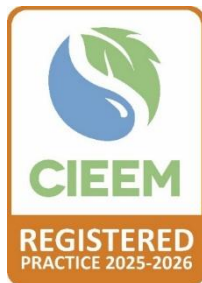


**Silver Birches,
Heath Ride,
Finchampstead,
Berks,
RG40 3QJ**

**PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL
APPRAISAL**

July 2025

Dr. Jonty Denton (Chartered Ecologist) FRES FLS MCIEEM CECol



Prepared by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consultant Chartered Ecologist Dr.Jonty Denton FRES FLS MCIEEM CEcol was commissioned to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of Silver Birches, Heath Ride, Finchampstead, Berks, RG40 3QJ (GR:SU808645).

The survey area was systematically walked and surveyed according to Phase 1 Habitat Survey criteria during daylight hours by Dr.Jonty Denton on the 12th July 2025. Phase 1 Habitat Survey is a standardised system for classifying and mapping semi-natural vegetation and wildlife habitats in Great Britain. Vegetation is mapped in terms of standard habitat types as defined in the JNCC Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey (2010).

The site comprises hard standing, extensive recently disturbed ground, pine woodland. No priority habitats occur on site or within 200m.

The Provisional Roost Assessment / Phase 1 Bat Survey was undertaken in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust Guidelines (Collins, 2023).

No evidence of bats was found within the dwellings or garage. However, the roofs of the bungalow, rear extension and detached garage have small openings which could be exploited by crevice roosting bats and all have low potential for bats, and a phase 2 survey is required.

INTRODUCTION

Site Proposals

This is required for a planning application seeking to demolish the existing bungalow and replace with a new dwelling.

This section details the methods used during the Phase 1 survey undertaken of the site.

METHODS

Phase 1 Habitat Survey Methods

The survey area was systematically walked, and habitats mapped according to Phase 1 Habitat Survey criteria during daylight hours on 12th July 2025. Phase 1 Habitat Survey is a standardised system for classifying and mapping semi-natural vegetation and wildlife habitats in Great Britain. Vegetation is mapped in terms of standard habitat types as defined in the JNCC Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey (2010).

In addition, habitats were appraised for their suitability to support protected or notable (UK Biodiversity Action Plan/Species of Principle Importance [S41]) species, e.g. breeding birds, badgers, bats, herptiles, stag beetle, that might be affected by the proposed development; in accordance with the 'Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment' (IEA, 1995).

Phase 1 Bat Survey Methods

The Daytime Bat Assessment / Phase 1 Bat Survey was undertaken in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust Guidelines (Collins, 2023).

The Phase 1 Bat Survey was carried out and comprised of a daytime walkover of the site, internally and externally, to record evidence of any protected bat species.

Details of the survey methods are given below.

The property was investigated externally to identify potential bat access/egress locations and roosting areas such as gaps or holes between wooden cladding, roof tiles, fascias and soffits and to record direct evidence of bat presence such as

droppings and urine staining. This was followed by a detailed investigation of all accessible internal spaces to record evidence of bat roosting activity such as droppings, feeding remains, live animals, corpses, urine staining and fur staining. The building was assessed as to its suitability for supporting roosting bats. The survey conformed to current Bat Conservation Trust guidelines (Bat Conservation, (2023) *Bat surveys for professional ecologists: Good practice guidelines* 4th edition).

The details of the assessment criteria used to determine the ecological value of on-site attributes is outlined below. During the Phase 1 survey the assessment criteria are based on the potential for the site to support the species considered. However, in many cases Phase 2 surveys will be required to confirm presence /absence of any bat species and hence the importance of a population at the site, therefore the assessment of value should be considered as provisional.

Where possible, a provisional assessment of potential will be made although this may well require Phase 2 surveys to confirm status.

High Potential- High potential buildings are those that have features highly suitable for use by roosting bats, including gaps around soffits, hanging tiles, extensive roof spaces etc. High potential buildings are often, but not always, buildings of more historic construction. Further Phase 2 surveys will be required to confirm the presence/absence of bats.

Moderate Potential- Moderate potential buildings have a moderate number of features that may be utilised by bats for roosting, these may include loose fascias, roof spaces etc. Further Phase 2 surveys are likely to be required to confirm the presence/absence of bats.

Low Potential- Low potential buildings are those that provide limited bat roosting potential although some features that may be utilised by bats may be present. Further Phase 2 surveys are likely to be required to confirm the presence/absence of bats.

No/Negligible Potential – These are buildings that are extremely unlikely to support roosting bats due to the absence of suitable features. Further Phase 2 surveys are unlikely to be required for buildings with negligible potential.

Phase 1 Survey Equipment

During the Phase 1 survey the surveyor was equipped with 10 x 42 close focus binoculars and a high-powered torch.



Figure 1. Site location. *Courtesy of Google images*



Figure 2. Priority habitats and species map. *Courtesy of Magicmaps*

Dark green= Deciduous woodland, Pink = Lowland heathland.

RESULTS

Phase 1 Habitat Survey Results

Background Data Search

A desk-based assessment was carried out using the DEFRA MagicMap website <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx> to identify all designated sites within 5km of the site and all other designated sites and protected species within 2km.

A search was made for information on statutory designated sites (often internationally and nationally important sites for ecology) and non-statutory designated sites (often important in a local context) within 1 km of the site boundary.

Sites with Statutory Designations

There is an area of woodland marked as priority habitat deciduous woodland (see figure 2) which crosses the northern third of the site. However, the dominant trees are Scot's pine in this area with a poor understorey dominated by bracken. There are no statutory protected sites within 500m of the property.

The site lies *outside* the Nitrate Vulnerable Zone as defined by DEFRA 2017.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site is situated to the north of Heath Ride in a suburban setting in Finchhamstead in Berkshire (See figure 1). It is flanked to the north by mixed woodland including areas designated as deciduous woodland and to the south, east and west by other detached properties with mature gardens (see figure 2). The site comprises hard-standing, extensive recently cleared sandy ground, pine woodland with bracken understorey and ornamental shrubs (See figure 3a-b). A list of vascular plants is given in appendix 1. There was no sign of any acid grassland indicator species and the majority of plants still present were relics of cultivation and ruderals (Garden Alchemilla, Caper Spurge, Black Nightshade etc.). There was a small patch of ling *Calluna vulgaris* under south edge of pines on northern edge of site.

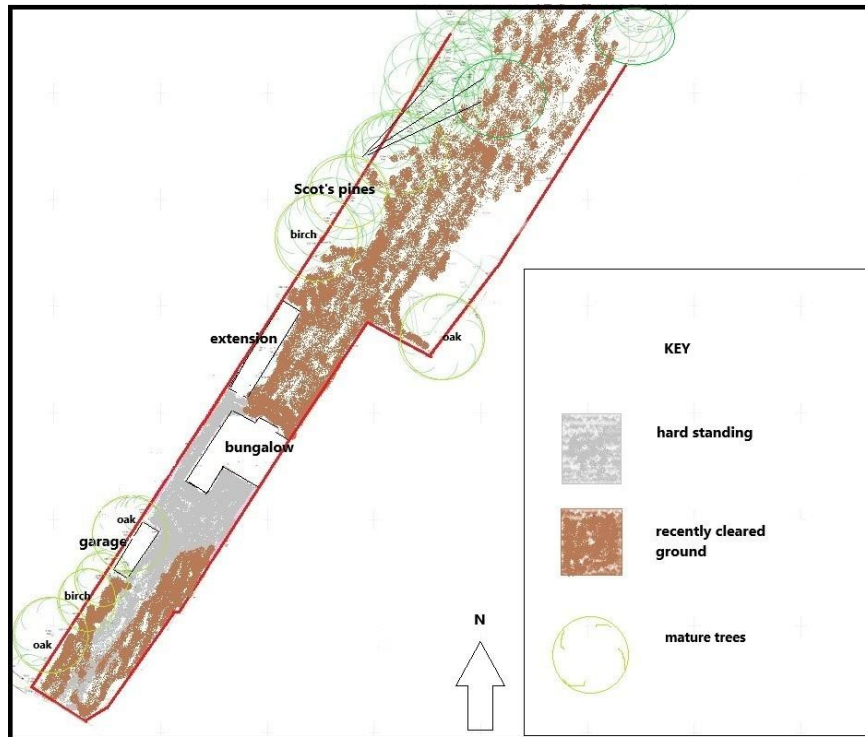


Figure 3a. Habitat map: Southern section

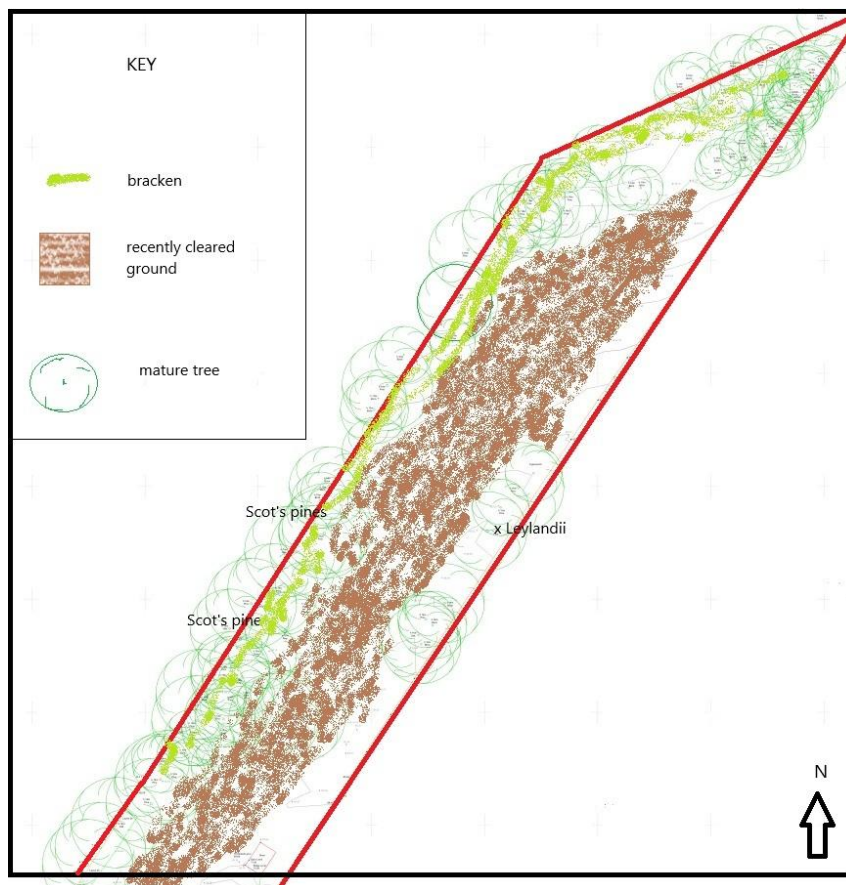


Figure 3b. Habitat map: Northern section



Figure 4. Looking northeast from back face of bungalow.



Figure 5. Looking southwest across site front garden.

PROTECTED HABITATS

UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) Priority Habitats are also Habitats of Principle Importance (HPI) listed under The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 Section 41 (NERC S41). These habitats do not receive statutory protection, but the S41 list is intended to provide guidance to decision-makers, e.g. those representing public bodies and local/regional authorities, in implementing their duty under Section 40 of the NERC Act to ‘...have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England when carrying out their normal functions’.

There are no priority habitats on site: The nearest is woodland deciduous woodland immediately to the north of the garden. There is an area of lowland heathland 340m to the southeast. King’s Mere a large lake is 332 m to the northeast. The area supports habitats suitable for moths bats species



Figure 6. Pines with bracken understorey to east of garden looking southwest.

PROTECTED SPECIES

Reptiles

All native British reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) from killing and injury. Sand Lizards and Smooth Snakes also receive additional protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 2010 from intentional killing and injury and from intentional damage, destruction or obstruction of access to a place of shelter. All native UK reptiles are UK BAP Priority Species and SPI.

The site has negligible potential for common reptiles in the absence of any structured habitats.

Amphibians

Great Crested Newts are protected under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 2010 from intentional killing and injury and from intentional damage, destruction or obstruction of access to a place of shelter. In addition Great Crested Newts and Common Toads are UK BAP Priority species and SPI.

According to MagicMap, the closest GCN return is 2.2km to the northwest in Eastheath. There are ponds 82m to the east and 250m to the west. The area does support Common Frog and Common Toad (UKBAP/SPI).

Badgers

Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, which makes it illegal to kill, injure or take a badger or to interfere with their setts; such as by the use of heavy machinery nearby.

No evidence of Badgers (holes, dung pits or push-throughs under fences) was found within the survey area, and there is no sign of any sett activity in the surrounding gardens or hedgerows.

Breeding Birds

All wild birds are protected under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, from damage or destruction of their nest whilst in use or construction, some birds listed on Schedule 1 receive additional protection from disturbance during nesting.

The mature pines have potential for nesting birds. The garden is largely bare and the buildings either closed or regularly disturbed.

Bats

Bats are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, and also receive additional protection via The Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations (2017) from intentional killing and injury and from intentional damage, destruction or obstruction of access to a place of shelter. It is an offence to kill or injure a bat or interfere with any roosting or resting site. A bat roost is interpreted as "any structure or place used for shelter or protection" whether or not bats are present at the time or not. Barbastelle Bats, Bechstein's Bat, Noctule, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared Bat, Greater Horseshoe Bat and Lesser Horseshoe Bat are also UK BAP Priority Species and SPI.

Phase 1 Bat Survey Results

According to MagicMap, four protected species licences have been issued for Bats within 500m of the site. Closest is from 171m to the southeast issued in 2015 (No.2014-4594-EPS-MIT) covering brown long-eared and soprano pipistrelles. With 2015-7982-EPS-MIT from 490m to north and 2020-45340-EPS both covering brown long-eared bats.

Bats – trees

There are mature Scot's pines to the east but these had negligible potential for roosting bats.

Bats – building

Building Assessment

Bungalow

The bungalow is brick faced block walls with a low-pitched roof of clay tiles which are close fitting with no gaps. However, there are a few potential openings where the tile faced parapets have been damaged (see figures 7-8).

The loft is partly boarded out and had been used for storage. The roof is lined with felting which is in very good order with no external daylight visible from within and there was no sign of any bat activity.



Figure 7. Front elevation of bungalow looking northeast: Red arrows indicate potential openings for crevice roosting bats.



Figure 8. Rear elevation of bungalow looking southwest: Red arrows indicate potential openings for crevice roosting bats.

Rear Extension of bungalow

The elongate extension was formerly attached by a garage/utility area which has been removed. The north face of the former connecting roof section is partly exposed there are a few potential openings where the tile faced parapets have been damaged (see figure 9). The flat roofed eastern third of the extension has negligible potential for ats in absence of enclosed voids and closed off fascias (see figure 10).

Detached garage

The detached garage is situated to southwest of bungalow and has a hipped single pitched roof of cement tiles. These are in good order but there is a broken ridge tile at northeast corner which bats could utilise to access the undertile spaces (see figure 11). The garage interior is permanently illuminated via side windows and has no enclosed roof void.



Figure 9. South face of rear extension looking north: Red arrows indicate potential openings for crevice roosting bats.



Figure 10. Rear extension looking southwest.



Figure 11. Garage looking southwest: Figure 7. Red arrow indicates potential openings for crevice roosting bats.

Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs occur in the wider area and could utilise the garden for foraging and nesting. Care should be taken when removing the debris piles

EVALUATION, IMPACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Phase 1 Habitat Survey

Priority and protected Habitats

There are no priority habitats onsite or within 190m of the site.

Protected Species

Amphibians & Reptiles

The proposed site for the extension falls on hard standing with negligible potential for amphibians and reptiles.

Badgers

No badger activity was detected on site [REDACTED] good building practice should be followed (such as placing boards over holes or trenches overnight) to prevent animals being harmed during site works.

Breeding Birds

All birds, their nests and eggs are protected by Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) under which it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure, disturb or take any wild bird. This legislation and its requirements should be highlighted in staff inductions, toolbox talks and signed by all contractors, operators, and sub-contractors.

Any removal of structures should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season, which is typically 1st March to 31st August.

If any works occur within the breeding bird season the area should be checked, ideally by an ecologist, and if any nesting birds are found there is a legal obligation to protect the affected area with a buffer zone of 10m until after the young have fledged.

Phase 1 Bat Survey

The Daytime Bat Assessment / Phase 1 Bat Survey was undertaken in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust Guidelines (Collins, 2023).

No evidence of bats was found within the dwellings or garage. However, the roofs of the bungalow, rear extension and detached garage have small openings which could be exploited by crevice roosting bats and all have low potential for bats, and a phase 2 survey is required.

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INTERNET RESOURCES

Google Maps: www.maps.google.co.uk

Magic Interactive Map: www.magic.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1. Plant species list

LD =locally dominant, F= frequent, O= occasional, R= rare P=planted

Species	English name	status	DAFOR
<i>Alchemilla mollis</i>	Garden Lady's-mantle	casual	F
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver birch	very common	R
<i>Buddleja davidii</i>	Butterfly-bush	very common	R
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather	common	R
<i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Hedge Bindweed	very common	R
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	Common Mouse-ear	very common	R
<i>Conyza canadensis</i>	Canadian Fleabane	very common	O
<i>Cotoneaster bullatus</i>	Hollyberry Cotoneaster	common	O
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot	very common	O
<i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i>	Sun Spurge	very common	F
<i>Euphorbia lathyris</i>	Caper Spurge	Local	F
<i>Fallopia baldschuanica</i>	Russian-vine	common	LD
<i>Festuca pratensis</i>	Meadow Fescue	very common	O
<i>Geranium macrorrhizum</i>	Rock Crane's-bill	casual	P
<i>Hedera helix</i> subsp. <i>helix</i>	Common Ivy	very common	LD
<i>Hypericum androsaemum</i>	Tutsan	common	O
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	Cat's-ear	very common	O
<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	Red Dead-nettle	very common	O
<i>Lapsana communis</i>	Nipplewort	very common	O
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial Rye-grass	very common	O
<i>Nicandra physalodes</i>	Apple-of-Peru	casual	O
<i>Origanum vulgare</i>	Wild Marjoram	common	F
<i>Picea abies</i>	Norway Spruce	very common	P
<i>Pilosella officinarum</i>	Mouse-ear-hawkweed	very common	LD
<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	Scots Pine	very common	LD
<i>Populus x canescens</i>	Grey Poplar (P. alba x tremula)	common	LD
<i>Potentilla reptans</i>	Creeping Cinquefoil	very common	R
<i>Prunus lusitanica</i>	Portugal Laurel	common	LD
<i>Prunus x fruticans</i>	Prunus spinosa x domestica	common	O
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken	very common	LD
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Pedunculate Oak	common	R
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock	very common	O
<i>Sasaella ramosa</i>	Hairy Bamboo	casual	LD
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Common Ragwort	very common	O
<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Black Nightshade	common	O
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	Smooth Sow-thistle	very common	R
<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	Snowberry	common	LD
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle	very common	LD
<i>X Cupressocyparis leylandii</i>	Leyland Cypress	very common	P