

Executive Summary

The Ecology Consultancy was commissioned by Conran and Partners to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of Meeching Down, Newhaven, East Sussex.

The main findings of the PEA are as follows:

- The majority of the site is subject to a non-statutory nature conservation designation - Meeching Down Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI). This designation is typically recognised as being of value up to a district level.
- The on-site woodland qualifies as a habitat of principal importance, however it is a poor example of its type. Although the on-site woodland and scrub were not intrinsically of high value, they represent a habitat type that is not very common in the district. They form part of the largest area of connected woodland and scrub habitats present in the parish.
- The site was considered to have high potential to support breeding birds and badger, moderate potential to support bats and low potential to support great crested newt, widespread reptiles and hazel dormouse. An invasive plant species was also confirmed as being present.
- The proposals for the site involve a loss of ecologically valuable habitats within a locally designated site, including habitats with potential to support protected species. In line with local planning policies any proposals to develop the site must demonstrate that the need for development clearly outweighs the potential harm caused, and/or that appropriate mitigation and compensation measures will be provided.
- It is recommended that the schemes architects work with the project ecologist to find ways in which the layout can be so designed as to minimise adverse effects on the SNCI, protected and/or notable species. These details should be captured within an Ecological Constraints and Opportunities Plan and accompanied with a detailed management plan. Any management plan should have the aim of enhancing the conservation value of retained habitats.
- If sufficient mitigation measures cannot be incorporated within the development, suitable provision for the loss of habitats should be made elsewhere in the locality.
- Recommended further survey work and mitigation measures for the site are as outlined below:
 - Depending on the final scheme layout a great crested newt survey may be required. As a minimum this would comprise a Habitat Suitability Index

- assessment (to be carried out at any time of year) with further survey work (if required) to be carried out between mid-March and June;
- A bat survey is required for the removal of woodland and trees. The tree assessment can be carried out at any time of year. If required this would be followed by up to three dusk emergence/dawn re-entry surveys to be carried out from May to August;
 - A badger survey is required. This can be carried out any time of year, but best carried out during the optimal period from February to April, or October;
 - A dormouse survey is required to eliminate any risk of an unexpected discovery of this species on-site. This should be carried out between April and November;
 - Clearance of vegetation with potential to support breeding birds and reptiles should be undertaken by the method outlined in Section 5 of this report and guided by the results of the further survey work;
 - should the presence of any other protected species be confirmed or suspected during works, these must cease immediately and the advice of an ecologist sought; and
 - all mature trees should be retained on site and protected in accordance with British Standard 5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction.
- There are opportunities to compensate for the loss of habitats and to enhance the biodiversity value of the site. These are described in detail in Section 5 of this report and include the removal of invasive species, woodland management, creation of log piles, inclusion of Sustainable Drainage Systems, landscape planting of wildlife value and bird boxes.