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Your ref:

01 September 2015

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Dear David

Re: Proposed development at Thompson's Walls, Kilham, Northumberland

Introduction

Following our site meeting on 26 August 2015 at Thompson's Walls, near Kilham, Northumberland, I am writing to set out my assessment of the ecological impacts that might arise as a result of the proposed development.

Proposed Development

It is understood that the development will involve a number of phases as follows. The first phase will be the construction of a new dwelling immediately to the north-west of the existing farm cottages. Following this the cottages will be demolished and this part of the site cleared. Finally the existing barns and outbuildings to the south-east will be converted, but it is understood that this will take place some years after the completion of the new dwelling.

In my assessment I have taken account of two reports that have been prepared following the completion of surveys at the site in 2010:

- Thompson's Walls, Kilham - Bat Scoping Survey Report, prepared by the Landscape Agency and published on 6 April 2010;
- Bat Activity Survey of Thompsons Wall, Kilham, prepared by All About Trees and published on 31 August 2010.

Both of the above reports should be read in association with this assessment.

Site Value for Bats

A bat scoping survey was originally carried out by the Landscape Agency during March 2010. During this survey all of the buildings that would be affected by the proposed development were searched for signs of bat presence and for features that could potentially be used by roosting bats. Whilst no signs of bats were found in any of the buildings, a number of features were identified that were considered to have suitability for use by roosting bats.

The results of the scoping survey can be summarised as follows (see Landscape Agency, 2010);

- Bungalow (building 1) – no bat evidence but high bat roost potential
- Two storey traditional barn (building 2a) – no bat evidence but high bat roost potential
- Open store (building 2b) – no bat evidence but medium bat roost potential

- Open store (building 2c) – no bat evidence but medium bat roost potential
- Open stall and store (building 2d) – no bat evidence but high bat roost potential
- Steel framed barn (building 3) – no bat evidence but low bat roost potential
- Steel framed barn (building 4) – no bat evidence but low bat roost potential

During the site visit conducted on 26 August 2015 all buildings were re-assessed to check whether or not the results of the original building assessment remained valid. The most recent building inspection concluded that none of the buildings have changed significantly since the original building assessment was completed, however, it is also concluded that the original assessment was highly precautionary with regards to buildings 2b and 2c.

The building assessment carried out in 2015 concluded the following for buildings 2b and 2c: Both barns are open along one side and both have a roof that is covered with metal sheeting. There are low stone walls present to the rear and sides, and these are generally in good condition with relatively few holes evident. The interior of both barns is very light and their open-sided construction means that they are likely to be draughty. The construction materials used and the construction style are likely to mean that internal temperatures will be very variable and unstable, and the wall sections are unlikely to provide optimum roost conditions due to their limited extent and exposure. Overall both barns are considered to be low potential for roosting bats taking into account the location, exposure, construction style and construction materials used.

Roosting Bats

Bat activity surveys were undertaken on the evening of Tuesday 17 August, the dawn of Wednesday 18 August and the evening of Wednesday 25 August 2010 by ecologists from the consultancy All About Trees. These surveys identified a small common pipistrelle roost in the upper gable end wall of the two storey traditional barn (building 2a) but no other roosts were found. During the dawn survey on 18 August 2010 three bats were seen exhibiting swarming behaviour near the gable end wall of building 2a. On 25 August 2010 two bats were seen inside the same building after emerging from a roost.

The survey data collected during the three survey visits indicates that bat activity levels within the site are low and that species diversity is limited. This is not unexpected as the site is located in an elevated position at 175m Above Ordnance Datum. There are small pockets of plantation woodland in the vicinity of the steading but beyond this there is grazing pasture which is considered to provide poor foraging for bats. Whilst streams are present these are narrow and flow in shallow incised channels with very few shrubs or trees along the banks. Whilst some foraging opportunities exist for bats, these are limited in their extent and are therefore only expected to support a small number of animals, which is in line with observations made during the bat activity surveys.

Licence Requirements

A small common pipistrelle bat roost has been identified in one of the barns (building 2a) and therefore a Natural England European protected species development licence will need to be obtained before work commences that will impact on this roost or the bats that are present. To secure a licence a Method Statement will need to be submitted as part of the application, and this will need to be supported by up-to-date data.

It is understood that conversion of building 2a is not likely to commence for at least 2-3 years until after the new dwelling has been constructed. Consequently a re-survey will be required at that time prior to submitting a licence application.

Conclusion

The site visit carried out on 26 August 2015 concluded that there have been no significant changes in the condition of the buildings within the site since the original inspection carried out in 2010. Furthermore the habitats present remain of limited suitability for foraging bats, which have limited roosting opportunities within the steading. Surveys carried out in 2010 identified a small common pipistrelle roost with no other species detected.

Whilst the results of the original survey are now five years old, it is considered that they remain valid for the purposes of impact assessment. It is unlikely that the buildings will support a bat population that is significantly different from the population that was identified in 2010: the location of the site, the quality of the habitats present and the condition of the buildings has led to the conclusion that it is unlikely that the resident population of bats will have increased significantly since the original surveys were completed.

The original planning application included a commitment to provide loft areas that will be accessible to bats. These loft areas will provide alternative roost locations that will compensate for the loss of a small common pipistrelle bat roost. The extent of the proposed measures is such that some enhancement is included.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Steven Betts.

Steven Betts CEnv MCIEEM

Partner

For and on behalf of BSG Ecology