

**Environmental Impact Assessment:
Bulby's Wood, Ingram Valley, Northumberland National Park
Proposed Works – Refurbishment of Toilet Block**

Revised September 2014

**Design Group
Architecture and Construction Services
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G5043



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Environmental Impact Assessment for the Bulby's Wood site has been undertaken with reference to the Northumberland Biodiversity Action Plan.

The specific action plans that are relevant to this site are as follows:

Habitats – Trees & Hedgerows

Species – Bats, Hedgehog, Garden Birds

1.2 Site Description

The OS grid reference is NU 008 164

The public toilet block was constructed in the 1960's and the associated trees and shrubs planted on the west side of the building at a later date. The mixed woodland block to the east of the building is not part of the site or affected in any way by the proposals.

The site is approximately 18m from the course of the River Breamish which is part of the Tweed Rivers SAC European site and a designated SSSI.

The vegetation identified within the site is a mixture of semi-mature and early mature trees and shrubs which have been planted and young self-set trees located within the site boundary which is a timber post and rail fence. The site is flat other than an old defunct hedgerow bund, which is a likely remnant of a stone dyke enclosure. The planting here was most likely undertaken to provide a screen and shelter to the setting of the toilet block. It is likely that a large percentage of the original planting was either managed initially by coppicing or otherwise damaged when young as much of the vegetation evident here now is multi-stemmed from the base. There does not appear to have been any management of the trees for a number of years and the majority have few lower branches of any size and a high but dense canopy. In addition there are many self-set specimens, Prunus in particular. As a group the block of trees is of considerable value in the landscape but there are very few individual trees of high quality.

Within the central area of the site there is virtually no understorey or ground vegetation. Around the perimeter and where a thinner canopy allows there is an understorey of Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Bramble.

1.3 Project Proposals

The purpose of the project is the upgrade of the toilet block and to improve facilities for visitors. In addition to the renewal of toilet facilities, modifications to the internal arrangement of the building will allow the creation of a small office for the use of National Park Rangers and information for visitors. It is anticipated that the building will become more of a focal point for visitors either to meet with rangers (for example when joining a guided walk) or collect maps, leaflets or find other information about the valley. In order to create a gathering point immediately outside of the office three trees will be removed. Removing these three trees will have no detriment on the overall appearance of the woodland block nor open up the building when viewed from outside of the car park, however it will have the added benefit of allowing more light onto the ground which will in turn allow the establishment of ground cover vegetation. This will have a positive benefit for species diversity within the woodland block.

Within the woodland block overall it is recommended that a management programme is undertaken to improve the habitat diversity of the area and to ensure the long term sustainability of the trees, allowing them to reach maturity with adequate trunk girth and a balanced crown. A tree survey has been undertaken and identifies this work in greater detail.

1.4 Fauna - existing

A simple walk-over survey in January 2014, plus a return visit in September 2014 revealed a small variety of woodland birds as listed below:

Blackbird, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Robin, Wood Pigeon

There were no visual sightings of any mammals or reptiles although it is likely that the area is used by mice.

A visual survey of the building has been undertaken and there is no sign that any part of it is occupied by bats at any time of the year.

It is likely that the adjacent woodland block offers greater attraction for both birds and mammals.

2.0 Conclusion

The proposed works to the building will not affect the habitat or biodiversity of the area in any way.

Proposed works to the woodland block will potentially improve the range of habitats. A lack of maintenance has resulted in trees with very bare stems and no understorey except around the perimeter. As a result there is little or no cover for birds and small mammals. Thinning the trees by as much as 15% will allow more daylight to reach ground level which will encourage woodland flora to establish.

None of the trees to be removed have cavities or similar that could be colonised by bats for roosting or birds for nesting. The erection of bird and bat boxes on some trees around the perimeter would help to provide this missing opportunity.

Overall the project is seen as a way of improving the variety of habitats and providing additional interest for visitors.