The Old Thatch, Finchampstead

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Prepared on behalf Twenty-20 Architecture

March 2025

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The Old Thatch

Ecology 8780

Version 01

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 The Client is proposing to redevelop the site at The Old Thatch, Finchampstead with plans including the construction of a replacement dwelling within the site. Pro Vision Ecology were commissioned in February 2025 to provide the ecological assessment of the site to ascertain the ecological constraints and survey requirements for a future planning application.

1.2 The ecological appraisal comprised a desk study of existing ecological data in relation to the site, and an assessment of sites habitats and suitability to support protected species within the application site.

1.3 The site comprises a residential dwelling and four associated outbuildings in the form, of a garden shed, chicken coop, greenhouse and old flight cage. Some parcels of modified grassland are present and the site is enclosed by native hedgerows. A small number of scattered trees were located on the southern and eastern boundaries.

1.4 During the Preliminary Roost Assessment bat droppings were recorded within roof void four of the main dwelling. The droppings were sent off for DNA analysis which confirmed the species as brown long-eared. The house is therefore confirmed bat roost and further surveys will be required to characterize the roost. A licence will also be required from Natural England if plans impact the bat roosts. Details regarding the further surveys and mitigation are provided in **Section 5.0.**

1.5 The four outbuildings were assessed as having negligible bat potential and therefore no further surveys are required on these buildings.

1.6 The scattered trees, hedgerows and buildings provided some foraging and nesting opportunities for common bird species. It is recommended that any vegetation clearance or building demolition should avoid the bird nesting season (1st March – 31st August) unless inspection by an ecologist concludes that there are no nesting birds present immediately prior to the commencement of works. If the presence of nesting birds is confirmed, any works which may disturb them will be delayed until the young birds have fledged the nest of their own accord. Details regarding this are provided in **Section 5.0**.

1.7 The unmanaged modified grassland habitat has some potential to support populations of reptiles. This area of grassland is due to be retained within the development. However, the management of the grassland may change during the client's ownership. Recommendations have been provided in **Section 5.0** should proposals include the changes to the existing management regime.

1.8 The development will provide ecological enhancements in line with national and local planning policy to secure net gains on the site. Details regarding this are provided in **Section 5.0**.

2.0 Introduction

Project Background

2.1 Pro Vision Ecology were commissioned in February 2025 to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal at The Old Thatch, Finchampstead. For the site location refer to **Appendix A**. This report will contribute to a forthcoming planning application to be submitted by Twenty-20 architecture to Wokingham Council for planning consent to demolish the current residential building and construct a replacement dwelling.

2.2 This report describes the current ecological baseline of the site based on the findings of the ecological assessment and provides information for further survey requirements and potential mitigation on the site.

Brief

2.3 To carry out Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the land within the site boundaries, to inform the Client of any further survey work required and of the ecological implications of their proposals.

Relevant Legislation and Planning Policy

2.4 The key legislative provisions of relevance to this report with respect to the development proposals and their potential effects on ecological features are listed below:

- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

2.5 The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was the Governments response to the 1992 Convention on Biodiversity (The Rio Convention), with the aim of halting the loss of biodiversity in the UK. The new UK post-2010 Biodiversity Framework replaced the previous BAP and is the government's response to the new strategic plan on the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Although the UK post-2010 Biodiversity Framework supersedes the UK BAP, the UK BAP lists of priority species and habitats still remain an important reference source for identifying habitats and species of principal importance within the UK. Within England, Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006) lists species and habitats of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity.

2.6 The Government has set out its policies for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity through the planning system in the National Planning Policy Framework Section 15 (NPPF, 2024).

2.7 The Environment Act 2021 includes the requirement for developments to provide 10% biodiversity net gain, to be evidenced with the use of the statutory metric. Developments are exempt if they are self-build comprising less than nine dwellings on an area less than 0.5 hectares, householder applications or developments below the threshold of impacts to habitats.

2.8 The site at The Old Thatch falls under the planning authority of Wokingham Borough Council. The Woking Core Strategy, 2007 (adopted in January 2010) includes the Policy CP7 relating to Biodiversity.

CP7: Biodiversity

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:

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

B) 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

C) 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

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

ii) Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided

CP8 - Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

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.

3.0 Methodologies

Desk Study

3.1 The desk study methodology is based upon guidelines set out by the Chartered Institute of Environmental and Ecological Management (CIEEM, 2017). A data-gathering exercise was undertaken to obtain any available information relating to statutory and non-statutory nature conservation sites and protected species (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Summary of information sources used for the Desk Study

Organisation / Source	Information Sought
Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC)	Records of the presence of key protected and notable species and non-statutory wildlife sites within one kilometre of the site.
MAGIC	Locations of and citations for all national statutory wildlife sites, including SSSI, within two kilometres and all international sites including SAC, SPA or Ramsar sites within five kilometres of the site. Records of EPSM licences and class licence returns within two kilometres.
Ordnance Survey Maps	Large scale habitat information and identification of off-site habitats which may require consideration (such as ponds) within 500m.

Ecological Assessment

Habitats

3.2 A site visit was carried out on 19th February 2025 by experienced ecologist Alex Hannam in overcast weather conditions, still and dry and an ambient temperature of 5.5°C. The survey employed techniques based on the UK Habitat Classification System.

3.3 The collection of botanical information focused on the dominant and/or key indicator species for each habitat, to allow allocation of habitats to hierarchy levels 3 and/or 4 and where relevant to identify any priority habitats which are present on site.

3.4 Any habitats identified as having potentially high botanical value will be subject to further botanical surveys, if deemed necessary.

Limitations

3.5 The survey was carried out during the winter and therefore the species found may not be a comprehensive list of what is present during the summer months. However, due to the nature of the site being a well grazed horse field and a well-maintained short sward garden it can be determined that the species present during the habitat walkover survey are representative of the habitat all year around.

Protected species

3.6 The PEA included an assessment of the potential for habitats on or immediately adjacent to the site to support legally protected or conservation-notable species. The location and nature of any signs of the presence of protected species (such as droppings, footprints, burrows, etc.) were documented and mapped accordingly. Indicative survey methods for protected species are outlined below.

[redacted]

Bats

3.8 Bats use features within buildings such as stone crevices or cracks in brickwork, ridge beams, gaps between roofing materials and the main building structure, and any potential access points. An internal and external inspection of the building was conducted by CL17 bat licence holder Louisa Jones MCIEEM (licence numbers available upon request) during the PEA. During the survey any evidence of bats such as droppings, urine staining, claw marks, feeding remains or bats themselves were recorded. An assessment of the potential of the building to support roosts was then made in line with Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) guidelines (2016) shown in **Table 2** below.

Table 2: Assessment of buildings to support roosting bats

Potential	Criteria
Negligible	Negligible features on site likely to be used by bats
Low	Potential features present which may support low numbers of bats irregularly but no suitable features for regular use by large numbers of bats.
Medium	A building with one or more potential roost features that may be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, condition and habitats present. Unlikely to support a roost of high conservation value.
High	A building with one or more potential roost sites that are suitable for use by a large number of bats on a regular basis.

3.9 The majority of bat species roost within trees. Therefore, an assessment of trees recorded on site was undertaken identifying any Potential Roost Features (PRFs). The assessment was undertaken from the ground looking for features which may support bats such as cavities, crevices, and peeling bark. The assessment was based on BCT guidelines (Collins, 2016) shown below in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Potential of trees to support bat roosts

Suitability	Criteria
Negligible	Negligible features on the tree
Low	A tree of sufficient size and age to contain PRFs but with none seed from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.
Medium	A tree with one or more potential roost features that may be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, condition and habitats present. But unlikely to support a roost of high conservation value.
High	A tree with one or more potential roost sites that are suitable for use by a large number of bats.

3.10 Bats use features in the landscape to navigate and also habitats may provide key foraging areas. Foraging and commuting habitat was assessed based on based on BCT guidelines (Collins, 2016) shown in **Table 4** below.

Table 4: Assessment of foraging/commuting habitat

Suitability	Criteria
Negligible	Negligible features on site likely to be used by bats
Low	Suitable but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of bats.
Medium	Habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape and could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland or water.
High	Continuous high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape and may be used by significant numbers of bats including annex II species.

Survey Limitations

3.11 Bats will often roost in places that are inaccessible to the surveyor, such as under tiles and crevices within structures. During the inspection of the building on site for bats, features that have the potential to support crevice dwelling species were also noted as it is not possible to definitively conclude that bats are absent from these areas.

3.12 Two of the voids were inaccessible due to void three being unboarded and void 2 having an inaccessible hatch above the stairs. These were not seen as significant limitations due to the fact they could be assessed from either the hatch or another void, both were located within the well-sealed thatched construction limiting any access into the void.

Birds

3.13 Any habitat features, for example, scrub and trees, which could potentially be used by nesting birds, were surveyed and any nesting activity was noted. The habitat was also assessed regarding its potential for bird activity.

Great Crested Newts (Triturus cristatus)

3.14 Ponds within the vicinity of the site were noted and the potential of the land to act as a commuting route, shelter or foraging resource for great crested newts was assessed. A rapid risk assessment was undertaken to assess the likelihood of great crested newts being impacted by the proposed works.

Hazel dormouse (Muscardinus avellanarius)

3.15 An assessment of the suitability of the habitat to support hazel dormouse was undertaken in accordance with The dormouse Conservation Handbook (Bright *et al*, 2006). Any small mammal feeding signs were checked and assessed, including:

- Examination of hazel nuts; and
- Evidence of nest building.

Invasive species

3.16 During the survey any invasive species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were noted

Invertebrates

3.17 An assessment was undertaken to assess the potential of the habitats recorded on site to support diverse communities of invertebrates, or any Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species. The assessment was based on the presence of a number of habitat features which may support important invertebrate communities such as:

- An abundance of deadwood;
- Presence of diverse plant communities;
- Presence of varied woodland structure and sunny woodland edge;
- Presence of ponds or watercourses; and
- Presence of free draining soil exposures.

Reptiles

3.18 Habitat features that could be suitable as hibernacula, foraging or basking areas were noted. Extant refugia were lifted and examined for evidence of reptiles, including sloughs (shed skins).

4.0 Results and Analysis

Designated sites

Statutory Designated Sites

4.1 The data search returned one record of a International Statutory Designated Sites within five kilometres of the site.

- **Thames Basin Heath Special Protected Area (SPA):** This 8274.72-ha composite site, located across several counties, consists of open heathland habitats. These include dry heaths on well-drained slopes, wet heaths on low-lying shallow slopes, and bogs in valleys. Other habitats include tracts of scrub, acidic woodland, conifer plantations, and mire. The site supports a significant proportion of the breeding populations of nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), woodlark (*Lullula arborea*), and Dartford warbler (*Sylvia undata*) in the UK. This site is 2.8 kilometres east of the proposed development.

4.2 The Thames Basin Heaths SPA has a zone of influenced of 7 kilometres. The proposed development is located approximately 2.8 kilometres west of this SPA. Where a development will lead to an increase of 50 dwellings within the 5-7 kilometre zone it is considered likely to contribute to significant effects on the SPA. Proposals are for a replacement dwelling and there will be no net increase in residential units. Therefore, no significant negative impact is anticipated. No further action is required.

4.3 National sites within two kilometres of the site boundary. The national designated sites were both Local Nature Reserves. The national statutory sites are:

- **Ambarrow Court**: This site contains many habitats including ancient woodland, hazel coppice, marshes, ponds and pools, birch coppice and meadow. Notable plants include bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and spring woodland flowers, cuckoo flower (*Cardamine pratensis*) and yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*). Important animals include stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*), noctule bat (*Nyctalus noctula*) and glow worm (*Lampyris noctiluca*). The site lies 1.5 kilometres east of the proposed development.
- **Edgbarrow woods:** Habitats include mixed, semi-natural high forest, wet and dry heathland and acidic, unimproved, lowland grassland. The site lies 1.7 kilometres east of the proposed development.

4.4 These national sites are considered to lie outside the zone of influence of the development due to the scale of the works and distances involved. No further action is required.

Non-Statutory Designated Sites

4.5 The data search returned records of four non-statutory designated sites within one kilometres of The Old Thatch.

4.6 The non-statutory sites were designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS):

- **Fishers Copse**: a 15-hectare site of woodland of which half is comprised of ancient woodland in the southeastern aspect and lies 330 metres north east of the site.

- **Finchampstead ridges:** a secondary birch and pine woodland with some conifer plantation, there are open areas of heathland encompassing bell heather, purple moor grass, bracken, heath bedstraw and sheep's sorrel. The area lies 130 metres to the north of the site.
- **Simons wood and heath pond:** a Scots pine plantation with areas of heath, purple moo-grass, s small bog pool with a fringe of mire/wet heath and a large pond. The area lies 900 metres to the north of the site.
- **Moor Green Lakes:** a site consisting of two gravel pits with marginal wetland and scrub at the pit edges. The area lies 295 meters southwest of the site boundary.

4.7 These non-statutory sites are considered to lie outside the zone of influence of the development due to the scale of the works and distances involved. No further action is required.

Ecological Assessment

Introduction

4.8 The results of the PEA are presented below. A habitat survey map is shown in **Appendix B**. The map illustrates the location and extent of the sites surveyed, along with additional notable features.

Habitats

Surrounding habitat

4.9 The old thatch is located within a semi-rural landscape with residential properties on the eastern and western borders. A large expanse of woodland is located to the north and moor green lakes are located to the self of the site. The Old Thatch is located in the town of Finchampstead.

Vegetated garden

4.10 The majority of the site is comprised of vegetated garden, with the majoirty of the habitat comprising short sward grassland. The grassland was maintained at a short sward with the dominant species being Perrenial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*). Further species comprised yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), dandelion *(Taraxacum officinale*), fescue (*Fescue ovina*) and springy turf moss (*Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*) (**Figure 1**). Ornamental beds were also present within the amenity garden **(Figure 2**).

Figures 1 and 2: Vegetated Garden

4.11 A small parcel of grassland located in the northern aspect surrounding the outbuildings was less formally managed than the uniform nature of the rest of the grassland. This area comprised tussocky cocksfoot, common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), willowherb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*), soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*).

Figure 3: Less formally managed grass in vegetated garden

Modified grassland

4.12 An area of the site which is considered likley to previously have been a tennis court has now been colonised by grassland. This area comprised tussocky cocksfoot, pedulous sedge (*Carex pendula*), fescue (*Festuca sp.*), buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*) and bramble. A brash pile was present within this area of grassland **(Figure 4 and 5**).

Figures 4 and 5: Modified grassland

4.13 A paddock was located on the easterm boundary of the site which also comprised modified grassland, this is grazed which maintained the grassland at a short sward height (**Figure 6**). This parcel of modified grassland comprised the dominant species of yorkshire fog and cocksfoot, as well as fescue, dandelion and creeping buttercup.

Figure 6 – Grazed padddock

Buildings

4.14 A large residential dwelling and four outbuildings are present on site. These are discussed in more detail within the bat section of the report.

Artificial unsealed surface

4.15 An area of artificial; unsealed surface in the form of gravel driveway is present on the central western aspect north of the residential property.

Hedgerows and tree lines

4.16 Five hedgerows and two tree lines are present within the site. Hedgerow one (**Figure 7**) runs along the northwestern aspect of the site and runs adjacent to Drift Lane. This hedgerow was comprised of holly *(Ilex aquifolium*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and willow (*Salix sp.*) with an understorey of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).

4.17 Tree line one is located along the northern and eastern site boundary. The tree line comprises ash *(Fraxinus excelsior)*, holly, apple (*Malus sp.*) and silver birch (*Betula pendula*).

4.18 Hedgerow three (**Figure 8**) bordered the small patch of artificial unvegetated unsealed surface, seperating the driveway from the rest of the vegetated garden in the north of the site. Hedgerow three was solely comprised of holly and was partially managed due to its placement on site.

Figure 7: Hedgerow 1

Figure 8: Hedgerow 3

4.19 Hedgerow four (**Figure 9**) runs along the northern boundary of the paddock. The hedgerow measured approximatley 1.5 meters in width and 1.5 meters in height. Hedgerow four was comprised of holly, blackthorn *(Prunus spinosa*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) ivy (*Hedra helix*), bramble and a single oak tree (*Quercus robur*).

4.20 Tree line two (**Figure 10**) runs along the southern boundary of the site, and west of the paddock. This hedgerow comprised beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) with a group of three medium beech trees and one large beech tree located at the southeastern end. The tree line is formally managed and was approximately 2.5 metres in height along the majority of its legnth.

Figure 9: Hedgerow 4

Figure 10: Hedgerow 5

4.21 Hedgerow six (**Figure 11**) runs along the southeastern border of the site and comprised hazel, holly, ivy, hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn, elder and measured approximately 2.5m in height.

Figure 11: Hedgerow 6

4.22 Hedgerow seven ran along the southwestern aspect of the site reaching the access track of the property, this was a partially managed native hedgerow comprised of holly measuring approximately 1.5 meters in width and 1 meters in height.

Scattered trees

4.23 Four species of trees were located within the site boundary which were small cherry trees (*Prunus avium*), beech, oak and magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*). Four small cherry trees were located on the northeastern corner of the main residential dwelling, a beech tree was located on the northwestern border of the paddock and an oak tree was present to the north of the paddock (**Figures 12 and 13**).

Figures 12 and 13: Scattered trees

Protected and/or notable species

[redacted]

Bats

4.26 The TVERC data search returned 384 records of bats within 1 kilometre of the site boundary including the species:

- Bat sp.(*Chiroptera*)
- Pipistrelle Sp. (Pipistrellus sp.)
- Common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*)
- Soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*)
- Brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*)
- Myotis (*Myotis sp)*
- Serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*)
- Noctule (*Nyctalus noctule*)

4.27 The DEFRA run website, MAGIC, was searched for a list of granted European Protected Species Licences (EPSL's) within two kilometres of the site. Nineteen granted EPSL's in respect of bats within two kilometres of the site have been granted for soprano pipistrelle, common pipistrelle, nathusius pipistrelle and brown long-eared and serotine roosts. Six licences include the damage/destruction of breeding sites, with the closest breeding site located approximately 130 metres south.

Buildings

4.28 There is a total of five buildings on the site. B1 was a residential dwelling and the remaining four buildings were garden outbuildings which are a mixture of a shed, greenhouse, old chicken coop and an old flight cage. Descriptions and photos are provided below (see **Table 5**) with building locations shown in **Appendix C**.

Table 5: Building descriptions

Building reference	Photo	External description	Internal description
B1 Residential dwelling	 	• Two-storey residential property of rendered brick construction and a predominantly thatch roof. • A small section of the roof was of a hipped clay tile construction which was in a generally good condition, however lifted tiles were noted on the northern elevation and within the hanging tiles. • The eaves were all well sealed or had blocked access with chicken wire. • A mono-pitch bitumen roof garage was present with a well-sealed metal garage door further limiting access. • A flat roof extension is present comprised of lead and well-sealed.	• Four roof voids are present with differing constructions. • Void 1 was of thatch construction with a bitumen felt lining and was T-shaped. Timber rafters, purlins, trusses and a wooden ridge beam were present. The gable ends were both of a breezeblock construction and the void measured 65m^2 with an apex height of approximately 1.75 metres at its highest point. The void was mostly bordered and contained loose fill insulation. No evidence of bats was recorded. • Void 2 was connected to void one and was of the same construction measuring approximately 16 m^2 with an apex height of approximately 0.5 metres . Void two was unlined and inaccessible. • Void 3 was also of an unlined thatched nature measuring approximately 20 m^2 with an apex height of approximately 0.5 metres. No evidence of bats or light ingress was identified. • Void 4 was bitumen felt lined and comprised timber trusses. This void measured 2.5 meres in height at the apex, 7 metres in width and 5 metres in length.

Building reference	Photo	External description	Internal description
			• approximately 10 brown long-eared droppings were recorded scattered through the roof void. Species was confirmed via DNA analysis.
B2	 	• Timber construction with a pitched bitumen felt roof. • Windows present on the eastern elevation and one was left ajar. • Timber was well sealed.	• Internally, no roof void was present and there were high levels of ambient light. • The roof was unlined, however timber support beams were present. It is considered these provide limited potential roosting opportunities.
B3		• An old flight cage which was comprised of a timber frame. • Chicken wire was present on all elevations. • Corrugated metal sheet roof.	• No internal roosting features present. • Building provides no shelter.

Building reference	Photo	External description	Internal description
B4		• B4 comprised an old chicken coop of a timber frame construction. • A corrugated onduline felt roof was present.	• No internal roosting features present. • Building provides no shelter.
B5		• B5 comprised a garden greenhouse of plastic and metal construction. • This was in a poor condition with a panel missing of the roof.	• No void was present. • The internal environment was deemed unsuitable due to the open nature of the roof.

4.29 A summary highlighting bat potential and access points for each building assessed on site is shown below (see **Table 6**) with internal results shown in **Appendix C** Bat droppings recorded in the dwelling were sent to Swift ecology for DNA analysis which confirmed brown long-eared.

Table 6: Results of the phase I bat survey

Building reference	Potential access points	Potential Roosting locations	Evidence of bats	Bat potential
B1	Gaps beneath clay tiles and behind clay hanging tiles	Under clay roof tiles on northern elevation and hanging tiles.	Brown long-eared droppings recorded within roof void 4	**Confirmed roost** for Brown long-eared bats.
B2	Open window	None	None	**Negligible** due to the single skinned construction and high ambient light levels. Whilst access is available via the ajar window it is considered likely the building suffers severe temperature fluctuations making it unsuitable for bats.
B3	Open Nature	None	None	**None -** due to a lack of roosting features internally.
B4	Open nature	None	None	**None -** due to a lack of roosting features internally.
B5	Through open roof panel.	None	None	**None -** due to a lack of roosting features internally.

4.30 B2, 3, 4 and 5 have no or negligible potential for bats and no further action is required for these structures. B1 is a confirmed roost for brown long-eared bats and further surveys and mitigation will be required to characterise the roost present and inform a mitigation strategy to demolish the building. Further details are provided in **Section 5.0.**

4.31 There were a low number of semi-mature mature trees present on the site which had no PRFs. All trees on the site have negligible potential to support bat roosts.

4.32 The on-site vegetation present at The Old Thatch provides foraging opportunities for local bat populations. There are a number of hedgerows on the site which would provide good potential foraging and commuting routes and the site is currently a relatively unlit site. The surrounding habitats comprise predominantly fields with a large area of woodland to the north of the site creating connectivity to high quality habitat for bats. The site is considered to be moderate quality for foraging and commuting bats and recommendations to maintain dark corridors across the site are provided in **Section 5.0.**

Birds

4.33 TVERC provided records for the following bird species of conservation concern that may be present on the site: Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*), cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), herring gull (*Larus aregentatus*), pochard (*Aythya farina*), swift (Apus apus), hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), song thrush (Turdus philomelos) and starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). In addition to these records for the following Schedule 1 and/or Annex I species were returned: peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*).

4.34 The hedgerows and trees on the site are considered suitable for nesting birds. Further recommendations have therefore been made in **Section 5.0** for the clearance of buildings and vegetation.

Great crested newts

4.35 The TVERC data search returned no records of great crested newt presence within one kilometre of the site boundary. The DEFRA run website, MAGIC, was searched for a list of granted European Protected Species Licences (EPSL's) and positive class licence returns within two kilometres of the site. Two positive class licence returns were identified in Moulsham Green located approximately 1.5 kilometres south of the site and south of Moor Green Lakes.

4.36 The site is located in an amber risk zone for great crested newts, indicating where suitable habitat is present great crested newts are likely to be present.

4.37 No evidence of amphibian presence was recorded during the survey. The longer sward, unmanaged grassland and hedgerows provide some suitable terrestrial habitat for great crested newts. However, there will be no impacts to these habitats as construction will be limited to the existing building footprint and short sward grassland and vegetated garden which is considered unsuitable for great crested newts.

4.38 There are no ponds on the site. However, there is one pond located 130 metres northeast of the site boundary (**Appendix D**). A rapid risk assessment was conducted to evaluate the likelihood of great crested newts being impacted based on the worst case scenario of the entire site being impacted. The rapid risk assessment confirmed an offence is highly unlikely great crested newts.

Table 7: Results Rapid Risk Assessment

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 score
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)	0.1 - 0.5 ha lost or damaged	0.1
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.1
Rapid risk assessment result:	**GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY**	

4.39 The proposed development footprint will be smaller than the redline boundary, further reducing the likelihood of impacting great crested newts.

4.40 Great crested newts are therefore considered unlikely to be impacted by the proposed works due to an absence of suitable breeding habitat on site and the limited extent of suitable habitat due to be impacted by the proposed development.

Hazel dormouse

4.41 The TVERC data search returned no records of dormouse within one kilometre of the site boundary and there are no records of granted EPSL's for this species.

4.42 The hedgerows on the site may provide foraging habitat for dormice and the site is well connected to woodland to the north of the site..

4.43 The proposed development will retain the existing boundary features maintain connectivity across the site and within the area. Proposals are for demolition of an existing residential dwelling and construction of a replacement residential dwelling therefore it is considered there will be no additional pressures on any potential dormouse populations present within the area.

4.44 If the plans change to include the removal of the hedgerows, then presence/absence surveys of dormice will be required.

Invertebrates

4.45 The TVERC data search provided 246 records of invertebrates including beetles, dragonflies, moths and butterflies. No habitats of particular note which may support rare or important assemblages of invertebrates were recorded on the site.

Reptiles

4.46 The TVERC data search returned 137 records for reptiles within one kilometre of the site boundary. Species recorded include adder located in moor green lakes, common lizard in Simons wood, grass snake in moor green lakes and slow-worms in fishers copse.

4.47 The unmanaged modified grassland habitat has some potential to support populations of reptiles. This area of grassland is tussocky providing sheltering and basking opportunities and foraging habitat. The habitats link to neighbouring field margins which may support populations, however the majority of the site comprises short sward grassland which is considered unsuitable for reptiles. The areas of unmanaged grassland are considered suitable for reptiles however these are not due to be directly impacted by the proposed development.

4.48 Due to the minor extent of the suitable habitat on site and as no direct impacts are anticipated it is considered disproportionate to undertake presence/absence surveys.

1.9 The management of the grassland may change during the client's ownership however this is not considered unreasonable in the context of a residential dwelling. Recommendations have been provided in **Section 5.0** should proposals include the changes to the existing management regime.

5.0 Impacts and Mitigation

Essential Pre-Application Further Survey Work

Bats

5.1 Further survey work is required to fully assess the status of the roost and population size of bat species at The Old Thatch within the main residential dwelling (**B1**).

5.2 As evidence of roosting bats was just located in roof void 4 and suitable potential roost features and access/egress points are limited to this section of the building the further emergence surveys required are limited to this section of the building. In accordance with the current bat survey guidance (Collins, 2016) three emergence surveys are required during the bat survey period (which runs from May to September). At least two of the three surveys must be conducted during the peak time of year, May to August, and surveys must be spread at least three weeks apart.

5.3 Following the completion of the surveys a suitable mitigation scheme will be devised, and once full planning permission has been obtained a licence from Natural England will be required for works to any building which supports a bat roost.

5.4 B2, B3, B4 and B5 were assessed as having negligible potential and to support roosting bats and therefore do not require further surveys.

Impacts and Required Mitigation for the Proposed Development

Hedgerows

5.5 The native hedgerows should be retained and protected during construction in-line with BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction. This will include provision of Heras fencing or similar to prevent root compaction from the movement of vehicles and potential damage to the hedgerows.

5.6 A varied mixture of native hedgerow species should be used for any new hedgerow planting and within boundary vegetation. Hedgerow species should include the following: hazel (*Corylus avellana*), hawthorn, dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*). Such species diversity will provide a mixture of food sources and create a diverse boundary and therefore habitat for species that rely on hedgerows, including a range of invertebrates which will provide food for foraging bats and birds.

Bats - buildings

5.7 Following the completion of the surveys a suitable mitigation scheme will be devised and once full planning permission has been obtained a licence from Natural England will be required for the works for all building which support bat roosts.

5.8 An EPS licence will be required as confirmed bat roosts are present within the loft void which will be directly impacted by development proposals at The Old Thatch. In order to carry out a lawful operation (e.g. development work which has full planning permission) that may result in an offence under the Habitats Regulations, it is first necessary to obtain a licence from Natural

England. EPS Licences will only be granted after Natural England has been satisfied that there are no satisfactory alternatives, that there will not be any adverse impacts on the favourable conservation status of the species and that the development is of overriding public interest.

5.9 The mitigation strategy will be dependent on the survey results, but it will require the incorporation of features suitable for bats within the new building. Due to the presence of brown-long eared bats a suitable void will be required within the building to provide pre-flight space with access points for the bats.

Bats - lighting

5.10 The site provides potential for foraging and commuting habitat for bats along the boundaries of the site including the woodland. If any lighting is proposed, it should adhere to the following guidelines (ILP, 2023):

- Minimise lightspill on the boundary features.
- LED luminaires should be used of a warm white spectrum (<2700 Kelvin) which will feature peak wavelengths higher than 550 nm.
- Internal luminaires should be recessed to reduce light spill outside the property.
- Only luminaires with a negligible or zero Upward Light Ratio, and with good optical control, should be considered.
- Luminaires should always be mounted horizontally, with no light output above 90° and/or no upward tilt.
- Where appropriate, external security lighting should be set on motion sensors and set to as short as possible.

5.11 The site can provide additional enhancement measures though the management and provision of native hedgerows. These measures are discussed further in relation to enhancements on the site.

Nesting birds

5.12 The trees and hedgerows within the site provide habitat for nesting birds. It is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use. Any vegetation clearance required must be scheduled to avoid peak bird nesting season (1st March to 31st August, although this will vary between species and local conditions) to avoid contravention of protected species legislation; unless inspection by an ecologist concludes that there are no nesting birds present immediately prior to the commencement of works.

5.13 If the presence of nesting birds is confirmed, a 5-metre buffer will be implemented, and no works will be permitted within this buffer. Works will be able to proceed once the young birds have fledged the nest of their own accord.

Reptiles

5.14 The longer sward, tussocky grassland is considered suitable to support common reptile species in low numbers. It is recommended that the existing management regime of the site continues until the site is developed to ensure the short sward grassland remains unsuitable for reptiles.

5.15 Any clearance of the longer sward grassland habitat should be undertaken following a precautionary method of works under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist. This will include habitat manipulation using a two-phase strim and push methodology to encourage reptiles to move out of the construction zone of their own accord. This must be completed during the reptile active season (March to October, dependant on temperatures). This will involve an initial reduction of the onsite vegetation height to approximately 15 centimetres, followed by reduction of reptile habitats down to ground level. Strimming will be undertaken towards the retained grassland areas. If any reptiles are found, they will be moved to the receptor area by a suitably qualified ecologist.

Enhancement Measures for the Proposed Development

5.16 In accordance with the Natural Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024) plans whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.

5.17 The Environment Act 2021 includes the requirement for developments to provide 10% biodiversity net gain, to be evidenced with the use of the statutory metric. Unless the development is exempt. If the development is not exempt details will be provided in the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment Report.

5.18 Suggested enhancement measures which can be included within the development are provided below:

- The replacement residential dwelling should include integrated bat or bird boxes.
- Any future landscaping should look to incorporate native species that provide benefits to wildlife.

6.0 References and Bibliography

Bright , P., Morris , P. & Mitchell -Jones , T. (2006) . *The dormouse conservation handbook. (2nd edition)* Peterborough, English Nature 73pp.

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CIEEM (2020) Guidelines for Accessing, Using and Sharing Biodiversity Data in the UK. 2nd Edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. Winchester, UK.

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

ILP (2023) *Guidance note 8/23 Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night*

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

Oldham R.S., Keeble J., Swan M.J.S. & Jeffcote M. (2000). Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). Herpetological Journal 10(4), 143-155.

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (2025) *TVERC/24/0890*

Wokingham Borough Council (2010) Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document

Appendices

Appendix A: Site Location

0 25 50m 75 100m

SCALE 1:1250

N

Red Barn House

The Old Thatch

Green Acres

62.5m

LB

Moor Green House

Hall Farm

The Stables

58.8m

REV.	DATE	REVISIONS:

CLIENT: MR & MRS R WESTELL

PROJECT: THE OLD THATCH, LOWER, LOWER SANDHURST ROAD, FINCHAMPSTEAD, BERKSHIRE, RG40 3TH

SCALE: 1:500 (A3 ORIGINAL)

DRAWING: LOCATION PLAN

DRAWN: BM

JOB NO: 24 - P0252

DRAWING NO: LP

REVISION: -

DATE: JUNE '24

TWENTY-20
: Architecture
: Technical
: Vision

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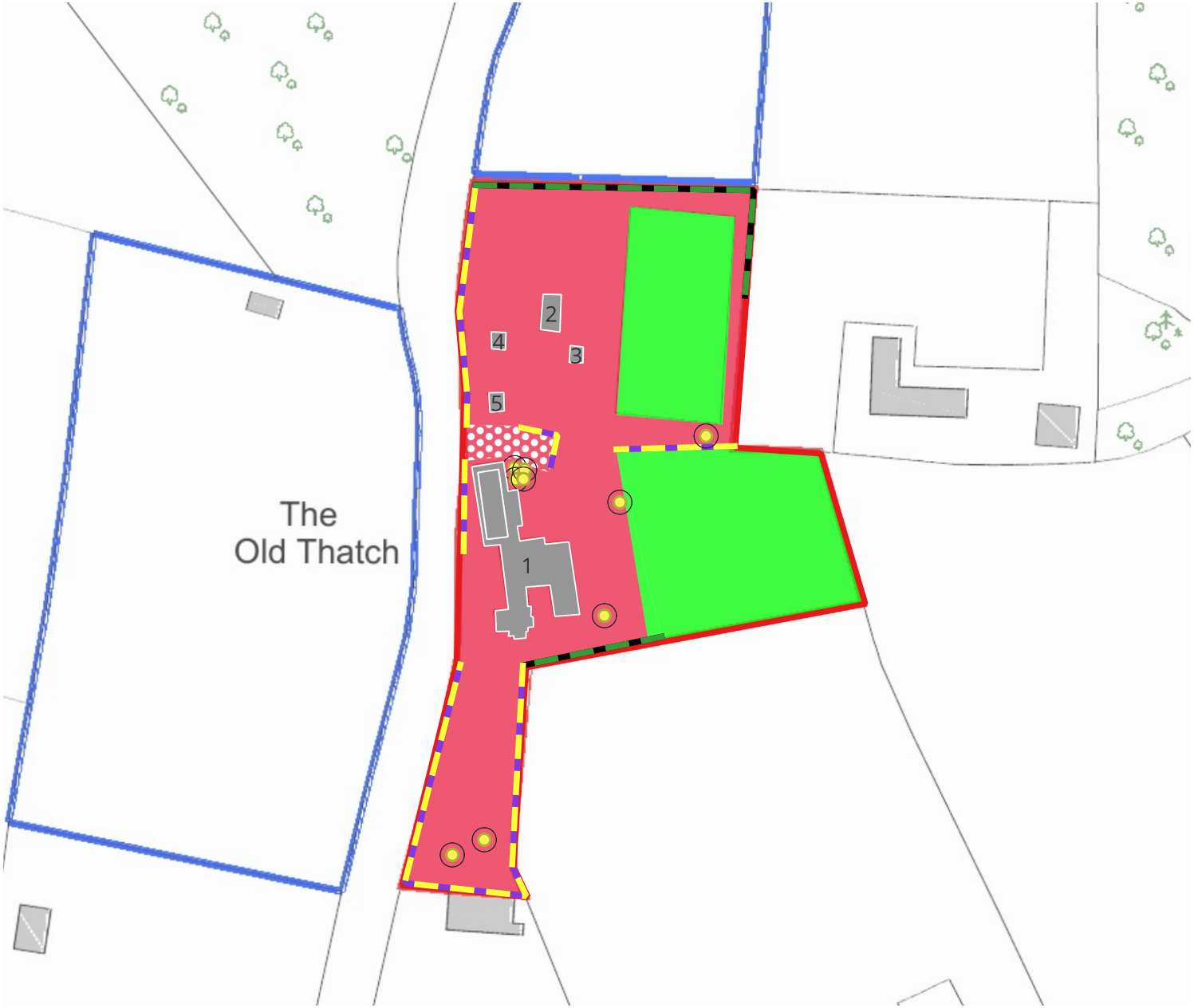
Appendix B: Habitat Survey Map

- Red Line Boundary
- Scattered trees
- Line of trees
- Native hedgerow
- Native hedgerow with trees
- Buildings
- Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface
- Modified grassland
- Vegetated garden



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N

ISSUE	DATE	DESCRIPTION	DRAWN	CHECKED
v1	17.03.25	Map created	MC	AH

CLIENT:	**Robert and Lucy Westell**	
PROJECT:	**The Old Thatch**	
DRAWING:	**Habitat Map**	**1:1000**
NUMBER:	**8780-XX-E0-01**	**A4**
ISSUE:	**v1**	**17.03.25**

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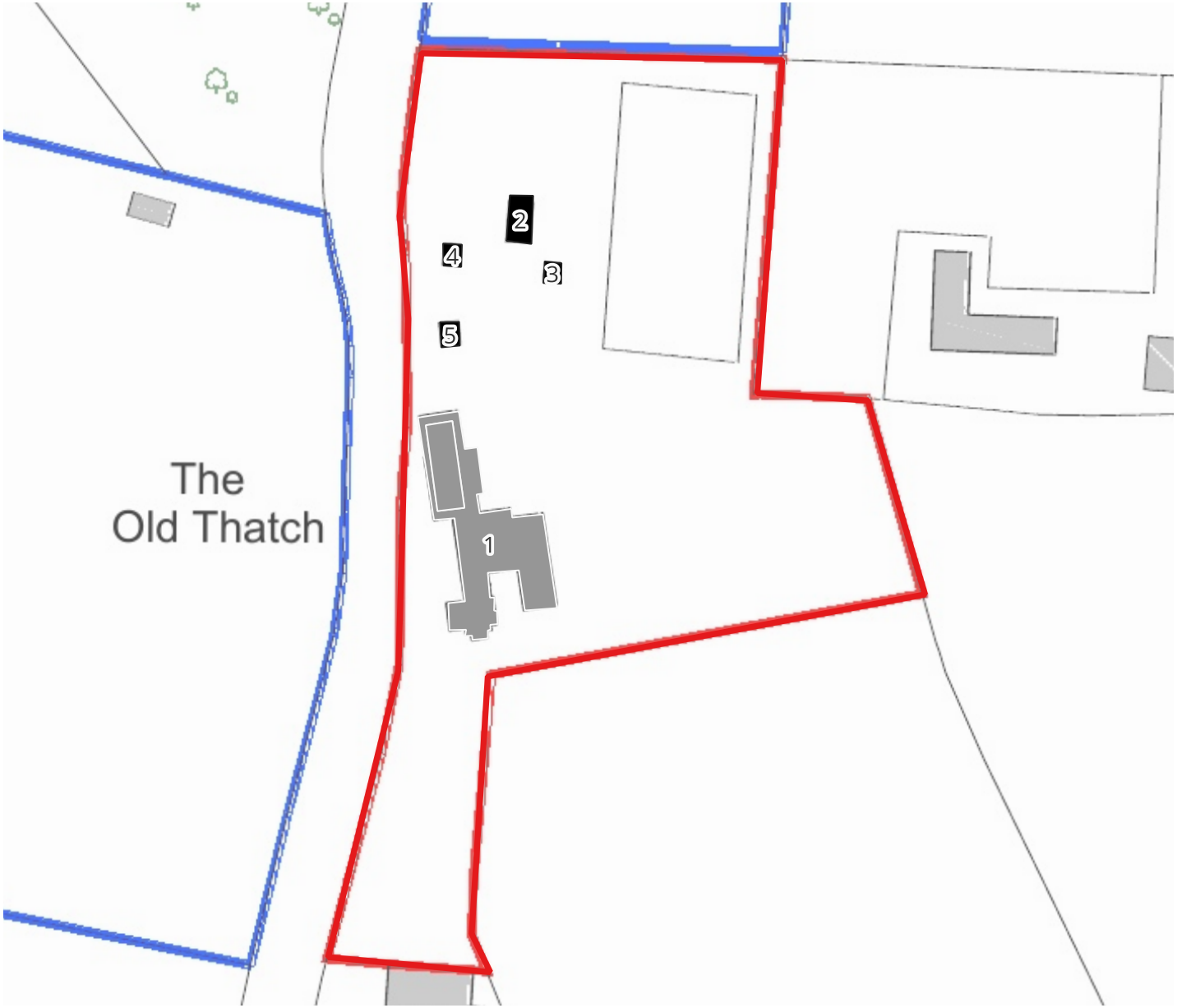
Appendix C: Preliminary Roost Assessment Results

Legend

- Red Line Boundary
- Neglible potential
- Confirmed bat roost



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ISSUE	DATE	DESCRIPTION	DRAWN	CHECKED
v1	17.03.2025	Map created	MC	AH

CLIENT:	**Robert and Lucy Westell**	
PROJECT:	**The Old Thatch**	
DRAWING:	**Preliminary Roost Assessment Results**	**1:800**
NUMBER:	**8780-XX-E0-02**	**A4**
ISSUE:	**v1**	**17.03.25**

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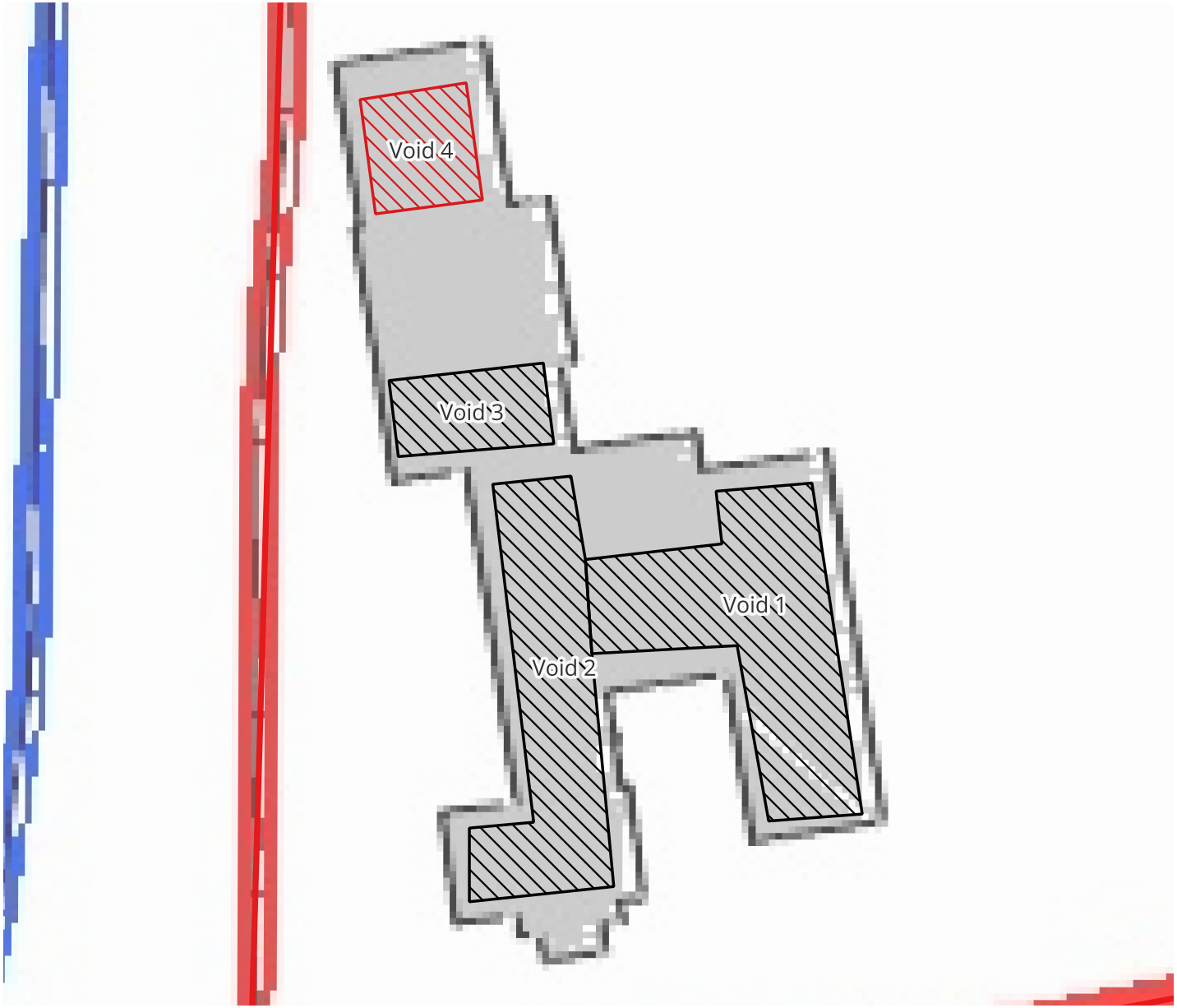
Legend

- Red Line Boundary
- Confirmed brown long-eared roost
- No evidence or access/egress points identified



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ISSUE	DATE	DESCRIPTION	DRAWN	CHECKED
v1	17.03.2025	Map created	MC	AH

CLIENT:	**Robert and Lucy Westell**	
PROJECT:	**The Old Thatch**	
DRAWING:	**Detailed PRA results**	**1:200**
NUMBER:	**8780-XX-E0-03**	**A4**
ISSUE:	**v1**	**17.03.25**

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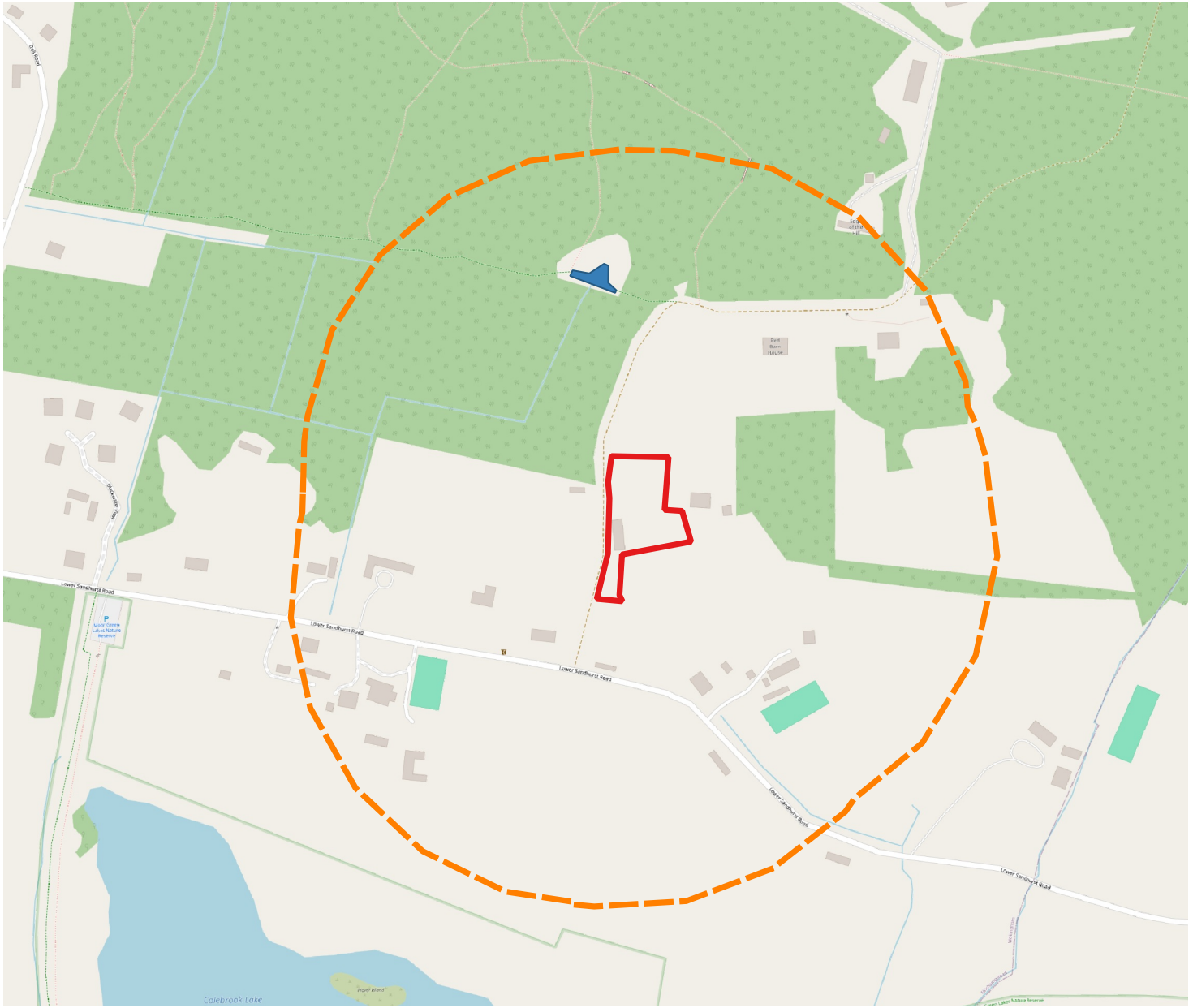
Appendix D: Waterbody Location Plan

The plan shown here is for the purpose of supporting a planning application only. Only scale from this drawing for the purposes of determining a planning application. Do not scale from this drawing for construction purposes.

The proposal presented here is subject to review by specialist consultants, and is to be read in conjunction with all relevant specialist's drawings and information where available. Any discrepancies between this and any other consultant's drawings and information should be reported to Pro Vision immediately.

Legend

- Red Line Boundary
- 250m search radius
- Waterbody



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N

ISSUE	DATE	DESCRIPTION	DRAWN	CHECKED
v1	17.03.25	Map Created	MC	AH

CLIENT:	**Robert and Lucy Westell**	
PROJECT:	**The Old Thatch**	
DRAWING:	**Waterbody Location Plan**	**1:5000**
NUMBER:	**8780-XX-E0-04**	**A4**
ISSUE:	**v1**	**17.03.25**

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Appendix E: Relevant Legislation

The Conservation of Habitats and Species 2017

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the Habitats Regulations) transpose Habitats Directive into UK legislation. The Habitats Regulations provide for the designation and protection of European Sites and European Protected Species. European Sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), which form part of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas across Europe.

European Protected Species (EPS) are those listed under Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations and include dormouse, great crested newt, otter and all species of bat. The regulations prohibit the deliberate capture, killing or disturbance of any EPS; it is also an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any of these species. In order to carry out a lawful operation (e.g. development work which has full planning permission) that may result in an offence under the Habitats Regulations, it is necessary to obtain a licence from Natural England. EPS Licences will only be granted after Natural England has been satisfied that there are no satisfactory alternative and that there will not be any adverse impacts on the favourable conservation status of the species.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is the principle piece of legislative protection of wildlife in Great Britain. Various amendments have occurred since the original enactment. The Wildlife and Countryside Act contains both habitat and species protection. Certain bird, animal and plant species are afforded protection under Schedules 1. 5 and 8 of the Act. Measures for the protection of the countryside, National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are also included within the Act.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 improved wildlife protection by amending the WCA. The main function of the NERC Act was to raise the profile of biodiversity amongst public authorities. Section 40 (S40 of the Act places a 'Biodiversity Duty' on all public bodies to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their normal functions.

[redacted]

ENVIRONMENT ACT 2021

The Environment Act 2021 received royal assent in November 2021 and introduces new environmental protection regimes. This includes the creation of the Office for Environmental Protection who will oversee the framework. The Act includes several measures which impact on the planning application process to provide measures to ensure developments result in a net gain in biodiversity. The Act includes the mandatory requirement of 10% net gain for new developments, unless listed within the exemptions, which includes householder applications, self-build and developments below the threshold of impacts. Biodiversity net gain must be evidenced with the use of the statutory metric and associated documents.