

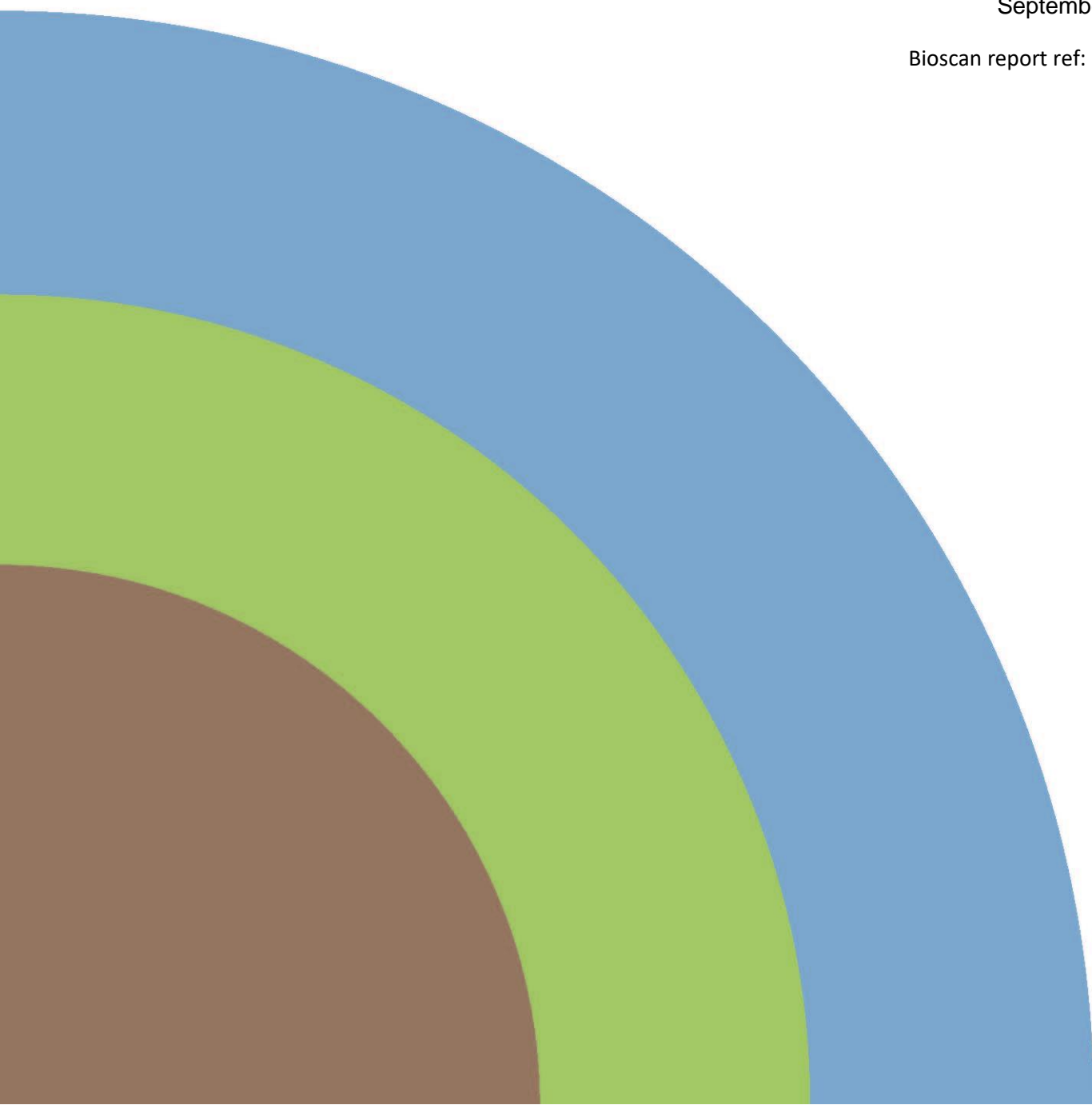


FORMER CONSERVATIVE CLUB, BETWEEN TOWNS ROAD, OXFORD

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Bat Survey

September 2019

Bioscan report ref: E1996r1





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Figure 1:

Site location

Photos

1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Bioscan (UK) Ltd was commissioned by Cantay Estates Ltd to carry out a preliminary ecological appraisal and bat survey of the former Conservative Club, Between Towns Road, Oxford (grid reference SP544040) in order to inform a proposal to redevelop the site for housing.

1.1.2 The site is located within the Cowley conurbation of Oxford and is surrounded on all sides by existing development, with Between Towns Road forming the site's north-western boundary and St Luke's Road along the south-western boundary.

1.2 Methods

Habitat survey

1.2.1 A Phase 1 habitat survey was carried out on 9th August 2019. The methodology for this was based the technique set out in the Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey¹ devised by the former Nature Conservancy Council (now Natural England), as updated periodically by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. In addition to habitat classification and mapping, the habitats were also assessed for their potential to support protected species, with the whole site also searched for evidence of badger *Meles meles* activity including setts, latrines and 'push-throughs'.

Bat survey

1.2.2 All the buildings within the site were subject to an internal and external inspection for evidence of bats. Internally this involved checking areas such a roof voids for evidence including droppings, feeding remains, staining and any bats themselves. The exterior of each building was then assessed for its potential to support roosting bats based on the presence and suitability of features bats could potentially exploit for roosting such as gaps behind fascia/barge boards and soffits, loose or hanging tiles, cracks in brickwork or panelling/weatherboarding.

1.2.3 This survey was carried out in conjunction with the habitat survey on the 9th August 2019, by Samuel Watson who is registered on Natural England's Bat Survey Class Licence WML-CL18 registration ref: 2015-11529.

¹ JNCC, (2010), *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit*

2 RESULTS

2.1 Habitat survey

2.1.1 Other than the buildings, which are described in more detail below, the site contains a former car park that presumably served the club when operational. At the time of the survey, this was being used as a site compound and storage area (see Photo 1) by Watkin Jones Group during the construction of a new student accommodation block to the north of the study site and was therefore subject to a high degree of disturbance. As a result, much of this area was devoid of vegetation, with the remainder of the site also having very little vegetation. Where it was present, a limited range of ubiquitous species was noted that included prickly lettuce *Lactuca serriol*, Canadian fleabane *Erigeron canadensis*, bristly oxtongue *Helminthotheca echioides*, buddleia *Buddleja davidii* and groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*.

2.2 Bat survey

Former conservative club

2.2.1 This building appears to have been extensively extended, with, what appears to be, the original two storey building fronting Between Towns Road constructed of red brick with a concrete tile roof (see Photo 2). To the rear (southeast) of this is a collection of flat roofed, one and two storey extensions that are of modern brick construction, with a bitumen felt covering.

2.2.2 Internally, the only contained roof voids are those in the original part of the building. The central void has a wooden frame, whilst the voids either side of this have a metal frame. All three have wooden sarking, although this is painted in the two outer voids (see Photo 3).

2.2.3 Externally, all of the buildings are generally well sealed and lacking any significant cracks and crevices that might provide a roost location. In particular, the small area of hanging clay tiles was assessed to have negligible roosting potential due to the tiles being flush against each other (see Photo 4). The only significant potential roosting feature, therefore, is where a ridge tile has become dislodged on one of the pitched roofs (see Photo 5), although this is likely to be exposed any inclement weather and is not considered to have more than low roosting potential as a result.

2.2.4 No evidence of bats was found during either the internal or external survey of the club buildings and, overall, they are assessed to have negligible to low roosting potential.



Garage block

- 2.2.5 The only other building on the site is a group of flat roofed garages, which are constructed from concrete panels with a corrugated roof (see Photo 6). They are assessed to have negligible roosting potential and no evidence of bats was found associated with these.

3 EVALUATION

3.1 The principles of site evaluation

- 3.1.1 While some level of subjectivity is unavoidable when apportioning value to ecological features and resources, certain parameters and points of reference can be used to help ensure consistency. Those used in this appraisal are explained below.
- 3.1.2 Sites already possessing statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations will have been subjected to some form of evaluation process in the past, and their importance defined at a geographical scale (e.g. international, national, local). For these, evaluation will generally reaffirm their qualifying attributes, or in some cases may identify where designation may no longer be appropriate.
- 3.1.3 Factors such as extent, naturalness, rarity, fragility and diversity are all relevant to the determination of ecological value, and for the evaluation of sites and habitat features outside designated sites, these and other criteria as described by Ratcliffe² (1977), may be applied. Ratcliffe's criteria are integral to the procedure for selecting both Sites of Special Scientific Interest and many non-statutory designation systems in the UK, and therefore remain an accepted standard for site evaluation.
- 3.1.4 In applying these criteria, attention may be drawn to the relative scarcity or abundance of features within the survey area and in the wider geographical context. Some criteria are, however, absolute and not relative to scale. Ancient woodland, for example, is fragile irrespective of whether it is being considered in an international or local context. Similarly, the value of an otherwise poor habitat may be elevated if it is central to the survival of a rare species.
- 3.1.5 Where evaluation is important for the purposes of informing decisions related to land-use planning and development control, the above approach needs to be supplemented by consideration of whether individual species are subject to legal protection³, or whether habitats or species are present which have been identified as of 'principal importance' for biodiversity conservation in the UK⁴ (HPI and SPI respectively). Planning authorities have a statutory duty⁵ to have regard to protected species and to further biodiversity objectives and the presence of such resources may therefore be material to the determination of development control decisions⁶.

² Ratcliffe (1977) "A Nature Conservation Review."

³ Principal legislation being the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) with the latter implementing the EC Habitats Directive and Birds Directive. Some animals are protected under separate legislation (e.g. the Protection of Badgers Act 1992).

⁴ As published by the Secretary of State further to their duties under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

⁵ Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

⁶ National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019, supplemented by ODPM Circular 06/2005.

3.1.6 Scales of comparison varying from the international to the context of the local area may be used to define the measure of importance attached to individual features. The definition of geographic terms can vary, but in this evaluation the geographic frame of reference contained within the CIEEM guidelines⁷ is used.

3.1.7 Finally, attention may be drawn to species not necessarily subject to legal protection or identified by Government as a priority for biodiversity conservation, but which nonetheless have an 'unfavourable' conservation status as defined by the Red Data Book system⁸ or the Red and Amber lists for birds⁹, or which are otherwise known to be rare or scarce in a local or regional context.

3.2 Habitats

3.2.1 Without exception the habitats on the site are all assessed to have negligible ecological value and the loss of any would not be considered likely to result in a significant impact at any geographic level.

3.3 Bats

3.3.1 Overall the buildings on the site have very limited roosting potential, with no evidence of bats was found and no roosts identified. As such, no requirement to obtain a Regulation 53¹⁰ derogation licence has been identified before the buildings can be demolished.

3.4 Other protected and notable species

3.4.1 No evidence of any other protected or notable species was found during the survey and there is negligible scope for the site to support such species.

⁷ CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine version 1.1. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

⁸ Following the British Red Data books published by the JNCC/RSNC and the Nationally Notable (Nationally Scarce) categorisations recognised by the JNCC

⁹ Eaton *et al.* (2015) Birds of Conservation Concern 4: the population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. British Birds 108, pp708-746.

¹⁰ Regulation 53 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)

4 RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Recommendation


- 4.1.1 Given the very limited roosting potential identified, coupled with the suburban location of the site which is likely to mean there is low to very low levels of bat activity in the local area generally, the very small residual risk that bats might use the buildings for roosting is not considered to warrant further survey. A dusk emergence or dawn re-entry survey is in any event highly unlikely to detect the sporadic and short duration roosting that is likely, if indeed any roosting occurs at all. If further assurance is needed that bats can be appropriately protected when the building is demolished, a watching brief of the process by a suitability licenced ecologist could be implemented, such that in the very unlikely event a bat is roosting in the building at that time appropriate action can be taken.

4.2 Conclusion

- 4.2.1 Overall, no significant intrinsic ecological interest has been identified at this site, with there negligible scope for such interest to be present. Redevelopment it not likely, therefore, to have any significant ecological impact.



Key

 Site boundary



DO NOT SCALE

Title

Site location

Project

Former Conservative Club, Oxford

Client

Cantay Estates

Drawing No.

Figure 1

Revision

A

Project No.

E1996

Drawn

SW

Checked

SW

Date

September 2019

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Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6





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