

25th July 2024

Jessica Sparkes
Head of Planning
Cala Homes South Home Counties
The Dorking Business Park
Station Road
Dorking
RH4 1HJ

Dear Jess

RE: Interim update on Ecology Surveys of Land to rear of 22 to 32 Chichele Road, Oxted, RH8 0NZ

1. Introduction

- 1.1 I have prepared this technical note to provide an update on ecology surveys underway at the above site. I have provided this information to help inform the Local Planning Authority in its preparation of its Statement of Common Ground, and with an aim to seek areas of common ground in relation to ecology between the LPA and the Appellant.
- 1.2 I will be representing Cala Homes as expert witness in relation to ecology, I am the Managing Director of Ethos Environmental Planning, I have an honours degree in Environmental Biology, a masters degree in business management and I am a full member of the chartered institute of ecology and environmental management (CIEEM). I have over 15 years' experience of ecology consultancy, and hold a level 2 bat license, a registered consultant on the Bat Low Impact Class License (BLICL) and level 2 (AL2) accreditation for bat earned recognition. I also hold a license to survey Great Crested Newts.

2. Reason for updated surveys

- 2.2 Consultation responses were received from Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) and the LPA Ecologist in response to the ecology information submitted with the planning application.
- 2.3 As part of the consultation responses received, both SWT and the LPA Ecologist requested further information, which was not limited to, but did include clarification in relation to both habitat and species surveys. Having considered these comments, whilst I do not consider all are justified or proportional (which I will address in my evidence), I do feel that some targeted additional survey information is useful in agreeing some areas of common ground.
- 2.4 Whilst some surveys are still underway, I have provided this interim statement as I felt it would be helpful to provide in advance of both parties preparing evidence.

3. Surveys underway and headline results

Bat Surveys

- 3.1 Previously, bat surveys were undertaken in May, June, July and September 2022 which I do consider provided a robust set of data to assess the importance of the site for bats. As this data is now two years old, and new bat surveys guidance was produced in 2023, I have undertaken additional surveys this year. To date I have survey results from two activity surveys (Spring and Summer) and four months of static surveys. The tables below provide a summary of the static surveys.
- 3.2 To date, the results are very similar to the previous surveys, whereby activity is dominated by common pipistrelle bats, and that activity is focused around the northern boundary to the ancient woodland.
- 3.3 Considering the mitigation provided within the scheme which maintains the ancient woodland boundary and boundary hedgerows as dark corridors, it remains my professional opinion that the scheme has avoided impacts on bats and follows the mitigation hierarchy.
- 3.4 I will continue to survey the site in the coming months and if required, will provide the most up to date survey information within my evidence. However, based on the past and current data available for bats, I consider it reasonable that it can be agreed that the scheme does avoid impacts on bats, and this is a point of common ground.

Table 1 Summary of bat surveys results

Species	April	May	Jun	Jul
Common Pipistrelle	921	1968	6071	6012
Brown Long-eared Bat	6	19	8	27
Leisler's Bat	34	61	140	49
Nathusius' Pipistrelle			3	
Noctule	5	19	6	22
Serotine	27	181	17	36
Soprano Pipistrelle	45	94	570	51
Daubenton's Bat		8	13	27
Natterer's Bat		3	33	
Whiskered Bat		3	5	25
Other Myotis Spp	1	2	1	
Grand Total	1039	2358	6867	6249

Table 1 Summary of bat surveys results by location

Species	Location 1: East Boundary	Location 2: West Boundary	Location 3: Northern Woodland Boundary
Common Pipistrelle	2080	1402	11490
Brown Long-eared Bat	31	12	17
Leisler's Bat	40	5	239
Nathusius' Pipistrelle			3
Noctule	23	11	18
Serotine	190	15	56
Soprano Pipistrelle	54	45	661
Daubenton's Bat	7	9	32
Natterer's Bat	2	1	33
Whiskered Bat			33
Other Myotis Spp	4		
Grand Total	2431	1500	12582

4. Reptiles

4.1 Reptile surveys were not undertaken previously, however, the requirement for this has been raised. Whilst my opinion remains that these surveys are not necessary due to the limited value of the habitats on site for reptiles, the matter is best concluded through undertaking the surveys.

4.2 Therefore, in May and June this year, myself and members of my team undertook 7 presence/absence surveys which were undertaken in line with good practice. No reptiles were recorded during the surveys. I therefore consider it reasonable that it can be agreed that reptiles are likely absent from the site and will not be impacted by the development.

5. Breeding Birds

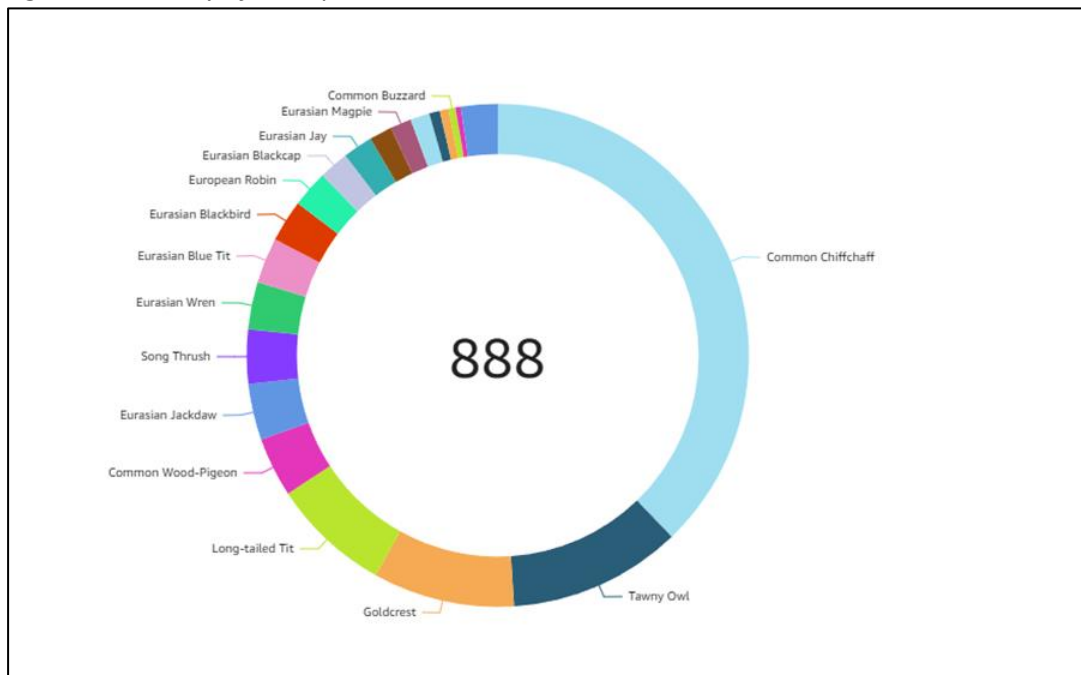
5.1 No bird surveys were previously undertaken, as I considered that the grassland on site had low value for birds and that the most suitable habitats (woodland and hedgerow) are to be retained and buffered, and therefore impacts on birds are being avoided.

5.3 However, in the absence of any survey data, the above remains my professional opinion, and is not based on actual evidence. Therefore, I undertook 3 breeding bird surveys between April and June, and supplemented this with 15 days of static bird monitoring.

5.4 The surveys confirmed that no birds were utilising the grassland on site (e.g. skylark) and all birds recorded were associated with the woodland and hedgerows (as reflected in the species summary below).

5.5 Therefore, the evidence does support my professional opinion, and I consider it reasonable that it can be agreed that the appeal scheme will not have an impact on birds.

Figure 1 Summary of bird species recorded on site



6. Great Crested Newts

6.1 During previous surveys, a small ephemeral pond in the ancient woodland has been repeatedly dry, and therefore no surveys for GCN were undertaken. However, in 2024 the wet weather has meant the pond did contain water, which allowed DNA water samples to be taken on the 22nd May 2024. The samples were sent for DNA analysis and confirmed GCN are absent (I have attached the results from the analysis). I therefore consider it reasonable that it can be agreed that the appeal scheme will not have an impact on Great Crested Newts.

7. Invertebrates

7.1 When scoping the original surveys to inform the ecology assessment, it was my professional opinion that the grassland habitats on site were sub optimal for invertebrates and that whilst the ancient woodland may provide some valuable invertebrate habitats, impacts on the woodland were being avoided. However, to support my own opinion, as I am not a specialist entomologist, I have sought the advice of Dr Jonty Denton who is a specialist.

7.2 I have provided a copy of Dr Denton's report which concludes *"The pasture field is largely very species poor and has a low value for invertebrates, grass vetchling and ox-eye daisy were the only potential host species of any value within the sward which is dominated by Yorkshire fog and rye-grass. Rapid assessment of the field indicates it does not pass the threshold for further surveys. However, it does support a population of small heath which is a schedule 41 species"*.

7.3 Having discussed the presence of the small heath butterfly with Dr Denton, it is considered that the buffer habitats to be created in the north of the site to the ancient woodland are capable of providing grassland habitat that will continue to provide suitable habitat for this

species. I therefore consider it reasonable that it can be agreed that the appeal scheme will not have an impact on invertebrates and that no further surveys are required.

The above information does not form the full extent of my evidence, but I hope that it helps reduce any matters of dispute in relation to ecology and the appeal scheme.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Phillips,
Managing Director,
Ethos Environmental Planning