34 Sandy Lane, Romiley

Ecological Appraisal

2023

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ECOLOGY

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Project Title	34 Sandy Lane, Romiley
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Report Contents

Executive Summary

Development Details

The client is proposing a planning application for a change of use and small extension to provide a 22 bed HMO (sui generis). This report describes the ecological features of the site and its surroundings and assesses the potential impacts of the development on the ecological interest. Recommendations are provided so that the development is compliant with biodiversity policy and legislation.

Ecological Interest

The site has a negligible level of ecological interest. Ecological features of interest include the main property and mature trees on the site only.

Outcomes

No evidence of bat activity was found in the property and the mature trees offered no potential roosting features. No evidence of other protected species was found on the site. No further survey effort or protected species mitigation is recommended at this time.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Brief

1.1.1 Rachel Hacking Ecology Limited was commissioned in 2023 by Patrick Sheridan to carry out an Ecological Appraisal at 34 Sandy Lane, Romiley, Stockport (O.S. grid reference: SJ 94585 91229 – see Figure 1).

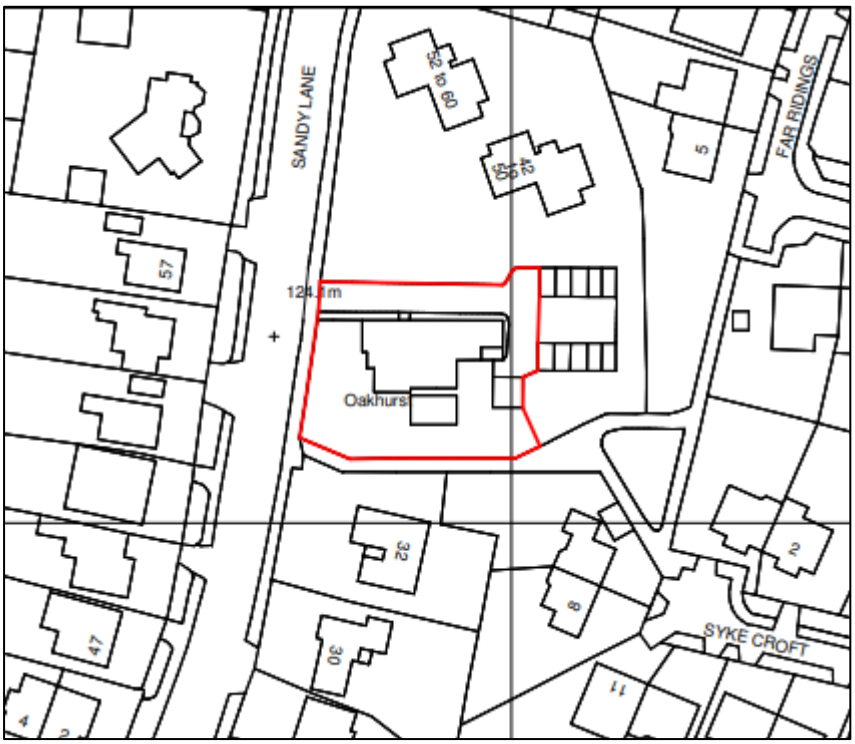


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the site.

1.1.2 The proposed development site is a large residential property constructed from brick, with pitched, tiled roofing. The property is currently unoccupied. A timber-clad annexe building occurs to the south of the main building.

Description of Development

1.1.3 The site is the subject of a planning application for a change of use and small extension to provide a 22 bed HMO (sui generis).

1.2 Scope of Work

1.2.1 The Client commissioned Rachel Hacking Ecology to carry out the following works:

- Carry out a daytime bat survey of the building, to include an external and internal assessment.
- Search for signs of protected species and assessment of the potential of habitats and features to support protected and notable species.

1.3 Site Visit Information

Surveyor Details

1.3.1 Joel Hacking (Senior Ecologist) and Matt Bottomley (Ecologist) visited the site on 6th September 2023. Both surveyors are fully trained and experienced in protected species assessments, and Joel holds a Natural England Class 2 Survey Licence for bats (Ref. 2016-24701-CLS-CLS).

Weather

1.3.2 The weather at the time of the survey was mild and sunny.

2. Methods

2.1 Desk Study

2.1.1 The Magic website (Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside) was interrogated for the presence of Statutory Designated Sites (and European Protected Species licences) within 1km radius of the site.

2.2 Field Survey

Site Walkover

2.2.1 During the walkover habitat and features were assessed for their suitability to support of protected and notable species in accordance with CIEEM guidelines[1]. Field signs of protected, notable, and invasive non-native species, if encountered, were noted, and described.

Bats

2.2.2 The exterior of the site was surveyed from the ground using binoculars, a high-powered torch and an endoscope. Features offering potential access to roosting bats were recorded. Such features may include suitable gaps in roof coverings, gaps behind external cladding/facia and gaps in masonry.

2.2.3 Evidence indicating the presence of roosting bats was also searched for. This may include bat droppings on walls, windows or on the ground below roost entrances or staining from fur oil around roost entry points.

2.2.4 The interior of the site, including the roof void, was surveyed to identify any evidence indicating use by roosting bats. Such evidence may include bat droppings, feeding remains, urine splashes, live or dead bats and staining from fur oil on timbers.

2.2.5 Any trees on the site that are to be affected by the proposals were given a ground-level assessment, searching for Potential Roosting Features (PRF's), such as flaking bark, woodpecker holes, knot holes and limb splits.

[1] CIEEM (2017). *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

2.3 Mitigation Hierarchy

2.3.1 Mitigation measures should be embedded within the masterplan design and planning application process. Measures during the construction phases should be included in a Construction Environmental Management Plan: Biodiversity (CEMP). This process from proposal to implementation needs to consider the 'mitigation hierarchy' of avoid, reduce, compensate, and enhance:

- Aim to avoid negative effects through the design process.
- Mitigate if negative effects cannot be avoided.
- Use compensation measures to offset residual impacts.
- Identify and implement opportunities to enhance biodiversity.

3. Results

3.1 Survey Constraints

3.1.1 Field survey results are valid for a limited duration and no investigation can provide a complete description and characterisation of a site. The composition of habitats and species can change depending on environmental variables and the mobility of species, so the results of a study become less reliable over time. In some cases, surveys that are 3 years old may be acceptable for a project assuming that habitats have not significantly changed in the intervening period, but for protected species it is likely that survey data will need to be no more than 18 months old.

3.1.2 The site was fully accessible, and a full assessment could be made.

3.2 Designated Sites

3.2.1 The nearest designated site is Tangshutts Local Nature Reserve, situated approximately 600m to the south west of the site. No designated sites occur on the site or immediately adjacent to it.

3.3 Site Walkover

3.3.1 The site was the subject of a walkover, to assess the site for protected and notable species. The site comprises mainly hardstanding pathways and a rear yard (see Photograph 1). No evidence of a Badger sett was present on the site or immediately adjacent to the site. No waterbodies are present within 250m of the site.

Photograph 1 showing the hardstanding.

3.3.2 Several mature trees occur on the site (see Photograph 2). The mature trees to the south of the building, both Pendunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, did not have visible bat roosting features, and were categorised as offering negligible/low bat roosting suitability.

Photograph 2 showing one of the mature trees.

3.3.3 The area between the mature trees is partially scrubbed over (see Photograph 3), with a dense covering of Ivy *Hedera helix*. A small amount of *Rhododendron sp*. is present on this part of the site.

Photograph 3 showing the Rhododendron on the site.

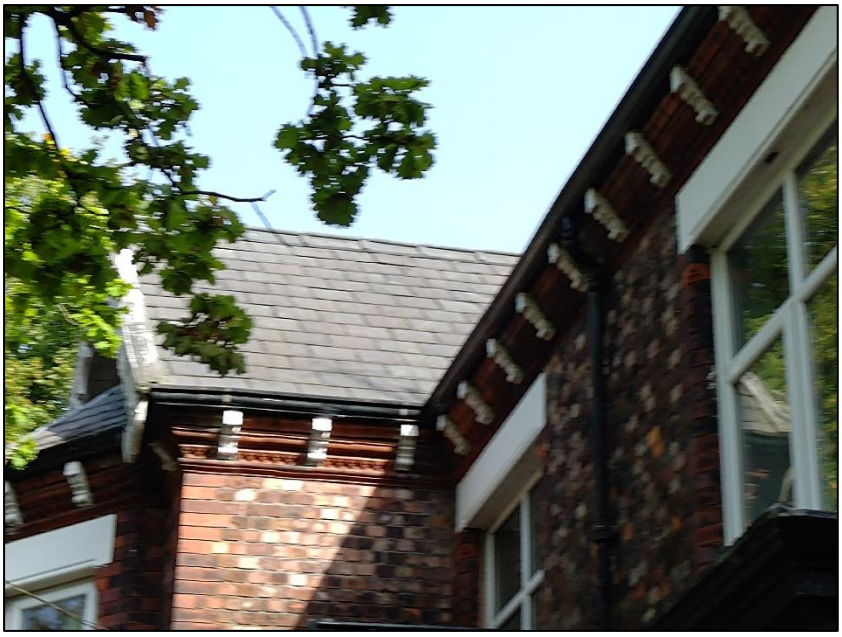
3.4 Daytime Bat Survey

3.4.1 The buildings on the site was the subject of a daytime bat survey. The main building is constructed from brick and has a pitched, tiled roof. The external brickwork is complete and intact, offering no suitable gaps between bricks or recesses in the mortar (see Photographs 4 and 5). The door and window frames sit flush to the surrounding masonry. The stone window lintels are complet and sealed. The decorative brickwork at the roof edges is complete. The chimney stacks are intact, offering no damaged bricks.

Photograph 4 showing the exterior of the building.

Photograph 5 showing the rear elevation.

3.4.2 The roof is pitched and tiled (see Photograph 6). The roof is complete and intact, with no slipped tiles presenting roosting or entry opportunities. The ridge tiles are complete and sit flush to one another. The small areas of roofing on some of the rear extensions is complete and sealed.



Photograph 6 showing the roof of the building.

3.4.3 The property has exposed roof joists on the main elevations (see Photograph 7). The roof appears to be sealed where the joists meet the brick. Some of the rear extensions have bargeboards, which sit flush to the brickwork.

Photograph 7 showing the exposed roof joists.

3.4.4 The property has several roof voids covering the expanse of the roof space, these can be accessed via loft access panels from inside the property. The roof joists in all voids are intact, offering no significant cracks for bats to exploit (see Photographs 8, 9 and 10). The roofs are unlined, with mortar present where the tiles meet the joists. The roofs are insulated throughout. The internal brickwork is complete and intact, offering no suitable bat roosting cavities. No daylight is visible at the roof edges, suggesting the voids are sealed. No evidence of bat activity was found in any of the roof voids.

Photograph 8 showing one of the roof voids.

Photograph 9 showing one of the roof voids.

Photograph 10 showing one of the roof voids.

3.4.5 The property has a timber-clad annexe building to the side of the main building (see Photographs 11 and 12). The external timber is complete and sealed. The UPVC windows sit flush to the cladding. The flat roof is complete and sealed to the timber and the roof overhang/covering is well-sealed to the timber walls (see Photograph 12). No internal access was possible. No potential roosting features are present externally and no access points are present. No evidence of bat activity was found on the timber-clad annexe building.

Photograph 11 showing the timber-clad annexe building.

Photograph 12 showing the timber-clad annexe.

3.4.6 Small wooden sheds are also present on the site, which are in a poor state of repair. The sheds do not provide suitable bat roosting habitat.

4. Assessment

4.1 Development Context

4.1.1 The development will result in the loss of existing hardstanding only, with the new extension cutting into the side and rear elevations only, following the demolition of the timber-clad annexe building.

4.2 Impacts on Designated Sites

4.2.1 The development will result in the loss of existing hardstanding and timber-clad annexe only. No designated sites lie on the site or immediately adjacent to the site. There will be no impacts on designated sites from the proposed development.

4.3 Impacts on Habitats

The development will remove a timber-clad structure, and existing hardstanding only. The impacts on any habitats of ecological value is considered to be negligible.

4.4 Impacts on Species

Bats

4.4.1 No evidence of bat activity, such as bat droppings, could be found the buildings, and no suitable roosting features are present. The building is considered to offer negligible bat roost suitability.

4.4.2 The mature trees were considered to offer negligible/low bat roosting suitability, due to the lack of potential roosting features.

Birds

4.4.3 The mature trees offer suitable habitat for nesting birds. If any works to the trees or vegetation is to take place during the nesting bird season, a nesting bird survey is required to be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist.

Invasive Species

4.4.4 Rhododendron sp. is present on the site to the south. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (Section 14 and Part II of Schedule 9) 1981 (as amended), it is an offence for this to be planted in the wild or otherwise cause it to grow in the wild.

4.4.5 It is not an offence to have Rhododendron on your land, but it is an offence to allow the species to spread into neighbouring areas or to grow in the wild. Therefore, it will be necessary to ensure appropriate measures are in place to prevent development activities from causing further spread of the species to new areas.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Further Surveys

Bats

5.1.1 No further surveys or specific bat mitigation measures are recommended at this time. The site can be enhanced for bats by installing bat and bird boxes on to the building or mature trees following completion of development works[2].

Nesting Birds

5.1.2 Impacts on nesting birds should be avoided in particular, by carrying out site clearance and similar operations outside of the bird breeding season (March- August). Construction activities that might directly impact upon breeding birds should hence be limited to the September-February period. If vegetation has to be cleared during the bird breeding season checks immediately before clearance by a suitably qualified ecologist will be required. If nesting activity is detected work in that area will need to stop until the ecologist considers that nesting activity is finished.

5.2 Mitigation Measures

General Precautions

5.2.1 Protection of ecological features (habitats and species) during the construction phase should be described in a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).

5.2.2 It is not always possible to prove absence of roosting bats. Bats can roost in suitable features opportunistically and are not always identified during surveys. It is recommended that roof coverings are removed with due caution. Should a bat/bats be identified at any time, work should stop in that area and a suitably qualified ecologist contacted to attend site and advise how to proceed.

5.2.3 This report is considered to be valid for two years. After this, a suitably qualified ecologist should be consulted to assess its validity. An assessment update may be required.

[2] Reason, P.F. and Wray, S. (2023). UK Bat Mitigation Guidelines: a guide to impact assessment, mitigation and compensation for developments affecting bats. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Ampfield.

Appendix 1: Planning Policy & Legislation

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2021) describes the Government's planning policy for England and how it should be applied. Within this framework, the requirements in relation to biodiversity are included within several policies. The two most relevant to individual planning decisions are Paragraphs 174 and 180, shown below:

- 174. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

  a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

  b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

  c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;

  d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures; etc…

- 180. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

  a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;

  b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;

  c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and

d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Legislation

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000) includes the notification and confirmation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). SSSIs can be notified for their floral, faunal, geological, or physiographical features. Protection against damaging operations and management of SSSIs is also included within the Act. Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) are zones around an SSSI account for the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified and identify development proposal which could have adverse impacts.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000) protects native animals, plants and habitats. Under the Act it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal listed on Schedule 5 and it is an offence to interfere with places used for shelter or protection, or intentionally disturb animals occupying such places. The Act prohibits picking, uprooting or destroy any wild plant (or any attached seed or spore) listed in Schedule 8.

European Protected Species (EPS) such as bats, Hazel Dormouse, Otter, Natterjack Toad, Smooth Snake, Sand Lizard and Great Crested Newt are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The Acts make it an offence to:

a) Deliberately capture, injure or kill an EPS;
b) Deliberately impair an EPS's ability to survive, breed, reproduce, rear or nurture young; to hibernate or migrate; or significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the EPS.
c) Possess or control live or dead EPS or any part of, or anything derived from a EPS;
d) Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of an EPS;
e) Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place that is used for shelter or protection by an EPS;
f) Intentionally or recklessly disturb a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection that is occupied by an EPS.

All common herptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000). Grass Snake, Slow Worm, Common Lizard, Adder are protected against intentional killing or injury.

Common Frog, Common Toad, Smooth Newt and Palmate Newt is protected against sale. In addition, all British reptiles, Common toad and Great Crested Newt are listed as Species of Principal Importance.

All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or take, damage, or destroy its nest whilst in use or being built, or take or destroy its eggs. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act while they are nest building or at or near a nest with eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it an offence to wilfully, or to attempt to kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a Badger, or intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett. Interference of a sett includes disturbing badgers during occupation of a sett, or damaging or destroying a sett, or obstructing access to the sett.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a duty on every public authority to have regard to conserving biodiversity. Section 41 of the same Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitats that are of 'Principal Importance' for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The Secretary of State must take steps, as appear reasonably practicable, to further the conservation of those living organisms and habitats in any list published under this section. The list of species and habitats of principal importance currently includes 943 species and 56 habitats. These are the species and habitats found in England which are regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework

The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 protect 'important' hedgerows from destruction or damage. A hedgerow is 'important' if it (a) has existed for 30 years or more; and (b) satisfies at least one of the criteria listed in Part II of Schedule 1 of the Regulations. Under the Regulations, it is against the law to remove or destroy 'important' hedgerows unless permitted by the local planning authority.