

Stanbury House, Basingstoke Road, Spencer's Wood

Ecological Appraisal

March 2025

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Executive Summary

- i) **Introduction.** Aspect Ecology was commissioned by Cooper Estates Ltd in February 2025 to undertake an update Ecological Appraisal in respect of proposed development of land at Stanbury House, Basingstoke Road, Spencer's Wood.
- ii) **Proposals.** The proposals are for development of the site to provide up to 63 new dwellings, with associated infrastructure and landscaping.
- iii) **Survey.** The site was originally surveyed by Aspect Ecology Ltd in 2006 in order to inform proposed development at the site, with further surveys undertaken in 2013 and 2019 to inform specific proposals at that time. In order to inform the current planning submission, the site has been subject to further surveys during April to June 2023 and February 2025. Surveys were undertaken based on standard extended Phase 1 methodology. In addition, general appraisal of faunal species was undertaken to record the potential presence of any protected, rare or notable species, with specific surveys conducted in respect of bats, Badger, Great Crested Newt and Reptiles.
- iv) **Ecological Designations.** The site lies within 5km of a component of the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area, for which suitable mitigation in the form of SANG and SAMM will be provided. The site itself is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory ecological designations and subject to mitigation measures outlined in this report no ecological designation is likely to be adversely affected by the proposals.
- v) **Habitats.** The site comprises two fields of modified grassland with woodland, hedgerows with associated drainage ditches, and an off-site tree line present at the site boundaries. The proposals have sought to retain features of ecological importance, including the vast majority of the trees, woodland, hedgerows and off-site tree line. As such, subject to the implementation of the mitigation measures set out (ensured through suitably worded planning condition/obligation where appropriate) the proposals are unlikely to result in any significant adverse effects on habitats or features of ecological importance.
- vi) **Protected Species.** The site provides a number of opportunities for protected species, with the presence of Great Crested Newt confirmed in off-site ponds. Low populations of Common Lizard and Grass Snake are also known to be present within the site. In addition, it is likely that birds nest within suitable habitat at the site and there are habitats suitable to support roosting bats, and these species could therefore potentially be adversely affected by the proposals. Appropriate mitigation measures are recommended and subject to the implementation of these measures, it is anticipated that protected species will be fully safeguarded under the proposals.
- vii) **Enhancements.** The proposals present the opportunity to secure a number of biodiversity benefits, including additional native tree planting, pond creation, new roosting opportunities for bats and more diverse nesting habitats for birds.
- viii) **Summary.** In summary, the proposals have sought to minimise impacts on biodiversity and subject to the implementation of appropriate avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures, it is considered unlikely that the proposals will result in significant harm to ecological receptors.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Proposals

- 1.1.1 Aspect Ecology has been commissioned by Cooper Estates Strategic Land Ltd to undertake an Ecological Appraisal in respect of proposed development of land at Stanbury House, Basingstoke Road, Spencer's Wood, hereafter referred to as 'the site' (see Plan 1083-03/ECO1).
- 1.1.2 The proposals are for development of the site to provide 63 new dwellings, along with associated infrastructure and landscaping.
- 1.1.3 Initial ecological survey and appraisal work was undertaken at the site in 2006, with further surveys undertaken in 2013, 2014, 2019, and 2023 to inform a previous development scheme for the site and adjacent land. As a result of the 2019 survey work, a portion of the wider site is now in receipt of planning (ref: APP/X0360/W/15/3097721).
- 1.1.4 At the current time, Aspect Ecology Ltd has been commissioned to undertake update ecological survey work to inform a new outline planning application for the current red line boundary. The results of this survey work and assessment are set out within this report.

1.2 Site Overview

- 1.2.1 The site is located south of Reading in Spencer's Wood. It is bound by semi-improved grassland and woodland, with agricultural fields to the south and west, with the A33 lying further to the west. The land adjacent to the eastern boundary is largely a completed new residential development area, with the western-most portion currently an active construction site completing this residential development (under planning permission ref: APP/X0360/W/15/3097721). The north of the site is bounded by a small area of woodland and existing residential development known as Wellington Court.
- 1.2.2 The site itself comprises two fields of semi-improved grassland with a small area of woodland in the south-east. The fields are separated and bound by hedgerows and tree lines. A single pond is present adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site and a number of drainage ditches associated with boundary features and the woodland. The north-east of the site currently forms the site compound for the adjacent residential development.

1.3 Purpose of the Report

- 1.3.1 This report documents the methods and findings of the baseline ecology surveys and desktop study carried out in order to establish the existing ecological interest of the site and subsequently provides an appraisal of the likely ecological effects of the proposals. The importance of the habitats and species present is evaluated. Where necessary, avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures are proposed so as to safeguard any significant existing ecological interest within the site and where appropriate, opportunities for ecological enhancement are identified with reference to national conservation priorities and local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs).

2 Methodology

2.1 Desktop Study

- 2.1.1 In order to compile background information on the site and its immediate surroundings Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) was contacted, with data requested on the basis of a search radius of 2km.
- 2.1.2 Information on statutory designations was obtained from the online Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database, which utilises data provided by Natural England, with an extended search radius (25km). In addition, the MAGIC database was searched to identify the known presence of any Priority Habitats within or adjacent the site.
- 2.1.3 In addition, the Woodland Trust database¹ was searched for any records of ancient, veteran or notable trees within or adjacent to the site.
- 2.1.4 The information received from these organisations is discussed in the text and reproduced where appropriate on Plan 1083-03/ECO2.

2.2 Habitat Surveys

- 2.2.1 The site was surveyed in April 2023 and February 2025 in order to ascertain the general ecological value of the land contained within the boundaries of the site and to identify the main habitats and ecological features present.
- 2.2.2 The survey was informed by Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology², with habitat types identified and mapped in accordance with the UK Habitat Classification system (version 2.0)³, together with an assessment of the species composition of each habitat. This technique provides an inventory of the habitat types present and allows identification of areas of greater potential for botanical interest which require further survey. Any such areas identified can then be examined in more detail through Phase 2 surveys. This method was extended, in line with the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal⁴ to record details on the actual or potential presence of notable or protected species.
- 2.2.3 In line with guidance⁵, the fine scale minimum mapping unit of 25sqm or 5m in length has been used where appropriate.
- 2.2.4 The nomenclature used for plant species is based on the Botanical Society for the British Isles (BSBI) taxon list⁶.

2.3 Faunal Surveys

- 2.3.1 General faunal activity, such as mammals or birds observed visually or by call during the course of the surveys was recorded. Particular attention was also paid to the potential

¹ Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Inventory, at <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

² Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010, as amended) *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey: A technique for environmental audit*.

³ UKHab Ltd (2023). *UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0* (at <https://www.ukhab.org>)

⁴ Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (2013) *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*.

⁵ *The UK Habitat classification User Manual*. Version 1.1. 2020

⁶ <https://bsbi.org/taxon-lists>

presence of protected, rare or notable species, with specific survey work undertaken for bats, Badger and Great Crested Newt as described below.

Bats⁷

Buildings and Built Structures

- 2.3.2 **Visual Inspection Surveys.** Buildings and built structures within the site assessed as suitable for use by roosting bats were subject to external inspection surveys using ladders, torches and binoculars where necessary in February 2025.
- 2.3.3 During the external inspections, particular attention was given to potential roost features or access points, such as broken or lifted roof tiles, lifted lead flashing, soffit boxes, weatherboarding, hanging tiles, and similar, and for any indications of use by bats such as accumulations of bat droppings or staining. Binoculars were used to inspect inaccessible areas more closely.
- 2.3.4 During the internal inspections, searches were made for evidence of the presence of bats with particular attention paid to any loft voids and locations such as ridge boards, rafters, purlins, gable walls, and mortise joints that may provide potential roost features. Specific searches were made for bat droppings that can indicate present or past use and the extent of use. Droppings collected during the course of the surveys were visually assessed and attributed to a species where possible on the basis of size/shape/texture⁸.
- 2.3.5 Building inspection surveys were undertaken by a CL18 (bat survey level 2) licence holder (registration number: 2024-12360-CL18-BAT).

Trees

- 2.3.6 Trees were assessed for their suitability to support roosting bats based on the presence of features such as holes, cracks, splits or loose bark. Trees were categorised as supporting Potential Roost Features (PRFs), Further Assessment Required (FAR) or supporting no suitable features.
- 2.3.7 **Ground Level Tree Assessment.** Where practical, trees / Trees that may be impacted by the development proposals were subject to a Ground Level Tree Assessment (GLTA) based on relevant guidance⁹ with PRFs categorised as PRF-I (only suitable for individual or small numbers of bats) or PRF-M (suitable for multiple bats). Any PRFs identified were inspected using binoculars from ground level for any signs indicating possible use by bats, such as staining, scratch marks or bat droppings. Where accessible from ground level, PRFs were subject to close inspection using a torch.

Badger (*Meles meles*)¹⁰

- 2.3.8 A Badger survey was carried out in April 2023 and February 2025. The survey comprised two main elements. The first element involved searching for evidence of Badger setts. For

⁷ Surveys based on: Reason, P.F. and Wray, S. (2023) UK Bat Mitigation Guidelines: a guide to impact assessment, mitigation and compensation for developments affecting bats. CIEEM; and Bat Conservation Trust (2023) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edn).

⁸ Stebbings, RE, Yalden DW and Herman, JS (2007). Which bat is it? A guide to bat identification in Great Britain and Ireland. The Mammal Society

⁹ Bat Conservation Trust (2023) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edn).

¹⁰ Based on: Mammal Society (1989) Occasional Publication No. 9 – Surveying Badgers

any setts that were encountered, each sett entrance was noted and mapped. The following information was recorded:

- Number and location of well used and active entrances; these are clear from any debris or vegetation and are obviously in regular use and may, or may not, have been excavated recently;
- Number and location of inactive entrances; these are not in regular use and have debris such as leaves and twigs in the entrance or have plants growing in or around the edge of the entrance; and
- Number of disused entrances; these have not been in use for some time, are partly or completely blocked and cannot be used without considerable clearance. If the entrance has been disused for some time all that may be visible is a depression in the ground where the hole used to be and the remains of the spoil heap.

2.3.9 The second element involved searching for signs of Badger activity such as well-worn paths and push-throughs, snagged hair, footprints, latrines and foraging signs, so as to build up a picture of any use of the site by Badger.

Reptiles¹¹

2.3.10 Given the presence of potentially suitable reptile habitat within the site, a survey was undertaken between April and June 2023 to establish the presence/absence of common reptile species.

2.3.11 A total of sixty-five 50x50cm sheets of thick roofing felt were placed within suitable areas across the site to act as artificial refugia. This represents a density of approximately 20 refugia per hectare. The refugia, which provide shelter for reptiles, heat up more quickly than their surroundings in the morning and can remain warmer than their surroundings in the late afternoon. Being ectothermic (cold blooded), reptiles will readily use these refugia to bask upon or beneath so as to raise their body temperature, which allows them to forage earlier and later in the day. Checking the refugia at appropriate times of the day (morning and evening) for the presence of reptiles provides an effective measure of assessing the presence/absence of common reptiles at a site.

2.3.12 The refugia were left in place undisturbed for approximately 1-2 weeks to allow reptiles to find and start using them. Following this initial bedding-in period, refugia were checked at appropriate times of the day on seven occasions during suitable weather conditions as set out below in Table 2.1. Reptile survey dates and weather conditions.

¹¹ Surveys based on: Froglife Advice Sheet 10 (1999) Reptile Survey - an introduction to planning, conducting and interpreting surveys for snake and lizard conservation.

Table 2.1. Reptile survey dates and weather conditions

Survey Date	Weather Conditions			
	Wind (BF)	Temp(°C)	Cloud Cover (%)	Precipitation
11/05/2023	1	12	50	Dry
19/05/2023	1	12-14	50	Dry
25/05/2023	2	12-14	0	Dry
01/06/2023	1	11-12	100	Dry
08/06/2023	2	14-17	0	Dry
14/06/2023	1	14-16	0	Dry
20/06/2023	2	13-17	40	Dry

BF0 = calm, BF12 = hurricane force

- 2.3.13 Any reptiles that were observed basking in the open or within partial cover were also recorded. Searches were also made of existing natural objects (such as logs and rocks) and other artificial refugia (such as debris or discarded tyres), where present, for reptiles or evidence of reptiles (such as sloughed skin).

Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)

- 2.3.14 As a first step in assessing the possible presence of Great Crested Newt at the site, Ordnance Survey mapping and satellite imagery were examined to identify water bodies within 500m of the site boundary.
- 2.3.15 Guidance set out within Natural England's Method Statement template, to be used when applying for a Great Crested Newt development licence, states that surveys of ponds within 500m of the site boundary are only required "when all of the following conditions are met: (a) maps, aerial photos, walk-over surveys or other data indicate that the pond(s) has potential to support a large great crested newt population, (b) the footprint contains particularly favourable habitat, especially if it constitutes the majority available locally, (c) the development would have a substantial negative effect on that habitat, and (d) there is an absence of dispersal barriers."
- 2.3.16 Given that in this instance, none of the four points listed above are applicable to the site, it is considered that survey of ponds within 500m of the site boundary is not required, and that survey of ponds within 250m¹² represents adequate survey effort.

Habitat Suitability Index (HSI)

- 2.3.17 Where access was available, identified ponds were then subject to a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment. The HSI is used to assess the likely suitability of water bodies to support Great Crested Newt. The HSI is a score derived from ten component factors that are each scored separately according to the standard method. These are:
- *SI1 Location.* The location of the water body within Great Britain;
 - *SI2 Pond area.* The size of the water body;
 - *SI3 Permanence.* How often the water body dries out;
 - *SI4 Water Quality.* The water quality, based primarily on invertebrate diversity;

¹² 250m is the typical maximum migratory range of this species, see English Nature (2004) 'An assessment of the efficiency of capture techniques and the value of different habitats for the great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*'. English Nature Research Report 576

- *SI5 Shade*. The percentage of the perimeter of the water body that is shaded;
- *SI6 Fowl*. The presence or absence of water fowl;
- *SI7 Fish*. The presence or absence of fish;
- *SI8 Pond Count*. The number of water bodies within 1km of the surveyed water body (not counting those on the far side of major barriers such as roads);
- *SI9 Terrestrial*. The quality of terrestrial habitat surrounding the water body; and
- *SI10 Macrophytes*. The percentage cover of the surface area of the water body by macrophytes (aquatic plants).

2.3.18 The overall HSI is then determined by combining scores for the above criteria into an equation devised by Oldham *et al.* (2000)¹³. The HSI score corresponds with a measure of the suitability of the water body to support Great Crested Newt of either 'poor', 'below average', 'average', 'good' or 'excellent'.

2.3.19 The HSI study was undertaken in line with the guidelines developed by Oldham *et al.* and subsequently adapted by ARG UK (2010)¹⁴. A suitably experienced ecologist undertook the assessment, informed by desktop research where appropriate.

Environmental DNA (eDNA)

2.3.20 Water samples were taken for eDNA analysis to investigate the presence/absence of Great Crested Newt within one pond, P2 (see Plan 1083-03/ECO4). Water samples were collected on 15th April 2025 following the procedure outlined in the methods manual prepared for DEFRA by Biggs *et al.* (2014)¹⁵. The survey fell within the acceptable seasonal window set out by Natural England (15 April to 30 June inclusive)¹⁶. Samples were collected by suitably trained Aspect Ecology staff. The water samples were sent for laboratory analysis which was conducted by Cellmark in accordance with the procedure set out by Biggs *et al.* (2014)¹⁴.

Detailed presence / absence survey

2.3.21 Ponds P2 and P3 (see Plan 1083-03/ECO4) were subject to further specific Great Crested Newt survey between May and June 2019 and ponds P1 and P2 were subject to further specific Great Crested Newt survey between April and May 2023.

2.3.22 Surveys were undertaken in suitable weather conditions, using at least three of the methods described below per visit (where possible) in accordance with the Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines¹⁷. Suitable weather conditions are those nights when the night-time air temperature is 5°C or warmer.

¹³ Oldham RS, Keeble J, Swan MJS & Jeffcote M (2000) *Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (Triturus cristatus)*. Herpetological Journal 10 (4), 143-155

¹⁴ Amphibian & Reptile Groups of the UK (2010) ARG UK Advice Note 5: Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index

¹⁵ Biggs J., Ewald N., Valentini A., Gaboriaud C., Griffiths R.A., Foster J., Wilkinson J., Arnett A., Williams P. and Dunn F. (2014). *Analytical and methodological development for improved surveillance of the Great Crested Newt. Appendix 5. Technical advice note for field and laboratory sampling of great crested newt (Triturus cristatus) environmental DNA*. Freshwater Habitats Trust, Oxford.

¹⁶ Natural England (2015) Great crested newts: surveys and mitigation for development projects. Standing advice for local planning authorities who need to assess the impacts of development on great crested newts. Viewed at www.gov.uk on 24/12/2015.

¹⁷ Surveys based on: English Nature (2001) *Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines*

- 2.3.23 Torch surveys involved the use of high-powered torches (min. 50,000 candlepower) to identify and count amphibians observed. As recommended by the guidance, the entire margin of each water body was walked once, slowly searching for Great Crested Newt.
- 2.3.24 Bottle-trapping comprised setting traps made from 2-litre plastic bottles around the pond margins and leaving them in place overnight before checking the following morning. Where possible, traps were set at a density of one trap for every two metres of shoreline, as recommended by the guidance.
- 2.3.25 Netting requires pond nets to be swept around the edge of the waterbody, including within vegetation, and inspecting nets for newts or larvae after every few sweeps. The time spent netting is determined by the size of the water body, the guidance recommending 15 minutes of search time for every 50 metres of shoreline. In practice, where undertaken, the search time significantly exceeded this duration.
- 2.3.26 Egg searching was carried out within areas of vegetation where present within the waterbody. Surveyors searched for the presence of newt eggs amongst vegetation, unfolding leaves where necessary to confirm species identification. As recommended by the guidance, once a Great Crested Newt egg was identified no further egg searching was carried out.
- 2.3.27 Searches for Great Crested Newt within terrestrial habitats, notably beneath logs, rocks and debris, were also undertaken.

2.4 Survey Constraints and Limitations

- 2.4.1 Not all of the species that occur in each habitat will necessarily be present or detectable during survey work carried out at any given time of the year, since different species are apparent during different seasons.
- 2.4.2 The Phase 1 habitat survey work includes surveys undertaken within the optimal season, whilst the nature of the habitats within the site allowed for the broad habitat types to be identified and an adequate assessment of the intrinsic ecological interest of the site to be made.
- 2.4.3 Note was made of any invasive species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) that were observed during surveys. However, because the detectability of such species varies according to factors such as the time of year or site management regime, the absence of invasive species should not be assumed even if no such species were recorded during the surveys undertaken.
- 2.4.4 In 2019, permission to access pond P3 could not be obtained for the first two Great Crested Newt presence / likely absence surveys undertaken at the site. Therefore, a total of 4 surveys were undertaken for this pond. In 2023, permission to access ponds P3,4 and 5 could not be obtained for any of the Great Crested Newt presence / likely absence surveys undertaken. However, in both 2019 and 2023 access was granted to pond P2 (the pond located immediately adjacent to the site) which recorded the presence of Great Crested Newts. As such, it is considered that despite encountering constraints, a full assessment of this species has been possible and the presence of Great Crested Newts within the site is now well understood.
- 2.4.5 Densely vegetated habitats within the site have the potential to reduce the detectability of field signs for faunal species such as Badger. Detailed surveys were completed over a number of years and, whilst dense scrub vegetation is present within the site, it is

considered that the survey results provide an accurate baseline to assess the potential for impacts on Badger under the development proposals.

2.5 Ecological Evaluation Methodology

- 2.5.1 The evaluation of ecological features and resources is based on professional judgement whilst also drawing on the latest available industry guidance and research. The approach taken in this report is based on that described by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, 2018)¹⁸, which identifies 'important ecological features' within a defined geographical context (i.e. international, national, regional, county, district, local or site importance). Further details are provided at Appendix 1083-03/1.

2.6 Relevant Planning Policy

National Policy Approach to Biodiversity in the Planning System

- 2.6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹⁹ describes the Government's national policies on 'conserving and enhancing the natural environment' (Chapter 15). NPPF is accompanied by Planning Practice Guidance on 'Biodiversity, ecosystems and green infrastructure' and ODPM Circular 06/2005²⁰.

- 2.6.2 NPPF takes forward the Government's strategic objective to halt overall biodiversity loss²¹, as set out at Paragraph 187, which states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

'minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs'

- 2.6.3 The approach to dealing with biodiversity in the context of planning applications is set out at Paragraph 193:

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

- a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;*
- b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed*

¹⁸ CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine, ver. 1.3 (updated September 2024)

¹⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2024) *National Planning Policy Framework*

²⁰ ODPM (2006) Circular 06/2005: Planning for Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – A Guide to Good Practice

²¹ DEFRA (2011) Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services

clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;

- c) *development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and*
- d) *development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.'*

2.6.4 The above approach encapsulates the 'mitigation hierarchy' described in British Standard BS 42020:2019²², which sets out the following step-wise process:

- **Avoidance** – avoiding adverse effects through good design;
- **Mitigation** – where it is unavoidable, mitigation measures should be employed to minimise adverse effects;
- **Compensation** – where residual effects remain after mitigation it may be necessary to provide compensation to offset any harm; and
- **Enhancement** – planning decisions often present the opportunity to deliver benefits for biodiversity, which can also be explored alongside the above measures to resolve potential adverse effects.

2.6.5 The measures for avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement should be proportionate to the predicted degree of risk to biodiversity and to the type and scale of the proposed development (BS 42020:2019, section 5.5).

Local Policy

2.6.6 Wokingham Borough Council adopted their Core Strategy in 2010 which, along with their Managing Development Delivery (MDD) local plan (adopted in February 2014) outlines the Council's vision and strategy for the Borough until 2026. The emerging Local Plan has been submitted for examination and, when operational, will replace the current Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery local plans for the period to 2040.

2.6.7 The current Core Strategy for Wokingham covers a period until March 2026 and comprises 21 policies and strategies. Of these policies, one directly relates to ecology (Policy CP7) with a further policy relating to the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA) (CP8).

2.6.8 **Core Policy CP7.** *'Sites designed 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:

²² British Standards Institution (2013) Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development, BS 42020:2019

- 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 principal 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 only be 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 would result in less or no harm is available to 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.'*

2.6.9 **Core Policy CP8.** *'Development which alone or in combination is likely to have significant effects on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area will be required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigation any potential adverse effects are delivered.'*

2.6.10 The Shinfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan, adopted in February 2017 has two policies directly relating to ecology, namely Policy 6 and Policy 7.

2.6.11 **Policy 6 – Trees, hedgerows and Woodland.** This policy states that new build developments will be supported if hedgerows deemed appropriate for retention (e.g. of significant age or of ecological value), Habitats of Principle Importance in England, Ancient Woodlands, Local Wildlife Sites or ponds are protected by an appropriate buffer zone (comprising soft landscaping) or if habitats which meet the description of section 41 habitat type but do not support significant ecological value are enhanced under the proposals.

2.6.12 **Policy 7 – Biodiversity.** This policy states that new build development will be supported if the proposals include measures to enhance biodiversity such as; creation of new areas of Habitats of Principle Importance in England, provision of bat roosting and bird nesting opportunities, creation of hibernacula and 'Bug Hotels', provision of wildlife corridors and access across the site for garden dwelling species such as hedgehog (e.g. hedgehog cut-outs in garden fences).

3 Ecological Designations

3.1 Statutory Designations

3.1.1 The statutory designations of ecological importance that occur within the local area around the site are shown on Plan 1083-03/ECO2.

3.1.2 **Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA).** A portion of the site lies within 5km of Bramshill Plantation, which is a component of the Thames Basin Heath SPA. SPAs are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the Birds Directive (formally known as the European Commission Directive on the conservation of wild birds (2009/147/EC)), which codifies an earlier EC Directive (79/409/EEC) which came into force in April 1979. SPAs are classified for rare and vulnerable birds listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive, and for regularly occurring migratory species. In March 2005, the Government designated the Thames Basin Heath SPA under the EC Birds Directive, recognising the international importance of these heathlands as a habitat for endangered bird species, namely the Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*.

3.1.3 **Other Statutory Designations.** The statutory designations of ecological importance that occur within the local area are shown on Plan 1083-03/ECO2. The nearest statutory designation is Stanford End Mill and River Loddon Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located approximately 1.6km to the south of the site. The SSSI comprises a series of traditionally managed, seasonally waterlogged hay meadows and a 4km stretch of the River Loddon. The next nearest statutory designation of ecological importance is Swallowfield Meadow Local Nature Reserve (LNR), located approximately 2.3km to the south-east of the site, designated largely for the species-rich meadows present, along with a range of other habitats including native hedgerows, ditches, and ponds.

3.1.4 Natural England has developed Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) as an initial tool to help assess the risk of developments adversely affecting SSSIs, taking into account the type and scale of developments. The site sits within an IRZ, however, this IRZ does not relate to residential development.

Assessment of Proposals

Thames Basin Heaths SPA

3.1.5 The site is situated within the vicinity of a component of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, which is located approximately 4.7km to the south-east of the site.

3.1.6 The Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework (TBH Joint Strategic Partnership Board, 2009) has been developed to set out a consistent approach to mitigation in relation to the SPA, whilst specific guidance for the Wokingham Borough is set out within the Core Strategy Document, Core Policy CP8 which applies to all planning applications submitted after April 2013.

3.1.7 The framework identifies two main zones around the SPA, a 400m zone (Zone A) within which there is a presumption against development, and a 'Zone of Influence' (Zone B) between 400m and 5km from the perimeter of SPA. The site is located approximately 4.7km from the nearest component of the SPA and accordingly within the 'Zone of Influence' (Zone B). At this distance, direct effects on the SPA are unlikely, although the proposed development has the potential to result in an increase in recreational disturbance, which in

combination with other residential developments, could lead to adverse effects on the bird species for which the SPA is designated.

- 3.1.8 Accordingly, it will be necessary for the proposed development to provide mitigation/avoidance measures in order to avoid effects on the SPA. Standard avoidance measures with respect to residential development comprise 2 parts: provision of Suitable Areas of Natural Greenspace (SANG), along with Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM), both of which can be provided direct by developers or by way of financial contributions.
- 3.1.9 Land adjacent to the site currently has planning permission for 9.7ha of bespoke SANG to be created as mitigation for development within 5km of the SPA and indeed is currently being created. This SANG is more than sufficient mitigation for the proposed development. If the proposed development is granted permission the SANG will be formally linked to this permission by way of a Section 106 agreement.
- 3.1.10 Following the provision of mitigation through the creation of a bespoke SANG, in line with the standard, accepted approach within the Borough, it is considered that the proposals would not result in any adverse effects on the integrity of Thames Basin Heaths SPA, either alone or in combination with any other plans or projects.
- 3.1.11 Given the proximity of the site to the above European Designation, in considering any planning application in relation to the proposals, it will be necessary for the Local Planning Authority (as 'competent authority') to undertake a formal Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. On this basis, Appendix 1083-03/3 provides further specific detail/consideration to inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA – including 'Appropriate Assessment' stage as appropriate) in relation to the proposed development.

Other Statutory Designations

- 3.1.12 All other statutory designations in the surrounding area are well separated from the site by existing development and given the nature and scale of the proposals, and indeed the provision of SANG discussed above, these designations are unlikely to be affected.

3.2 Non-statutory Designations

- 3.2.1 The non-statutory designations of nature conservation interest that occur within the local area are shown on Plan 1083-03/ECO2.
- 3.2.2 The nearest non-statutory designation is the 'Woods between Whitehouse and Highlands' Local Wildlife Site (LWS), which is located approximately 0.13km south of the site. The LWS is designated on the basis of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland (Priority Habitat) being present which supports a range of species associated with long-established and ancient woodland. Three ponds are also present within the woodland which are recorded to support Great Crested Newt.
- 3.2.3 The next nearest non-statutory designation is Clare's Green, Spencer's Wood LWS located approximately 0.56km northeast of the site. This LWS is designated on the basis of supporting stands of Lowland Unimproved Meadows.

Assessment of Proposals

- 3.2.4 The site itself is not subject to any non-statutory nature conservation designations. All non-statutory designations in the surrounding area are well separated from the site by existing

development and given the type and scale of the proposals, these designations are unlikely to be affected.

3.3 Priority Habitats, Ancient Woodland and Notable Trees

3.3.1 Priority Habitats. The northern and eastern part of the site is mapped as Priority Habitat Wood-pasture and Parkland on the MAGIC database. These habitats are discussed further within the evaluation section below and within the relevant habitat section in Chapter 4 below. The whole site is included in a Network Expansion Zone for the Priority Habitat Wood-pasture and Parkland.

3.3.2 Ancient Woodland. No identified areas of Ancient Woodland are mapped within or adjacent to the site boundary. The nearest area of ancient woodland is an area of woodland within High Copse Farm, which is located approximately 1.67km north-east of the site boundary.

3.3.3 Ancient, Veteran or Notable Trees. A number of notable and veteran trees are mapped on the Woodland Trust's website in the woodland in the south east of the site.

Assessment of Proposals

3.3.4 The northern portion of the site is mapped as Priority Habitat Wood Pasture and Parkland. The site does support mature trees, nor has it been regularly grazed or managed for some time. As such, at best it is considered to represent a poor example of this habitat and is unlikely to meet the majority of the qualifying criteria²³. Nevertheless, the proposed development will retain the vast majority of mature trees present within the site and include the creation of new habitats including open-water habitat, new tree planting and wildflower grassland. Although the site will not be managed via grazing, open space habitats within the site will be managed in an ecologically sensitive way which is anticipated to be beneficial for biodiversity.

3.3.5 A number of trees within the site appear to be shown as notable and veteran trees within information available on the Woodland Trust website, albeit on the basis of the current survey work (consistent with the detailed arboricultural survey information available in regard to the site, prepared by Barrell Tree Consultancy), none of the trees present appear to represent veteran trees based on standard definitions (e.g. Lonsdale, 2013²⁴).

3.3.6 In any event, the vast majority of the trees present within the site are fully retained under the proposals and as such, subject to the implementation of standard tree protection measures, these trees will remain unaffected by the proposals.

3.4 Summary

3.4.1 In summary, the site itself is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory ecological designations and, subject to the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures (as described below), it is unlikely that any such designations or Priority Habitats, notable or veteran trees or ancient woodland in the surrounding area will be significantly affected by the proposals.

²³ JNCC (2011) UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Description – Wood-pasture and Parkland

²⁴ Lonsdale, D (Ed) (2013) Ancient and other veteran trees: further guidance on management. The Tree Council, London

4 Habitats and Ecological Features

4.1 Background Records

- 4.1.1 No specific records of any protected, rare or notable plant species from within or immediately adjacent to the site are included within the information returned from the Records Centre. Records of Species of Principle Importance including Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, Tormetil *Potentilla erecta*, Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Corn Mint *Mentha arvensis*, Stinking Chamomile *Anthemis cotula*, Hoary Plantain *Plantago media* and Water-violet *Hottonia palustris* were returned from within the search area. However, no evidence for the presence of any of these species within the site was recorded during any of the survey work undertaken.

4.2 Overview

- 4.2.1 The habitats and ecological features present within the site are described below and evaluated in terms of whether they constitute an important ecological feature and their level of importance, taking into account the status of habitat types and any presence of rare or notable plant communities or individual plant species of elevated interest. The likely effects of the proposals on the habitats and ecological features are then assessed. The value of habitats for the fauna they may support is considered separately in Chapter 5 below.

- 4.2.2 The following habitats/ecological features were identified within/adjacent to the site:

- Semi-improved Grassland;
- Woodland;
- Trees;
- Hedgerows;
- Scrub;
- Bare Ground;
- Drainage Ditches;
- Buildings and Hardstanding;
- Off-site Line of trees; and
- Off-site Ponds

- 4.2.3 The locations of these habitat types and features are illustrated on Plan 1083-03/ECO3 and described in detail below.

4.3 Priority Habitats

- 4.3.1 Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places duties on public bodies to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of their normal functions. In particular, Section 41 of the NERC Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats which are of principal importance for conservation in England. This list is largely derived from the 'Priority Habitats' listed under the former UK BAP, which continue to be regarded as priority habitats under the subsequent country-level biodiversity strategies.

- 4.3.2 Of the habitats within the site, the woodland, hedgerows, and off-site ponds are considered to qualify as Priority Habitats and therefore constitute important ecological features. This is discussed further in the relevant habitat sections below.

4.4 **Habitat Descriptions and Evaluation**

- 4.4.1 The habitats and ecological features present within the site are described in Table 4.1 below. This table sets out their UK Habitat Classification Primary Habitats and Secondary Codes. The table also indicates whether these habitats constitute an important ecological feature and sets out their level of importance, taking into account the status of habitat types and the presence of rare plant communities or individual plant species of elevated interest. Further information relevant to grassland and woodland habitats is set out below the table. The value of habitats for the fauna they may support is considered separately in Chapter 5 below.

Table 4.1a. Habitat Descriptions and Evaluation – Area Habitats

Ref	UK Hab Primary Habitat/ Secondary Codes*	Description	Evaluation
On-site Habitats			
G1	g4 modified grassland 10, 106	The site is largely dominated by species-poor grassland which spans two fields. The grassland supports an average of 4.9 species per m² includes a range of grass species including Perennial Rye-grass <i>Lolium perenne</i>, Cock's-foot <i>Dactylis glomerata</i>, Yorkshire Fog <i>Holcus lanatus</i>, along with Common Bent <i>Agrostis capillaris</i>, Timothy <i>Phleum bertolonii</i>, Meadow Foxtail <i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, Red Fescue <i>Festuca rubra</i>, Sweet Vernal-grass <i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i> and very occasional Tufted Hair-grass <i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>. Although herb cover is generally low (<20% cover), a range of species were recorded within the sward, including locally abundant Creeping Buttercup <i>Ranunculus repens</i>, Common Sorrel <i>Rumex acetosa</i> subsp. <i>acetosa</i> and Cinquefoil <i>Potentilla</i> sp. together with frequent to occasional Lesser Stitchwort <i>Stellaria graminea</i>, Germander Speedwell <i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>, Rush <i>Juncaceae</i> sp., Vetch <i>Vicia</i> sp. and Common Mouse-ear <i>Cerastium fontanum</i>. The majority of grassland appears to be managed by cutting, with sward height of approximately 10-20cm present throughout save for the margins. The field margins are clearly subject to less frequent management and support a similar range of species but with coarse grass species more prominent, notably Couch grass <i>Elytrigia repens</i>, False Oat-grass <i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i> and Cock's-foot. A range of tall herb species are also present within these taller areas, including Creeping Thistle <i>Cirsium arvense</i>, Stinging Nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i>, Broad-leaved Dock <i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>, Greater Plantain <i>Plantago major</i> and occasional Ragwort <i>Senecio jacobaea</i>. Within these taller areas there is a varying degree of scrub development, including encroaching Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg. and Blackthorn <i>Prunus spinosa</i>.	Does not form important ecological feature
W1	w1f Lowland mixed deciduous woodland 30, 42, 521	Woodland W1 is located in the south-east of the site and is triangular in shape. The woodland is dominated by Oak <i>Quercus robur</i> which, along with occasional Ash <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> and Horse Chestnut <i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i> forms a closed canopy, with a dense cover of Ivy <i>Hendra helix</i> on some trees. A number of notable and veteran trees are mapped within the woodland on the Ancient Tree Inventory albeit these were not noted in the detailed arboriculture survey information available in regard to the site. The understorey is composed of Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> , Blackthorn, Cherry <i>Prunus</i> sp. Holly <i>Ilex aquifolium</i> and Elder <i>Sambucus nigra</i> . Dog's Mercury <i>Mercurialis perennis</i> is prominent in the ground flora, although large areas are dominated by bare ground and leaf litter.	Forms important ecological feature (Local value)

Ref	UK Hab Primary Habitat/ Secondary Codes*	Description	Evaluation
Bramble scrub	h3d Bramble scrub 521	A narrow band of scrub is located along the southern site boundary. The scrub is present around the margin of the grassland and is dominated by Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus agg</i> with occasional Elder.	Does not form important ecological feature
Mixed scrub	h3h Mixed Scrub 521	A small area of scrub is present in the south east of the site, encroaching from boundary into the margins of the grassland. The scrub is dominated by Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Bramble with occasional Elder, Common Privet <i>Ligustrum vulgare</i> , Holly, young Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> and young Field Maple <i>Acer campestre</i> .	Does not form important ecological feature
Bare Ground	u1c artificial unvegetated – unsealed surface 510, 516, 805	A large area in the north-east of the site comprises bare ground due to clearance works under the extant permission and ongoing construction activities. This area comprises loose gravel and earth substrate, some of which is stored in large mounds throughout these areas.	Does not form important ecological feature
Buildings and Hardstanding	u1b developed land – sealed surface 516, 805	Several temporary buildings and containers are present toward the north-east of the site (discussed further in relation to fauna at Section 5 below) with associated areas of hardstanding comprised of asphalt, gravel, and concrete. Very limited vegetation is present in these areas of hardstanding	Does not form important ecological feature
T1-T12	(trees) 200, 203	A number of semi-mature to mature trees are present throughout the site, associated with the hedgerows. Species present include Oak, Horse Chestnut and Sweet Chestnut <i>Castanea sativa</i> .	Does not form important ecological feature
Off-site Habitats			
P1	r1g other standing water 41	A small off-site field boundary pond is located north-west of the site. It is heavily overshadowed by the surrounding trees. The vegetation is dominated by Pendulous Sedge <i>Carex pendula</i> , Stinging Nettle and Bramble, covering the majority of the pond. P1 was recorded to be dry in previous surveys in 2019 and was recorded to hold very little water during the course of the GCN population surveys undertaken in May-June 2023 and update phase 1 habitat survey in February 2025.	Forms important ecological feature (Local value)
P2	r1g other standing water 40	A small off-site pond is present at the woodland edge, located adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site. The pond was heavily overshadowed by surrounding trees during the previous surveys and largely devoid of aquatic/emergent vegetation, dominated by leaf litter. In the survey in February 2025, due to with tree removal and pruning associated with the ongoing construction works, P2 was not recorded to be significantly shaded. This pond was recorded to hold water in April 2023 but dried out, albeit not completely, during the course of the GCN population surveys undertaken in May-June 2023. During the update survey in February 2025, the pond was recorded to hold water.	Forms important ecological feature (Local value)

Ref	UK Hab Primary Habitat/ Secondary Codes*	Description	Evaluation
P3	r1g other standing water 40	A large, permanent pond surrounded by rough grassland and trees, beyond which is grazed horse paddocks.	Forms important ecological feature (Local value)
P6	r1g other standing water 42	A small newly created pond is present in the SANG located west of the site. The pond was dry at the time of survey in February 2025 and was recorded to be vegetated with a similar species composition to G1.	Does not form important ecological feature

* Habitat types not listed as a primary habitat are indicated in brackets

UK Hab Secondary Codes:

10 – Scattered scrub

30 – Semi-natural woodland

40 – Pond (priority habitat)

41 – Pond (non-priority)

42 – Pond

106 – Mown

200 – Tree

203 – Mature tree

510 – Bare ground

516 – Active management

521 – Unmanaged

805 – Development site

Table 4.1b. Habitat Descriptions and Evaluation – Hedgerows/Line of Trees

Ref	UK Hab Primary Habitat/ Secondary Codes*	Description	Evaluation
On-site Habitats			
H1a	h2a native hedgerow 50	H1a and H1b are located in the centre of the site, separating the two grassland fields and are both approximately 4-6m in height and 2-3m in width. The hedgerows are parallel to each other and associated with a drainage ditch. They are generally dense and unmanaged with largely only small gaps present, albeit a single 10m gap is present towards the centre of the hedgerow, associated with a gate for access. The hedgerow is dominated by Hawthorn with Elder, Blackthorn and Ash also present. The ground flora and climbers include Bramble, Dog-rose <i>Rosa canina</i> , Ivy, and species consistent with the adjacent grassland. The hedgerows are unlikely to qualify as important hedgerows under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 given the number of species per 30m is <5.	Priority habitat, forms important ecological feature (local value)
H1b	h2a native hedgerow 50		
H2	h2a native hedgerow		
Off-site Habitats			
TL1	(line of trees) 33	Tree Line TL1 is located off-site along the south-western site boundary. Trees are located beyond a post and wire fence which demarcate the site boundary. Species recorded include Elder, Horse Chestnut, Blackthorn, Willow <i>Salix</i> sp., Oak and Scots Pine <i>Pinus sylvestris</i> .	Does not form important ecological feature

* Habitat types not listed as a primary habitat are indicated in brackets

UK Hab Secondary Codes:

33 – Line of Trees

50 – Ditch

Table 4.1c. Habitat Descriptions and Evaluation – Watercourses

Ref	UK Hab Primary Habitat/ Secondary Codes*	Description	Evaluation
Drainage Ditch	(Ditch) 10, 50	A series of drainage ditches are present in the south of the site, which are associated with Tree Line TL1 and Woodland W2. The drainage ditches are relatively shallow in nature, with bramble starting to encroach into them and all were found to be dry or damp at the time of the most recent survey. None of the ditches at the site were recorded to hold significant water throughout the survey work undertaken.	Does not form important ecological feature

* Habitat types not listed as a primary habitat are indicated in brackets

UK Hab Secondary Codes:

10 – Scattered scrub

50 – Ditch

4.5 Summary

- 4.5.1 On the basis of the above, the following habitats within and adjacent to the site are considered to form important ecological features:

Table 4.2. Evaluation summary of habitats forming important ecological features.

Habitat	Level of Importance
Woodland	Local
Hedgerows	Local
Off-site Ponds (P2 and P3)	Local

- 4.5.2 Other habitats present within the site include semi-improved grassland, treelines, scrub, and drainage ditches. However, these habitats do not form important ecological features.

4.6 Assessment of Proposals

- 4.6.1 The proposed development has followed the mitigation hierarchy approach as set out under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with consideration given first to avoidance, followed by mitigation and compensation.
- 4.6.2 In line with this hierarchy, habitats forming important ecological features are largely retained under the proposals avoiding significant habitat losses, with built development focused within areas of lower value habitat including modified grassland. Losses of these habitats, not forming important ecological features, will be addressed as part of the overall balance of biodiversity net gain.
- 4.6.3 A discussion of effects and any requirements for mitigation or compensation in relation to individual habitats of ecological importance is set out below.

Modified Grassland

- 4.6.4 Overall, the grassland supports a low diversity of common and widespread species and based on the type and abundance of species present it can be classified as semi-improved grassland, albeit the habitat within the site is considered to be generally species-poor. Areas of species-poor semi-improved grassland will be lost under the proposed development. However, given the assemblage of common species recorded, the loss of the species-poor semi-improved grassland is not considered to be significant, and this habitat type remains common in the local area.
- 4.6.5 Nevertheless, such grassland will offer some opportunities for faunal species, including herpetofauna and invertebrates. As such, the proposals include provision for the creation of wildflower grassland within the south-eastern area of greenspace as part of the SUDS design, which will provide compensation for the loss of the semi-improved grassland and will provide a heightened opportunities for faunal species by creating a more diverse, species rich sward compared to the grassland currently present.
- 4.6.6 The grassland present in the north of the site is mapped as Wood-pasture and Parkland Priority Habitat on MAGIC. However, Wood-pasture and Parkland Priority Habitat is characterised by areas of open grassland managed by long-term, continuous grazing with large, veteran / ancient trees scattered throughout providing habitat for a diverse assemblage of invertebrates, Lichen and Fungi. It is understood that the site has not been

frequently managed / grazed for a substantial period of time and lacks the microhabitats and invertebrate, lichen and fungal diversity typically associated with this habitat type. Although a number of mature trees are present at the grassland boundaries, in general these appear unlikely to meet the definitions of veteran trees based on standard guidance (e.g. Lonsdale, 2013), whilst the lack of long-term management at the site is such that the habitat present within the site is considered to be at best a poor example of the Priority Habitat and is not considered to constitute an important ecological feature.

- 4.6.7 Nevertheless, the majority of mature trees present at the grassland boundaries will be retained and the opportunity exists under the proposals to enhance the existing habitat by introducing native tree planting and flowering plant species which will increase the diversity of nectar sources available for invertebrates in particular. Although grazing is not considered appropriate management for the areas of greenspace within the development areas, the introduction of targeted mowing (likely through an annual or twice-yearly hay cut) will be beneficial, with the aim of assisting the establishment of a more species-rich, diverse sward in the long-term. Overall, the proposals offer the opportunity to provide enhancements to the existing habitat and increase the number of key features of Wood-Pasture and Parkland Priority Habitat present.

4.6.8 Woodland

- 4.6.9 The assemblage of tree species present within the woodland is not particularly diverse and the understorey and ground flora is relatively sparse. The woodland meets the definition for Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, which is a Priority Habitat, albeit is not a great example of this habitat type. Accordingly, the woodland within the site is considered to constitute an important ecological feature and be of local level importance.

- 4.6.10 The woodland present within the site is to be fully retained under the proposals and will be safeguarded through the implementation of mitigation measures as set out in section 6 below.

Hedgerows

- 4.6.11 The hedgerows recorded within the site are relatively substantial and outgrown in nature, with a number of standard trees present. From a preliminary appraisal, the hedgerows are not considered to be species-rich and are therefore unlikely to qualify as ecologically 'important' under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997.

- 4.6.12 The hedgerows are likely to qualify as Priority Habitat based on the standard definition²⁵, which includes all hedgerows (>20m long and <5m wide) consisting predominantly (≥80%) of at least one native woody species. It has been estimated that approximately 84% of countryside hedgerows in GB qualify as a Priority Habitat under this definition. As such, the hedgerows within the site constitute important ecological features, although given the relatively limited network present, are only of importance at the local level.

- 4.6.13 It is understood Hedgerow H2 will be fully retained under the proposals. Hedgerow H1a and H1b will also be largely retained, with short sections in the centre lost under the footprint of the development. The section of hedgerows H1a and H1b to be lost under the proposals are currently rather gappy, with an existing gateway present. Deadwood is present within the section to be lost, mostly in the form of dead tree stumps. However, it is anticipated

²⁵ Based on: Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (2011) 'UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitat Descriptions', ed. Ant Maddock

that subject to the implementation of mitigation measures to safeguard protected species such as Nesting Birds and Stag Beetle (see Chapter 6 below), the loss of this portion of the hedgerow will not be significant.

- 4.6.14 In any event, the provision of new landscape planting with native species within the new development and new hedgerow planting within the site, which will improve connectivity across the site, will fully compensate for the loss of the small section of hedgerows H1a and H1b. In addition, the arising from the clearance of this area will be used on-site to provide habitat / log-piles for invertebrates.
- 4.6.15 The retained hedgerows will be protected during the construction phase of the proposals in line with the recommendations included at Chapter 6 below.

Off-site Ponds

- 4.6.16 Pond P1 was recorded to hold very little water during the survey work undertaken in 2023. The vegetation within the pond area is dominated by Pendulous Sedge, Stinging Nettle and Bramble. Given the dominance by Pendulous sedge recorded to be present, it is likely that pond P1 is ephemeral in nature, likely only holding water temporarily during periods of heavy rain. As such, the pond is unlikely to support aquatic flora or fauna and is considered to be of ecological value at the site level only. Pond P1 does not meet the criteria for a priority habitat and therefore, does not constitute an important ecological feature.
- 4.6.17 Pond P2 is located within the off-site northern section of woodland W1 and contains substantial leaf litter, with no little aquatic or emergent vegetation recorded. The pond is heavily shaded by the surrounding trees. However, the pond is recorded to support a Habitats Directive Annex II species (Great Crested Newt, see Chapter 5 below). Given the presence of this species, the pond is considered to qualify as a Priority Habitat and constitute an important ecological feature. The pond is also considered to be of ecological value at the local level.
- 4.6.18 Pond P3 is a large, permanent pond surrounded by rough grassland and trees, beyond which is grazed horse paddocks. The pond is recorded to support a Habitats Directive Annex II species (Great Crested Newt, see Chapter 5 below). Given the presence of this species, the off-site pond is considered to qualify as a Priority Habitat and constitute an important ecological feature.
- 4.6.19 It is understood that the off-site ponds are to be fully retained and will remain unaffected under the proposals. Subject to the implementation of standard protection measures, including pollution prevention measures, as detailed in Chapter 6 below, the ponds will be fully protected and will not be adversely affected under the proposals.

- 4.6.20 In addition, under the current proposals, new attenuation basins will be created as part of the SUDs within the proposed development. These new basins will provide additional seasonal opportunities for faunal species (as discussed in Chapter 5 below) and will help provide a net gain in biodiversity under the proposals.

Other Development Impacts

- 4.6.21 Standard measures will be implemented to minimise construction effects such as dust deposition and surface run-off of contaminants or silt, whilst implementation of a drainage strategy as part of the completed development will safeguard water quality in the long-term. Ongoing management of retained habitats and open spaces will allow for

management of recreational activity to minimise disturbance to sensitive habitats and wildlife. Further detail is set out at Chapter 6 below.

5 Faunal Use of the Site

5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 During the survey work, general observations were made of any faunal use of the site with particular attention paid to the potential presence of protected or notable species. Specific survey work was undertaken in respect of Badgers, bats, reptiles, and Great Crested Newt, the results of which are set out below.

5.2 Priority Species

- 5.2.1 Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places duties on public bodies to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of their normal functions. In particular, Section 41 of the NERC Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of species which are of principal importance for conservation in England. This list is largely derived from the 'Priority Species' listed under the former UK BAP, which continue to be regarded as Priority Species under the subsequent country-level biodiversity strategies.
- 5.2.2 During the survey work undertaken, the Priority Species Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*, Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* and Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* were recorded within the site. These are discussed individually below, within the appropriate section.

Bats

- 5.2.3 **Legislation.** All British bats are classed as European Protected Species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and are also listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). As such, both bats and their roosts (breeding sites and resting places) receive full protection under the legislation (see Appendix 1083-03/2). If proposed development work is likely to result in an offence a licence may need to be obtained from Natural England which would be subject to appropriate measures to safeguard bats. Given all bats are protected species, they are considered to represent important ecological features. Several bat species are also S41 Priority Species.
- 5.2.4 **Background Records.** A number of records were returned from the LRC within the site including Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, Brown Long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*, Myotis bat species *Myotis* spp. and Pipistrelle bat species *Pipistrellus* spp. were potentially recorded on site. However, the records had 1km x 1km OS grid squares containing the site, albeit more specific information was not available that would allow the precise location of these records to be determined in relation to the site. Further records of Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Nathusius' Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii*, Brown Long-eared Bat, Noctule Bat *Nyctalus noctula*, Daubenton's Bat *Myotis daubentonii*, Serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*, Leisler's Bat *Nyctalus leisleri*, Western Barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*, Pipistrelle bat species and Myotis bat species were returned within the 2km search area.

Survey Results and Evaluation

Roosting – Buildings and Built Structures

Visual Inspection

- 5.2.5 All the built structures within the site were subject to detailed inspection, the findings of which are summarised below.
- 5.2.6 Several portacabins and storage containers are present in the north-east of the site. These buildings and structures are of metal construction, with no gaps present, and in frequent use as offices, toilets, break room, and storage, and as such offer negligible roosting opportunities for bats and indeed no evidence of roosting bats was recorded during the survey.

Roosting – Trees

Assessment of Roosting Potential

- 5.2.7 Trees within and immediately adjacent to the site were subject to an initial assessment for their suitability to support roosting bats. Where practical / where trees may be impacted under the development proposals, these have been subject to a ground level tree assessment (GLTA). Trees identified as supporting PRFs or identified as FAR are indicated on Plan 1083-03/ECO3. The results of this assessment are summarised in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5Error! No text of specified style in document..1. Tree assessment results

Tree Ref.	Species	Age	Assessment and potential roosting features	Summary
T1	Oak	Mature	Split limb, dead wood in canopy, rot holes and ivy cover	FAR
T2	Oak	Mature	Woodpecker holes x 4 on the northern aspect / split limb	FAR
T3	Oak	Mature	Fallen limb and small cracks	FAR
T7	Oak	Mature	Deadwood, rot hole (possible shallow) and split limbs	FAR
T8	Scots Pine	Semi-mature	Rot hole (possible shallow) and wound on the southern aspect of an east facing branch. Holes also present at the base of limb tear out.	FAR
T9	Hawthorn		Deep splits in the main stem. x 2 rot holes and exposed heart wood. Endoscopable from ground. Extends 2-3cm.	PRF-I
T10	Unknown	Dead	Large plates of lifted bark, split limbs, notable cavity behind old limb, wound / exposed heartwood.	x1 PRF-M and multiple PRF-Is.
T11	Ash	Mature	Cavity at 0.5-1m on the north-western aspect leading upwards into the tree. Extends at least 1m. Additional cavities on lower limbs. A large cavity is present on the north-eastern aspect. Butt rot present, multiple limb tear outs, and tube features.	x3 PRF-Ms and x5 PRF-Is.
T12	Oak	Mature	Rott holes with occasional limb tears and splits in canopy	FAR
T13	Scots Pine	Mature	x1 Split limb and x1 rot hole present in canopy	FAR

Assessment of Proposals

Roosting

Built Structures

- 5.2.8 The portacabins and storage containers have negligible suitability to support roosting bats and no evidence of roosting bats was recorded during the survey work undertaken.
- 5.2.9 As such, it is considered that no specific mitigation or licensing for bats is required. Nonetheless, bats are dynamic animals and as such it remains possible that individuals could colonise the site in the future. Natural England guidance in respect of European Protected Species²⁶ advises that, even where proposals are reasonably unlikely to result in any offence such that licensing is not required, reasonable precautions should be taken to minimise the risk to protected species in the unlikely event that they should be found during the course of the activity. Accordingly, recommended precautionary mitigation measures are set out at Chapter 6 below and subject to their implementation it is considered that bats will be fully safeguarded under the proposals.

Trees

- 5.2.10 The majority of trees within the site which have been identified to have suitability to support roosting bats will be retained under the proposals, such that in the event that bats are present they will remain unaffected, with the exception of trees T10 and T11 located within hedgerow H1a (see Plan 1083-03/ECO3), which will be lost under the proposals. Both trees have been confirmed to have PRF-M features, and therefore three further surveys are required between May and September, with at least two surveys undertaken between May and August, and spaced at least three weeks apart. These surveys will comprise climbed inspection surveys, where possible, and dusk emergence surveys if climbed inspections are not possible. If the absence of bats is confirmed then felling of the tree can proceed immediately, on the same day as the final inspection / the day following the final dusk emergence survey. Appropriate compensation, in the form of bat boxes, would need to be provided to mitigate for the loss of potential roosting features.
- 5.2.11 If any evidence for the presence of roosting bats is recorded during the inspection surveys or dusk emergence surveys discussed above, any works will need to be carried out under a European Protected Species (EPS) development licence and a licence application will therefore be made to Natural England as required.

Foraging and Commuting

- 5.2.12 The woodland, treeline and hedgerows present within the site provide suitable foraging and commuting habitat for common bat species, with the grassland providing some potential foraging habitat, albeit to a lesser extent. It is understood that the woodland, treelines and the majority of the hedgerows within the site will be retained under the proposals.
- 5.2.13 The proposed development will result in the loss of grassland, along with a section of hedgerows H1a and H1b. However, given the limited connectivity across the site and the limited value of semi-improved grassland for the bat species recorded to be present within the site, it is anticipated that the loss of these habitats under the footprint of the development will not be significant for foraging and commuting bats. In any event, modified

²⁶ Natural England (2013) European Protected Species: Mitigation Licensing - How to get a licence (WML-G12)

grassland remains a common habitat type in the local area. In addition, the proposed development provides the opportunity to create new, optimal habitat for foraging and commuting bats including creation of a permanent waterbodies, wildflower grassland, and tree and shrub planting. The loss of the section of hedgerows H1a and H1b will also be fully compensated for by new hedgerow planting along the south-western boundary of the site, which will improve connectivity across the site, in particular linking hedgerow H2 with the off-site treeline TL1.

- 5.2.14 As such, subject to the implementation of the recommendations outlined at Chapter 6 below in relation to lighting, it is considered that foraging and commuting bats will be fully safeguarded under the proposals.

5.3 Badger

- 5.3.1 **Legislation.** Badger receives legislative protection under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (see Appendix 1083-03/2), and as such should be assessed as an important ecological feature. The legislation aims to protect this species from persecution, rather than being a response to an unfavourable conservation status, as the species is in fact common over most of Britain.

- 5.3.2 Licences can be obtained from Natural England for development activities that would otherwise be unlawful under the legislation. The types of activity that should be licensed are described in the relevant best practice guidance.^{27, 28}

- 5.3.3 **Background Records.** No specific records of Badger *Meles meles* from within the site boundary were returned from TVERC. [REDACTED]

- 5.3.4 **Survey Results and Evaluation.** No evidence of any Badger setts within the site boundary have been recorded during survey work undertaken at the site. In addition, no evidence of Badger activity (latrines, push-throughs etc.) were recorded during the survey work undertaken.

- 5.3.5 [REDACTED]

- 5.3.6 The proposals seek to retain the majority of the habitats considered optimal for forging and commuting Badger including woodland, treelines and hedgerows. Although, the modified grassland within the site will largely be lost under the development footprint. Given the lack of evidence of use of the site by Badger at the present time, it is considered that the modified grassland within the site is unlikely to be of significant value to the local Badger population and that the loss of this grassland is unlikely to result in a negative impact on this species. The retention of the woodland, hedgerows and treelines, coupled with new

²⁷ English Nature (2002) *Badgers and Development*

²⁸ Natural England (2011) *Badgers and Development: A Guide to Best Practice and Licensing*, Interim Guidance Document

hedgerow and landscape planting, will preserve connectivity across the site and between suitable off-site habitats.

- 5.3.7 The creation of new habitat under the proposed development will be beneficial to Badger, providing new foraging opportunities through the planting of nut and fruit bearing species in the new landscape planting and creation of wildflower grassland which will help to increase invertebrate diversity within the site. As such, subject to the implementation of standard mammal safeguards, and in the unlikely event a Badger is present within the site during construction, it is anticipated that Badger will be fully safeguarded under the proposals.

5.4 Other Mammals

- 5.4.1 **Legislation.** Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* and Otter *Lutra lutra* are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and are European Protected Species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019 (as amended). Such legislation affords protection to individuals of the species and their breeding sites and places of rest. Dormouse and Otter are also S41 Priority Species. On this basis, Dormouse and Otter are considered to form an important ecological feature where present.

- 5.4.2 Water Vole is fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Water Vole is also a S41 Priority Species. As such, this species is considered to represent an important ecological feature. The legislation affords protection to individuals of the species and their breeding sites and places of. There is no provision under the Act for licensing what would otherwise be offences for the purpose of development. Such activities must be covered by the defence in the Act that permits otherwise illegal actions if they are the incidental result of a lawful operation and could not reasonably be avoided.

- 5.4.3 If, despite all reasonable efforts, properly authorised development will adversely affect Water Vole and there are no alternative habitats nearby, Natural England may issue a licence to trap and translocate Water Vole for the purpose of conservation. To issue such a licence, Natural England would need to be assured there is no reasonable alternative to the development and that there are no other practical solutions that would allow Water Vole to be retained at the same location. NE would also require assurance that the actions would make a positive contribution to Water Vole conservation.

- 5.4.4 A number of other UK mammal species do not receive direct legislative protection relevant to development activities but may receive protection against acts of cruelty (e.g. under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996). In addition, a number of these mammal species are S41 Priority Species and should be assessed as important ecological features.

- 5.4.5 **Background Records.** No specific records of other mammals from within or adjacent to the site were returned from the desktop study. A number of records of Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*, Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris* and Dormouse were returned from within the search area around the site. The closest mammal record was Hedgehog, dated 2018, was located 0.2km east of the site. The most recent mammal record was also Hedgehog which was dated 2021 and located 0.38km north-east of the site.

- 5.4.6 **Survey Results and Evaluation.** No evidence of any other protected, rare or notable mammal species was recorded within the site. The habitat present within the site is considered unsuitable for Water Vole or Otter, therefore these species are not considered further within the context of the site or the current proposals.

- 5.4.7 Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* were identified to be using the site. This species and other mammal species likely to utilise the site, such as Fox *Vulpes vulpes*, remain common in both a local and national context, and as mentioned above do not receive specific legislative protection in a development context. As such, these species are not a material planning consideration and the loss of potential opportunities for these species to the proposals is of negligible significance.
- 5.4.8 The desktop study returned background records of Hedgehog within the surrounding area. Hedgehog is a Priority Species, albeit this species remains common and widespread in England. The site offers potential opportunities for this species, particularly in the form of areas of denser scrub, woodland, semi-improved grassland, treelines and hedgerows, although habitats are unlikely to be of importance in a local context, and Hedgehog is considered to be of importance at a site level only. The majority of these areas are retained under the proposals and in any event, abundant similar opportunities are present within the local area and there is no evidence to suggest the proposals will significantly affect local populations of this species. However, it is recommended that precautionary safeguards are put in place to minimise the risk of harm to Hedgehog in the event this species is present, as detailed in Chapter 6 below.

5.5 Amphibians

- 5.5.1 **Legislation.** All British amphibians receive a degree of protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Great Crested Newt is protected under the Act and is also listed as a European Protected Species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). As such, both Great Crested Newt and habitats used by this species are afforded protection (see Appendix 1083-03/2). Great Crested Newt is also a S41 Priority Species, as are Common Toad *Bufo bufo*, Natterjack Toad *Epidalea calamita*, and Pool Frog *Pelophylax lessonae*. As such, these species should be assessed as important ecological features.
- 5.5.2 **Background Records.** A record for Great Crested Newt adjacent to the site located in the off-site woodland pond P2 (see Plan 1083-03/ECO4) was returned from the desktop study dated from 2023. This is the record from the GCN surveys undertaken by Aspect Ecology in May to June 2023, the result of which were submitted to the local records centre. Further records of Great Crested Newt, dated 2002, 2007 and 2019, were also returned from the off-site pond P3 (located approximately 0.2km south-east of the site). A number of records of Great Crested Newt, Smooth Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*, Palmate Newt *Lissotriton helveticus*, Common Frog *Rana temporaria* and Common Toad were returned from the wider 2km search area surrounding the site.
- 5.5.3 **Survey Results.** As discussed at section 4.10, five off-site ponds have been identified within 250m of the site. An initial appraisal of each pond (where accessible) was made using the HSI system to identify potential suitability to support Great Crested Newt, see Table 5.2, below.

Table 5.2. HSI survey results.

Pond	Suitability Indices										HSI Score	Suitability
	SI 1 Location	SI 2 Pond Area	SI 3 Pond Drying	SI 4 Water Quality	SI 5 Shade	SI 6 Water Fowl	SI 7 Fish	SI 8 Ponds	SI 9 Terrestrial Habitat	SI 10 Macrophytes		
Offsite Ponds												
P1	1	0.4	0.1	0.67	0.2	1	1	1	0.67	0.9	0.56	Below Average
P2	1	0.4	0.9	0.67	0.4	1	1	1	1	0.4	0.72	Good

5.5.4 In summary, of the two ponds which were assessed, pond P1 and pond P2 were assessed as being of 'Below Average' and 'Good' suitability to support Great Crested Newt, respectively. Due to the potentially suitable terrestrial habitat surrounding the ponds and historical records of Great Crested Newt from the pond P3, an eDNA survey was undertaken of pond P2 in April 2019. An eDNA survey of pond P3 could not be undertaken as permission to access the pond could not be obtained. The eDNA survey yielded a positive result for Great Crested Newt within pond P2.

5.5.5 Following the results of the eDNA survey, specific Great Crested Newt population survey work was undertaken on ponds P2 and P3 during May to June 2019 (where access was possible) and on ponds P1 and P2 during May to June 2023 the results of which are shown on Plan 1083-03/ECO4 and set out in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3. GCN survey results summary.

Pond Ref.	eDNA Result	GCN Recorded	GCN Peak Adult Count	GCN Population Size Class	Smooth Newt Peak Count	Palmate Newt Peak Count	Other amphibians	Fish
2019								
P2	Positive	N	-	-	2	0	x	x
P3	N/A	Y (larvae found only)	0	Low	3	0	x	x
2023								
P1	N/A	N	-	-	x	0	x	x
P2	N/A	Y	1	Low	3	0	x	x
Summed across ponds			1	Low				

5.5.6 **Evaluation and Assessment of Likely Effects.** In 2019, pond P1 was dry. In 2023, this pond held a small amount of water and surveys could be undertaken. No evidence of Great Crested Newts was identified during the survey work.

5.5.7 In 2019, pond P2 was recorded to have dried out completely prior to completion of the six population class surveys. In 2023, it held water for the duration of the survey work and all six population surveys were able to be undertaken. A peak count of a single Great Crested Newt was recorded in this pond. A single male and a single female Great Crested Newt were found across survey visits (so concluding that there is a peak count of 2 Great Crested Newt would not be unreasonable), albeit no evidence of breeding in this pond was identified.

5.5.8 In 2019, two Great Crested Newt larvae and Great Crested Newt eggs were recorded within pond P3. A total of four surveys were undertaken in line with best practice guidance. However, the two additional surveys required to undertake a population class assessment

could not be undertaken due to access issues. Therefore, based on the background records obtained from the desktop study, the small number of larvae recorded within the pond and the lack of adult Great Crested Newt recorded within the pond during survey work, it is considered that the pond is likely to support no more than a low population of Great Crested Newt. Access to this pond was not granted in 2023.

- 5.5.9 The off-site ponds are located outside of the proposed construction areas and will remain unaffected by the proposed development. The site itself provides suitable terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newt in the form of woodland edges, hedgerows and grassland.
- 5.5.10 Given the scale of construction works which will be undertaken under the proposals and the amount of terrestrial habitat which is to be lost under the footprint of the development (approximately 5ha), it is considered that an offence under the current legislation is highly likely to occur in the absence of mitigation. Accordingly, based on Natural England guidance²⁹ it will likely be necessary to implement detailed mitigation measures under a licence, so as to avoid killing or injuring of GCN during construction, which would otherwise constitute an offence under the legislation. An appropriate mitigation strategy is set out in Chapter 6 below, which will ensure the protection and relocation of GCN prior to construction works commencing on site (the details of any mitigation strategy will be subject to licensing requirements and accordingly, any final strategy will be dependent on the licensed position and requirements at the time).

5.6 Reptiles

- 5.6.1 **Legislation.** All six species of British reptile are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which protects individuals against intentional killing or injury. Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca* receive additional protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), as set out at Appendix 1083-03/2. All six reptile species are also S41 Priority Species. As such, all reptile species should be assessed as important ecological features.
- 5.6.2 **Background Records.** Information returned from TVERC returned a record for Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* within the 1km grid square containing the site, albeit a more accurate location for this record was not available. A single record of Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* was returned 0.9km NE of the site dated from 2013. Further records for Slow-worm and Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* were returned within the 2km search area. A single Grass Snake was found during survey work undertaken at the site in 2013.
- 5.6.3 **Survey Results and Evaluation.** The site provides suitable habitat for reptiles in the form of grassland. Update survey work was undertaken in 2023, the results of which are shown on Plan 1083-03/ECO5 and detailed in table 5.4 below.

²⁹ Natural England GCN Licence Method Statement (WML-A14-2), 'Licence risk assmt(2)'

Table 5.4. Reptile survey results summary.

Visit	Date	Common Lizard		Slow Worm		Grass Snake		Other Species
		Adult	Juv.	Adult	Juv.	Adult	Juv.	
1	11/05/2023	-	1	-	-	-	-	Great Crested Newt
2	19/05/2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	Shrew
3	25/05/2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	
4	01/06/2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	Field Vole
5	08/06/2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6	14/06/2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	
7	20/06/2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Peak Count		0		0		0		

- 5.6.4 The results of the survey work undertaken in 2013 found a low population of Grass Snake to be present within the site. Conditions at the site remain unchanged since this survey work was undertaken, therefore, it is considered likely that a small number of Grass Snake likely make occasional use of the site, albeit they were not found during the most recent survey work undertaken, and it is considered unlikely the site is of particular significance to this species.
- 5.6.5 The results of the 2023 survey work found a low population of Common Lizard, albeit given the very low numbers found (a single juvenile) it is considered unlikely the site is of particular significance to this species.
- 5.6.6 The proposed development will result in the loss of the modified grassland. Therefore, mitigation will be required to ensure reptiles are fully safeguarded under the proposals. As set out above in relation to Great Crested Newt, it is likely that a GCN translocation exercise and subsequent destructive search of suitable habitat will be required under licence. Therefore, it is recommended that provision for the translocation of reptiles is also included during this exercise to ensure reptiles are also fully safeguarded under the proposed development.
- 5.6.7 Subject to the implementation of the mitigation measures (detailed above and within Chapter 6 below) it is anticipated that any reptiles present within the site will be fully protected under the proposals. Indeed, the creation of the new wildflower grassland will enhance the site for reptiles, providing additional foraging opportunities. Other enhancements, such as creation of log-piles that will benefit reptiles are also detailed in Chapter 6 below.

5.7 Birds

- 5.7.1 **Legislation.** All wild birds and their nests receive protection under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) in respect of killing and injury, and their nests, whilst being built or in use, cannot be taken, damaged or destroyed. Species included on Schedule 1 of the Act receive greater protection and special penalties apply to legal offences (see Appendix 1083-03/2).

- 5.7.2 **Conservation Status.** The conservation importance of British bird species is categorised based on a number of criteria including the level of threat to a species' population status³⁰. Species are listed as Green, Amber or Red. Red Listed species are considered to be of the highest conservation concern, being either globally threatened and/or experiencing a high level or rapid rate of population decline (>50% over the past 25 years). Numerous birds are also S41 Priority Species. Red and Amber listed species and Priority Species should be assessed as important ecological features.
- 5.7.3 **Background Records.** Information from the data search included records for several bird species in the vicinity of the site, including the Red and Amber listed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Rook *Corvus frugilegus*, Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, Swift *Apus apus*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*, which are also all Priority Species. Such records are potentially on site however they had 1km x 1km OS grid squares containing the site, albeit more specific information was not available that would allow the precise location of these records to be determined in relation to the site.
- 5.7.4 **Survey Results and Evaluation.** Several species of bird were observed within the site during the Phase 1 survey including: Woodpigeon, Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*, Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, Great Tit *Parus major*, Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Wren, Magpie *Pica pica* and Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, along with Red Kite *Milvus milvus* and Buzzard *Buteo buteo* flying overhead.
- 5.7.5 Most of the birds recorded at the site are not listed as having any special conservation status, although Woodpigeon, Wren, and Song Thrush, are included on the Red list as a result of declines in UK breeding populations. These species are also a S41 Priority Species. However, the habitats present are common in the surrounding area and there is no evidence to suggest the site is of elevated value at a local level for this species, which remains common throughout Great Britain³¹.
- 5.7.6 **Assessment of Proposals.** The proposals seek to retain the woodland, the majority of the hedgerows within the site and all of the off-site treeline. Nonetheless, the proposals will result in the loss of vegetated habitats, which could therefore potentially affect any nesting birds that may be present at the time of works. Accordingly, a number of safeguards in respect of nesting birds are proposed, as detailed in Chapter 6 below. In the long-term, new nesting opportunities will be available for birds as described in Chapter 6 below.

5.8 Invertebrates

- 5.8.1 **Legislation.** Various invertebrate species are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). In addition, Large Blue *Phengaris arion*, Fisher's Estuarine Moth *Gortyna borelii lunata* and Lesser Whirlpool Ram's-horn Snail *Anisus vorticulus* receive protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations

³⁰ Stanbury, A., Eaton, M., Aebischer, N., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D. and Win I. (2021). 'The status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain. British Birds 114, p.p. 723-747.

³¹ Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. Musgrove et al., British Birds, 2013

2017 (as amended), as set out at Appendix 1083-03/2. Some invertebrates are also S41 Priority Species. Where such species are present, they should be assessed as important ecological features.

- 5.8.2 **Background Records.** A number of records of priority invertebrates within 2km were returned by TVERC including Stag Beetle *Lucanus cervus*, Cinnabar *Tyria jacobaeae*, Dusky Thorn *Ennomos fuscantaria*, Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*, Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*, Rustic *Hoplodrina blanda* and Jersey Tiger *Euplagia quadripunctaria*. A species of weevil *Tournotaris bimaculatus* was potentially recorded on site however the record had a 1km x 1km OS grid square containing the site, albeit more specific information was not available that would allow the precise location of this record to be determined in relation to the site. The next closest record was a Stag Beetle, dated from 2006 and located 80m east of the site.
- 5.8.3 **Survey Results and Evaluation.** The site is likely to offer a range of opportunities for common species of invertebrate, particularly associated with the denser areas of vegetation such as woodland, hedgerows, treelines, trees, dead wood and scrub. Indeed, a number of invertebrate species were recorded within the site during the survey work undertaken in 2013, including 7-spot Ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata*, Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator*, Roesel's Bush-cricket *Metrioptera roeseli* and Meadow Grasshopper *Chorthippus parallelus*, along with butterfly / moth species such as Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*, Gatekeeper *Pyrionia tithonus*, Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*, Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*, Peacock *Inachis io*, Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina* and Cinnabar Moth *Tyria jacobaeae*. However, no evidence to suggest the presence of any significant invertebrate assemblage was recorded during the survey work undertaken.
- 5.8.4 Background records of Stag Beetle were returned to the east of the site dating from 2006. Stag Beetle is a globally threatened species, protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. Although widespread in the south of the UK, the general distribution of the species is sparse and indicates some contraction of the beetle's range. This is likely due to the removal of dead tree stumps and deadwood, as a general tidying of the countryside, which has taken place over the last 25 years, which are necessary for the completion of its lifecycle. The site provides opportunities for Stag Beetle in the form of dead wood within areas of woodland and grassland. This species is relatively frequently encountered in the Wokingham Borough; however it is recommended that precautionary measures are put in place during works affecting potentially suitable deadwood habitats (as set out at Chapter 6) to further safeguard any individuals present.
- 5.8.5 In addition, Small Heath butterfly was recorded within the site during the survey work undertaken in 2013. Small Heath butterfly is listed as a Species of Principal Importance in England under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. The habitats within the site provide suitable opportunities for this species, although abundant similar opportunities are present within the wider area surrounding the site. On this basis, it is considered that the site is unlikely to be of any particular importance for this species.
- 5.8.6 **Assessment of Proposals.** Under the proposals, additional potential opportunities for invertebrates will be provided in the long term in the form of new landscape planting and the creation of wildflower grassland. Accordingly, invertebrates are not considered to pose a constraint to the proposals. Nevertheless, recommendations in respect of Stag Beetle are detailed at Chapter 6 to ensure the site continues to provide opportunities for this species.

5.9 Summary

5.9.1 On the basis of the above, a summary of the evaluation of fauna is provided below:

Table 5. Error! No text of specified style in document.5. Evaluation summary of fauna forming important ecological features

Species / Group	Supported by or associated with the site	Level of Importance
Bats – Foraging / Commuting	Potential habitat in the form of trees, woodland, hedgerow, off-site treeline and to a lesser extent modified grassland	Local
Bats - Roosting	Potential habitat in the form of trees	Local
Badger	Present within surrounding area. No setts or foraging activity identified within or adjacent to the site, but individuals likely access the site from time to time.	Site
Dormouse	Likely absent	Negligible
Great Crested Newt	Confirmed presence within pond adjacent to site P2 and within 250m of the site P3	Local
Reptiles	Confirmed presence within site	Local
Birds	Confirmed presence on site	Local
Invertebrates	Confirmed presence on site	Local

5.9.2 Other fauna likely supported by the site include non-priority species of mammals, amphibians and invertebrates, however, these species do not form important ecological features.

6 Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement

6.1 Mitigation

- 6.1.1 Based on the habitats, ecological features and associated fauna identified within / adjacent to the site, it is proposed that the following mitigation measures (**MM1** to **MM10**) are implemented under the proposals. Further, detailed mitigation strategies or method statements can be secured via suitably worded planning conditions, as recommended by relevant best practice guidance (BS 42020:2019).

Hedgerows and Trees

- 6.1.2 **MM1 – Hedgerow and Tree Protection.** The hedgerow and trees to be retained within the proposed development shall be protected during construction in line with standard arboricultural best practice (BS5837:2012) or as otherwise directed by a suitably competent arboriculturalist. This will involve the use of protective fencing or other methods appropriate to safeguard the root protection areas of retained trees / hedgerow.

Watercourses

- 6.1.3 **MM2 – Pollution Prevention.** In order to safeguard the ditches present within the site and the off-site pond adjacent to the site against any potential run-off or pollution events during construction, the following safeguards will be implemented:

- Storage areas for chemicals, fuels, etc. will be sited well away from the ditches / ponds (minimum 10m) and stored on an impervious base within an oil-tight bund with no drainage outlet. Spill kits with sand, earth or commercial products approved for the stored materials shall be kept close to storage areas for use in case of spillages;
- Where possible, and with prior agreement of the sewage undertaker, silty water should be disposed of to the foul sewer or via another suitable form of disposal, e.g. tanker off-site;
- Water washing of vehicles, particularly those carrying fresh concrete and cement, mixing plant, etc. will be carried out in a contained area as far from the watercourse as practicable (minimum 10m), to avoid contamination; and
- Refuelling of plant will take place in a designated area, on an impermeable surface, away from the watercourse (minimum 10m).

- 6.1.4 Post-development, the drainage system for the development will ensure the ditches / ponds is not subject to adverse changes in surface water run-off or quality.

Bats

- 6.1.5 **MM3 – Felling of Trees Supporting Suitability for Roosting Bats.** Of the trees proposed for removal, two trees (T10 and T11), have been identified to have suitability to support roosting bats, with a number of PRF-Ms and PRF-Is present. For trees identified as PRF-M, three surveys are required between May and September, with at least two surveys undertaken between May and August, and spaced at least three weeks apart. Where possible, this will comprise a close inspection survey of all identified PRFs using an endoscope and torch to ensure that bats are absent and that no evidence of a roost (e.g. droppings) is present. Where this is not possible, dusk emergence surveys will be undertaken. Following these surveys, if the absence of bats is confirmed, then felling of the

tree in questions can proceed immediately, on the same day as the final inspection / the day after the final dusk survey. If this is not possible, any potential roosting features will need to be inspected again, or a dusk survey undertaken immediately prior to felling. Felling will be undertaken under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist and the tree will be felled during the spring or autumn to avoid the main bat breeding and hibernation periods.

6.1.6 If any evidence for the presence of roosting bats is recorded, works on that tree will be suspended and consideration will be given to the need to undertake works under a European Protected Species (EPS) development licence, and a licence application will be made to Natural England as required.

6.1.7 **MM4 – Sensitive Lighting.** Light-spill onto retained and newly created habitat, in particular the retained hedgerows, tree lines and scrub (especially along the south- western boundary), will be minimised in accordance with good practice guidance³² to reduce potential impacts on light-sensitive bats (and other nocturnal fauna). This will be achieved through the implementation of a sensitively designed lighting strategy, with consideration given to the following key factors:

- **Light exclusion zones** – lighting should be controlled in areas likely to be used by bats. Light exclusion zones or 'dark buffers' may be used to provide interconnected areas free of artificial illumination to allow bats to move around the site;
- **Appropriate luminaire specifications** – consideration should be given to the type of luminaires used, in particular luminaries should lack UV elements and metal halide and fluorescent sources should be avoided in preference for LED luminaries. A warm white spectrum (ideally <2,700K) should be adopted to reduce the blue light component;
- **Light barriers / screening** – new planting (e.g. hedgerows and trees) or fences, walls and buildings can be strategically positioned to reduce light spill;
- **Spacing and height of lighting units** – increasing spacing between lighting units will minimise the area illuminated and allow bats to fly in the dark refuges between lights. Reducing the height of lighting will also help decrease the volume of illuminated space and give bats a chance to fly over lighting units (providing the light does not spill above the vertical plane). Low level lighting options should be considered for any parking areas and pedestrian / cycle routes, e.g. bollard lighting, handrail lighting or LED footpath lighting;
- **Light intensity** – light intensity (i.e. lux levels) should be kept as low as possible to reduce the overall amount and spread of illumination;
- **Directionality** – to avoid light spill lighting should be directed only to where it is needed. Particular attention should be paid to avoid the upward spread of light so as to minimise trespass and sky glow;
- **Dimming and part-night lighting** – lighting control management systems can be used, which involves switching off/dimming lights for periods during the night, for example when human activity is generally low (e.g. 12.30 – 5.30am). The use of such control systems may be particularly beneficial during the active bat season

1.1.1 ³² Bat Conservation Trust and Institute of Lighting Professionals (2023) Guidance Note 08/23: Bats and artificial lighting at night; Stone, E.L. (2013) Bats and lighting: Overview of current evidence and mitigation guidance; ILP (2011) Guidance notes for the reduction of obtrusive light. Institution of Lighting Professionals, GN01:2011.

(April to October). Motion sensors can also be used to limit the time lighting is operational.

Mammals

6.1.8 **MM5 – Mammal Construction Safeguards.** In order to safeguard mammals should they enter the site during construction works, the following measures will be implemented:

- Any trenches or deep pits within the site that are to be left open overnight will be provided with a means of escape should a mammal enter. This could simply be in the form of a roughened plank of wood placed in the trench as a ramp to the surface. This is particularly important if the trench fills with water;
- Any temporarily exposed open pipes (>150mm outside diameter) should be blanked off at the end of each working day so as to prevent mammals gaining access as may happen when contractors are off-site;
- Any trenches/pits will be inspected each morning to ensure no mammals have become trapped overnight. Should a mammal such as a Badger become trapped in a trench it will likely attempt to dig itself into the side of the trench, forming a temporary sett. Should a trapped mammal be encountered a suitably qualified ecologist will be contacted immediately for further advice;
- The storage of topsoil or other 'soft' building materials in the site will be given careful consideration. Mammals such as Badgers will readily adopt such mounds as setts. So as to avoid the adoption of any mounds, these will be kept to a minimum and any essential mounds subject to daily inspections with consideration given to temporarily fencing any such mounds to exclude mammals;
- The storage of any chemicals at the site will be contained in such a way that they cannot be accessed or knocked over by any roaming mammals;
- Fires will only be lit in secure compounds away from areas of mammal activity and not allowed to remain lit during the night; and
- Unsecured food and litter will not be left within the working area overnight.

6.1.9



Great Crested Newt

6.1.10 **MM7 – Mitigation Measures and licensing.** In order to safeguard this species under the proposals, it will be necessary to implement a detailed mitigation and compensation strategy. Given the presence of this species at the site, it is therefore likely that a licence will need to be obtained in order to facilitate the works, which would be subject to further specific documents and consideration, including a method statement detailing the proposed mitigation measures. Upon receipt of any licence, all works would then need to progress in accordance with the licensed details.

6.1.11 Licence applications can only be progressed following receipt of appropriate planning permission and any other associated necessary permissions required to facilitate a development scheme, and accordingly it is likely that a licence application will need to be drawn up at the appropriate stage, following any grant of planning permission.

6.1.12 The following mitigation and safeguarding measures in respect of Great Crested Newt is considered to be in line with standard guidance and follow the measures anticipated within any licence application in order to safeguard this species at the site, albeit (not least noting the current 'outline' stage of the proposals) further detail would need to be informed by any additional detailed design and the licensing process at the appropriate stage.

- *Contractor Briefings:* Prior to commencement of any works with potential to affect Great Crested Newt, site staff and contractors should be inducted by a suitably qualified ecologist to make them aware of the possible presence of bats, their legal protection and the necessary working practices in order to avoid potential harm to bats (including the need to comply with any licence requirements). A copy of any licence issued along with associated documentation should remain available on site at all times, whilst a summary sheet of guidance will be made available to each of the contractors/site staff working on the structures present.
- *Translocation Exercise:* Following the granting of planning permission and any licence, it is likely that a translocation exercise will be required, in line with best practice guidance, within suitable habitat which are to be lost under the footprint of the development. During the exercise, appropriate amphibian fencing will be erected around the perimeter of the site by a specialist contractor and will remain in-place for the duration of the development. Pitfall traps and artificial refugia would be installed within the translocation area to facilitate the capture of Great Crested Newt (and reptiles, see below). The traps / refugia will be checked daily (likely for a minimum of 30 days, or until five consecutive days of no captures has been recorded, depending on licensing requirements).
- *Destructive search:* Once the translocation exercise has been completed, a targeted destructive search of areas of suitable habitat which are to be lost under the proposed development will be undertaken. This exercise should be carried out under the supervision of a competent ecologist during the active amphibian/reptile season (generally March/April to September/October, depending on prevailing weather). Any potential refuge features, e.g. piles of rubble, heavy logs, brash piles, will be fingertip-searched by an ecologist prior to being carefully disassembled. Any amphibians/reptiles encountered during the destructive search will be carefully rescued by the supervising ecologist and relocated to the identified receptor habitats.

Reptiles

6.1.13 **MM8 – Translocation Exercise and Destructive Search.** As a precautionary measure to minimise the risk of harm to reptiles which are likely to be present within the site in small numbers, consideration will be given during the translocation exercise and destructive search for the capture and release of reptile species, should they be encountered. During the translocation exercise, suitable artificial refugia will be placed across the translocation area and searched daily for reptiles. Additional refugia and hibernacula will also be created within areas of retained habitat to accommodate for any reptiles captured.

Nesting Birds

- 6.1.14 **MM9 – Timing of Works.** To avoid a potential offence under the relevant legislation, no clearance of suitable vegetation should be undertaken during the bird-nesting season (1st March to 31st August inclusive). If this is not practicable, any potential nesting habitat to be removed should first be checked by a competent ecologist in order to determine the location of any active nests. Any active nests identified would then need to be cordoned off (likely minimum 5m buffer) and protected until the end of the nesting season or until the birds have fledged. These checking surveys would need to be carried out no more than three days in advance of vegetation clearance.

Invertebrates

- 6.1.15 **MM10 – Removal of Deadwood.** Suitable habitat for Stag Beetle, in the form of deadwood, is present throughout the site. It is understood that some deadwood habitat will require removal to facilitate the proposed development, in particular during general tidying up of grassland areas and the removal of a section of hedgerows H1a and H1b. In order to safeguard Stag Beetle in the event they are present within suitable habitat during works, removal of deadwood will be guided by a suitably qualified ecologist, with a proportion of the arisings used to make habitat / log-piles within areas of retained habitat.

6.2 Ecological Enhancements

- 6.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages new developments to maximise the opportunities for biodiversity through incorporation of enhancement measures. The proposals present the opportunity to deliver ecological enhancements at the site for the benefit of local biodiversity, thereby making a positive contribution towards the broad objectives of national conservation priorities and the local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The recommendations and enhancements summarised below are considered appropriate given the context of the site and the scale and nature of the proposals. Through implementation of the following ecological enhancements (**EE1 – EE9**), the opportunity exists for the proposals to deliver a number of biodiversity benefits at the site.

Habitat Creation

- 6.2.2 **EE1 – New Planting.** It is recommended that where practicable, new planting within the site be comprised of native species, including trees and shrubs appropriate to the local area. Suitable species for inclusion within the planting could include native trees such as Oak, Birch *Betula pendula* and Field Maple, whilst native shrub species of particular benefit would likely include fruit and nut bearing species which would provide additional food for wildlife, such as Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Crab Apple *Malus sylvestris*, Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Elder. Where non-native species are proposed, these should include species of value to wildlife, such as varieties listed on the RHS' 'Plants for Pollinators' database, providing a nectar source for bees and other pollinating insects.
- 6.2.3 **EE2 – Wildflower Grassland.** It is recommended that areas of wildflower grassland are created within the site such that, in combination with new native landscape planting, opportunities for biodiversity will be maximised under the proposals. Consideration should be given to the laying of wildflower turfs, comprising locally appropriate native species, to establish wildflower grassland. This would ensure rapid establishment of these habitats and reduce the timeframe for delivering the range of ecological benefits that are proposed.

Bats

- 6.2.4 **EE4 - Bat Boxes.** A number of bat boxes will be incorporated within the proposed development. The provision of bat boxes will provide new roosting opportunities for bats in the area, such as Soprano Pipistrelle, a national Priority Species. So as to maximise their potential use, the bat boxes should ideally be situated on suitable retained trees, erected as high up as possible and sited in sheltered wind-free areas that are exposed to the sun for part of the day, facing a south-east, south or south-westerly direction. In addition, where architectural design allows, a number of integrated bat boxes / roost features should be incorporated into a proportion of the new build. The precise number and locations of boxes / roost features should be determined by a competent ecologist, post-planning once the relevant final development design details have been approved.

Birds

- 6.2.5 **EE5 - Bird Boxes.** A number of bird nesting boxes are to be incorporated within the proposed development, thereby increasing nesting opportunities for birds at the site. Ideally, the bird boxes will have greater potential for use if sited on suitable, retained trees, situated as high up as possible. In addition, where architectural design allows, a number of integrated bird boxes (such as Swift Boxes) should be incorporated into a proportion of the new build. The precise number and locations of boxes should be determined by a competent ecologist, post-planning once the relevant final development design details have been approved.

Great Crested Newt / Reptiles

- 6.2.6 **EE6 – Wildlife Kerbs.** In order to prevent amphibians / reptiles becoming trapped in gully-grids, wildlife friendly kerbs (such as ACO Wildlife Kerbs) will be installed adjacent to all road gullies to reduce the risk of amphibians / reptiles becoming trapped as they commute through the site.
- 6.2.7 **EE7 – Hibernacula / refugia.** A proportion of any deadwood arising from vegetation clearance works will be used to create a number of hibernacula / refugia around the new permanent water features and around the existing on-site pond in order to provide new opportunities for amphibians and reptiles.

Mammals

- 6.2.8 **EE8 – Hedgehog Cut-outs.** In order to allow Hedgehog unobstructed access across the site, hedgehog cut-outs will be made in all garden fences, where appropriate, to allow Hedgehog to forage within residential gardens and commute safely between areas of suitable habitat on and off-site.

Invertebrates

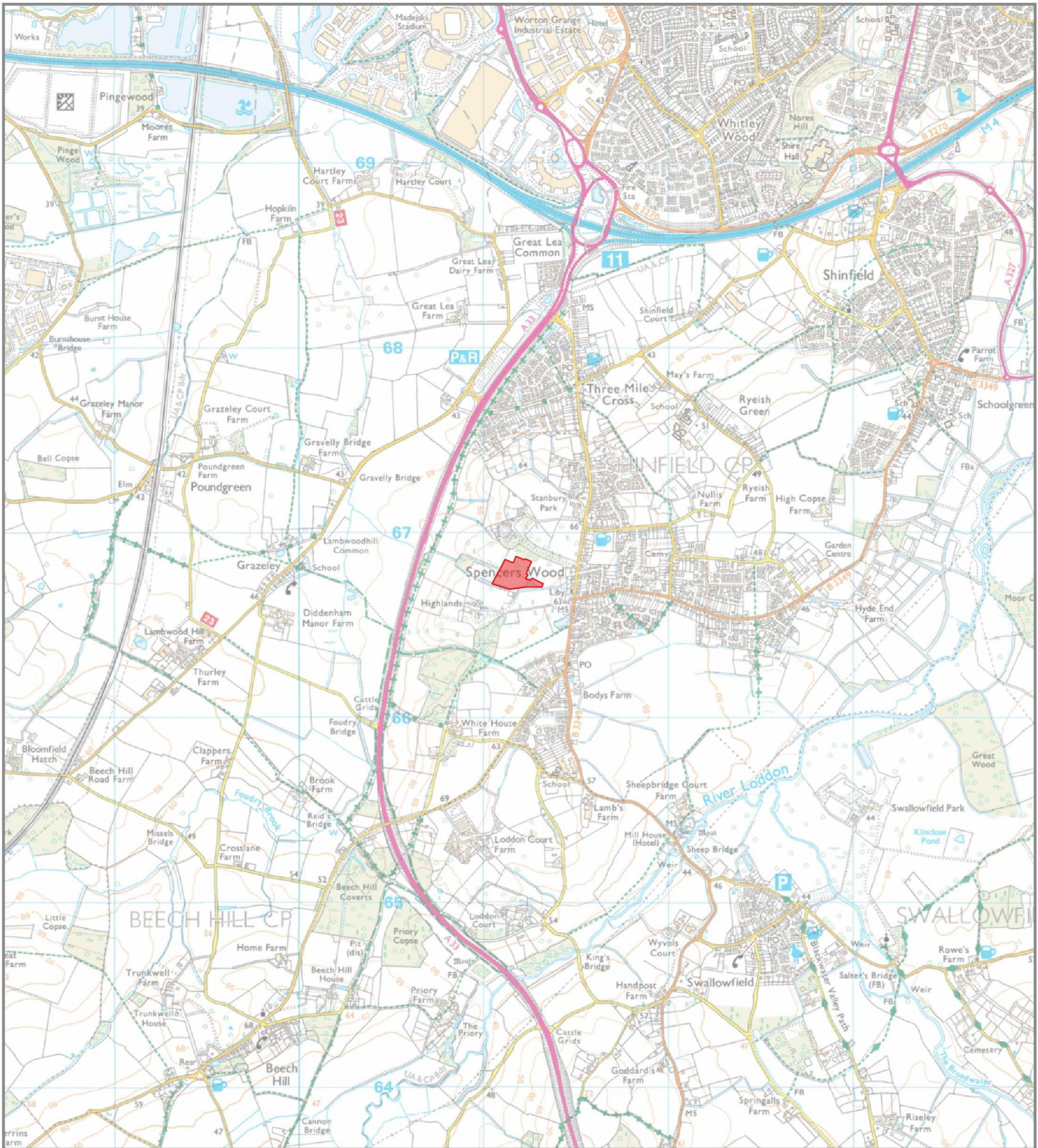
- 6.2.9 **EE9 – Stag Beetle Loggeries.** The desktop study returned records of Stag Beetle just to the east of the site. As such, it is recommended that a number of Stag Beetle loggeries are created as an enhancement for this species.

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 Aspect Ecology has carried out an Ecological Appraisal of the proposed development, based on the results of a desktop study, habitat survey and a number of detailed protected species surveys.
- 7.2 The available information confirms that no statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations are present within or adjacent to the site, and none of the designations within the surrounding area are likely to be adversely affected by the proposals.
- 7.3 The habitat survey has established that the site is dominated by habitats not considered to be of ecological importance, whilst the proposals have sought to retain those features identified to be of value. Where it has not been practicable to avoid loss of habitats, new habitat creation is proposed to offset losses, in conjunction with the landscape proposals.
- 7.4 The habitats within the site support several protected species, including species protected under both national and European legislation. Accordingly, a number of mitigation measures have been proposed to minimise the risk of harm to protected species, with compensatory measures proposed, where appropriate, in order to maintain the conservation status of local populations.
- 7.5 In conclusion, the proposals have sought to minimise impacts and subject to the implementation of appropriate avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures, the proposals will not result in significant harm to biodiversity.
- 7.6 Ecological enhancements are proposed to achieve a biodiversity net gain, to be set out further as part of the BNG strategy in a separate submission.

Plan 1083-03/ECO1:

Site Location



Key:



Site Location

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Stanbury House,
Basingstoke Road
Site Location

1083/ECO1

A/JP

March 2025

PROJECT

TITLE

DRAWING NO.

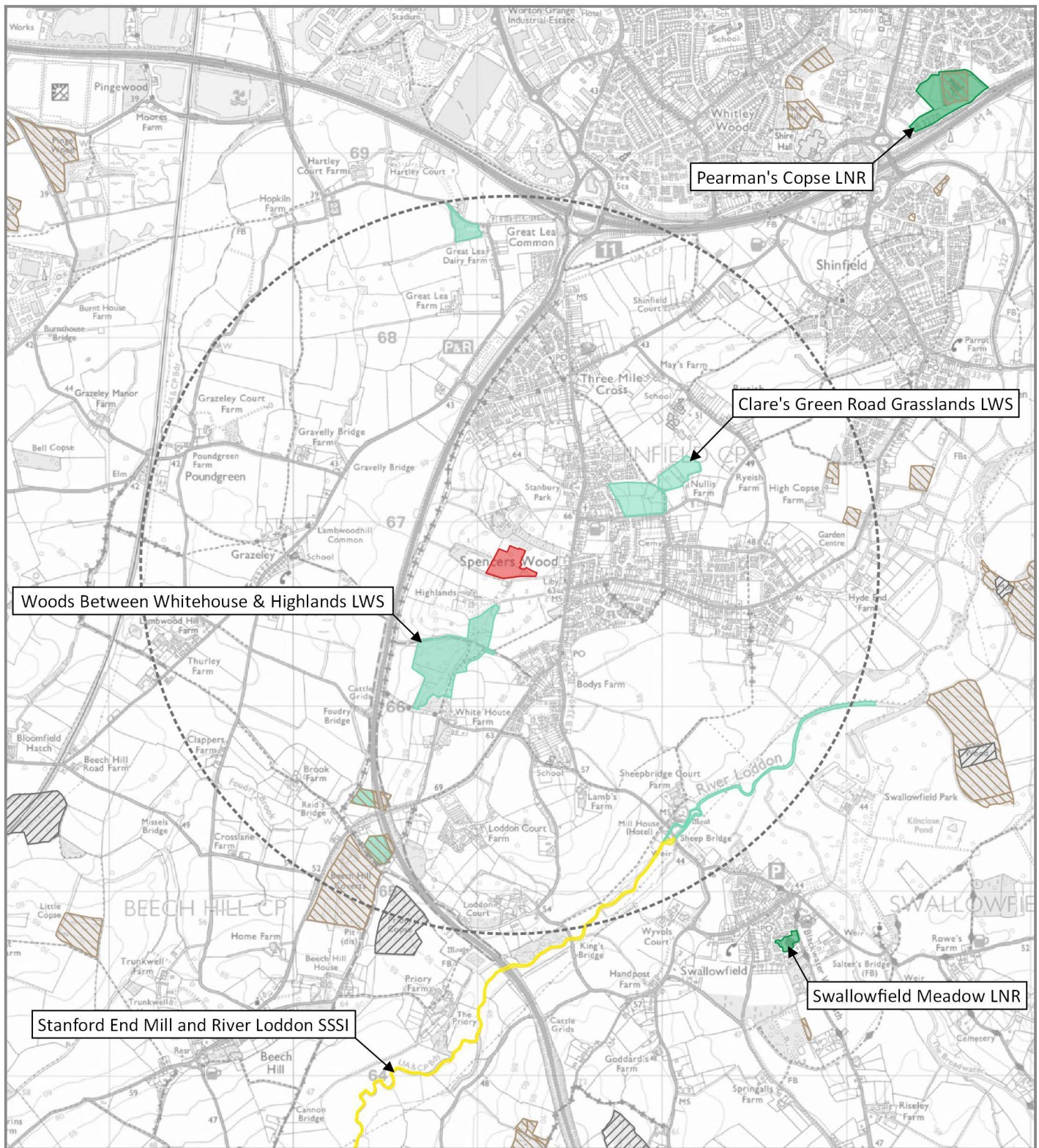
REV

DATE



Plan 1083-03/ECO2:

Ecological Designations



Key:

- Site Location
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR)
- Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
- Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW)
- Ancient Replanted Woodland (ARW)
- Local Records Centre 2km Search Area
(Only non-statutory designations occurring within 2km of the site centre are shown)

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Stanbury House,
Basingstoke Road
Ecological Designations

1083/ECO2

A/JP

March 2025

PROJECT

TITLE

DRAWING NO.

REV

DATE



Plan 1083-03/ECO3:

Habitats and Ecological Features



- Key:
- Site Boundary
 - Bare ground
 - Bramble scrub
 - Building
 - Earth mound
 - Grass spoil mound
 - Grassland
 - Mixed scrub
 - Woodland
 - Ditch
 - Dry Ditch
 - Hedgerow
 - Line of Trees
 - Tree with Potential Roosting Features Suitable for Multiple Bats
 - Tree with Potential Roosting Features Suitable for Individual Bats
 - Further Assessment Required
 - Tree
 - Scattered Scrub



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Habitats and Ecological Features	TITLE
1083/ECO3	DRAWING NO.
C/JP	REV
March 2025	DATE



Plan 1083-03/ECO4:

Great Crested Newt Survey Results



- Key:
- Site Boundary
 - 250m Site Boundary Buffer
 - GCN Present 2019 (no access 2023)
 - GCN Present 2023
 - Dry February 2025
 - GCN Absent
 - No Access



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Stanbury House, Basingstoke Road

Great Crested Newt Survey Results

1083/ECO4

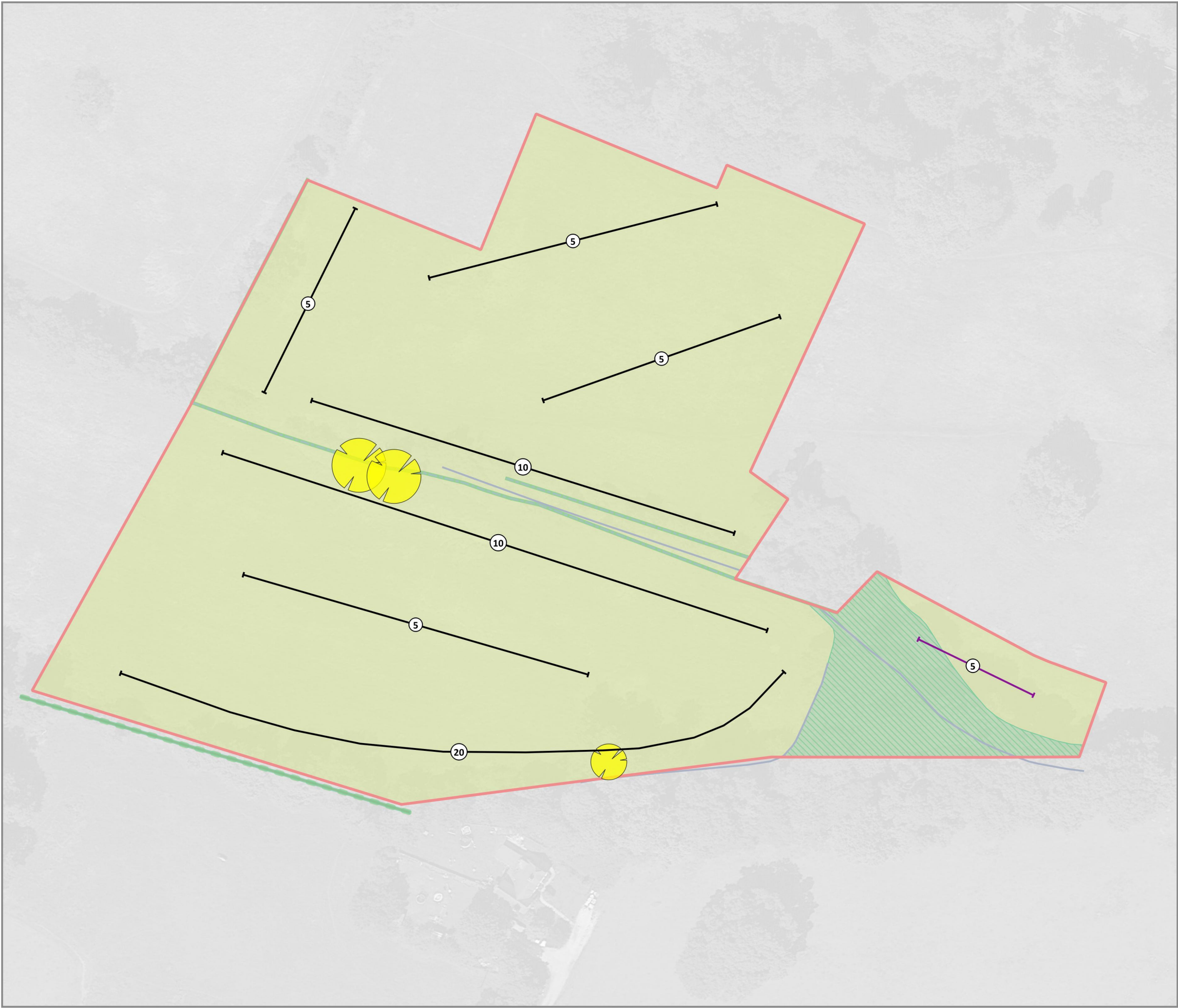
C/JP

March 2025



Plan 1083-03/ECO5:

Reptile Survey Results



- Key:
- Site Boundary
 - Reptile Transect
 - Reptile Transect -
1 common lizard recorded



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Reptile survey results

1083/EC05

B/JP

March 2025

PROJECT

TITLE

DRAWING
NO.

REV

DATE



Appendix 1083-03/1:

Principles of Ecological Evaluation

Evaluation Methodology

1. The evaluation of ecological features and resources is based on professional judgement whilst also drawing on the latest available industry guidance and research. The approach taken in this report is based on that described by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 'Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland' (2018)¹.

Importance of Ecological Features

2. Ecological features within the site/study area have been evaluated in terms of whether they qualify as 'important ecological features'. In this regard, CIEEM guidance states that *"it is not necessary to carry out detailed assessment of features that are sufficiently widespread, unthreatened and resilient to project impacts and will remain viable and sustainable"*.
3. Various characteristics contribute to the importance of ecological features, including:
 - Naturalness;
 - Animal or plant species, sub-species or varieties that are rare or uncommon, either internationally, nationally or more locally, including those that may be seasonally transient;
 - Ecosystems and their component parts, which provide the habitats required by important species, populations and/or assemblages;
 - Endemic species or locally distinct sub-populations of a species;
 - Habitat diversity;
 - Habitat connectivity and/or synergistic associations;
 - Habitats and species in decline;
 - Rich assemblages of plants and animals;
 - Large populations of species or concentrations of species considered uncommon or threatened in a wider context;
 - Plant communities (and their associated animals) that are considered to be typical of valued natural/semi-natural vegetation types, including examples of naturally species-poor communities; and
 - Species on the edge of their range, particularly where their distribution is changing as a result of global trends and climate change.
4. As an objective starting point for identifying important ecological features, European, national and local governments have identified sites, habitats and species which form a key focus for biodiversity conservation in the UK, supported by policy and legislation. These are summarised by CIEEM guidance as follows:

Designated Sites

- Statutory sites designated or classified under international conventions or European legislation, for example World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA);

¹ CIEEM (2018) 'Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine', Version 1.3, Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester (updated September 2024)

- Statutory sites designated under national legislation, for example Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR);
- Locally designated wildlife sites, e.g. Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).

Biodiversity Lists

- Habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England and Wales (largely drawn from UK BAP priority habitats and priority species), often referred to simply as Priority Habitats / Species;
- Local BAP priority species and habitats.

Red Listed, Rare, Legally Protected Species

- Species of conservation concern, Red Data Book (RDB) species;
- Birds of Conservation Concern;
- Nationally rare and nationally scarce species;
- Legally protected species.

5. In addition to this list, other features may be considered to be of importance on the basis of local rarity, where they enable effective conservation of other important features, or play a key functional role in the landscape.

Assigning Level of Importance

6. The importance of an ecological feature should then be considered within a defined geographical context. Based on CIEEM guidance, the following frame of reference is used:
 - International (European);
 - National;
 - Regional;
 - County;
 - District;
 - Local (e.g. Parish or Neighbourhood);
 - Site (not of importance beyond the immediate context of the site).
7. Features of 'local' importance are those considered to be below a district level of importance, but are considered to appreciably enrich the nature conservation resource or are of elevated importance beyond the context of the site.
8. Where features are identified as 'important' based on the list of key sites, habitats and species set out above, but are very limited in extent or quality (in terms of habitat resource or species population) and do not appreciably contribute to the biodiversity interest beyond the context of the site, they are considered to be of 'site' importance.
9. In terms of assigning the level of importance, the following considerations are relevant:

Designated Sites

10. For designated sites, importance should reflect the geographical context of the designation (e.g. SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites are designated at the international level whereas SSSIs are designated at the national level). Consideration should be given to multiple designations as appropriate (where an area is subject to differing levels of nature conservation designations).

Habitats

11. In certain cases, the value of a habitat can be measured against known selection criteria, e.g. SAC selection criteria, 'Guidelines for the selection of biological SSSIs' and the Hedgerows Regulations 1997. However, for the majority of commonly encountered sites, the most relevant habitat evaluation will be at a more localised level and based on relevant factors such as antiquity, size, species-diversity, potential, naturalness, rarity, fragility and typicalness (Ratcliffe, 1977). The ability to restore or re-create the habitat is also an important consideration, for example in the case of ancient woodland.
12. Whether habitats are listed as priorities for conservation at a national level in accordance with Sections 41 and 42 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, so called 'Habitats of Principal Importance' or 'Priority Habitats', or within regional or local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) is also relevant, albeit the listing of a particular habitat under a BAP does not in itself imply any specific level of importance.
13. Habitat inventories (such as habitat mapping on the MAGIC database) or information relating to the status of particular habitats within a district, county or region can also assist in determining the appropriate scale at which a habitat is of importance.

Species

14. Deciding the importance of species populations should make use of existing criteria where available. For example, there are established criteria for defining nationally and internationally important populations of waterfowl. The scale within which importance is determined could also relate to a particular population, e.g. the breeding population of common toads within a suite of ponds or an otter population within a catchment.
15. When determining the importance of a species population, contextual information about distribution and abundance is fundamental, including trends based on historical records. For example, a species could be considered particularly important if it is rare and its population is in decline. With respect to rarity, this can apply across the geographic frame of reference and particular regard is given to populations where the UK holds a large or significant proportion of the international population of a species.
16. Whether species are listed as priorities for conservation at a national level in accordance with Sections 41 and 42 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, so called 'Species of Principal Importance' or 'Priority Species', or within regional or local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) is also relevant, albeit the listing of a particular species under a BAP does not in itself imply any specific level of importance.
17. Species populations should also be considered in terms of the potential zone of influence of the proposals, i.e. if the entire species population within the site and surrounding area were to be affected by the proposed development, would this be of significance at a local, district, county or wider scale? This should also consider the foraging and territory ranges of individual species (e.g. bats roosting some distance from site may forage within site whereas other species such as invertebrates may be more sedentary).

Appendix 1083-03/2:

Legislation Summary

LEGISLATION SUMMARY

1. In England and Wales primary legislation is made by the UK Parliament, and in Scotland by the Scottish Parliament, in the form of Acts. The main piece of legislation relating to nature conservation in the UK is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
2. Acts of Parliament confer powers on Ministers to make more detailed orders, rules or regulations by means of secondary legislation in the form of statutory instruments. Statutory instruments are used to provide the necessary detail that would be too complex to include in an Act itself¹. The provisions of an Act of Parliament can also be enforced, amended or updated by secondary legislation.
3. In summary, the key pieces of legislation relating to nature conservation in the UK are:
 - Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
 - Protection of Badgers Act 1992
 - Hedgerows Regulations 1997
 - Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act for England and Wales 2000
 - Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
 - Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
4. A brief summary of the relevant legislation is provided below. The original Acts and instruments should be referred to for the full and most up to date text of the legislation.
5. **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)**. The WCA Act provides for the notification and confirmation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) identified for their flora, fauna, geological or physiographical features. The Act contains strict measures for the protection and management of SSSIs.
6. The Act also refers to the treatment of UK wildlife including protected species listed under Schedules 1 (birds), 5 (mammals, herpetofauna, fish, invertebrates) and 8 (plants).
7. Under Section 1(1) of the Act, all wild birds are protected such that it is an offence to intentionally:
 - Kill, injure or take any wild bird;
 - Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird whilst in use* or being built;
 - Take or destroy an egg of any wild bird.

* The nests of birds that re-use their nests as listed under Schedule ZA1, e.g. Golden Eagle, are protected against taking, damage or destruction irrespective of whether they are in use or not.
8. Offences in respect of Schedule 1 birds are subject to special, i.e. higher, penalties. Schedule 1 birds also receive greater protection such that it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly:
 - Disturb any wild bird included in Schedule 1 while it is building a nest or while it is in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young;
 - Disturb dependent young of such a bird.

¹ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/bills-and-legislation/secondary-legislation/statutory-instruments/>

9. Under Section 9(1) of the Act, it is an offence to:
 - Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal included in Schedule 5.
10. In addition, under Section 9(4) it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly:
 - Obstruct access to, any structure or place which any wild animal included in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection; or
 - Disturb any wild animal included in Schedule 5 while occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose.
11. Under Section 13(1) it is an offence:
 - To intentionally pick, uproot or destroy any wild plant listed in Schedule 8; or
 - Unless the authorised person, to intentionally uproot any wild plant not included in Schedule 8.
12. The Act also contains measures (S.14) for preventing the establishment of non-native species that may be detrimental to native wildlife, prohibiting the introduction into the wild of animals (releases or allows to escape) and plants (plants or causes to grow) listed under Schedule 9.
13. **Protection of Badgers Act 1992.** The Act aims to protect the species from persecution, rather than being a response to an unfavourable conservation status, as the species is in fact common over most of Britain. It should be noted that the legislation is not intended to prevent properly authorised development. Under the Act it is an offence to:
 - Wilfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat* a Badger, or attempt to do so;
 - To intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett[#] (this includes disturbing Badgers whilst they are occupying a sett, as well as damaging or destroying a sett or obstructing access to it).

* the intentional elimination of sufficient foraging area to support a known social group of Badgers may, in certain circumstances, be construed as an offence

A sett is defined as “any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a Badger”. Natural England advice (June 2009) is that a sett is protected so long as such signs remain present, which in practice could potentially be for some time after the last actual occupation by Badger. Interference with a sett includes blocking tunnels or damaging the sett in any way
14. Licences can be obtained from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO) for development activities that would otherwise be unlawful under the legislation, provided there is suitable justification. The SNCO for England is Natural England.
15. **Hedgerows Regulations 1997.** ‘Important’ hedgerows (as defined by the Regulations) are protected from removal (up-rooting or otherwise destroying). Various criteria specified in the Regulations are employed to identify ‘important’ hedgerows for wildlife, landscape or historical reasons.
16. **Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act for England and Wales 2000.** The CROW Act provides increased measures for the management and protection of SSSIs and strengthens wildlife enforcement legislation. Schedule 12 of the Act amends the species provisions of the WCA 1981, strengthening the legal protection for threatened species. The Act also introduced a duty on Government to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity and maintain lists of species and habitats for which conservation steps should be taken or promoted, in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

17. **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.** Section 41 of the NERC Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The S41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as local planning authorities, in implementing their duty under Section 40 of the Act, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when exercising their normal functions. 56 habitats and 943 species of principal importance are included on the S41 list. These are all the habitats and species in England that were identified as requiring action in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).
18. **Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).** The Regulations enact the European Union's Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) in the UK. The Habitats Directive was designed to contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity within member states through the conservation of sites, known in the UK as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), containing habitats and species selected as being of EC importance (as listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive respectively). Member states are required to take measures to maintain or restore these natural and semi-natural habitats and wild species at a favourable conservation status.
19. The Regulations also require the compilation and maintenance of a register of European sites, to include SACs and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)² classified under Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (the Birds Directive). These sites constitute the Natura 2000 network. The Regulations impose restrictions on planning decisions likely to significantly affect SPAs or SACs.
20. The Regulations also provide protection to European Protected Species of animals that largely overlaps with the WCA 1981, albeit the provisions are generally stricter. Under Regulation 43 it is an offence, *inter alia*, to:
 - Deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of a European Protected Species;
 - Deliberately disturb any wild animals of any such species, including in particular any disturbance likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, to rear or nurture their young, to hibernate or migrate, or which is likely to affect significantly their local distribution or abundance;
 - Deliberately take or destroy the eggs of such an animal;
 - Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal.
21. Similar protection is afforded to European Protected Species of plants, as detailed under Regulation 47.
22. The Regulations do provide a licensing system that permits otherwise illegal activities in relation to European Protected Species, subject to certain tests being fulfilled.

² Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC) (aka the Birds Directive), which came into force in April 1979. SPAs are classified for rare and vulnerable birds (as listed on Annex I of the Directive), and for regularly occurring migratory species.

Appendix 1083-03/3

Document to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment

Technical Briefing Note

Stanbury House, Basingstoke Road, Spencer's Wood (1001083-03)

Technical Briefing Note 1: Document to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment

Date: March 2025

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1. Aspect Ecology has been commissioned in respect of ecological matters relating to the site at Stanbury House, Basingstoke Road, Spencer's Wood.
- 1.2. The site is proposed for residential development, for which a planning application is required.
- 1.3. A number of European designations are located within the vicinity of the site, and as such, the proposed development will need to be subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) undertaken by the 'competent authority' (LPA) under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as part of the planning application process. On this basis, the following note sets out information to inform a HRA in relation to the proposed development.

2. Legislation

- 2.1. All areas in England classified as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs), collectively known as European sites, receive statutory protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations'). These Regulations transpose into UK legislation the 'Habitats Directive' 1992 (92/43/EEC) and the 'Birds Directive' 2009 (2009/147/EC).
- 2.2. The Regulations impart a duty on Local Planning Authorities (competent authorities) to carefully consider whether any proposals may have a significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. In most circumstances, permission may only be given for a plan or project to proceed if it has been ascertained that it will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any such designation.

3. Assessment Methodology

- 3.1. The procedure for assessment of projects that are not directly connected with, or necessary to, the management of the designation for conservation is an ordered process following a number of key stages, as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (revised

December 2024)¹ and accompanying ODPM circular 06/2005², whilst further detail is provided by EC guidance relating to the Habitats Directive^{3,4}.

- 3.2. Where initial consideration under the HRA identifies that (in the absence of any mitigation/avoidance measures) a plan or project will result in 'likely significant effects' on a European Site (or that such effects cannot be ruled out), the competent authority is required to proceed to a formal 'Appropriate Assessment' of the proposals.

Appropriate Assessment

- 3.3. Under an Appropriate Assessment, it is necessary to determine whether the proposals, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, will result in any adverse effects on the integrity of the site as defined by the conservation objectives and status of the site. The precautionary principle should be applied, and the focus should be on objectively demonstrating, with supporting evidence, that there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of the European site. Where this is not the case, adverse effects must be assumed.
- 3.4. If it is considered that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site, permission can be granted. If this cannot be ascertained, or there is uncertainty, it would be necessary to assess if there are alternative solutions and whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest. If these tests are passed, authorisation may be granted subject to compensation measures being secured.

4. Information to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment

Details of the plan or project

Site location	The site is set within an urban edge context to the west of the village of Spencer's Wood, Berkshire. The site is bounded to the west by semi-improved grassland fields, beyond which lies a BP garage, the A33 and agricultural land. South of the site are horse grazed paddocks and to the east is existing residential development associated with the village of Spencer's Wood. The north of the site is bounded by a small area of woodland and existing residential development known as Wellington Court.
National grid reference	SU 711 667
Site description	The site is composed of two fields of modified grassland with a small area of woodland located in the south-east. Hedgerows are located between the fields and at the site boundaries. A single pond is present adjacent to the site, along with a number of drainage ditches associated with boundary features and the woodland.
Description of the proposals	The proposals are for development of the site to provide up to 63 new residential dwellings.

¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (December 2024) *National Planning Policy Framework*

² ODPM Circular 06/2005: Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and their impact within the Planning System (16 August 2005)

³ European Commission (November 2001) *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*

⁴ European Commission (April 2000) *Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*

Screening

European designations that could be affected by the proposals	Based on a review of the <i>"Habitats Regulations Assessment for: Wokingham Borough's Supplementary Planning Documents associated with the delivery of the Strategic Development Locations allocated in the Core Strategy"</i> (2014) and the <i>"Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework"</i> (2009) a number of European designations are to be considered in terms of potential effects that are located within 25km of the site: • Thames Basin Heaths SPA • Hartslock Wood SAC • Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC • River Lambourn SAC • Thursley, Ash, Pirbright & Chobham SAC • Chiltern Beechwoods SAC • Winsor Forest & Great Park SAC
Initial screening of impact pathways	Based on a review of the above documents, a number of potential impact pathways have been identified in relation to European designations. Those relevant to the proposed development are largely restricted to recreational pressure, which is considered in relation to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, which is located 4.7km south-east of the proposed development. All other identified European Designations within 25km of the site are all located 5.5km or further away from the site, indeed the closest of these is Hartslock Wood SAC which is located 14.4km to the north-west of the site, and as such, are considered to be sufficiently removed from the site for the proposed development to generate no more than a de minimis increase in visitor numbers to these sites. No other indirect effects are anticipated. Accordingly, these designations are all scoped out from further consideration.

On this basis, further detail is set out below in relation to relevant European designations and whether a likely significant effect may occur as a result of the proposed development.

Thames Basin Heaths SPA

European site interest features	Thames Basin Heaths SPA qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) as it supports populations of European importance of the following bird species: • Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>; • Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>; and • Dartford Warbler <i>Sylvia undata</i>.
Conservation objectives of the European site	The conservation objectives for the site are to: <i>"Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring;</i> • <i>The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features;</i> • <i>The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features;</i> • <i>The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely;</i> • <i>The population of each of the qualifying features; and</i> • <i>The distribution of the qualifying features within the site."</i>

Condition of European site	The most recent condition assessments for the SSSIs which underpin the European designation states that the majority are in 'unfavourable recovering' condition.
Threats	A review of relevant planning documentation identifies the following threats or pressures to the integrity of the designation: • Urbanisation; • Recreational pressure and disturbance; • Atmospheric Pollution; • Water quality; • Water abstraction; • Predation of Bird Population; and • Garden Escapes.
Screening of likely significant effects	
Urbanisation, Predation of Bird Populations and Garden Escapes	The site is located a significant distance from this designation, well outside of the identified 400m zone within which potential effects of urbanisation, predation of bird populations and garden escapes are considered to be of relevance. As such it is considered that no detrimental effects as a result of urbanisation will be caused by the proposals.
Recreational pressure and disturbance	The site is located within 5km (the identified zone of influence in regard to recreational pressure) of this designation and as such it is considered that an increase in recreational pressure could result from the proposals in combination with other developments.
Atmospheric Pollution	Information available within the HRA prepared by Wokingham Borough Council in respect of the Borough's Supplementary Planning Documents associated with the delivery of the strategic development locations allocated within the core strategy (September 2011) states that the Core Strategy's approach is to balance housing and employment growth to minimise the likelihood of increased out-commuting, where increased commuting is likely to occur, Core Policy CP10 seeks to deliver improvements to public transport to address this. Therefore, development within the borough should not result in additional traffic using M3, which is identified as the main source of pollutants in the borough. As such, the proposed development is unlikely to result in effects as a result of atmospheric pollution.
Water quality	Given the distance and separation of the site from the SPA, it is clear that there is no hydrological connectivity between the site and the SPA, and as such, it would not be affected by water quality associated with the proposed development.
Water abstraction	Water abstraction is largely a strategic issue, and as stated within the HRA prepared by Wokingham Borough Council in respect of the Borough's Supplementary Planning Documents associated with the delivery of the strategic development locations allocated within the core strategy (September 2011, " <i>Technical work carried out by the former South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) into the impact of the since revoked SEP on water abstraction suggests that enough water exists in the South East to accommodate the planned level of growth. The finding is conditional on the delivery of a combination of demand and supply-side activities, including a greater level of water efficiency in all new development that occurs as standard at present, plus the development of new water resources including new and expanded reservoirs. Due to the proximity of the borough to the SPA and possible issues caused by developments of land, it has been highlighted to the authority that there may be issues regarding water abstraction. This was in responses to the Core Strategy screening by the Environment Agency. However, the Core Strategy was amended to include recognition of the importance of minimising water usage in</i>

	development (paragraph 4.4). The AA of the Core Strategy concluded that this measure once applied through the consideration of subsequent plans or projects would address the likely significant impacts. The Council considers that this view is reasonable for the SDL Delivery SPD."
Conclusion – is the potential scale or magnitude of any effect likely to be significant?	
Alone	
The degree of separation of the site from the designation renders routine visits to the SPA, for example for daily dog walking, less likely, as visitors would most likely travel by car. It is therefore considered that those residents of the new development who choose to visit the SPA would do so on a less frequent basis (weekly/fortnightly/monthly). Overall, it is considered that the proposals alone would generate only a small number of additional visitors to the SPA arriving by car, and this is unlikely to generate significant effects related to increases in recreational pressure. There is considered to be no scope for effects to arise in respect of predation of bird population and garden escapes as the site lies 4.7km from the closest component of the SPA. Changes in atmospheric pollution, water abstraction and water quality are also not considered likely to be significant based on the available background information and associated considerations.	
In combination with other plans or projects	
The site is located within the 5km zone of influence for Thames Basin Heaths SPA (as identified in the "Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework" (2009) and other associated references), and as such it is considered that an increase in recreational pressure will result from the proposed development which could result in likely significant effects on the designation in combination with other projects.	

Appropriate Assessment

Thames Basin Heaths SPA

Do the proposals, in-combination with other relevant plans and projects have the potential to affect the integrity of the European designation, given the sites' conservation objectives?	
The proposed development is located within the identified 5km zone of influence in regard to recreational activity and therefore is likely to result in increased recreational pressure which in conjunction with other projects in the area has the potential to detrimentally affect the ground nesting bird populations for which Thames Basin Heaths SPA is designated, principally as a result of disturbance from dogs.	
Proposed avoidance and/or mitigation measures	
Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM)	The site is located within the 5km zone of influence for Thames Basin Heaths SPA (as identified in the "Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework" (2009) and associated references). Accordingly, it will be necessary for the proposed development to implement mitigation measures in order to avoid effects on the SPA as a result of recreational pressures. Accordingly, it is proposed to rely of the provision of SANG (in line with standard guidelines), and associated SAMM contributions in line with standard guidance requirements in order to provide mitigation in respect of additional recreational visits to the SPA by new residents. Land immediately adjacent to the site has planning permission for 9.7ha of bespoke SANG to be created as mitigation for development within 5km of the SPA and indeed is currently being created. Given the size of the SANG and the magnitude of the proposed residential development (up to 63 new dwellings), it is clear that the SANG will

	provide sufficient capacity to mitigate for the proposed development in combination with the appropriate SAMM contributions. If the proposed development is granted permission the SANG will be formally linked to this permission by way of a Section 106 agreement.
Conclusion – with the implementation of mitigation, will the proposals in-combination with other plans or projects result in an adverse effect on integrity of a European designation?	
As set out in the <i>“Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework”</i> (2009), the implementation of suitable mitigation (in line with the proposed measures set out in respect of the site) would reduce the likely effects to a level which would not affect the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, and this has been adopted into local policy. It is considered that the proposed mitigation set out above, in view of the designation's conservation objectives, is fully in line with the strategic policies and accepted approach in place and is therefore appropriate and proportional given the size of the proposed development and the distance of the site to these designations. Therefore, it is considered that no further assessment is required and proceeding to Stage 3 is not necessary.	

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. This note provides information to inform an HRA of the proposed development, given that the site is located within the identified zone of influence associated with identified European designations.
- 5.2. On the basis of the above information, it is considered that a HRA prepared in respect of the current proposals (including formal 'Appropriate Assessment' stage) would result in the conclusion that, in view of the designations' conservation objectives, following the implementation of mitigation measures (in the form of bespoke SANG provision within the land adjacent to the western site boundary, in combination with the appropriate SAMM contributions), the proposed development would not result in any adverse effect on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, nor any other identified European designations either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects.

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