Clear View Cottage, Whistley Green

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and
Bat Survey

October 2025

Report ref: SWE-P25-0246-R1

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PROJECT: Clear View Cottage, Whistley Green

CLIENT: Nigel Horscroft

REPORT REF: SWE-P25-0246-R1

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Demolition of existing building and construction of a replacement dwelling.

REPORT SCOPE: Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Bat Survey

REPORT CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	1 | Page
2.0	METHODS	3 | Page
3.0	RESULTS - HABITATS	5 | Page
4.0	RESULTS - FAUNA	7 | Page
5.0	LEGISLATION	11 | Page
6.0	ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION	12 | Page
7.0	RECOMMENDATIONS	14 | Page

Drawings

0246-0610-1	Habitat map and bat survey

Appendices

Appendix 1	Camera field of view for dusk bat surveys

PROPORTIONALITY STATEMENT

Section 5.5 of BS42020[1] states –

> *"The work involved in preparing and implementing all ecological surveys, impact assessments and measures for avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement should be proportionate to the predicted degree of risk to biodiversity and to the nature and scale of the proposed development. Consequently, the decision-maker should only request supporting information and conservation measures that are relevant, necessary and material to the application in question. Similarly, the decision-maker and their consultees should ensure that any comments and advice made over an application are also proportionate."*

In addition, paragraph 45 of the National Planning Policy Framework[2] states –

> *"Local planning authorities should publish a list of their information requirements for applications for planning permission. These requirements should be kept to the minimum needed to make decisions, and should be reviewed at least every two years. Local planning authorities should only request supporting information that is relevant, necessary and material to the application in question."*

Paragraphs 98 and 99 of Government Circular 06/2005[3] also state –

> "*98. 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…*
>
> *99. It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision. The need to ensure ecological surveys are carried out should therefore only be left to coverage under planning conditions in exceptional circumstances, with the result that the surveys are carried out after planning permission has been granted. However, bearing in mind the delay and cost that may be involved, developers should not be required to undertake surveys for protected species unless there is a reasonable likelihood of the species being present and affected by the development*."

In accordance with these standards, the surveys and information detailed in this report are considered to provide an assessment of the potential impacts on ecological receptors proportionate to the predicted degree of risk to each from the proposed development. The assessment is not intended to be exhaustive or assess receptors that have been scoped out based on professional judgement, nor can this reasonably be requested in support of an application.

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1 BSI Standards Publication – BS42020:2013 - *Biodiversity — Code of practice for planning and development*

2 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (December 2024) – *National Planning Policy Framework*.

3 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (16 August 2005) *Government circular: biodiversity and geological conservation – statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system*

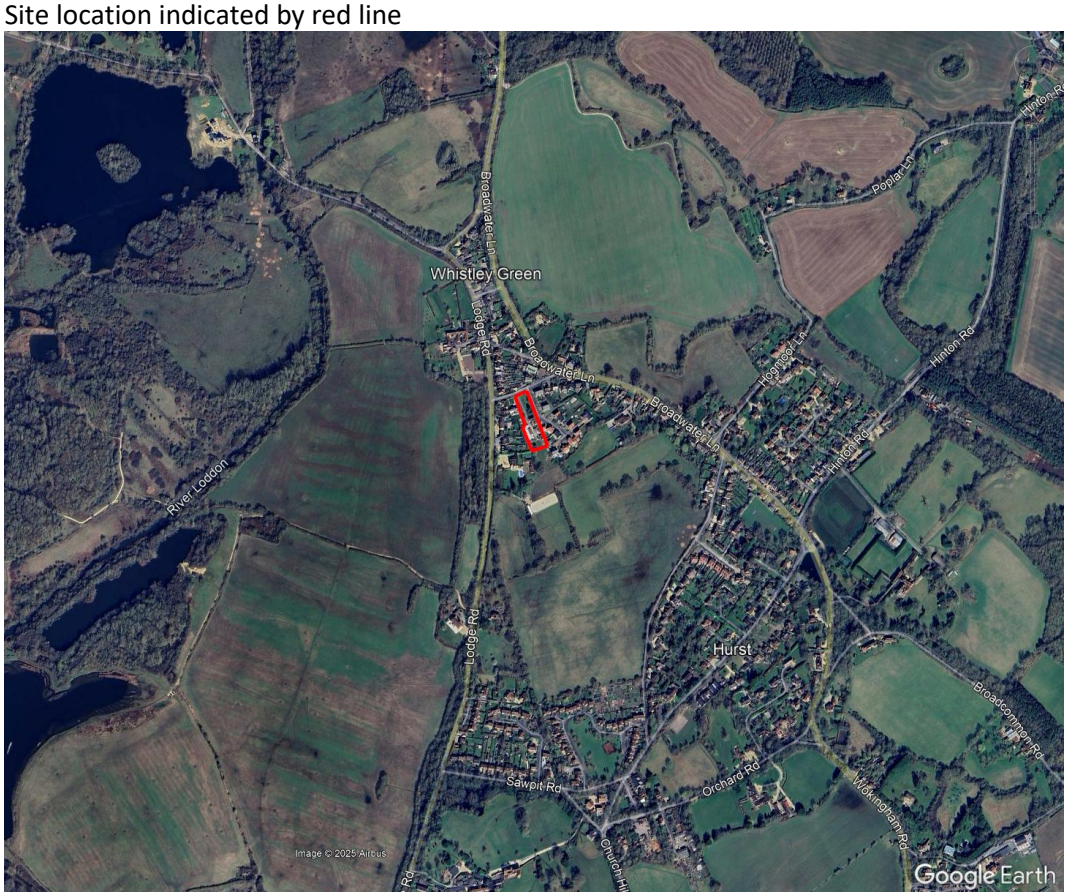
1.0 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1.1 Sam Watson Ecology (SWE) was appointed by Nigel Horscroft to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and bat survey of a site known as a Clear View Cottage, Whistley Green. The survey was commissioned to support an application for consent to demolish the existing building and construct a replacement dwelling on the site.

1.2 The site is located towards the southern edge of Whistley Green, in the civil parish of St Nicholas Hurst, Berkshire (approximate central grid reference SU 79355 74029). The site is adjoined to the north, east and west by existing built development, with farmland to the south. The wider landscape is as a mix of arable and pastoral farmland, together with other existing conurbations. The River Loddon and its flood plain are to the west of the site.

Site location indicated by red line



Biodiversity net gain statement

1.3 It is understood that the proposed planning application will seek consent for a self-build development. In accordance with Section 8 of the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024, as the development is for less than 9 units; is on a site of less than 0.5ha; and consists exclusively of dwellings which are self-build or custom-build, it is exempt from statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

2.0 METHODS

Habitat survey

2.1 A Phase 1 habitat survey was carried out of the site on 17th July 2025. The methodology for the survey was based on the Phase 1 approach devised by the former Natural Conservancy Council (now Natural England), and updated periodically by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee[4]. This technique categorises and maps the broad habitat types present within the site and targets areas of more interest or that would benefit from further survey. Additional detail was also gathered in the form of representative lists of species compiled for each habitat (an 'extended' Phase 1 survey).

2.2 Throughout the habitat survey, the potential for the site to support protected and/or notable species was assessed, with any evidence of such species recorded. Concurrently with the habitat survey, a search was also carried out for evidence of badgers *Meles meles*, including setts, latrines, 'push-throughs' and foraging evidence.

Bats – preliminary roost assessment

2.3 The only building that will be directly affected by the proposal is the existing Clear View Cottage; all of the other buildings are to be retained and were not therefore included in the bat survey. On this basis, in order to investigate the potential use of Clear View Cottage by bats for roosting, an internal and external survey was carried out concurrently with the habitat survey on 17th July 2025. The methodology used for this was based the Bat Conservation Trust's (BCT) Good Practice Guidance[5] and involved checking contained areas such as roof voids for evidence of bats including droppings, feeding remains, staining, and any bats themselves.

2.4 Following the internal survey, features on the exterior of the building that bats could potentially exploit for roosting were also identified. Such features can include gaps behind fascia/barge boards and soffits, loose, missing or hanging coverings such as roof tiles and lead flashing, cracks in brickwork or panelling, and where weatherboarding has warped allowing potential access behind.

2.5 An assessment of the overall suitability of the building to support roosting was then carried out based on the presence, number and suitability of interior and exterior features that bats might use for roosting.

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4 JNCC, (2010), *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit*

5 Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

2.6 The building survey was carried out by Samuel Watson who is registered on Natural England's Bat Survey Class Licence WML-CL18 registration ref: 2015-1152-CLS-CLS.

Bats – dusk emergence surveys

2.7 The building was assessed during the preliminary roost assessment to have moderate roosting potential. On this basis, in order to supplement the building survey and provide additional information relating to the potential use of any exterior features by bats for roosting, two dusk emergence surveys were carried out. The methodology for these was also based on the BCT good practice guidance and involved the buildings being monitored continually from 15 minutes before sunset until at approximately 1.5 hours after sunset.

2.8 To achieve the necessary level of coverage, four Canon XA40 camcorders set to infrared (IR) mode were deployed around the building as shown on Drawing 0246-0610-1 and the same locations were used for both surveys for consistency. It was not possible to fully observe the east elevation of the building due to the presence of a fence along the site boundary. However, there is tall buddleia *Buddleja davidii* vegetation between the building and fence at this location which reduces the scope for roosting to occur in any event.

2.9 IR light was provided during the survey for each camera by a 28w IR floodlight which has a 120^{o} beam angle and 50m effective range. Each camera was also accompanied by a Wildlife Acoustics "mini bat" bat detector that was set to record continually in both full spectrum and zero crossing format throughout the survey.

2.10 The footage recorded during the surveys was analysed using PotPlayer video software at no greater than double the real-time rate. Species identification is achieved by timestamping each event recorded and cross-referring to the recordings obtained by the accompanying bat detector.

3.0 RESULTS – HABITAT SURVEY

3.1 The following habitats were recorded on the site.

- Amenity grassland
- Artificial surfaces and buildings
- Pond
- Trees
- Hedgerow
- Ornamental

3.2 Each habitat is mapped on Drawing 0246-0610-1 and described in more detail below, with reference to the dominant or more notable species identified.

Amenity grassland

3.3 The most abundant vegetated habitat on the site is amenity grassland. This had a short sward height at the time of the survey and appeared to be well maintained by regular mowing. Grasses such as Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris* dominated, with tall fescue *Festuca arundinacea* also recorded. The herb component of this habitat was limited in both abundance and diversity, and contained yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris*, creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and nettle *Urtica dioica*.

Artificial surfaces and buildings

3.4 A large proportion of the site had an artificial, made surface in the form of either asphalt, concrete or gravel. Areas of asphalt and concrete were well sealed and were largely devoid of vegetation. Areas with a gravel surface had been colonised to a varying degree, with buddleia dominating in places. Other species recorded included Yorkshire fog, evening primrose *Oenothera biennis*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, nettle, bristly oxtongue *Helminthotheca echioides* and hollyhock *Alcea rosea*.

3.5 Clear View Cottage is discussed in detail below.

Pond

3.6 The site contains an ornamental pond at the southern end, which aerial photos indicate was installed between 2010 and 2013. It has a synthetic butyl liner and vertical banks. Aquatic and emergent vegetation present within the pond included water lily *Nymphaea alba*, sallows *Salix spp.*, purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and abundant reedmace *Typha latifolia*.

Trees

3.7 There are a number of trees on the site, including tulip *Liriodendron tulipifera*, atlas cedar *Cedrus atlantica*, olive *Olea europaea*, whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and eucalyptus *Eucalyptus spp.*. There are also several fruit trees, including apple *Malus domestica*, medlar *Mespilus germanica* and quince *Cydonia oblonga*.

Hedgerow

3.8 The site's northern boundary is defined by an ornamental hedgerow. This contained cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*, snowberry *Symphoricarpos albus* and hawthorn.

Ornamental

3.9 Pockets of ornamental vegetation include many of the same species as have colonised the areas of gravel. Other species recorded in addition to these were Wilson's honeysuckle *Lonicera nitida*, Darwin's barberry *Berberis darwinii*, rose of Sharon *Hypericum calycinum*, dog rose *Rosa canina*, ivy *Hedera helix*, bay *Laurus nobilis* and Oregon grape *Mahonia aquifolium*.

4.0 RESULTS – FAUNA

Bats – preliminary roost assessment

4.1 Clear View Cottage is a two storey, red brick building that has a multi-pitched roof covered with clay tiles. The largest roof void is present over the northern end of the building and it appears to have been extended at some point, with the western section having a clear span truss constructed from sawn timber, whist the east section has a braced purlin truss constructed from timbers that appear to be markedly older.

4.2 An active wasps' nest was present in this void at the time of the survey which prevented a detailed survey being carried out. Nevertheless, no evidence of bats was found in proximity to the access hatch and the build-up of cobwebs within the void would also indicate that there has been a lack of movement generally. The presence of an active wasps' nest does, itself, also reduce the likelihood of bats roosting.

4.3 There is a second void at the centre of the building, but this was not accessed at the time of the survey. The third section of pitched roof at the southern end of the building is open to the roof internally and has been lined with fibreboard.

4.4 Externally, the principal roosting features noted were the roof tiles, many of which appeared to be traditional and so have an irregular shape that creates potential crevice type roosting opportunities below. A number of the roof and hip tiles were also raised or missing, providing further potential roosting opportunities, with the lead flashing also warped in places. The remainder of the building is generally well sealed, with the brickwork complete and the building lacking a soffit box at the eaves.

4.5 Overall, the building was assessed to have moderate roosting potential and no evidence of bat was found during the building survey.

Bats – dusk emergence survey

4.6 The field of view for each camera is shown at Appendix 1, and the same locations were used for both surveys for consistency. The dusk surveys were carried out during optimal weather conditions, as detailed below.

Table 1 – dusk survey parameters

Date	Start	Sunset	Finish	Temperature	Wind*
31st July 2025	20:37	20:52	22:22	18	0
28th August 2025	19:43	19:58	21:28	15	0

*estimated speed based on the Beauford scale

4.7 A single emergence event was recorded during the dusk surveys. This was detected during the first dusk survey and involved a bat emerging from the eaves of the building at the southern end (see Drawing 0246-0610-1). Analysis of the recordings of the accompanying bat detector confirms that the bat was a soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*.

Location of bat emergence

Other fauna

4.8 No evidence of any other protected or notable fauna was found, in particular no evidence of badgers was identified.

5.0 LEGISLATION

5.1 All bat species and their roosts are afforded full protection under Regulation 43 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Regulation 43 states:

"43.— (1) A person who—

(a) deliberately captures, injures or kills any wild animal of a European protectedspecies,

(b) deliberately disturbs wild animals of any such species,

(c) deliberately takes or destroys the eggs of such an animal, or

(d) damages or destroys a breeding site or resting place of such an animal,

is guilty of an offence.

(2) For the purposes of paragraph (1)(b), disturbance of animals includes in particularany disturbance which is likely—

(a) to impair their ability—

(i) to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young; or

(ii) in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernateor migrate; or

(b) to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong."

5.2 It is also an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat whilst it is occupying a place of shelter or protection, and to obstruct access to such a place. **On the basis of the surveys carried, the above protection is considered to apply to the existing Clear View Cottage, and a derogation licence issued by Natural England must therefore be obtained before any work can be carried out to these buildings that could infringe this protection.**

6.0 ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION

Habitats

Assessment

6.1 The plant species and assemblages of plant species found within the site are either common and widespread throughout much of lowland Britain and are typical of a site of this type, or are non-native, ornamental species. None of the habitats or species recorded is afforded legal protection, all are readily recreated other than the more mature trees, and all are well represented in the wider area. As such, even in the absence of mitigation and/or compensation, the loss of any of the habitats as a result of the proposed development would not be considered likely to result in an ecological impact of significance at anything above the immediate confines of the site itself. It is also likely that the site will contain many of the same habitats and species post-development in any event, with many of the existing trees also retained.

Bats

Assessment

6.2 The only evidence found of bats roosting in the existing building, was a single soprano pipistrelle bat that was recorded emerging from the corner of the building at dusk. As both dusk surveys were carried out during the peak survey season, the presence of a single bat would indicate that the roost is a non-maternity, day roost, most likely used by an individual male bat or a non-breeding female.

6.3 With reference to Table 3.2 of the UK Bat Mitigation Guidelines[6], the value of a day roost used by a widespread species is restricted to the lowest geographic level. The identified roost is therefore assessed to have value at the site level only.

Mitigation

6.4 In order to reduce the regulatory burden for developments that affect low value roosts of the type assessed to be present within the building, Natural England operate a specific derogation licence known as the Bat Mitigation Class Licence. This operates to allow development affecting low value roosts to be licenced using a more streamlined and faster process. This in turn reduces delays and costs for the development. SWE is registered with Natural England to operate under the Bat Mitigation Class Licence, registration ref: RC102.

6 Reason, P.F. and Wray, S. (2023). *UK Bat Mitigation Guidelines: a guide to impact assessment, mitigation and compensation for developments affecting bats.* Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Ampfield.

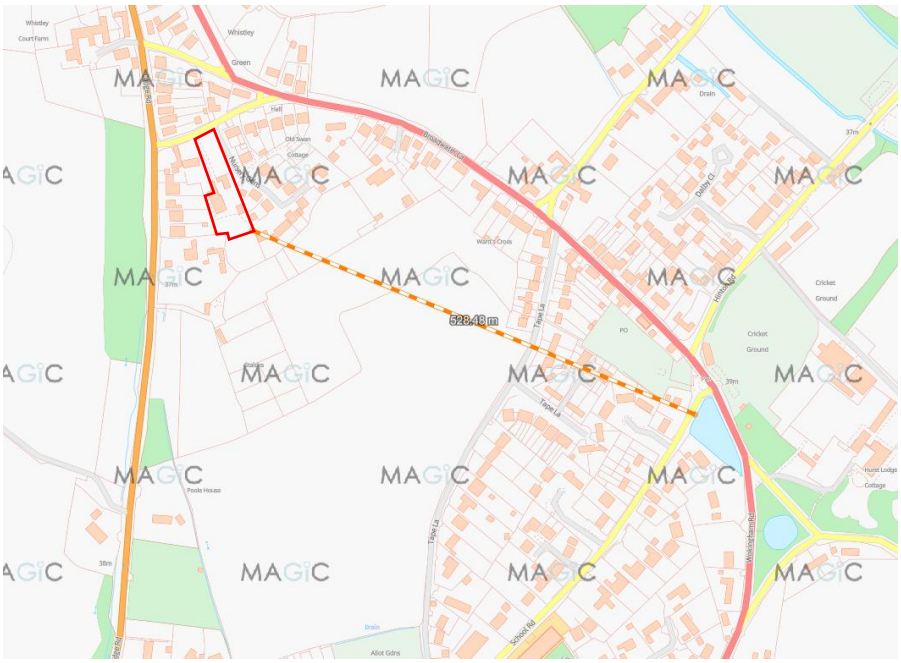
Whilst the identified roost will be removed due to the demolition of the building, under this licence there is no mandated requirement for compensatory roosting provision and none is therefore considered necessary. The installation of a bat box on a retained tree or the new building could, however, be provided as an enhancement.

6.5 In the absence of any evidence that the building is used by a maternity roost, coupled with the fact that as a residential building it is intrinsically unlikely to support hibernation roosting due to central heating, there is considered to be no requirement for restricting when work can be carried out to the building that could impact the roost.

Other fauna

Assessment

6.6 No evidence of other protected or notable fauna was found on the site. The habitats are assessed to be unsuitable for dormouse and the well managed nature of the grasslands means these are unlikely to support a resident population of reptiles. Similarly, the on-site pond is assessed as unlikely to be used by great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* for breeding. This is because it is an ornamental feature that is still relatively new, and the nearest off-site pond identifiable on the MAGIC website is over 500m to the southeast (see below); a distance that is likely to preclude individual animals travelling from it to the pond on-site. There are also substantial barriers between this pond and the site in the form of roads and numerous existing dwellings, which further reduces the likelihood of great crested newts being able to colonise the site.



7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Nesting birds

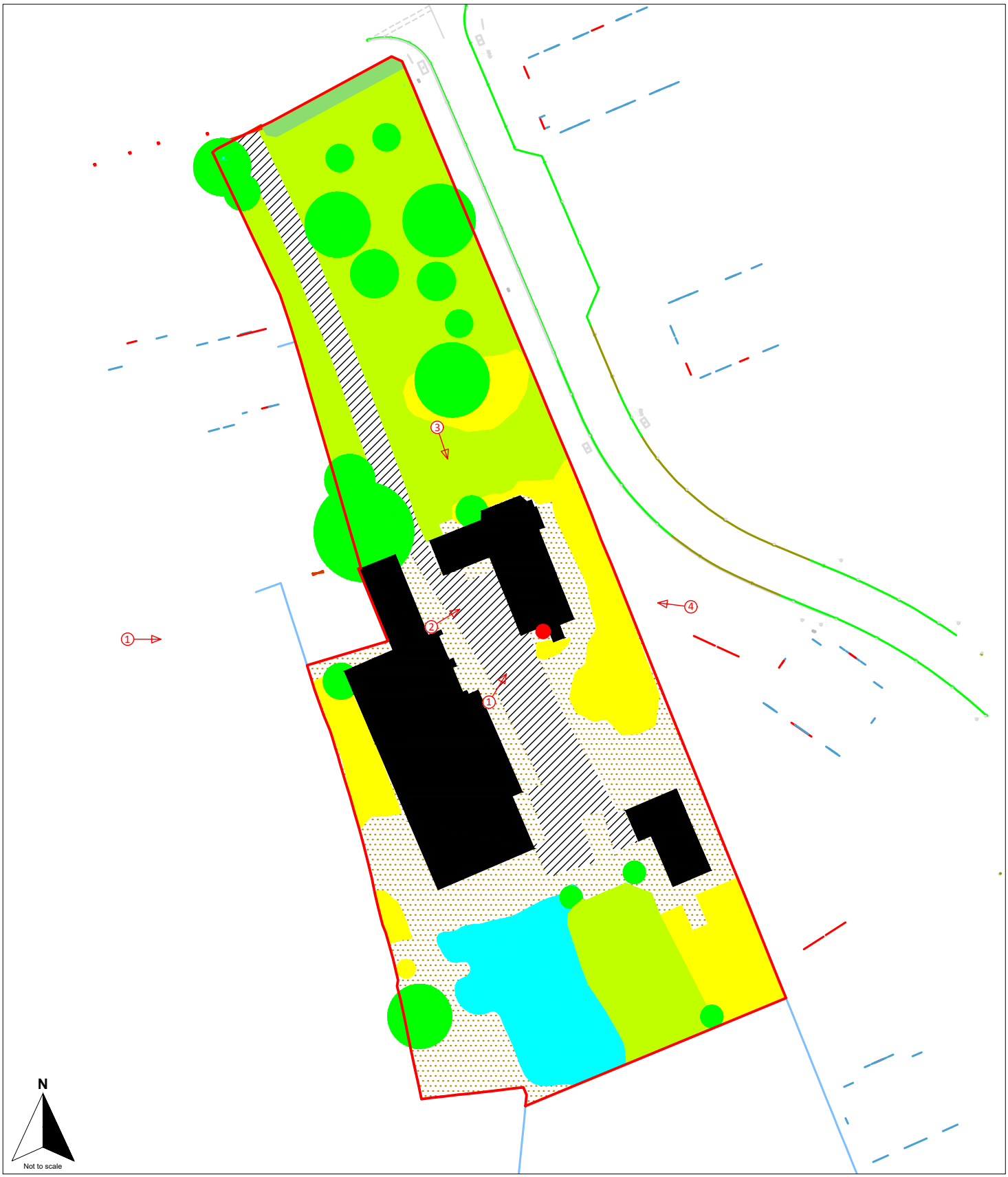
7.1 In order to avoid legislative constraints relating to nesting birds, it is recommended to carry out any clearance works, such as vegetation removal, soil stripping and building demolition, outside of the peak bird nesting season, which typically runs from mid-February to August inclusive, although some bird species will nest all year-round if conditions are suitable. If such work is programmed for during the peak nesting period, a prior survey by a suitably experienced ecologist is recommended to identify if any nesting constraints are present at that time. If an active nest is identified within an area to be affected by any works, it is likely that it would have to remain *in situ* and unaffected until such time as a re-survey confirmed that it was no longer in active use, at which point it is likely that it could be removed.

Enhancement

7.2 Although not required for legislation compliance, the NPPF[7] at paragraph 193(d) states "*opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design"*. The following enhancements are therefore recommended so this policy requirement can be met:

- Install 1 bird boxes on the new buildings or retained trees within the development.
- Install 1 bat boxes on the new buildings or retained trees within the development.

[7] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (last revision September 2023). National Planning Policy Framework.



Site boundary

Amenity grassland

Gravel

Hardstanding

Pond

Tree

Hedgerow

Building

Ornamental

Soprano pipistrelle day roost

Dusk survey location

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Project - Clear View Cottage, Whistley Green

Client - Nigel Horscroft

Title - Habitat map and bat survey

Date - October 25 | Drawing - 0246-0610-1 | Rev -

APPENDIX 1

Location 1

Location 2

Location 3

Location 4