PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

STANLEY HOUSE HOTEL

MONTE BLACKBURN LIMITED

Rural Solutions

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

LOCATION
STANLEY HOUSE HOTEL
MELLOR
LANCASHIRE
BB2 7NT

PROPOSAL
EXTENSIONS TO CURRENT HOTEL

APPLICANT
MONTE BLACKBURN LTD

ISSUE DATE
31ST JULY 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1: Due to a series of legal protections, it is illegal to cause disturbance or harm to many species across the whole of the UK, including nesting birds, bats of all UK species, great crested newts, badgers and many others. In order to determine the possible impact that development works or other land management proposals may cause, an ecological assessment is necessary to identify the species using the site, ways in which these species may be at risk, and potential avoidance, mitigation or compensation measures required during the planned works on site. The aim of this report is to provide the above listed information and to inform future works taking place on the proposed site in terms of habitat protection and ecological enhancement (biodiversity net gain).

LEGISLATION

1.2: Within the UK, there is a suite of environmental legislative acts concerned with the protection, conservation and enhancement of the ecological and environmental factors present within our rural and built environments. The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) is the primary legislation for protection of wildlife within the UK and refers to the treatment and management of protected species listed as Schedule 1 (birds), 5 (mammals, reptiles, fish and invertebrates) and 8 (plants). Section 9 is arguably the most important part of the legislative act, as it states 'It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure, or take a scheduled species that is living wild at the time; to possess a scheduled species; to damage, destroy or obstruct access to the place of refuge used by the protected species.'

1.3: The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 is the English enactment of European legislation and provides similar but subtly different protection for species listed on Schedules 2 and 4 of those regulations. A recent change in this legislation means that the provisions of this act now complement those of the Wildlife and Countryside Act more. Species to which these provisions apply are the European Protected Species, examples of this include any of the Bat species within the UK and Great Crested Newts. Activities that might cause offences to be committed can be legitimised by obtaining a licence from the relevant statutory body.

1.4: Badgers also have their own specific piece of legislation, the Protection of Badgers Act (1992), and there are other species that also have their own specific legislation.

1.5: Other important pieces of legislation that are important to protecting and conserving the environment as a whole within the UK and in some cases Europe include the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979), Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) and the Plant Health Act (1967, amended 2008). This is by no means an exhaustive list, but these are the most important legislations with regards to the ecological protections of the UK countryside.

BIOSECURITY

1.6: Biosecurity is important when entering any land, or other premises where there is a risk of spreading pests. Primarily, the goal of biosecurity is to prevent, control and/or manage risks to life and health. Food safety, zoonoses, the introduction of animal and plant diseases and pests, and the introduction and management of invasive alien species are all possible aspects relating to biosecurity, and it is of vital importance that measures are taken to prevent the spread of disease, loss of biodiversity and introduction of pests and pathogens.

1.7: Biosecurity measures are a series of precautionary steps designed to reduce the risk of transmission of harmful organisms. Good biosecurity practice refers to ways of working that minimise the risk of contamination and the spread of pests and invasive plants. The term pest in this case should be taken to include all invertebrate, bacterial or fungal organisms that are harmful.

1.8: When conducting all on site survey work, appropriate biosecurity measures are employed to prevent breaches of biosecurity and the potential spread of harmful pests and disease. A detailed brief on our biosecurity measures and qualifications is available on request.

2. SITE CONTEXT

2.1: The site, known as Stanley House Hotel is located at Mellor, Lancashire BB2 7NT at Grid Reference SD 64543 29901(Figure 1). This can be accessed by private road from A677 Preston New Road. The plans for this site include two extensions that lie within the gardens on amenity grassland and hard standing. Rural Solutions Ltd were commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of Stanley House Hotel, in order to identify the current ecological value of the site and any potential issues that will need to be mitigated or compensated for as a result of the planned works, as well as providing the basis for a suite of ecological habitat enhancement which is a key aim of the project

FIGURE 1. Survey areas indicated by the red line above.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1: During the course of our Preliminary Ecological Assessment, we use two main methods of survey: field based and computer based. When conducting these surveys we ensure that we adhere to all guidelines set out by the appropriate expert bodies, including Natural England, the Bat Conservation Trust, The British Trust for Ornithology and the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust to name a few. In accordance with best practice, levels of wildlife disturbance caused when conducting these surveys are kept to an absolute minimum and appropriate biosecurity measures are assessed and put in place.

FIELD SURVEY

3.2: The field based survey consists of an initial walkover survey conducted over the proposed site to identify the presence of any protected species or habitats, as well as to identify any invasive species that may be present and any possible detrimental impacts on site that the proposed works may cause. Any ponds and watercourses within the immediate vicinity of the site would also be assessed for their value to protected species, and if deemed necessary a habitat suitability index would be carried out. Through this initial field based survey, the need for further species specific surveys would be confirmed and it would also be determined if any alternate biosecurity methods would be necessary for future site visits.

COMPUTER BASED SURVEY

3.3: The computer based survey is carried out using data sets from open source resources such as OpenStreetMap, the Ordnance Survey OpenData, the governmental open data download portal and the Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside web portal (MAGIC) which collates datasets from a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental organisations including DEFRA, Historic England, the RSPB, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency to name a few. Designated areas within the near vicinity of the site are important to know in case of any impact that may be caused through the planned future use of the site and any proposed works to take place. From this information, a landscape scale map is produced using geographical information services (GIS) software to illustrate and investigate the distances and geographical barriers between the site and the designated areas, in order to determine any potential impacts.

PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

3.4: Based on the habitats present, the site was assessed with particular regard to determining the presence or otherwise of badgers (*Meles meles*), bats, great crested newts (GCN) (*Triturus cristatus*), nesting birds, and reptiles. An overview of the survey methods used is outlined below.

Badgers: An assessment of the site and surrounding habitats (where access was available), with a focus on any areas of dense vegetation, was carried out in order to identify any evidence of badgers, including:

- the presence of any setts
- well-used runs/tracks
- supplementary evidence, such as hairs or prints
- badgers themselves

Any badger holes found during the survey were classified in accordance with standardised survey guidelines (Harris *et al.*, 1989), being grouped into setts, where applicable, and categorised in terms of the type of sett (in descending order of significance: main, annexe, subsidiary, outlier) and the level of use of each hole (well-used, partially-used, disused).

Bats:

A preliminary ground level roost assessment of any trees on or directly adjacent to the site was carried out in order to identify the presence of any potential roost features (PRFs)/PRFs for bats, such as split bark, woodpecker holes and other cavities for bats and/or evidence of roosting bats. All trees assessed were categorised in terms of their value in accordance with the current Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) survey guidelines (Collins, 2016), shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Guidelines for assessing bat roosting potential of structures and trees

Suitability	Habitat description	Further action required?
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.	No further bat risk assessment effort or bat activity surveys are required.
Low	A tree of sufficient size and age to contain PRFs, but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.	**Trees:** No further bat risk assessment effort or bat activity surveys are required.
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection conditions and surrounding habitat, but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.	Two bat activity surveys are required to determine whether the structure or tree is being utilised by roosting bats; this should be comprised of one dusk and one dawn survey. One survey must occur between May and August.
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.	Three bat activity surveys are required to determine whether the structure or tree is being utilised by roosting bats; this should be comprised of one dusk and one dawn survey, with an additional survey (either dusk or dawn). Two surveys must occur between May and August.

Evidence of roosting bats includes: bat droppings in, around or below an entrance hole; staining around an entrance hole; small scratches around an entrance hole;

audible squeaking at dusk or in warm weather; smoothening of surfaces around cavity or an entrance hole; distinctive smell of bats.

Great Crested Newts: An assessment of the habitats present on the site was carried out in order to determine their suitability to support GCN and any natural or artificial refugia (such as logs, stones, discarded building materials etc.) present were also lifted to check for the presence of GCN.

Nesting Birds: The habitats on site were assessed to determine their suitability for nesting, with a check carried out for the presence of any active nests or any evidence of nesting behaviour.

Reptiles: The assessment for reptiles followed a similar methodology to that for GCN, with an assessment of the habitats present carried out to determine their suitability to support reptiles, and with any refugia lifted to check for the presence of reptiles or evidence of reptiles, such as sloughs (shed skins).

Other Wildlife: In accordance with good practice, the site was checked for the presence of any other protected/notable species, with a regard to any other species highlighted in the desktop study.

Invasive Species: The site was also surveyed for the presence of any invasive, non-native flora or fauna.

4. RESULTS

4.1: The site was visited on 19th June 2020, by Principal Ecologist David Pollard BSc (Hons) MRSB, who was assisted in this commission by Senior Ecologist Sarah Woods BSc (Hons) MSc AMRSB. The weather conditions at the time of the field survey were drizzly, humid with a slight breeze and 100% cloud cover and as such were suitable for the walkover survey. There were no constraints with regards to access on the site, and all survey and biosecurity guidelines were adhered to. The results of the field and computer based study are as listed below.

ECOLOGICAL FEATURES ON SITE

4.2: There are two small, separate, and distinct development areas on the Stanley House site

4.3: The first area is an extension to the reception area/restaurant and is on a patch of short sward amenity grassland dominated by perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, Timothy *Phleum pratense* and common couch *Elymus repens.* Herb species recorded comprised primarily of patches of species such as white clover *Trifolium repens*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*. On the edges of site is a privet hedge *Ligustrum vulgare*, cut and managed. Also, within the development boundary are two mature trees a sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and an oak *Quercus robor* and a small patch of dense bramble scrub *Rubus fruiticosa*.

4.4: The second area is an extension to the accommodation block which entails another area of amenity grassland, dense bramble scrub, small birch trees Betula sp. and a beech dominated hedge *Fagus sylvatica*. The development area also encompasses a portion of one of the smaller car parks with rowan trees *Sorbus acuparia* and tall ruderals , hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*,

ECOLOGICAL FEATURES OFF SITE

4.5: The two development sites are within the larger hotel complex situated within a mixed agricultural landscape on the outskirts of Blackburn. Close to the second area is a large ornamental pond with a population of fish including sticklebacks *Gasterosteus aculeatus* which limits it's potential for GCN.

PROTECTED SPECIES ON SITE

BADGERS

4.6: Badgers are likely to use the gardens and close environs for foraging. There are no obvious setts in the close environs to the hedgerow and immediate woodland. Thus, badgers are not considered to be of material consideration in this development of this portion of land.

BATS

4.7: There is one particular mature oak tree within the development boundary that contain PRFs for bats. This will need further investigation prior to removal The hedgerows and the gardens across the whole of site have the potential to be a bat flight lines/foraging routes given the optimal foraging habitat close by and thus should be maintained and protected from light spill and noise disturbance.

BIRDS

4.8: The surrounding vegetation, hedgerows and mature trees offer numerous nesting opportunities for other common passerine species.

GREAT CRESTED NEWTS AND OTHER AMPHIBIANS

4.9: Common amphibians including GCN could utilise the peripheries of site for foraging purposes. They will not forage on the grazed short sward grassland. The presence of fish in the pond will be sub optimal for GCN.

REPTILES

4.10: The majority of the site is sub optimal for common reptiles due to short sward height of vegetation. It is possible that reptiles will utilise the hedgerows and woodlands for commuting and foraging

INVASIVE SPECIES ON SITE

4.11: No invasive species, as listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, were recorded on site at the time of survey. However grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*..

COMPUTER BASED STUDY OF SITE

4.12: The computer based study was carried out on a landscape wide scale, using open source GIS software to research and analyse any potential impacts to designated areas that may occur as a result of the planned works. The closest internationally designated site is the Ribble and Alt Estuaries Special Protected Area (SPA) at approximately 18 km to the west of the site. The nearest nationally designated site is Darwin River Sections Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which lies 2.73 km west of the site. Due to the distances involved and the intrinsic nature of this development will not impact these sites.

Designated area type	Site Name	Reference code	Reason for designation	Size (ha)	Distance from site (km)
Sites of Special Scientific Interest	Darwen River Section	1003969	Biological and Geological	6.34	2.73
Local Nature Reserves	Pleasington Old Hall	1421576	Biological	3.54	2.66
Ancient Woodland	Jeffrey Wood (N)	1102443	Ancient Replanted	41.11	0.41

Designated area type	Site Name	Reference code	Reason for designation	Size (ha)	Distance from site (km)
	Jeffrey Wood (S)	1102443	Ancient and Semi-Natural	40.13	1.26
	Hoolster Wood	1102439	Ancient and Semi-Natural	3.96	1.54
	Heatley Wood	1102437	Ancient and Semi-Natural	10.14	2.12
	Riverside Wood	1102431	Ancient and Semi-Natural	2.56	2.73
	Mammon Wood	1102473	Ancient and Semi-Natural	4.29	2.67
	Smith Fold Wood	1102457	Ancient and Semi-Natural	3.62	4.21
	Goose House Wood	1102458	Ancient and Semi-Natural	7.99	3.39
	Seed Park	1102295	Ancient Replanted	12.56	4.32
	Owlet Holes Wood	1102438	Ancient and Semi-Natural	13.37	4.35
	Mercyfield Woods	1102471	Ancient and Semi-Natural	20.98	3.64
	Flashers Wood	1102474	Ancient and Semi-Natural	20.99	3.31
	Old Park Wood	1102478	Ancient and Semi-Natural	58.06	3.51

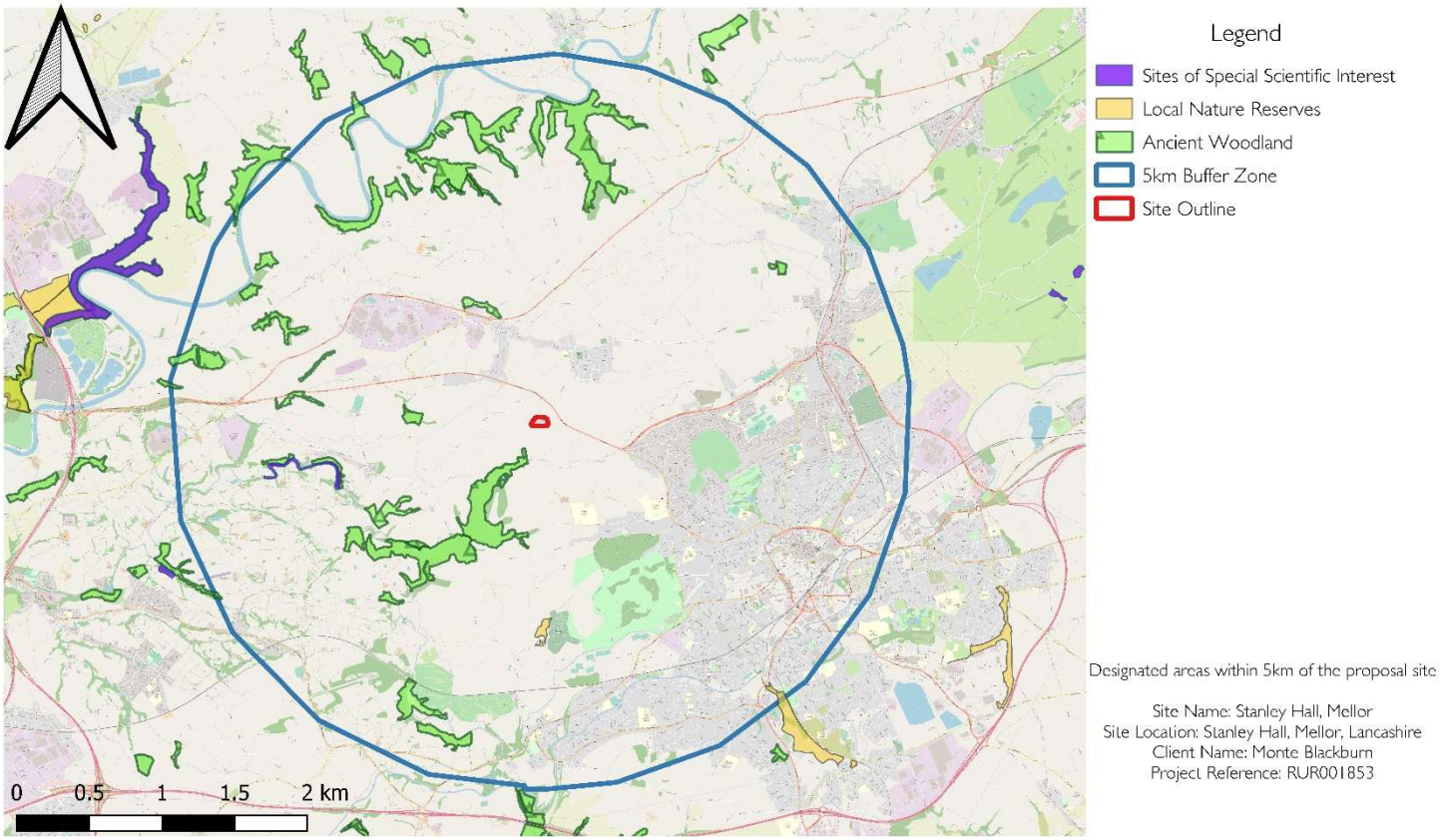

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Figure 2: The map above shows a 5km buffer around the proposed development site and any designated areas that fall within that area.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1: The surveyed areas lie within a mosaic of formal garden and a hotel complex and the proposed development area is of low ecological value apart from one large oak tree which offers a little more potential for diversity.

5.2: Based on the findings from the surveys carried out as part of this Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Rural Solutions Ltd would recommend the following:

MITIGATION

5.3: Nesting birds should not be disturbed between March 1st and August 31st. Inside the bird breeding season any vegetation removal should be done under ecological supervision by an ecological clerk of works.

5.4: The large oak tree with the PRF's will need further examination for bats prior to removal

5.5: Any of the large trees within the grounds that are close to any development proposals or associated infrastructure i.e. access corridor will need to be protected using Heras or equivalent fencing around their Root Protection Areas, in accordance with British Standard documentations BS 5837:2012 – 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.6: Badgers are known to be present throughout the area and due to them being a highly mobile species preconstruction checks are recommended.

5.7: If the proposal is to have external lighting it is recommended that a low-level lighting scheme should be adopted during and post-development in order to minimise disturbance to any nocturnal wildlife using the site, such as bats foraging along the site boundaries. For this to be achieved, some of the following elements should be considered:

- Position of lighting: proximity to the adjacent trees and hedgerow;
- Angle of lighting: avoidance of direct lighting and light spill onto areas of habitat that are of importance as commuting pathways (vegetation on the southern boundary);
- Type of lighting: studies have shown that light sources emitting higher amounts of UV light have a greater impact to wildlife. Use of narrow-spectrum bulbs that avoid white and blue wavelengths are likely to reduce the number of species impacted by the lighting;
- Reduce the height of lighting columns to avoid unnecessary light spill.

5.8: A full enhancement package will be issued in a Biodiversity and Landscape Enhancement Plan together with net gain calculations. It is recommended that consideration should be given to the following enhancements:

- Planting of an Orchard and planting up gaps in hedgerows with a diverse range of species providing fruit, nuts/seeds and nectar.
- The management of small woodland blocks within the wider land holding for the benefit of nature conservation.

5.9: Any landscaping planting should use native plant species that will enhance the ecological value of the site for local populations of invertebrates, birds, bats and small mammals.

5.10: Incorporation of bat access tiles or bat boxes within the design of the proposed new build will give an extra potential roosting resource for a number of common species of bat, improving biodiversity.

FURTHER SURVEYS

5.11: The only surveys that will be required at this point, are to investigate the oak tree for bats directly prior to it's removal. It is also recommended that if works creating the access are due to take place during bird nesting season (March-August) a nesting bird check is carried out beforehand by a competent and suitably qualified ecologist.

6. SITE IMAGES

Image 1 Area 1 showing amenity grassland and large oak tree

Image 2 Area 1 showing manicured privet hedge

Image 3 Large Oak tree with potential roosting features for bats

Image 4 Ornamental pond close to Area 2

Image 5 Part of Area 2 amenity grassland and beech hedge

Image 6 Car Park part of development Area 2

Image 7 Dense bramble scrub leading to woodland on periphery of development Area 2

7. REFERENCES

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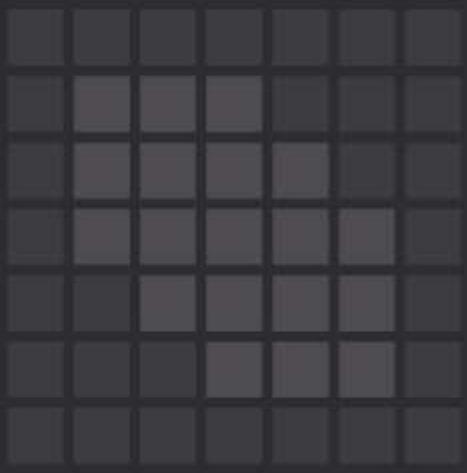

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