

# **COYNE ENVIRONMENTAL**

**Litle Ravenscourt**

**Amwell Hill**

**Great Amwell**

**SG12 9RA**



## **ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

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**KENNETH COYNE**  
Dip LA, DA, Dip TP, Cert Ecol. & Cons CMLI. AIEEM  
Coyne Environmental  
5 Philosophers Gate  
Ashwell  
Herts.  
SG7 5DL  
01462 743723

## INTRODUCTION

Country & Town, with advice from Alison Young, Planning Associates has instructed Coyne Environmental to carry out an Ecological Assessment of Little Ravenscourt, Great Amwell, to establish the potential presence or absence of protected ecological features of significance. It is proposed to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the site. Another house is to be built within the grounds of the existing dwelling. This will be submitted to East Herts Council (EHC) for determination.



From the survey and analysis of the site, it will be possible to review the proposals to ascertain what measures are needed to achieve a satisfactory result for the proposal. The completed PEA will enable the local planning authority (LPA) to consider the impact of the proposal on wildlife. The authority can then discharge its legal obligations under the 'Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations' (2018) and any 'Outline Mitigation and Compensation Strategy' if required.

I am a qualified Ecologist, Associate of the Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management with over 35 years' experience in the environmental field. This includes being a licence bat worker (Bat Licence 2015-15943-CLS-CLS). The PEA survey was carried out on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023. This was conducted in the day time, (19C) variable, light winds, dry.

## LOCATION

The site is in the village of Great Amwell, Herts., south of Ware. On a hill, above the 11<sup>th</sup> C St. John the Baptist, is an Iron Age hill fort and to the west of it a large tumulus



at Barrowfield. Its name is derived from a spring called Emma`s Well and is one of the sources of the New River and the whole area is influenced by the river Lea

The village has several noted residents. The 18<sup>th</sup> C Quaker poet John Scott of Amwell built Scott`s Grotto and ancestors of Richard Warren, one of the passengers on the Mayflower, include US Presidents Ulysses S. Grant and Franklin D. Roosevelt.



Ravenscourt is a large Edwardian family house, in extensive grounds which has been divided into two separate dwelling. This is opposite a large garden centre. Little Ravenscourt occupies the east wing with a shared access drive from the busy Amwell Hill road. It is proposed to construct a new house in the garden with a separate access through the boundary wall onto the main road

## **AREA DESIGNATIONS**

Management and protection of biodiversity within the UK planning system is set out through European and UK legislation. The Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA 1981) is the main protection for the environment. Wildlife conservation is set out in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). There is also legislation for specific species, Bats are protected under the WCA, Protection of Badgers Act 1992, EU Habitats and Birds Directive and more general guidance, Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994, which defines "European Protected Species " (EPS) and EU Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2020. This study and Report have also taken into account BS 42020 (2013) Biodiversity -Code of Practice for Planning and Development.

The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Partnership has developed the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for the county as A 50-year Vision for wildlife and natural habitats of Hertfordshire along with the Hertfordshire Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan 2010. These all are aimed at ensuring the environment of the county and its wildlife is adequately protected

The Environment Act 2021 now has a mandatory require for biodiversity net gain (BNG) on developments. This will be used as the basis for determining additional

mitigation. East Herts Local Plan 2011-2033 has also been taken into account. The site is in the Green Belt (GB).

There are no National Nature Reserves (NNR) or RAMSAR sites within the study area but Hertford Heath Nature Reserve (NR) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a 28ha. acid heathland, is the nearest reserve. There are numerous woods including Post Wood (Ancient Wood) and Balls Wood NR in the area and the site is within the Lea Valley SSSI flood plain.

## CONDITION

A full Phase 1 Habitat Survey was not deemed necessary as the site appeared to be one with no important habitats or ecology of significance. An Ecological Walkover Survey has therefore been undertaken. However, if the survey identifies any wildlife of significance, measures will be taken as set out in the JNCC guidance Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Surveys (2010) and CIEEM Guidelines (2017).



Ravenscourt occupies the centre of extensive grounds with mature trees but very informal gardens. These are mainly of amenity lawns with shrub borders around the houses. The garden of Little Ravenscourt is not well attended but has mature trees within the grounds, including a line of large Lalandi conifers, which were probably a former screen, that has been left to grow. This is next to a large mature sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*).

It is only around the boundaries of the property that there is any ecology of interest. Along the Amwell Hill frontage is a brick wall with evergreen laurel adjacent to it. On the outside, is a mature screen of lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*) with a large beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) on the corner of High Trees. The laurel hedge extends round to the joint access boundary.

Within the grounds are a number of buildings, garages, sheds and a greenhouse. All of these appear to be in reasonable condition. The existing dwelling and all the out buildings do not form part of the proposed application site. It would appear to be a large informal garden with little ecological value.



## ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

As the proposal is nowhere near the existing house or any other of the associated buildings, an inspection of these was not required. Bats, being European Protected Species (EPS), are a priority for a standard PEA survey. However, as this will not be required in this study, no internal inspections have taken place. The vegetation on the surrounding site was inspected, using binoculars, where the trunks of the mature trees, were studied for holes (woodpecker), fissures etc. No evidence of urine, signs of faeces, entry scratches etc. were found. Therefore, in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust (2012) Guidelines and having regard to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, I conclude that the site does not contain evidence of bats.

The site condition assessment has shown that the grounds have only limited ecological value. Most of the area is mown amenity ornamental species including (*Agrostis tenuis*), (*Festuca ovina*) and (*Lolium perenne*). Within this are hawkweed (*Herbarium vulgatum*), curled dock (*Rumex crispus*), wild marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*) and common mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*) among others,

It is only along the boundaries, that there is more ecology of value. On the west side, the mature beech is the dominant feature of the road. However, the adjacent limes are tall, spindly specimens, possible part of a former hedge that has been left to grow out. The non-native laurel hedge is of little ecological value. Within the site, the mature sycamore is the only tree of significance, but is outside the application area.

The site was inspected for bird activity and song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) was seen on the site. Using binoculars, vegetation and trees in particular, was studied, for nesting or nest building activity (although we are out of the normal breeding season Mar-Aug). None was found in the trees or within the boundary hedges. Using the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) guidelines it would show a medium score. Aviflora in general will use the site for foraging and passing through and there appeared to be potential sites for nesting but none found.

Within the grass habitat there was no evidence of paths of any passage by wildlife. No droppings (rabbits, deer), footprints (slots, fox) were evident. Searches under vegetation for burrows, under stones and fallen wood, produced no evidence of small animals (voles, shrew) activity or reptiles (common lizards, slow worms) under any refugia.

As this is adjacent to the countryside, the likelihood is it is an ecological corridor for a wide range of species that range well beyond the site and area in general

The site is not near the river Lea and does not have any ponds or other bodies of water, within the grounds. The likelihood of Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*) EPS and other amphibians like frogs (*Rana temporaria*) and toads (*Bufo bufo*) using these limited habitats is doubtful. Using the GNC Suitability Index the site has a negative value. No other significant ecological features were observed on the survey.

Within the site and along the boundaries there was potential refuges for small mammals like hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) and mole (*Talpa europea*) but no

signs of mole-hills or similar activity though the area was found. However, there is an areas of old tree stumps and scrub which could be a possible refuge for wildlife, like hedgehogs.

This evaluation has shown that although the site has some wildlife value there are other areas of equal or greater value in the adjacent nature reserves, fields, woodlands and surrounding gardens where nature can find more advantageous habitats and foraging opportunities. Any proposal to change this in the design could be compensated with appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures.

## **ANALYSIS**

The evaluation has shown that Little Ravenscourt is a typical urban garden of mainly amenity grasses and non-native trees and shrubs but within an area of ecological potential. This grassland maybe used by a number of animals although no actual fauna was observed. The possibility of EPS being present is negative with regard to both bats and GCN. Other more common species that may be displaced can translocate to the wider countryside beyond the site.

The boundary vegetation has some value for wildlife and will be retained. The proposals are to access the new dwelling from Amell Hill. This will require part of the existing brick wall to be removed and the position of this has not yet been decided. This assessment has shown that the beech tree is of ecological significance, while the other lime trees are of less importance.



The access should therefore avoid the canopy and root plate of the beech tree. Roots of this specimen will probably extend beyond this area, so care must be taken when excavating and constructing the access. This must be by hand and not machinery with the road made of materials that will cause as little disturbance to the roots as possible (i.e., pavers on sand, not tarmac construction). It is advisable that an Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) be prepared before any work takes place and that an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) be on site for a Watching Brief as this work takes place

The treatment of the external spaces of the proposal is the key to ensuring the existing biodiversity is retained in a managed programme of conserving as much of the existing ecology as practical together with habitat creation as part of the proposals. In order to ensure the site is managed in an environmentally controlled way as practical, a Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS) is proposed. This identifies the probable wildlife and habitats that may be affected by a development and the method that needs to be taken to ensure these species are protected and their habitats are not affected or if necessary trans-located to alternative safe areas

## **PRECAUTIONARY WORKING METHOD STATEMENT**

The following works are recommended to be undertaken to ensure the existing ecology and wildlife of the site is managed to conserve as much as practical:

- 1 The site has a number of mature trees that may be used by wildlife. Any works near them must be protected in accordance to BS 5837(2012) Trees in Relationship to construction
- 2 No work to trees should be undertaken in the bird breeding season (Mar-Aug) and particularly important for House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) which are in steep decline (Red Listed).
- 3 If this is necessary the vegetation should be inspected to see if nest sites are present and active. If this is the case the ecologist should be contacted for advice.
- 4 If the proposal is to be accessed near the existing beech tree, this must be constructed to ensure any effect on the tree roots is minimal. The preparation of this should be by any requirement from an AMS and an ECoW will be present when the works take place.
- 5 If it is necessary to erect protective fencing round trees or other ecological features, this should be protected from construction works by the erection of 2m high Heras Fencing and retained in good order until the works are complete.
- 6 When carrying out removal of the vegetation, care should also be taken to ensure small mammals, like hedgehogs are not present in the undergrowth. It is also important to ensure that if clearance does involve wood fires these are inspected to ensure animals have not temporally taken refuge here.
- 7 Although the likelihood of wildlife being present on the site has not been found, as a precautionary measure, works to prepare the land should be timed to minimise the potential impact on possible wildlife.
- 8 Any vegetation clearance should ideally be removed in winter (Dec-Feb) to within 20cm of ground level to ensure that any possible foraging / migrating between areas are not affected.
- 9 Ground level vegetation clearance can be undertaken during the spring/summer (mid Mar-mid Jun) when activity is more dispersed. This precautionary approach can be relaxed if no wildlife has been detected on site.
- 10 Much of the site comprise grass which it is assumed will require preparation for construction. Vegetation clearance and soil stripping works should progress in a systematic method working towards the site boundaries. This will encourage any potential reptiles / animals present to disperse to the surrounding gardens /green belt beyond the site.

- 11 Soil stripping should ideally be undertaken during the active season, between March to October and in suitable weather conditions. Given that wildlife is potentially likely to visit the site, simple precautions will be sufficient to ensure that they do not exploit more attractive or useful habitats created during the works by keeping the site tidy and storing materials off the ground. Any soils stacking should be smoothed to prevent potential cavities and covered in tarpaulin.
- 12 If in the unlikely event that animals are found on site, they should be left to disperse of their own accord. Any that need assistance should be gently placed in a clean bucket and moved on to a safe location away from the development.

## **BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN**

The Environment Act 2021 has a mandatory require for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on developments of a minimum of 10%. Within this scheme it is proposed that the BNG should be undertaken as part of the planning permission with suitable mitigation or enhancement required to meet the statutory net gain incorporated into the ecological and landscape design. This can include native species of planting, selected wild flora mixes and habitat creation in the form of bat and bird boxes and other features for fauna. Areas of wildflower meadow and rain gardens (damp areas) could form part of the proposals along with SuDS design.

## **CONCLUSION**

The site survey and subsequent desk top study of Little Ravenscourt and the surrounding area, indicates that the site is not in an area of high risk for any specific species or sensitive habitats. It is however near to several SSSI`s which should not be affected by this proposal. The design and location of the proposal will have a bearing on the details of the recommendations for BNG measures but this PEA is flexible enough to accommodate such changes.

Therefore, in my professional opinion I assess that the proposal of a new dwelling at Little Ravenscourt, Amwell Hill, Gt. Amwell, will have minimal impact on the overall ecology of the area. I conclude that, no further environmental studies are required to satisfy the requirement for ecological /biodiversity assessments and that the proposal can be determined on this basis.

## **REFERENCES**

Proposals Plan

Hertfordshire BAP Landscape Character Areas

HCC Hertfordshire Strategic GI Plan 2010

Hertfordshire Biological Records

East Herts Council Local Plan 2011-2033





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**MONARCH**  
Design and Build Ltd

9 Bury Lane  
Barnet  
London N4 3JL  
Tel: 0208 234 2211  
Mobile: 0773 234309  
Email: [enquiries@monarch.com](mailto:enquiries@monarch.com)

Project:  
Proposed new dwelling

Drawing Title  
Site Plan

Scale	Date	Drawn by
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