

Land North of Orchard Cottage
Honey Hill
Wokingham

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

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Report Quality Control Information	
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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Martin Kemball to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) for Land North of Orchard Cottage, Honey Hill in Wokingham to accompany a full planning application to be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the erection of a new residential dwelling with associated access and landscaping proposals.
- 1.1.2** The desk study (including a TVERC 1 kilometre data search) revealed that the site is not statutorily or non-statutorily designated for its wildlife interest. However, the site falls inside the Thames Basin Heaths SPA 5 kilometre zone of influence and within the impact risk zone of Heath Lake SSSI.
- 1.1.3** The site is predominantly neglected open habitat on sandy acidic soil characterised by a carpet of bluebells, a patch of broom and grassland (**g1d~ 10/12/14/32/203/518**). The site sits between broadleaved woodland along Hatch Ride (**w1f~ 30**) and mixed woodland along Honey Hill (**w1h~ 30**). The broadleaved woodland (**w1f~ 30**) is representative of lowland mixed deciduous woodland priority habitat (NERC Act 2006 Section 41).
- 1.1.4** The proposed development is a self-build and custom application that would qualify for exemption from mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements. The exemption applies to this development because the following criteria are met: consists of no more than 9 dwellings and has an area no larger than 0.5 hectares.
- 1.1.5** The following recommendations have been made:
- Financial contribution to SANG likely required for SPA zone of influence;
 - Appropriate buffer zones for priority habitat and biodiversity features;
 - Buffer zones and sensitive lighting scheme for bats;
 - Ground level tree assessment for bats (if tree removal is required);
 - Reasonable avoidance measures for GCN;
 - Reptile presence/absence survey;
 - Precautions for nesting birds; and
 - Biodiversity enhancements.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

2.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Martin Kemball to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) for Land North of Orchard Cottage, Honey Hill in Wokingham.

2.1.2 The PEA was commissioned to accompany a planning application to be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the erection of a new residential dwelling with associated access and landscaping proposals (refer to proposed site layout in **Appendix 1**).

2.2 Site Location and Context

2.2.1 The site is approximately 1.03 hectares of land to the north of Orchard Cottage, Honey Hill in Wokingham and the application (i.e. red line boundary) covers approximately 0.43 hectares of the site (OS grid ref.: SU 830 656).

2.2.2 The site is a disused plot of land that sits between Hatch Ride and Honey Hill; it is currently accessible through Orchard Cottage.

2.3 Report Objectives

2.3.1 The aim of this PEA is to understand the nature of the site and assess its ecological value. The key objectives are to:

- identify any likely ecological constraints associated with the planning proposals;
- establish appropriate mitigation measures in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy (i.e., avoid > mitigate > compensate);
- determine any additional surveys that may be required following on from this preliminary stage; and
- recognise opportunities to deliver ecological enhancements in line with national and local planning policy.

3 LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

3.1 Relevant Legislation

3.1.1 The following legislation is considered relevant for the purpose of this Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA):

- Wildlife and Countryside Act (W&CA) 1981 (as amended)
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations ('Habitat') Regulations 2017
- Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996

3.1.2 These acts hold relevance to both protected and invasive species and the degree of protection varies depending on faunal/floral group or species. For example, some species of European importance receive full protection in England and Wales under the Habitat Regulations (e.g. bats), whereas others may only be afforded protection through national legislation such as the W&CA 1981 (as amended) (e.g. common lizard). For a detailed overview of species-specific legislation, please refer to **Appendix 2**.

3.2 European Protected Species Mitigation Licensing

3.2.1 The Government's statutory nature conservation advisory organisation, Natural England, is responsible for issuing European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences that permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations. An EPS mitigation licence can be issued if the following three tests derived from Regulation 55 have been satisfied:

- (2)(e) – the derogation is for the purposes of '*preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment.*'
- (9)(a) – there is '*no satisfactory alternative*' to the derogation; and
- (9)(b) – '*the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.*'

3.2.2 Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have a statutory duty under Regulation 7(3)(e) of the

Habitat Regulations consider and determine whether these three tests are likely to be satisfied by planning proposals affected EPS before granted planning permission. If an EPS mitigation licence is necessary, a licence can be sought once all the necessary planning consents have been granted. Natural England aims to issue a decision on licence applications within 30 working days of submission.

4 PLANNING POLICY

4.1 National Planning Policy

- 4.1.1** The biodiversity duty imposed through the Environment Act 2021 states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must consider what action they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England.
- 4.1.2** The ODPM Circular 06/2005 provides guidance on the application of the law relating to planning and nature conservation in England, stating that *'the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat.'*
- 4.1.3** The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in December 2023, sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. Section 15 of the NPPF sets out the approach local authorities should adopt to conserve and enhancing the natural environment when preparing planning policy and when considering planning applications. Paragraph 186 sets out the principles LPAs should apply when determining planning applications, as follows:

'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 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.'

- 4.1.4** In England, BNG became mandatory for major development from the 12th February 2024 and for minor development (small sites) from the 2nd April 2024 under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). In practice, planning permission in England is now subject to a condition to secure a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity, unless the development is a type that is exempt from mandatory BNG requirements.

4.2 Local Planning Policy

- 4.2.1** Wokingham Borough Council's development plans are formed of a number of documents including the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) (January 2010), Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan (February 2014), and supplementary planning documents (SPDs), which set out planning criteria used to determine applications for planning permission in the Borough. The Local Plan Update aims to refine the current Core Strategy and provide a strategy for the Borough up to March 2036. The following policies relate to biodiversity:

'Core Strategy DPD: 'Policy CP7 – Biodiversity

Sites designated as of importance for nature conservation at an international or national level will be conserved and enhanced and inappropriate development will be resisted. The degree of protection given will be appropriate to the status of the site in terms of its international or national importance. Development:

- A) Which may harm county designated sites (Local Wildlife Sites in Berkshire), whether directly or indirectly, or*
- B) Which may harm habitats or, species of principle importance in England for nature conservation, veteran trees or features of the landscape that are of major importance for wild flora and fauna (including wildlife and river corridors), whether directly or indirectly, or*
- C) That compromises the implementation of the national, regional, county and local biodiversity action plans will be only permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, that no alternative site that would result in less or no*

harm is available which will meet the need, and:

- i) Mitigation measures can be put in place to prevent damaging impacts; or*
- ii) Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided.*

Core Strategy DPD: 'Policy CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths

Development which alone or in combination is likely to have a significant effect on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area will be required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects are delivered.

MDD Local Plan: 'Policy TB23: Biodiversity and Development

- 1. Sites of national or international importance are shown and sites of local importance are defined on the Policies Map.*
- 2. Planning permission for development proposals will only be granted where they comply with policy CP7 – Biodiversity of the Core Strategy and also demonstrate how they:*
 - a) Provide opportunities, including through design, layout and landscaping to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing;*
 - b) Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation; and*
 - c) Ensure that all existing and new developments are ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network.'*

5 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

5.1 Desk Study

- 5.1.1** A desktop study was conducted by Conor Watson ACIEEM before and after visiting the site. The study utilised data from the local environmental records centre and open access online resources to acquire information on the nature of the site and its surroundings and highlight any potential ecological features.
- 5.1.2** Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) was commissioned to undertake a search of pre-existing records of protected and/or notable species and non-statutorily designated wildlife sites held by them within a 1km radius around a central point inside the site.
- 5.1.3** The DEFRA Data Services Platform was used to obtain geospatial datasets for designated sites (i.e. RAMSAR, SPA, SAC, SSSI) and important habitats (i.e. Priority Habitat Inventory, Ancient Woodland Inventory) to be analysed in QGIS. The Multi-Agency Geographical Information Centre (MAGIC) website was examined for granted European Protected Species (EPS) licence applications. These geospatial datasets and Google Earth satellite imagery were used to determine the extent and connectivity of habitats, how the site is linked to the surrounding landscape and whether the development could have wider scale impacts on biodiversity.
- 5.1.4** Historical OS maps and Google Earth satellite imagery were consulted to provide insight into historic and current land use; such information helps contextualise the continuity of habitats and determine the importance of existing ecological features.
- 5.1.5** The type of soil on site was inferred using geological information taken from the British Geological Survey and on-site interpretation.

5.2 Field Survey

- 5.2.1** A site walkover was undertaken on the 8th April 2024 by Conor Watson ACIEEM. The site was surveyed using the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) system (UKHab Ltd 2023) in accordance with '*Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2nd Edition*' (CIEEM 2017). Particular attention was given to evidence of protected and priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principal importance) and the site's potential to support such species.
- 5.2.2** There were no significant survey constraints because full access was available to the

site. The survey was subject to seasonal constraints because not all plant and animal species are visible throughout the year and therefore the report represents a snapshot of the site at the time of the survey only.

6 DESK STUDY FINDINGS

6.1 Designated Sites and Habitats

6.1.1 The desk study returned one internationally designated statutory site within a 5km radius of the site and three nationally designated statutory sites within a 2km radius. Two locally designated non-statutory sites, i.e. Berkshire Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), were highlighted within a 1km search radius – see **Tables 1a & 1b** below.

Table 1a. Statutory designated sites within the vicinity of the site (Source: DEFRA).

Site name	Designation	Description	Distance from nearest site boundary (m)
Thames Basin Heaths	Special Protection Area (SPA)	8274.72 ha composite site located across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire characterised by open heathland habitats, scrub, acidic woodland and conifer plantations. The site supports important breeding populations of nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler.	1791SE
Heath Lake	Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	6.1 ha site consisting of a small, shallow lake surrounding by birch and pine woodland with areas of relict heathland. Heath Lake is the only example of an acid lake in Berkshire which still retains its characteristic flora.	295S
Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths	Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	1696.99 ha site characterised by extensive mosaic of broadleaved woodland, coniferous plantation, dry and wet heathland, valley mire, a series of base-poor ponds and a scarce breeding invertebrate assemblage.	1791SE
Heathlake	Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	22.7 ha site containing Heath Lake SSSI.	83S

Table 1b. Non-statutory designated sites within the vicinity of the site (Source: TVERC).

Site name	Designation	Description	Distance from nearest site boundary (m)
Gorrick Plantation	Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	64.77 ha site of predominantly conifer plantation with some wet alder woodland and remnants of heathland and bog habitat.	401W
Land to East and West of Sandhurst Road	Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	39.35 ha site comprising a diverse mixture of woodland, wetland, heathland and grassland habitats as well as Queen's Mere lake.	946SW

6.1.2 The site contains deciduous woodland mapped in the Priority Habitat Inventory (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 habitats of principle importance).

6.2 Protected and Notable Species

6.2.1 The search of the TVERC database revealed a range of protected and notable species records starting from the late 1990s. Only recent records defined as fewer than ten years old are included in this report (see **Tables 2a & 2b**).

Table 2a. Recent protected and/or notable species records within the vicinity of the site (Source: TVERC).

Common name	Scientific name	No. of records	Most recent record	Nearest record (m)	Precision (m)	Status
Amphibians & Reptiles						
Common toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>	8	2021	330	10	NERC_s41
Adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>	1	2014	859	100	WCA_5s91k NERC_s41
Common lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>	6	2018	596	10	WCA_5s91k NERC_s41
Grass snake	<i>Natrix helvetica</i>	8	2018	961	10	WCA_5s91k NERC_s41
Slow-worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>	16	2018	674	10	WCA_5s91k NERC_s41
Birds						
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	2	2019	350	100	WCA_1p1
Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	4	2017	857	1000	WCA_1p1
Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	1	2020	93	1000	WCA_1p1
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	3	2018	860	100	WCA_1p1
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1	2015	958	1000	WCA_1p1
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	3	2017	0	1000	WCA_1p1
Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	7	2023	860	100	WCA_1p1
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	3	2021	857	1000	WCA_1p1 NERC_s41
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	2	2018	860	100	BOCC_red
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	1	2021	0	1000	BOCC_red
House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	2	2019	350	100	BOCC_red
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	2	2016	293	1000	BOCC_red
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	2	2016	0	1000	BOCC_red
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1	2014	958	1000	BOCC_red NERC_s41
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	3	2018	860	100	BOCC_red NERC_s41
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	3	2019	350	100	BOCC_red
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	1	2020	272	1000	BOCC_red
Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	4	2020	0	1000	BOCC_red
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	1	2018	860	100	NERC_s41
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	6	2019	350	100	NERC_s41
Invertebrates						
Stag beetle	<i>Lucanus cervus</i>	17	2022	365	1	Hab_2np NERC_s41
Cinnabar	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>	1	2020	389	100	NERC_s41
Olive crescent	<i>Trisateles emortualis</i>	1	2017	0	1000	NERC_s41
Mammals - Bats						
Brown long-eared bat	<i>Plecotus auritus</i>	19	2022	335	1	Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c NERC_s41
Common	<i>Pipistrellus</i>	36	2022	262	100	Hab_4

pipistrelle	<i>pipistrellus</i>					HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Daubenton's	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	2	2021	736	100	Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Leisler's	<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>	3	2018	695	1	Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Nathusius' pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus nathusii</i>	1	2018	835	100	Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Natterer's	<i>Myotis nattereri</i>	2	2021	736	100	Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>	13	2022	262	100	Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c NERC_s41
Serotine	<i>Eptesicus serotinus</i>	10	2022	262	100	Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Soprano pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	30	2022	262	100	Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c NERC_s41
Western barbastelle	<i>Barbastella barbastellus</i>	2	2021	736	100	Hab_2np Hab_4 HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c NERC_s41
Terrestrial Mammals (excl. bats)						
Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	7	2020	509	1	NERC_s41

Table 2b. Species status key.

Abbreviation	Legislation
BOCC_red	Birds of Conservation Concern Red list – Globally threatened according to IUCN criteria; those whose population or range has declined rapidly in recent years; and those that have declined historically and not shown substantial recovery.
Hab_2np	Annex II of the Habitats Directive (non-priority species) – Endangered animal and plant species that are of Community interest (i.e. endangered, vulnerable, rare or endemic in the European Community) requiring the designation of special areas of conservation.
Hab_4	Annex IV of the Habitats Directive – Animal and plant species of Community interest (i.e. endangered, vulnerable, rare or endemic in the European Community) in need of strict protection. They are protected from killing, disturbance or the destruction of them or their habitat.
HabReg_2	Schedule 2 of Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (European Protected Species animal) – It is an offence (subject to exceptions) to deliberately capture, kill, disturb, or trade in the animals listed in Schedule 2.
NERC_s41	Priority Species listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
PBA	Protection of Badgers Act 1992 – Badgers and their setts are protected; making it illegal to kill, injure or take, possess or cruelly ill-treat badgers or to interfere with a badger sett
WCA_1p1	Schedule 1 Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) – birds protected from disturbance at their nests, or their dependent young.
WCA_5s91k	Schedule 5 Section 9 Part 1 (taking) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) – Animals which are protected from being intentionally killed or injured.
WCA_5s94b/c	Schedule 5 Section 9 Parts 4b/c of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as

	amended) – Animals which are protected from intentional disturbance while occupying a structure or place used for shelter or protection / Animals which are protected from their access to any structure or place which they use for shelter or protection being obstructed.
WCA_8	Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) – Plants and fungi that are protected from intentional picking, uprooting or destruction; selling, offering for sale, possessing or transporting for the purpose of sale; advertising for buying or selling.

6.2.2 11 European Protected Species licence applications have been granted in the last 10 years within a 2 kilometre radius of the site for the following species: brown long-eared bat (*P. auritus*), soprano pipistrelle (*P. pygmaeus*), common pipistrelle (*P. pipistrellus*), Brandt's bat (*Myotis brandtii*) and whiskered bat (*Myotis mystacinus*). The nearest licence application was for the destruction of a breeding site and resting place covering all five species, approximately 560m north of the site (Case refs.: 2014-4527-EPS-MIT & 2014-4527-EPS-MIT-1).

6.2.3 The NatureSpace great crested newt (GCN) (*Triturus cristatus*) impact map shows the site falling within an amber risk zone; these zones are considered to have suitable habitat where GCN are likely to be present. Five bodies of standing water that could potentially support breeding GCN have been identified within a 500 metre radius of the site (see **Figure 1** below).

6.3 Historic and Current Land Use

6.3.1 Google Satellite imagery dating from back to 1999 depicts the site as largely unchanged up to present day.

6.3.2 OS mapping dating from the early 1900s shows that the site was once part of a larger area of a sparsely wooded and heathy habitat.

6.4 Geology, Soils and Topography

6.4.1 The geology of the site is Bagshot Formation (Sand) bedrock with some superficial deposits of River Terrace Deposits, 6 (Sand and Gravel) which gives rise to freely draining, slightly acid loamy soils; the habitats associated with such soils include neutral and acid pastures and deciduous woodlands.

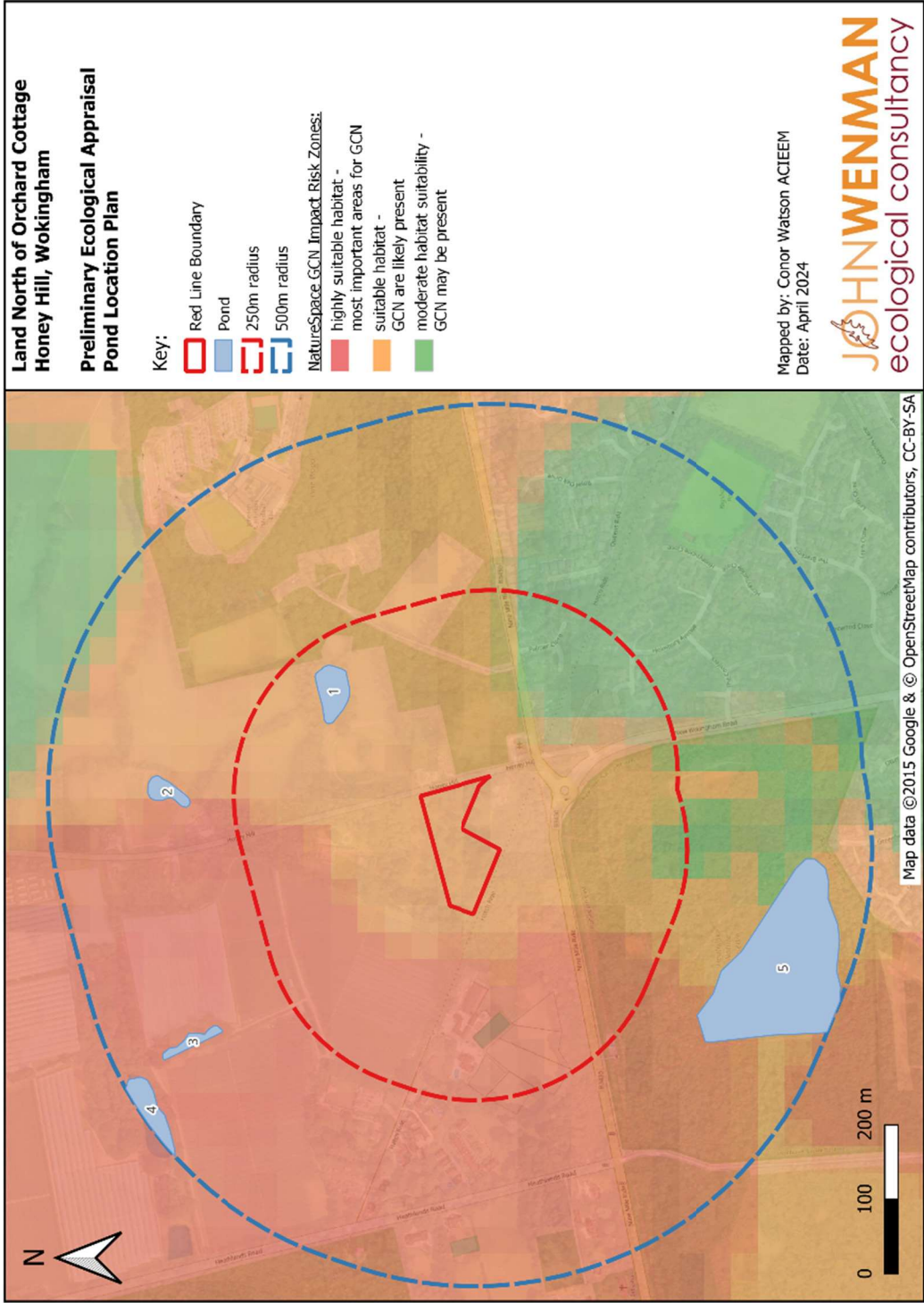


Figure 1. Pond Location Plan.

7 UK HABITAT CLASSIFICATION SURVEY

7.1 Overview

- 7.1.1** The site was a 1.03 hectare disused plot of land sitting between Hatch Ride and Honey Hill. It is currently accessible through the garden of Orchard Cottage.
- 7.1.2** The following UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) habitats were observed during the site walkover: g1d Other lowland acid grassland; w1f Lowland mixed deciduous woodland; and w1h Other mixed woodland.
- 7.1.3** The UKHab primary habitats and secondary codes are described alongside photographs (see **Photographs 1-6**) and a survey plan (see **Figure 2**), as follows:

7.2 g1d Other lowland acid grassland

10 Scattered scrub/ 12 Scattered bracken/ 14 Scattered rushes/ 32 Scattered trees/ 203 Mature tree/ 518 Neglected

- 7.2.1** The site was predominantly a neglected open habitat on sandy acidic soil. The open habitat was characterised by a carpet of bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), a patch of broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and grassland (**Photographs 1 & 2**). There was a group of five large, mature lime trees (*Tilia* sp.) and pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*); faster-growing trees, such as silver birch (*Betula pendula*) and goat willow (*Salix caprea*), were scattered across the habitat (**Photograph 3**). An old dung heap and a dilapidated timber outbuilding indicated historic grazing (**Photograph 4**).



Photograph 1. Carpet of bluebells (g1d~10/12/14/32/203/518).



Photograph 2. Patch of broom (g1d~10/12/14/32/203/518).



Photograph 3. Group of mature trees (g1d~ 10/12/14/32/203/518).



Photograph 4. Dilapidated timber outbuilding (g1d~ 10/12/14/32/203/518).

7.2.2 A list of the plant species recorded in the open habitat is detailed in **Table 3** below.

Table 3. Plant species recorded in open habitat (g3c~ 10/14/32/518).

Common name	Scientific name
Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>
Bog stitchwort	<i>Stellaria alsine</i>
Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.
Broom	<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>
Cleaver	<i>Galium aparine</i>
Clustered dock	<i>Rumex conglomeratus</i>
Common bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>
Common knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>
Common nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>
Common ragwort	<i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>
Creeping bent	<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
Germander speedwell	<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>
Goat willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>
Greater stitchwort	<i>Stellaria holostea</i>
Haircap moss	<i>Polytrichum commune</i>
Hairy-brome	<i>Bromopsis ramosa</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Hedge woundwort	<i>Stachys sylvatica</i>
Herb robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Ivy-leaved speedwell	<i>Veronica hederifolia</i>
Lesser celandine	<i>Ficaria verna</i>
Lords-and-ladies	<i>Arum maculatum</i>
Magnolia	<i>Magnolia</i> sp.
Male fern	<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>
Meadow buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>
Parsley-piert	<i>Aphanes arvensis</i>
Pedunculate oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Perforate St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>
Pignut	<i>Conopodium majus</i>
Red fescue	<i>Festuca rubra</i>
Sheep's sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>
Silver birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>
Slender St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>
Soft rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>
Soft shield fern	<i>Polystichum setiferum</i>
Springy turf moss	<i>Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus</i>
Tufted vetch	<i>Vicia cracca</i>
Virginian juniper	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>
Wood forget-me-not	<i>Myosotis sylvatica</i>

7.3 w1f Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

30 Semi-natural woodland

- 7.3.1** Broadleaved woodland bordered Hatch Ride on the south-western boundary of the site (**Photograph 5**). The tree canopy comprised sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), pedunculate oak (*Q. robur*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). The shrub layer was open but included garden privet (*Ligustrum ovalifolium*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and yew (*Taxus baccata*). The ground layer was sparse except along the northern edge where bluebells (*H. non-scripta*) were prevalent amongst other flora, such as three-nerved sandwort (*Moehringia trinervia*).



Photograph 5. Woodland bordering Hatch Ride (w1f~ 30).

7.4 w1h Other mixed woodland

30 Semi-natural woodland

- 7.4.1** Mixed woodland bordered Honey Hill on the eastern boundary of the site (**Photograph 6**). The tree canopy included broadleaved species and Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*); while the shrub layer was predominantly dense holly (*Ilex aquifolium*).



Photograph 6. Woodland bordering Honey Hill (w1h~ 30).

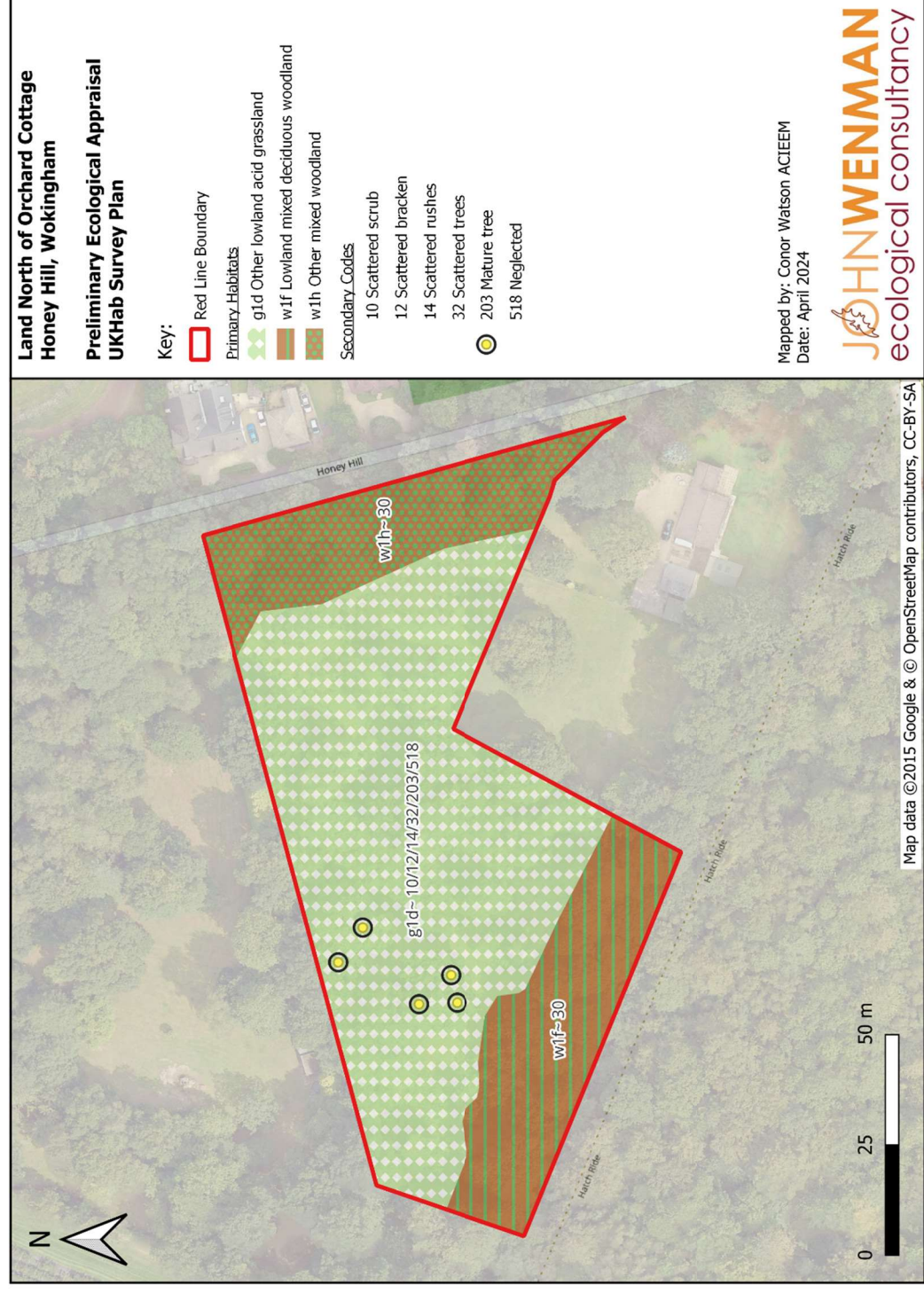


Figure 2. UKHab Survey Plan.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Designated Sites for Nature Conservation

Evaluation of Baseline

8.1.1 The desk study revealed that the site is not statutorily or non-statutorily designated for its wildlife interest and therefore is not currently recognised as being of international, national or county level conservation significance. However, the site falls inside the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) 5 kilometre zone of influence and within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) of Heath Lake Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

8.1.2 The desk study data included two locally designated sites within a 1 kilometre radius of the site: Gorrick Plantation Local Wildlife Site (LWS) located 401 metres west; and Land to East and West of Sandhurst Road LWS located 946 metres southwest.

Impact Assessment

8.1.3 The planning proposals are for the erection of a new residential dwelling with associated access and landscaping and as such, the scheme will result in a net increase of dwellings in the Thames Basin Heaths SPA zone of influence so the applicant will be required to adhere to Wokingham Borough Council's delivery framework of measures to mitigate harm to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA arising from new housing development – refer to **Section 9.2**. Only residential developments of 50 units or more inside the IRZ are considered to impact Heath Lake SSSI so no adverse effects are anticipated on this nationally designated site.

8.1.4 Considering the nature and scale of development, in conjunction with the distance between the site and the nearby LWSs, no adverse effects are anticipated on the two locally designated sites.

8.2 Important Habitats

Evaluation of Baseline

8.2.1 The site is predominantly neglected open habitat on sandy acidic soil characterised by a carpet of bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), a patch of broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and grassland – a habitat of medium distinctiveness (**g1d~ 10/12/14/32/203/518**). The site sits between broadleaved woodland along Hatch Ride – a habitat of high

distinctiveness (**w1f~ 30**) – and mixed woodland along Honey Hill – a habitat of medium distinctiveness (**w1h~ 30**). Although both woodlands are mapped in the Priority Habitat Inventory, only the broadleaved woodland (**w1f~ 30**) is representative of lowland mixed deciduous woodland priority habitat (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 habitat of principle importance).

Impact Assessment

- 8.2.2** The proposed development is a self-build and custom application that would qualify for exemption from mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements. The exemption applies to this development because the following criteria: consists of no more than 9 dwellings and has an area no larger than 0.5 hectares.

8.3 Bats

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.3.1** The desk study data included records of at least ten bat species: brown long-eared bat, common pipistrelle, Daubenton's, Leisler's, Nathusius' pipistrelle, Natterer's bat, noctule, serotine, soprano pipistrelle and Western barbastelle. The nearest granted European Protected Species (EPS) licence application was for the destruction of a breeding site and resting place covering brown long-eared bat, soprano pipistrelle, common pipistrelle, Brandt's bat and whiskered bat, approximately 560m north of the site (Case refs.: 2014-4527-EPS-MIT & 2014-4527-EPS-MIT-1).
- 8.3.2** The open habitat (**g1d~ 10/12/14/32/203/518**) and woodlands (**w1f~30 & w1h~30**) resemble high potential suitability flight paths and foraging habitat for bats roosting locally. The mature trees in the open habitat (**g1d~ 203**) and woodlands (**w1f~30 & w1h~30**) may harbour potential roost features for bats; the dilapidated timber outbuilding has been assigned low potential suitability for roosting bats and presence has currently been ruled out by a thorough search for evidence.
- 8.3.3** The site is small and when considered in the local context – where there is a landscape scale network of high-quality habitat for bats – it is considered unlikely to be important for bats beyond a local scale.

Impact Assessment

- 8.3.4** The proposed development may result in the loss of flight paths and foraging habitats for bats as a consequence of lighting and direct habitat loss without appropriate avoidance

and mitigation measures – refer to **Section 9.4**. Furthermore, any tree removal required to facilitate the proposals should be preceded by a ground level tree assessment to determine the available roosting resource and the need for further survey and/or mitigation – refer to **Section 9.4**.

8.4 Great Crested Newt (and other amphibians)

Evaluation of Baseline

8.4.1 The desk study data included no recent records of great crested newt (GCN) within a 1 kilometre radius of the application site. However, the NatureSpace GCN impact map shows the application site falling within an amber risk zone; these zones are considered to have suitable habitat where GCN are likely to be present.

8.4.2 The application site lacks standing water so offers no breeding opportunities for amphibians, such as GCN or the locally recorded common toad – a priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principle importance); though the open habitat (**g1d~ 10/12/14/32/203/518**) and woodlands (**w1f~30 & w1h~30**) provide suitable terrestrial opportunities for these amphibians.

Impact Assessment

8.4.3 Based on the assumption that the nearby ponds support breeding GCN, the Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of a scenario where less than 0.5 hectares of land is lost and/or damaged by the proposed development. The Tool indicates that less than 0.5 hectares of land within 100-250 metres of a GCN breeding pond is highly unlikely to result in an offence – see **Figure 3** below. However, in the absence of mitigation there is an extremely low risk that individual GCN could potentially be injured and/or killed during construction activities – refer to **Section 9.5**.

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.1 - 0.5 ha lost or damaged	0.1
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.1 - 0.5 ha lost or damaged	0.005
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.1
Rapid risk assessment result:		GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY

Guidance on risk assessment result categories

"**Green: offence highly unlikely**" indicates that the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that it is highly unlikely any offence would be committed should the development proceed. Therefore, no licence would be required. However, bearing in mind that this is a generic assessment, you should carefully examine your specific plans to ensure this is a sound conclusion, and take precautions (see **Non-licensed avoidance measures tool**) to avoid offences if appropriate. It is likely that any residual offences would have negligible impact on conservation status, and enforcement of such breaches is unlikely to be in the public interest.

Figure 3. Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool.

8.5 Hazel dormouse

Evaluation of Baseline

8.5.1 The desk study data included no recent records of hazel dormice and a search of MAGIC for granted EPS licence applications returned none within a 2 kilometre radius of the application site. There are very few known dormice records in East Berkshire.

8.5.2 The woodlands (**w1f~30 & w1h~30**) on site resemble suitable habitat for dormice, though are not optimal, like coppice woodland or ancient woodland. The nearest ancient woodland is 700 metres north but is located on the opposite side of Honey Hill and not directly connected to the site. Therefore, the presence of dormice on site is considered highly unlikely.

Impact Assessment

8.5.3 The risk of hazel dormice presence on site is extremely low and therefore no adverse effects on this species are anticipated.

8.6 Reptiles

Evaluation of Baseline

8.6.1 The desk study data included recent records of adder, common lizard, grass snake and slow-worm within a 1 kilometre radius of the application site; the nearest record was common lizard just under 600 metres away. The open habitat (**g1d~10/12/14/32/203/518**) has the structural diversity to support the locally recorded reptiles.

Impact Assessment

- 8.6.2** The proposed development has potential to harm and/or kill reptiles so further survey is required to ascertain the presence or likely absence of reptiles – refer to **Section 9.6**.

8.7 Birds

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.7.1** The desk study data included recent records of eight bird species protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (W&CA) 1981 (as amended), such as firecrest and woodlark, and ten species on the birds of conservation concern red list, such as greenfinch and woodcock.
- 8.7.2** The open habitat (**g1d~ 10/12/14/32/203/518**) and woodlands (**w1f~30 & w1h~30**) provide suitable nesting and foraging opportunities for locally recorded bird species. However, the site is small and when considered in the local context – where there are large scale sites such as the Thames Basin Heaths SPA designated for important breeding populations of rare birds – it is considered unlikely to be an important site for breeding birds.

Impact Assessment

- 8.7.3** The proposed development will need to be designed to minimise the loss of habitat available to nesting birds. Furthermore, a precautionary method of working would enable compliance with legislation protecting nesting birds – refer to **Section 9.7**.

8.8 Badgers (and other mammals)

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.8.1** [REDACTED]
- 8.8.2** No evidence of badger activity (i.e. setts, trails, snuffle holes or mammal diggings) was identified within the application site. Therefore, the presence of badger on site is considered highly unlikely.
- 8.8.3** The open habitat (**g1d~ 10/12/14/32/203/518**) and woodlands (**w1f~30 & w1h~30**) provide opportunities for hedgehogs to forage and take shelter on site.

Impact Assessment

8.8.4 The risk of badger presence on site is extremely low and therefore no adverse effects are anticipated.

8.8.5 The proposed development will need to be designed to maintain ecological permeability for hedgehogs – refer to **Section 9.8**.

8.9 Invertebrates

Evaluation of Baseline

8.9.1 The desk study data included 17 recent records of stag beetle – a priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principle importance) – within a 1km radius of the application site.

8.9.2 The site is small and when considered in the local context – where there are large scale sites such as the Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI designated for important invertebrate assemblages – it is considered unlikely to be an important site for invertebrates. However, the scattered trees in the open habitat (**g1d~10/12/14/32/203/518**) and woodlands (**w1f~30 & w1h~30**) will provide suitable egg-laying opportunities in deadwood so it is possible that this species is present on site.

Impact Assessment

8.9.3 The development proposals could be designed to incorporate enhancements for stag beetles – refer to **Section 9.8**.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Overview

- 9.1.1** This chapter provides the details regarding proposed avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures, including measures to enable legislative compliance.

9.2 Designated Sites for Nature Conservation

- 9.2.1** A financial contribution towards the provision of existing Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) will likely be required for the proposed development in line with Wokingham Borough Council's delivery framework of measures to mitigate harm to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA arising from new housing development.

9.3 Important Habitats

- 9.3.1** An appropriate buffer zone should be designed to protect the priority habitat and other identified biodiversity features (e.g. protected species) during construction activities and post-development. Further surveys recommended below should be undertaken to guide the design of the buffer zones on site.

9.4 Bats

- 9.4.1** The proposed development will need to be designed to avoid the loss of potential flight paths and foraging habitat for bats by protecting habitat with appropriate buffer zones and a sensitive lighting strategy.
- 9.4.2** Any tree removal to facilitate the development proposals should be preceded by a ground level tree assessment to determine the available roosting resource and the need for further survey and/or mitigation. The assessment would involve a detailed inspection of the trees marked for removal to compile information on the presence of any potential roost features (PRFs) and any evidence of bats. The assessment may lead to recommendations for a PRF inspection survey, using tree-climbing or access equipment, to re-assess any PRFs and determine the presence/likely absence of bats at the time of the survey and the need for further survey and/or mitigation.

9.5 Great Crested Newt

- 9.5.1** The proposed development will result in less than 0.5 hectares of land being lost and/or damaged so it is likely that any residual offences would have negligible impact on the conservation status of a local great crested newt (GCN) population and the enforcement

of such breaches is unlikely to be in the public interest. Therefore, a European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licence (including under the District Level Licensing scheme) would not be required to allow the works to proceed lawfully, providing that reasonable avoidance measures are adopted during construction activities in order to minimise the extremely low risk of harming individual GCN.

9.6 Reptiles

- 9.6.1** A survey for the presence of reptiles on site should be carried out. The survey should comprise a minimum of seven survey visits to check artificial refugia set out on the site in advance; surveys should be carried out between March and September and within this period are most reliable when carried out in April, May or September (Froglife 1999).
- 9.6.2** If the presence of reptiles is confirmed, there is a risk that they could be harmed by the proposed development during the construction phase. A mitigation strategy will need to be designed and agreed by the Wokingham Borough Council to avoid harm or injury to reptiles during the works.

9.7 Nesting Birds

- 9.7.1** Any tree or shrub removal should be completed outside of the peak bird nesting season (March to August) or alternatively, following an inspection by an ecologist confirming that there is no current nesting activity. If nesting birds are discovered prior to or during any work, work should stop immediately and should only continue once bird nesting has finished, i.e. young have fledged and left the nest.

9.8 Biodiversity Enhancement Measures

- 9.8.1** The planning proposals provide opportunities for the enhancement of the site's biodiversity value. The inclusion of the following recommendations would be of ecological benefit and be in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy and Local Plan:
- Stag beetle loggeries;
 - Wildlife friendly landscaping;
 - Integrated bat and bird boxes; and
 - Ensuring ecological permeability for hedgehogs, i.e. 13cm x 13cm holes in garden fencing and 'hedgehog highway' signs.

10 REFERENCES

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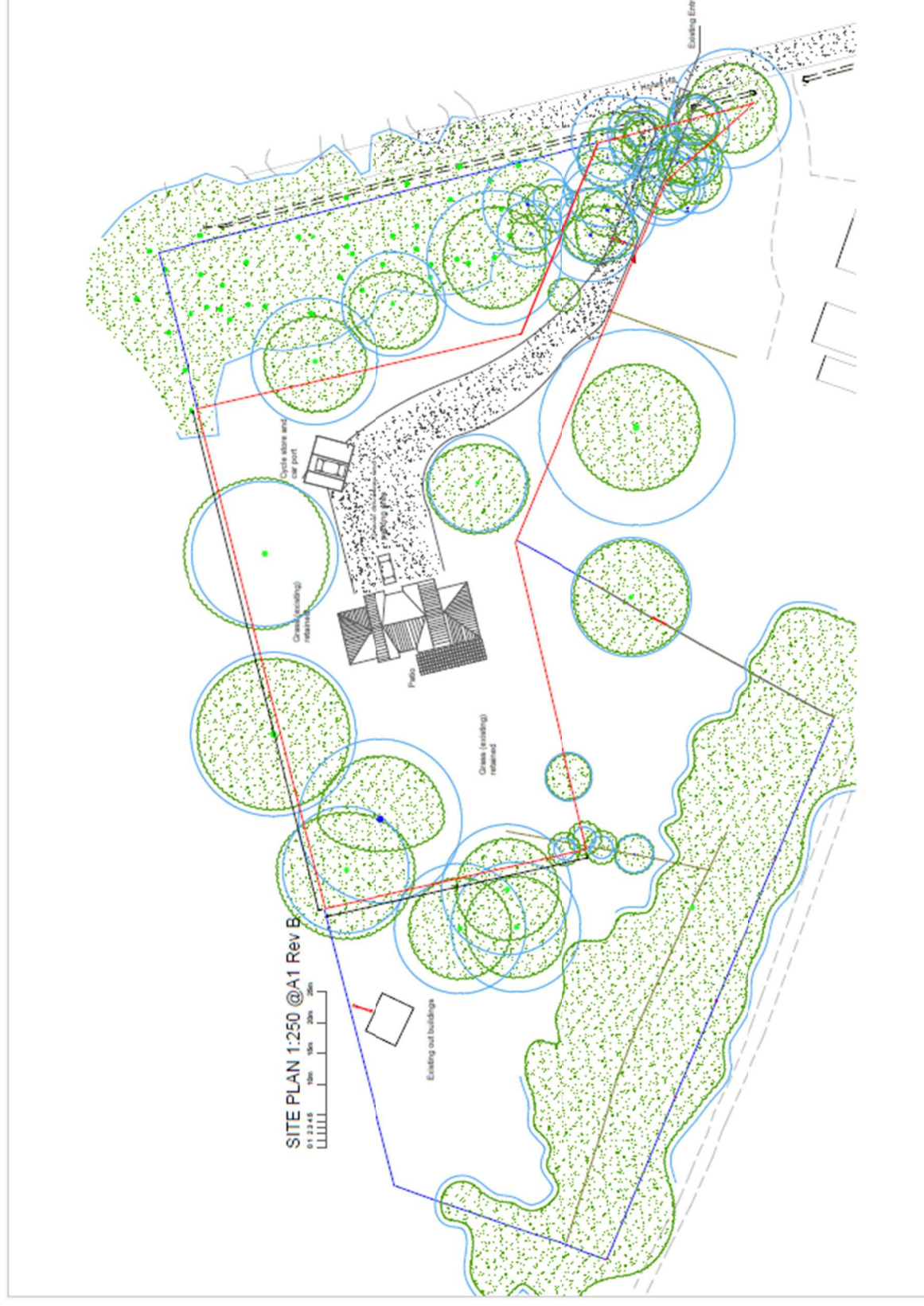
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APPENDIX 1 – PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT



APPENDIX 2 – LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

Amphibians

The seven native species of amphibian receive protection under the W&AC 1981 (as amended). The four widespread and common amphibians (common frog, toad, smooth newt and palmate newt) receive only limited protection – making their sale illegal.

The great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) receives full protection under the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and under the Habitat Regulations 2019. The combined legislation makes it illegal to:

- intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a great crested newt;
- possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a great crested newt;
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a great crested newt; and
- intentionally or recklessly disturb great crested newts; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating animals, to hibernate or migrate.

Great crested newts (*T. cristatus*) and common toads (*Bufo bufo*) are species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England ('UKBAP Priority Species') under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Badgers

Badgers are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The Act makes activities such as development that would harm or disturb badgers or damage, obstruct or destroy their setts illegal. If badgers are to be affected by the proposed development, activities can be undertaken only under a licence issued by Natural England.

Bats

All bat species in Britain are fully protected by the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and by the Habitat Regulations 2019. In summary, the combined legislation makes it an offence to:

- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a bat;

- deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb bats; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of bats to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating bats, to hibernate or migrate; or to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species; and
- deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Birds

All wild birds are protected under the W&CA 1981 (as amended). The Act makes it an offence to kill, injure or take a wild bird or to damage or destroy the nest of a wild bird whilst in use or being built. Species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act, such as barn owls and kingfishers, are afforded additional protection against disturbance while nesting.

Hazel dormice

Hazel dormice receive full protection under the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and under the Habitat Regulations 2019. These make it illegal to:

- intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a dormouse;
- possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a dormouse;
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a dormouse; and
- intentionally or recklessly disturb dormice; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating animals, to hibernate or migrate.

Invasive non-native plants

The W&CA 1981 (as amended) provides the primary controls on the release of non-native species into the wild in Great Britain. It is an offence under Section 14(2) of the Act to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' any plant listed in Schedule 9, Part II. The species listed in the Act include Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) and Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

Otters

Otters are fully protected by the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and by the Habitat Regulations 2019. In summary, the combined legislation makes it an offence to:

- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly

- obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by an otter;
- deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb otters; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of otters to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species; and
- deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Reptiles

The four widespread reptiles most likely to be encountered (adder, grass snake, slow worm and common lizard) are protected under the W&CA 1981 (as amended). The Act makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, possess or sell any of the species.

The aforementioned species are all listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England ('UKBAP Priority Species') under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Water voles

Since April 2008, water voles have received full protection under Section 9 in Schedule 5 of the W&CA 1981 (as amended). This makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take water voles or to possess or control live or dead water voles or derivatives. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection or intentionally or recklessly disturb water voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose.

The water vole is listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England ('UKBAP Priority Species') under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Wild mammals

Under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 it is an offence to intentionally inflict unnecessary suffering, as specified by the Act, on any wild mammal.