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CROSSLANDS COTTAGE, SUTCOMBE, DEVON

Hedgerow Assessment

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A REPORT TO:

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Sutcombe
Devon
EX22 7QA

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Executive Summary

Penpont Ecology Services was appointed to undertake an assessment of a 150m section of hedgerow south of Crosslands Cottage, Sutcombe, Devon, EX22 7QA. This was carried out to support a planning application to remove a 10m section of hedge to provide a new accessway, and to move a 50m section to provide a suitable visibility splay onto the public highway. The aim of the survey was to assess the ecological status of the hedgerow habitat, its potential to support protected species, and to assess the impact the proposed works may have.

The hedgerow does not meet the criteria of a UK BAP Habitat and is in poor condition due to lack of sensitive management creating 'leggy' growth patterns, the proximity of the road, and the low number of woody species. Nevertheless, regulations state there must be no net loss of hedgerow habitat.

The proposed works have a low potential to impact upon:

- Hedgerow habitat
- Protected species
- Trees.

The hedgerow has limited potential to support nesting birds, mammals and reptiles, however any that may be present are likely to be impacted negatively upon by the proposed works in the absence of mitigation.

A number of mitigative recommendations are made to reduce negative impacts on habitats and species.

The line of oak trees is adjacent to the zone of works. Care must be taken to avoid impacting upon the bank and tree root systems.

Compensatory recommendations are given with regard to any trees that may be lost.

It is considered that if these recommendations are strictly adhered to, the level of impact caused by the proposed works shall be reduced to an acceptable level, with no long-term impacts.

Crosslands Cottage - Hedgerow Assessment

1 Introduction

Penpont Ecology Services was appointed to undertake an assessment of a 150m section of hedgerow south of Crosslands Cottage, Sutcombe, Devon, EX22 7QA. This was carried out to support a planning application to remove a 10m section of hedge to provide a new accessway, and to move a 50m section to provide a suitable visibility splay onto the public highway. The aim of the survey was to assess the ecological status of the hedgerow habitat, its potential to support protected species, and to assess the impact the proposed works may have.

Hedgerows are protected by the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 and are a UK BAP Priority Habitat.

2 Site description

Crosslands Cottage is located on the Holsworthy to Bradworthy, Devon main road at OS Grid Reference: SS 3187 1121. The land is surrounded by fields in agricultural production of mainly permanent pasture and grass leys, with occasional arable. Fields are bordered by hedges providing good connectivity with the River Waldon which flows 1km to the east, and the Tamar Lakes that are located 2km to the west (Figs 1 & 2).



Fig 1 – Location of Crosslands Cottage and roadside hedge.



Fig 2 – Aerial photograph showing surrounding land-use.



Fig 3 - Extent of survey area (outlined in red).

3 Survey methodology

The hedgerow was surveyed in accordance with guidelines set out by Defra (2007), and was inspected for signs of dormouse in accordance with guidelines, as set out by English Nature (Bright et al, 2006), and for reptiles in accordance with methodology recommended by Natural England (Froglife, 1999). The hedgerow's potential to support nesting birds, and to provide commuting flightpaths and foraging habitat for bats was also assessed in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust guidelines (2016).

3.1 Desk study

An electronic search was made for ecological records for the site and its surrounds. The desk study researched all designated nature conservation sites and records of important habitats and species within a 1km radius of the site (post 1980). Additional information was sought for dormice (a 2km radius around the site boundary) and highly mobile bats and birds (a 4km radius).

3.2 Site Survey

The site survey was undertaken on 5 January 2023 in dry, clear weather conditions. The site was easily accessible on foot and a general walk over survey was undertaken to record habitats and species. The extent of the survey area is shown in Fig 3.

Plants

A list of higher plants was recorded and the abundance of each species was estimated for each habitat using the standard 'DAFOR' scale (D = Dominant; A = Abundant; F = Frequent; O = Occasional; R = Rare). The survey also searched for notable plants which may be present within the hedgerow and any evidence of alien, invasive species.

Fauna

Bats

The hedgerow was inspected for suitable habitat to support roosting, foraging and commuting bats.

The potential of the hedgerow to support bats was assessed according to the results of the desk study, any field evidence of bats, the quality of bat habitats and the context and connectivity of the site within the local landscape.

Dormouse

The hedgerow was searched for evidence of characteristically gnawed Hazel nuts and nests. Where no evidence was found, the potential of hedgerow to support Dormouse was assessed, according to the results of the desk study, habitat quality and connectivity of the site.

Badger

Field signs of Badger were recorded and mapped, such as setts, latrines, hairs, paths and tracks. The potential of the site to support Badger was assessed according to the

desk study records, habitats present and connectivity to woodlands and other favourable Badger habitats.

Birds

The hedgerow was searched for bird's nests and for bird foraging habitat. The potential of the hedgerow to support bird species of special conservation importance was assessed, taking into account the bird species assemblage observed during the survey, the habitats present, the context of the site in the wider landscape and the results of the desk study.

Reptiles

The potential of the hedgerow to support reptiles was assessed according to the findings of the desk study, the suitability of habitats, the context of the site and the results of the desk study.

4 Survey Results

4.1 Hedgerow

The surveyed hedgerow is a section with a northerly grid reference of SS 3187 1121 to a southerly reference of SS 3193 1107.

The roadside hedgerow comprises a typical Devon earthbank topped with vegetation. The earthbank is 70cms height x 1.2m width, and is topped with a further 1.3m of vegetation including (D) Hazel and (O) Blackthorn and Oak. Holly occurs rarely. There is an understorey of vegetation dominated by Ivy. The roadside hedge has been managed by annual cutting with a flail arm resulting in a poor growth pattern which is 'leggy' and gappy (Fig 4).

There is a second hedgebank approximately 3m east from the roadside hedge. This bank is 80cms height x 1m width and is topped with approximately 20 English Oak trees to a height of 6m. This 'double hedge' is divided by a trench of vegetation including (D) Bramble, Ivy and Bracken with (O) Hart's tongue fern.

An existing gateway is present. The hedges provide a boundary between the road and the garden of Crosslands Cottage. A small livestock collecting area is present.



Fig 4 – This over-exposed photograph shows the roadside hedge dominated by Hazel that has been trimmed with a flail arm, with the secondary hedge behind it dominated by Oak.

Due to the management of the hedge an accurate assessment of its age (and conservation status) is difficult, however the size and shape of the hedgerow section indicates that it is likely to date to after the Enclosure Act era of the 18th Century and it may be reasonable to estimate the age to be ≥ 100 years old (Defra, 2007). Due to the lack of woody species per 50m, 'leggy' growth, and the presence of the road to one side, it is unlikely the hedge would meet the criteria of a UK BAP Habitat.

4.2 Desk Study

The hedgerow does not lie within any designated sites.

Several legally protected and priority species have been recorded within the local area. The survey inspected the site for any evidence that these, and any other, important species may be present, and whether habitats are suitable to support these species.

Mammals

Bats

The desk study found that Pipistrelle, Long-eared and Noctule bats have been identified within 2km of the site.

All species of bat are legally protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, making it an offence to kill, injure, capture or disturb bats, obstruct access to bat roosts or damage/destroy bat roosts. Some bat species, including Brown long-eared, are included on list of UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority species and receive additional legal protection under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) Act 2006.

It is considered likely bats will use the double hedgerow as part of a larger foraging territory and as a commuting flight-line.

Dormouse

The desk study found that Dormouse has been recorded within 2km of the site.

Dormouse is classed as a European Protected Species under the transposed Habitats Directive 1992 and in the UK it is legally protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. Together this legislation makes it an offence for any person to kill, injure, capture or disturb a Dormouse, or to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place used by Dormouse for shelter or protection. Dormouse is also UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species and protected under the NERC Act 2006.

The survey inspected the hedgerow for any potential Dormouse habitat and considered that its suitability to support this species is limited due to:

- lack of woodland (preferred Dormouse habitat)
- lack of woodland edges (preferred Dormouse habitat)
- lack of connectivity with woodland
- lack of tall, thick, bushy growth
- human (presence, vehicular, light, noise, domestic pet) disturbance

Badger

The desk study did not identify Badger within 2km of the site.

Badgers and their setts are legally protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, making it an offence to kill, injure or take a Badger or to damage a sett.

The survey searched for any evidence that badgers are using the hedgerow, looking for any signs of setts, tracks, latrines, paths and hairs. No evidence was recorded.

Birds

Several bird species of nature conservation importance have been recorded from the local area including Cuckoo, Starling, Hedge Accentor, House Sparrow, Song Thrush and Barn Owl.

Barn Owl is afforded the highest protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. The others are UK BAP Priority species and have some protection under the NERC Act 2006.

The nests and eggs of all wild birds are legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), making it an offence to intentionally or recklessly take, damage or destroy eggs or any nest while it is in use or being built.

It is considered that the roadside hedgerow may provide limited habitat for nesting birds due to the lack of suitable woody growth. The oak trees of the secondary hedgebank are likely to provide suitable nesting habitat.

Reptiles

The desk study did not identify reptiles within 2km of the site.

All species of reptiles are legally protected from killing and injury under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Reptiles are also UK BAP Priority species and under the CRoW Act 2000 and the NERC Act 2000, Local Authorities have a legal duty to further the conservation these species.

As the hedge has no south-facing banks it is considered unlikely it will support reptiles. Any suitability may be further reduced by by human disturbance (presence, lighting, vehicular movement, noise, domestic pets).

Plants

No botanical species of ecological note were identified.

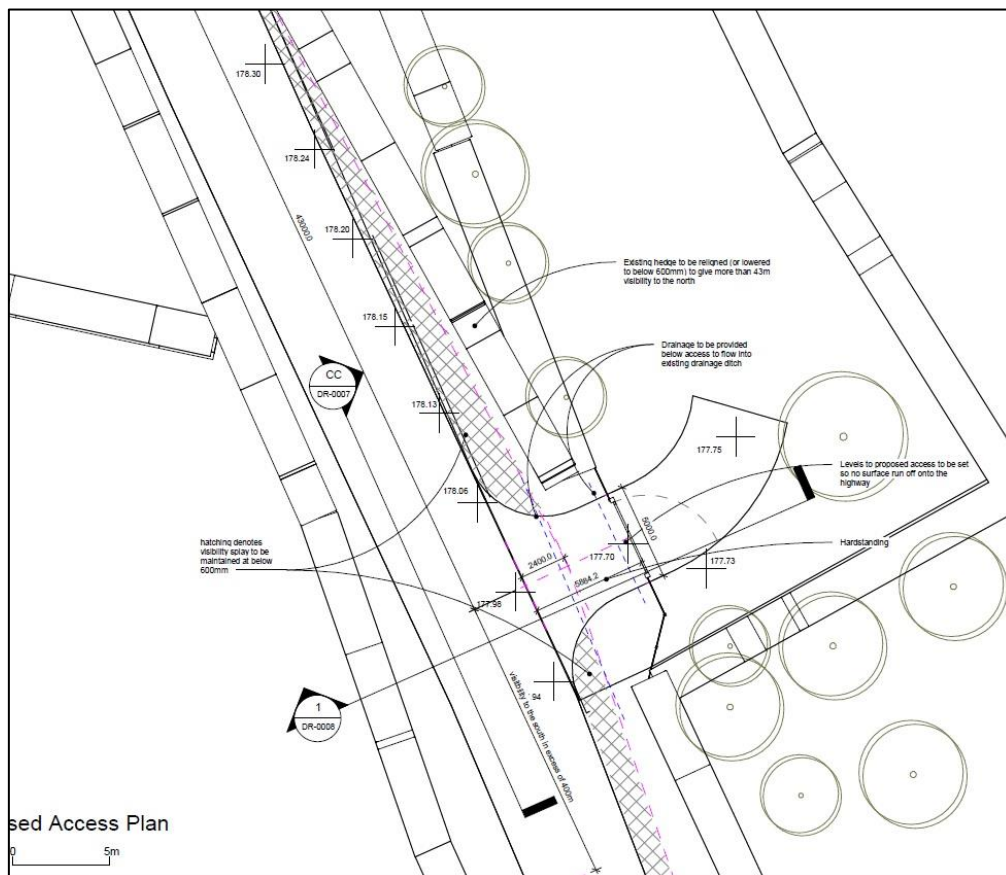


Fig 5 – Proposed works.

5 Impact assessment

The proposed works include the removal a 10m section of hedge to provide a new accessway, and the translocation of a 50m section to provide a suitable visibility splay onto the public highway (Fig 5). The translocated material will in-fill the existing trench between the row of trees and the roadside hedge. It is considered that, without mitigation, this proposed activity may impact negatively upon:

- Hedgerow habitat in poor condition (permanent impact)
- local protected species (temporary)
- secondary row of trees (permanent)
- Nesting birds (temporary).

6 Mitigation Strategy

In order to ensure negative impacts on habitats and species are minimised the following mitigation strategy will be implemented:

Hedgerow

The top vegetation shall be cut down to bank level height during the winter months when the hedge is dormant – this occurs between 1 September and 1 March. This timing aims to reduce the suitability of the hedgerow habitat to support nesting birds, reptiles, and mammals.

The translocation of the hedgerow (Devon earthbank or turf bank) shall be carried out using the following methodology:

Using several passes of the swing shovel, carefully remove top and bankside vegetation and topsoil and store on-site.

Again, using several passes, carefully and gradually remove the remaining subsoil and any stone material. Store this material separately from the vegetation and topsoil.

Clear the new hedgerow footprint of 6cms of topsoil.

Rebuild the hedge by placing the subsoil down first, then cover with the removed topsoil and vegetation.

Plug any gaps by planting whips of native species including Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Hazel and Holly.

Protect the new hedgerow against stock where necessary. Protect newly planted whips against rabbit damage with guards.

It is considered that, if this mitigation strategy is strictly adhered to, it is unlikely the re-location of 50m of hedgerow will impact negatively on commuting bats, feeding mammals and invertebrates in the long term.

Trees

The row of trees shall be protected as follows:

Retain all Oak trees wherever possible.

Do not pile translocated hedgerow material on top of the bank of the trees.

Any trees that require felling will need to be compensated for. For each felled tree, a new oak at a minimum of pole growth stage shall be planted within 20m of the zone of works, within 6 months of removal.

It is considered that, if this mitigation/compensation strategy is strictly adhered to, it is unlikely the re-location of 50m of hedgerow will impact negatively on the site's existing habitats in the long term.

7 Conclusions

The surveyed hedgerow is in poor condition and does not meet the criteria of a UK BAP Habitat due to lack of sensitive management creating 'leggy' growth patterns, the proximity of the road, and the low number of woody species.

The hedgerow has limited potential to support nesting birds, mammals and reptiles, however any that may be present are likely to be impacted negatively upon by the proposed works in the absence of mitigation. A number of mitigative recommendations are made to reduce negative impacts on habitats and species.

A line of oak trees are adjacent to the zone of works. Protection measures are recommended, and compensation given for any felled trees.

It is considered that if these recommendations are strictly adhered to, the level of impact caused by the proposed works shall be reduced to an acceptable level, with no long-term impacts.

This report has been produced in good faith, with all reasonable skill, care and diligence based on the information provided and accessible at the time of its preparation and within the scope of the work agreed with the client.

We disclaim any responsibility to the client and others in respect of any matters outside the scope of the above.

This report is provided for the sole use of the named client and is confidential to them and their professional advisors.

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