
**Heath Buildings
Oxshott**

Report for:
Heath Buildings Limited
c/o Wolsey House Designs Limited
4th Floor Tuition House
27-37 St George's Road
London
SW19 4EU

INTRODUCTION

AA Environmental Limited (AAe) has been instructed by Heath Buildings Limited to carry out a follow-up ecological survey of the above site. Although an initial ecological survey was carried out on the site by AAe in June 2021, it was considered best practice to carry out a follow-up survey to update the previous findings and to record any changes that may have occurred during the intervening period. This information will serve to assess the ecological impact of the proposals and identify any ecological constraints and/or mitigation measures that may be required. A series of photographs has been attached for reference.

The proposals are to re-develop the site and construct a block of flats with associated hard and soft landscaping requiring the demolition of the existing buildings.

METHODOLOGY

Baseline Data

A review of AAe's Letter Report (March 2022) was completed to provide baseline conditions for the site. In addition, as certain baseline data is now readily available on the internet, the Multi-agency website (www.magic.defra.gov.uk) was consulted to determine whether any part of the site or nearby habitats have been statutorily or otherwise designated and a review of Google Earth's satellite imagery (http://www.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/earth/index.html) was completed to determine past land uses of the site and surrounding land.

Walk-over Site Survey

An updated walk-over survey of the site was completed on Tuesday 24 October 2023. Particular attention was paid to record the presence of badgers, bats and herpetofauna (amphibians and reptiles) that may be using the site or present in adjacent habitats, in accordance with the following survey methodologies:

Badgers

Badgers (*Meles meles*) and their setts are protected by the *Protection of Badgers Act 1992*, under which it is an offence to harm badgers or their setts. A sett is defined as "any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a badger". Natural England has provided the following guidance on the interpretation of current use:

A sett is defined as such (and thus protected) as long as signs indicative of 'current use' are present. Thus, a sett remains protected by the Act until such times as the signs (i.e. 'field signs') have deteriorated or decayed to such an extent that they indicate that the sett is no longer in 'current use'.

A thorough survey of the whole site and adjacent habitats, where access was available, was carried out. Particular attention was paid to dense areas of vegetation to check for any evidence of badger activity, which is usually detected by any one or more of the following signs:

- presence of holes with evidence of badger, such as footprints, discarded hair, etc.;
- presence of dung pits and latrines;
- presence of well-used runs with subsidiary evidence of badger activity; and

- presence of other indications of badger activity, such as signs of foraging and footprints.

Bats

Currently there are 17 species of bat known to breed in the UK. All species and their roosts are protected under Regulation 41 of *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)*. As a signatory to the *Bonn Convention (Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe)* the UK is also required to protect their habitats. This legislation makes it illegal to kill, injure, capture or disturb bats, or to obstruct access to, damage or destroy bat roosts. Under the law, a roost is any structure or place used for shelter or protection.

A visual survey of the site was completed to record any evidence of bats or features that could provide potential roosting opportunities. The survey was carried out following the guidelines provided by the Bat Conservation Trust¹ by an experienced and licensed ecologist². A thorough internal and external re-examination of the existing buildings was carried out, where access was possible, with any potential access points inspected for evidence of bats. All internal roof voids/spaces, where present, were checked for any evidence of bats.

The surrounding habitat was also surveyed to identify any important features such as mature trees with suitable features for roosting bats and any established lines of vegetation that might provide important flightlines.

Evidence of bats is usually detected by any one or more of the following signs:

- the presence of bat droppings, which tend to accumulate under established roost sites or at roost entrances;
- the accumulation of large numbers of moth wings, which have been discarded by feeding bats;
- areas of staining by urine or from fur rubbing; and
- the presence of bats themselves or their corpses.

The visual survey was facilitated by the use of binoculars, ladders, powerful torches (1M candlepower) and a Ridgid Micro CA-350 Inspection Camera endoscope. A heterodyne bat detector (Pettersson D200) was also used to record any bat calls during the inspection.

Herpetofauna

Amphibians

All amphibian species have some level of protection under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)*. Great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)* and *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)*. The intentional or reckless killing, injury or taking, and intentional or reckless disturbance of great crested newts whilst occupying a 'place used for shelter or protection' is prohibited, as is the destruction of these places.

Reptiles

All reptile species are protected at some level under Schedule 5 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)* and *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)*. The more common species of reptiles, which include slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*), common or viviparous lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), adder (*Vipera berus*) and grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*) are protected by the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)* by part of Section 9(1) and all of Section 9(5). This means that they are protected against intentional or reckless killing and injuring (but not 'taking') and against sale and transporting for sale.

¹ Collins, J. (ed) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

² Lead surveyor was Harry Simpson MSc BSc (Hons) (2023-11139-CL18).

An assessment of the site was carried out to determine its suitability for herpetofauna by recording the habitats present. In addition, any natural/artificial refugia present on the site was lifted to check for any sheltering animals or evidence of animals, such as sloughs (shed skins).

Other Wildlife

In accordance with good practice, the site was checked for any evidence of other protected species or species of particular note.

RESULTS

Baseline Data

The results of the previous survey concluded that there are no habitats of international, national, county or local importance that would be directly affected by the proposals. The site was found to be of overall low ecological value, with the species recorded described as common or abundant and are found in similar places across much of Britain, with no evidence of protected species recorded.

According to the Multi-agency website, there are no ecological statutory designated sites located on or directly adjacent to the site. The nearest statutory designated site is Esher Commons Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), located approximately 0.6 km to the north-west of the site. According to the Multi-agency Website, there are no Habitats of Principal Importance (HPI) located on or directly adjacent to the site. The nearest HPI is an area of Deciduous Woodland, also noted as National Forest Inventory, located approximately 0.2 km to the north.

Google Earth Imagery shows that the site has remained largely unchanged since at least 2003 dominated by the existing buildings and associated hardstanding. The existing buildings were under construction in 1999.

Site Description (Photographs 1 - 4)

The site is located off the A244 (High Street) in Oxshott, centred at National Grid Reference: TQ 145605 and covers an area of less than 0.1 of a hectare. The site comprised four high street shops with residential accommodation above and associated hardstanding areas. It is bordered by associated hardstanding and the A244 to the east, residential properties to the north and west and shops and associated hardstanding to the south.

The buildings were of masonry and concrete construction, with flat, felted roofs. Both timber and plastic soffits/fascias were present. The high street shops had glass fronted windows/doors. There were no attic spaces/roof voids within the buildings but there were a few 'service units' housing boilers.

Site conditions remained the same as previously recorded, with no established vegetation present. Only a few 'weed' species recorded growing around the edge and in gaps in the hardstanding, including annual meadow-grass (*Poa annua*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* agg.), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), butterfly-bush (*Buddleja davidii*), green alkanet (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) saplings and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) recorded.

Badgers

No evidence of badger or their setts was recorded on or adjacent to the site.

Bats

No evidence of bats was recorded during a careful internal and external re-inspection of the buildings. The buildings were well-maintained and sealed, with no obvious access points recorded. In addition, the soffits/fascias were well-maintained and tightly sealed lacking any access points. The service units were accessed and found to be well-sealed, with some light cobwebbing covering the timbers.

There were no established trees on site that could provide roosting opportunities for bats. The site, due to its restricted size, lack of established vegetation and within a well-lit urban location, provides very limited foraging opportunities for bats.

Herpetofauna

There were no ponds on the site and therefore no breeding opportunities for amphibians. The site, being dominated by the buildings and hardstanding, does not provide suitable terrestrial habitat for any species of herpetofauna. In addition, despite a careful search of the site, no species of herpetofauna was found sheltering under any refugia lifted during either site visit.

Other Wildlife

Apart from a few common species of birds, either recorded on the site or flying overhead, no other species of any note were recorded.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposals are to re-develop the site and construct a block of flats with associated hard and soft landscaping requiring the demolition of the existing buildings.

There are no habitats of international, national, county or local importance that would be directly or indirectly affected by the proposals. The site conditions remain unchanged since the previous survey, with the species recorded described as common or abundant and are found in similar places across much of Britain, with no evidence of protected species recorded.

Although there are considered to be no ecological constraints to the proposals, a series of generic measures, as detailed below, could be implemented on the site to reduce any impact the development proposals may have on local wildlife. There is also an opportunity to implement some enhancement measures to increase the nature conservation value of the site in the long term, in accordance with Government guidance as set out in National Planning Policy Framework National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023³.

A thorough examination of the existing buildings was completed, with all potential access points and/or roosting opportunities fully inspected for evidence of bats on two occasions (recently and initially back in 2021). All service units were fully accessed and not complex allowing a thorough inspection and, therefore, there are considered to be no constraints to the survey findings. Although no evidence of bats was recorded and no further surveys are considered necessary, all site operatives should be made aware of current legislation protecting bats and their roosts. In the unlikely event of any bats being encountered on the site, then works should stop immediately and Natural England or AAe contacted so that appropriate advice can be provided.

It should be noted that all species of wild bird and their nests are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)*. Therefore, in order to avoid contravention of current legislation, site clearance works should be timed to avoid the main bird nesting season, which, in general, runs from March to August inclusive. If this is not possible, a check should be carried out prior to any clearance works to ensure there are no active nests present.

Where any new planting is proposed on site, this should aim to use native species, but where this is not practicable then species of known value for wildlife can be used. In particular, flowering plants will be of benefit to invertebrate species and shrubs and trees may provide nesting opportunities for birds once they become established.

³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2023). *National Planning Policy Framework*. London.

In order to protect any established vegetation adjacent to the site, suitable fencing may be required at certain locations to reduce the possibility of any damage that could be caused during the works. To minimise accidental damage, any overhanging branches should be pruned back to suitable live growth points. All works should be undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced specialist contractor and should conform to current industry best practice, i.e. BS 3998: 2010 'Tree Work - Recommendations'.

Any new boundary treatment should be designed to promote permeability of the site to minimise fragmentation and allow free movement of wildlife throughout the site, for example by strengthening/enhancing the existing boundary vegetation, planting up a series of new hedgerows and/or installing post and rail fences. These measures will strengthen habitat connectivity and provide additional foraging habitat, cover and nesting opportunities. If close boarded fences are required for security reasons these should be minimised and raised slightly off the ground (c. 150-200 mm) to allow animals to pass underneath.

The site could be further enhanced by providing roosting, nesting and sheltering opportunities for a range of species and the creation of new wildlife habitats, such as some of those recommended by the Chartered Institute of Ecology Environment and Management's published Biodiversity Net Gain Good Practice Guidance, and listed below:

- Nest boxes
- Bat boxes
- Pollinator nest sites
- Planting wildflowers

The effects of lighting on plants and animals are difficult to assess, but it is thought that lighting can adversely affect invertebrates, birds and bats. Although the site is located within a well-lit area (on Oxshott High Street), in accordance with good practice, any new lighting to be introduced should be designed to minimise light spillage and pollution and not directed onto any wildlife boxes installed.

Overall the findings of this updated ecological survey would indicate that there are no over-riding ecological constraints to the development proposals that would preclude planning permission being granted, subject to appropriately worded conditions. A range of standard controls are available and deliverable to ensure that there would be no adverse impact on local wildlife that are using the site with a series of controls to be implemented to avoid contravention of current legislation.

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Photograph Record Sheet



Photograph 1: Showing the front of the buildings.



Photograph 2: Showing the rear of the buildings.



Site Boundary (Indicative)



Photograph 3: Showing the flat, felted roof used by residents.



Photograph 4: Showing one of the service units' housing a boiler.

| Rev. | Details | Drawn Chkd. | Date |
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| PROJECT Heath Buildings Oxshott | | | |
| TITLE Photograph Record Sheet | | | |
|  | | AA Environmental Ltd Units 4-8 Cholswell Court Shippon Abingdon Oxon OX13 6HX T: 01235 536042 F: 01235 523849 info@aae-ltd.co.uk www.aae-ltd.co.uk | |
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