

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Site Location : Proposed Traveller Plots On Land Opposite Charlton Lane, Trowes Lane, Swallowfield, RG7 1RN

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Prepared For : Mr. Michael Ward and ET Planning

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Introduction

1.1 EDM Planning-Ecology has been commissioned by Mr. Michael Ward to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) On Land Opposite Charlton Lane, Trowes Lane, Swallowfield.

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

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

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

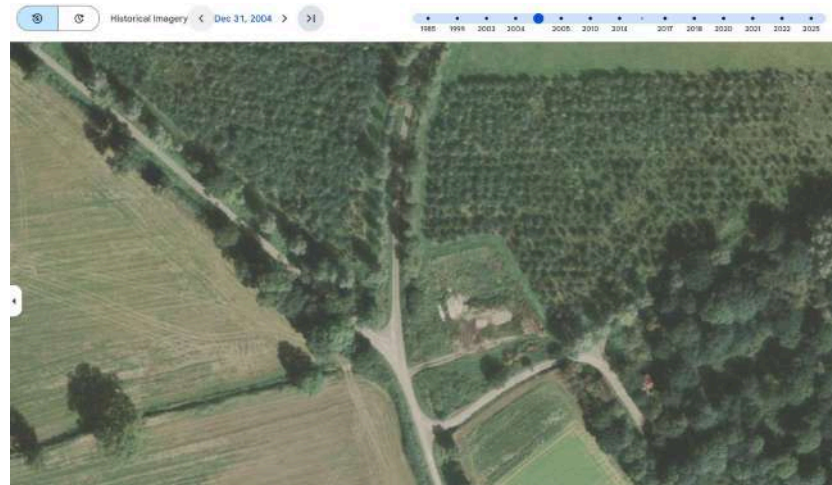
2017) and *BS 42020:2013 – Biodiversity: Code of Practice for Planning and Development*.

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

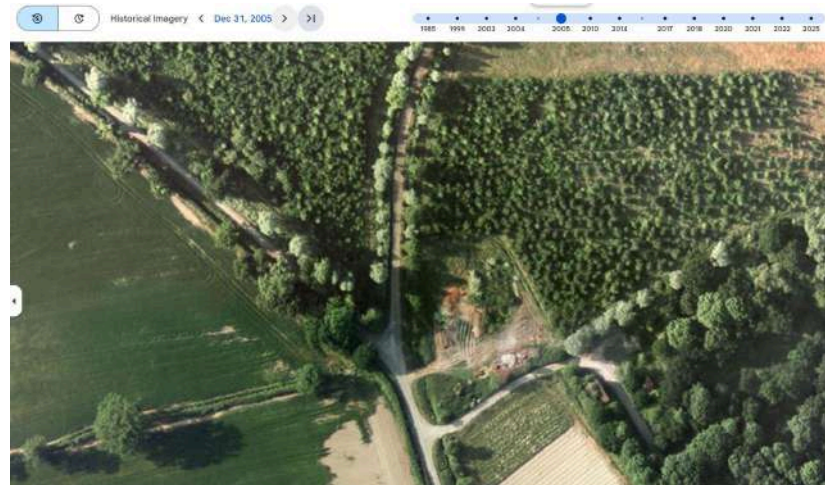
Information from the NBN Atlas and DEFRA's Magic Map was used to locate both statutory and non-statutory designated sites, as well as habitats of principal importance. Additionally, aerial imagery from Google Earth Pro was reviewed to provide context for the site and assess its connectivity with surrounding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

Site History

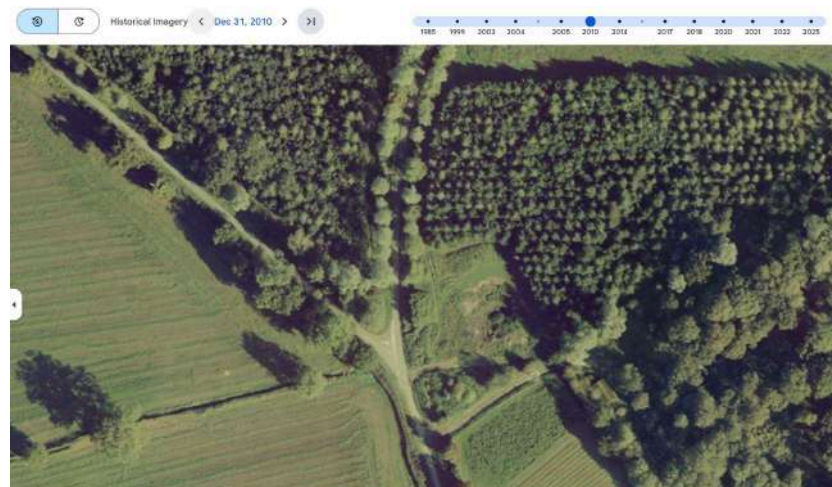
2.1 A review of Wokingham Borough Council's online planning register identified no planning applications relating directly to the Site. An active outline application for 79 dwellings was identified on adjacent land to the north-east. Review of historic aerial imagery indicates that the Site has not been in permanent built development and has historically formed part of a wider wooded area adjoining agricultural land. The surrounding woodland appears to be planted and managed, with the Site itself comprising a small clearing or disturbed area from at least 2004 onwards. Between approximately 2014 and 2020, the clearing appears to have been enlarged and used as a temporary works or storage area, with extensive bare ground / hardstanding and direct vehicular access from the adjoining road network. By 2021–2025 this disturbed area appears to have been partly cleared and left to revegetate, with natural regeneration of ruderal vegetation, grassland and scattered scrub evident within the former compound area. The historic pattern of disturbance suggests the Site has been subject to relatively recent and repeated ground disturbance, likely in connection with nearby utility/infrastructure works, potentially associated with the overhead power line corridor to the north-east.



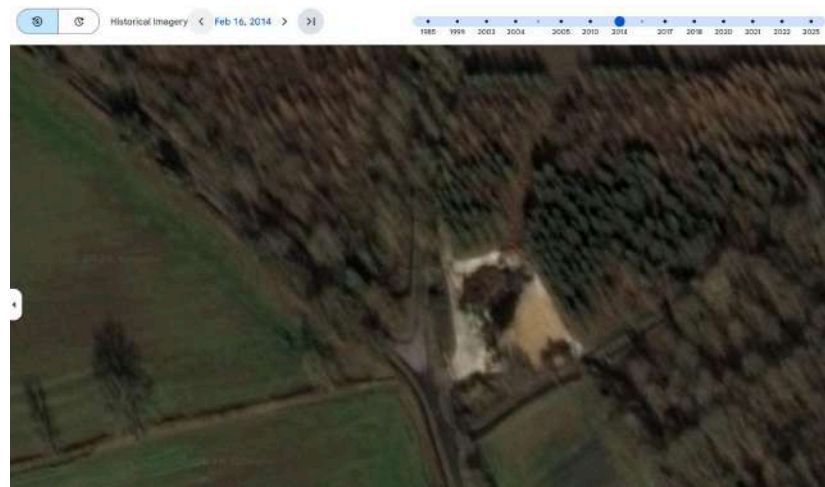
Site 2004



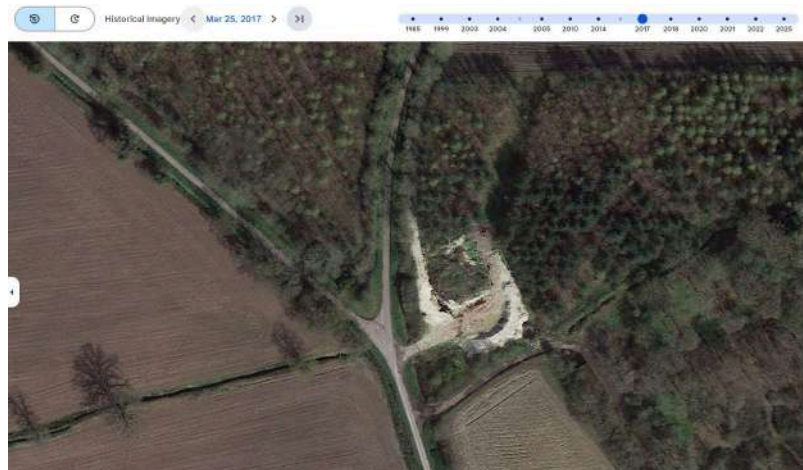
Site 2005



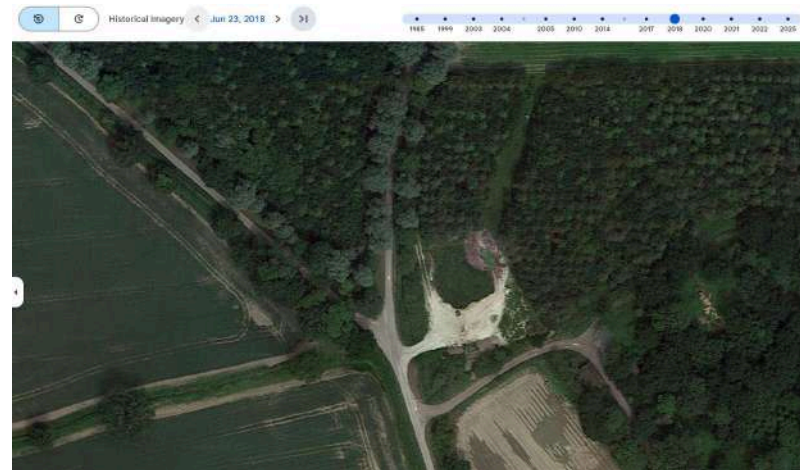
Site 2010



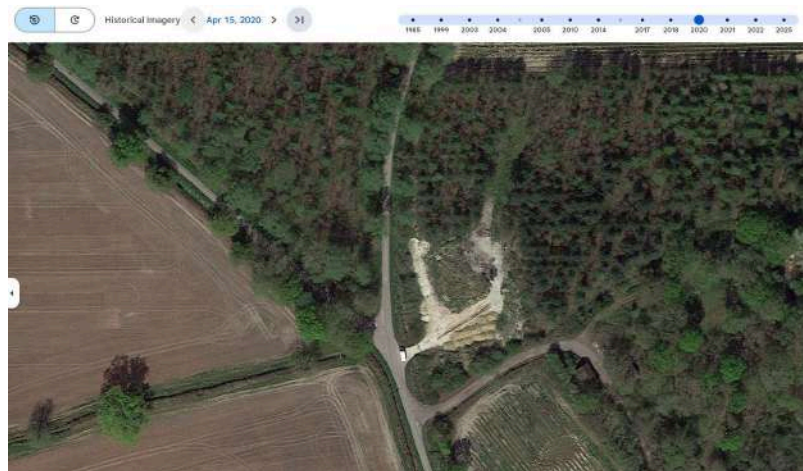
Site 2014



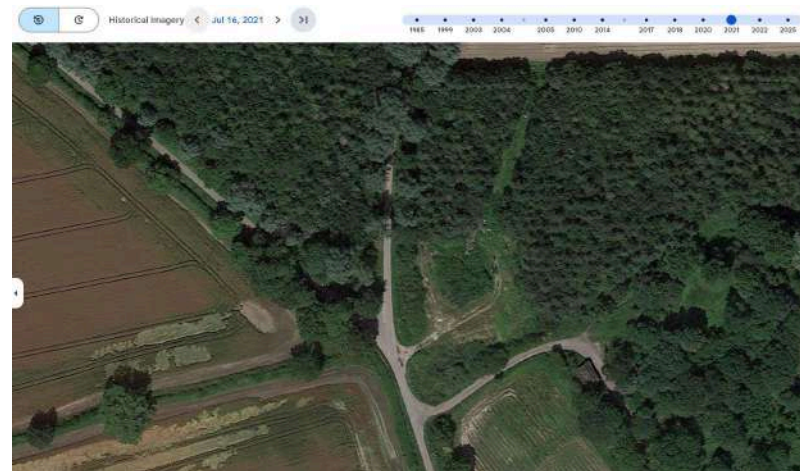
Site 2017



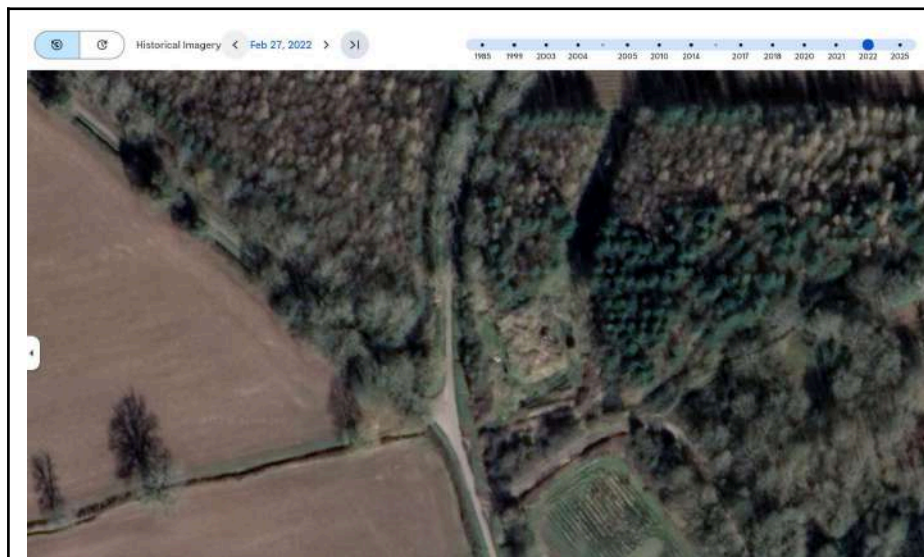
Site 2018



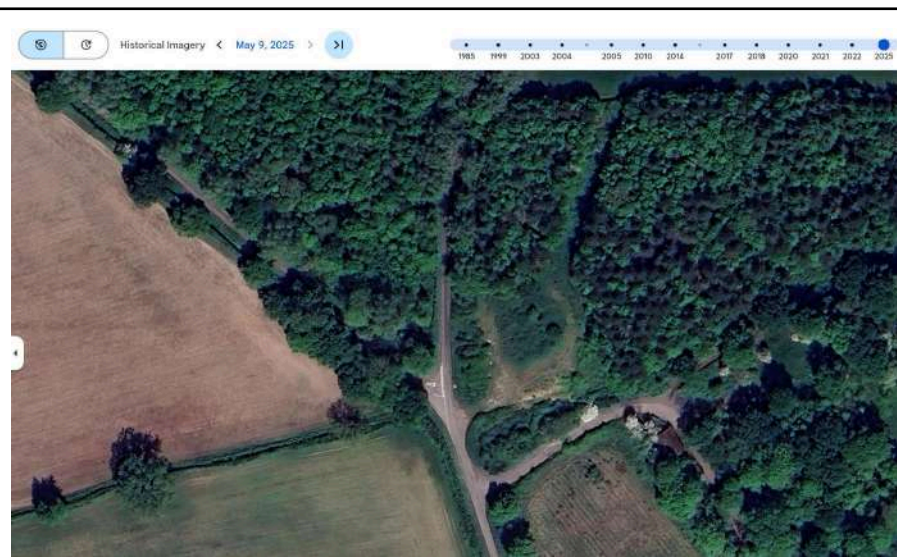
Site 2020



Site 2021



Site 2022



Site 2025

The Proposal

3.1 The application seeks the change of use of the land for the creation of a 5 plot gypsy and traveller site for an extended family. Each plot contains one mobile home and ancillary day room.





Desk Study

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

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

- **MAGIC (DEFRA)/ Natural England Open Data Geoportal (DEFRA):** To identify statutory nature conservation sites, Priority Habitats, non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), ancient woodland, and any granted European Protected Species (EPS) licences within a 2km radius of the site.

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

4.3 A summary of designated sites within the search area:

Statutory Designated Sites				
Site Name	Designation	Approx Distance from Site	Direction	Summary
Swallowfield Meadow	LNR	450m	NE	Swallowfield Meadow is a 0.7-hectare Local Nature Reserve
Stanford End Mill and River Loddon	SSSI	1.0 km	NW	The site's national importance stems from its habitats for rare species. The River Loddon section serves as the national stronghold for the rare Loddon pondweed (<i>Potamogeton nodosus</i>).
The Marshes	LNR	1.3 km	SE	Once a gravel pit in the late 19th Century, this land is partly wooded and partly marshland, so lent itself to the construction of ponds to create a wetland area.
Bramshill	SSSI	2.2 km	SE	The SSSI's shallow acidic ponds, formed in former gravel workings and damp valleys, host a rich aquatic flora dominated by bog pondweed (<i>Potamogeton polygonifolius</i>) and nationally scarce species.
Hazeley Heath	SSSI	4.9 km	SE	This is one of the largest tracts of lowland heathland in the region where 90% has been lost in the past 100 years. This endangered environment supports an array of plant and

Statutory Designated Sites

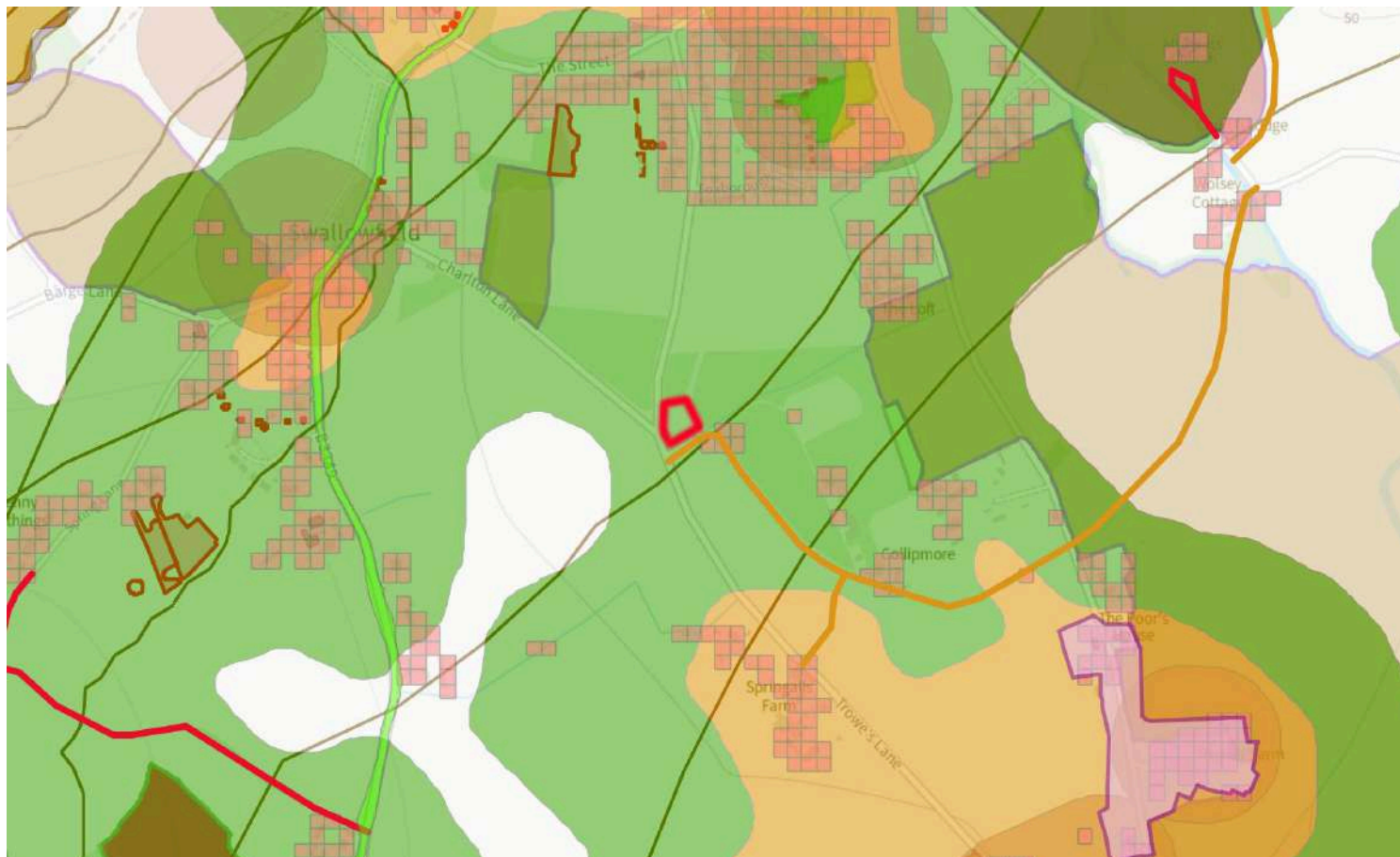
Site Name	Designation	Approx Distance from Site	Direction	Summary
				animal communities and it is because of this rich biodiversity that it has been notified a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
Pearman's Copse	LNR	5.1 km	N	Pearmans Copse is a small area of ancient woodland, in Lower Earley, covering 2 hectares. It contains ash, hazel, and oak trees. It contains many classic archaeological features, such as boundary banks and ditches.
Longmoor Bog	LNR + SSSI	5.6 km	E	This is mainly carr woodland, together with areas of wet heath and secondary mixed woodland. A small stream runs through the carr woodland, which has peat to a depth of more than a metre and the ground is covered by mosses.
Castle Bottom	NNR	9.0 km	SE	Castle Bottom is a British national nature reserve located near Yateley in Hampshire. It is part of Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area for the conservation of wild birds.
Horsehill Lake	LNR	9.1 km	NW	A beautiful lake surrounded by meadows, ponds and sheltered reedbeds.

Statutory Designated Sites

Site Name	Designation	Approx Distance from Site	Direction	Summary
Pamber Forest and Silchester Common	SSSI+LNR	10.1 km	SW	Pamber Forest and Silchester Common is a 341.7-hectare biological Site of Special Scientific Interest in Tadley in Hampshire.

Local Non-Statutory Designated Sites

Site Name	Designation	Approx Distance from Site	Direction	Summary
Ancient Woodland	ASNW	300m	E	Natural England's Provisional Ancient Woodland Inventory - 52813
Collins Copse	PAWS	850m	SW	Natural England's Provisional Ancient Woodland Inventory - 53101



Local Policies Map

4.4 Priority Habitats and Features

- Priority habitats identified via MAGIC include Deciduous woodland and Traditional Orchard.

Priority Habitats		
Site Name	Approx Distance from Site	Direction
Deciduous Woodland	50m	SE
Deciduous Woodland	350m	NW
Traditional Orchard	420m	NW
Traditional Orchard	480m	NE

No priority habitats were found on-site.



Priority Habitats within 500m.

4.5 Protected and Notable Species of Fauna

4.5.1 Greater Crested Newts

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

A search of EPS licensing and great crested newt pond survey data on Magic Maps returned one result within 2km of the site: 2015-13523-EPS-MIT.

In addition, one pond and two ditches were identified within 500 m of the Site through MAGIC.

No ponds, ditches or other aquatic habitats suitable for breeding great crested newt are present within the Application Site. Localised ephemeral surface water / puddling associated with poor drainage was noted within disturbed ground on Site, but this is temporary in nature and does not represent suitable breeding habitat for great crested newt.

The Application Site is dominated by disturbed ground supporting ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and scattered scrub, and provides low to suboptimal suitability for terrestrial great crested newts. Habitat features associated with sheltering, dispersal and hibernation are generally limited, although some localised refugial opportunities may be present within scrub margins and small accumulations of vegetation or disturbed material. Overall, the Site appears to have been subject to recent and repeated disturbance.

Although off-site ponds occur within the surrounding landscape, the Application Site is considered unlikely to support more than occasional terrestrial use by great crested newt and is unlikely to comprise important breeding habitat, resting habitat or significant functionally linked terrestrial habitat. The proposals include the removal of small areas of bramble scrub associated with localised earth mounds; however, the principal boundary features, including hedgerows and trees, are to be retained. On this basis, the likelihood of great crested newt occurring within the Application Site is considered low, and no further survey is recommended. A precautionary approach to vegetation clearance is nevertheless advised.



Water Bodies within 500m.

4.5.2 Other Amphibians

The data search returned eight records of Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*), two records of Smooth Newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) and one record of common frog (*Rana temporaria*) within 2 km of the Application Site.

In addition, one pond and two ditches were identified within 500 m of the Site through MAGIC.

No ponds, ditches or other aquatic habitats suitable for breeding amphibians are present within the Application Site. Localised ephemeral surface water / puddling associated with poor drainage was noted within disturbed ground on Site, but this is temporary in nature and does not represent suitable breeding habitat for common amphibians.

The Application Site is dominated by disturbed ground supporting ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and scattered scrub, and provides low to suboptimal suitability for terrestrial amphibians. Habitat features associated with sheltering, dispersal and

hibernation are generally limited, although some localised refugial opportunities may be present within scrub margins and small accumulations of vegetation or disturbed material. Overall, the Site appears to have been subject to recent and repeated disturbance.

Although off-site ponds occur within the surrounding landscape, the Application Site is considered unlikely to support more than occasional terrestrial use by amphibians and is unlikely to comprise important breeding habitat, resting habitat or significant functionally linked terrestrial habitat. On this basis, and subject to no further loss or alteration of more suitable boundary habitats, the likelihood of common amphibians occurring within the Application Site is considered low, and no further survey is recommended.

4.5.3 Bats

The data search returned records of the following bat species within 2 km of the Application Site: one record for Eurasian Serotine (*Cnephaeus serotinus*), one record for Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), two records for Brown Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*) and three records for Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*).

A review of European Protected Species (EPS) licence records indicated there are five licence returns within 2 km;

EPSM2013-5997, 600m W

EPSM2010-1956, 750m N

2015-7206-EPS-MIT, 1.3 km NE

2017-28675-EPS-MIT, 1.3 km SE

EPSM2011-2965, 1.9 km E

The Application Site comprises a small open clearing dominated by disturbed ground, ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and scattered scrub, set within a wider matrix of woodland and dense boundary vegetation. The open central parts of the Site are considered to be of generally low value for foraging bats. However, the woodland edge, scrub margins and adjoining tree lines are likely to provide some low-level to localised foraging and commuting opportunities, particularly as part of the wider connected landscape.

No buildings, trees or other structures with potential to support roosting bats were identified within the Application Site. The Site is considered to offer negligible suitability for roosting bats and low suitability for foraging and commuting bats. The proposed removal of small areas of bramble scrub associated with localised earth mounds would result in only a very minor loss of low-quality habitat that may be used occasionally for foraging and commuting. However, given the limited extent of the habitat affected, together with the retention of the wider surrounding woodland edge, hedgerows and trees, significant effects on bats are not anticipated. No further bat survey is recommended, provided no trees or other potential roost features are removed and sensitive lighting design is implemented.

4.5.4 Reptiles

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

The data search returned one record of Grass Snake (*Natrix helvetica*) and one record of Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*) within 2km of the Application Site.

A further review identified no records within 1 km of the Site.

The Application Site comprises disturbed ground supporting ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and scattered scrub within a small open clearing surrounded by woodland and dense boundary vegetation. The open central parts of the Site appear to have been subject to recent and repeated disturbance and are considered to be of generally low suitability for reptiles. However, some localised habitat features of potential value are present along the Site margins, including scrub edge, taller ruderal vegetation and small accumulations of disturbed material, which may provide limited opportunities for basking, sheltering and dispersal.

Overall, the Application Site is considered to offer low suitability for common reptiles, with any potential interest likely to be limited to occasional use of peripheral habitats. The proposed removal of sections of bramble scrub along the southern boundary would result in the loss of a small area of low-quality reptile habitat, but significant impacts are considered unlikely given its limited extent and the disturbed character of the Site. On this basis, no further reptile survey is recommended; however, a precautionary approach to vegetation clearance should be adopted.

4.5.5 Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

The data search returned one record of hazel dormouse within 2 km.

A search for EPS licence returns found one within 2km;

2018-34337-EPS-MIT, 1.5 km SW.

Within the Application Site, habitat potentially suitable for hazel dormouse is limited to the woodland edge, scattered scrub and dense boundary vegetation around the margins of the Site. These features are of relatively limited extent within the Site itself, although they form part of a wider network of connected woodland and scrub habitats in the surrounding landscape. The central part of the Application Site comprises disturbed ground with ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and ephemeral vegetation, and does not provide suitable core habitat for dormouse.

On this basis, the Application Site is considered to offer, at most, limited potential for occasional use by hazel dormouse along its vegetated edges, but is unlikely to support a significant population within the Site itself. The proposals include the removal of small areas of bramble scrub associated with localised earth mounds. However, the principal

boundary features, including hedgerows and trees, are to be retained. As such, any habitat loss is limited in extent and is not considered likely to result in significant ecological effects, subject to a precautionary approach to vegetation clearance where appropriate.

4.5.6 Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)

Hedgehog is listed as a species of principal importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006).

The data search returned nineteen records of Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) within 2km of the application site.

The Application Site comprises disturbed ground supporting ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and scattered scrub within a small open clearing, bounded by woodland edge and dense boundary vegetation. The open central parts of the Site are considered to be of generally low value for hedgehog. However, the scrub margins and vegetated edges, particularly along the southern boundary, are likely to provide some cover, refuge and commuting opportunities.

The proposed removal of sections of scrub edge along the southern boundary would result in the loss of a small area of peripheral habitat that may be used by hedgehog for shelter and movement. Although this habitat is limited in extent and is to be replaced, there is potential for harm to individual hedgehogs during vegetation clearance and ground disturbance if works are not undertaken sensitively.

Overall, the Application Site is considered to offer low suitability for hedgehog, with any likely use focused on boundary and edge habitats rather than the Site as a whole. Hedgehog presence within the wider landscape should nevertheless be recognised and, as a precaution, vegetation clearance and groundworks should be undertaken sensitively. Replacement scrub planting should use native species and maintain connectivity with retained boundary vegetation, to ensure the Site continues to provide some cover and commuting opportunity post-development. A precautionary approach to clearance is consistent with standard ecological impact assessment practice.

4.5.7 Badger (*Meles meles*)

Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. It is an offence, amongst other things, to kill, injure or take a badger, or to damage, destroy, obstruct access to, or disturb a badger whilst occupying a sett.

The data search returned one record of badger (*Meles meles*) within 2km of the Application Site. A further search found no records within 1km.

The Application Site comprises a small open clearing dominated by disturbed ground, ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and scattered scrub, bounded by woodland edge and dense boundary vegetation. The open central parts of the Site are considered to be of generally low value for badger. The woodland edge, retained hedgerows and treed boundaries may, however, provide some limited foraging and commuting opportunities for badger and other terrestrial mammals.

No badger sett entrances or other field signs indicative of current badger occupation were recorded within the Application Site during the survey. In particular, no active or disused setts, spoil heaps, latrines, hair, well-used mammal paths attributable to badger, or other characteristic evidence of badger activity were identified on Site.

Based on the habitats present, the Application Site is considered unlikely to support a badger sett, although occasional use of peripheral habitats by commuting or foraging badgers cannot be ruled out.

The proposals include the removal of small areas of bramble scrub associated with localised earth mounds. However, the principal boundary features, including hedgerows and trees, are to be retained. As such, habitat loss is limited in extent and is not considered likely to result in significant effects on badger. On this basis, the likelihood of badger being present on-site as a resident or sett-forming species is considered low, and no further badger survey is recommended at this stage. As a precaution, an updated pre-construction badger check should be undertaken if works are delayed for a prolonged period or if the scope of works changes to include excavation or vegetation removal in close proximity to retained boundary habitats. Natural England advises surveys should be sufficiently up to date for the planning stage and revisited where circumstances change.

4.5.8 Riparian mammals

The data search returned one record of otter (*Lutra lutra*) and one record of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) within 2 km of the Application Site. A more refined search identified no records within 1 km of the Site.

No ponds, watercourses, marshy areas or other suitable riparian habitats are present within the Application Site. A ditch is shown on MAGIC adjacent to the western Site boundary. Localised ephemeral surface water / puddling associated with poor drainage was noted within disturbed ground on Site, but this is temporary in nature and does not represent suitable habitat for otter or water vole.

The Application Site comprises a small open clearing dominated by disturbed ground, ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and scattered scrub, bounded by woodland edge and dense boundary vegetation. The Site does not support bankside vegetation, burrowable channel margins or other habitat features typically associated with water vole, and is considered unsuitable for resting, breeding or commuting water vole. The likelihood of water vole being present within the Application Site is therefore considered negligible.

Although waterbodies occur within the wider surrounding landscape, no suitable aquatic habitat is present within the Application Site for otter. The Site is not considered likely to support resting or breeding otter, although occasional use of nearby off-site waterbodies or connecting habitats within the wider landscape cannot be ruled out.

On this basis, and provided no works affect off-site ditches, ponds, drains, watercourse corridors or associated bankside vegetation, significant effects on otter or water vole are considered unlikely and no further survey is recommended.

4.5.9 Invertebrates

The data search returned records for a large number of invertebrate taxa within 2 km of the Application Site. The records are dominated by common and widespread species associated with grassland, scrub, woodland edge and garden habitats, including small white (*Pieris rapae*; 241 records), meadow brown (*Maniola jurtina*; 190), large white (*Pieris brassicae*; 169), red admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*; 161), gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*; 149), peacock (*Aglais io*; 139), green-veined white (*Pieris napi*; 127), speckled wood (*Pararge aegeria*; 125), comma (*Polygonia c-album*; 122), orange-tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*; 112) and small skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*; 106).

The local records also include a number of species indicative of a wider diversity of habitats in the surrounding landscape. These include woodland- and scrub-associated butterflies such as purple hairstreak (*Favonius quercus*; 13 records), silver-washed fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*; 10) and white admiral (*Limenitis camilla*; 8); grassland-associated species such as marbled white (*Melanargia galathea*; 26), small heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*; 7), brown argus (*Aricia agestis*; 5) and burnet companion (*Euclidia glyphica*; 5); and species associated with watercourses, ponds and other wet habitats in the wider area, including banded demoiselle (*Calopteryx*

splendens; 105), white-legged damselfly (*Platycnemis pennipes*; 58), common blue damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*; 53), azure damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*; 47), beautiful demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*; 33), red-eyed damselfly (*Erythromma najas*; 25), emperor dragonfly (*Anax imperator*; 27) and common club-tail (*Gomphus vulgatissimus*; 6). The records also include stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*; 29), a notable saproxylic species associated with deadwood and mature treed landscapes.

Collectively, these records indicate that the wider landscape supports a diverse invertebrate assemblage associated with a mosaic of grassland, scrub, woodland edge, mature trees and aquatic habitats.

Within the Application Site itself, habitat for invertebrates is more limited. The Site comprises a small open clearing dominated by disturbed ground, ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and scattered scrub, bounded by woodland edge and dense boundary vegetation. Although the Site includes some features of local value to invertebrates, such as ruderal nectar sources, patches of bare or sparsely vegetated ground, and structurally varied margins, it appears to have been subject to recent and repeated disturbance and does not provide extensive or high-quality habitat. The principal features of value are limited to the woodland edge, retained boundary

vegetation and localised ruderal and scrubby areas, which may provide some foraging, basking, sheltering and dispersal opportunities.

Overall, the Application Site is considered to be of low to, at most, local value for invertebrates, particularly in comparison with the more extensive and structurally diverse habitats present in the surrounding landscape.

4.5.10 Birds

The data search returned records of 128 bird species within 2 km of the Application Site. The local record set is dominated by common and widespread species associated with gardens, woodland, woodland edge and rural settlement habitats, including blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*; 712 records), robin (*Erithacus rubecula*; 706), blackbird (*Turdus merula*; 705), great tit (*Parus major*; 702), chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*; 679), dunnock (*Prunella modularis*; 664), magpie (*Pica pica*; 656), woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*; 630), greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*; 612), collared dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*; 608), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*; 595) and starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*; 594).

The desk study also returned a number of species indicative of the wider ecological value and habitat diversity of the surrounding landscape. These include woodland, scrub and farmland-associated species such as bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*; 122 records), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*; 114), whitethroat (*Curruca communis*; 111), yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*; 71), linnet (*Linaria cannabina*; 55), willow warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*; 76), spotted flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*; 24), barn owl (*Tyto alba*; 10) and turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*; 3). The records also include numerous wetland and open-water species, such as mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*; 271), coot

(*Fulica atra*; 271), mute swan (*Cygnus olor*; 221), great crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*; 209), moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*; 195), tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*; 188), gadwall (*Mareca strepera*; 112), grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*; 105), kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*; 74) and reed bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*; 47). Collectively, these records indicate that the wider landscape supports a diverse bird assemblage associated with a mosaic of woodland, scrub, grassland, farmland and wetland habitats.

Within the Application Site itself, habitat of value to birds is largely restricted to the woodland edge, retained hedgerows, trees, scattered scrub and other vegetated margins, which may provide nesting, foraging, perching and sheltering opportunities for common bird species. The central parts of the Site comprise disturbed ground, ruderal vegetation and species-poor grassland, and are of more limited value, although they may provide some incidental foraging habitat for ground-feeding birds.

The proposals include the removal of small areas of bramble scrub associated with localised earth mounds. This may result in the loss of a small amount of low-quality nesting or sheltering habitat; however, the principal boundary features, including hedgerows and trees, are to be retained. On this basis, significant effects on birds are not anticipated.

Should works to scrub or other vegetation be undertaken during the bird nesting season (typically March to August inclusive), a pre-construction nesting bird check should first be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist. If an active nest is identified, works in that area should be delayed and an appropriate exclusion buffer maintained until the nest is no longer in use.

4.6 Landscape and Ecological Context

The Application Site is located at land opposite Charlton Lane, Trowes Lane, Swallowfield, RG7 1RN, within the Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland Landscape Character Area. The surrounding landscape is rural in character and comprises a mosaic of farmland, woodland blocks, plantation woodland, hedgerows, tree belts, rural lanes and scattered development.

The Site comprises a small disturbed clearing bounded by road to the west and south, and woodland / dense boundary vegetation to the north and east. The eastern boundary connects to pine plantation and further woodland beyond, such that local habitat connectivity is focused along woodland edge, trees and hedgerows rather than through the Site interior.

The Site is dominated by disturbed ground with ruderal vegetation, species-poor grassland and localised bramble scrub. Evidence of underlying hardstanding is present across much of the Site and localised ephemeral wetness was noted in association with poor drainage. The Site appears to have been subject to previous disturbance, potentially associated with utility works, and is of generally low habitat distinctiveness.

The principal ecological features are the retained boundary trees, hedgerows and woodland edge vegetation. These provide the main structural and ecological value of the Site. By contrast, the central disturbed area is of comparatively low ecological interest. The proposals would retain the principal boundary vegetation, with habitat loss largely limited to small areas of low-value bramble scrub and ruderal vegetation.

Overall, the Site is of greatest ecological relevance for its retained margins and their contribution to local habitat connectivity, while the interior is of limited ecological value. The main ecological considerations therefore relate to the protection of retained boundary vegetation and avoidance of indirect construction effects.

Field Survey

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

Date of Survey	Temperature	Humidity	Cloud Cover	Wind	Rain
16/03/2026	12C	60%	80%	SE 10 KM/h	None



Surveyed Area

5.1 Survey Methodology

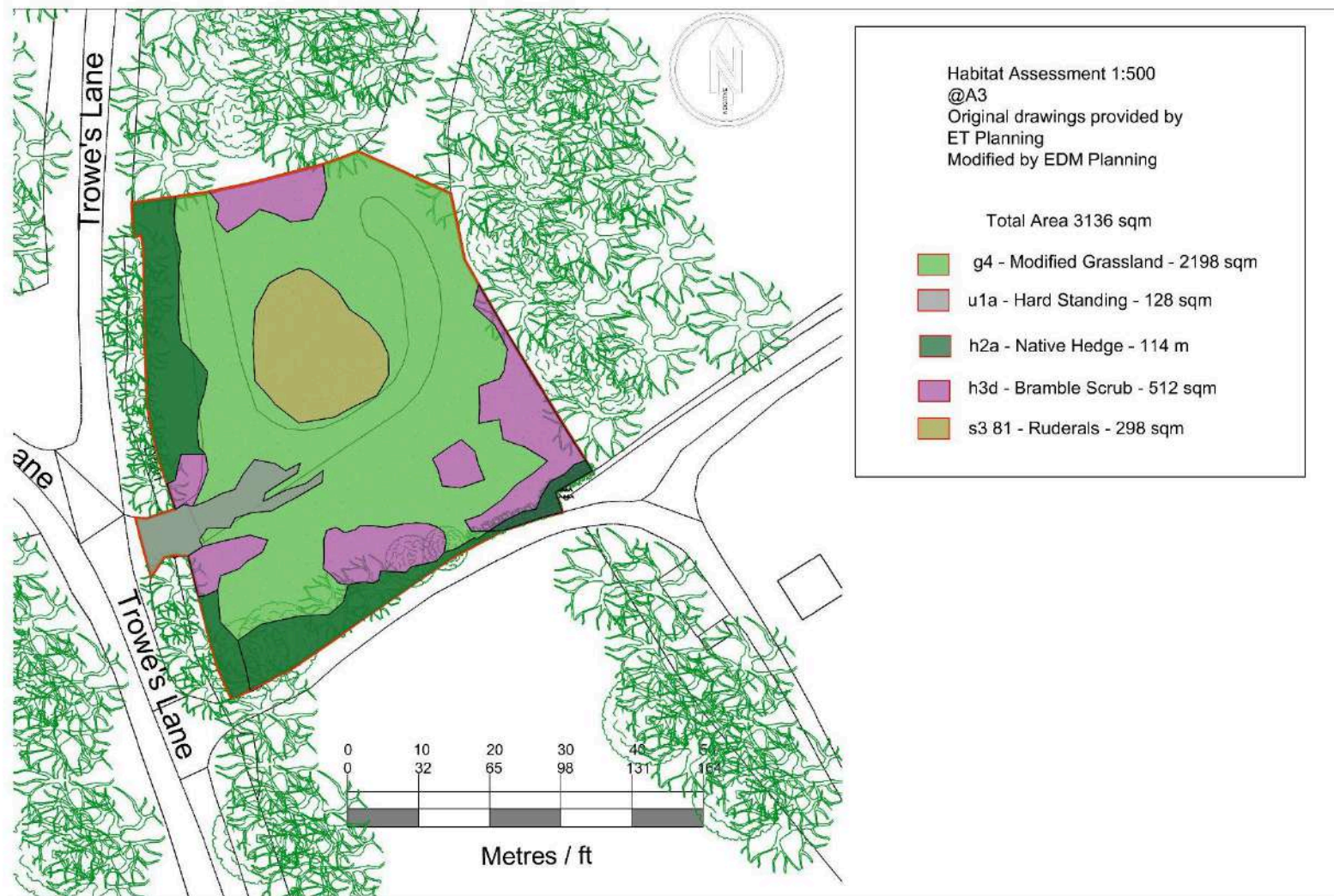
A walkover survey was undertaken following the methodology for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals set out in the *CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2017/2018)*. The survey included:

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

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

5.2 Habitat types recorded on site and immediately adjacent habitats

UKHAB Code	Habitat Type	Location on Site	Condition	Notes
g4	Modified Grassland	Most of Site	Poor/Moderate	There is a hardstanding subsurface that the grassland has grown on.
s3 81	Ruderals	Central section and borders	Poor	Contained within the grassland areas
h3d	Bramble Scrub	Southern section and borders	Poor/Moderate	There are mixed poor and moderate condition sections of bramble scrub along the southern edge of the site, the moderate condition bramble is limited to the borders and corners.
u1b	Hard Standing	Access and subsurface throughout site	N/A	Gravel, access
h2a	Native Hedgerows	South and West borders	Moderate	
w2c	Coniferous Woodland	Adjacent habitat to the East	Moderate	Habitat is beyond red line
w1h	Mixed Woodland	Adjacent habitat to the North	Moderate	Habitat is beyond red line



Approximate Baseline Habitat.

5.3 Notable Features and Species Evidence

- **Hedgerows:** The well established native hedgerows on the South and West borders of the site offer structural diversity and are likely to be of value for nesting birds and commuting bats.
- **Adjacent woodland:** Adjacent woodlands to the North and East offer structural diversity and are likely to be of value for nesting birds and commuting bats.

No direct evidence of protected species (e.g. badger setts, GCN ponds, owl pellets) was recorded during the survey.

5.4 Survey Photographs



Site Entrance



Site Entrance



Site Entrance



Brambles north of entrance



Grassland growing through hard standing substrate



Grassland growing through hard standing substrate



Modified Grassland



Division between northern forested area and eastern forested area,
contains bramble scrub



Poor quality grassland areas



Bramble patch towards the north of the site



Native hedge on the West border



Brambles on the Western edge and Native hedge



Poor quality grassland



Grassland with some hard standing substrate below



Site entrance



Tall forbs and Ruderals



Bramble scrub borders on the South



Sand and Stone piles on the south of the site, Brambles in the corners



Adjacent woodland to the East



Ruderals and dead tall forbs dominate the central section



Adjacent woodland to the North



Adjacent woodland to the North



Sand and Stone piles on the south of the site



Some bramble on the piles



Aerial Photography

Summary and Recommendations

6.1 Overall summary

The Application Site at land opposite Charlton Lane, Trowes Lane, Swallowfield, RG7 1RN comprises a small disturbed clearing within a wider rural landscape. The Site is dominated by modified grassland, ruderal vegetation, localised bramble scrub and areas of hardstanding / compacted substrate, with the principal ecological features limited to the native hedgerows along the southern and western boundaries and the adjacent woodland to the north and east. The central parts of the Site are of generally low ecological distinctiveness and appear to have been subject to relatively recent and repeated disturbance.

The desk study identified a number of statutory and non-statutory designated sites, Priority Habitats and species records within the wider search area. However, no statutory or non-statutory designated sites are located within the Application Site itself, and no Priority Habitats were identified on-site. The nearest ecological features of note are off-site and include areas of deciduous woodland and ancient woodland within the surrounding landscape.

The field survey confirmed that the Site is of limited intrinsic ecological value overall, with its main ecological relevance arising from the retained boundary vegetation and its connection to the surrounding woodland network. No direct evidence of protected species was recorded during the

survey, and the habitats within the development area are generally of low suitability for most protected or notable fauna.

Overall, the proposals for the creation of a 5 plot gypsy and traveller site are not considered likely to result in significant ecological effects, subject to the retention and protection of boundary habitats and the implementation of appropriate precautionary mitigation during construction.

6.2 Protected and notable species

Records of protected and notable species were returned from the desk study within 2 km of the Application Site, including great crested newt, other amphibians, bats, reptiles, hazel dormouse, hedgehog, badger, otter, water vole, notable invertebrates and a wide range of bird species. Notwithstanding these surrounding records, the Application Site itself provides low or limited suitability for most of these receptors.

No ponds, ditches or other permanent aquatic habitats suitable for breeding great crested newt or other amphibians are present within the Site. Although ephemeral wet areas were noted, these are temporary and do not represent suitable breeding habitat. The Site also offers only limited terrestrial shelter opportunities, and no further amphibian survey is considered necessary.

The Site contains no buildings, trees or structures with bat roost potential. The open disturbed interior is of low value for foraging bats, although the retained boundary vegetation and adjacent woodland edges are likely to offer some low-level commuting and foraging opportunity. Provided the boundary vegetation is retained and lighting is designed sensitively, significant impacts to bats are not anticipated.

The Site offers low suitability for reptiles, with any potential interest likely to be confined to small areas of scrub edge, ruderal vegetation and disturbed material around the margins. Similarly, habitat suitable for hazel dormouse is limited to vegetated edges connected to the wider woodland

network, and the Site is unlikely to support a significant population. Hedgehog and badger may occasionally use the Site margins for refuge, commuting or foraging, but no evidence of badger sett activity was recorded and the Site is not considered important habitat for either species.

No suitable riparian habitat is present within the Site for otter or water vole. Invertebrate interest within the Site is considered low to, at most, local, reflecting the disturbed character of the habitats present. The main ornithological interest relates to the retained hedgerows, scrub and adjacent woodland edges, which may support nesting and foraging birds. Overall, no further species-specific surveys are considered necessary at this stage, subject to the scheme remaining as currently proposed.

6.3 Avoidance, mitigation and enhancement

The main ecological requirement of the development is the protection of retained boundary vegetation and adjacent woodland edge habitats during construction. These features should be clearly identified on site prior to works commencing, and construction activity should be controlled to avoid encroachment, storage of materials, soil compaction, excavation, fires, or other indirect damage within or adjacent to retained vegetated margins.

Any vegetation clearance should be undertaken outside the main bird nesting season, typically March to August inclusive, where reasonably practicable. Where this is not possible, the affected areas should first be checked by a suitably qualified ecologist, and if active nests are found, works should be delayed in that area until nesting has finished.

Given the limited potential for reptiles, hedgehog and other small fauna to use peripheral vegetation and disturbed refuge features, site clearance should proceed under a precautionary approach. This should include a staged and directional clearance of vegetation, working from open habitat towards retained cover, so that any animals present are given the opportunity to disperse naturally into adjacent suitable habitat.

External lighting should be designed to avoid unnecessary light spill onto retained hedgerows, woodland edge and other vegetated boundaries, in order to maintain their function for bats, birds and other wildlife. Opportunities for ecological enhancement should also be incorporated into the

final layout and landscaping, including the use of native planting and the retention of habitat connectivity along the Site boundaries.

6.4 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

From a baseline ecological perspective, the Application Site is dominated by habitats of relatively low distinctiveness, namely modified grassland, ruderal vegetation, hardstanding and small areas of bramble scrub. The habitats of greatest ecological value in the local context are the retained hedgerows and adjacent woodland edges, which contribute most strongly to habitat structure and connectivity.

The proposals should therefore seek to retain these boundary features wherever possible and ensure that they are protected during construction and appropriately integrated into the final site design. In principle, this creates an opportunity for biodiversity enhancement through the sympathetic management of retained margins, supplementary native planting, and the strengthening of habitat connectivity around the Site edges.

Appendix

7.1 Legislation and Planning Policy

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

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

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

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

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