



Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Site Location : Proposed outbuilding and ground mounted solar panels at
Elmlands, Little Hill Road, Hurst, RG10 0TG

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Introduction

1.1 EDM Planning-Ecology has been commissioned by Mr. Ben Williams on behalf of Mr. Stuart Williams to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) within the site known as Elmlands.

The appraisal establishes an ecological baseline through a UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) survey, broadly equivalent to an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey, with habitats recorded using UKHab and an assessment of potential for protected and notable species. The purpose is to identify, map, and characterise existing habitat types within the defined survey boundary.

The findings presented in this report are intended to inform a planning application submitted to Wokingham Borough Council.

The appraisal has been prepared in accordance with current best practice guidance, including the *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal* (CIEEM,

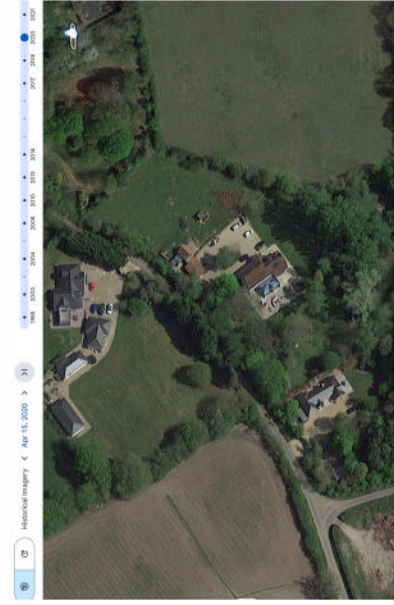
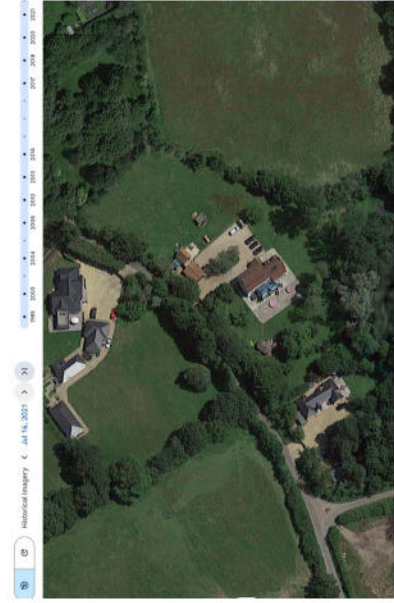
2017) and *BS 42020:2013 – Biodiversity: Code of Practice for Planning and Development*.

A desk study was conducted to support the field survey data and to identify any additional potential ecological constraints, including areas designated for nature conservation.

Information from the NBN Atlas and DEFRA's Magic Map was used to locate both statutory and non-statutory designated sites, as well as habitats of principal importance. Additionally, aerial imagery from Google Earth Pro was reviewed to provide context for the site and assess its connectivity with surrounding habitats.

Site History

2.1 A review of Wokingham Council's online planning register identified several planning applications relating directly to the Site. The site has seen a series of approved expansions over the years, namely; 252662, 222110, 210778, 121390, 021676, 990495 and 981397.

	Site 2020
	Site 2021

	
Site 2022	Site 2025
	
Site 2026	

The Proposal

3.1 The application seeks the erection of an outbuilding with associated ground mounted solar panels.



Desk Study

4.1 A desk-based review was undertaken to gather baseline ecological information relevant to the site and its surrounding area. This includes designated sites, habitats of principal importance, and records of protected and notable species. The purpose of the desk study is to inform the scope of the field survey, highlight potential ecological constraints, and guide recommendations for further assessment and mitigation.

4.2 The following sources were consulted as part of the desk study:

- **MAGIC (DEFRA)/ Natural England Open Data Geoportal (DEFRA):**
Used to identify statutory nature conservation sites, Priority Habitats, ancient woodland, non-statutory ecological designations where available, and relevant European Protected Species licence records. Protected and notable species records were reviewed within 2 km of the Site, while statutory and

internationally designated sites were considered over a wider area where relevant to planning policy, impact pathways or ecological connectivity.

- **NBN Atlas (LERC):** To obtain records of protected and notable species, and species-rich habitats.
- **Google Earth Pro:** For the interpretation of aerial imagery to assess landscape features, habitat connectivity, and land-use patterns.
- **Wokingham Borough Council Planning Policies and Constraints Map:** Consulted to determine the site-specific ecological policies, non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), spatial planning designations, and environmental constraints that apply to the proposed development at Elmlands.

4.3 A summary of designated sites within the search area:

Statutory and Non-Statutory Designated Sites				
Site Name	Designation	Approx Distance from Site	Direction	Summary
Lavels Lake	LNR	950m	NW	Lake and wetland reserve forming part of the Dinton Pastures area, supporting reedbeds, sedges, grassland, coppiced scrub, hedgerows and the River Loddon along the western boundary.
Lodge Wood & Sandford Mill	SSSI	2.1 km	NW	Two small wet woodland blocks beside the River Loddon, notable for floodplain woodland habitat and a significant population of Loddon Lily.
Holt Copse & Joel Park	LNR	2.6 km	SE	Local Nature Reserve comprising ancient semi-natural woodland and parkland habitat, managed for public access and nature conservation.
Alder Moors	LNR	2.9 km	NW	Ancient woodland reserve in a shallow valley, characterised by alder woodland and connected pedestrian routes through adjacent greenspace.
Malden Eriegh Park	LNR	3.7 km	W	Approximately 12 ha Local Nature Reserve comprising woodland, lake and parkland habitats, managed by Earley Town Council

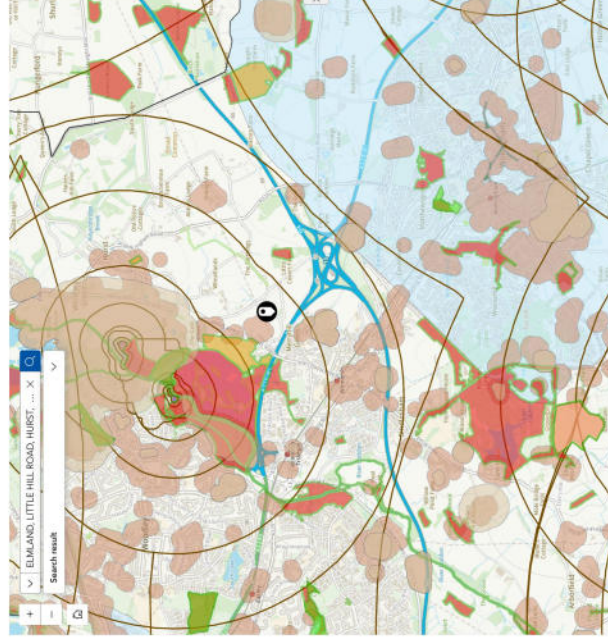
Statutory and Non-Statutory Designated Sites

Site Name	Designation	Approx Distance from Site	Direction	Summary
High Wood	LNR	3.9 km	W	Mixed lowland woodland with an area of heathland, located within the urban edge of Woodley and managed for public access and biodiversity.
Ali's Pond	LNR	5.0 km	NW	Small pond-based Local Nature Reserve in Sonning, with ponds, paths, amphibian breeding habitat, log/brushwood piles and native hedgerow planting.
Pearman's Copse	LNR	5.8 km	SW	Small ancient woodland in Lower Earley, supporting ash, hazel and oak with boundary banks, ditches and associated community woodland.
Farley Copse	LNR	6.0 km	E	Broadleaved woodland, largely ancient woodland, supporting woodland wildlife and associated pond habitat within the Binfield area.
Longmoor Bog	SSSI	6.3 km	S	Wetland and woodland SSSI comprising carr woodland, wet heath, secondary woodland and a small stream, supporting notable bog and wet-heath invertebrates.
Wykery Copse	SSSI	6.7 km	SE	Ancient semi-natural woodland SSSI with wet ash-maple, valley and base-rich alder

Statutory and Non-Statutory Designated Sites

Site Name	Designation	Approx Distance from Site	Direction	Summary
Heath Lake	SSSI	7.4 km	SE	woodland, and oak, birch and hazel woodland types. Lowland acid lake SSSI with nutrient-poor waters, peaty/marshy margins, woodland, dry heath and acid grassland habitats.

Local Designated Sites:



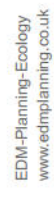
Local Interactive Map

4.4 Priority Habitats and Features

- Priority habitats identified within the wider area via MAGIC include Deciduous woodland and Traditional orchard.

There is a newly planted Traditional Orchard on the East of the site which is included as part of this proposal.

Priority Habitats		
Site Name	Approx Distance from Site	Direction
Newly Planted Traditional Orchard	0-2m	E
Deciduous Woodland	90m	SW
Traditional Orchard	125m	NE



Priority Habitats within 500m.

4.5 Protected and Notable Species of Fauna

4.5.1 Greater Crested Newts

The data search returned fifty three records of great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) within 2km of the Application Site.

A further search found none within 500m of the application site.

A search of EPS licensing on Magic Maps returned three results within 2km of the site;

2015-14054-EPS-MIT, 2019-41221-EPS-MIT, EPSA2013-6712-A-AD2.

Natural England great crested newt pond survey data identified approximately thirteen positive great crested newt pond survey results within 2 km of the Site with the nearest being 750m away to the West.

Nine potential waterbodies were identified within 500 m of the Site through desk study mapping. The waterbodies are located off-site and are separated from the Application Site by the A329, Davis Street and Little Hill Road, with no apparent direct habitat

connectivity between the ponds and the Site. The intervening land includes road infrastructure, hardstanding, managed/disturbed land and fragmented habitat, which are considered to substantially reduce the likelihood of great crested newt dispersal between the waterbodies and the Application Site.

No ponds, ditches or other aquatic habitats suitable for breeding great crested newt are present within the Application Site. The Site itself comprises an established Vegetated garden with areas of hardstanding, modified grassland, short ruderal vegetation, individual trees, scrub margins and hedgerow planting. Much of the Site is subject to regular human activity, vehicular movement, storage and repeated urban use.

Potential terrestrial habitat for great crested newt within the Site is limited to localised scrub margins, hedgerow bases and occasional accumulations of vegetation or disturbed material. These features are limited in extent and fragmented by hardstanding and active site use.

Given the absence of aquatic habitat within the Site and the separation of the nearest mapped pond by Little Hill Road and intervening developed/managed land, nearby ponds are not considered to be functionally connected to the Application Site. The Site is therefore considered unlikely to support great crested newt and is not considered to

provide important breeding, resting or functionally linked terrestrial habitat for this species.

No further great crested newt survey is considered necessary. As a precaution, vegetation clearance and removal of any potential refugial material should be undertaken using Reasonable Avoidance Measures, including staged vegetation clearance, hand-searching of suitable refuges before removal, and stopping works with advice sought from a suitably qualified ecologist if any great crested newt or other amphibian is encountered.

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4.5.2 Other Amphibians

The data search returned records of common amphibian species within 2 km of the Application Site, comprising sixteen records of Smooth Newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*), thirty eight records of Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*) and seven records of Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*).

A further search within 500 m returned nine records of Common Frog, all associated with the same pond to the south-west of the Site beyond the A329. No other amphibian records were returned within 500 m.

Several waterbodies were identified within 500 m of the Site through desk study mapping. As set out in Section 4.5.1, these waterbodies are located off-site and are separated from the Application Site by the A329, Davis Street and Little Hill Road, with no apparent direct habitat connectivity between the ponds and the Site. The intervening land includes road infrastructure, hardstanding, managed land, residential development and fragmented vegetation, which reduces the likelihood of regular amphibian dispersal between the waterbodies and the Application Site.

No ponds, ditches or other aquatic habitats suitable for breeding amphibians are present within the Application Site. The Site itself comprises an established vegetated residential garden with areas of hardstanding, gravel driveway, modified grassland, short ruderal vegetation, individual trees, scrub margins, hedgerow planting and young orchard planting. The majority of the Site is subject to regular domestic management, vehicle movement, access, storage and general human disturbance.

Potential terrestrial habitat for common amphibians is limited to boundary vegetation, scrub margins, hedgerow bases, longer grassland edges, occasional refugial material and shaded areas beneath or adjacent to retained vegetation. These features may provide limited opportunities for sheltering or foraging by common amphibians on an occasional basis, particularly during damp conditions or outside the breeding season. However, such habitat is localised and fragmented, and the more open, regularly managed grassland, hardstanding and driveway areas are considered to be of low suitability.

Given the absence of breeding habitat within the Site, the separation from nearby ponds and the limited extent of suitable terrestrial habitat, the Application Site is not considered likely to support significant populations of common amphibians. Any use of

the Site by smooth newt, common frog or common toad is likely to be occasional and associated primarily with boundary vegetation and other sheltered marginal habitats.

No further amphibian survey is considered necessary. As a precaution, vegetation clearance, ground works and the removal of any potential refugial material should be undertaken using Reasonable Avoidance Measures. These should include staged vegetation clearance, hand-searching of suitable refuges before removal, careful dismantling of log piles or stored materials where present, and halting works with advice sought from a suitably qualified ecologist if amphibians are encountered. Retained hedgerows, scrub margins, orchard planting and boundary vegetation should be protected where practicable and can continue to provide limited terrestrial habitat for common amphibians.

4.5.3 Bats

The data search returned records of the following bat species within 2 km of the Application Site: eighteen records of Daubenton's Bat (*Myotis daubentonii*), seven records of Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), seven records of Soprano Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), four records of Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), one record of Eurasian Serotine (*Cnephaeus serotinus*), one record of Natterer's Bat (*Myotis nattereri*) and one record of Brown Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*).

The Application Site forms part of an established residential landholding at Elmlands, Little Hill Road, Hurst, and comprises an existing dwelling, outbuildings, gravel driveway and hardstanding, patio areas, managed garden land, modified grassland, raised planter areas, young orchard planting, hedgerows, scrub margins and boundary trees. The wider landscape is semi-rural in character and includes scattered residential properties, gardens, paddocks, agricultural land, hedgerows, tree belts, woodland blocks and traditional orchard habitat. These features provide opportunities for foraging and commuting bats within the wider local area.

No existing buildings are proposed to be affected by the development, and no works to existing roofs or roof structures are proposed. As such, direct impacts to potential building-based bat roosting features are not anticipated. The proposed works are understood to be focused on ground-level development within the residential landholding.

The Site contains trees and boundary vegetation which may provide foraging and commuting opportunities for bats, particularly along hedgerows, scrub margins, tree belts and the edges of the orchard and garden vegetation. These features are likely to be of greatest value where they connect with off-site woodland, hedgerows, gardens and field boundaries. The more open and regularly managed parts of the Site, including hardstanding, gravel driveway, patio areas and short modified grassland, are considered to be of comparatively lower value for bats.

The proposed development is not expected to result in impacts to buildings or roof structures. Provided that mature trees, boundary hedgerows and other potential roosting or commuting features are retained and protected, significant effects on roosting, foraging or commuting bats are not anticipated. If any mature trees are

subsequently proposed for removal, pruning or other direct works, they should first be assessed for potential bat roost features by a suitably qualified ecologist.

No further bat survey is considered necessary on the basis that no existing buildings, roof structures or mature trees with potential roost features are to be removed or directly affected. However, retained boundary vegetation, orchard planting, hedgerows and tree lines should be protected during works and any new external lighting should be designed sensitively to minimise light spill onto these habitats. This should include the use of low-level, downward-facing luminaires, avoidance of unnecessary lighting of boundary habitats, and warm-spectrum lighting where practicable.

4.5.4 Reptiles

All native reptile species are afforded legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, making it an offence to intentionally kill or injure individuals of common and widespread reptile species.

The data search returned records of two reptile species within 2 km of the Application Site, comprising four records of Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*) and four records of Grass Snake (*Natrix helvetica*).

The Application Site forms part of an established residential landholding and comprises an existing dwelling, outbuildings, gravel driveway and hardstanding, patio areas, managed garden land, modified grassland, raised planter areas, young orchard planting, hedgerows, scrub margins and boundary trees. A newly planted traditional orchard comprising apple and plum trees is also present to the east of the Site within land owned by the client and is included as part of the proposal.

The regularly managed garden, driveway, patio, hardstanding and short grassland areas are considered to be of negligible to low suitability for reptiles due to regular domestic management, access, disturbance and limited structural diversity. However,

localised features of potential value are present along the Site margins, including hedgerow bases, scrub edges, longer grassland margins, shaded boundary vegetation, occasional refugial material and less frequently disturbed areas associated with the young orchard planting.

These features may provide limited opportunities for basking, sheltering, foraging and dispersal by common reptile species, particularly Slow-worm, which can occur in gardens, composting areas, rough grassland and vegetated margins. Grass Snake is typically associated with wetland, ponds, ditches, rough grassland and composting/refuge features; however, no ponds, ditches or other aquatic habitats are present within the Application Site, and nearby waterbodies are separated from the Site by intervening roads, managed land and fragmented habitat.

Overall, the Application Site is considered to offer low suitability for reptiles, with any potential interest likely to be limited to occasional use of peripheral vegetation, hedgerow bases, scrub margins and refugial features. The more intensively managed and developed parts of the Site are of limited value for this group. The retained boundary vegetation and orchard planting provide the principal areas of potential reptile habitat within the Site and associated landholding.

No further reptile survey is considered necessary, provided that the works remain focused on the managed and developed areas of the Site and that principal boundary vegetation is retained and protected. As a precaution, vegetation clearance, ground works and removal of any potential refugial material should be undertaken using Reasonable Avoidance Measures. These should include staged cutting of taller vegetation, hand-searching of suitable refuges before removal, careful dismantling of compost piles, log piles or stored materials where present, and halting works with advice sought from a suitably qualified ecologist if any reptile is encountered.

4.5.5 Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

The data search returned no records of Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) within 2 km of the Application Site.

The Application Site forms part of an established residential landholding and comprises an existing dwelling, outbuildings, gravel driveway and hardstanding, patio areas, managed garden land, modified grassland, raised planter areas, young orchard planting, hedgerows, scrub margins and boundary trees. A newly planted traditional orchard comprising apple and plum trees is also present to the east of the Site within land owned by the client and is included as part of the proposal.

Habitats potentially suitable for Hazel Dormouse within the Application Site are limited to boundary hedgerows, scrub margins, trees and associated peripheral vegetation. These features provide some structural cover but are localised, subject to regular domestic management and not considered to form part of an extensive or continuous network of high-quality woodland, species-rich hedgerow or dense scrub habitat suitable for supporting this species.

Priority habitats within the wider area include deciduous woodland to the south-west and traditional orchard habitat to the north-east. However, these habitats are located off-site and are separated from the Application Site by intervening roads, residential land, managed gardens, fields and fragmented boundary vegetation. The newly planted orchard to the east of the Site is a positive habitat feature, but due to its recent establishment and limited structural maturity, it is not currently considered likely to provide important nesting or foraging habitat for Hazel Dormouse.

The central and developed parts of the Site, including the gravel driveway, hardstanding, patio areas, buildings, regularly managed garden and short modified grassland, do not provide suitable habitat for Hazel Dormouse. Any potential interest is therefore restricted to retained boundary vegetation and scrub margins, which are limited in extent and are not considered to provide important breeding, nesting, foraging or dispersal habitat for this species.

On this basis, the Application Site is considered to offer negligible to very low suitability for Hazel Dormouse and is unlikely to support this species. The proposals are not expected to affect any extensive woodland, dense scrub or species-rich hedgerow

network, and the principal boundary features are understood to be retained. Significant effects on Hazel Dormouse are therefore not anticipated.

No further Hazel Dormouse survey is considered necessary. A precautionary approach to vegetation clearance should nevertheless be adopted, including staged clearance of scrub and taller vegetation, to minimise the risk to common wildlife species and to protect retained boundary habitats.

4.5.6 Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)

Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) is listed as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

The data search returned ninety-seven records of Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) within 2 km of the Application Site.

The Application Site forms part of an established residential landholding and comprises an existing dwelling, outbuildings, gravel driveway and hardstanding, patio areas, managed garden land, modified grassland, raised planter areas, young orchard planting, hedgerows, scrub margins and boundary trees. A newly planted traditional orchard comprising apple and plum trees is also present to the east of the Site within land owned by the client and is included as part of the proposal.

Suitable habitat for Hedgehog within the Site is likely to be associated primarily with boundary vegetation, hedgerow bases, scrub margins, longer grassland edges, shaded garden margins, orchard planting and any log piles, composting areas or stored materials. These features may provide opportunities for foraging, sheltering, nesting and commuting. The more open and regularly managed parts of the Site, including the

gravel driveway, patio areas, hardstanding and short modified grassland, are considered to be of lower suitability.

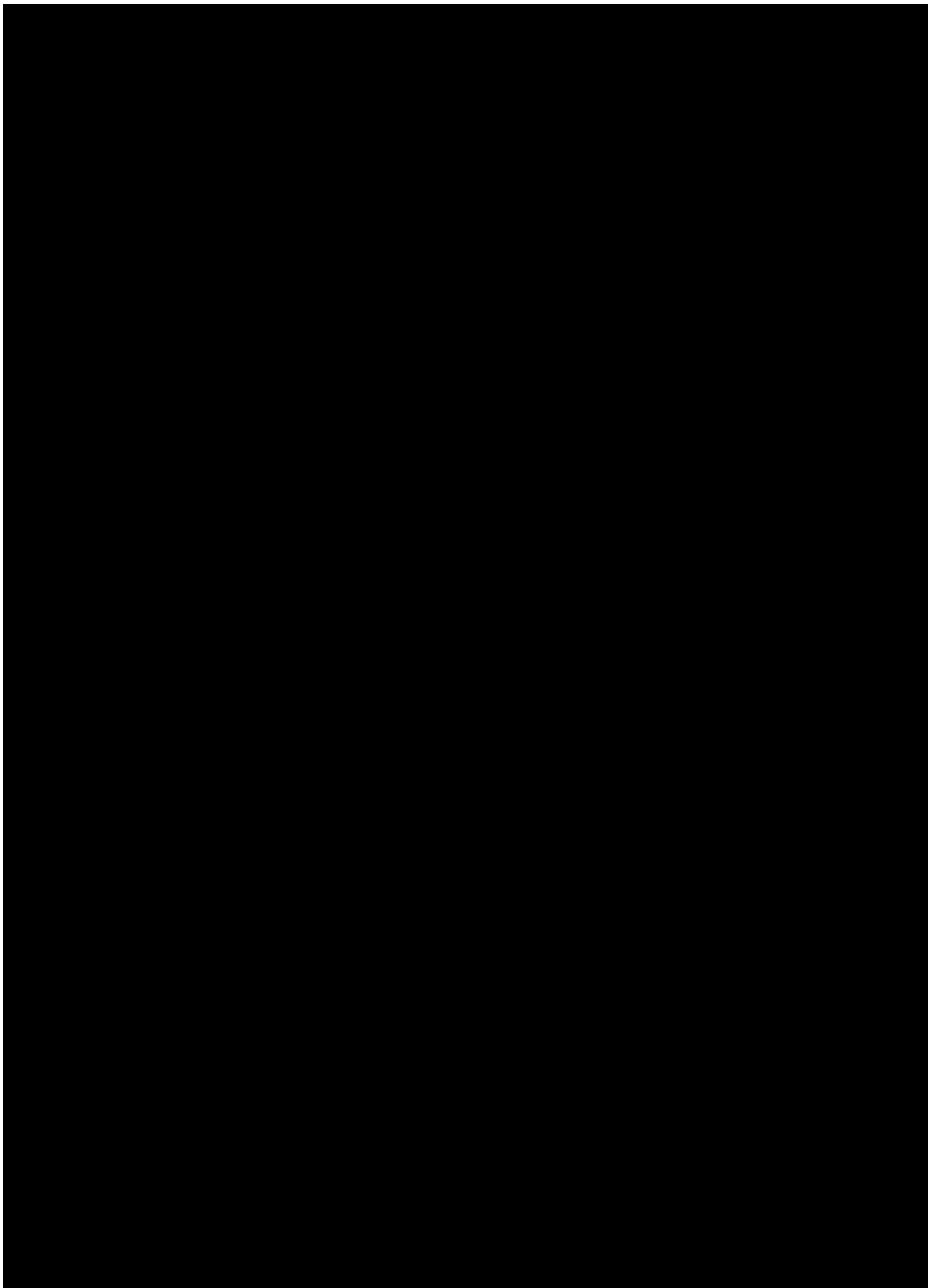
Given the number of local records and the presence of suitable garden, hedgerow, scrub and orchard habitats, Hedgehog may occur within or pass through the Site. The retained boundary vegetation and orchard planting are likely to provide the principal areas of value for this species within the Site and wider landholding.

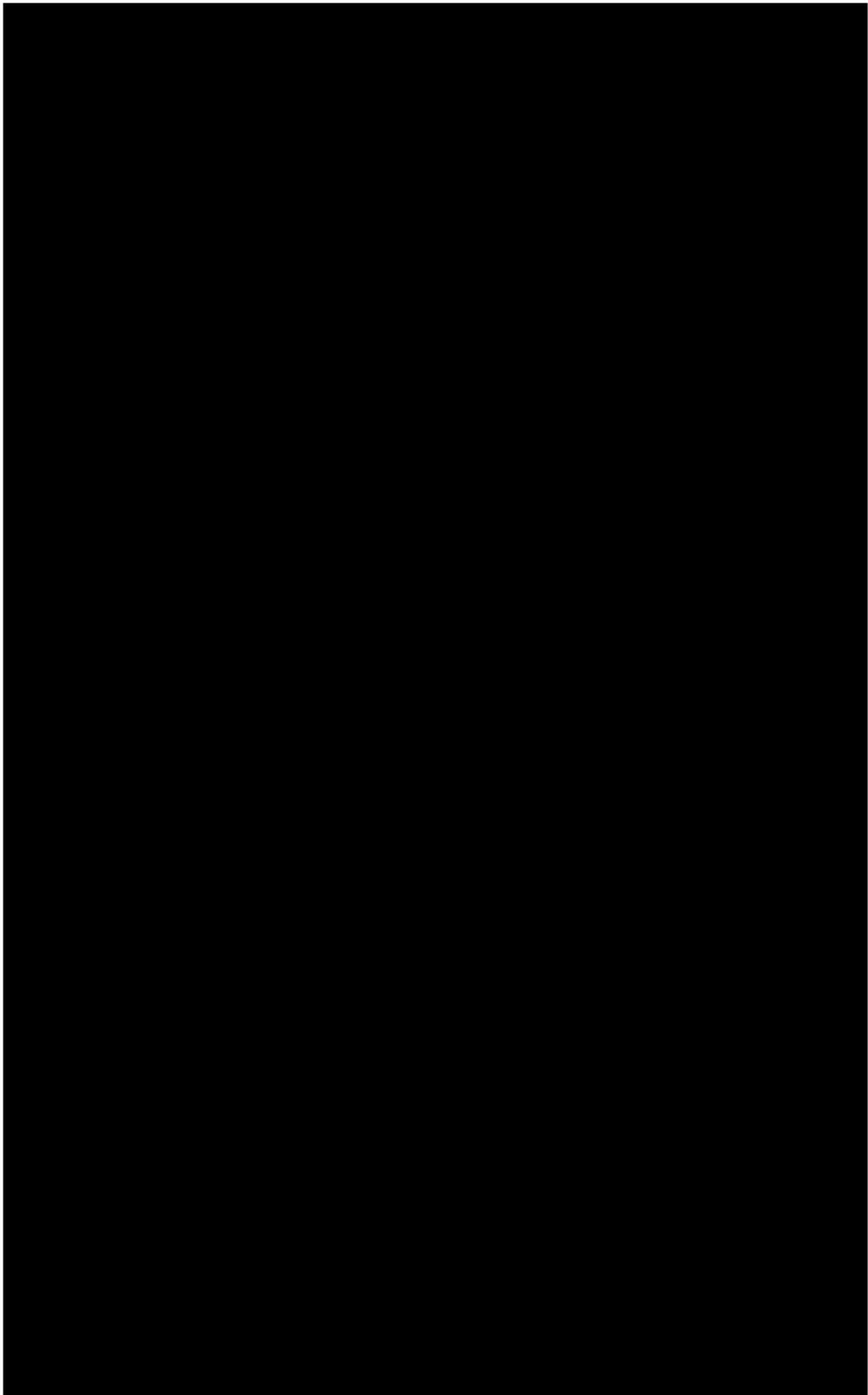
The proposals are not expected to affect existing buildings or roof structures. Potential impacts to Hedgehog are therefore most likely to relate to localised vegetation clearance, ground works, disturbance of refugial material and the temporary risk of entrapment within excavations. Provided that retained boundary features, hedgerows and orchard planting are protected, significant effects on Hedgehog are not anticipated.

No further survey for Hedgehog is considered necessary. However, precautionary working measures should be adopted during vegetation clearance and ground works. These should include staged clearance of taller vegetation and scrub, hand-searching of suitable refugial areas before removal, careful dismantling of log piles, compost heaps or stored materials where present, covering or ramping any open excavations overnight, and checking stored materials before they are moved. Any Hedgehog

encountered should be allowed to move away from the working area, or works should pause and advice should be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist where necessary.

Where new fencing or boundary treatments are proposed, these should allow continued Hedgehog movement through the Site, for example through the provision of small ground-level gaps or purpose-made Hedgehog access points.





4.5.8 Riparian mammals

The data search returned no records of Otter (*Lutra lutra*) or Water Vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) within 2 km of the Application Site.

No rivers, streams, ditches, ponds or other aquatic habitats suitable for Otter or Water Vole are present within the Application Site. The Site forms part of an established residential landholding comprising an existing dwelling, outbuildings, gravel driveway and hardstanding, patio areas, managed garden land, modified grassland, raised planter areas, young orchard planting, hedgerows, scrub margins and boundary trees.

The Application Site does not provide suitable riparian habitat, holt or resting opportunities for Otter, or suitable bankside burrowing, feeding or commuting habitat for Water Vole. No field signs associated with either species were recorded during the survey.

Given the absence of suitable aquatic or riparian habitat within the Site, and the absence of records within 2 km, Otter and Water Vole are considered absent from the Application Site. No further survey or mitigation for riparian mammals is considered necessary.

4.5.9 Invertebrates

The data search returned 1,408 separate invertebrate records within 2 km of the Application Site. The most frequently recorded species were largely common and widespread moths, butterflies and other invertebrates associated with garden, grassland, hedgerow, woodland edge and wetland habitats. These included Large Yellow Underwing (*Noctua pronuba*), Shuttle-shaped Dart (*Agrotis puta*), Heart & Dart (*Agrotis exclamatoris*), Willow Beauty (*Peribatodes rhomboidaria*), Vine's Rustic (*Hoplodrina ambigua*), Dark Arches (*Apamea monoglypha*), Light Brown Apple Moth (*Epiphyas postvittana*), Setaceous Hebrew Character (*Xestia c-nigrum*), Small White (*Pieris rapae*) and Large White (*Pieris brassicae*).

The records also include a range of butterfly species typical of gardens, grassland, scrub and hedgerow habitats, including Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*), Holly Blue (*Celastrina argiolus*), Peacock (*Aglais io*), Orange-tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*), Comma (*Polygonia c-album*), Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*), Gatekeeper (*Pyrionia tithonus*), Green-veined White (*Pieris napi*), Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*), Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*), Small Skipper

(*Thymelicus sylvestris*), Large Skipper (*Ochlodes sylvanus*), Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) and Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*).

Records of dragonflies and damselflies were also returned, including Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*), Banded Demoiselle (*Calopteryx splendens*), Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma najas*), Brown Hawker (*Aeshna grandis*), Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*), Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*), Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*), Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna mixta*) and Azure Damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*). These records are likely to reflect the presence of ponds, ditches, wetland features and other aquatic habitats within the wider landscape, rather than within the Application Site itself.

Stag Beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) was also returned within the data search. This species is associated with decaying timber, buried deadwood, old tree stumps and mature broadleaved trees. Within the Application Site, potential habitat for this species is likely to be limited to any retained mature trees, deadwood, log piles or buried woody material associated with boundary vegetation and garden margins.

The Application Site itself comprises an established residential landholding with an existing dwelling, outbuildings, gravel driveway and hardstanding, patio areas,

managed garden land, modified grassland, raised planter areas, young orchard planting, hedgerows, scrub margins and boundary trees. A newly planted traditional orchard comprising apple and plum trees is present to the east of the Site and is included as part of the proposal.

The principal features of potential value for invertebrates are the boundary trees, hedgerows, scrub margins, longer grassland edges, orchard planting, flowering garden plants and any retained deadwood or log piles. These features may provide nectar, sheltering, larval foodplant and dispersal opportunities for common invertebrates. The newly planted orchard is likely to provide increasing value for pollinating insects as it matures, particularly if managed with a diverse grassland sward or wildflower-rich understorey.

The more intensively managed parts of the Site, including hardstanding, gravel driveway, patio areas, short modified grassland and regularly disturbed garden areas, are considered to be of limited value for invertebrates. The Site does not appear to support extensive species-rich grassland, wetland habitat, veteran trees, substantial deadwood habitat or other features likely to support an important invertebrate assemblage.

Overall, the Application Site is considered to be of low to local value for invertebrates, with the greatest interest associated with retained boundary vegetation, orchard planting, scrub margins and any deadwood features. Significant effects on invertebrate assemblages are not anticipated. Where practicable, retained deadwood, log piles, mature trees, hedgerows and scrub margins should be protected, and new planting should favour native and nectar-rich species to enhance opportunities for pollinating insects.

4.5.10 Birds

The data search returned records of 167 bird species within 2 km of the Application Site. The local record set includes a high number of common and widespread species associated with gardens, woodland, woodland edge, hedgerows, farmland and rural settlement habitats, including Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*), Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), Great Tit (*Parus major*), Magpie (*Pica pica*), Blackbird (*Turdus merula*), Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*), Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*), Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*), Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*), Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) and Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*).

The desk study also returned a range of species indicative of the wider habitat diversity of the surrounding landscape, including woodland, scrub, farmland and urban-edge species such as Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*), Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*), Whitethroat (*Curruca communis*), Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*), Swift (*Apus apus*), Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), Skylark (*Alauda*

arvensis), Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*), Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*) and Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*).

A substantial number of wetland and open-water species were also recorded within the wider 2 km search area, including Coot (*Fulica atra*), Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*), Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*), Teal (*Anas crecca*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*), Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*), Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) and Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*). These records are considered to reflect the presence of ponds, lakes, watercourses and wetland habitats within the wider landscape rather than within the Application Site itself.

Within the Application Site, habitat of value to birds is largely associated with boundary trees, hedgerows, scrub margins, garden planting, orchard planting and areas of less intensively managed vegetation. These features may provide nesting, foraging, perching and sheltering opportunities for common garden and woodland-edge bird

species. The newly planted traditional orchard to the east of the Site is likely to provide increasing value for birds as it matures, particularly where managed alongside grassland, hedgerow and scrub-edge habitats.

The regularly managed garden, gravel driveway, patio, hardstanding and short modified grassland are considered to be of lower value, although they may provide incidental foraging opportunities for common ground-feeding species. No works to existing buildings or roof structures are proposed, and impacts to any building-nesting birds are therefore not anticipated.

The proposals are not expected to result in significant effects on bird populations, provided that boundary vegetation, mature trees, hedgerows and orchard planting are retained and protected where practicable. Any unavoidable clearance of scrub, hedgerow, tree or dense garden vegetation should be undertaken outside the main bird nesting season, which typically runs from March to August inclusive.

Where vegetation clearance or tree works are required during the nesting season, a pre-commencement nesting bird check should be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist. If an active nest is identified, works in that area should be delayed and an appropriate exclusion buffer maintained until the nest is no longer in use.

4.6 Landscape and Ecological Context

The Application Site is located at Elmlands, Little Hill Road, Hurst, Reading, RG10 0TG. The Site lies within a semi-rural landscape on the edge of Hurst and Winnersh, with the wider area comprising scattered residential properties, farmsteads, paddocks, agricultural fields, managed gardens, hedgerows, tree belts, woodland blocks and transport infrastructure, including the M4 and A329(M) corridors to the south and south-east.

The Site forms part of an established residential landholding and includes an existing dwelling, outbuildings, gravel driveway and hardstanding, patio areas, managed garden land, modified grassland, vegetable/raised planter areas and young orchard planting. Mature trees, hedgerows, scrub and ornamental planting occur around the Site boundaries and within neighbouring land, providing a degree of local structural habitat and screening.

Priority habitats are present within the wider 500 m search area, including deciduous woodland to the south-west and traditional orchard habitat to the north-east. In addition, a newly planted traditional orchard comprising apple and plum trees is present to the

east of the Site within land owned by the client. This orchard is to be included as part of the current proposal and represents a positive habitat feature within the wider landholding.

The wider ecological context is influenced by a network of field boundaries, garden vegetation, tree belts, small woodland blocks and orchard habitats. Habitat connectivity is principally associated with these boundary features and off-site woodland/hedgerow corridors, rather than through the managed and developed parts of the Site itself. The M4, A329(M), Little Hill Road, Green Lane and surrounding residential plots create localised barriers and fragmentation for some species, although retained vegetation still provides opportunities for mobile wildlife such as birds, bats, invertebrates and common small mammals.

No priority habitat is evident within the main developed and garden parts of the Application Site itself. The principal ecological features within the Site and associated landholding are the retained boundary trees, hedgerows, scrub margins, young orchard planting, managed grassland and the newly planted apple and plum orchard to the east. These features provide locally relevant habitat and contribute to ecological

connectivity at a local scale, particularly in combination with nearby woodland, orchard and hedgerow habitats.

The existing buildings are not proposed to be affected, and no roofing works or alterations to existing roof structures are proposed. As such, building-related impacts, including impacts to potential roosting features within existing roof structures, are not anticipated. Ecological considerations are instead focused on the proposed ground-level works, retained vegetation, grassland, orchard planting and boundary habitats.

Overall, the Site is of greatest ecological relevance for its retained boundary vegetation, mature trees, scrub/hedgerow margins and the newly planted traditional orchard to the east. The regularly managed garden, driveway, patio, hardstanding and developed areas are of comparatively low ecological value. The main ecological considerations therefore relate to the protection and enhancement of retained vegetation, safeguarding the orchard habitat, precautionary measures for nesting birds and bats, sensitive lighting design, and maintaining habitat connectivity with nearby woodland, hedgerow and orchard features.

Field Survey

The site survey was undertaken by Christopher Nixon BSc, Principal Ecologist and Daniel Bennett Associate Ecologist.

Date of Survey	Temperature	Humidity	Cloud Cover	Wind	Rain
23/04/2026	14C	60%	60%	SE 10 KM/h	None



Surveyed Area

5.1 Survey Methodology

A walkover survey was undertaken following the methodology for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals set out in the *CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2017/2018)*. The survey included:

- A UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) survey for habitat mapping and classification;
- A protected and notable species appraisal, assessing the potential presence of key taxa based on field signs, habitat suitability, and contextual records;
- An assessment of ecological connectivity with surrounding habitats.

Survey boundaries were defined in relation to the red line boundary of the application site, incorporating accessible adjacent features where relevant to ecological function (e.g. boundary hedgerows).

5.2 Habitat types recorded on site and immediately adjacent habitats

UKHAB Code	Habitat Type	Location on Site	Condition	Notes
g4/u1	Modified Grassland/Vegetated Garden	Majority of site	Moderate	Grassland and flower beds surrounding the house.
g4 / s3 81	Ruderalis	Some ruderal borders	Moderate	Mostly beyond red line but infringing upon borders
h3d	Bramble Scrub	Beyond borders	Moderate	Some Bramble scrub to the east across the fence line, forms part of a native hedge row
u1b	Hard Standing	Access and homes	N/A	Gravel, access, concrete
h2a	Native Hedgerows	Most borders of site	Moderate	The site is bordered by native hedgerows, predominantly formed of Bramble, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Ash, Oak, Beech and Elm
	Traditional Orchard	East of site	Moderate	A newly planted Orchard is to the east of the site
w1g	Broadleaved woodland	South of the red line	Moderate	Off site adjacent feature.
	Individual Trees	Towards the western part of the site	Moderate	There are several scattered trees of varying sizes throughout the site, Black Walnut, Ash, Poplar and Cherry. There are further trees that are beyond the red line area and a wooded area south west of the site.



Habitat Map - habitats recorded during the site visit. The statutory BNG baseline differs from the habitat map where required to account for relevant post-baseline degradation and the inclusion of the orchard within the BNG proposals.

5.3 Notable Features and Species Evidence

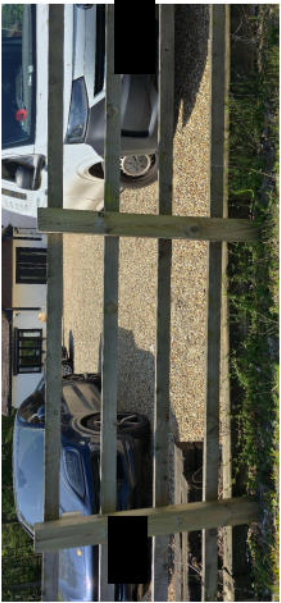
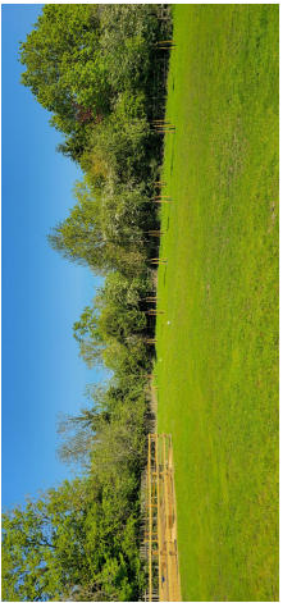
- **Native hedgerows:** Established native hedgerows are present along the southern, western, northern and eastern Site boundaries. These provide local habitat structure and potential nesting, foraging and commuting habitat for common birds and bats.
- **Boundary trees:** Scattered trees are present within the western part of the Site and beyond the red line boundary. These contribute to local habitat connectivity and may provide foraging/perching opportunities for birds and bats.
- **Off-site woodland/tree belt:** A broadleaved wooded area is present to the south of the Site, beyond the red line boundary but within the wider surveyed area. Species noted included Common Hornbeam, Crack Willow and Red Maple, together with other broadleaved trees. This feature provides off-site structural habitat and local connectivity.

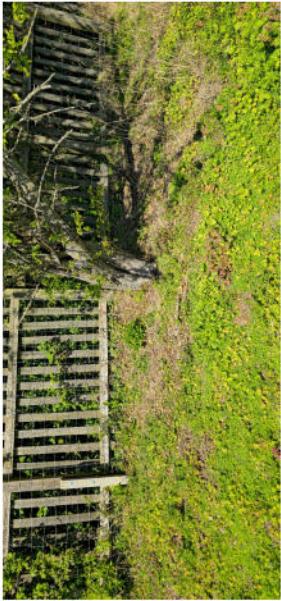
- **Scrub and hedgerow bases:** Scrub margins, longer vegetation and hedgerow bases provide limited sheltering and dispersal opportunities for common amphibians, reptiles, Hedgehog and other small fauna.
- **New orchard planting:** Young apple and plum orchard planting is present to the east of the Site. This is currently of limited structural maturity but is expected to increase in ecological value as it establishes.

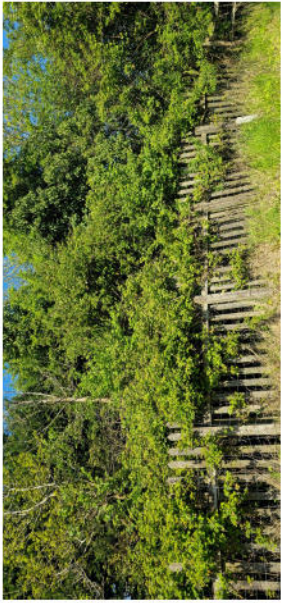
No direct evidence of protected species (e.g. pellets) was recorded during the survey.

GCN ponds, owl

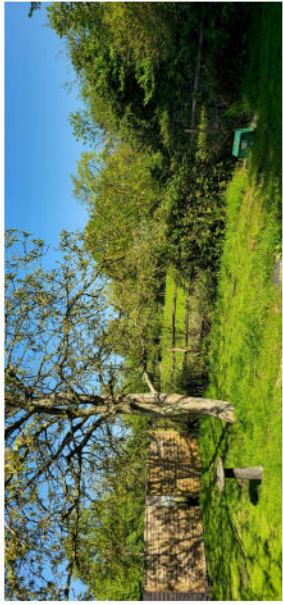
5.4 Survey Photographs

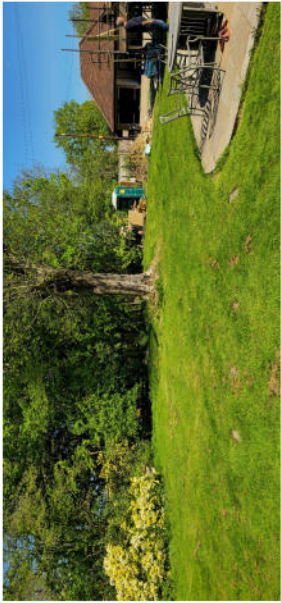
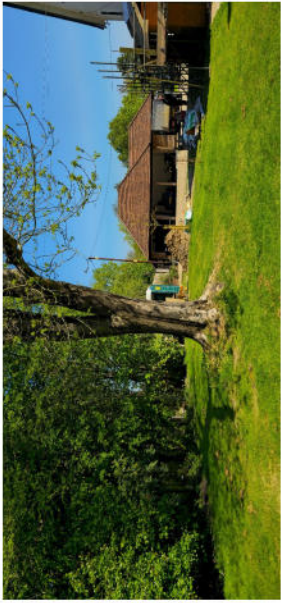
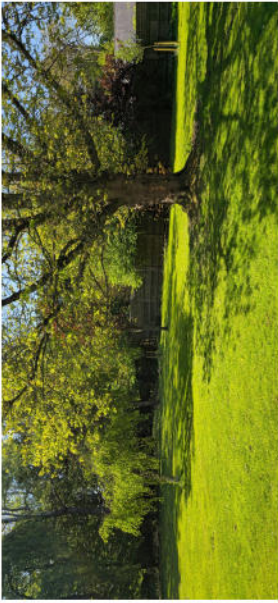
	
Main house and Site Entrance in distance	Hard standing area at entrance
	
Existing Outbuildings and hardstanding	Vegetated garden / Grassland East of site

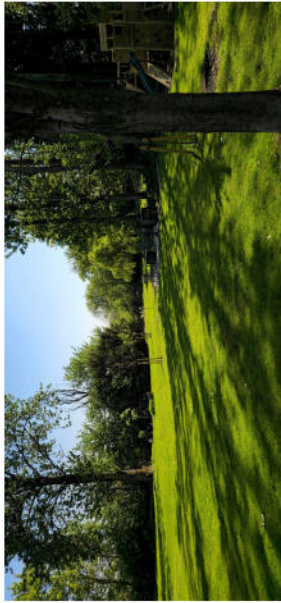
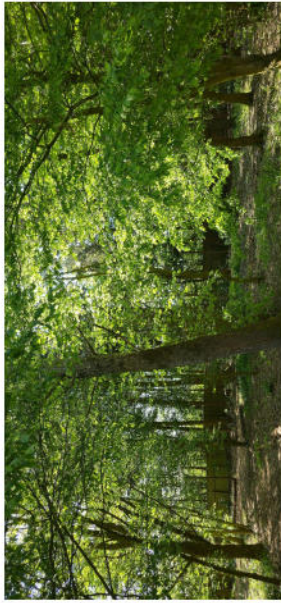
	
Vegetated Garden Lawn Grassland	Wild flowers and Ruderal borders with common Hawthorn
	
Orchard planting: Apple, Cherry, Plum	New Orchard planting, partly compensatory for tree loss on site

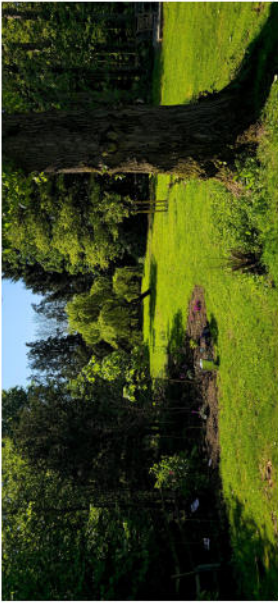
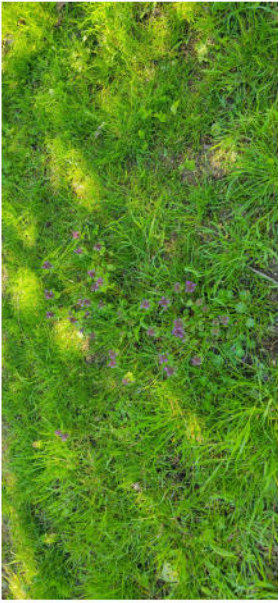
	
Native Hedge East border	Native hedge: Bramble, Hawthorn, Blackthorn
	
Daffodil planting around borders of vegetated garden	Daffodil planting around borders of vegetated garden

	
South Native hedge: Elm, Bramble, Hawthorn, Ash	Concrete area, central north
	
Concrete area, central north	Vegetated Garden and individual trees to the South west of the site

	
Looking North East	Looking South West
	
Non native Ornamental hedge	Laurel borders

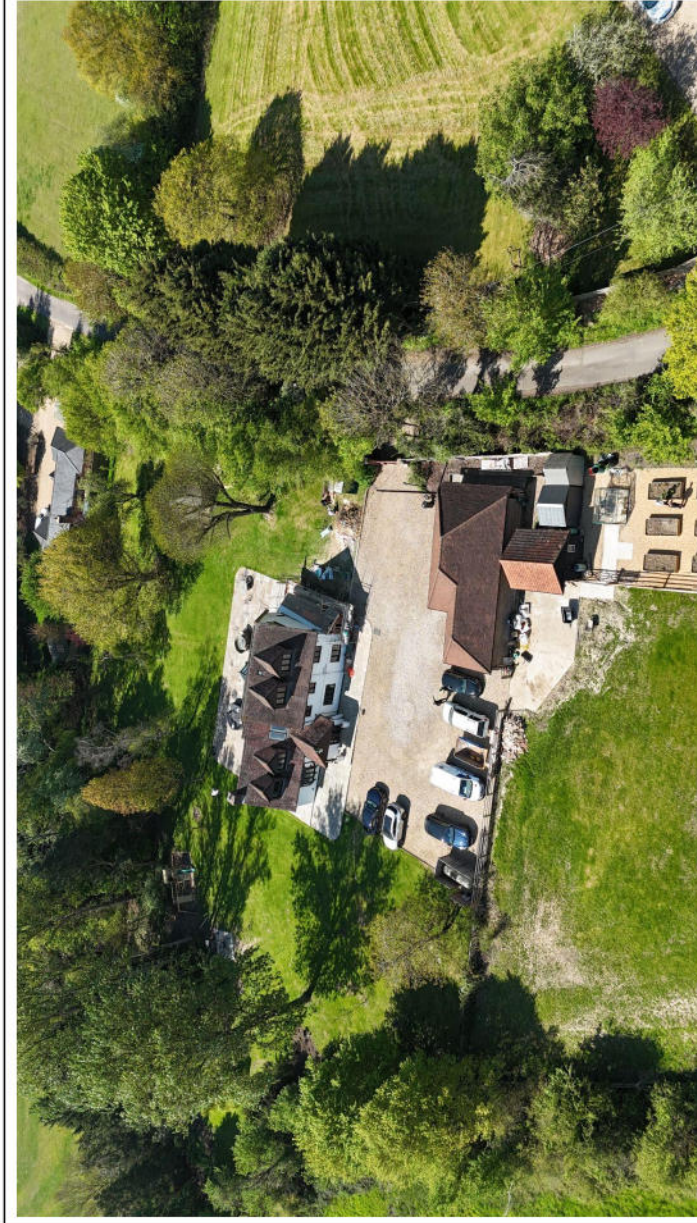
	
Ash tree within western vegetated garden, near entrance	Ash tree, native hedge and outbuilding visible
	
Vegetated Garden, beyond the red line	Vegetated Garden, beyond the red line

	
Vegetated garden beyond the red line area, new tree planting shown	Wooded area south of the red line
	
Wooded area south of the red line	Wooded area south of the red line

	
Vegetated garden beyond the red line area	Vegetated garden beyond the red line area, new tree planting shown
	
Vegetated Garden, beyond the red line	Wild flowers; Purple Dead Nettle



Aerial Photos



Aerial Photos

Summary and Recommendations

6.1 Overall summary

The Application Site comprises part of an established residential landholding at Elmlands, Little Hill Road, Hurst, RG10 0TG. The proposals comprise the erection of an outbuilding and associated ground mounted solar panels. No existing buildings, roofs or roof structures are proposed to be affected.

The Site comprises vegetated garden, modified grassland, hardstanding, gravel driveway, patio areas, ruderal margins, hedgerows, scrub edges, scattered trees and young orchard planting. A newly planted traditional orchard comprising apple and plum trees is present to the east of the Site within land owned by the client and is included as part of the proposal.

The principal ecological features are the retained native hedgerows, boundary trees, scrub margins and orchard planting. These provide local habitat structure and limited connectivity for common wildlife. The more intensively managed garden, driveway, hardstanding and patio areas are of lower ecological value.

Priority habitats are present within the wider area, including deciduous woodland approximately 90 m to the south-west and traditional orchard approximately 125 m to the north-east. No statutory or

non-statutory designated sites are present within the Application Site, and significant effects on designated sites are not anticipated.

Overall, the Site is considered to be of low to local ecological value, with ecological interest focused on retained boundary vegetation, trees and orchard planting. Significant ecological effects are not anticipated, subject to the implementation of the recommendations below.

6.2 Protected and notable species

The desk study returned records of protected and notable species within 2 km, including Great Crested Newt, common amphibians, bats, reptiles, Hedgehog, [REDACTED] invertebrates and birds. The Site provides limited suitability for most protected species, with any potential interest largely associated with hedgerows, scrub margins, trees, garden margins and orchard planting.

No ponds, ditches or other aquatic habitats suitable for breeding Great Crested Newt or other amphibians are present within the Site. Off-site waterbodies are separated from the Site by roads, managed land and fragmented habitat. No further amphibian survey is considered necessary, although precautionary working measures are recommended.

No existing buildings or roof structures are proposed to be affected, and therefore direct impacts to building-based bat roosting features are not anticipated. Retained trees, hedgerows and boundary vegetation may provide foraging and commuting opportunities for bats and should be protected from unnecessary disturbance and light spill.

The Site offers low suitability for reptiles and Hedgehog, primarily within hedgerow bases, scrub margins, longer grassland edges and refugial material. [REDACTED] field signs were recorded, and no suitable habitat for Otter or Water Vole is present.



Bird interest is likely to be limited to common species using trees, hedgerows, scrub, garden vegetation and orchard planting for nesting and foraging. No further protected species surveys are considered necessary, provided the scheme remains as currently proposed and the mitigation below is implemented.

6.3 Avoidance, mitigation and enhancement

Retained hedgerows, boundary trees, scrub margins and orchard planting should be protected during works. No storage, tracking, excavation, fires or material deposition should occur within retained vegetated margins or tree root protection areas.

Vegetation clearance should be undertaken outside the main bird nesting season, March to August inclusive, where practicable. If clearance is required during this period, a nesting bird check should be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to works.

Clearance of taller vegetation, scrub, hedgerow bases and refugial material should proceed under Reasonable Avoidance Measures for reptiles, amphibians, Hedgehog and other small fauna. This should include staged clearance, hand-searching of suitable refuges, careful dismantling of log piles, compost heaps or stored materials where present, and stopping works if protected or notable species are encountered.

Any excavations left open overnight should be covered or provided with a means of escape, and stored pipes or similar materials should be capped or checked before use.

Any new lighting should avoid unnecessary illumination of retained hedgerows, trees, scrub margins and orchard habitat. Low-level, downward-facing, warm-spectrum lighting should be used where practicable.

Enhancement should focus on retention and strengthening of boundary habitats, protection of the newly planted orchard, native and nectar-rich planting, provision of bird and bat boxes where suitable, retention of deadwood/log piles in appropriate locations, and provision of Hedgehog access through any new fencing.

6.4 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Biodiversity Net Gain is addressed separately within the accompanying BNG Statement and statutory metric. This PEA does not duplicate the BNG calculation, trading assessment or final unit balance.

The Site baseline comprises vegetated garden, modified grassland, hardstanding, ruderal margins, native hedgerows, scattered trees, scrub-edge habitat and young orchard planting. The main ecological features are the retained native hedgerows, boundary trees, scrub margins and newly planted traditional orchard to the east.

The BNG assessment should account for the recorded baseline and any relevant post-baseline clearance, including scrub clearance undertaken after August 2023 where applicable. Retained habitats should be protected during construction and incorporated into the final layout, landscaping and long-term management.

The newly planted traditional orchard provides a positive opportunity for biodiversity enhancement and should be secured and managed through the separate BNG documentation.

Appendix

7.1 Legislation and Planning Policy

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

Protection of Badgers Act 1992
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/51/contents>

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents>

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents>

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019 (as amended)
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/9780111176573>