

# Planning reference DC/25/0962/FUL

## The Vixen Millfields Way Haverhill Suffolk CB9 0JB

**Planning application - change of use and construction of second floor extension to existing public house to create nine flats (class C3 and three commercial units (class E)**

Ecology comments 9 July 2025

### Information submitted and reviewed

- Existing Block Plan
- Proposed Block Plan
- Biodiversity Report
- Application Form
- Biodiversity Net Gain – Metric
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (ML-Ecology, March 2025)

### Ecology comments

#### Adequacy of Information

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (ML-Ecology, March 2025) lacks context as no desk study has been provided. The purpose of the desk-based study is to inform on nearby designated sites, protected species, and invasive species.

The site is within 200m of a County Wildlife Site, with good connectivity. There are recent records of a Biodiversity Priority Species (common toad) and multiple Protected and Notable Species (starlings, house sparrows and swifts) within 200m of the site. These need to be fully considered and therefore, a full desk study is required in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (PEA).

#### Bats

The building on the site is classified as having moderate suitability for roosting and hibernating bats.

The PEA (ML-Ecology, March 2025) recommends that *two nocturnal emergence surveys are undertaken within the period May to August to confirm the presence or absence of roosting bats*. There is no evidence that these bat surveys have been carried out.

#### Nesting Birds

The PEA states *there is potential for nesting birds within the existing building and scattered scrub on the site*. However, no construction management proposals, mitigation, or enhancement measures have been proposed regarding nesting birds.

#### Reptiles

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report states: *The site was considered to offer poor habitat for common reptiles (i.e. dominated by building and hardstanding)*. However, Haverhill generally has good reptile populations and there is potentially direct connectivity to areas with recorded reptiles.

The debris, overgrown vegetation, and logs, shown photographically across the site in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, BNG Metric and Phase One Land Contamination Assessment (Castledine Environmental, April 2025), could potentially support reptiles. As such a precautionary methodology for site clearance of habitat suitable for reptiles is required.

## **Mitigation**

Section 4.2 of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (ML-Ecology, March 2025) outlines mitigations and enhancements. These must be conditioned.

## **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**

### **Red line**

The red line boundary is inconsistent when comparing the Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map found in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (ML-Ecology, March 2025), the Block plans and Location Plan. The red line must be consistent to ensure that the BNG metric is completed accurately.

The Application form informs a total site area of 483 m<sup>2</sup>. However, the total area of the site in the BNG Metric is 771m<sup>2</sup>. These areas must match to ensure that all the information is accurate.

### **Applicants' confirmation that BNG applies or not**

The Application form indicates that the site is not subject to statutory biodiversity net gain because it is a self-build and custom build development. However, the planning case officer has confirmed that this is not the case and therefore the site **is** subject to statutory biodiversity net gain.

### **Pre-development Biodiversity Value**

The BNG metric and Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map (found in the PEA) indicate that the yard area to the northwest of the site is dominated by hardstanding ground/developed land; sealed surface. However, images found in the PEA, BNG metric and Phase 1 Land Contamination Assessment appear to show piles of debris on soil and grass. Developed land; sealed surface implies impervious materials because of development and may not be appropriate habitat classification for areas containing significant debris. More evidence is required to ensure this is an accurate representation of the habitat type.

Appendix 4 of the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (abg Environmental, December 2016) appears to show a tree on the northeastern boundary of the site. This can also be seen overhanging the site on aerial photography from 2023, sourced from Google, in the image below.



Figure 1 – Google aerial imagery from 2023 tree circled

The tree is shown to be lost as part of the development. Guidance is unclear about the treatment of trees which are located outside the application site but so close that they might be affected by the proposals. Our view is that the BNG calculation should reflect the impact of the proposals and therefore these trees should be included where there will be an impact consistent with the impact of the proposals (as indicated in the PEA and or in the arboricultural assessment). For example, if the Arboricultural Report shows the tree to be pruned or lost (as in this case) this should be reflected in the BNG metric.

### **Metric calculation tool**

The Biodiversity Net Gain Metric shows a 57.66% biodiversity net loss.

### **Post-development Biodiversity Value**

The above is based on the creation of an area of vegetated garden however there are no plans or evidence to show this.

### **Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy**

Government guidance states that *in relation to all onsite habitats which are adversely affected by the development, the adverse effect should be compensated by prioritising in order, where possible, the enhancement of existing onsite habitats, creation of new onsite habitats, allocation of registered offsite gains and finally the purchase of biodiversity credits.*

There is no indication as to how the statutory biodiversity objective will be met.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Holding objection.**

The applicant needs to submit the following:

- An amended Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, to include:
  - A desk study
  - Mitigation and enhancement measures relevant to any additional information from a desk study
- Evidence of two nocturnal emergence bat surveys at the site and, should they be needed, sufficient mitigation/enhancement measures.
- An amended Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) report and metric to include:
  - A red line boundary consistent with all other documents submitted with the application

- Accurate pre-development mapping and habitat classification and condition sheets where necessary, including any trees that are affected by the works
- Post development mapping to show the extent of habitats to be created on-site (if any)