

Sally Waights
Chairman
Community Playcentre Walburton
Hollytree Cottage,
The Street,
Walberton,
BN18 0PH



20th October 2014

Dear Sally

Land to the north of Walburton Village Hall – Poplar Removal
Discharge of Condition 7 of Permission WA/75/12

Many thanks for instructing PJC to undertake an endoscopic tree survey and assessment of the poplar which is due for removal for the approved community play centre scheme. Furthermore, PJC undertook a site assessment with regards to the ecological value of the site.

The poplar has been previously identified as having some potential for supporting roosting bats due to the presence of ivy covering on the main trunk as several holes located within the structure. The initial assessment of the tree was undertaken in 2011 by Lizard Landscape, which recommended that further surveys on this poplar were undertaken prior to removal. As such this was conditioned as part of the permission:

Condition 7 Permission WA/75/12

'No development, or tree felling shall take place until details indicating how suitable provision will be made for bats'/owls' habitats contained within an updated Ecological and Phase 1 Habitat Survey have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority and such habitats shall be secured/provided before development commences and thereafter maintained to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.'

As such PJC were instructed to undertake a further assessment of the poplar. The location of the poplar within the wider landscape is shown in figure 1.



Figure 1: Location of poplar which is required for removal identified in red

Methodology

PJC re surveyed this tree to assess its potential to support roosting bats. Roosts of bats in trees may be identified from the following field signs:

- Black stains beneath cracks, splits and other features where bat dropping have fallen;
- Dark marks at entrance points where bats have rubbed against the wood and left natural body oils;
- Feeding remains beneath roosts, such as insect wings;
- Chattering of bats;
- Bat droppings under access points;
- Scratch marks around a feature (cavity or split) caused by bat claws;
- Urine stains below the entrance or end of split;

- Large roosts or regularly used sites may produce an odour;
- Flies around the entrance, attracted by the smell of guano.

Veteran trees typically exhibit many of these features and should usually be regarded as sites with clear potential, but any tree, which possesses one or more such feature, may host bats. Any tree species can be suitable but oak and beech often seems to be the preferred option. However, bats rarely restrict themselves to one tree.

The poplar was re assessed for features that increase the likelihood such as the following:

- Woodpecker holes, natural cracks and rot holes in trunks and branches;
- Frost cracks;
- Trunk and branch splits;
- Hollow sections of trunk and branches;
- Loose bark;
- Cavities beneath old root buttresses and coppice stools;
- Dense epicormic growth
- Dense ivy cover.

Finally, the tree was climbed by bat licence holder Richard Law CLS 001058, with Alexia Tamblyn bat licence holder CLS 0138 also present.

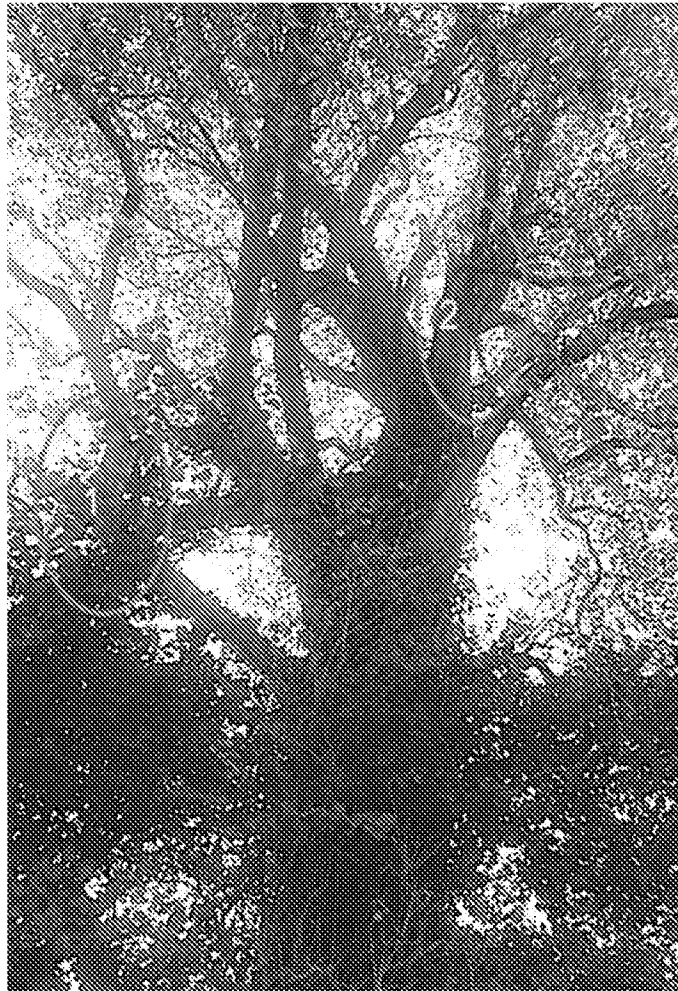
The poplar was climbed with each of the holes identified being surveyed with the use of an endoscope.

Finally the site was re assessed for its potential to support a range of other protected species and the habitats on site were assessed for their potential to be classified as BAP habitats or habitats which are considered to be of significant ecological value.

It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive description of the site, no single investigation could ensure the complete characterisation and prediction of the natural environment.

Results

The poplar supported two areas which were identified as supporting some potential for bats. These are shown in the photo below.

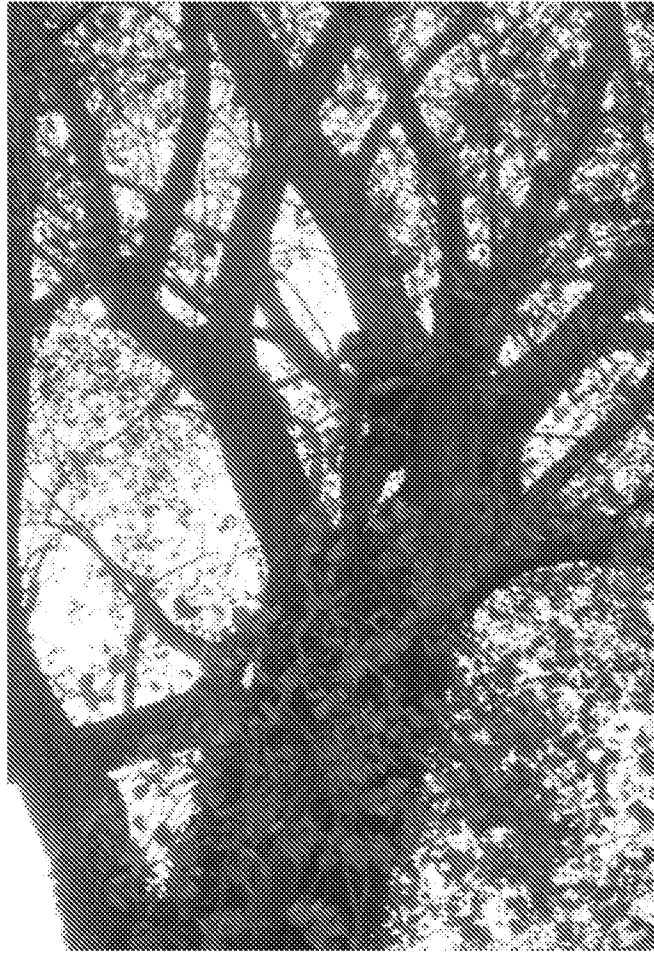


The limb present on the southern aspect of the tree (shown as area 1) was identified as only being superficial, with no significant hole or crevices which bats could exploit. Additionally, this area was exposed, allowing water to penetrate into the wound, making it unsuitable for roosting bats. This section of the tree was not considered likely to support a bat roost.

A section of dead wood above the main trunk, shown as area 2, supported 3 holes within the structure, one seemingly made by a woodpecker.



These holes were considered to have some potential for bats, as they were not exposed to water ingress. This section was investigated with no evidence of droppings, scratch marks, or other evidence of bats being noted around the edges of the hole. An endoscope was used to assess the internal environment. The hole extended through the limb from the base of the limb, providing opportunities for roosting bats. However, on internal investigation, no bats and no evidence of bats was recorded inside the hole.



Ivy was present on the main trunks, however, the ivy covering was not thick or dense, and on closer investigation did not cover any holes or cracks which could be exploited by bats. The main trunk of the tree was not considered to provide significant features associated with bats.

The site was re assessed for its ecological value and was re assessed against the baseline survey undertaken by Lizard Landscape in 2011.

The footprint of the proposed development lies almost entirely on semi improved grassland, which is of short sward height, well maintained, supporting limited diversity. The grassland is mostly comprised of perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*) with occasional herbs such as dandelions (*Taraxacum officinalis*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and white clover (*Trifolium repens*).

The western edge, a defunct hedgerow where the polar is located, supports ivy (*Hedera helix*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and nettles (*Urtica dioica*).

No evidence of protected species, such as badgers, using the area were identified. The habitats present were not considered suitable for species such as common reptiles or amphibians. Breeding birds are likely to use scrub and trees for nesting.

No opportunities for owls were noted. The habitats were considered to be limited in terms of foraging bats, due to the lack of significant tree lines or hedgerows within the site boundaries. Poor semi improved grassland, which is well maintained, is considered to be sub optimal for invertebrates and therefore for bats.

Discussion

This tree is required to be felled to enable the construction of a community play centre. Permission has been granted, subject to condition 7, which requires an update survey and assessment of the tree in relation to bats and owls. Condition 7 also requires an update ecological assessment of the site prior to works. It is considered that this letter of report addresses any requirements within condition 7 and that submission of this report will allow its discharge.

The tree did not support suitable features to support nesting/roosting owls. The tree is not considered to be constrained by this species. Furthermore, no old birds nests were recorded during the survey.

The tree did support one limb which supported 3 holes. None of these holes supported any external evidence of roosting bats, such as staining or scratch marks during the climbing assessment. Furthermore, no internal evidence of bats was recorded.

Bats can use trees in a highly transient way, moving from roosting sites to seek out small changes in humidity and temperature. As such, it can be difficult to identify some bat roosts. However, significant roosts, roosts which are likely to be used as maternity roosts, or long term roosts, are likely to support some external evidence, even if droppings have been washed away. Features such as the smoothing of the bark around the entrance hole, or indeed the smell, are signs that the roost would be considered significant and in often use.

As no evidence of bats was found, it is considered unlikely that the tree supports a significant bat roost, if indeed a roost at all. However, as bats can move between trees and have the potential to use holes on a temporary basis it is recommended that a precautionary approach to works is undertaken to ensure that in the unlikely event of a bat being present it would not be harmed by the process.

It is recommended that the tree is climbed and the limb which supports the 3 holes is removed gently and in one section prior to any additional works following the standard protocol:

- The limb of the tree should be felled in one section and limb carefully lowered to the ground. Cuts should be made at least 50cm from the potential roost feature.
- This limb should be gently removed to a location which will be safe from any further felling activity of the tree.
- This limb should then be left for several days in this location.
- The wood from the limb should be stacked as habitat piles where possible.

The remaining limbs did not support bat friendly features and can be removed without following the approach above. However, it is expected that due to the location of the tree that sensitive working practices are likely to be required.

Should any bats be encountered during the felling operations all works and activity must cease immediately and a licensed/experienced bat worker contacted to advise on the most appropriate manner to deal with the situation.

The site and the surrounding habitats are considered to be common and widespread and are considered to be of limited ecological value. The grassland is of short sward and is well maintained. The regular maintenance of the grassland, its lack of structure and species diversity limits its potential to support a range of species, such as common reptiles and amphibians. As such the site is not considered to be constrained by such species. Furthermore, no evidence of the site being in use by badgers was recorded and no further surveys are recommended.

It is recommended that the tree should be felled outside nesting bird season, so the felling of the tree does not conflict with any active birds nests that may be present in the scrub habitat.

It is considered that the proposals for the site, including the felling of the poplar, will not affect the nature conservation value of the site or indeed the wider landscape, due to the nature and extent of the proposals and the habitats which are to be affected.

It is always recommended where possible enhancements for wildlife are provided. As this site is to become a community play area, there are opportunities for local children to become involved, and ecological enhancements, such as the creation of bird baths or bird feeders, would provide a focus for these enhancements.

Conclusions

Planning permission has been granted for the construction of a community play centre to the north of the village hall in Walburton. As such one tree, a large poplar, will have to be removed to enable the development.

Condition 7 requires an updated survey to ensure that protected species and the habitats on site have been characterised. This letter of report is considered to be sufficient to discharge condition 7.

The sites habitats are common and widespread and considered to be of limited ecological value. The poor semi improved grassland and same amount of scrub present, is limited in diversity and structure and does not offer opportunities for protected species. Nesting birds, however, should be considered.

It is considered that the poplar does not support an active bat roost. No evidence of bats externally or internally, was recorded during the investigation, and it is considered unlikely that bats would be affected by the felling of the tree. However, as a precaution, it is recommended that the one limb with the three holes, is removed and lowered gently to ensure that in the unlikely event of a bat being found it will not be harmed.

The site does not support habitats suitable for owls, reptiles or common amphibians or indeed badgers and the site is not considered to be constrained by these species. No further surveys are recommended and it is considered that the proposal can proceed without the need for further ecological input.

I trust this letter of report provides you with the information that is required to satisfy condition 7. However, if you require any further information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area. A small, faint, curved line is visible above the box, likely a remnant of a signature or a stray mark.

Alexia Tamblyn MA (Oxon) MSc CEnv MCIEEM FRGS
Managing Director