

ECOLOGY SURVEY REPORT

Land off Heron Hill Lane, Culverstone Valley, Kent DA13 0DT

**Application for a material change of use of land to Gypsy Traveller site with 3 pitches each with space for stationing of a static caravan, utility block with associated hard standing for parking, with shared septic tank and shared storage of touring caravans (part retrospective)
Mr R Webb**

MAY 2022



The Council has requested an Ecology Survey Report in support of this application. However, as noted in the Planning Statement the application is submitted retrospectively and habitat on the site was cleared prior to planning consent being granted. Any study now completed can not record what was on the land before it was cleared. However submitted with the application is a photo of the land when it was sold and this confirms that it was a mixture of semi mature trees on the lower ground adjacent to the track with more open grassland on the slope leading up to the woodland edge.



An Ecological Report was prepared February 2018 for land nearby off Heron Hill Lane at the start of the track leading to this site. As with this application the land had already been cleared. But it provides helpful background information to the area.

Ground that is mostly undisturbed on adjoining land also provides a good indication of the likely habitat prior to clearance.

This is an area of plotlands served by private roads and public rights of way. There is much human activity in the area associated with residential properties, small holdings/ farms and use of the tracks. Local wildlife will be used to human activity.

The application site in its present state is composed of a thin layer of bare earth and exposed chalk/ flint bedrock and is of low ecological value. Most of the site clearance took place during the winter months. A couple of semimature trees remain on the site boundary. The site is sloping ground which drops approximately 11m from 147m AOD at the edge of the woodland to 136m AOD at the track. There was a very thin layer of soil over existing bedrock especially on the upper levels.

To the east is natural woodland where birch/ silver birch is dominant with evidence of hazel coppicing . To the north are adjoining plots with some chalk grassland used to graze horses, some evergreen planting, some regenerating scrub/ woodland and evidence of other uses including storage of cut timber. To the south is scrub land with evidence of cleared ground and gabion structures at lower levels. Beyond this the land is more open, comprising mostly chalk grassland as part of a small farm holding with some woodland.

To the west is the access track. On the other side of the track are areas of enclosed paddock/ chalk grassland used for the grazing of animals/ chickens with various outbuildings/ polytunnels/ pig arcs and caravans, enclosed along the access track with non native hedgerows. Further down the track there are a couple of plots with houses/ caravan sites.

When the site was surveyed in March 2022 there was much evidence of scrub vegetation on the adjoining land including brambles, hawthorn, hazel, wild garlic, ivy, thistles, self seeded buddleia with wild primroses, hairy violet and daffodils, wiry sheep fescue and wild thyme on the more open paddock areas. In addition there was evidence of evergreen shrubs (eg laurel), leylandii hedges and fir trees on parts of plots.

There are no Tree Preservation Orders on the site or on adjoining land.

The site is not within nor does it adjoin any area of Ancient Woodland.

There are no water bodies (ponds or streams) on the site or on adjoining land.

The 2018 report for a nearby site confirmed that there were no records of protected species on the site/ immediate area. This was not challenged by Kent Wildlife Trust in their comments on that application or in representations by the Council to the Planning Appeal.

I attach Photos of site in March 2022 at Appendix A

As the ground has been cleared with bed rock exposed in parts there is no potential for nesting birds, bat roosting, badgers, hazel dormice, reptiles or Great Crested Newts on the actual site and no potential for any impact by the proposed development.

The use of adjoining land and photo of the site prior to clearance would tend to suggest that a small amount of regenerating woodland with young semi/ mature trees and scrub has been cleared mostly next to the track together with some chalk grassland on the upper slope. There has been some damage to the woodland edge to the east where the ground has been excavated but this could be mitigated with suitable landscaping/ restoration of the bank along the eastern edge of the site. Evidence of tree felling in this area predated the site clearance. The adjoining woodland and regenerating grassland area would allow wildlife to move around the site where cover is still provided. External lighting could be controlled with appropriate conditions.

Appendix A Photos of site and adjoining land March 2022

- a) Cleared site looking east towards woodland
- b) Plots to north showing grazing land with some scattered trees on lower ground
- c) Land to south with cleared ground and gabions
- d) Plot on opposite side of track showing paddock area
- e) Plots on opposite side of the track showing small holding with various animal shelters etc
- f) More domestic plots on other side of track

A.Cleared site looking to woodland



B) Adjoining land to north with horse grazing



C). Adjoining land to south



D). Paddock on the opposite side of track with regenerating woodland



E) small holding on west side of track



f) Domestic plots on west side of track



Gravesham Borough