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Date: 19<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

Colin Henry  
Hampshire County Council  
Three Minsters House  
76 High Street  
Winchester  
SO23 8UL

Dear Colin,

### **WEEKE PRIMARY SCHOOL, WINCHESTER – ECOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT**

RPS was commissioned by Hampshire County Council to undertake a detailed bat and pond survey of Weeke Primary School, Winchester, Hampshire. Habitats within the proposed development area were also assessed for their ability to support further legally protected or otherwise notable species.

Proposals for development include the construction of several new school buildings to accommodate new classrooms and re-furbishment of an existing classroom. Five new car parking spaces will also be constructed on an area of grassland in the north-east corner of the site. The survey was commissioned to assess the buildings and trees due to be affected for their suitability to support roosting bats and assess habitat on site for its suitability to support Great Crested Newts (GCN).

#### **Survey Methodology**

The site survey involved a suitably qualified ecologist externally inspecting the buildings and trees using binoculars and a high powered torch to look for features, such as loose roof tiles and flaking bark, suitable for use by bats. Internal inspection of the buildings was not possible due to the presence of asbestos. Details are given of the areas of the site currently proposed to be modified, with reference to other sections, where relevant.

A Habitat Suitability Assessment was also carried out to assess the pond on site for its suitability to support GCN. This is a means of evaluating habitat quality and uses a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) to give the pond a numerical score between 0 and 1, where 0 indicates sub-optimal habitat and 1 indicates optimal habitat. It is based on a range of criteria such as size of pond, prevalence of suitable terrestrial habitat in the area, aquatic vegetation cover etc. The HSI score is then used to define the suitability of the pond to support GCN. The system is not precise enough to allow the conclusion that a pond with a high score will support GCN, or that those with a low score will not but is used as an indication of potential likelihood of presence/absence.



## Results and Recommendations

### *The site*

The site consisted of several inter-connected buildings (see Figure 1). These were brick built, some being one storey in height and some being two storeys, and were a mixture of flat, felted roofs and pitched, tiled roofs. These buildings were connected at the ground floor but were separated on the first floor level and therefore had separate loft spaces. Two detached temporary classroom buildings were also present to the south-west of the site. These were one storey in height with pitched felt roofs, but no separate loft spaces.

A number of lifted roof tiles were present on the main school buildings that were considered suitable for roosting bats, particularly on those buildings to the south-western, south-eastern and north-eastern sides of the site (see Target Notes 1 – 3, on Figure 1). Access into the loft spaces of these buildings to check for evidence of roosting bats was not possible at the time of survey because of the known presence of asbestos.

A number of mature and semi-mature trees were scattered around the site boundary and to the south of the buildings. Two semi-mature English Oak *Quercus robur* trees and one standing dead tree were present in the north-east corner of the site (see Target Note 4). These had Ivy *Hedera helix* growing up them, and the standing dead tree had a broken branch hanging off. These were considered suitable to support a low number of roosting bats.

A vegetated bank was adjacent to the southern and western sides of the temporary classrooms. This was overgrown with ruderal species, including Dock and Ivy and was considered to be suitable habitat for reptiles. However, beyond this area was short mown amenity grassland, making this bank very isolated. Due to this and the fact that it covered a small area, it was not considered likely to support a significant population of reptiles.

A pond was present to the south-east of the main school buildings, approximately 67 meters from the proposed development area (see Target Note 5). This was surrounded by rough grassland and supported submerged and emergent vegetation. The pond had a HSI index score of 0.6 which indicates good, although not optimum, habitat for GCN.

### *Ecological constraints*

The survey suggests that there are three potential ecological constraints to the development on site:

- Bats;
- Breeding birds; and
- Reptiles.

Three of the main school buildings had gaps around the roof tiles which offered suitable access for roosting bats. These are being retained unmodified in the current scheme at the present date (HCC P9891 121129 Weeke School GA Plan) since the new building is to be built perpendicular to Building 1 on Figure 1 (i.e. opposite the gable end of this building). Therefore, the potential roost access points on the other

elevations will not be altered. However, should this not be the case in the future, recommendations are made below to fully account for the potential presence of bats on site.

Three trees in the north-east corner of the site had Ivy growing over them, and one had a split branch. These were considered suitable to support a low number of roosting bats. These trees are due to be retained in the current scheme. However, should they be considered for removal or if lighting were proposed adjacent to them at a later date further advice should be sought.

Trees and hedges on site provide suitable habitat for nesting birds. Several trees to the west of the main school buildings are due to be felled.

Ruderal vegetation on the bank to the south and west of the temporary classrooms was not considered suitable to support a significant population of reptiles, being small and isolated. However, it is possible that a small number of reptiles may be present. This area is due to be cleared. Therefore as a precautionary approach, recommendations are made below to sensitively clear the area to minimise disturbance to any reptiles if present.

Although the pond does offer suitable habitat for GCN, the pond is not due to be affected by the proposed works, and there is no connecting habitat between these areas and the pond. Therefore, it is considered unlikely that GCN pose a constraint to the proposed development of the site.

No other ecological constraints were identified.

### *Recommendations*

The buildings on site had suitable features present to support roosting bats but such features are due to be retained in the current scheme. Therefore, no further work is required. However, as internal access into loft spaces was not possible due to asbestos, it is recommended that, if the scheme changes such that these potential access points are altered in any way (either obstruction or lighting, for example), emergence surveys be carried out at a suitable time of year in order to determine the presence or likely absence of roosting bats. This would involve suitably experienced ecologists watching the south-western most building after sunset for emerging bats. Three visits should be undertaken with surveys ideally spread over as long a period as possible during the season when bats are active (May to October).

Trees and hedges on site provide suitable habitat for nesting birds. All birds and their nests are protected by law. Any vegetation clearance should be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season (generally March – September). Where this is not possible areas to be cleared should be checked by an experienced ornithologist before removal and if breeding birds are identified, the area would be left until breeding has ceased.

Vegetation on the earth bank adjacent to the temporary classrooms should be trimmed in two stages, working in a westerly direction to encourage any reptiles present to move away from the area of their own accord. The vegetation should first be trimmed to a height of 15 cm and then cut to ground level the following day. The



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vegetation clearance should be carried out at an appropriate time of year when reptiles are mobile (April to September in good weather conditions).

#### *Potential Enhancements*

Bird nest boxes and bat roost boxes could be incorporated onto the exterior of the buildings, incorporated into the brickwork of the new building or attached to any retained mature trees on site to provide additional nesting/roosting habitat. These should be in locations where they cannot be tampered with (under the eaves, for example).

#### Conclusions

Bats, breeding birds and reptiles were identified as potential ecological constraints to the proposed development on site, although no further surveys are required under the current scheme. Further surveys are recommended for bats if the potential roost access points identified were to become affected in future iterations of the design.

If you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely  
for RPS

**Dr Nicholas Betson CEnv MIEEM**  
**Principal Ecologist**

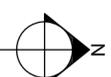


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**Key**

 Survey boundary

 Target Note refer to RPS Ecological Survey Report for details



Rev	Description	Date	Initial	Checked



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Winchester**

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