result in an offence under the legislation in relation to bats as described in the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). On no account should the bat(s) be handled by anyone other than a licensed bat worker.

PROTECTED SPECIES ASSESSMENT

The site was assessed for its potential to support protected species. The nearest water body is the river Sett and a drainage ditch that run to the south of the site in the woodland. No evidence of water vole or otter activity was found in the section of water accessible from the site. The drainage ditch was considered very low potential for great crested newts, and was nearly dry at the time of survey.

The trees on site were considered unsuitable for barn owl nesting sites

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There was no evidence of badger setts within the site boundary at the time of survey, however there is evidence of badger foraging activity on site and latrines at the south-western corner on a path entering the woodland to the south of the site.



Badger Latrine



Badger foraging sign

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The site has limited biological diversity within the flora and is considered to be of low conservation value as rank improved grassland.

The insect flora on the site provides a feeding source for foraging bats and this should be retained through the inclusion of insect attracting plants in the landscaping scheme

The trees in the centre of the site showed no evidence of bat presence or activity, however in the long term mature trees may provide bat roost sites therefore compensation for the loss of these potential roosts should be considered in the form of bat boxes which can be built into the walls of houses or attached to surrounding trees. The best time for work on trees is late autumn/winter avoiding active seasons for bats and nesting seasons for birds.

Badgers are using the site as a foraging area and are reported foraging in the gardens on the northern site boundary (anecdotal evidence). There was no evidence of a sett in the area of the woodland immediately adjacent to the site boundary on the southern side, however the sett may be sited further into the woodland and a biolgical record search may have data on this. When work is to commence, the working site should be fenced off to protect the badgers from injury on the construction site. If possible a corridor from the woodland to the northern gardens should be created, however there are alternative grassland foraging areas to the west of the woodland for the badgers to use.

The conclusions and recommendations in this report in respect to surveys for protected species are based upon the results from surveys in July 2010. These data will only be of use for 12 months following the survey, after which further survey to establish the current position and possible changes in status, will be necessary to ensure all activities are informed and guided by the most recent data on site status

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3rd August 2010

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