Land North of Forest Road (Western Plot)
Binfield
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 5SE

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

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Author	*Jake Morgan (Qualifying member of CIEEM)*
Reviewer	*John Wenman MCIEEM*
Authoriser	*John Wenman MCIEEM*

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JOHNWENMAN ecological consultancy

1 Diesel House, Honey Hill, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3BL
Telephone: 0118 327 1810 Mobile: 07979 403099 E-mail: info@wenman-ecology.co.uk
www.wenman-ecology.co.uk

John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales with registered number OC339057.
Registered office: 1 Diesel House, Honey Hill, Wokingham RG40 3BL where you may look at a list of members' names.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Mark Leedale on behalf of Rob Allum to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) on land north of Forest Road in Binfield, Wokingham, Berkshire. The PEA was commissioned to accompany a Permission in Principle application to be filed with Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the construction of three houses with associated access and gardens (Refer to proposed site layout in **Appendix 2**).

1.1.2 The survey methodology included a desk study (comprising a TVERC 1km data search) and a field survey (using UKHab Classification). The desk study revealed that whilst the application site is not statutorily designated for its wildlife interest and therefore is not currently recognised as being of international, national or county level conservation significance, the on-site ancient woodland along the northern boundary forms the edge of the Tippens Wood Local Wildlife Site (LWS). The site falls within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for the Wykery Copse SSSI, but the planning proposals do not fall into any categories specified in the IRZ for the site and therefore no impacts are likely. No adverse effects are anticipated on the other nearby locally designated sites.

1.1.3 The application site covers an area of 0.31ha with the following UKHab habitats: g3c Other neutral grassland, h2a Native hedgerow, h3d Bramble scrub and w1f Lowland mixed deciduous woodland. The on-site woodland represents a parcel of priority ancient woodland (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 habitats of principle importance).

1.1.4 The following recommendations have been made:

- A 15 metre buffer between the proposed development and on-site ancient woodland in line with the standing advice provided by Natural England and the Local Plan adopted by Wokingham Borough Council;
- Preparation of a CEMP: Biodiversity to protect onsite habitats and incorporate reasonable avoidance measures for amphibians, reptiles and mammals;
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment;
- Sensitive lighting scheme;
- Reasonable avoidance measures for amphibians, reptiles and mammals; and
- Biodiversity enhancements.

1.1.5 This report will likely be valid for up to 12 months; after which point a professional

ecologist may need to review the report's validity (CIEEM 2019).

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

2.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Mark Leedale on behalf of Rob Allum to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) on land north of Forest Road in Binfield, Wokingham, Berkshire.

2.1.2 The PEA was commissioned to accompany a Planning in Principle application to be filed with Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the construction of three houses with associated access and gardens (Refer to indicative proposed site layout in **Appendix 2**).

2.2 Site Location and Context

2.2.1 The application site covers an area of circa 0.31 hectares (ha) comprising a regularly mown field to the north of Forest Road in Binfield, Wokingham, Berkshire (OS Grid Reference: SU 82711 71082).

2.2.2 The application site is within a semi-rural setting to the north of Wokingham and west of Binfield. Residential housing and their associated gardens are situated to the west and south, and approximately 10.3ha of mapped ancient woodland at Tippen's Wood to the north, a small strip of which is situated within the site boundary. Further surroundings are primarily rural in all immediate directions with hedge-lined fields and parcels of woodland.

2.3 Report Objectives

2.3.1 The aim of this PEA is to understand the nature of the site and assess its ecological value. The key objectives are to:

- identify any likely ecological constraints associated with the planning proposals;
- establish appropriate mitigation measures in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy (i.e. avoid > mitigate > compensate);
- determine any additional surveys that may be required following on from this preliminary stage; and
- recognise opportunities to deliver ecological enhancements in line with national and local planning policy.

3 LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

3.1 Relevant Legislation

3.1.1 The following legislation is considered relevant for the purpose of this Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA):

- Wildlife and Countryside Act (W&CA) 1981 (as amended)
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations ('Habitat') Regulations 2017
- Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996

3.1.2 These acts hold relevance to both protected and invasive species and the levels of protection vary depending on faunal/floral group or species. For example, some species of European importance receive full protection in England and Wales under the Habitat Regulations (e.g. bats), whereas others may only be afforded protection through national legislation such as the W&CA 1981 (as amended) (e.g. common lizard). For a detailed overview of species-specific legislation, please refer to **Appendix 4**.

3.2 European Protected Species Mitigation Licensing

3.2.1 The Government's statutory nature conservation advisory organisation, Natural England, is responsible for issuing European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences that permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations. An EPS mitigation licence can be issued if the following three tests derived from Regulation 55 have been satisfied:

- (2)(e) – the derogation is for the purposes of '*preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment.*'
- (9)(a) – there is '*no satisfactory alternative*' to the derogation; and
- (9)(b) – '*the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range*.'

3.2.2 Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have a statutory duty under Regulation 7(3)(e) of the Habitat Regulations consider and determine whether these three tests are likely to be satisfied by planning proposals affected EPS before granted planning permission. If an EPS mitigation licence is necessary, a licence can be sought once all the necessary

planning consents have been granted. Natural England aims to issue a decision on licence applications within 30 working days of submission.

4 PLANNING POLICY

4.1 National Planning Policy

4.1.1 The biodiversity duty imposed through the Environment Act 2021 states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must consider what action they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England.

4.1.2 The ODPM Circular 06/2005 provides guidance on the application of the law relating to planning and nature conservation in England, stating that '*the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat*.'

4.1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in December 2024, sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. Section 15 of the NPPF sets out the approach local authorities should adopt to conserve and enhancing the natural environment when preparing planning policy and when considering planning applications. Paragraph 193 sets out the principles LPAs should apply when determining planning applications, as follows:

'When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;

b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;

c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and

d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this

can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.'

4.1.4 In England, BNG became mandatory for major development from the 12th February 2024 and for minor development (small sites) from the 2nd April 2024 under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). In practice, planning permission in England is now subject to a condition to secure a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity, unless the development is a type that is exempt from mandatory BNG requirements.

4.2 Local Planning Policy

4.2.1 Wokingham Borough Council currently has in place a Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD), adopted in January 2010. The Core Strategy DPD sets out the long term 'spatial vision' for the Wokingham Borough up until March 2026.

4.2.2 Work is underway on the new Local Plan Update document which will refine the current Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery local plans for the borough up to 2040.

4.2.3 When considering planning applications, it is the local authority's obligation to consider the impacts of the development on protected species as set out in the NPPF and the OPDM Circular 06/2005.

4.2.4 The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is a strategic document which identifies zones of risk to help in the allocation of land for development, for Development Management decision making purposes. Policy CP7 of the Core Strategy DPD provides guidance on how biodiversity should be considered as part of development. The Policy states: '*Sites designated as of importance for nature conservation at an international or national level will be conserved and enhanced and inappropriate development will be resisted. The degree of protection given will be appropriate to the status of the site in terms of its international or national importance. Development:*

Which may harm county designated sites (Local Wildlife Sites in Berkshire), whether directly or indirectly, or

Which may harm habitats or, species of principle importance in England for nature conservation, veteran trees or features of the landscape that are of major importance for wild flora and fauna (including wildlife and river corridors), whether directly or indirectly, or

That compromises the implementation of the national, regional, county and local

biodiversity action plans will be only permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, that no alternative site that would result in less or no harm is available which will meet the need, and:

Mitigation measures can be put in place to prevent damaging impacts;

or Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided.'

4.2.5 Policy CP8 of Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy DPD provides guidance on the avoidance and mitigation measures required for any net gain in residential development within 7km of the Thames Basin Heath SPA. The Policy states: *'Development which alone or in combination is likely to have a significant effects on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area will be required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects are delivered.*

T*he Appropriate Assessment indicates that to ensure that development avoids its likely significant impact upon the SPA, the following principles will apply:*

i) Dwelling houses and other residential development (including staff accommodation in use class C2) will need to provide avoidance and mitigation measures where:

a. The proposal involves the provision of one or more net additional residential unit and is within 5km (linear) of the SPA. Contributions to on site SPA access management measures and monitoring in line with the Delivery Framework will be required together with provision of SANG at a minimum of 8ha/1,000 population (calculated at a rate of 2.4 persons per household). This monitoring includes the effectiveness of the SANG;

b. The proposal provides 50 or more residential units within 7km (linear). In this case, the proposal will be individually assessed for whether a significant effect upon the SPA is likely either on its own or in combination with other plans or projects around the site. Where avoidance and mitigation measures are required to address likely significant effects, this is likely to involve SANG together with funding towards monitoring the effectiveness of the solution agreed;

c. There is a 400m exclusion zone from the SPA for any net additional dwellings due to the inability to avoid likely significant effects upon the SPA.

ii) SANG to be provided and maintained in perpetuity in line with the quality and

quantity standards advocated by Natural England. The size and location of SANG contributes towards the delivery of healthy communities in line with advice from the Department of Health and NICE. In order to ensure access to avoidance sites in perpetuity, the Council's preference is for the authority to own any SANG. Where SANG also meets the definition of open space (see Appendix 4), it can also count towards this provision i.e. at least 1 ha/1,000 of the SANG could also contribute towards the Natural Greenspace requirement and vice versa; and

iii) Non-residential development will be individually assessed for their likely significant effects. Where avoidance and mitigation measures are required, monitoring of their effectiveness will be necessary.'

5 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

5.1 Desk Study

5.1.1 A desktop study was conducted by ecologist Jake Morgan (a qualifying member of CIEEM) and the study utilised data from the local environmental records centre and open access online resources to acquire information on the nature of the site and its surroundings and highlight any potential ecological features.

5.1.2 Thames Valley Environmental Research Centre (TVERC) was commissioned to undertake a search of pre-existing records of protected and/or notable species and non-statutorily designated wildlife sites held by them within a 1km radius around a central point inside the site.

5.1.3 The DEFRA Data Services Platform was used to obtain geospatial datasets for designated sites (i.e. RAMSAR, SPA, SAC, SSSI) and important habitats (i.e. Priority Habitat Inventory, Ancient Woodland Inventory) to be analysed in QGIS. The Multi-Agency Geographical Information Centre (MAGIC) website was examined for granted European Protected Species (EPS) licence applications. These geospatial datasets and Google Earth satellite imagery were used to determine the extent and connectivity of habitats, how the site is linked to the surrounding landscape and whether the development could have wider scale impacts on biodiversity.

5.1.4 Historical OS maps and Google Earth satellite imagery were consulted to provide insight into historic and current land use; such information helps contextualise the continuity of habitats and determine the importance of existing ecological features on site.

5.2 Field Survey

UK Habitat Classification Survey

5.2.1 A site walkover was undertaken on April 27th 2026 by John Wenman MCIEEM and Jake Morgan - a qualifying member of CIEEM. The site was surveyed using the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) system (UKHab Ltd 2023) in accordance with the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2nd Edition) (CIEEM 2017). Attention was given to evidence of protected and priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principal importance) and the site's potential to support such species.

5.2.2 There were no significant survey constraints because full access was available to the site. The survey was subject to seasonal constraints because not all plant and animal species are visible throughout the year and therefore the report represents a snapshot of the site at the time of the survey only.

5.2.3 This report contains information regarding a mobile species so it will likely be valid for less than 12 months (CIEEM 2019).

6 DESK STUDY FINDINGS

6.1 Designated Sites and Habitats

6.1.1 The desk study returned no records of internationally designated statutory sites within a 5km radius of the application site, no nationally designated statutory sites within a 2km radius of the application site, and five locally designated non-statutory sites, i.e. Berkshire Local Wildlife Sites and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas within a 1km radius - see **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Non-statutorily designated sites within the vicinity of the site (Source: TVERC).

Site name	Designation	Description	Distance from nearest site boundary (m)
Waltham to Binfield Woodlands and Parklands	Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA)	An area north of Wokingham and Bracknell with scattered ancient woodland sites and parkland. Further habitats include lowland mixed deciduous woodland, wet woodland and fen, lowland meadow, parkland and farmland. Primary targets for this BOA include management and restoration of woodland through planting with further potential to recreate and restore the remaining lowland meadow habitats, notable for their importance to farmland birds.	On-site
Tippens Wood	Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	9.11ha of ancient woodland with a canopy of oak and supporting ash, birch and abundant hazel coppice. There are also field maples and wild service tree. The ground flora is dominated by bramble with frequent bluebell and wood speedwell.	On-site
Pond Wood	Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	A 5.02ha parcel of ancient woodland, though it has been modified through planting of sweet chestnut coppice. There is an abundance of hazel and silver birch coppice and bramble at the ground layer.	180 N
Pebblestone Copse	Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	A 3ha parcel of broadleaved semi-natural woodland with two contrasting woodland types; mature coppiced alders around shallow peaty pools with strongly acidic flora, and wide-crowned oaks on the drier edges with a dense cover of bluebells.	850 S
Long Copse	Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	A 5ha parcel of woodland with two distinct habitats – the remaining woodland since being lost in 1981 and an area of relatively species-poor grassland divided into two paddocks with scattered mature trees and shrubs.	930 SE

6.1.2 Part of Tippens Wood LWS is within the site boundary. It is a parcel of ancient woodland i.e. an irreplaceable habitat (Natural England 2022) and an example of Mixed Lowland Deciduous Woodland – a priority habitat (Habitat of Principal Importance for Conservation as defined under S41 of the NERC Act 2006). Further parcels of mixed priority woodland are situated approximately 370 metres to the northwest, 450 metres to the east and 720 metres to the west.

6.2 Protected and Notable Species

6.2.1 The search of the TVERC database revealed a range of protected and notable species records dating from 1984. Only recent records (defined as fewer than ten years old) are included in this report (see **Tables 2a** & **2b**).

Table 2a. Recent protected and/or notable species records within the vicinity of the site (Source: TVERC).

Common name	Scientific name	No. of records	Most recent record	Nearest record (m)	Precision (m)	Status
Amphibians & Reptiles						
Smooth newt	*Lissotriton vulgaris*	1	2019	790	1	WCA5 NERC_S41
Birds						
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*	5	2024	/	1000	NERC_S41 BOCC_Red
Swift	*Apus apus*	2	2020	/	1000	BOCC_Red
Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*	3	2020	/	1000	NERC_S41 BOCC_Red
House martin	*Delichon urbicum*	4	2023	/	1000	BOCC_Red
Yellowhammer	*Emberiza citrinella*	3	2023	780	100	NERC_S41 BOCC_Red
Redkite	*Milvus milvus*	24	2024	/	1000	WACA-Sch1-p1
Black redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	2	2021	/	1000	WACA-Sch1-p1
Green sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*	2	2016	/	1000	WACA-Sch1-p1
Redwing	*Turdus iliacus*	1	2022	/	1000	WACA-Sch1-p1
Song thrush	*Turdus philomelos*	1	2021	/	1000	NERC_S41
Fieldfare	*Turdus pilaris*	3	2023	/	1000	NERC_S41 WACA-Sch1-p1
Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*	2	2023	/	1000	NERC_S41 BOCC_Red
High Flowering Plants						
Chamomile	*Chamaemelum nobile*	1	2017	570	10	NERC_S41
Invertebrates						
White admiral	*Limenitis camilla*	1	2018	170	100	NERC_S41
Stag Beetle	*Lucanus cervus*	1	2023	270	100	HDir2, WCA5, NERC-S41
Terrestrial mammals – Bats						
Noctule	*Nyctalus noctula*	5	2024	370	10	HDir4, HDir2, WCA5, NERC-S41
Common pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*	12	2024	250	10	HDir4, HDir2, WCA5, NERC-S41
Soprano Pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*	9	2024	250	10	HDir4, HDir2, WCA5, NERC-S41
Brown long-eared	*Plecotus auritus*	8	2024	320	1	HDir4, HDir2, WCA5, NERC-S41
Terrestrial mammals (excl. bats)						
Badger	*Meles meles*	4	2024	/	/	Badgers-1992
European hedgehog	*Erinaceus europaeus*	1	2023	350	1	NERC_S41

Table 2b. Species status key.

Abbreviation	Legislation
Badgers-1992	Protection of Badgers Act 1992
BOCC_Red	Birds of Conservation Concern Red List.
HabReg_2	Schedule 2 of Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (European Protected Species animal).

HDir2	Habitats Directive, Annex 2 – Species whose conservation requires the designation of special areas of conservation
HDir4	Habitats Directive, Annex IV - Species in need of strict protection
NERC_S41	Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (Section 41)
WACA-Sch1-p1	Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 - Birds which are protected by special penalties.
WCA5	Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 5 - Animals which are protected
WCA8	Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 8 - Plants which are protected
WCA9	Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 9 - Animals and Plants which are established in the wild

6.2.2 A single bat mitigation licence has been granted within a 2-kilometre radius of the application site, covering impacts on non-breeding brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) roosts at a site situated approximately 1820 metres to the southwest (Case reference: 2020-48489-EPS-MIT).

6.2.3 A single great crested newt (GCN) mitigation licence has also been granted within a 2-kilometre radius of the application site. The licenced site is also situated approximately 1820 metres to the southwest (Case reference: 2020-47555-EPS-MIT-2). In addition, a GCN Class Licence survey return was positive for GCN approximately 1010 metres to the southeast. There are six waterbodies that may be suitable for breeding GCN within a 500m radius, situated approximately 260 metres to the northeast, 350 metres to the northeast, 350 metres to the northwest, 370 metres to the west, 420 metres to the north, and 420 metres to the northwest. The site partially falls within the District Level Licence Amber Impact Risk Zone for GCN, i.e. a zone that contains suitable habitat where GCN are likely to be present.

6.3 Historic and Current Land Use

6.3.1 Google Satellite imagery dating back to 1985 shows that the application site has not significantly changed other than the separation of the initial field into multiple smaller sections with the addition of fences. The fields are regularly mown.

7 UK HABITAT CLASSIFICATION SURVEY

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 The application site covers a 0.31ha section of land within a field to the north of Forest Road in Wokingham, Berkshire.

7.1.2 The UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) habitats observed during the site walkover ranged from medium to high distinctiveness habitats and comprised: g3c Other neutral grassland, h2a Native hedgerow, h3d Bramble scrub and w1f Lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

7.1.3 The UKHab primary habitats and secondary codes are described alongside photographs (**Photographs 1 – 8**) and a survey plan (see **Figure 1**) as follows:

7.2 g3c – Other neutral grassland

108 Frequently mown, 516 Active management, 612 Fence

7.2.1 The site primarily comprised a section of frequently mown other neutral grassland bordered by two further unmanaged sections that are off-site but within the same field, separated by timber fencing (**Photographs 1 & 2**). The sward had a range of grassland and herbaceous species including Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), smooth meadow grass (*Poa pratensis*), red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*), meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*), smooth rush (*Juncus effusus*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinales*) and creeping thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*).

Photograph 1. Frequently mown other neutral grassland (g3c).

Photograph 2. Unmanaged section of other neutral grassland off-site to the east.

7.3 h2a Native hedgerow & h3d – Bramble scrub

7.3.1 The southern boundary of the field was lined by a native hedgerow along Forest Road, which was dominated by hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) with hedge garlic (*Alliaria petiolata*), hedge mustard (*Sisymbrium officinale*), cut leaved cranesbill (*Geranium dissectum*), barren brome (*Bromus sterilis*), ivy (*Hedera helix*) and cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) growing at the base (**Photograph 3**). This hedge was then separated from the grassland by a strip of bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) scrub with supporting nettle (*Urtica diocia*), cleavers (*Galium aparine*), cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), greater stichwort (*Rabelera holostea*), cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*), creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), white dead nettle (*Lamium album*) and sallow (*Salix* sp.) (**Photograph 4**).

Photograph 3. Native hedgerow along Forest Road (h2a).

Photograph 4. Bramble scrub adjacent to the native hedgerow along Forest Road (h3d).

7.4 w1f – Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

28 Ancient woodland site, 612 Fence

7.4.1 The woodland edge of the non-statutorily designated Tippen's Wood Local Wildlife Site (LWS) is situated along the northern boundary of the application site. The woodland's woody species comprised oak (*Quercus robur*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) with underlying bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), wood false brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), cleavers (*Galium aparine*), dock (*Rumex* sp.) and butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) (**Photograph 5**). A ditch ran parallel to the fence along the northern boundary of the application site, and whilst offsite, two badger setts and a latrine were observed within the woodland edge, less than 10 metres from the application site (**Photographs 6 & 7; Target notes 1 & 2**). Furthermore, trees within the woodland edge had potential roosting features for bats including knot holes and peeling bark (**Photograph 8**).

Photograph 5. Woodland edge along the northern boundary of the application site (w1f).

Photograph 6. Dry ditch along the northern boundary of the application site (w1f).

Photograph 7. Badger latrine within the woodland edge (w1f).

Photograph 8. Large knot hole with high potential of use by roosting bats (w1f).

Figure 1. UKHab Survey Plan - Baseline Habitats.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Designated Sites for Nature Conservation

Evaluation of Baseline

8.1.1 The desk study revealed that whilst the application site is not statutorily designated for its wildlife interest and so not recognized as being of international or nation level conservation significance, the woodland edge of the Tippen's Woods Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA) falls partly within its northern boundary. Furthermore, the site falls within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for the Wykery Copse Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) situated approximately 3370 metres to the southeast and a further three Local Wildlife Sites were situated approximately 180 metres to the north, 850 metres to the south, and 930 metres to the southeast.

Impact Assessment

8.1.2 The proposals i.e. construction of three additional homes with associated access and landscaping, will involve an increase in residential units, but does not correspond with the categories of development that are likely to have an impact on the nearby SSSI or other statutorily designated wildlife sites within 5km and so consultation with Natural England will not be required as adverse impacts on the sites are highly unlikely.

8.1.3 As the site partially includes the Tippen's Woods LWS, *Policy TB23: Biodiversity and Development* that forms part of Wokingham Borough Council's Local Plan states that the planning must provide *'appropriate buffer zones between the development proposals and designated sites, as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation'*. As such, through the provision of a suitable buffer between the proposed dwellings and the LWS, no adverse effects are anticipated on this or other nearby locally designated sites – refer to recommendations in **Section 9.2**.

8.2 Habitats

Evaluation of Baseline

8.2.1 The application site is characterised by grassland (g3c other neutral grassland) with bramble scrub along the southern boundary, and a part of the lowland mixed deciduous woodland along the northern boundary – i.e. habitats of medium to high distinctiveness.

8.2.2 The native hedgerow along the southern boundary is representative of a habitat of low distinctiveness and of no more than site level ecological value.

8.2.3 The grassland within the site is regularly cut and aerial photography available on Google

Earth suggests that the grassland has been subject to regular cutting over the last 20 years. The sward supported a range of widespread grasses and forbs typical of neutral grassland and overall diversity was relatively low as a consequence of regular mowing; however, it forms a semi-natural habitat that is a buffer to the adjacent ancient woodland. Overall, it is assessed to be of no more than local level ecological value.

8.2.4 The woodland on-site and to the north is an irreplaceable habitat that is also mapped within the Priority Habitat Inventory (a Habitat of Principle Importance (NERC Act 2006 Section 41). The woodland is classified as part of Tippens Wood LWS and therefore is recognised to be of county level conservation importance.

Impact Assessment

8.2.5 The indicative development proposals are restricted to the grassland, bramble scrub and native hedgerow without any direct impacts on the woodland along the northern boundary of the application site. The native hedgerow does not meet the definition of Hedgerow Priority Habitat (as defined under the NERC Act 2006) and so the proposals will not result in the loss of any priority habitats or habitats of importance beyond the site level. The small scale and temporary nature of the construction activities will not result in any air pollution or ground water pollutants and increased noise and vibrations from machinery will be temporary and minimal. Any low levels of dust from activities can be mitigated through precautionary measures. Without mitigation, the temporary construction activities may cause minor adverse impacts on the woodland habitats both onsite and offsite and therefore precautionary measures are recommended and can be secured in a Construction and Environmental Management Plan: Biodiversity (refer to **Section 9.3**).

8.2.6 The Local Plan for Wokingham Borough Council includes the requirement of a suitable buffer between the development site and a Local Wildlife Site's edge. Through the provision of a suitable buffer (a minimum buffer of 15m is required between ancient woodland and development; Natural England 2022), between the proposed dwellings and the LWS/ancient woodland in the detailed design, as well as the use of precautions to avoid any residual effect during construction, no adverse effects are anticipated on the LWS and ancient woodland – refer to recommendations in **Sections 9.2.**

8.2.7 The proposed development will need to demonstrate a minimum of 10% net gain for biodiversity at the Technicals Detailed Consent stage if Permission in Principle is granted - refer to recommendations in **Section 9.4.**

8.3 Bats

Evaluation of Baseline

8.3.1 The on-site woodland as well as further woodland to the north, northwest, east and west, and the network of hedgerows and tree lines within the immediate rural setting, resembles high-quality foraging habitats for any bats roosting locally. Furthermore, TVERC returned recent records of four species of bats and a single bat mitigation licence has been granted within a 2-kilometre radius of the application site, covering a non-breeding brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) roost at a site situated approximately 1820 metres to the southwest (Case reference: 2020-48489-EPS-MIT).

8.3.2 Potential roosting features (PRFs), primarily comprising knot holes, were observed throughout the woodland edge situated on-site, and it is considered likely that further PRFs would be scattered within the off-site woodland to the north (Collins 2023).

8.3.3 Overall, the site, forming a small proportion of a wider network of woodland and grassland habitats is likely to be of no more than site or local value to local bat populations.

Impact Assessment

8.3.4 Whilst the proposals will not directly impact any PRFs identified within the woodland's edge, the increase in residential units may lead to significant changes in artificial lighting on the application site and could result in an adverse impact on bat activity. Artificial lighting has been shown to alter the activity of nocturnal species and certain bat species have been found to be especially averse to lighting and actively avoid lit areas (ILP 2023). To prevent any adverse impacts from lighting, any lighting should be designed with the aim of reducing light spillage onto the nearby woodland and associated buffer, thereby maintaining dark corridors along this margin of the site – refer to recommendations in **Section 9.5**.

8.4 Great Crested Newt (and other amphibians)

Evaluation of Baseline

8.4.1 The application site lacks any standing water and therefore offers no breeding opportunities for amphibians, such as great crested newt (GCN) – a protected species and a priority species listed under the NERC Act 2006 (Section 41).

8.4.2 The desk study data returned a single Great Crested Newt mitigation licence granted within a 2km radius of the application site, situated approximately 1820 metres to the

southwest (Case reference: 2020-47555-EPS-MIT-2). Whilst a GCN Class Licence survey return was positive for GCN from a pond approximately 1010 metres to the southeast, TVERC holds no recent records of GCN with a 1km radius. However, smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) has been recorded approximately 790 metres to the east.

8.4.3 There are six waterbodies within a 500m radius of the application site, the closest of which is situated approximately 260 metres to the northeast. The GCN District Licence Impact Risk Zone Map available on the NatureSpace website shows that the site partially falls within an Amber zone, i.e. a zone that contains suitable habitat where GCN are likely to be present.

8.4.4 The grassland on site was cut at the time of the survey and historic aerial photography shows it has been managed grassland with cutting regularly throughout that period, which makes the site of low suitability for GCN.

Impact Assessment

8.4.5 With reference to the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool, the proposals, which will result in the loss or damage of 0.1 – 0.5ha of land greater than 250m from any potential breeding ponds, are highly unlikely to result in an offence – see **Figure 3** below.

Component	**Likely effect** (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	**Notional offence probability**
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.1 - 0.5 ha lost or damaged	0.005
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.005
Rapid risk assessment result:	**GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY**	

Guidance on risk assessment result categories

"Green: offence highly unlikely" indicates that the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that it is highly unlikely any offence would be committed should the development proceed. Therefore, no licence would be required. However, bearing in mind that this is a generic assessment, you should carefully examine your specific plans to ensure this is a sound conclusion, and take precautions (see **Non-licensed avoidance measures tool**) to avoid offences if appropriate. It is likely that any residual offences would have negligible impact on conservation status, and enforcement of such breaches is unlikely to be in the public interest.

Figure 3. Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool

8.4.6 In the absence of precautionary mitigation measures, there would be a small risk of harm to individual GCNs and other amphibians utilising cover e.g. beneath rubble, in the work area, but if simple precautions are adopted, the risk of harming GCNs and other amphibians is considered to be negligible - refer to recommendations in **Section 9.6**.

8.5 Hazel Dormouse

Evaluation of Baseline

8.5.1 The desk study data included no recent hazel dormouse records within a 1km radius of the site and the search of MAGIC for granted dormouse EPS licence applications also returned none within the same radius.

8.5.2 The woodland on site and within the surrounding area is lowland mixed deciduous woodland and offers suitable habitat for dormice, connecting to further parcels of woodland containing understorey species favoured by dormice such as bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), ivy (*Hedera helix*) and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). The bramble scrub and native hedgerow along the southern boundary of the site is isolated from the suitable woodland habitat for dormice.

Impact Assessment

8.5.3 The proposed development will have no impact on suitable habitat for dormice and therefore no adverse effects on this species are anticipated.

8.6 Reptiles

Evaluation of Baseline

8.6.1 The desk study data lacked recent records of reptile species within a 1 kilometre radius of the application site. The site provides poor reptile habitat currently i.e. regularly cut grassland, and has a history of agricultural management through cutting, and therefore it is unlikely that the site provides the habitats that would support a reptile population. However, common and widespread reptile species, such as slow-worm and grass snake, could opportunistically cross the site if present in neighbouring habitats.

Impact Assessment

8.6.2 The likelihood of reptiles being on site is low. The small residual risk of harming reptiles that could cross the site could be mitigated by adopting precautionary reasonable avoidance measures to prevent the contravention of legislation protecting common and widespread reptile species such as slow worm and grass snake that could be in the neighbouring habitats – refer to **Section 9.6**.

8.7 Birds

Evaluation of Baseline

8.7.1 The desk study data returned recent records of a variety of notable bird species that have been recorded across the nearby area including woodland and farmland species.

8.7.2 The ancient lowland mixed deciduous woodland, bramble scrub and native hedgerow provide good foraging opportunities and nesting opportunities for common and widespread bird species, such as the locally recorded house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), but in the context of extensive farmland and woodland habitats offsite within the nearby area, the regularly cut other neutral grassland habitat on site is unlikely to support a bird assemblage of conservation importance.

Impact Assessment

8.7.3 Whilst the ancient lowland mixed deciduous woodland, i.e. habitat of highest value to notable birds on-site is to be retained, the bramble scrub and native hedgerow are to be removed to allow for access and landscaping. In the wider context of the local surroundings, including the further surrounding woodland, the removal of these habitats is highly unlikely to have a significant impact on local bird populations; however, there is a low risk that it could have an impact on active bird nests. As such, timing precautions for the removal of the trees and shrubs must be adhered to avoid damaging active bird nests - refer to recommendations in **Section 9.7**.

8.8 Badgers (and other mammals)

Evaluation of Baseline

8.8.1 The desk study data held four recent records of badger (*Meles meles*) within a 1km radius of the site. Furthermore, evidence of badger activity within the on-site woodland edge was observed including two badger setts and a latrine. As such, the presence of badger on site is considered to be highly likely.

8.8.2 European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) – a priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principle importance) – has been recorded 350m from the application site. The hedgerow and bramble scrub along the southern boundary provides suitable forage and shelter for hedgehog and allow for their traversal across this boundary of the site.

Impact Assessment

8.8.3 The proposals will involve the removal of areas of frequently mown grassland, i.e. some

limited potential for foraging use by badger and other notable mammals. The habitat of more significant value to mammals is the lowland mixed deciduous woodland along the northern boundary, which is to be fully retained and protected during the construction works, and after development by using a buffer, which would act as a buffer to the badger sett and retain feeding opportunities. As such, the risk to mammals within the development area is low and therefore no adverse effects are anticipated, especially if precautions are taken – refer to recommendations in **Section 9.6**.

8.9 Invertebrates

Evaluation of Baseline

8.9.1 The desk study data included a single recent record of stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) - a priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principle importance), situated 270 metres to the west. This species may utilise the areas of woody vegetation onsite and to the north, however, given the context of the extensive wooded surroundings, the site is unlikely to be of importance in isolation, to local stag beetle populations.

8.9.2 The woodland edge across the northern boundary of the site provides habitats of good value to a range of commonly occurring invertebrates. The deadwood within the woodland may be exploited by stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) – a priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principal importance) – for egg-laying.

Impact Assessment

8.9.3 The proposals will impact areas of frequently mown grassland, bramble scrub and the southern native hedgerow. Whilst these proposals will not have a significant impact on invertebrate populations, there is scope to enhance the site for invertebrate priority species that have been recorded within the local area – refer to recommendations in **Section 9.8**.

8.10 Invasive Non-native Species

Evaluation of Baseline

8.10.1 No invasive non-native species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 were found on site.

Impact Assessment

8.10.2 The absence of any non-native species on site means there is no anticipated spread of invasive species by the proposals.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Overview

9.1.1 This chapter provides the details regarding proposed avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures, including measures to enable legislative compliance.

9.2 Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Site

9.2.1 In line with the standing advice provided by Natural England to protect the on-site ancient woodland (Natural England 2022), as well as Local Plan adopted by Wokingham Borough Council to protect the on-site Local Wildlife Site (LWS), a minimum 15 metre buffer from the ancient woodland boundary to the proposed development is required.

9.3 Habitats

9.3.1 Protection measures must be adopted during construction to prevent damaging the retained habitats, specifically the ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Site, and this can be secured by a Construction Environmental Management Plan (Biodiversity) as condition of a Technical Details Consent. The habitat protection measures during construction activities deemed appropriate and proportionate to the nature and scale of the proposed development are as follows:

- Erection of Heras fencing in advance of site clearance with netting to reduce dust reaching the woodland and buffer,
- Directing security/construction lighting away from the woodland;
- Storing equipment that could cause pollution safely and securely on hard surfaces and outside the fenced buffer;
- Adopting procedures to avoid pollution incidents, e.g. fuel spills or surface runoff;
- Storing materials on existing hard surfaces to avoid compaction of soil and associated tree roots; and
- Reasonable avoidance measures for notable/protected species and stopping and seeking advice from a suitably qualified ecologist if protected species are encountered during construction.

9.4 Biodiversity Net Gain

9.4.1 If Permission in Principle is granted, the Technical Details Consent application would be subject to mandatory BNG. The proposals will need to deliver a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity to ensure that more or better-quality natural habitat is created post-development.

9.5 Sensitive Lighting Strategy

9.5.1 The proposed development will need to be designed to avoid the loss of potential bat flight paths and foraging habitat through the preparation and compliance with a sensitive lighting strategy. During development, artificial lighting should be avoided or kept to a minimum and if security lighting is required, this should be controlled by passive infra-red motion sensors with no light spillage onto the woodland (and incorporated into a CEMP: Biodiversity as per **Section 9.2**).

9.5.2 In the long-term, external lighting on the new dwellings should be avoided wherever possible, but if essential, factors such as column height, light source, use of passive infrared motion sensors and light spillage should be considered carefully when designing the lighting. If lighting is required, lighting with low or no UV content, i.e. warm white LED lames (2700K or below), should be used in place of mercury and metal halides and luminaires or other directional light accessories should be used to ensure that light spillage onto the woodland, tree line and scattered trees is avoided (BCT and ILP, 2023). Timers to enable turning off lighting at night will avoid extended periods of time where area would be lit, and this can be tailored to suit human health and safety as well as wildlife needs.

9.6 Badgers

9.6.1 The Technical Details Consent application should be preceded by an updated survey for the presence of badgers to determine if there has been any change in the location of badger setts and associated activity. The design should incorporate an appropriate buffer zone between construction and active sett entrances and retain free access for badgers to move across the site. The new dwellings should have open fencing e.g. post and rail to enable the free movement of badgers and other wildlife across the site.

9.7 Amphibians, Reptiles and Mammals (Reasonable Avoidance Measures)

9.7.1 The following reasonable avoidance measures should be adopted to minimise the low risk of harming individual amphibians, reptiles and mammals (and incorporated into a CEMP: Biodiversity as per **Section 9.2**):

Pre-commencement of construction activities

- The areas of managed neutral grassland within the development site will be kept short prior to commencement of the works to prevent reptiles, amphibians and mammals from colonising areas that will be impacted during construction.

During construction activities

- Any stored building materials or waste, such as bricks or debris etc., that might

offer shelter for amphibians, reptiles or hedgehogs will be kept raised off the ground on pallets or on existing hard standing, and efforts should be made to process and removed from site as soon as possible; and

- Excavation works will be avoided after dusk and any open excavations or trenches will be backfilled (after a check for amphibian/reptile presence) or left with escape ramps to prevent amphibians, reptiles and hedgehogs from becoming trapped.

9.7.2 In the unlikely event that an amphibian or reptile is found during construction, works will stop immediately and a licensed ecologist will be called onto site to ensure the amphibian/reptile is not harmed and provide further advice on how to proceed; work will recommence only once further written advice has been received.

9.8 Nesting Birds

9.8.1 As landscaping plans and construction activities involve the removal of bramble scrub and sections of the southern native hedgerow, this should be completed outside of the peak bird nesting season (March to August inclusive) or after a check to confirm that birds are not nesting currently within. If nesting birds are discovered during the course of the works, work should stop immediately and should continue only once the bird nesting has finished, i.e. young have fledged and left the nest.

9.9 Biodiversity Enhancement Measures

9.9.1 The planning proposals provide opportunities for the enhancement of the site's biodiversity value. The inclusion of the following recommendations would be of ecological benefit and be in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), local planning policy, in addition to species specific mitigation measures and achieving mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain.

- Installation of integrated bat and bird boxes in the newly constructed buildings;
- Creation of partially buried log piles as part of the landscaping scheme for stag beetles; and
- Wildlife-friendly, native landscaping that utilises native pollinator plants to benefit invertebrates and other local species.

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APPENDIX 1 – LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

Amphibians

The seven native species of amphibian receive protection under the W&AC 1981 (as amended). The four widespread and common amphibians (common frog, toad, smooth newt and palmate newt) receive only limited protection – making their sale illegal.

The great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) receives full protection under the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and under the Habitat Regulations 2017 (as amended). The combined legislation makes it illegal to:

- intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a great crested newt;
- possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a great crested newt;
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a great crested newt; and
- intentionally or recklessly disturb great crested newts; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating animals, to hibernate or migrate.

Great crested newts (*T. cristatus*) and common toads (*Bufo bufo*) are species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (*'UKBAP Priority Species'*) under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Badgers

Badgers are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The Act makes activities such as development that would harm or disturb badgers or damage, obstruct or destroy their setts illegal. If badgers are to be affected by the proposed development, activities can be undertaken only under a licence issued by Natural England.

Bats

All bat species in Britain are fully protected by the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and by the Habitat Regulations 2017 (as amended). In summary, the combined legislation makes it an offence to:

- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a bat;
- deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb bats; in particular, any disturbance

which is likely to impair the ability of bats to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating bats, to hibernate or migrate; or to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species; and

- deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Birds

All wild birds are protected under the W&CA 1981 (as amended). The Act makes it an offence to kill, injure or take a wild bird or to damage or destroy the nest of a wild bird whilst in use or being built. Species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act, such as barn owls and kingfishers, are afforded additional protection against disturbance while nesting.

Hazel dormice

Hazel dormice receive full protection under the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and under the Habitat Regulations 2017 (as amended). These make it illegal to:

- intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a dormouse;
- possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a dormouse;
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a dormouse; and
- intentionally or recklessly disturb dormice; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating animals, to hibernate or migrate.

Invasive non-native plants

The W&CA 1981 (as amended) provides the primary controls on the release of non-native species into the wild in Great Britain. It is an offence under Section 14(2) of the Act to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' any plant listed in Schedule 9, Part II. The species listed in the Act include Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) and Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

Otters

Otters are fully protected by the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and by the Habitat Regulations 2017 (as amended). In summary, the combined legislation makes it an offence to:

- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly

obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by an otter;

- deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb otters; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of otters to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species; and
- deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Reptiles

The four widespread reptiles most likely to be encountered (adder, grass snake, slow worm and common lizard) are protected under the W&CA 1981 (as amended). The Act makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, possess or sell any of the species.

The aforementioned species are all listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (*'UKBAP Priority Species'*) under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Water voles

Since April 2008, water voles have received full protection under Section 9 in Schedule 5 of the W&CA 1981 (as amended). This makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take water voles or to possess or control live or dead water voles or derivatives. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection or intentionally or recklessly disturb water voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose.

The water vole is listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (*'UKBAP Priority Species'*) under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Wild mammals

Under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 it is an offence to intentionally inflict unnecessary suffering, as specified by the Act, on any wild mammal.

APPENDIX 2 – INDICATIVE PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT