

Summary of Ecological, Archaeological and Agricultural Investigations



Land at Sandy Lane, North Milverton
April 2016

ECOLOGY

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was carried out by CSA Environmental in March 2016 to update earlier survey work and to identify ecological constraints and opportunities. This included an extended Phase 1 Habitat survey and a new desktop study to identify designated wildlife sites and biological records. The site comprises a number of arable fields with grassland margins, bounded by hedgerows with mature trees. Two ponds, a brook, seasonal ditches and woodland are also present, creating some diversity in parts of this largely arable site.

The desk study identified an ungraded grassland Ecosite, Grassland to the rear of Northumberland Road, adjacent to the south-eastern boundary of the site, an area which falls within the draft site allocation plan. However, no part of the land promoted by Taylor Wimpey supports any nature conservation designation. The desktop study returned a number of records of uncommon plants from the search area, but these have not so far been found onsite.

Further surveys will be required to gain up to date information on presence/absence of various protected species. However, a suite of surveys completed in 2009 provide useful background information. Surveys in 2009 found three bat species using features within the area such as hedgerows and tree lines to forage. Bat roost records are present nearby and there is potential for bat roosting within mature trees at the Site. Badgers are recorded to be active within the site, and one substantial sett occurs, with a number of smaller outlying setts also present. Several water vole and otter records were returned for the River Avon to the north and west, and the potential for both species to pass through the small brook in the north of the site will need further investigation, although resident populations are unlikely.

Reptiles records occur locally and grass snakes have previously been seen onsite; rough habitats at site margins and near ponds and ditches afford the best potential for reptiles. There are great crested newt records in close proximity to the site and previous surveys in 2009 identified a medium population in an onsite pond close to the allotments and in the immediate and wider vicinity. It is anticipated that parts of the Site provide dispersal and/or foraging areas for great crested newts. There is not thought likely to be any notable assemblage of invertebrates or birds.

Great crested newts and badgers will provide certain constraints to development but only in so far as they must be carefully considered within the masterplanning of the site. With appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures, no over-riding constraints to development are identified.

ARCHAEOLOGY

An assessment of the potential archaeological resource within the field onsite was carried out in April 2016 to inform on the archaeological implications of proposed development. This included consultation of publicly available archaeological and historical information from documentary, cartographic and aerial photographic resources.

No previous archaeological investigations have been carried out within the site and those in the vicinity have been very limited. The north-eastern end of a former 19th century rifle range lies within the site and is presently flanked by hedgerows. This is of only low archaeological significance and more of a historic landscape feature, the south-western end of which has been lost to development. There are sporadic findspots of prehistoric flintwork around the site and updated cropmarks are also recorded to the west and north. Roman pottery has also been found c. 400m north.

Study of historic maps shows that most of the hedgerows within the site which were present in 1853 have since been lost; most of those that remain today are the product of mid-19th century field enclosure. Aerial photographs dating back to 1946 identified the presence of ridge and furrow earthworks of potential medieval date in the south-eastern corner of the site; these have now been ploughed out.

The investigation identified the site to be partly bounded to the south-east by the Royal Leamington Spa Conservation Area. Although the setting of this designation will need to be taken into account, development within the site is unlikely to result in significant harm to this designation. No other setting issues on designated heritage assets are anticipated.

It is concluded that given the lack of archaeological works in the area, the size of the development site and the presence of flintwork and cropmarks in the vicinity, further consultation would be appropriate with the Planning Archaeologist at Warwickshire Council to discuss the scope for pre-determination surveys.

AGRICULTURAL

A detailed assessment of agricultural quality and local farming circumstances in connection with land proposed for development was carried out in April 2016. This includes considering the quality of agricultural land in a national, regional and local context and provides an assessment of likely 'opportunities and constraints' associated with proposed development in agricultural land quality terms.

The findings of the investigation determined that much of the Site is underlain by mudstone of the Mercia Mudstone Group. The deep, well drained (Wetness Class I), permeable, sandy loams or sandy silty loams are predicted to be limited by soil droughtiness to Grade 2. A detailed post 1988 ALC survey of the Site carried out by MAFF in 1995 determined much of the site to be limited by soil droughtiness to Subgrade 3a, with a large central area and smaller area to the north-east limited by soil wetness to Grade 2. A small area in the south-west is limited by soil wetness to Subgrade 3b.

MAFF post 1988 surveys have determined there is a high likelihood of encountering ALC Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a agricultural land to the south and east of Royal Leamington Spa, with some Grade 1 to the south-west of the town. Therefore, the occurrence of ALC Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a at the site is unsurprising, as this quality of agricultural land is widespread around the urban edge of Leamington Spa. In this context, the loss of agricultural land of this grading will not significantly harm national agricultural interests, in terms of paragraph 112 of the NPPF (2012).