



Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
108 Victoria Road
Whitehaven, Cumbria

Prepared for: Mr Roy Donnan
Date: May 2023
Reference: J007



DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET

Report Number: J007/PEA/LS/16.05.23/FINAL V1

Client: Mr Roy Donnan

Project Name: 108 Victoria Road, Whitehaven, Cumbria

Project Number: J007

Report Type: Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Status: Final

Date of Issue: 16 May 2023

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Executive Summary	
Background	In April 2023 Natural Ecology were instructed to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal of 108 Victoria Road, Whitehaven, Cumbria (central grid reference NX 98412 19218).
Site Description	The site comprises common habitat types such as short poor semi-improved grassland, bracken and scrub.
Development Proposal	Development proposals include residential-led development of the site.
Purpose	The purpose of the survey was to: • Identify the major habitats present within the site and immediate vicinity; • Highlight the potential for legally protected and/or notable species; and • Make recommendations for any additional specialist ecological surveys.
Results	The findings confirms the habitats on site have limited potential to support protected species, namely common breeding birds. The building on site to be demolished (garage) does not have bat roost potential. Mammal paths were noted throughout the bracken, but the footprints present indicated usage of the site by deer. No evidence was found of a badger sett. No mature trees are to be removed as part of this development. The site was found to be lacking the habitat features to be suitable for European protected species and other species of note, such as notable birds, mammals and/or amphibians.
Recommendations	No further surveys are required however recommendations within Section 5 should be adhered to.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 Natural Ecology was commissioned to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal survey of the land behind 108 Victoria Road, Whitehaven, Cumbria (NX 98412 19218).
- 1.2 Currently, the site consists of short poor semi-improved grassland, bracken, and scrub.
- 1.3 This survey was therefore commissioned to provide a baseline of floral and faunal diversity and to assess whether any protected or notable species will be impacted by the proposed works.
- 1.4 The aim of this report is to inform the planning application for residential-led development of the site, comprising three houses with associated access.

Survey Objectives

- 1.5 The purpose of the survey was to:
 - Identify the major habitats present within the site and immediate vicinity;
 - Highlight the potential for legally protected and/or notable species; and
 - Make recommendations for any additional specialist ecological surveys.
- 1.6 The instructed works therefore entailed a walkover survey of the site to map the major habitats and identify key features of importance.
- 1.7 This report sets out the results of the above surveys. All features are then evaluated using the evidence from the desk study and relevant literature. The proposals for development are set out and the impacts on features are assessed. Mitigation options are then outlined in relation to legal and planning policy obligations and residual effects assessed.

2. METHODOLOGY

Desk Study

- 2.1 The desk study concluded that the most likely species to be present would be nesting birds based on the character and location of the area surveyed.

Walkover Survey

- 2.2 A Walkover Survey was conducted on the 19th April 2023 by Lucinda Spencer, a suitably qualified ecologist. the site and the immediate surround by an experienced ecologist.
- 2.3 A walkover survey provides a rapid assessment of a site's ecological features, including habitats and evidence of protected or notable species present.
- 2.4 The key objectives are to;
- Identify and map the main ecological constraints associated with a project;
 - Identify any mitigation measures likely to be required;
 - Identify any additional surveys that may be required; and
 - Identify the opportunities offered by a project to deliver ecological enhancement.
- 2.5 A walkover survey is a baseline survey and does not survey any particular species of plant or animal in detail. However, in identifying key habitats and potential presence of protected or notable species, recommendations can be made for further in-depth surveys.
- 2.6 This is a standard technique for obtaining baseline ecological information for areas of land, including proposed development sites.

Preliminary Roost Assessment

- 2.7 Alongside, the walkover survey, a building and ground level tree inspection was undertaken by Lucinda Spencer, a Class 2 Natural England licensed bat ecologist. An internal and external inspection was carried out as part of this survey.
- 2.8 The survey was conducted in accordance with Bat Conservation Trusts 'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists'. The rationale behind the values assigned to the suitability of a feature to support bats is shown in Table 1.

External Inspection of Buildings

- 2.9 A visual inspection of the buildings was undertaken to identify the suitability of the building to provide potential roost space for bats. In particular, potential access points and evidence of bats were searched for. This was carried out in full day light with the aid of binoculars, endoscope, torch and ladders (where needed) to identify the following features:
- Age and structure of the building;

- Condition of the roof noting any missing, dislodged or lifted tiles that would provide entry;
- Condition of the walls, doors and windows that may also provide entry;
- Windowsills, walls and sheltered areas are search for bat droppings; and
- Grease marks, scratch marks and urine staining around possible entry points.

Internal Inspection of Buildings

2.10 This section of the survey focuses on identifying features or areas which provide the correct environmental conditions for roosting bats and the evidence of bat activity. These include:

- Identifying dark, warm, undisturbed areas normally in the roof space such as joins in traditional roof joists and beams, behind the ridge beam or roofing felt and any cracks or crevices in the bricks or stonework that could be utilised as a roost site; and
- The walls, floor and any flat areas such as on top of beams were examined for bat droppings, feeding remains and bat corpses.

Table 1: Assessing the Potential Suitability of a Development Site for Bats (Taken from Collins, 2016)

Suitability	Description of roosting habitats	Description of commuting and foraging habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features onsite likely to be used for roosting bats.	Negligible habitat features onsite likely to be used by commuting or foraging bats.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation). A tree of sufficient size and age to contain potential roost features but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of commuting bats such as a gappy hedgerow or unvegetated stream, but isolated, i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat. Suitable, but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a long tree (not in a parkland situation) or patch of scrub.
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions, and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for commuting such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens.

	conservation status (with respect to roost type only – the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).	Habitat that is connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland, or water.
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by commuting bats such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge. High-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by foraging bats such as broadleaved woodland, tree-lined watercourses and grazed parkland. Site is close to and connected to known roosts.

Limitations

- 2.11 There were no significant constraints to the walkover survey; weather conditions were good for the survey and access was possible to all areas.

3. RESULTS – WALKOVER SURVEY

Site Description

- 3.1 The site is located to the south-east of Victoria Road, Whitehaven, Cumbria, behind property number 108. The survey site comprises a moderate-sized plot of short poor semi-improved grassland, trees and scrub.
- 3.2 The surrounding habitat consists of residential development to the north and west, scrub and trees to the east and grassland to the south with farmland beyond.
- 3.3 The application site is approximately 0.17ha in extent.



Figure 1: Site Location and approximate site boundary, highlighted in red

Habitats

3.4 A Phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken and habitats noted described below with example species found on site.

3.5 The Phase 1 Habitat types (JNCC, 2010) within the development site (red-line area) were:

- Amenity grassland;
- Building;
- Bracken;
- Defunct species-poor hedgerow;
- Hardstanding;
- Poor Semi-improved grassland;
- Scrub; and
- Swamp

Amenity Grassland

3.6 A small area of amenity grassland comprising a garden is present within the red-line boundary. This area is to be included to make way for access. Species include dominant perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*.

Buildings

3.7 A single-storey pitched-roof garage is present within the boundary of the site and will be due for demolition to provide a wider access road.

3.8 The building was assessed for bats (see section 3.19).

Bracken

3.9 The site has an area of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* at the base of the slope, with the bracken spreading throughout the rear of the site amongst the trees.

Defunct Species-Poor Hedgerow

3.10 A small defunct species-poor hedgerow is present along the access track. Species comprise dominant honeysuckle *Lonicera sp.*, with hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, rose *Rosa sp.* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg.

Hardstanding

3.11 Areas of hardstanding was present within the entrance to the site (paving) and adjacent the garage (concrete).

Poor Semi-Improved Grassland

3.12 A large area of the site comprises short-sward semi-improved grassland. Species are dominated by coarse grass species including cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, common bent, false oat-grass

and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Forbs species include dandelion *Taraxacum* sp., daisy *Bellis perennis*, common mallow *Malva sylvestris* and broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*.

Scrub

- 3.13 Amongst the bracken are small scrubby trees comprising predominantly hawthorn, and scattered areas of bramble.

Swamp

- 3.14 An area of land is dominated by reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* which indicates this is an area of apparent swamp which will have periods of being wet under-foot.

Outside the Development Zone

- 3.15 Habitats immediately adjacent the red line boundary (not to be affected by the proposed development) includes mature trees amongst scrubland.

Notable Species

Flora

- 3.16 No notable flora species were recorded during the survey. The ground flora and understorey were dominated by common plant and tree species which does not seem to offer any habitat of note.
- 3.17 No invasive or non-native species were discovered during the survey.

Badger

- 3.18 During the survey, mammal paths were noted within the survey site however fresh footprints in mud show these are deer tracks. The tracks were observed throughout the undergrowth within the area of scrub and trees.
- 3.19 No evidence was found of a badger sett (burrows). No holes, tunnels or signs of badger feeding or latrines was found within the survey area or within 30m of the site.
- 3.20 It is likely that badgers are present in the wider habitat and therefore the presence of passing badgers is not unusual. It is therefore concluded that badgers are likely to visit the site, both to pass through it and also to forage on site. However, at the time of the survey, no badger setts were found.

Bats

- 3.21 The building to be demolished (garage) to allow the access track to be widened was subject to an internal and external roost assessment. No evidence of bats was found internally and the condition externally is tight with no gaps allowing access to bats.
- 3.22 The site was subject to a ground level roost assessment and no features were noted in the trees and shrubs to be impacted.
- 3.23 It is likely that bats will forage within and across the site; the trees on the bank are likely to provide shelter from the wind where foraging bats can feed, as well as providing a commuting pathway for bats.

- 3.24 Consideration should therefore be taken to maintain existing flight-paths and wildlife corridors through and around the site.

Otter & Water Vole

- 3.25 The survey area does not provide suitable habitat for either of these species and there was no evidence of their presence.

Hazel Dormouse

- 3.26 The habitats on site does not provide suitable habitat for hazel dormouse, nor is it connected to suitable features and existing populations.

Birds

- 3.27 During the survey, the following bird species were observed on or over the site;

- Blackbird *Turdus merula*;
- Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*;
- Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*;
- Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*;
- Great Tit *Parus major*;
- Robin *Erithacus rubecula*; and
- Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*;

- 3.28 No nests were found during the survey. All shrubs within the survey area are likely to have potential for nesting birds, most likely common garden birds, such as the birds listed above.

Amphibians

- 3.29 There are no waterbodies on site or within 500m.

- 3.30 It is therefore unlikely that the survey site forms part of core habitat for great crested newts. There is some potential for common amphibians, such as common frog and common toads, to utilise the site as a terrestrial foraging area, but as there are no waterbodies nearby this may be unlikely.

Reptiles

- 3.31 The habitats on site offer limited suitability for reptiles, with the majority of the site being a relatively short sward-height. Refugia was scattered throughout the site and was checked during suitable weather conditions at the time of the survey and no reptiles or evidence of reptiles was found. Refugia included metal sheets, wood, logs and roofing felt.

- 3.32 Records from NBN Atlas suggest that there are records of reptiles within 2km however, the closest record is located 2km south of the site for slow worm *Anguis fragilis*. It is likely that reptiles may be located within the wider area, however as previously mentioned, it is unlikely they will be present on site. Measures will be undertaken to manage any habitat clearance in a way sympathetic to reptiles in the unlikely event they are present.

Bony Fish

- 3.33 There is no habitat on site that would provide a suitable environment for fish.

Invertebrates and Crustaceans

- 3.34 No terrestrial invertebrate species of note were identified during the survey or from records during the desk study.
- 3.35 The vegetation present on site is common in the wider area and do not provide any unique habitats for invertebrates.
- 3.36 It is therefore unlikely that the site supports any populations of notable invertebrates that would be affected by the proposed works.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 It can be concluded that the existing site provides suitability for some species, namely common birds.
- 4.2 The building on site to be demolished does not have suitability for bats.
- 4.3 Mammal paths were noted throughout the bracken, but the footprints present indicated usage of the site by deer. No evidence was found of a badger sett.
- 4.4 No mature trees are to be removed as part of this development.
- 4.5 The site was found to be lacking the habitat features to be suitable for European protected species and other species of note, such as notable birds, mammals and/or amphibians.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The site has been shown to have some limited ecological potential. However, the following recommendations have been made, to provide continual viable habitat availability during and following the proposed development;

- Where possible, all trees should be retained;
 - It may be necessary to undertake some woodland management (thinning) of shrubs at the base of the bank;
 - It is recommended that all retained trees are protected during construction works through the provision of suitable fencing such as Heras fencing. Heras fencing should follow British Standard BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction.
- The mature trees on the boundary of the site should be retained post development as a dark corridor, and as such should not be illuminated in any way;
- External lighting should be kept to a minimum and, where necessary, should be low wattage and should include measures to reduce reflective rebound into the surrounding sky.
 - Site lighting will be kept to a minimum during construction and operational phases. If lighting is necessary, there are a number of ways to minimise the effect of lighting on bats. Information can be taken from the Institution of Lighting Professionals and Bat Conservation Trust's Guidance Note 08/18 Bats and artificial lighting in the UK (2018). If further clarification is required, the ecologist should be consulted.
- Removal of trees and scrub habitat should be undertaken outside of the nesting bird season (nesting bird season is March-August, inclusive);
 - If any vegetation removal is required during the nesting bird season, a nesting bird check by a suitably qualified ecologist will be required prior to any removal.
 - If birds are found nesting in the vegetation, then removal will need to be delayed until such time as the nesting birds have departed;
- Phased removal of vegetation should be undertaken to allow small animals to move safely from the development area, moving across the site to the retained habitat to the south. Ideally this should be done under the supervision of an ecologist.
 - The first cut of vegetation should be to 30cm, moving in one direction to the south;
 - A second cut should then take vegetation to ground level, again moving in one direction to the south.
- Development should seek to contribute a net gain in biodiversity with an emphasis on improving ecological networks and linkages where possible.

- If any vegetation is removed (or if thinning of the woodland is undertaken) then at least three habitat piles should be created outside of the development boundary, from the timber and brash that arises;
- At least three bird boxes and three bat boxes should be erected in the retained trees outside of the development boundary, in order to provide continual nesting habitat;
- Any planting to be done should be of native species beneficial for wildlife.

6. REFERENCES

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7. PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1: Garage to be demolished



Photograph 2: Short-sward grassland present within the red-line boundary



Photograph 3: Bracken present within the red-line boundary on the bank



Photograph 4: Mature tree present outside red-line boundary