

MR & MRS DAVIES

LAND OFF WELLFIELD ROAD, BAGLAN

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL REPORT

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SUMMARY

Bay Ecology was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Davies to undertake an ecological appraisal of a parcel of land located immediately adjacent to Wellfield Road, located in Baglan. The site is the proposed location of a residential development.

The desk-based internet search confirmed that the site did not contain any statutory or non-statutory conservation designations. No records of protected species were associated with the site footprint. However, multiple records were identified within 2km radius.

The combination of desk and field surveys undertaken at the site identified a limited range of habitat types predominantly dominated by a steep amenity grassland lawn, with a boundary woodland and overgrown hedgerow with marginal scrub/bramble and standard trees. In terms of the ecological importance of the site the amenity grassland lawn was considered to be of low intrinsic ecological value and represented the most suitable area to support the development. The overgrown boundary hedgerow, broadleaf woodland corridor and marginal bramble/bracken were considered to be of ecological interest on a local context and were likely to be utilised by a variety of species such as birds, foraging & commuting mammals, and potentially small isolated population of reptiles. The broadleaf woodland corridor and hedgerow are to be retained as part of the proposed residential development and should be retained as dark wildlife corridors for commuting mammals and birds. The retention of boundary features would provide continued valuable green/wildlife corridors around the site boundaries.

The majority of site was considered unsuitable to support isolated populations of common reptile species. However, marginal habitats and vegetation cutting piles were considered to be potentially suitable and consideration should be given to the adoption of a sensitive directional vegetation clearance to retained habitats.

Given the high likelihood of bird species breeding on site any future site clearance works of vegetation should be undertaken outside the bird breeding season which typically extends from March – August inclusive.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Bay Ecology was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Davies to undertake an ecological appraisal of a parcel of land located immediately adjacent to Wellfield Road, located in Baglan (Grid Ref: SS 76040 90745) (Appendix I). The site is the proposed location of a residential development.
- 1.2 The site footprint is comprised of a limited range of habitats dominated by amenity grassland (lawn) with boundary woodland, an overgrown boundary hedgerow with associated bramble and standard trees. The site is approximately 0.1 ha in area and is bordered by a broadleaf woodland corridor to the west, with residential buildings & gardens located to the north, south and east.
- 1.3 This report provides a summary of the preliminary ecological appraisal undertaken in 4th June 2020 and includes recommendations on any ecological constraints/ opportunities associated with the proposed residential development.

2.1 METHODOLOGY

2.2 In order to establish the baseline ecological conditions on site and in the adjoining habitats, a combination of desk-based consultation and field survey were undertaken in June 2020.

Desk study

2.3 This element of the work primarily involved an internet search to identify any statutory or non-statutory conservation designations, as well as records of rare, protected or notable flora and fauna within the proposed site boundary (see plan in Appendix I) and surrounding 1 km area.

Extended Phase I Habitat Survey

2.4 Fieldwork was undertaken on the 4th June 2020 by a suitably qualified ecologist and followed standard Phase 1 Habitat Survey protocol (JNCC 1990) as amended by the Institute of Environmental Assessment (1995). All habitats within the proposed development site were classified. All habitats considered having potential to support rare, protected or otherwise notable species of flora and fauna were noted, as were any direct signs of these species (e.g. Badger setts and dung-pits). The survey also incorporated a subjective, ground-based assessment of the potential of mature trees or structures on site to support roosting bats.

2.5 During the field survey, any trees immediately adjacent to the site were assessed for their potential to support roosting bats and were categorised in relation to the bat roosting features (BCT, 2016). The categories are as follows:

- Known or confirmed roost
- High – A tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.
- Moderate – A tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.
- Low – A tree of sufficient size and age to contain Potential Roosting Features (PRFs) but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.
- Negligible - Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.

- 2.6 Additionally any species listed as a pernicious weed under Schedule 9, Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were also noted during the field survey. Examples of such species include Japanese Knotweed *Fallopia japonica* and Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*.

3.0 RESULTS

Desk study

- 3.1 The internet data search confirmed that the site did not contain any statutory or non-statutory conservation designations.
- 3.2 No records of protected species were associated with the site footprint. However, a number of notable and protected species records were identified within 2km of the site including mobile species such as records Otter *Lutra lutra* and Badger *Meles meles*, of which the habitats onsite were considered of some limited potential value to commuting/foraging Badgers.
- 3.3 Within a 5km radius, records of Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* were identified and considered to be of relevance to the boundary hedgerow and broadleaf woodland corridor. No records of common reptile species were recorded within a 2km radius. However, records of Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica*, Adder *Vipera berus* and Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* were identified within a 5km search radius of site in habitat, although the habitats onsite were only considered to be of limited suitability to common reptile species.

Field Survey

Overview

- 3.4 The results of the field survey are summarised in the following sections. The site was comprised of a limited range of habitats dominated by a steep amenity grassland lawn, with a boundary woodland and overgrown hedgerow with marginal scrub/bramble and standard trees. See Appendix II for Phase 1 habitat map.

Amenity Grassland

- 3.5 The amenity grassland lawn that comprised the majority of the site footprint, steeply descended from north east to south west towards an overgrown hedgerow (Cover Photo & Photo 1). The grassland was generally of limited botanical interest and was comprised of such species as Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Perennial Rye Grass *Lolium perenne*, Annual Meadow Grass *Poa annua*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and Hawkbit *Leontodon sp.*. However, the marginal grassland located closer to the southern hedgerow and eastern boundary scrub contained some more botanical diversity including Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Bird's foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*.

Broadleaf Woodland

- 3.6 A corridor of broadleaf woodland was located along the western boundary of site (Photo 2) and included such species as Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Hazel *Corylus avellane*, Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra* and Sycamore *Platanus occidentalis*. The woodland had an associated marginal ground flora that included the hedgerow had an ephemeral ditch on its northern side and has associated ground flora which included Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, Male Fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and Ivy *Hedera helix*.

Species Poor Overgrown Hedgerows with Trees

- 3.7 An overgrown species poor hedgerow with standard trees was located along the southern boundary (Photo 3) and was comprised of Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Sycamore, Hazel and Leyland Cypress *Cupressus × leylandii*. It was evident individual conifer trees, previously associated with the hedgerow, had been felled and ground flora associated with the hedgerow had colonised the surrounding stumps (Photo 4). The ground flora included such species as Hart's Tongue Fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* and Red Campion *Silene dioica*.

Photo 1: Steep sloping heavily managed amenity grassland (view looking east)



Photo 2: Western Broadleaf Woodland (view looking west)



Photo 3: Overgrown southern boundary hedgerow (view looking south).



Photo 4: Felled tree with ground flora located adjacent to southern hedgerow.



Standard Trees

- 3.8 A number of standard trees were located onsite including a mature Sycamore on the eastern boundary (Photo 5) and small immature trees on the northern plateau which included conifer sp. and Rowan *Sorbus subg. Sorbus* (Photo 6).

Bramble & Bracken

A Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Bramble margin was located along the eastern boundary of site with some clearance works of the habitats evident (Photo 7).

Photo 5: Standard mature Sycamore on eastern boundary (view looking east)



Photo 6: Standard trees located on northern plateau (view looking north)



Photo 7: Bracken and Bramble margin (view looking south)



Fauna

3.15 In the course of the survey, a search for field signs of protected or notable species was undertaken and the potential of the habitats to support these species considered. In the context of this report notable species were those considered to meet any of the following criteria:

- Species protected by British or International law;
- Environment (Wales) Act Section 7 Priority Species or local BAP species;
- Nationally rare or nationally scarce species;
- Species of Conservation Concern (e.g. JNCC Red List, RSPB/BTO Red or Amber Lists)

Birds

3.16 During the survey a number of species were noted onsite and in adjacent habitat including Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* and Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*. None of the bird species would be considered to be particularly rare or endangered. However, Bullfinch is listed as Red on the lists of species of Conservation Concern in Wales (Johnstone & Bladwell. 2016).

Badgers

3.17 No evidence of badger activity was noted during the survey. However, the use of the site footprint for potential foraging habitat could not be precluded.

Bats

3.18 The standard trees and trees within the overgrown hedgerow and woodland edge were considered to be of negligible/low bat roosting potential due to the lack of potential bat roosting features. However, the broadleaf woodland corridor and hedgerow were considered to be suitable foraging and commuting resources for the local bat species.

Dormouse

3.19 The hedgerows and broadleaf woodland corridor that border site contained woody species such as Hazel, Bramble and Hawthorn that were considered to offer a potentially suitable mosaic of foraging and nesting habitat for Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*. The hedgerow and woodland onsite were generally well connected to the surrounding agricultural habitat to the north. A detailed Hazel nut search was not conducted during the field survey. However, the presence of Dormice in the boundary features was considered possible due to records of Dormice identified within 5km radius of site.

Reptiles

3.20 The majority of the site habitat was considered unsuitable for common reptile species due to the heavily managed grassland lawn. However, the marginal habitat (bramble & bracken) and a pile of cuttings

located onsite (Photo 8) were considered potentially suitable to offer limited habitat for a small isolated population of common reptile species such as Slow-worm.

Photo 8: Cuttings pile (view looking east)



4.0 LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND PLANS

- 4.1 The following international, national and local legislation and planning policies relating to nature conservation and biodiversity are considered of relevance to the proposed residential development.

National Planning Policy

- 4.2 In terms of planning policy, a number of over-arching policies are of relevance not least of which are those described within Planning Policy Wales (PPW), which sets out land use planning policies of the Welsh Assembly Government with Chapter 5 dealing with Conserving and Improving Natural Heritage and Coast. The advice contained within PPW is supplemented for some subjects by Technical Advice Notes (TAN's), with TAN 5 addressing Nature Conservation.

Technical Advice Note 5 (2016)

- 4.3 TAN 5 identifies a number of key principles, which the Town and Country Planning system in Wales should incorporate those relevant are detailed below:
- work to achieve nature conservation objectives through a partnership between local planning authorities, CCW, the Environment Agency, voluntary organisations, developers, landowners and other key stakeholders;
 - integrate nature conservation into all planning decisions looking for development to deliver social, economic and environmental objectives together over time
 - ensure that the UK's international obligations for site, species and habitat protection are fully met in all planning decisions;
 - Look for development to provide a net benefit for biodiversity conservation with no significant loss of habitats or populations of species, locally or nationally.
 - Promoting approaches to development which create new opportunities to enhance biodiversity, prevent biodiversity losses, or compensate for losses where damage is unavoidable. Minimising or reversing the fragmentation of habitats and improving habitat connectivity through the promotion of wildlife corridors;
 - Local planning authorities should seek to protect trees, groups of trees and areas of woodland where they have natural heritage value or contribute to the character or amenity of a particular locality;
 - The presence of a species protected under European or UK legislation is a material consideration when a local planning authority is considering a development proposal which, if carried out, would be likely to result in disturbance or harm to the species or its habitat.

Environment (Wales) Act, 2016

- 4.4 Part 1 of the Environment Act Wales' came into force in May 2016 and sets out the approach to planning and managing natural resources at a national and local level with a general purpose linked to statutory 'principles of sustainable management of natural resources' defined within the Act.

Section 6 - Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty

- 4.5 Section 6 of the Act places a duty on public authorities to 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity' so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In so doing, public authorities must also seek to 'promote the resilience of ecosystems'.

Section 7 - Biodiversity lists and duty to take steps to maintain and enhance biodiversity

- 4.6 This section lists living organisms and types of habitat in Wales which are considered of key significance to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in relation to Wales. The Welsh Ministers are required to take all reasonable steps to maintain and enhance the living organisms and types of habitat included in any list published under this section, and encourage others to take such steps.

Local Planning Policy

- 4.7 The LDP for Neath Port Talbot was adopted in 2016 superseding the Unitary Development Plan, and provides the basis for decisions on land use planning in the County Borough up to 2026. Policies of relevance to the development include:

Policy SP 15

Biodiversity and Geodiversity. Important habitats, species and sites of geological interest will be protected, conserved, enhanced and managed through the following measures:

1. *The identification of the following Internationally and Nationally designated sites within the County Borough to enable their protection:*
 - (a) *Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Ramsar Sites;*
 - (b) *Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);*
 - (c) *National Nature Reserves (NNRs).*
2. *The identification and protection of sites of regional and local importance;*
3. *The protection of important natural heritage features.*

Policy EN 6

Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites Development proposals that would affect Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs), sites meeting SINC criteria or sites supporting Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) or S42 habitats or species will only be permitted where:

1. *They conserve and where possible enhance the natural heritage importance of the site; or*
2. *The development could not reasonably be located elsewhere, and the benefits of the development outweigh the natural heritage importance of the site. Mitigation and/or compensation measures will need to be agreed where adverse effects are unavoidable.*

Policy EN 7

Important Natural Features Development proposals that would adversely affect ecologically or visually important natural features such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows / field boundaries, watercourses or ponds will only be permitted where:

1. *Full account has been taken of the relevant features in the design of the development, with measures put in place to ensure that they are retained and protected wherever possible; or*
2. *The biodiversity value and role of the relevant feature has been taken into account and where removal is unavoidable, mitigation measures are agreed.*

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The combination of desk and field surveys undertaken at the site identified a limited range of habitat types predominantly dominated by a steep amenity grassland lawn, with a boundary woodland and overgrown hedgerow with marginal scrub/bramble and standard trees. In terms of the ecological importance of the site the amenity grassland lawn was considered to be of low intrinsic ecological value and represented the most suitable area to support the development. The overgrown boundary hedgerow, broadleaf woodland corridor and marginal bramble/bracken were considered to be of ecological interest on a local context and were likely to be utilised by a variety of species such as birds, foraging & commuting mammals, and potentially small isolated population of reptiles. The broadleaf woodland corridor and hedgerow are to be retained as part of the proposed residential development and should be retained as dark wildlife corridors for commuting mammals and birds. The retention of boundary features would provide continued valuable green/wildlife corridors around the site boundaries.

Bats

- 5.2 The trees on and adjacent to site were considered to be of negligible/low bat roosting potential (BCT, 2016) due to their lack of bat roosting features. However, the boundary woodland and hedgerow were considered suitable to be utilised as foraging and commuting features around site for the local bat species. It is recommended that the proposed residential structure's lighting should seek to maintain the retained woodland and hedgerow in darkness as far as is practicably possible.

Reptiles

- 5.3 The majority of the site habitats were considered to be unsuitable to support common reptile species. However, the marginal scrub, bracken and pile of cuttings was considered potentially suitable to support small isolated populations of common reptile species such as Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*. It is recommended that any future development considered the adoption of sensitive directional vegetation clearance by hand to retained habitats. All common reptiles are protected against intentional killing or injury under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Badger

- 5.4 No evidence of Badger were identified onsite. However, the utilisation of the habitats by foraging Badgers could not be precluded.

Birds

- 5.5 The woodland, hedgerow and bramble scrub were considered suitable habitat for breeding birds. The woodland and hedgerow are to be retained. However, the bramble and standard trees are to be lost as part of the development and as such it is recommended that any vegetation clearance be undertaken

outside the bird-breeding season (i.e. clearance between September and March inclusive) or preceded by a visual check for nesting birds. All wild birds are protected against killing and injury under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and their nests against damage or destruction whilst in use or being built.

Dormice

- 5.6 The presence of Dormice, utilising the boundary habitats onsite was considered possible due to the woody structure and proximity of Dormice records. However, the boundary features are to be retained as part of the development. The dormouse is strictly protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). The deliberate capturing, disturbing, injuring and killing of dormice is prohibited, as is damaging or destroying their breeding sites and resting places (simplified legislation text).

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APPENDIX I SITE LOCATION PLAN

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