

HAWKESWOOD ECOLOGY

Specialists in Ecological Survey and Assessment

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(Proprietors: Niki and Eric Hawkeswood)



Mr R Bowen
Asbri Planning Ltd
Suite D
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30/07/2024

Our Ref: HE/02/2024

Dear Richard,

Stationery House, Acacia Avenue, Port Talbot

Hawkeswood Ecology was instructed to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) at the above property. Stationery House is a large disused factory unit consisting of a large working area and offices. It is proposed to repurpose the building to house the Port Talbot Renal Dialysis Unit. The proposed development will include substantial re-profiling of the existing structure including demolition and rebuild.

The Site lies in a well-developed area of Port Talbot and is sandwiched between Acacia Avenue and the main A4241. It is surrounded by residential housing, factory units and retail units.

Surveyor experience

The surveyor and report author is Eric Hawkeswood. Eric has many years experience of broad habitat and detailed botanical and species surveying. He has extensive experience of protected species survey and holds Natural Resources Wales scientific and conservation licenses for bats and dormice (nos. S092015-1, 2023 and S093015-1, 2023 respectively). He has been a professional in the nature conservation field for thirty five years formerly working as Reserves Manager and Conservation Officer at Gwent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Manager for the Ruperra Conservation Trust. Eric has worked as an Ecological Consultant as joint proprietor of Hawkeswood Ecology since 2001.

Assistant surveyors on the first evening observation were Emma Adamson, Liam Kelly, David Norton and Helen Smith. Emma has worked with Hawkeswood Ecology for nearly 20 years and Liam Kelly for approximately 14 years Helen for 8 years. David has worked with Hawkeswood Ecology since 2020. All now have much experience of emergence/re-entry surveys and have received a satisfactory level of training and gained suitable experience and are considered fully competent in their role.

Methodology

All surveys conducted were undertaken in accordance with relevant published guidelines.

Results

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

The Site comprises mainly of buildings and hard-standing with small landscaped areas. It is unmanaged and the majority of the open Site is dominated by invasive species such as field horsetail and Guernsey fleabane. A small patch of Japanese knotweed was noted growing just off-Site beyond the landholding adjacent to fencing on the A4241.

Many of the species noted on Site have colonised following a cessation of management and would represent the sandy nature of the area. These include species such as evening primrose and hedgerow cranesbill. Many species are represented on nearby dunes at the seafront, these species include kidney vetch, haresfoot clover, mouse-eared hawkweed and scarlet pimpernel amongst others. It is clear that these species have colonised the Site naturally rather than being deliberately brought onto Site.

Preliminary Roost Assessment

The Building consists of two phases, both large. One is a double pitched open works unit which is adjoined to a smaller in length single pitched unit and a shallow pitched extension which contains working areas and offices and factory access.

The building is largely brick and block based with asbestos cladding on three sides. The pitched roofs are all asbestos sheet with glass fibre insulation. The office extension at the front of the building is brick built with corrugated metal sheet and Euro-profile sheet metal roofing.

Internally, the factory unit is a large open space, the office areas have a mix of small and larger rooms with some suspended ceilings. No access was possible to the shallow roof space above the offices; the factory unit held no enclosed loft space.

Given the presence of asbestos cladding and roofing sheets, although the building was generally well sealed, it was considered to be of moderate potential to support roosting bats and two observation surveys were planned for the Site. At the time of writing this update, one survey has been undertaken and one is to be carried out in early August. No direct evidence of occupation by bats was noted during the PRA.

Observations

An initial observation was undertaken on 11th July 2024 in suitable weather conditions. Commencing at 21.10, the survey terminated at 22.45, sunset was at 21.30. Temperatures were 18°C at commencement and 15°C at conclusion.

It was immediately noted that the building was heavily populated by lesser black backed gulls, these were both noisy and also aggressive towards the observers although there was no evidence of breeding activity on the building.

Bat activity was very low with the only species noted being common pipistrelle and noctule. The former appeared to be a single bat which was foraging in gardens to the east of the Site and rarely flew into the grounds. Two passes of noctule were noted with a distant animal that was not seen.

Constraints to the surveys will be detailed, along with full findings, in the final report.

Conclusion

At this stage, it appears that the Site is a fairly typical disused industrial area with some natural regeneration, some of which is typical of dune/shore vegetation locally. With a bat observation still to be undertaken, initial conclusions with regard to bat occupation is that it is unlikely. Bat activity was very low during the observation and the predation of bats around the unit by the gulls is highly likely, young bats in particular would be highly vulnerable to predation in this manner.

Amongst proposals to enhance the biodiversity of the Site the use of a meadow seed mix for sandy soils is proposed. This will allow development representing local dune type vegetation to be formalised and also allow continuing colonisation by other local species that are of value to wildlife (i.e. invertebrates).

The use of bat and bird boxes within the new build is also proposed, but measures to restrict access by gulls will be determined prior to concluding this action.

The full report and recommendations is expected to be completed in early August following completion of the bat observation surveys. Any changes to the status of the Site following that observation will be reflected in the report findings and recommendations.

We hope this is of use, if you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

Eric Hawkeswood
Principal Ecologist
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