

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Roost Assessment

Survey site:

400 Thames Valley Park Drive, Earley, Reading, RG6 1PT

Client:

TVP Investments Limited

Survey date:

1st June 2024

Project:

This report is prepared to inform a prior approval application to be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council. The proposal is described as:
Prior Approval Application under Schedule 2, Part 3, Class MA (commercial, business and service uses to dwellinghouses) of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 for a change of use of the ground, 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors (use Class E) to 62 residential dwellings (use Class C3).

PEA survey methodology and legislation can be found in the Arbtech Supplement: [PEA Methodology and Legislation - 2024.](#)

PRA survey methodology and legislation can be found in the Arbtech Supplement: [PRA Methodology and Legislation - 2024.](#)

The site survey was undertaken by Beth Ellison-Perrett BSc (Hons) MSc, MRSB, Consultant (2023-11066-CL17-BAT and 2024-11998-CL08-GCN)					
Date of survey	Temperature (°C)	Humidity (%)	Cloud Cover (%)	Wind (mph)	Rain
01/06/2024	17	63	100	14	None

Ecological Survey Factor	Detailed using desk study and site survey (carried out under good weather conditions). Any specific limitations noted within relevant section. This table may include further work you will need to commission (if any) to obtain planning permission or comply with legislation for other consent. All clients are expected to read and understand this section, or to contact the lead surveyor for advice.
Conclusion, Impact or Recommendations	
Habitats and plants (see habitat map in appendix 1, location plan in appendix 2, photos in appendix 3 and proposal plan in appendix 4). Botanical species are described with reference to the DAFOR scale (D = Dominant; A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional, R = Rare).	
Summary of Survey Findings (UKHab codes used) - Developed land; sealed surface with scattered trees (u1b 32) - Building (u1b5) - Other neutral grassland with scattered tress (g3c 32) - Pond (g3c 46) - Mixed scrub (h3h) - Other native hedgerow (h2a6)	Site Context The survey site is centred on National Grid Reference SU 74241 47071 and has an area of approximately 0.9ha. The site consists of one large office building, a pond, associated parking and is bordered with a ling of trees and hedgerow scrub. The site is set within a high-density urban area with a corpse of treelines and hedges around large commercial buildings and car parks, with a rail line to the south, and the river Thames to the north. There is a rowing lake to the north-west, and east Reading and Woodley to the south. Limitations A biological records data search has not been undertaken. However, given the location of the site, the nature of the habitats present and the assessed suitability of the site for protected or notable species, it is not anticipated that the purchase of biological records data will add any significant weight or alter the conclusions and recommendations outlined in this report. Additionally, there was no access internally into the building.

- Line of trees (u1 33)	These limitations have been taken into account during the evaluation of the site and requirement for further surveys and mitigation. On-site habitat descriptions • Developed land; sealed surface with scattered trees (u1b 32) • Building (u1b5) • Other neutral grassland with scattered tress (g3c 32) • Pond (g3c 46) • Mixed scrub (h3h) • Other native hedgerow (h2a6) • Line of trees (u1 33) <u>Developed land; sealed surface with scattered trees (u1b 32)</u> The majority of the site is comprised of developed land; sealed surface. These areas are comprised of tarmac and concrete paving which is of negligible habitat value for protected species. Present onsite within the hard standing are scattered trees, which are comprised of oak, cherry and lime. The trees are approximately 8-16m tall with a DBH of approximately 20-50cm. The trees are young to semi-mature in age and represent a fair to good structural condition. The trees are assessed for their suitability for roosting bats and nesting birds in the relevant sections below. Individual trees condition assessment: >70% of the trees are native species. - The tree canopy is predominantly continuous.
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	c) <50% of the trees are mature. d) There is little or no evidence of an adverse impact on tree health by human activities (such as vandalism, herbicide or detrimental agricultural activity). e) No ecological niches. f) <20% of the tree canopy is oversailing vegetation beneath. <u>Building (u1b5)</u> There is one building (B1) onsite. The building is a four-storey brick-built building with a flat roof with metal parapet walls around the roof clad. <u>Other neutral grassland with scattered tress (g3c 32)</u> To the north of the site and a small area to the west of B1 is an area of other neutral grassland which is subject to intensive mowing, resulting in a sward of approximately 2-3cm in length. Species composition is comprised of perennial ryegrass (D), creeping buttercup (F), daisy (F), clover (O), dandelion (O), plantain (O), small-flowered cranesbill (O), lesser trefoil (O), ragwort (R), burnet (R), common chickweed (R), bird's foot trefoil (R) and black meddick (R). Other neutral grassland condition assessment: a) The grassland is not a good representation of the habitat type it has been identified as, based on its UKHab description. b) Sward height is not varied. c) Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 5%, including localised areas, for example, rabbit warrens. d) Cover of bracken is less than 20% and cover of scrub (including bramble) is less than 5%. e) Combined cover of species indicative of sub-optimal condition and physical damage (such as excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, damaging levels of access, or any other damaging management activities) accounts for less than 5% of total area. f) <10 vascular plant species per m² present
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	Present onsite are scattered trees, which are comprised of alder, hazel, oak, hawthorn, cherry, goat willow and weeping willow. The trees are approximately 4-15m tall with a DBH of approximately 10-70cm. The trees are semi-mature in age and represent a fair to good structural condition. The trees are assessed for their suitability for roosting bats and nesting birds in the relevant sections below. Individual trees condition assessment: a) >70% of the trees are native species. b) The tree canopy is predominantly continuous. c) <50% of the trees are mature. d) There is little or no evidence of an adverse impact on tree health by human activities (such as vandalism, herbicide or detrimental agricultural activity). e) No ecological niches. f) >20% of the tree canopy is oversailing vegetation beneath. <u>Pond (g3c 46)</u> Adjacent to B1 on the northern elevation is a pond. The pond is approximately 210m² and has submergent vegetation along the eastern and western boundaries. The vegetation is comprised of water mint, reeds and the occasional lily pad. An HSI was completed of the pond (P1) which returned a score of 0.68 which indicates average suitability for great crested newt. Pond condition assessment: a) The pond is of semi-poor water quality. b) There is poor semi-natural habitat surrounding the pond from the pond edge for its entire perimeter. c) More than 10% of the water surface is covered with duckweed <i>Lemna</i> spp. or filamentous algae. d) The pond is not artificially connected to other waterbodies, e.g. agricultural ditches or artificial pipework. e) Pond water levels can fluctuate naturally throughout the year.
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	f) There is an absence of listed non-native plant and animal species. g) The pond is not artificially stocked with fish. h) Only 10% of the pond has submergent vegetation. i) The pond surface is no more than 50% shaded by adjacent trees and scrub. <u>Mixed scrub (h3h)</u> To the north of the site are two small areas of mixed scrub. These areas are comprised of bramble, dogwood, hazel, willow, buddleia and bindweed. The areas are approximately 50-90m² in size. Mixed scrub condition assessment: a) The scrub is a good representation of the habitat type it has been identified as, based on its UKHab description (where in its natural range). The appearance and composition of the vegetation closely matches the characteristics of the specific scrub type. At least 80% of scrub is native, and there are at least three native woody species, with no single species comprising more than 75% of the cover. b) Only two levels (young shrub and semi-mature) shrubs are present. c) There is an absence of invasive non-native plant species (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA4) and species indicative of sub-optimal condition make up less than 5% of ground cover. d) No well-developed edge between the scrub and adjacent habitat. e) There are no clearings, glades or rides present within the scrub. <u>Other native hedgerow (h2a6)</u> To the west and south of B1 are two small hedgerows. These hedges are comprised of dogwood, willow, holly, bramble and hawthorn. They are approximately 1.5m wide, 1.5m tall and range from 8-15m in length. Other native hedgerow condition assessment:
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	A1) Height: >1.5 m average along length A2) Width: >1.5 m average along length B1) Gap between ground and base of canopy <0.5 m for >90% of length B2) Gaps make up <10% of total length; and no canopy gaps >5 m C1) There is no undisturbed ground of >1m for >90% length C2) Plant species indicative of nutrient enrichment of soils dominates <20% cover of the area of undisturbed ground. D1) >90% of the hedgerow and undisturbed ground is free of invasive non-native plant species D2) <90% of the hedgerow or undisturbed ground is free of damage caused by human activities. The hedges are intensively managed. <u>Line of trees (u1 33)</u> Along the eastern, southern and western boundaries of the site are lines of trees. These are comprised of willow, dogwood, hazel, oak, hawthorn, apple, birch, maple and elder. The trees are approximately 10-20m tall. The trees are mature in age and represent a fair to good structural condition. Line of trees condition assessment: A) At least 70% of trees are native species. B) Tree canopy is predominantly continuous with gaps in canopy cover making up <10% of total area and no individual gap being >5 m wide. C) No ecological niches. D) There is no undisturbed naturally-vegetated strip of at least 6 m on both sides to protect the line of trees. E) At least 95% of the trees are in a healthy condition (deadwood or veteran features valuable for wildlife are excluded from this).
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	<u>Local notable habitats</u> There is one priority habitat deciduous woodland on site that extends to the rail line south of the site, as well as many other corpses within 2km. There is one priority habitat lowland fens ~835m north east of the site. No others are known.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	On-site habitats Only the building will be affected by the proposed plans. No other habitats onsite will be affected. Due to the scale of these works, impact and low value of the habitats present, this is likely to have a minimal impact on biodiversity. Notable habitats No impacts to any notable habitats are anticipated due to the small scale and distance of the proposed development from such habitats as well as the urban location of the site with surrounding physical barriers.
<i>Recommendations</i>	On-site habitats Retained trees and woodland should be protected in line with the measures outlined in the British Standard "Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction to Construction - Recommendations" (BS 5837) (2012). Notable habitats None required. Suggested biodiversity enhancements The planting of native tree and shrub species would be beneficial for wildlife, through the provision of sheltering and foraging habitats.
Locality and Designated Sites	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	Statutory designated sites (within 2km) The site is not subject to any designation, and there are two known statutory sites nearby. There are two Local Nature Reserves (LNR) within 2km of the site. - Highwood LNR, ~1340m south east.

	- All's Pond LNR, ~1840m north east. The site falls within the Sites of Special Scientific Interest Impact Risk zone, but the proposed plan should not require LPA consultation with Natural England. Non-statutory designated sites The presence of non-statutory designated sites within 2km cannot be established without biological records data from Thames Valley Environmental Centre.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	On-site designations No impacts foreseen. Statutory and non-statutory designated sites No impacts to designated sites are anticipated due to the small scale and distance of the proposed development from such sites (where known).
<i>Recommendations</i>	On-site designations None required. Statutory and non-statutory designated sites None required.
Invasive / Non-native species	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No problematic invasive and non-native species recorded on site.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	N/A
<i>Recommendations</i>	No further surveys but remain vigilant.
Invertebrates	

<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No habitat for protected or notable invertebrates is found on site. The site will provide habitat value for common assemblages of invertebrates which could exploit the trees onsite.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	None foreseen.
<i>Recommendations</i>	No further surveys. Suggested biodiversity enhancements The following habitat creation and enhancement opportunities could be incorporated into the proposed development to provide additional opportunities for invertebrates on site: • beetle banks • dead wood piles • floral borders
Bats	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	EPSL data A search of the magic.gov.uk database for granted EPSLs within a 2km radius of the site has been completed. Displaced bats from licensed sites <2km away from the survey site will find alternative habitat either within the mitigation measures implemented as part of the licence or will relocate to other known roosts sites in close proximity to the licensed site. There have been 36 granted European Protected Species Applications within 4km of the site. The closest was: - 2015-17476-EPS-MIT, ~1180m east, brown long-eared bat and soprano pipistrelle, destruction of a resting site. Foraging and commuting habitat The site itself has optimal habitats for commuting and foraging bats due to the small hedgerows to the west and south of B1 and tree lined boundaries to the east, south and west. The local area is of good bat habitat with significant woodland, linear commuting routes and other foraging areas.

	Roosting habitat There is one building (B1) onsite. B1 is a detached four-storey brick-built building with a flat roof with a metal parapet wall. The flat roof is bitumen felt and shingle lined and is in very good condition with no gaps in which bats could roost. The doors and windows are metal framed and appear in excellent condition with no suitable bat roosting sites. The brickwork around the building appears in excellent condition with no gaps or cracks within which crevice-dwelling bats could roost. the northern elevation of B1 is comprised predominately of windows which are very well sealed with no suitable roosting features.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	Roosting habitat B1 has negligible habitat value for roosting bats due to a lack of suitable features. Artificial lighting The proposed development may lead to an increase in the amount of current lighting of surrounding habitats or the retained building without mitigation. This may disturb commuting bats.
<i>Recommendations</i>	Roosting habitat In the unlikely event that a bat or evidence of bats is discovered during the development all work must stop and a bat licensed ecologist contacted for further advice. Foraging and commuting habitat No further surveys are required. Artificial lighting A low impact lighting strategy will be adopted for the site during post-development which outlines the areas of the site that will be retained as dark corridors. Parameters can be found on the Bat Conservation Trust website: https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/lighting-2

	Suggested biodiversity enhancements The installation of one bat box at the site will provide additional roosting habitat for bats. The bat box will be installed on a retained tree. Bat boxes should be positioned 3-5m above ground level facing in a south or south-westerly direction with a clear flight path to and from the entrance, away from artificial light. The bat box will be a specification suitable for crevice dwelling species such as Woodstone bat box or a similar alternative brand.
Birds	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No evidence of nesting birds was found on site during the surveys; however, birds could use the buildings, scattered trees and scrub for nesting. No habitat for schedule 1 birds was observed.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	The proposed development could result in the destruction or the disturbance and subsequent abandonment of active bird nests.
<i>Recommendations</i>	Precautions should be taken with machinery and noise levels when working close to any retained nests so as not to disturb any nearby nesting birds during construction works. At least a 3-5m buffer should be created between any machinery and active nests until the young have fledged. Suggested biodiversity enhancements The installation of one bird box at the site will provide additional nesting habitat for birds. The bird box will be installed on a retained tree. General purpose bird boxes should be positioned 3m above ground level where they will be sheltered from prevailing wind, rain and strong sunlight. Species-specific bird boxes should be installed in line with manufacturers specifications.
Reptiles	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No reptile EPSL's found within a 4km radius of the site. The habitats recorded on site are suboptimal as the site is predominately hard standing and other neutral grassland, which may provide foraging opportunities but is very open and exposed which increases the risk of predation. The tree lined boundaries and small areas of mixed scrub could provide suitable foraging and commuting habitats, albeit limited. The development area is considered unsuitable to support reptiles due to an absence of structural and species diversity. As the proposed development will be contained to B1, reptiles are highly unlikely to be present within the development areas but the presence of reptiles within peripheral habitats cannot be discounted.

<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	Although no areas of suitable habitat are being removed as part of the development, there is a low risk that a low number of reptiles could be present in the vicinity of the works. These could be injured or killed without mitigation.
<i>Recommendations</i>	A precautionary working method will be implemented for widespread reptiles during construction, including the following measures: • Vegetation will be maintained at a short sward (5cm) to discourage reptiles. • Any excavations will be covered overnight, or a ramp will be installed to enable any trapped animals to escape. • Best practice pollution prevention measures will be implemented to minimise impacts to nearby habitats. • Any chemicals or pollutants used or created by the development should be stored and disposed of correctly according to COSHH regulations. • If any reptiles are found in the working area these should be allowed to disperse of their own accord or, if at immediate risk, should be moved by hand to a sheltered, vegetated area away from disturbance. • In the unlikely event that a reptile is identified, works must cease and advice must be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist. Suggested biodiversity enhancements The site could be enhanced for reptile's post development with the inclusion of log piles and a compost heap.
Amphibians	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	There is one pond on site, and seven within 500m of the site. Six of these would be considered unsuitable due to there being roads as barriers between the site and the ponds. One ~320m west of the site could be deemed suitable. One Great crested newt EPSL was returned with 4km of the site. - EPSM2010-1708, ~3800m south west, destruction of a resting place.

	A review of the MAGIC database returned no granted EPSL within 2km of the site, and class licence or pond survey records for great crested newts within 500m of the site. However, there is one class licence returns, located 1760m north-east, which show the presence of GCN from historic pond surveys in 2015. Great crested newts exist in metapopulations and are known to utilise ponds and their connecting terrestrial habitat during their life cycle; great crested newts are typically found within terrestrial habitats up to 500m from breeding ponds (Langton <i>et al.</i> 2001). As such, the great crested newt metapopulation known to be present over 500m from the site, are not suitably connected to the site. There is one pond onsite as well as seven other within 500m of the site, located 45m north, 115m north-east, 135m north, 225m east, 315m west, 325m north and 375m north-east. These ponds, with the exception of the pond located 325m north, are all within the Thames Valley Park complex and are separated from the site by other industrial buildings, tarmac roads with kerbs and developed land; sealed surface. The pond onsite is adjacent to B1 on the northern elevation. The pond is approximately 210m² and has submergent vegetation along the eastern and western boundaries. The vegetation is comprised of water mint, reeds and the occasional lily pad. A HSI was completed of the pond (P1) which returned a score of 0.68 which indicates average suitability for great crested newt. However, the surrounding habitats are of relatively low value due to the intensively managed grassland and roads with high kerbs to the north, east and west of the pond. Additionally, the ponds boundary elevation is the building. Habitats recorded on site are assessed to provide limited terrestrial opportunities for amphibians in the form of other neutral grassland and scrub. However, the tree lined boundaries to the south, east and west of the site, could provide suitable commuting habitat for amphibians. It is noted that the site is dominated by hardstanding of negligible value to amphibians due to an absence of refuge from predation. Although the site is considered unsuitable to support amphibians due to the absence of suitably connected aquatic opportunities, other common amphibians such as common toads have better mobility and are able to travel longer distances from breeding sites. As a result, the presence of common amphibians within the other neutral grassland and tree lined boundaries cannot be discounted.
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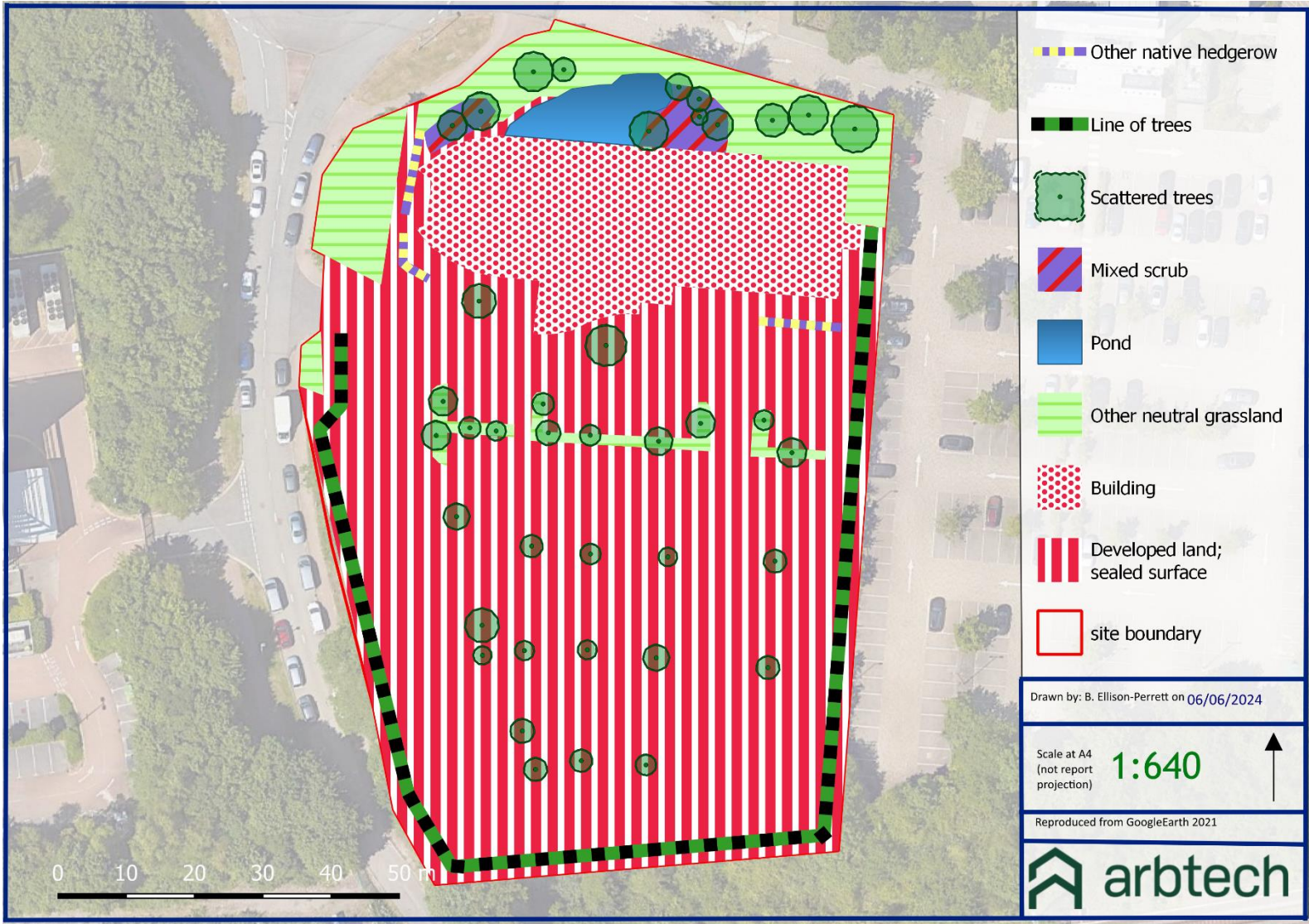
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	Only the building is to be affected by the proposed plans, in the form of a two-storey extension. The other habitats onsite will not be affected as part of the proposed plans, including the pond, scrub and boundary tree lines as they are set to be retained. Although no areas of suitable habitat are being removed as part of the development, there is a low risk that a low number of amphibians could be present in the vicinity of the works. These could be injured or killed without mitigation.
<i>Recommendations</i>	Owing to the nature of the proposed development and the low potential for impacts to great crested newts, further surveys are considered to be disproportionate. A precautionary working method will be implemented for common amphibians during construction, including the following measures: • Vegetation will be maintained at a short sward (5cm) to discourage amphibians. • Any excavations will be covered overnight, or a ramp will be installed to enable any trapped animals to escape. • Best practice pollution prevention measures will be implemented to minimise impacts to nearby aquatic habitats that amphibians could use. • Any chemicals or pollutants used or created by the development should be stored and disposed of correctly according to COSHH regulations. • If any common amphibians are found in the working area these should be allowed to disperse of their own accord or, if at immediate risk, should be moved by hand to a sheltered, vegetated area away from disturbance. • In the unlikely event that a great crested newt is identified, works must cease and advice must be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist. Suggested biodiversity enhancements The following habitat creation and enhancement opportunities could be incorporated into the proposed development which would be beneficial for amphibians: • Creation of amphibian refugia and hibernacula using debris and brash from site clearance. • Planting of native scrub and grassland to increase foraging opportunities.
Badger	

<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No evidence of badgers was found on site including latrines, setts or hairs of badgers. The site contains suitable habitat of other neutral grassland and small areas of scrub for badgers to use to forage, albeit limited. The site is connected to suitable habitat for badgers including hedgerows and tree lines within the immediate area and woodland in the further landscape. The development area is considered unsuitable to support badgers due to an absence of structural and species diversity. Badgers are highly unlikely to be present within the development areas but the presence of badgers within peripheral habitats cannot be discounted.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	Although no areas of suitable habitat are being removed as part of the development. The loss of such habitats is likely to be inconsequential to local badger populations owing to their low value and the presence of more extensive habitat locally. However, construction activities could result in the death or injury of badgers, if present.
<i>Recommendations</i>	Basic precautionary mitigation during works is recommended: - Any excavations will be covered overnight, or a ramp will be installed to enable any trapped animals to escape. - The use of night-time lighting will be avoided, or sensitive lighting design will be implemented to avoid light spill on to habitats which badgers could use. South and west boundaries. - Any chemicals or pollutants used or created by the development should be stored and disposed of correctly according to COSHH regulations. - In the unlikely event that a badger sett is identified within 30m, works must cease and advice must be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist. Suggested biodiversity enhancements The following habitat creation and enhancement opportunities could be incorporated into the proposed development which would be beneficial for badgers: Planting fruit bearing trees and species-rich grassland to increase foraging opportunities.
Riparian animals	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	There are no watercourses on or connected to the site.

<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	No impacts are anticipated on riparian animals as a result of the proposed development.
<i>Recommendations</i>	N/A
Hazel dormouse	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	A review of the MAGIC database has returned no EPSLs for dormice within a 4km radius of the site. No evidence of dormice was found within the site. It is not anticipated that dormice are present on the site due to the lack of suitable habitats present.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	No impacts are anticipated on hazel dormice as a result of the proposed development.
<i>Recommendations</i>	None.
Other e.g. hedgehog	
<i>Summary of Survey Findings</i>	No evidence of hedgehogs was found on site. The habitat recorded onsite provides suitable, albeit limited commuting and foraging opportunities for hedgehogs in the form of other neutral grassland, scrub and tree lined boundaries. The site is connected to suitable habitat for hedgehogs including hedgerows and woodlands in the further landscape. Although no evidence indicating the presence of hedgehogs was recorded, access to on-site habitats is available for hedgehogs. The future presence of foraging and commuting hedgehogs for transient periods cannot be discounted.
<i>Foreseen Impacts</i>	Although no areas of suitable habitat are being removed as part of the development. The loss of such habitats is likely to be inconsequential to local hedgehog populations owing to their low value and the presence of more extensive habitat locally. However, construction activities could result in the death or injury of hedgehogs, if present.
<i>Recommendations</i>	Similar to the badgers, a precautionary working method will be implemented during construction, including the following measures: - Any excavations will be covered overnight, or a ramp will be installed to enable any trapped animals to escape. - The use of night-time lighting will be avoided, or sensitive lighting design will be implemented to avoid light spill on to retained habitats which hedgehogs could use. - Any chemicals or pollutants used or created by the development should be stored and disposed of correctly according to COSHH regulations.

	• If any hedgehogs are found in the working area these should be allowed to disperse of their own accord or, if at immediate risk, should be moved by hand to a sheltered, vegetated area away from disturbance. Suggested biodiversity enhancements The following habitat creation and enhancement opportunities could be incorporated into the proposed development which would be beneficial for hedgehogs: • Creation of brash piles or installation of hedgehog houses in shady areas. Installation of gaps under boundary fencing to enable hedgehogs to move freely through the site.
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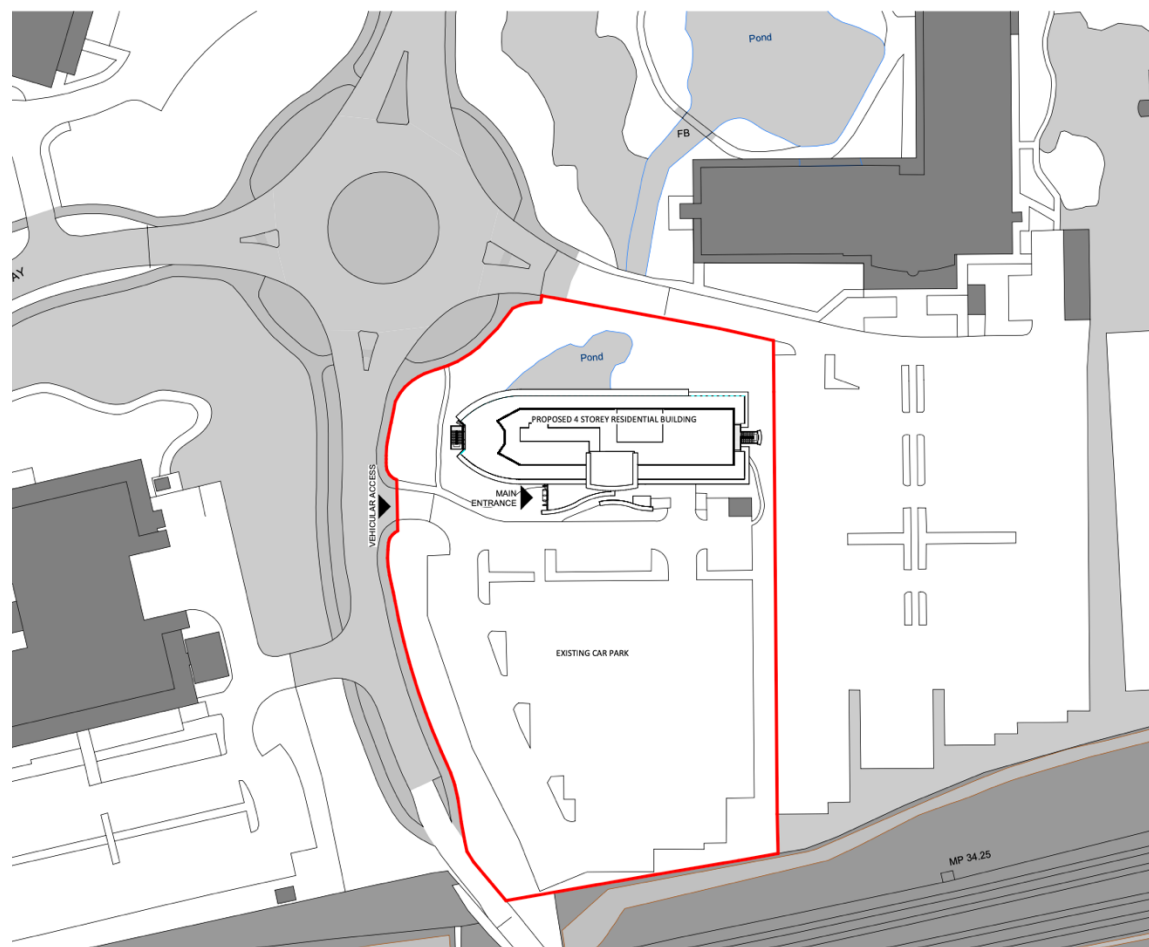
Appendix 1: Survey/Habitat map

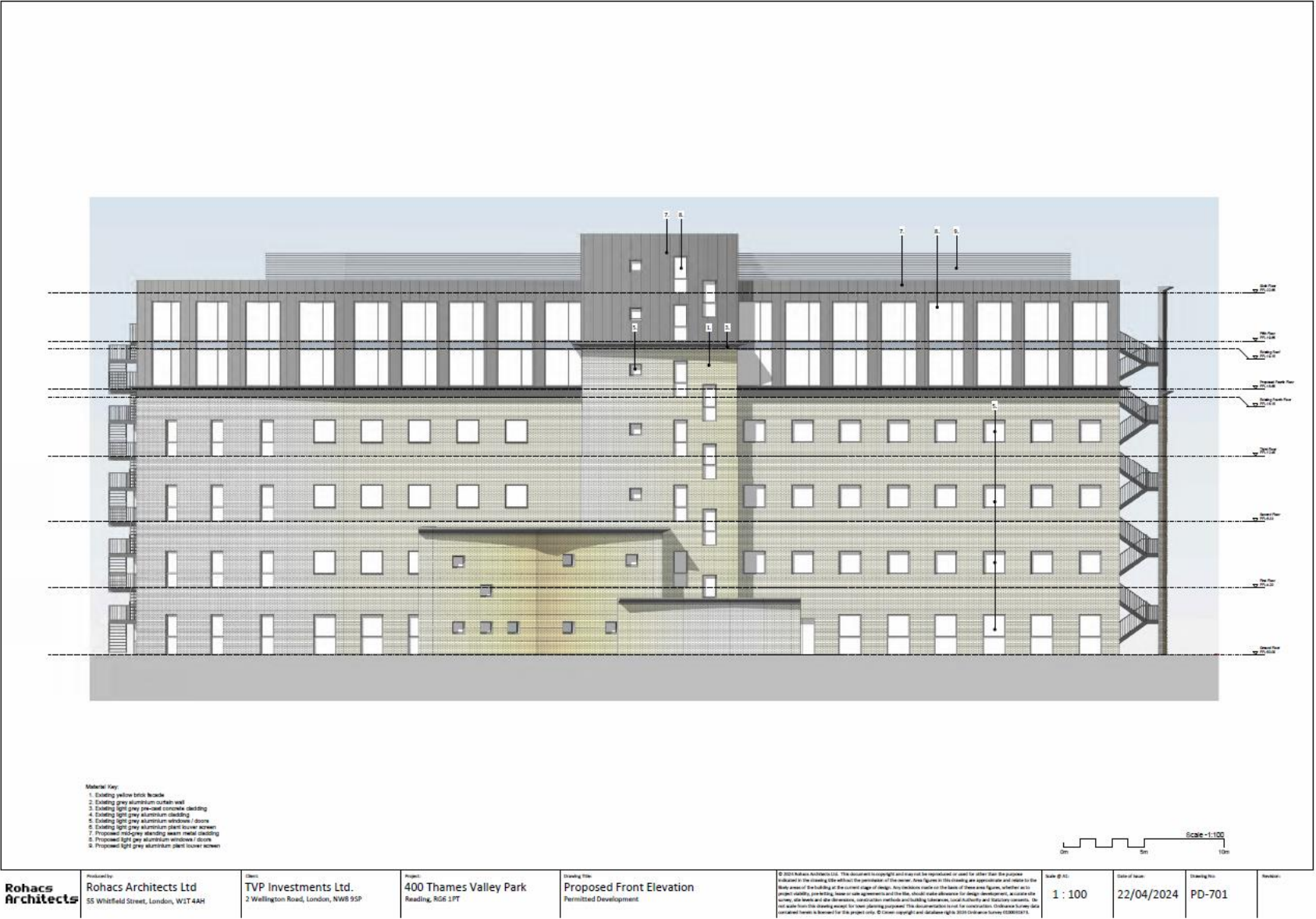


Appendix 2: Location map



Appendix 3: Proposed plan





Appendix 4: Photos



Photo 1: southern and western elevations of B1



Photo 2: northern elevation of B1



Photo 3: mixed scrub to the north of B1



Photo 4: developed land; sealed surface which comprises the majority of the site.



Photo 5: line of trees to the west of the site.



Photo 6: scattered trees, located throughout the site.



Photo 7: hedgerow to the south of B1.



Photo 8: pond to the north of B1.



Photo 9: grassland to the north of B1.

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