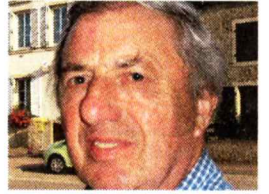


Horsham Society

with David Griffiths



Protecting wildlife on developments

Nowadays ecology plays an extremely important role in the construction process of commercial and residential developments. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was introduced to protect uncommon and/or vulnerable wildlife species that occur in England.

These include various species of birds, bats, snakes, slow worms, great crested newts, freshwater crayfish and harvest mice, for example. Developers and contractors are liable to sizeable fines if they contravene these regulations.

During the early stages of any development, and prior to the construction process starting, the contractor must undertake a wildlife survey of the entire development area. Any such requirement to carry out a survey would normally be written into any planning approval, which has been issued by the Local Authority. The survey must be carried out by a professional ecologist.

If for example the survey indicates the presence of great crested newts or snakes, additional measures have to be undertaken to clear the development area. This involves



Bats are protected under the Countryside and Wildlife Act.

the construction of a continuous exclusion fence around the development area, using black polythene about 600 mm high and with the lower edge sunk into the ground.

Many of you will have seen similar fences on the West of Horsham development. The area within the fence is then carefully cleared of any amphibians/reptiles. The process can only be carried out by a

licensed ecologist at certain times of the year and the process takes a number of months to complete. Any reptiles captured are relocated to another area which may be 'off site' and which has to be agreed in advance with the Local Authority.

There are approximately 17 species of bat known to be breeding in the UK, one of which is the Pipistrelle and common to our area. All are protected under the Countryside and Wildlife Act 1981, and additionally under European legislation.

Bats have at least two roosting habitats, one for use in summer which is often a roost in trees and the other in winter which can be in caves or buildings.

It is therefore essential that any survey works are carried out methodically and any roosts recorded. If roosts are noted in trees, ideally they should be retained and incorporated into the development. If this is not practical, by negotiation it is possible to replace the trees with artificial bat roosts, such as bat boxes.

Some residential developments have incorporated a bat roost into the roof area of a garage building. However, any alterations to known roosts will require a development licence issued from Natural

England.

Nesting birds can be a major concern. Should the survey reveal evidence of bird activity in any existing built structures, hedgerows or trees on the development site that require removal, the contractor will be unable to remove these until breeding has finished. The nesting season runs between February and August and should therefore be avoided wherever possible.

Ground nesting birds, such as the Skylark or Lapwing create another problem. If there is no suitable area for them near the development site, the developer/contractor must make provision within the scheme, by setting aside an area of land.

Whilst the developer or contractor employs the ecologist, the role is independent and the ecologist may report any regulation contraventions.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 259038.