Land Off Woodway Road, Sibford Ferris

Ecological Appraisal ADDENDUM

Introduction

Blue Cedar Homes Ltd are submitting a revised planning application to Cherwell District Council, which now seeks to construct five residential dwellings on land located to the east of Woodway Road, Sibford Ferris, Oxfordshire, OX15 5QW.

Malford Environmental Consulting prepared the following document to support the original planning application:

- Land Off Woodway Road, Sibford Ferris, Oxfordshire_Ecological Appraisal_Final Report (MEC, 13 December 2021).

For this revised planning application, the scheme has been revised to reduce the number of dwellings from six to five, while dwellings are now two-storey and have been realigned to align more closely with existing neighbouring development to the south. The new scheme provides more room for green open space and habitat creation to the west of the proposed new houses. The current application therefore now seeks consent for this alteration to scheme design.

This Ecological Appraisal Addendum has been prepared on behalf of Blue Cedar Homes Ltd by Malford Environmental Consulting, which will form part of the new planning application documentation. This addendum considers whether this scheme design change has any new or additional ecological effects over and above those identified in the original ecological appraisal report.

The following aspects of the new scheme design, which are relevant to ecology, will remain unaltered:

- Land use, habitats and wildlife within the study area grassland field (baseline conditions);
- Size and location of the development application site; and
- Retention and removal of existing trees, shrubs and hedge.

As stated, the scheme still integrates habitat creation including native and ornamental hedge, tree and shrub planting but now provides morel room for additional habitat creation.

Predicted Impacts and Mitigation

Predicted impacts (Ecological Appraisal Sections 7.2 – 7.6) covering boundary hedgerow & trees, two oak trees with bat roost potential, foraging/commuting bats, other notable mammals and nesting birds, and associated mitigation (Ecological Appraisal Sections 8.1 – 8.3) covering foraging/commuting bats, other mammals and nesting birds remain unaltered and are therefore still relevant for the revised scheme design and new planning application.

Indeed, the new scheme provides incremental benefits for bats due to the increased width of the exclusion buffer from the two mature oaks within the boundary Hedgerow H1, while an increase in the extent and types of semi-natural habitats combined with new gardens / boundary planting provide enhanced habitat that bats can use for foraging/commuting.

There are no new predicted impacts associated with the revised scheme, and as such no additional ecological mitigation is required.

Ecological Enhancement

The revised scheme does result in changes in the opportunities for ecological enhancement due to the revised layout and building designs, in particular: due to the reduction in number of dwellings from 6 to 5; conversion of dwellings from single-storey to two-storey with associated increase in height of eaves/ridge; and re-distribution of dwelling units and associated gardens further into the east of the application site creating more room for habitat creation opportunities.

These scheme design changes potentially alter the opportunities for ecological/wildlife enhancements, as set out within the Ecological Appraisal report, including: integration of bat boxes; integration of bird nesting boxes; and new habitat creation. These changes are discussed below.

Bat boxes

The original scheme integrated five bat roosting boxes on the southerly or westerly facing gable elevations of Plots 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Although the number of dwellings has been reduced the biggest gain is changing the dwellings to two-storey buildings thus providing additional height for bat boxes and improving their predicted efficacy. Five bat roosting boxes can still be integrated within the revised scheme with one box installed on the west-facing elevation of each of the five new properties.

The revised scheme will continue to deliver enhancements for roosting bats as previously set out in the original scheme, although importantly the potential for roosting boxes to be used by bats has been increased due to the raising of ridge/eave heights.

Bird boxes

The original scheme integrated six pairs of swift bricks on the northerly or easterly facing elevations of Plots 1-6 (12 swift bricks in total).

Swift boxes were chosen as Sibford Ferris already supports a good population of breeding swifts in the summer and is an Amber list species (species of moderate conservation concern due to declining populations), and provision of permanent nesting locations aimed specifically at swift was designed to help re-address this issue.

Although the number of dwellings has been reduced the biggest gain is changing the dwellings to two-storey buildings thus providing additional height for swift boxes and improving their predicted efficacy for swifts.

Given the loss of one building, five pairs of swift nesting bricks can be integrated within the revised scheme providing a total of ten nesting boxes (which is still above the recommended target for new development of ‘on average one box per property’). One pair of swift bricks will be installed on the northerly or easterly facing elevation of each of the five new properties.

The revised scheme will continue to deliver enhancements for nesting swifts and other birds as previously set out in the original scheme, although importantly the potential for nesting locations to be used by swifts has been increased due to the raising of ridge/eave heights.

New planting

For the original scheme the Landscape Layout Plan (Drawing No. JWL_095.01, dated December 2021) provides details of the soft landscaping strategy.

The soft landscaping strategy for the revised scheme is shown on the Landscape Layout Plan (Drawing No. JWL_095.01 Rev D, dated April 2023).

The key differences include:

- *Buildings and hard-standing*. Properties have been relocated, reduced in number and realigned eastwards leading to a reduction in development footprint and the extent of hard-standing / access road.
- *Hedgerow*. The revised scheme layout maintains the amount of new mixed native hedgerow planted along the application site eastern and northern boundaries, but also realigns formal garden boundary hedge along the eastern boundary of the development plot now forming a physical barrier between gardens and the proposed public open space supporting a range of semi-natural / wildlife habitats. Recommended hedgerow species mixes and habitat creation/management remain unaltered, with the final suite of species to be agreed as part of detailed landscape planting.
- *Trees and shrubs*. The revised scheme layout now provides additional new trees and shrubs, particularly associated with the public open space that can link to and strengthen existing hedgerows and trees found on-site. Recommended tree and shrub species and habitat creation/management remain unaltered, with the final suite of species to be agreed as part of detailed landscape planting.
- *Orchard*. The revised scheme layout now incorporates a small community orchard, which can be managed traditionally within an area of species-rich grassland. The orchard can include fruit trees such as apple (*Malus pumila* agg), pear (*Pyrus communis*) or plum (*Prunus* sp). The final suite of species to be agreed as part of detailed landscape planting.
- *Species-rich grassland*. The revised scheme layout now provides additional areas of species-rich grassland within the public open space. This includes native wildflower meadow grassland, with mown paths / open recreational areas, interspersed with native tree and shrub planting. The orchard will be underplanted with drifts of natural bulbs. Recommended seed mixes and habitat creation/management remain unaltered, with the final suite of seed or species mixes to be agreed as part of detailed landscape planting.
- *Wildlife hibernacula and garden fencing*. Recommendations for creation of two wildlife hibernacula and ensuring new garden fencing is wildlife friendly by installing small gaps at the base of fences to facilitate small mammal movement remain unaltered.

The revised scheme will continue to deliver habitat enhancements as previously agreed as part of the original scheme, albeit with a slightly different mix of habitat areas/lengths.

Conclusion

The revised scheme is not predicted to have any additional adverse ecological impacts and is considered to provide additional ecological benefits from the original scheme. Ecological enhancements integrated within the revised scheme design still include bat and bird boxes but the potential for use by target species is predicted to be enhanced due to raised height of roof ridges/eaves. Importantly re-configuring the residential properties has allowed the type and extent of semi-natural habitats created to be increased, while increasing stand-offs from sensitive features such as the mature oak trees.

The revised scheme provides unaltered predicted adverse ecological impacts from the original scheme, and therefore the conclusions of the original ecological appraisal remain unaltered and are still valid for this new scheme design, while the new scheme provides tangible benefits for ecology. The revised scheme will continue to have no adverse impacts on the ability of local wildlife to survive, breed or reproduce, to rear or nurture their young or to hibernate or migrate, and would actively improve the situation for target species such as bats, swifts and other birds, other mammals and invertebrates.

Dr Stephen Dangerfield MCIEEM FCIWEM CEnv
Director

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