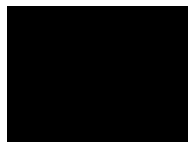


**58 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40
2NS**

Preliminary Ecological Assessment

Document Control Sheet

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	Name	Position	Signature	Date
Prepared by:	Lisha Price	Ecologist		13/03/24
Checked by:	Nick Kirke	Ecologist	NK	13/03/24
Updated:	Lisha Price	Ecologist		27/08/24

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1 Executive Summary

Plan Ecology Ltd was commissioned to provide a preliminary ecological assessment including a preliminary roost assessment for bats at the garages at 58 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40 2NS.

The proposed works seek to demolish the existing detached house, shed and outbuilding and build four detached houses on the Site.

Biological records were requested from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) to review designated sites, protected/ notable species and habitats within a defined search area from the centre of the site. Records for great crested newts were also requested as the Site is within an amber risk zone.

An ecological walkover was carried out by a suitably experienced ecologists in November 2023. The survey assessed the ecological value of the site and recorded any protected habitats and evidence of/ potential for any protected or notable species on site or within the relevant surrounding area. In addition, a preliminary roost assessment for bats was carried out on the buildings due to the planned demolition of the buildings.

The roost assessment identified negligible bat roosting potential on the buildings. The outbuildings were simple structures without features. There are no gaps in the cladding or around the roof tiles of the house and the loft could be fully inspected.

No bats or evidence of bats was found during the internal inspection.

As no potential bat roosting features were identified, no further surveys are recommended for bats at this time.

Any materials used during the build should be stored carefully and covered to ensure fauna are not harmed during the works.

Although no works are currently proposed in the areas of vegetation precautionary mitigation for nesting birds is recommended if any clearing is required prior to any works. Scrub, tree and vegetation clearance should be carried out outside of the nesting bird season (late February to August inclusive). Where vegetation cannot be removed outside of the nesting season, pre-clearance checks must be undertaken by an experienced ecologist to identify if any birds are nesting within or close to the vegetation due to be removed.

There are no ponds within the Site and the area to be developed is of low potential habitat to great crested newts comprising of lawn and bare ground. These areas should

be maintained, and the grass kept short to keep the habitat less suitable. Any areas of ruderal or scrub should be removed under supervision of an ecologist. Once removed these areas also need to be kept free from vegetation.

Precautionary mitigation for badgers is recommended; any materials used during the build should be stored carefully and covered to ensure badgers are not harmed during the works.

Works should be conducted during the day to avoid disturbance to badger foraging activities. If steep sided works are to be left overnight, these should have an exit route provided for badgers, such as a roughened plane at a suitable angle within the excavation, leading to ground level.

Biodiversity enhancements could be included at the Site such as providing additional bat roosting and bird nesting opportunities such as bat and bird boxes on trees and bee bricks built into the new elevations; a hibernaculum could be built in the Site to provide hibernation opportunities for reptiles and amphibians.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 Plan Ecology Ltd has been commissioned to provide an ecological assessment including a preliminary bat assessment and bat surveys of 58 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40 2NS. Grid Reference: SU 81101 67972 (referred to from here on as 'the Site').
- 2.1.2 This report sets out the ecological issues associated with the site and the surrounding area and identifies how these will be addressed through scheme design and mitigation or compensation in order to meet with local and national planning policy and legal requirements relating to protected sites and species.

2.2 Site Location

- 2.2.1 The Site consists of a brick build house with a tiled roof and accessible loft space, a green house, an outbuilding and a timber clad shed with trees surrounding the area and areas of shrubbery. Immediately outside of the site there are residential and commercial areas whereas the wider landscape comprises of arable and pastoral fields and copses of trees.

2.3 Approach to Ecology Assessment

- 2.3.1 This report is informed by a desk study and field survey in order to determine the presence of, or potential for, ecologically sensitive receptors in or near the proposed development site. This information has been used to determine the approach necessary to ensure that effects on these ecologically sensitive receptors are avoided or ameliorated such that the proposed development will be acceptable with reference to the planning and legal framework relating to ecological resources.

3 Methodology

3.1 Desk study

3.1.1 Prior to undertaking the survey, searches of databases containing information on ecological records and important sites for nature conservation were made. The following sources were included in these searches:

- National Biodiversity Network (NBN) database (<http://data.nbn.org.uk/>)
- MAGIC mapping service (www.magic.gov.uk)

3.1.2 Relevant ecological records and statutory nature conservation sites within 1km were recorded.

3.1.3 Information was requested from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and has been used to inform this report.

Field Team

3.1.4 The survey was carried out by Nick Kirke from Plan Ecology Ltd. Nick Kirke has 9 years of ecological experience and holds a class 2 bat licence allowing him to enter potential bat roosts.

Preliminary Ecological Assessment

3.1.5 An ecological walkover was carried out by a suitably experienced ecologist on the 14th of November 2023. The survey assessed the ecological value of the site and recorded any protected habitats and evidence of/ potential for any protected or notable species on site or within the relevant surrounding area. Any incidental records or evidence of species were noted, and each habitat was assessed for its potential to support protected or notable species.

3.1.6 A protected species risk assessment was carried out to provide an assessment of whether the habitats present on the site and in the immediate environs are likely to support any protected species. This included a preliminary assessment of the potential presence of bats, barn owls, badgers, breeding birds, great crested newts and reptiles on or immediately adjacent to the site with the need for any further surveys identified.

Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment

- 3.1.7 The surveys were undertaken in accordance with the methods described in the Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn), Bat Conservation Trust (BCT).
- 3.1.8 The building to be affected by the planned works was surveyed during the daytime on the 14th of November 2023 by Nick Kirke (Natural England bat licence No. 50736-CLS) of Plan Ecology. The building was inspected for evidence of bats in the form of live or dead bats, droppings, urine staining and insect feeding remains such as moth and butterfly wings. An endoscope (Ridgid) was used for spot checks of internal and external gaps. The exterior of the building was surveyed for droppings on walls and window ledges.

Limitations

- 3.1.9 The Preliminary survey was carried out on one visit during the month of November; as such, seasonal variations could not be observed and potentially only a selection of all species that occur within the survey area will have been noted. The Survey therefore provides a general assessment of potential nature conservation value. However, it is considered that the combination of biological records from the desk study and the site visit provides an accurate representation of the various species and habitat types present or potentially present within the survey area.
- 3.1.10 All accessible areas of the building and grounds could be surveyed without restrictions.

Bat survey results are generally considered to be valid within two years of the survey date or until the next active bat season of May-September. The County Council Ecologists and/or Natural England may ask for updated surveys if the reports are older than one year.

4 Results and Interpretation

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 This section sets out the findings of the desk study and survey work and determines which of these have significance with reference to ecological planning policy and legislation and, therefore, need to be considered further in terms of mitigation and/or compensation in subsequent sections of this report. Summaries of relevant legislation and planning policy are included where this is relevant to provide context to the reasoning.

4.2 Designated Sites

- 4.2.1 The desk-based search shows there is one Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Longmoor Bog. As a base-poor valley mire, it is situated three miles south-west of Wokingham and lies in a shallow valley on sandy deposits of the Lower Bagshot beds. A small stream arises from an outlet from Longmoor Lake and follows a straight course through the main area of carr woodland. Longmoor bog is also included as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
- 4.2.2 There are several Local Wildlife Sites in the desk-based search.
- 4.2.3 One such is Longmoor Lake which is part of California Country Park and includes the lake, lakeside path and some mixed woodland.
- 4.2.4 Another such is The Moors (including Sand Martins Golf Course Edge) which is an area of wet woodland, marsh and a marshy meadow managed by Wokingham District Council.
- 4.2.5 Another Local Wildlife site is Longmoor Woodland and Bog is the part of California Country Park that lies outside the Longmoor Bog SSSI. There is a lack of specific habitat details.
- 4.2.6 Lastly, Brook Farm Meadows is a site that site comprises two wet grasslands split and surrounded by a thick scrubby hedgerow. The grassland areas are neutral to acid uneven marshy grassland with significant areas of remnant rush pasture. The rush pasture areas are concentrated around several poorly drained ditches running across the site.
- 4.2.7 No works will take place within the designated sites.

4.3 Habitat Description

Buildings

- 4.3.1 The site consists of a brick-built, detached building with clay roof tiles. The interior roof liner consists of wooden cladding.

- 4.3.2 The outbuilding adjacent to the main building is a single storey wooden clad structure. There is also a wooden shed with a corrugated roof. This is a simple structure and in good condition without any gaps or cracks.

Hardstanding

- 4.3.3 The driveway leading to the property is formed of hardstanding. There is also a path leading past the side elevation of the main house.

Amenity grassland

- 4.3.4 The rear garden consists mainly of amenity grass which is kept short from regular mowing.

Scattered trees

There are a number of trees throughout the Site with species including ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, conifer *Pinus sp.*, Japanese maple *Acer sp.*, hazel *Corylus avellana* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*.

4.4 Protected Species

- 4.4.1 The desk study and site surveys combined have allowed determination of the species that are likely to be affected by the proposed development. A description of the suitability of the site for these ecological receptors, and any evidence of their presence, is set out below.

Badgers

- 4.4.2 The desk study contains 7 confidential records of [REDACTED] between 2003 and 2022.
- 4.4.3 No signs of badger setts or evidence of badgers commuting or foraging on the Site were seen during the survey. There were no visible animal paths, holes, diggings or latrines present.

Bats

- 4.4.4 The desk study contained records for Common pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, Soprano pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, Nathusius' pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus Nathusii*, Natterer's bat *Myotis nattereri*, Noctule bats *Nyctalus noctule*, Leisler's bat *Nyctalus leisleri*, Serotine bats *Eptesicus serotinus*, and Brown long-eared bats *Plecotus auritus* within 1km of the site.

General information about bats and buildings

- 4.4.5 External features of the building can potentially be used as roosting sites by e.g. Pipistrelle bat species (*Pipistrellus spp*). Pipistrelle bats are the most common bats out of the British species and they are known to almost exclusively roost

inside buildings utilising areas such as cavity walls, soffits and fascia boards, and between tiles and roofing felt. It is not practical to carry out a full physical examination of such building features, which is why activity surveys have to be done during summer months (May-September) when the bats are fully active. Access points of 1-2 centimetres only are used by bats to enter and exit their roosting sites. Most buildings will have gaps of such size in roof areas as ventilation of the roof void would otherwise not be possible.

External and internal inspection results

- 4.4.6 The roost assessment identified negligible roosting potential on the buildings. Refer to the Preliminary Roost Assessment.
- 4.4.7 No further surveys for bats are recommended.

Breeding Birds

- 4.4.8 There are records of a number of schedule 1 birds including Kingfishers *Alcedo atthis*, Brambling *Fringilla monifringilla* and Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*.
- 4.4.9 No schedule one birds, or nesting birds were found on the Site during the survey.
- 4.4.10 The trees and shrubs on the Site may provide suitable habitat for breeding birds during the nesting season.

Reptiles

- 4.4.11 There are records of slow worm *Angilis fragilis* Grass snake *Natrix helvetica* and Common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* within 1km of the site.
- 4.4.12 The vegetated areas along the boundaries of the Site have low suitable habitat for reptiles.

Great Crested Newts

- 4.4.13 There are records of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* over 3000m of the site. A total of 18 great crested newts have been recorded since 2010 up until 2019.
- 4.4.14 See Appendix E for map and table of great crested newt data.
- 4.4.15 There are no ponds within the Site and the area to be developed is of low potential habitat to great crested newts comprising of lawn and bare ground. There is a flowing ditch to the rear of the Site unsuitable for newts.

5 Potential Impacts and Mitigation Recommendations

5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 The presence of protected sites and species described in the preceding sections of this report and the legislation and planning policies relating to them make them a material consideration in the planning application for the proposed development. Therefore, the likely impacts of the proposed development on those protected sites and species identified as being present, or likely to be present, within the study area are discussed below, along with the appropriate mitigation and compensation that will be required to ensure that the proposed development follows National and local planning policy and legislation. Where mitigation and compensation is required to ameliorate those impacts, this is also set out below.

5.2 Protected Species

Badgers

- 5.2.1 Badgers are protected under the Badgers Act 1992. It is an offence to kill, injure or disturb a badger whilst in a sett. It is also an offence to damage or destroy a sett.
- 5.2.2 Precautionary mitigation for badgers is recommended; any materials used during the build should be stored carefully and covered to ensure badgers are not harmed during the works.
- 5.2.3 Works should be conducted during the day to avoid disturbance to badger foraging activities.
- 5.2.4 If steep sided works are to be left overnight, these should have an exit route provided for badgers, such as a roughened plant at a suitable angle within the excavation, leading to ground level.

Bats

- 5.2.5 All UK bat species are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended. Several bat species are also priority species under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006), identifying them as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

5.2.6 As population numbers have fallen, all bats and their roosts are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

5.2.7 Under this legislation it is an offence to:

- deliberately capture (or take), injure or kill a bat;
- intentionally, recklessly or deliberately disturb a bat (in relation to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) the offence applies whilst the species is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; in relation to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 it applies anywhere);
- damage or destroy the breeding or resting place (roost) of a bat;
- possess a bat (alive or dead), or any part of a bat;
- intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost;
- sell (or offer for sale) or exchange bats (alive or dead), or parts of bats.

5.2.8 Please refer to the original legislation for the definitive interpretation.

Breeding Birds

5.2.9 The majority of UK bird species are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended, and a number of species are listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006), identifying them as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

5.2.10 If any vegetation needs to be removed on the Site Precautionary mitigation for tree, scrub and vegetation clearance should be undertaken outside of the nesting bird season (late February to August inclusive). Where vegetation cannot be removed outside of the nesting season, pre-clearance checks must be undertaken by an experienced ecologist to identify if any birds are nesting within or close to the vegetation due to be removed. An informed decision should then be made if the vegetation clearance can be undertaken. If a bird nest is found, it must be left in-situ and protected from works; no works can be undertaken in that area until the young birds have fledged from the nest site. This may take several weeks and will vary depending on the species.

5.2.11 Works should be restricted where possible to daylight hours to prevent any adverse impacts on roosting birds at dusk and dawn.

Reptiles

- 5.2.12 The four common native reptiles; grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*), and adder (*Vipera berus*) are partially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended. Under this legislation it is an offence to intentionally kill or injure these species. The widespread reptile species are listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006), identifying them as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.
- 5.2.13 No planned works are currently proposed to take place on the vegetated areas. Any management of the vegetation should be undertaken in the active season (March to September inclusive) when the weather is considered warm enough for reptiles to move on their own accord into other vegetation within the garden.

Great Crested Newts

- 5.2.14 Great crested newts receive full protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 2010 ('Habitat Regulations') (as amended). These make 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;
 - 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 great crested newt;
 - 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.
- 5.2.15 There are no ponds within the Site and the area to be developed is of low potential habitat to great crested newts, lawn and bare ground. These areas should be maintained, and the grass kept short to keep the habitat less suitable. Any areas of ruderal or scrub should be removed under supervision of an ecologist. Once removed these areas also need to be kept free from vegetation.
- 5.2.16 Historically on the OS there appears to have been a pond at the Site TN 28 photograph show that this appear is currently bare ground.

- 5.2.17 There are no records of great crested newts within 1km and no ponds in or around the Site. However, should great crested newts be found at any time during the works operations must cease immediately and an ecologist consulted.
- 5.2.18 The likelihood of finding newts during the course of the development and individual newts being harmed or disturbed is considered to be very low, particularly if precautions are used as set out.

5.3 Recommendations

- 5.3.1 The grassland within the construction area should be kept short prior to the commencement of site work to minimise the likelihood of newts of being present during excavations, the grassland should be cut starting from the centre of the site working outwards towards the margins to allow any newts present to move to safety. Any vegetation in the development area should be kept closely mown during the course of the construction work.
- 5.3.2 Any open excavations and trenches should be backfilled before nightfall, or alternatively, escape ramps should be installed to allow newts to escape if they become trapped;
- 5.3.3 Any building materials stored on site should be on the grassland and raised off the ground on pallets as otherwise they may offer temporary resting places or hibernation sites for newts.
- 5.3.4 In the event that great crested newts are encountered during the course of construction, works should stop, and a licensed ecologist called to site to attend to the newt and liaise with Natural England on how to proceed.

Ecological Enhancement Opportunities

- 5.3.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), revised in 2018, states that the planning system should contribute to "minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures". It also states that "opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged".
- 5.3.6 The master planning process should maximise opportunities for enhancement, in order to achieve a net increase in biodiversity. This is in accordance with the NERC Act (2006) which requires that *"every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat."* Recommendations for ecological enhancement are provided below.....
- Minimising light and noise pollution on the site. In particular minimising the hours the construction site is lit.
 - Nesting bird and bat potential can be enhanced with the inclusion of bat and bird boxes placed on trees to remain on the Site or built in nest and roost boxes on the new elevations.
 - Hedgehog houses could be included in the garden designs as far from the driveway and road as possible.
 - Bee bricks can be included in the walls of the new extension.
 - Any landscaping should include a variety of native trees to encourage and support native fauna.
 - Hibernacula could be constructed in the Site to provide habitat for amphibians and reptiles.

See Appendix D for biodiversity enhancements.

Appendix A: Site Location



Appendix B Photographs/ Target Notes



TN 1: Timber clad shed.



TN 2: Muddy terrain



TN 3: Rear elevation of house.



TN 4: Interlocking roof tiles in good condition no lifting or gaps.



TN 5: Well-fitted tight soffits without gaps.



TN 6: Loft fully inspected.



TN 7: Timber clad roof liner



TN 8: Loft space of house.



TN 9: Tight fitted lead flashing.



TN 10: Rear garden bordered by trees and shrubs.



TN 11: Rear garden.



TN 12: Driveway with hedges and trees.



TN 13: Wooden outbuilding interior.



TN 14: Wooden outbuilding interior with missing roofing.



TN 15: Wooden outbuilding.



TN 16: Small wooden shed.



TN 17: Trees.



TN 18: Main house.



TN 19: Main house with no gaps in the roof tiles.



TN 20: Side of house.



TN 21: Log pile.



TN 22: Log pile.



TN 23: Muddy terrain.



TN 24: Log pile.



TN 25: Small ditch.



TN 26: Muddy terrain.



TN 27: Pile of wood chips.



TN 28: Large felled tree.

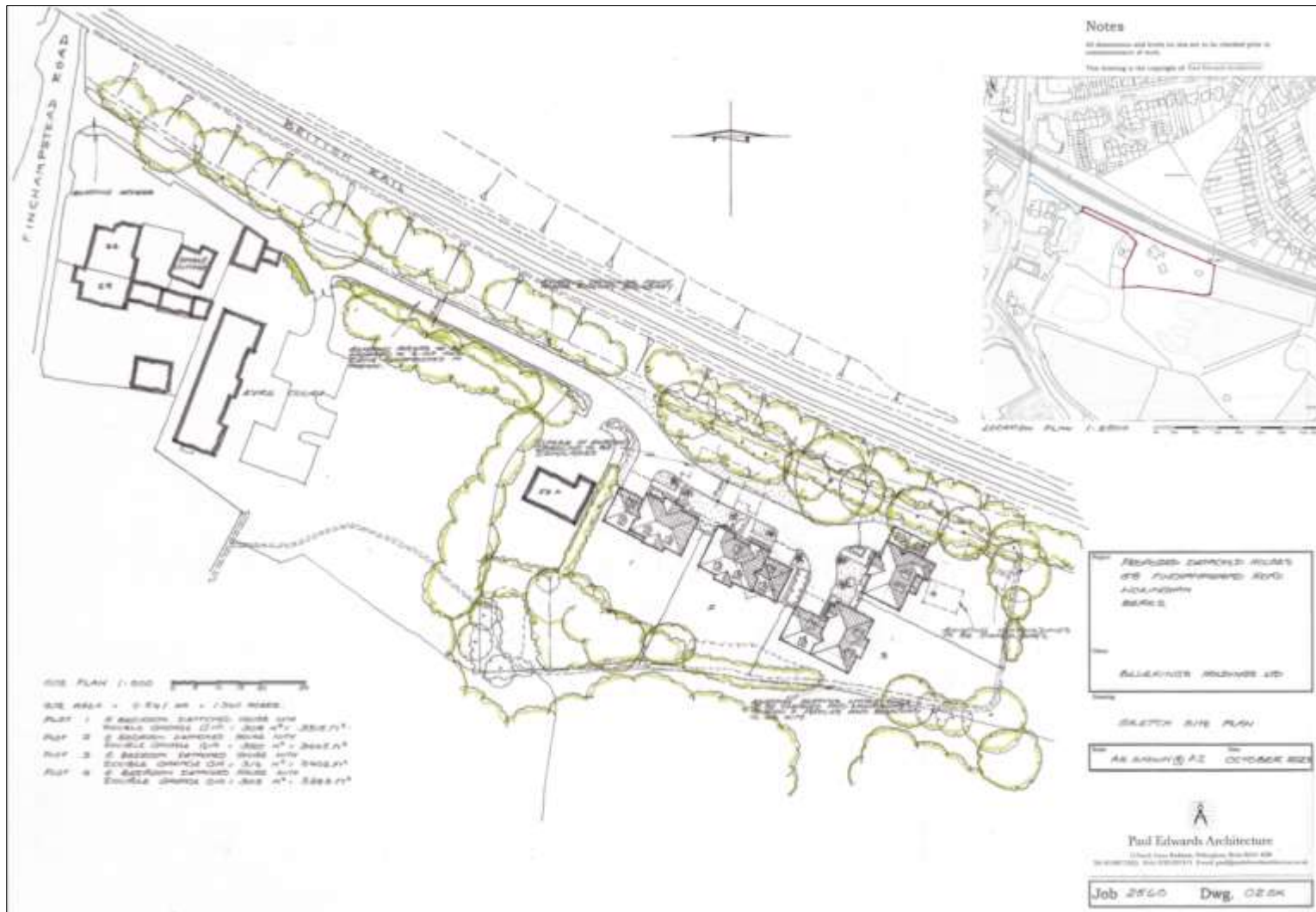


TN 27: Large felled tree.



TN 28: Bare ground.

Appendix C: Planned Works



Appendix D: Biodiversity Enhancements

Woodstone Built in Open nest box



Forticrete Bat brick



Bee Brick Nester Hotel Solitary Bee Hive House 21.5cm x 10.5cm x 6.5cm Red

£78.99

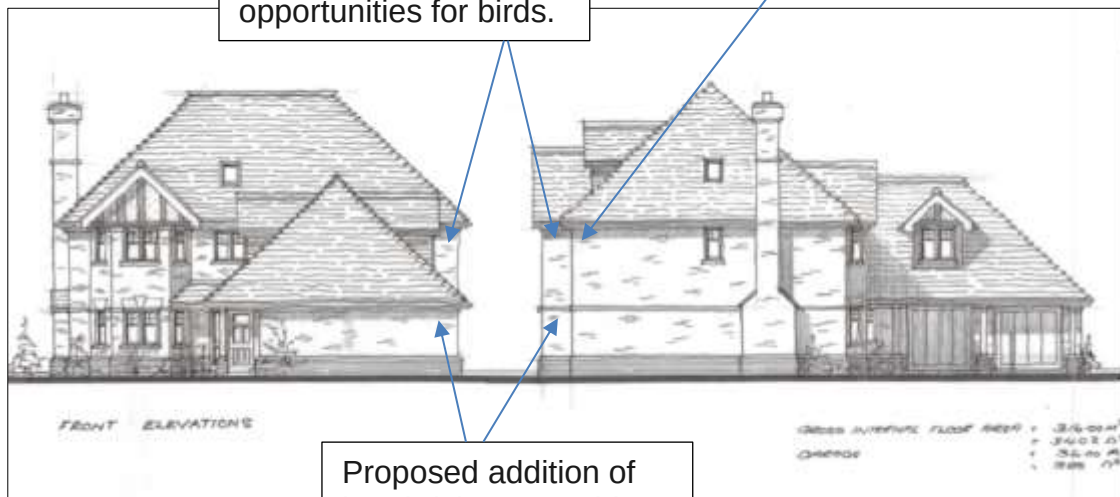


- ✓ Bee Brick 21.5cm x 10.5cm x 6.5cm
- ✓ The bee brick is a beautiful, stylish product which makes a great gift or a satisfying treat for yourself, great to introduce kids to learning more about the world about them.
- ✓ Each bee brick has cavities where the bees will lay their eggs, sealing the entrance with mud or chewed up vegetation.
- ✓ The bee brick can be used in urban spaces and places where there may not be alternative nesting sites for bees
- ✓ The bee brick won the Soil Association's 2014 Innovation Award, sponsored by the Duchy Future Farming Programme.



Proposed addition of bat bricks to provide roosting potential for bats

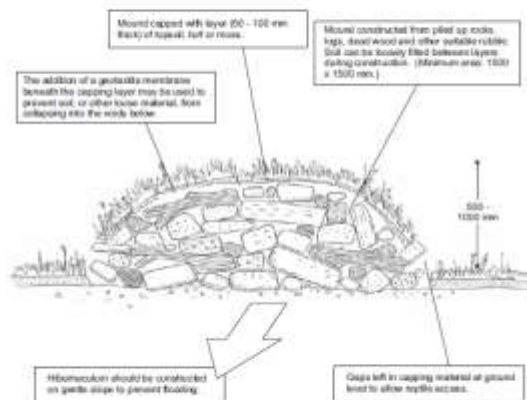
Proposed addition of bird nesting bricks to provide nesting opportunities for birds.



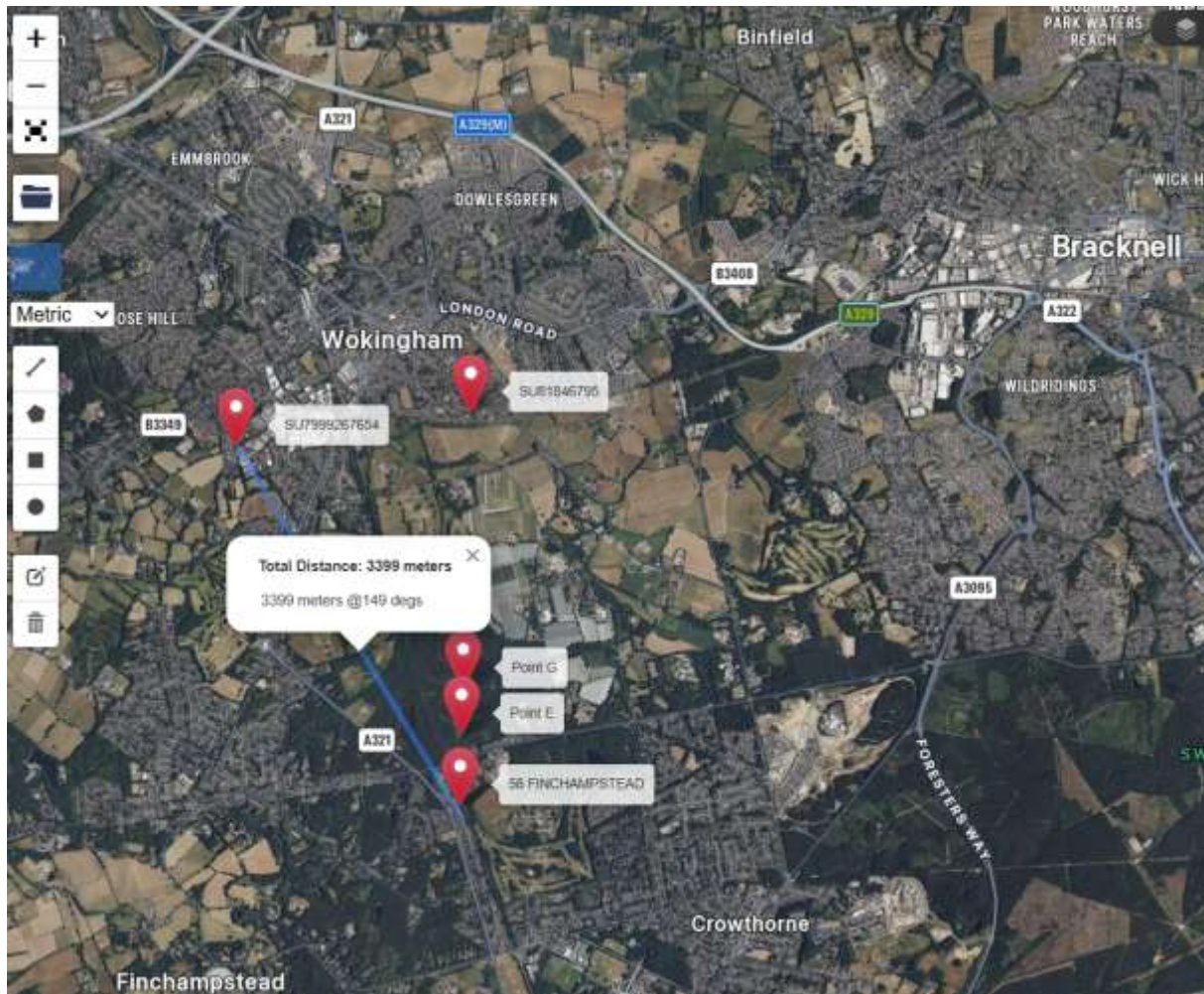
Proposed addition of bee bricks to provide habitat for bees onsite.

Hibernaculum on impermeable ground

Where ground conditions are impermeable, then an 'above-ground' or mounded design should be utilised in order to prevent the hibernaculum from flooding. This design should also be used if it is not possible to excavate a pit for any other reason.



Appendix E: Great Crested Newt Data



Nearest recorded great crested newt 3399 meters from Site.

	PondID	Abundance	Negative	RecDate	RecYear	GridRef
186	NA	13 Females; 2 Males; Eggs	N	26/04/2008	2008	SU81846795
1505	NA	1 Male	N	02/05/2012	2012	SU81846795
3660	NA	2 Adult Females	N	01/10/2019- 10/11/2019	2019	SU7999267654

Source: TVERC