Daniel Washington C2010
Designing Out Crime Officer

Thames Valley Police
Headquarters South
Oxford Road
Kidlington
OX5 2NX

27 November 2024

Reference: 242653
Location: Hogwood Farm, Sheerlands Road, Arborfield, Wokingham, RG40 4QY

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you for consulting Thames Valley Police in relation to the above planning application. I have reviewed the submitted documents and crime statistics for the area and the following comments are provided to ensure the application meets the requirements of;

- The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 paragraph 96(b); which states that Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion…
- The National Planning Policy Framework 2023, paragraph 135(f) which states that "Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible… and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience".

The layout of the site around plots 1048 – 1053 creates an issue from a designing out crime perspective. The proposed layout places plots 1049 and 1052 essentially within the centre of a perimeter block which exposes the vulnerable side and rear boundaries of a number of units to the public realm. Whilst plots 1049-1052 will provide a degree of overlooking of the exposed rear boundaries and it is noted that robust walls are proposed as boundary treatment in these locations, the rear elevations of properties are where the majority of burglaries are perpetrated and having rear/side elevation located adjacent to the public realm make the rear of the property more accessible to offenders. The side and rear boundaries also present blank frontages to the public realm which can be attractive to antisocial behaviour.

The issue with the layout in this location is exacerbated as plot 1048 does not have any windows proposed on its side elevation which, if included, could provide some additional active surveillance and reduce the amount of blank frontage. Also, the positioning of plot 1053 exposes the rear boundaries of plots 1031 and 1032. It is recommended that the layout of the scheme is amended so as to minimise the number of units with exposed side and/or rear boundaries.

With regards to boundary treatment, it is noted that the side and rear boundary to plot 1031 is proposed to be marked by hedgerow. Whilst hedgerows can provide defensive planting, it is essential that they are to an appropriate height if providing the primary boundary treatment (at least 1.8m) and must be reinforced with additional boundary treatment to ensure the boundary is sufficiently robust, particularly as the hedgerow matures. It is noted that brick walls are proposed throughout the development to define boundaries where they abut the public realm and it would be appropriate for the garden boundary for plot 1031 to also to be defined as such (in addition to the hedgerow).

The above comments are made on behalf of Thames Valley Police and relate to designing out crime only. I hope that you find these comments of assistance. If you have any queries relating to crime prevention design, please do not hesitate to contact myself.

Yours faithfully,

Dan Washington | Designing Out Crime Officer

3rd Party Planning Application – 242653

Wokingham District Council

P.O Box 157

Shute End

WOKINGHAM

Berks

RG40 1WR

Our DTS Ref: 78047

Your Ref: 242653

14 November 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: STONES , PARK LANE, FINCHAMPSTEAD, WOKINGHAM, RG40 4QR

Waste Comments

Thames Water would advise that with regard to FOUL WATER sewerage network infrastructure capacity, we would not have any objection to the above planning application, based on the information provided.

Water Comments

With regard to water supply, this comes within the area covered by the South East Water Company. For your information the address to write to is - South East Water Company, Rocfort Road, Snodland, Kent, ME6 5AH, Tel: 01444-448200

Yours faithfully

Development Planning Department

Development Planning,

Thames Water,

Maple Lodge STW,

Denham Way,

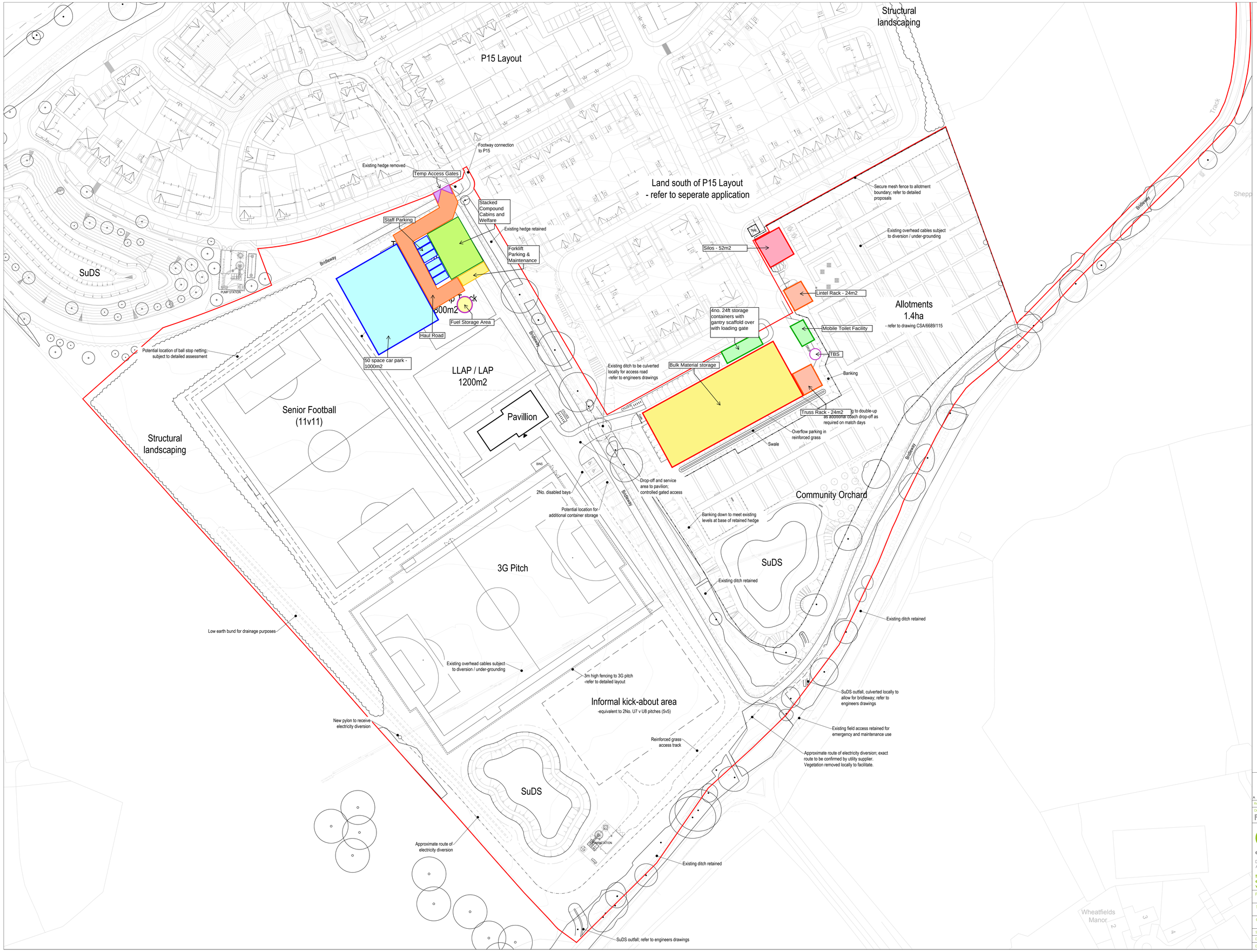
Rickmansworth,

WD3 9SQ

Tel:020 3577 9998

Email: devcon.team@thameswater.co.uk

APPENDIX C: DRAWINGS



Notes:
- For Sports Hub Land Masterplan: refer to drawing CSA/6689/140
- For Sports Hub Land detailed landscape proposals (hard and soft) refer to drawings CSA/6689/142-144
- For detailed allotment proposals: refer to drawing CSA/6689/115
- For Land south of P15 details refer to seperate application

Rev	Date	By	Description
A	08/10/24	GC	Allotment boundary updated to banking

Drawing Status
FOR PLANNING

CSA environmental
Dixies Barns, High Street,
Ashwell, Hertfordshire SG7 5NT
t 01462 743647
e ashwell@csaenvironmental.co.uk
w csaenvironmental.co.uk

Project	Finchwood Park, Finchampstead
Title	Sports Hub Land General Arrangement
Client	CALA Homes
Scale	1:500 @ A0
Drawn	GC
Date	October 2024
Checked	-
Drawing No.	CSA/6689/SK05
Rev	A

Cala at Finchwood Park
Phase six

Construction access route.

Temporary road blocks to be installed to reduce public interaction along route - shown as -

Two Traffic marshalls to be in place for duration of large scale works, one to be in place at site access points, roaming between the two gates. One will be located at the mid route pinch point with a small hut as shown.

Visitors bays after pinch point to have planted sections removed temporarily to enable vehicles to pass and hold safely. These must not be parked in by residents.

The above development layout is not drawn to scale and is for general guidance only. Road layouts, pathways and external treatments may differ. Please confirm the most up-to-date details with our Sales Consultant prior to reservation.

APPENDIX D: ECOLOGICAL REPORTS

Landscape Architecture
Masterplanning
Ecology

hda

HOGWOOD FARM, FINCHAMPSTEAD

ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT – LAND SOUTH OF PARCEL 15

Prepared for CALA Homes Thames Ltd

by

Hankinson Duckett Associates

HDA ref: 868.1

October 2024

hankinson duckett associates
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location and summary description

1.1.1 This document describes an Ecological Assessment of proposed development within Land South of Parcel 15 of the development of approximately 110ha of land at Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead. The Land South of Parcel 15 development area comprises approximately 2ha of land, hereinafter referred to as 'the site'. The site centre is located by National Grid Reference SU 776 641. The study was commissioned by CALA Homes Thames Ltd in September 2023.

1.1.2 The Land South of Parcel 15 site is located to the north-west of the village of Finchampstead, Berkshire. In general terms, it comprises part of a modified grassland field and a soil bund dominated by recently established scrub and tall ruderal vegetation. The field is bordered to the east by a non-native ornamental hedgerow and beyond the western site boundary is a ditch with scattered Bramble scrub and trees and a track. The Land South of Parcel 15 site is bordered to the north by Parcels 14 and 15 of the wider development which is currently under construction; to the west and south by a future development parcel which currently comprises modified grassland and scrub; and to the east by buildings and grassland. The location and boundary of the Land South of Parcel 15 site is shown in *Figure 1*.

1.1.3 The Land South of Parcel 15 site is part of a larger area covering a total of 110ha, hereinafter referred to as the 'wider site'. The wider site includes residential properties associated with Parcel 1 and a construction site associated with Parcel 2 in the north-west and a SANG in the south which comprises a mix of wetland, species-rich grassland, scrub and woodland habitats. In general terms, the western area of the wider site is comprised of three fields of disturbed ground dominated by short ruderal vegetation with scattered areas of tall ruderal vegetation and large spoil heaps bordered by mature trees and woodland with scrub field margins. The central and eastern areas of the wider site are comprised of areas of hardstanding and construction/disturbed ground bordered by mature treelines and woodland. The south-eastern area of the wider site comprise two fields of semi-improved grassland intersected by a ditch with associated scrub and scattered trees. A species-rich hedgerow with trees adjacent to Park Lane is present along the southern boundary. Woodland shaws and copses are located in the northern, western and central areas of the wider site, including mixed, broadleaved and broadleaved plantation woodland types, some of which are included on Natural England's Inventory of Ancient Woodland. Wetland habitats within the wider site include drainage ditches and small streams associated with the field boundaries and several ponds in poor condition are located across the wider site. The wider site is bordered to the north by a construction site, the Bohunt

School and the Hogwood Industrial Estate; to the east by Park Lane beyond which lie residential dwellings and park homes; to the south by Park Lane and farmland; and to the west by A327 Reading Road and Sheerlands Road beyond which lie farmland and woodland. The wider area is dominated by agricultural land interspersed with woodland and residential properties.

1.1.4 The location and boundary of the site and wider site are shown in *Figure 1*. A more detailed description of the habitats present within the site is given in *Section 3* below.

1.2 Development proposals

1.2.1 Planning permission (O/2014/2179 and 140764) was granted in January 2017 for a hybrid application. This comprises:

- Outline permission for demolition of all existing buildings on site; up to 1,500 new dwellings; employment floor space; a Neighbourhood Centre; a primary school; sports pitches and associated pavilion building; highways infrastructure; associated landscaping, public realm, open/green space and sustainable urban drainage systems; and
- Full permission for a 29.7ha Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) in the south of the site.

The hybrid planning permission was subsequently amended by a Section 73 application (181194) which was approved in November 2018.

1.2.2 Following proactive engagement with Officers at Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) an opportunity to deliver the sport and community facilities earlier, enabled by the delivery of 48 new homes was identified. The Land South of Parcel 15 site will subsequently be subject to a full planning application for the construction of 48 new residential dwellings and associated access and landscaping. The location and boundary of the site are shown in *Figure 1*.

1.2.3 The location and extent of the development proposals are shown on the *Site Layout* (Omega Architects, 2024).

1.3 Scope and purpose of the report

1.3.1 This study brings together the results of all ecological survey work carried out at the site in the context of the development proposals described in *Section 1.2* above.

1.3.2 Specifically, the aims of this study are:

1. To assess the nature conservation value of habitats associated with the site and the site surrounds;
2. To assess the likely presence of protected or notable species;
3. To identify constraints to development due to the above, and to identify the likely ecological effects of development; and
4. To identify appropriate measures to avoid or minimise the ecological effects of development, and where effects are unavoidable, to develop proposals to mitigate or compensate for these effects in accordance with planning policy and nature conservation legislation.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk study

2.1.1 Existing ecological and nature conservation data relevant to the site was collated from various sources including the MAGIC online database and Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). Protected species records were obtained for an area of approximately 2km around the site and a check for designated sites was extended to an area of up to 10km from the site boundary. The desk study is summarised in *Section 3.2* below and plans and citations are given in *Appendix A*.

2.2 Field surveys

2.2.1 A suite of ecological surveys have been conducted at the Hogwood Farm site since 2008, including an ecological desk study, extended Phase 1 habitat survey, invasive plant species walkover survey and specialist surveys for the following species/species groups:

- Bats;
- Water Voles;
- Otters;
- Dormice;
- [redacted]
- Breeding birds;
- Reptiles; and
- Great Crested Newts.

2.2.2 The methodologies, habitat descriptions and results of the surveys conducted to inform the Environmental Statement are detailed in the *Chapter 7: Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna* (Royal Haskoning DHV, 2014). Where appropriate, additional surveys have subsequently been undertaken by HDA between 2017 and 2024 to update the earlier surveys and to inform ongoing development design works.

2.2.3 The results of the surveys are summarised in this report and where applicable full copies of the assessments are given in the accompanying appendices/figures[1]. These include:

- HDA (2024a) *Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead: Phase 1 Habitat Survey and Target Notes*. Hankinson Duckett Associates, Wallingford – *Figure 1;*
- HDA (2023a) *Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead: Summary of Parcels 14 and 15 Invasive Species Walkover Survey Findings.* Hankinson Duckett Associates, Wallingford – *Appendix B;*
- HDA (2023b) *Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead: 2022 Bat Survey Report*. Hankinson Duckett Associates, Wallingford – *Appendix C;*
- HDA (2018) *Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead: Water Vole and Otter Survey Report*. Hankinson Duckett Associates, Wallingford*;*

[redacted]

- HDA (2024c) *Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead: 2023 Reptile Survey Report and Site-wide Outline Mitigation Strategy*. Hankinson Duckett Associates, Wallingford – *Appendix E;*
- HDA (2024d) *Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead: 2023 Great Crested Newt HSI and eDNA Survey Report*. Hankinson Duckett Associates, Wallingford – *Appendix F.*

In addition to update the information detailed within these ecology reports, an ecological walkover survey including an updated Phase 1 habitat survey, Phase 1 bat scoping survey [redacted] was carried out on the 14th August 2023 by Fiona Muir of HDA. The results of this survey are summarised below and, where applicable, updated Figures are included.

2.3 Evaluation Criteria

2.3.1 The evaluation of the site, and the habitats within it, is based on the results of the field surveys described above, any designations pertaining to the site and existing ecological information collected during the desk study.

2.3.2 Each ecological resource (site, habitat, species or feature) was assigned a value at the following geographic scales (CIEEM, 2018):

- International
- National (England/Scotland/Wales/Northern Ireland)
- Regional
- County/Metropolitan
- District/Borough

[1] More recent reports for updated surveys reference earlier survey findings where these remain relevant.

- Local/Parish
- Within immediate zone of influence only (Site/Negligible)

2.3.3 Assigning value is relatively straightforward in the case of designated sites, and undesignated sites meeting designation criteria. However, in most cases evaluation of ecological resources is not straightforward and requires a degree of knowledge, training, experience and professional judgement (Usher, 1986; Spellerberg, 1992). Evaluation of an ecological resource was based on a number of criteria (Ratcliffe, 1977; CIEEM, 2018). These are summarised in *Appendix G*.

2.3.4 The potential for protected species and Habitats and Species of Principal Importance identified under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act to be present within the site has been assessed on the basis of the specialist ecological surveys, habitats and features present and the results of the desk study.

3 BASELINE CONDITIONS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The following section summarises the findings of the desk study and extended Phase 1 habitat survey, and outlines the findings of specialist surveys carried out at the site. The full findings of these studies are provided in *Figures 1-2* and *Appendices A-F*.

3.2 Desk study

3.2.1 The following section summarises the findings of the desk study most recently undertaken by HDA in September 2024. Plans showing the locations of designated sites are given in *Appendix A*.

Designated sites

3.2.2 No statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations pertain to the site or adjacent land. This is confirmed by information from the MAGIC online database and TVERC.

Statutory designated areas

3.2.3 One internationally designated area is located within 10km of the site boundary, this is Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) the closest unit of which is located approximately 1.9km to the south-west of the site. This 8309.5ha SPA comprises open heathland, scrub and woodland supporting internationally important numbers of ground nesting birds (Nightjar, Woodlark and Dartford Warbler).

3.2.4 One National Nature Reserves (NNRs) is located within 5km of the site. This is Castle Bottom NNR which is located approximately 4.5km to the south of the site. This 30.82ha NNR comprises a large valley bog associated with heathland habitats. NNRs have been established to protect some of England's most nationally important habitats in addition to providing opportunities for research.

3.2.5 Three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are located within 5km of the site. These are:

- Longmoor Bog SSSI located approximately 870m north-east of the site. This 14.03ha SSSI comprises a base-poor valley mire supporting well-developed Alder, Grey Willow, Downy Birch and Alder Buckthorn carr and wet heathland. In addition, the SSSI supports an area of secondary mixed woodland.
- Bramshill SSSI (also forming part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA described in *Section 3.2.3*) located approximately 1.9km south-west of the site. This 673.27ha SSSI comprises extensive areas of conifer plantation together with a series of shallow acidic ponds within relic wet heathland and a small unimproved grassland area adjacent which provides habitat for the nationally rare Small Fleabane *Pulicaria vulgaris.* The SSSI supports a rich assemblage of dragonfly and damselfly and provides habitat for internationally important populations of Nightjar, Woodlark and Dartford Warbler.
- Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI (also forming part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA described in *Section 3.2.3* and the Castle Bottom NNR described in *Section 3.2.4*) located approximately 4.5km south of the site. This 922.74ha SSSI comprises one of the largest remnants of lowland heathland in the Thames Basin. This SSSI is notified for its heathland and young conifer plantation which supports an internationally important population of Dartford Warbler and populations of two other internationally important species, Woodlark and Nightjar. The scrub/heathland interface supports a particularly rich invertebrate fauna including a number of nationally scarce species. It also supports an outstanding dragonfly assemblage.

3.2.6 Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) are used by Natural England to identify development activities in the vicinity of SSSIs, SPAs and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) which, in the absence of avoidance or mitigation measures, may adversely affect designated features, thereby requiring planning authorities to consult with Natural England where potentially damaging activities are proposed.

Table 1: Areas of the site falling within IRZs.

Area of site	Associated IRZs	Potentially damaging activities relevant to the site
Eastern area of site	• 500m-1km IRZ for the Longmoor Bog SSSI • 2-3km IRZ for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA (and associated Bramshill SSSI)	• **Residential:** Residential development of 100 units or more. • **Rural Residential:** Any residential development of 50 or more units outside existing settlements/urban areas.
Central area of site	• 1-2km IRZ for the Longmoor Bog SSSI • 2-3km IRZ for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA (and associated Bramshill SSSI)	Residential development, on any scale, is not identified as being a potentially damaging activity for the IRZs in which this area of the site is located.
Western area of site	• 1-2km IRZ for the Longmoor Bog SSSI • 1-2km IRZ for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA (and associated Bramshill SSSI)	• **Residential:** Residential development of 50 units or more. • **Rural Residential:** Any residential development of 50 or more units outside existing settlements/urban areas.

The development proposals are to construct 48 residential dwellings on the site and as such the proposed development falls below the criteria for potentially damaging activities relevant to the protected sites in the vicinity of the site. As such Natural England would not be expected to be consulted by the planning authority on proposals for residential development at the site in this regard.

3.2.7 One Local Nature Reserve (LNRs) is located within 2km of the site. This is Longmoor Bog LNR (also forming part of the Longmoor Bog SSSI described in *Section 3.2.5*) is located approximately 970m to the north-east of the site. This 11.75ha LNR supports lowland valley mire and wet (bog) woodland.

Non-statutory designated areas

3.2.8 TVERC provided details of 11 Berkshire Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and 1 BBOWT Reserve within 2km of the site. The closest of which is Shepperlands Copse LWS (which is also Shepperlands Farm BBOWT reserve) located approximately 160m to the east of the site. This 9.42ha LWS comprises mixed woodland, a heathland restoration area and two unimproved wet meadows. The next closest LWS is Woodlands Near Banisters Farm LWS located approximately 500m to the south-west of the site. This LWS comprises two areas of ancient semi-natural woodland linked by a boundary hedge and recently planted stands of Oak, Ash, Field Maple and Wild Cherry.

3.2.9 No areas of woodland listed on Natural England's Inventory of Ancient Woodland are located within the site. 32 units of ancient woodland listed on Natural England's Inventory

of Ancient Woodland are located within 2km of the site. The closest unit to the site is located approximately 160m east of the site, associated with Shepperlands Copse LWS (as described in *Section 3.2.8*).

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and 2006 NERC Act Habitats and Species of Principal Importance

3.2.10 The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BRIG, 2011) lists habitats and species which have undergone significant declines in recent years and for which conservation is a priority in order to preserve biodiversity in the UK. The BAPs provide a list of actions to be implemented to halt or reverse these declines.

3.2.11 These habitats and species are identified as Habitats and Species of Principal Importance for the conservation of biological diversity in England under Section 41 of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. Together with the 2023 NPPF and underpinning guidance (ODPM, 2005), Section 40 of the 2006 NERC Act requires that these species are a material consideration in the planning process.

3.2.12 The Berkshire Local Nature Partnership has developed a spatial approach to biodiversity action planning in the county through Biodiversity Opportunity Area's (BOAs), which identify the most important areas for wildlife conservation in Berkshire, where targeted conservation action will have the greatest benefit. Berkshire has 29 BOAs. The site is not located within any of the BOAs, and the closest to the site is the Blackwater Valley BOA located approximately 1.3km to the south. This BOA includes the Blackwater Valley from Eversley in the west to Camberley in the east. Key habitats identified for the BOA include lowland meadows, purple moor grass and rush pasture, standing water, woodland and gravel pits with marginal fen, woodland, scrub and grassland areas. Targets and opportunities for the BOA identified include:

- Management and re-creation of grassland habitats.
- Management of gravel pits and associated habitats

3.2.13 Berkshire Local Nature Partnership also lists Habitats and Species of Principal Importance within the county. Priority species listed include Polecat, Brown Hare, Adder, farmland birds, Great Crested Newt, Desmoulin's Whorl Snail and the Small Blue butterfly. Priority habitats listed for Berkshire include:

- *Freshwater* – eutrophic standing water, ponds and rivers;
- *Wetlands* – reedbeds, lowland fen and coastal and floodplain grazing marsh;

- *Grassland* – lowland calcareous grassland, lowland dry acid grassland, lowland meadow;
- *Woodland* - lowland mixed deciduous woodland, wood pasture and parkland and wet woodland;
- *Arable* – traditional orchard and hedgerows;
- *Heathland* – lowland heathland; and
- *Inland rock* - open mosaic habitats on previously developed land.

Protected and Notable Species

3.2.14 Data provided by TVERC has shown that there no records directly associated with the site but there are records of protected and notable species occurring in the vicinity of the site including bats, Dormouse, Water Vole, [redacted] Great Crested Newt, birds, reptiles, invertebrates and plant species.

3.2.15 *Bats*

TVERC provided 623 records of bats within 2km of the site including records of Brown Long-eared bat, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Nathusius' Pipistrelle, Serotine, Noctule, Leisler's, Natterer's bat, Daubenton's, Barbastelle and *Myotis*, *Pipistrellus* and *Plecotus* species and unidentified species of bat. The closest records relate to a high-level 1km grid reference at least 320m to the south-east of the site associated with 21 records dating from 2007 to 2021 for aural bat detector recordings and droppings of Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared bats and *Pipistrellus* and *Plecotus* species.

All UK bat species are protected as European Protected Species (EPS) under the 2017 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as amended). In relation to EPS, the 2017 Regulations make it an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of an EPS;
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of any such species, in particular any disturbance which is likely to: (i) impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young; or to hibernate or migrate; (ii) affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal; and/or
- To: (i) be in possession of, or to control; (ii) to transport any live or dead animal or any part of an animal; (iii) to sell or exchange; or (iv) offer for sale or exchange any live or dead animal or part of an animal of an EPS.

In addition, all UK bats are protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). All species are listed on Schedule 5 of the Act and are subject to the provisions of Sections 9.4b and 9.4c, which make it an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; and/or
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a bat.

If works are planned that are likely to result in an offence under the current legislation, the works should be carried out under an appropriate Natural England licence.

Seven species of bat (Barbastelle, Bechstein's, Noctule, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared, Greater Horseshoe and Lesser Horseshoe) are also included as Species of Principal Importance identified under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.2.16 *Dormouse*

TVERC provided one record of Dormouse for the desk study area. This relates to feeding signs located approximately 1.7km to the west of the site, dating from 2023.

The Dormouse is protected through its inclusion on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) and is an EPS through the 2017 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as amended) (see *Section 3.2.15*). It is also a priority species on the UKBAP and identified as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.2.17 *Water Vole*

TVERC provided four records of Water Vole for the desk study area, all associated with waterbodies to the north-east of the site dating from 1996 to 1998. The closest record pertains to a location approximately 1.2km to the north-east of the site.

The Water Vole is protected through its inclusion on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). Unless permitted under a licence issued by Natural England this makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take Water Voles;
- Possess or control live or dead specimens or anything derived from a Water Vole;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which Water Voles use for shelter or protection; and/or

- Intentionally or recklessly disturb Water Voles while they are using such a place.

The Water Vole is also a priority species on the UKBAP and listed as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.2.19 *Birds*

TVERC provided records of 1791 bird species occurring within the desk study area. All nesting birds are afforded a basic level of protection under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). Species included on Schedule 1 of the Act are afforded additional protection against disturbance when breeding. *Table 2* below details the notable bird species recorded within 2km of the site:

Table 2: Notable bird species recorded within the desk study area

Common Name	Scientific Name	Annex I[1]	WCA 1[2]	NERC 41[3]	BOCC5 (2021)[4]
Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*				Green
Barnacle Goose	*Branta leucopsis*				Amber
Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*				Amber
Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*				Amber
Brambling	*Fringilla montifringilla*				Green
Bullfinch	*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*				Amber
Cetti's Warbler	*Cettia cetti*				Green
Common Gull	*Larus canus*				Amber
Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*				Amber
Crossbill (Common)	*Loxia curvirostra*				Green
Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*				Red
Dartford Warbler	*Sylvia undata*				Amber
Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*				Red
Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*				Amber
Fieldfare	*Turdus pilaris*				Red

Firecrest	*Regulus ignicapilla*				Green
Gadwall	*Anas strepera*				Amber
Garganey	*Anas querquedula*				Amber
Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*				
Golden Plover	*Pluvialis apricaria*				Green
Goldeneye	*Bucephala clangula*				Red
Great White Egret	*Ardea alba*				Amber
Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*				Amber
Greenfinch	*Carduelis chloris*				Red
Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*				Amber
Grey Partridge	*Perdix perdix*				Red
Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*				Amber
Greylag Goose	*Anser anser*				Amber
Hawfinch	*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*				Red
Herring Gull	*Larus argentatus*				Red
Hobby	*Falco subbuteo*				Green
House Martin	*Delichon urbicum*				Red
House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*				Red
Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*				Amber
Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*				Green
Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*				Red
Lesser Black-backed Gull	*Larus fuscus*				Amber
Lesser Redpoll	*Acanthis cabaret*				Red
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos minor*				Red
Linnet	*Carduelis cannabina*				Red
Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*				Green
Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*				Green
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*				Amber
Meadow Pipit	*Anthus pratensis*				Amber
Mediterranean Gull	*Larus melanocephalus*				Amber
Mistle Thrush	*Turdus viscivorus*				Red
Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*				Amber
Nightingale	*Luscinia megarhynchos*				Red
Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*				Amber
Oystercatcher	*Haematopus ostralegus*				Amber
Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*				Green
Pintail	*Anas acuta*				Amber
Pochard	*Aythya ferina*				Red
Red Kite	*Milvus milvus*				Green
Redshank	*Tringa totanus*				Amber
Redwing	*Turdus iliacus*				Amber
Reed Bunting	*Emberiza schoeniclus*				Amber
Ring Ouzel	*Turdus torquatus*				Red
Ringed Plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*				Red
Rook	*Corvus fruilegus*				Amber

Sandpiper (Common)	*Actitis hypoleucos*				Amber
Sedge Warbler	*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*				Amber
Shelduck	*Tadorna tadorna*				Amber
Shoveler	*Anas clypeata*				Amber
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*				Red
Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*				Amber
Song Thrush	*Turdus philomelos*				Amber
Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter nisus*				Amber
Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*				Amber
Spotted Flycatcher	*Muscicapa striata*				Red
Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*				Red
Stock Dove	*Columba oenas*				Amber
Swift	*Apus apus*				Red
Tawny Owl	*Strix aluco*				Amber
Teal	*Anas crecca*				Amber
Wheatear	*Oenanthe oenanthe*				Amber
Whinchat	*Saxicola rubetra*				Red
White Stork	*Ciconia ciconia*				
Whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*				Amber
Wigeon	*Anas penelope*				Amber
Willow Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochilus*				Amber
Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*				Amber
Woodcock	*Scolopax rusticola*				Red
Woodlark	*Lullula arborea*				Green
Woodpigeon	*Columba palumbus*				Amber
Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*				Amber
Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*				Red
Yellowhammer	*Emberiza citrinella*				Red

Notes:

1 Species listed in Annex I of Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds.

2 Species specially protected under Schedule 1 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended).

3 Species included in the UKBAP and Species of Principal Importance under the 2006 NERC Act.

4 Species included in the Birds of Conservation Concern 5 Red and Amber lists (RSPB, 2021)[2].

3.2.20 *Reptiles*

TVERC provided 1147 records of reptiles for the desk study area, including records of Slow-worm, Adder, Common Lizard and Grass Snake. The closest records to the site relates to 5 records of Slow-worm and Grass Snake located approximately 220m to the east of the site, dating from 2008.

[2]**Red Listed**: Red list species are those that are 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 a substantial recent recovery.

Amber Listed: Amber list species are those with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; those whose population or range has declined moderately in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders; and those with internationally important or localised populations.

All native reptiles are protected against killing and injuring under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended), are priority species on the UKBAP, and are listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.2.21 *Great Crested Newt*

TVERC provided 7 records of Great Crested Newts for the desk study area. The closest records relates to two field records located approximately 70m to the east of the site, dating from 2014 and 2015.

The Great Crested Newt is protected through its inclusion on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) and as an EPS through the 2017 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as amended) (see *Section 3.2.15*). It is also a priority species on the UKBAP and listed as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.2.22 *Invertebrates*

TVERC provided 134 records of invertebrate species for the desk study area, none of which pertain directly to the site. These include:

- Stag Beetle which is protected against commercial exploitation under Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). Stag Beetle is also included on the 1992 EC Habitats Directive: Annex II and V(a) which through the 2017 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as amended) allows the setting up of SACs where key populations exist. In addition, Stag Beetle is a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act;
- Silver-studded Blue which is protected against commercial exploitation under Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). In addition, it is listed as 'Vulnerable'[3] on the IUCN Red List and listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act;
- Purple Emperor which is protected against commercial exploitation under Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). In addition it is listed as 'Near Threatened'[4] on the IUCN Red List;

[3] **Vulnerable** (IUCN Red List, 2012): A taxon is Vulnerable when it is considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild in Great Britain.

[4] **Near Threatened (IUCN Red List, 2012):** A taxon is Near Threatened when it does not qualify for Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable now, but is close to qualifying for or is likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future in Great Britain.

- Necklace Ground Beetle which is listed as 'Endangered'[5] on the IUCN Red List and listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act;
- Grayling and White Admiral which are listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List and listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act;
- Small Heath butterfly which is listed as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN Red List and listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act; and
- September Thorn, Cinnabar, Knot Grass, Sallow, Shaded Broad-bar and Buff Ermine moth which are listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.2.23 *Plants and fungi*

TVERC provided 85 records of plants and fungi for the desk study area, none of which pertain directly to the site. These include:

- Pennyroyal which is protected under Schedule 8 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) against commercial exploitation only. In addition, it is listed as 'Critically Endangered'[6] on the IUCN Red List and listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act;
- Bluebell which is protected under Schedule 8 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) against commercial exploitation only;
- Lesser Spearwort which is listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List; and
- Bell Heather, Common Cow-wheat, Common Valerian, Cross-leaved Heath, Devil's-bit Scabious, Heath Speedwell, Hoary Plantain, Marsh Pennywort, Marsh Speedwell, Marsh-mallow, Mat-grass, Ragged-Robin, Round-leaved Sundew, Tormentil, Wild Strawberry and Wood-sorrel which are listed as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN Red List.

Records were also provided of invasive plant species within the desk study area. This includes Buddleia, Himalayan Balsam and Rhododendron which are listed on Schedule 9 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). It is an offence to release, plant or cause to grow in the wild any plant included on this schedule of the Act.

[5] **Endangered (IUCN Red List, 2012):** A taxon is Endangered when it is considered to be facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in Great Britain

[6] **Critically Endangered** (IUCN Red List, 2012): A taxon is Critically Endangered when it is considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in Great Britain.

3.2.24 *Other species*

Other notable species for which desk study records were provided include Toad and Hedgehog which are identified as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act. No records of other protected or notable species such as Otter were provided for the desk study area.

Planning Policy

3.2.25 National and local planning policy relevant to this assessment are summarised below.

3.2.26 *National Planning Policy Framework*

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in December 2023, outlines the Government's vision for sustainable development in England. Chapter 15 sets out the requirements for 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment', which states:

"180. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;

e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate."

"181. Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries."

"182. Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas."

"183. When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;

b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and

c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated."

"184. Within areas defined as Heritage Coast (and that do not already fall within one of the designated areas mentioned in paragraph 182), planning policies and decisions should be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation. Major development within a Heritage Coast is unlikely to be appropriate, unless it is compatible with its special character."

Habitats and biodiversity

"185. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and

b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity."

"186. 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."

"187. The following should be given the same protection as habitats sites:

a) potential Special Protection Areas and possible Special Areas of Conservation;

b) listed or proposed Ramsar sites; and

c) sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on habitats sites, potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation, and listed or proposed Ramsar sites."

"188. The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a habitats site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), unless an appropriate assessment has concluded that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of the habitats site."

3.2.27 *Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and their Impact within the Planning System* (ODPM, 2005)

This provides guidance on the application of English law relating to planning and nature conservation, complementing the expression of national planning policy in the NPPF. In the context of planning applications, the circular includes guidance on the following:

- Internationally designated sites;
- Nationally designated sites;
- Conservation of habitats and species outside designated sites;
- Conservation of species protected by law;
- Environmental Impact Assessment;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment; and
- The 2000 Water Framework Directive.

3.2.28 *Local Planning Policy*

Local planning policy relating to wildlife and nature conservation is provided by the *Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework: Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document* (2010):

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."

CP8 - Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area
"Development which alone or in combination is likely to have a significant effects 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."

3.2.29 Relevant policies from the *Wokingham Borough Development Plan: Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan* (2014) includes:

Policy CC03: Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping
"1. Green Routes and Green Route Enhancement Areas are defined on the Policies Map.
2. Development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieved the following criteria within scheme proposals:
a. Provide new or protect and enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development
b. Promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green corridors including public rights of way such as footpaths, cycleways and bridleways
c. Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside
d. Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features
e. Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.
3. Development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable.
4. Development proposals within the River Valley areas shall improve or contribute toward:
a. The establishment of a Loddon/ Blackwater riverside footpath and bridleway, as defined on the Policies Map, to accommodate dual use
b. The establishment of a riverside footpath and cycleway to accommodate dual use along the Emm Brook
c. Opportunities for improvements to green infrastructure to help minimise flood risk"

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
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."

3.2.30 Relevant policies from the *Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022 – 2038* adopted in September 2023 includes:

Policy IRS5 - Ecologically important areas and Biodiversity
"Development proposals should conserve and enhance the natural environment and green spaces of the area, specifically biodiversity areas set out in Figure 23 and the TVERC Survey 2019 (Annex M TVERC Report) wherever practicable.

The Plan area abuts the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), specifically Bramshill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). All development resulting in a net gain in dwellings or other recognised pathway to likely significant effects, alone or in-combination, on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA must provide sufficient information to allow assessment of the effect and demonstrate how, through secured avoidance and mitigation

measures if required, no adverse effect will occur in accordance with saved policy NRM6 of the South-East Plan and policy CP8 from Wokingham BC's Core Strategy to 2026.

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should demonstrate that:

- *They will not have an unacceptable impact on local biodiversity or the network of sites designated as of importance for nature conservation, as evidenced through a robust specialist independent survey report, which is supported by the Borough's Ecological Adviser. The assessment should consider impacts on the site and on connections between sites important for biodiversity.*
- *There are no alternatives with less harmful impacts.*
- *They provide a net gain of at least 10% over base value using a robust metric. Where a loss of biodiversity on site is demonstrably unavoidable, development will only be acceptable if off site compensation measures are secured to ensure the creation of like-for-like or better distinctiveness habitats so a minimum 10% gain of biodiversity overall is achieved.*
- *All water courses and ditches are protected from any contamination or interruption to natural flow.*
- *Compensation through suitable alternatives of any loss of bird nesting habitat is secured.*
- *They take any opportunities to protect, enhance and extend wildlife corridors between existing open spaces and habitats as a means of mitigating the impacts of development on biodiversity.*
- *They conserve the environment for nocturnal species, through the avoidance of lighting and mitigating the impact of external lighting likely to increase night-time human presence.*
- *They contain measures that will help to mitigate the impacts of, and adapt to, climate change with reference and adherence to the Wokingham Borough Council Climate Change action plan.*

All development which would result in a net gain in dwellings or other recognised pathway to likely significant effects, alone or in-combination, on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA must provide sufficient information to allow assessment of the effect and demonstrate that no adverse effect will occur through secured avoidance and/or mitigation measures if required."

Policy IRS6 - Trees

"1. Development proposals should seek to retain mature or important trees, groups of trees or woodland on site.
2. Proposals should clearly identify the trees, the constraints and root protection areas, any trees to be removed, and state how the health of the trees on the site and those influencing from neighbouring sites including the highway will be protected during demolition and construction, including that of installing utilities, drainage, and landscaping.
3. Where removal of a tree or group of trees of recognised importance is proposed, a replacement of similar amenity value should be provided on the site.
4. Wherever appropriate, the planting of additional trees should be included in new developments, particularly local species that are in keeping with the character of the area and appropriate to the site/ground conditions. Planting that contributes to the biodiversity of the area and supports green corridors is particularly encouraged."

3.3 Phase 1 habitat survey

3.3.1 The results of the extended Phase 1 habitat survey are presented in map form with target notes in *Figure 1* of this report. A brief non-technical description of the habitats and features across the site is given below. Numbers in brackets refer to target notes.

3.3.2 *General description*

In general terms, the site comprises part of a modified grassland field and a soil bund dominated by recently established scrub and tall ruderal vegetation. The field is bordered to the east by a non-native ornamental hedgerow and beyond the western site boundary is a ditch with scattered Bramble scrub and trees and a track. The site is bordered to the north by Parcels 14 and 15 of the wider development which is currently under construction; to the west and south by a future development parcel which currently comprises modified grassland and scrub; and to the east by buildings and grassland. The habitats and features across the site are described below.

3.3.3 *Linear features and trees*

The northern half of the eastern site boundary comprises a non-native, ornamental species-poor hedgerow comprising Cherry Laurel, Leylandii Cypress and Elder, to the south of which is a wooden post and electric wire fence which is overgrown with tall grasses and ruderal vegetation (32).

Beyond the western site boundary is a dry ditch with scattered Bramble scrub and Willow and Pedunculate Oak trees, bordering a fence and dirt track. The track supports ephemeral vegetation including Scentless Mayweed, Cock's-foot, Smooth Hawksbeard, Common Yarrow, Hawthorn saplings, Common Bent and Spear Thistle. Beyond the dirt track is a 1-2m wide scrub line supporting Grey Willow, Dog-rose, Oak and Bramble scrub (34).

3.3.4 *Scrub and tall ruderal vegetation*

A recently established soil bund/storage pile supporting tall ruderal and scrub vegetation (31). Tall ruderal vegetation present includes Spear Thistle, Common Nettle, Broadleaved Dock and Smooth Hawksbeard and scrub species present include Bramble, Elder, Silver Birch and Dog-rose. There are also piles of deadwood near and within the scrub.

3.3.5 *Grassland*

Modified grassland dominates the site (31). Species include Yorkshire Fog, Perennial Rye-grass, False Oat-grass, Cock's-foot, Red Fescue, Common Bent, Creeping Buttercup, White Clover, Doves-foot Cranesbill, Common Vetch, Common Mouse-ear, Scentless Mayweed, Creeping Thistle, Spear Thistle, Common Sorrel, Ragwort, Greater Willowherb, Cleavers, Broadleaved Dock, Common Knapweed, Meadow Vetchling, Forget-me-not, Fleabane and Self-Heal.

3.4 Specialist surveys

3.4.1 *Bat survey* (*Figure 2* and *Appendix C*)

A suite of bat surveys was carried out in 2022 of the site and wider site and comprised a Phase 1 bat scoping survey to identify trees and buildings providing suitable features for roosting bats, followed by Phase 2 roost surveys comprising emergence/re-entry surveys to determine the presence/likely absence of bats within potential roosts and, where present, identify species and numbers. In addition, bat activity surveys were carried out to provide an assessment of the importance of the site and wider site for foraging and commuting bats. Further to this, in August 2023 an updated Phase 1 bat scoping survey was carried out to identify any changes in bat roosting potential of the features present within the Land South of Parcel 15 site. These surveys provided updates to bat surveys undertaken of the site and wider site by Entec in 2008, Amec in 2012, Royal Haskoning DHV in 2014 and HDA between 2017-2019.

No bat roosts have been recorded within the Land South of Parcel 15 site. *Table 3* below details the results of the updated Phase 1 bat scoping survey carried out in August 2023. The locations of the trees with bat roost potential associated with the Land South of Parcel 15 site are identified in *Figure 2*.

Table 3: Results of Phase I bat scoping survey

Tree ref*,**	Species	Findings	Bat Roost Potential (BCT, 2016)
2	Pedunculate Oak	Broken branch on northern aspect which appears hollow. Two possible openings into trunk where large branches have torn away from main stem.	**High**
4	Pedunculate Oak	Two dead branches, one with large split and the other with a potential cavity on western aspect.	**Moderate**
5	Pedunculate Oak	Possible cavity on western aspect.	**Low**
7	Dead	Limited features of bat roosting potential including narrow cracks in branches and a hole in trunk of limited depth.	**Low**
9	Pedunculate Oak	Dead branch with a possible opening on western aspect.	**Low**

**Tree reference numbers relate to those used for the Tree Survey (RPS, 2017).*

*** Trees 28 and 29 identified as having potential to support roosting bats in 2022 (HDA, 2023) were collapsed in August 2023 and subsequently no longer had potential to support roosting bats.*

The suite of bat activity transect, automated detector and emergence/re-entry surveys confirmed the presence of at least five bat species/species groups using the site and wider site for foraging and commuting, with varying levels of activity observed throughout the surveys. The bat species/species groups recorded were: Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule, *Myotis* sp. bat and Brown Long-eared bat. Bat activity within the Land

South of Parcel 15 site was limited to one pass by a Soprano Pipistrelle, however in the wider site the bat activity survey identified widespread foraging by Common and Soprano Pipistrelle, particularly in association with woodlands and hedgerows bordering the grassland and arable fields. Noctule, *Myotis* sp. bat and Brown Long-eared bat were recorded on an occasional basis within the wider site from similar habitats on a less frequent basis suggesting the site and wider site forms only a small part of a much wider foraging territory for individuals of these species/species groups.

Overall the level of bat activity recorded within the Land South of Parcel 15 site was considered to be low, relative to the size of the site, and similar and better quality foraging and commuting opportunities are relatively widespread in the wider site and wider area. Recommendations to maintain and enhance opportunities for foraging and roosting bats at the site during and following development are provided in *Section 5*.

The full findings of 2022 bat surveys undertaken at the site and wider site, and key findings of previous survey work where relevant, are given in *Appendix C* and the plan showing the updated Phase 1 bat scoping survey for the Land South of Parcel 15 site is given in *Figure 2*.

[redacted]

3.4.3 *Reptile survey* (*Appendix E*)

A reptile survey of the site and wider site was most recently undertaken between September and October 2023. The extent of the survey is shown in the plan provided in Appendix A of the 2023 *Reptile Survey Report and Site-Wide Outline Reptile Mitigation Strategy* provided in *Appendix E*.

Although no reptiles were recorded at the site or the wider site during the updated 2023 reptile survey, previously low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard have been recorded within the site and wider site. On this basis it is conceivable that very low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard may remain present at the site. The site is therefore considered to support very low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard and as such does not qualify as a SSSI, SINC or Key Reptile Site. The site is considered to be of no more than site value for Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard.

The full findings of the reptile survey, and key findings of previous survey work where relevant, are given in *Appendix E*.

3.4.4 *Great Crested Newt survey (Appendix F)*

Great Crested Newts typically have a maximum routine migratory range of 250m away from breeding ponds during terrestrial phases (Cresswell and Whitworth, 2004) and there are waterbodies both within the wider site and within 300m of the wider site boundary which may provide breeding habitat for Great Crested Newts. In addition, habitats within the site and wider site such as hedgerow bases, woodland, grassland and scrub provide suitable terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newts. A Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment and Great Crested Newt eDNA sampling survey of waterbodies in the vicinity of the site and wider site was most recently undertaken in June 2023, with a previous survey undertaken in 2018. The extent of the most recent survey is shown in the plan provided in Appendix A of the *2023 Great Crested Newt HSI and eDNA Survey Report* provided in *Appendix F*.

The surveys indicates that it is highly unlikely that Great Crested Newts are present within the site or wider site during either breeding or terrestrial phases.

The full findings of the 2023 Great Crested Newt survey, and key findings of previous survey work where relevant, are given in *Appendix F*.

3.4.5 *Plants*

No protected species of plant were recorded during the extended Phase 1 habitat surveys or other ecological site work carried out between 2017 and 2024.

During consultation with Natural England, Japanese Knotweed was identified in the wider area (Royal Haskoning, 2014). In addition during an updated Phase 1 habitat survey, Variegated Yellow Archangel was recorded approximately 470m north of the site, Rhododendron was recorded approximately 720m north-west of the site in association with Parcel 7 during an invasive species walkover survey and an unidentified Cotoneaster species was recorded approximately 200m south-west of the site in association with the proposed sports and allotments area of the wider site during an invasive species walkover survey (HDA, 2023a).

No species listed under Schedule 9 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) were recorded during the invasive plant species walkover survey carried out in August 2023.

The full findings of the Phase 1 habitat survey are given in *Figure 1* and the findings of the invasive plant species walkover survey are given in *Appendix B*.

4 NATURE CONSERVATION EVALUATION

4.1 Habitats

4.1.1 The habitats within the site have been assessed with consideration given to the criteria summarised in *Appendix G* of this report (Ratcliffe 1977; CIEEM 2018). A summary of the site habitat evaluation is given in *Table 4.* Numbers in brackets refer to target notes.

Table 4: Site habitat evaluation

Value	Habitats present
International	None
National	None
Regional	None
County	None
District	None
Local	**High:** - None **Moderate:** - None **Low:** - Network of dense scrub, hedgerows and trees (in combination) [31, 32, 34]
Negligible/Site	All other habitats recorded

4.1.2 No habitats of international, national, regional, county or district nature conservation interest pertain to the site.

4.1.3 The network of hedgerows, treelines and dense scrub within and bordering the site are considered in combination to be of at most **low local value** as although in general they are individually considered to be of no more than site interest due to their limited diversity and abundance in the wider landscape, together they combine to form a network of semi-natural habitats across the site, providing habitat connectivity around the site and contributing towards that of the wider area.

4.1.4 All other habitats recorded within the site, including the modified grassland field, are regarded as being of no more interest than at the 'site' level and in a local context are considered to be of **negligible** nature conservation value in their own right.

4.2 Species

4.2.1 *Bats*

No trees with bat roost potential are located within the site, however 4 trees (Trees 2, 4, 5 & 7) with bat roost potential are located beyond the western site boundary. It is understood that all trees with bat roost potential bordering the site will be retained (RPS, 2024). Notwithstanding this, measures to maintain the integrity of retained roosting opportunities within and adjacent to the site are recommended in *Section 5* below and in the 2022 Bat Survey Report (*Appendix C*).

At least five species/species groups of bats were recorded using the site and wider site for foraging and commuting, with varying levels of activity observed throughout the surveys. Overall the level of bat activity recorded was generally considered to be low, relative to the size of the site, and similar foraging and commuting opportunities are relatively widespread

in the wider area. As a whole the site is considered to be of no more than **site value** for foraging bats. Recommendations to maintain and potentially enhance opportunities for foraging and roosting bats at the site during and following development of the site are provided in *Section 5*.

4.2.2 *Dormice*

No evidence of Dormouse was recorded during a survey of the site and wider site in 2011 (Royal Haskoning DHV, 2014). However, during the desk study one record of Dormouse was obtained relating to feeding signs located approximately 1.7km to the west of the site, dating from 2023.

The Land South of Parcel 15 site of highly limited interest for Dormice, with interest limited to the species-poor ornamental hedgerow located along part of the eastern site boundary, the recently created soil bund dominated by scrub and tall ruderal vegetation in the centre of the site and the line of trees and scrub located beyond the western site boundary. These features are species-poor, with limited connectivity to suitable habitats in the surrounding area. The site is therefore considered to be of negligible value for Dormice and this species is not considered further in this assessment.

4.2.3 *Water Vole and Otter*

The dry ditch located beyond the western site boundary provides highly sub-optimal habitat for Otter and Water Vole due to its small size, absence of water and lack of connectivity to more suitable waterbodies/watercourses in the surrounding area. The site is therefore considered to be of negligible value for either of these species and these species are not considered further in this assessment.

4.2.5 *Birds*

The avian habitats of greatest interest are the hedgerow, trees and scrub habitats, within and bordering the site. The habitats present within the site for breeding birds are relatively common and widespread in the surrounding area and the breeding bird assemblage at the site is likely to be typical of the site surrounds. It is however possible that common and

widespread breeding birds are nesting within the site. In view of the abundance of similar habitat in the wider area the site is unlikely to be of local ornithological significance. Notwithstanding this, all breeding birds should be afforded the basic level of protection afforded by the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). This is discussed further in *Section 5* below.

4.2.6 *Reptiles*

The site is considered to support very low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard. Habitats suitable for reptiles within the site include grassland, scrub and hedgerow bases. These habitats are however abundant in the wider site and wider area. Furthermore, Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard are common and widespread reptile species. It is therefore considered that the site is of no higher than **site value** for reptiles. Notwithstanding this, development proposals should maintain opportunities for the local reptile population together with the protection afforded to all reptiles under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). This is considered further in *Section 5* below.

4.2.7 *Great Crested Newts*

During the desk study, 7 records of Great Crested Newts were obtained for within 2km of the site. The closest records relates to two field records located approximately 70m to the east of the site, dating from 2014 and 2015. HSI and Great Crested Newt eDNA sampling surveys of waterbodies in the vicinity of the site and wider site were however carried out in 2018 and 2023 which indicated that it is highly unlikely that Great Crested Newts are present within the site or wider site during either breeding or terrestrial phases. The site is therefore considered to be of negligible value for this species and this species is not considered further in this assessment.

4.2.8 *Invertebrates*

The site is likely to support an invertebrate assemblage typical of the wider area, and it is unlikely that notable populations of invertebrates are present. Notwithstanding this, habitats within and bordering the site including hedgerows, scrub, grassland and ditch habitats provide opportunities for a range of invertebrate species. Although similar and higher quality habitats are present in the wider area, the proposed development should seek to maintain opportunities for invertebrates at the site and this is discussed further in *Section 5* below.

4.2.9 *Plants*

The site is likely to support a plant assemblage typical of the wider area, and it is unlikely that notable populations of plants are present. In addition, no species listed on Schedule 9 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) have been recorded at the site.

5 ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS AND MITIGATION PROPOSALS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Advice on ecological constraints and opportunities for ecological enhancement was provided throughout the design process. Consequently, measures to avoid and minimise effects on features of ecological interest have been incorporated into the scheme design and are described below alongside any additional mitigation requirements. Ecological enhancement measures have also been incorporated into the scheme where possible in accordance with nature conservation legislation, national planning policy (NPPF, 2023) and the 2006 NERC Act and these are also described together with other potential enhancement opportunities arising from the scheme.

5.1.2 Development proposals for the site include construction of residential development with associated infrastructure. The hedgerow along the eastern site boundary and the ditch/scrub line bordering the western site boundary are proposed to be retained. The development proposals are shown on the *Site Layout* (Omega Architects, 2024) and landscape proposals are shown on the *Landscape Masterplan* (CSA, 2024).

5.1.3 The majority of land affected by the proposed development comprises modified grassland and a soil bund with recently establish scrub and tall ruderal vegetation, which are considered to be of limited nature conservation value in their own right. Furthermore, in the absence of mitigation and avoidance measures the proposals have the potential to affect local populations of protected and notable species described above. This section identifies potential impacts on features of nature conservation interest both within the site and the wider area, and measures to avoid, reduce, mitigate and compensate for such impacts, before discussing the likely residual impacts following development.

5.2 Designated sites

Thames Basin Heaths SPA

5.2.1 The Thames Basin Heaths SPA is located approximately 1.9km from the site and is regarded as being of international nature conservation importance on the basis of the habitats and species it supports.

5.2.2 SPAs are protected by the 2017 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as

amended) which requires decision making authorities to consider the potential effects of development on designated features both alone and in combination with other plans and projects.

Potential effects

5.2.3 Potential effects on this internationally designated area resulting from the proposed development, in combination with other plans and projects, for consideration in this assessment include an increase in recreational pressure that may have the potential to adversely affect the integrity of habitats and species for which the Thames Basin Heaths SPA is designated. In view of the size, location and nature of the application scheme, no other potentially significant effects on this designated site are likely to arise either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

5.2.4 The proposed development will result in a net gain of up to 48 residential units within 400m-5km of the SPA boundary. In view of the limited scale of the proposed development in the context of that already present in the vicinity of the 8309ha SPA, the provision of substantial areas of public open space within the wider site as part of the consented scheme (including a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)), and the ease of access from the site to other extensive areas of accessible greenspace (such as the nearby Shepperlands Farm BBOWT reserve), it is certain that the proposed development would not result in any significant effects on the integrity of the SPA in isolation. Notwithstanding this, it is conceivable that the proposed development may contribute to a cumulative increase in recreational pressure in combination with other plans or projects. Therefore, in keeping with the *Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Delivery Framework* (Thames Basin Heaths JSPB, 2009) and Thames Basin Heaths SPA guidance on Wokingham Borough Council's website[7] mitigation will be required as detailed below.

Mitigation proposals

5.2.5 The measures outlined below will be employed to avoid the potential effects of increased recreational pressure arising from the proposed development at the Land South of Parcel 15 site, as identified above.

5.2.6 In accordance with Wokingham Borough Council's guidance, any net gain in residential development at the site will need to be accompanied by provisions towards alternative greenspace to deflect any potential increase in recreational pressure on the SPA which

[7] https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/advice-developers/thames-basin-heath-special-protection-area

might otherwise arise in combination with other plans or projects. For the Land South of Parcel 15 site it is proposed that this is achieved through residual capacity of the SANG constructed within the wider site.

5.2.7 In addition, Wokingham Borough Council would require payment of SAMM tariffs towards the Strategic Access, Management and Monitoring of the SPA. These payments are used for management of visitors to the SPA and monitoring the efficacy of mitigation.

Residual effects

5.2.8 Subject to the provision of SANG and SAMM avoidance measures in line with Wokingham Borough Council's guidance, no impact on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA would be expected to arise as a result of the proposed development either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. An Appropriate Assessment of the proposed development can subsequently conclude that any increase in recreational pressure arising from the proposed development on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA will not result in any significant effect on this designated area, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Other designated areas

5.2.9 No other statutory or non-statutory sites are considered to have potential to be adversely affected by the proposed development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This is due to a combination of factors including the nature and scale of the proposed development, the distance of the site from the designated areas, mitigation and avoidance measures proposed in relation to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA described above, and accessibility and/ or robustness of the habitats for which the sites are designated.

5.3 Grassland

5.3.1 *Potential effects*

The proposed development will require the removal of approximately 1.93ha of improved grassland to facilitate construction of residential dwellings and associated infrastructure. The improved species-poor grassland is considered to be of negligible nature conservation value, owing to its limited species diversity and similar habitat being abundant in the wider area. The majority of the improved grassland will be lost to the proposed development. In the absence of mitigation, where these habitats are to be removed, there is likely to be a net loss of habitat as well as some loss of habitat continuity across the site and the wider area.

5.3.2 *Mitigation and enhancement proposals*

Approximately 0.12ha of species-rich grassland (Germinal Seeds Ltd WFG8 Hedgerow and Shaded Areas Mix (or similar)) will be created along the eastern and western boundaries of the site. Further to this, approximately 2.1ha of grassland will be enhanced to species-rich grassland within the existing SANG and managed for both wildlife and amenity purposes as indicated on the *BNG Technical Note* (HDA, 2024e). Recommendations to maximise the value of grassland resource of the site through the proposed development include:

- Long-term management of the enhanced and newly-created grassland habitats to create a species-rich meadow grassland/rough grassland mosaic to increase their floristic diversity and structure;
- Where management by cutting is employed, all arisings should be removed to prevent accumulation of nutrient levels;
- Cuts on established grassland should be carried out no more than twice annually at the end of May and the end of September and should be timed to allow seed set of target species;
- Selected areas of meadow grassland should be left uncut during each mowing period in order to provide additional refuge habitat for reptiles, small mammals and invertebrates and encourage a more diverse flora;
- Areas managed as rough grassland should be cut every 2-3 years in order to establish a tussocky sward favoured by small mammals, reptiles and hibernating invertebrates;
- If required, injurious weed species (e.g. Creeping Thistle) should be controlled, particularly whilst the grassland is becoming established. This will be achieved either through topping before flowering or using spot treatment with herbicide;
- No fertilisers, lime or manure should be added to any areas of the species rich grassland habitats, including the meadow/ rough grassland mosaic; and
- Scrub areas should be managed to maintain species diversity and prevent encroachment into the grassland areas or succession into woodland.

5.3.3 *Residual effects*

Although the proposed development is expected to result in a reduction in the current extent of grassland habitats within the site, it is recommended that the above measures to maximise the value of newly created and enhanced areas of grassland are undertaken. Subject to implementation of these measures across all informal grassland habitats indicated on the *Landscape Masterplan*, it is considered that the proposed development would not result in a significant impact on the grassland resource in a local context.

5.4 Scattered mature trees, hedgerows and scrub

5.4.1 *Potential effects*

The development proposals require the removal of approximately 0.2ha of dense Bramble scrub/tall ruderal vegetation and 0.03km of non-native, ornamental hedgerow to accommodate the development. The scrub and mature tree habitats located beyond the western site will be retained.

The mature trees, hedgerows and scrub habitats provide habitat for wildlife including [redacted]bats, reptiles, invertebrates and birds. The network of trees, hedgerows and scrub also act as wildlife corridors for the movement of these species across the site. In the absence of mitigation, where these habitats are to be removed, there is likely to be a net loss of habitat as well as some loss of habitat continuity across the site and the wider area.

5.4.2 *Mitigation and enhancement proposals*

The development has been designed to ensure that loss of existing hedgerows, trees and scrub habitats is limited and where possible these features are retained and enhanced within areas of informal open space within the proposed development. Notwithstanding this, in line with the *Landscape Masterplan* the following measures will be implemented to minimise the effect of the loss of trees, hedgerows and scrub and to minimise the effect of the development on retained trees, scrub and hedgerow habitats:

General/scrub:

- Development design has avoided the use of retained hedgerows, mature trees and scrub as residential curtilages;
- New areas of species-rich scrub, hedgerow and tree planting will be established within areas of proposed landscape planting on the eastern, southern and western site boundaries, thereby creating new links between areas of retained and newly created habitat within and adjacent to the site;
- Further ornamental wildlife friendly tree and shrub planting will be carried out within areas of public open space and the gardens of the new development. Where appropriate this will include fruit and nut producing species and nectar and pollen rich species in order to maximise benefits for wildlife;
- Construction activities will avoid works within the Root Protection Area (RPA) of the retained mature trees and hedgerows. Where incursion is unavoidable then works will be carried out in accordance with the protocols outlined in an

agreed arboricultural method statement and supervised by a suitably qualified arboriculturalist;

- New and supplementary hedgerow, tree and scrub planting will include a mix of native species typical of the local area, sourced from stock of local provenance where available;
- Lighting will be restricted in the vicinity of new and retained scrub, trees and hedgerows during both the construction and operational phases in order to maintain their value for nocturnal wildlife. Further details are provided in *Section 5.7.2*; and
- Scrub habitats will be managed to maintain species diversity and prevent succession into woodland.

Hedgerows:

- Hedgerows will be managed to encourage bushier growth and increased fruiting for the benefit of birds and other wildlife;
- Approximately 0.15km of species-rich hedgerow will be established along the southern site boundary; and
- Where possible hedgerows will be complemented by a rough and/ or meadow grassland buffer of at least 3m.

Mature trees:

- No trees are proposed to be lost as a result of the development proposals. In addition, approximately 51 additional trees will be planted in public open space across the site, with further trees proposed within residential gardens;
- Maintenance and enhancement of standing and fallen deadwood habitats where safe to do so, including use of management techniques such as veteranisation of selected retained mature trees to promote deadwood.

Where appropriate these measures would be reflected in the detailed landscape scheme and it is recommended are subject of a Management Plan ensuring establishment and long-term management of a coherent network of semi-natural habitats across the site.

5.4.3 *Residual effects*

Although it is likely that the development will result in a reduction in the current extent of hedgerow and scrub habitats within the site, subject to implementation of the measures outlined above, the proposed removal of areas of scrub and hedgerow from the site is not considered to represent significant losses in a local context and would maintain a network of habitats allowing the movement of wildlife across and around the site.

5.5 Ditches

5.5.1 *Potential effects*

The development proposals show that the ditch located beyond the western site boundary will be supplemented by a green corridor. However, in the absence of mitigation and avoidance measures the proposed development has the potential to indirectly effect the ditch through impacts on the quality, quantity and constancy of water entering the ditch during the construction and operational phases. These considerations are described below.

5.5.2 *Mitigation and enhancement proposals*

The development has been designed to ensure that the ditch bordering the site is supplemented by a green corridor.

Pollution avoidance measures to be implemented in the vicinity of the ditch during the construction period should include the following:

- Workers should be fully briefed on ecologically sensitive habitats and all construction activities should be conducted in accordance with the Pollution Prevention for Businesses guidance (www.gov.uk/guidance/pollution-prevention-for-businesses#construction-inspection-and-maintenance);
- The design of the surface water drainage scheme for the proposed development should also seek to maintain the quality, quantity and constancy of water entering the watercourses; and
- All hazardous liquids and chemicals should be stored and utilised in accordance with the 2002 Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations (HSE, 2002).

Measures to maintain the value of the ditch network for nocturnal wildlife through sensitive use of lighting are provided in *Section 5.7.2*.

5.5.3 *Residual effects*

Although it is possible that the development could result in impacts on the quality, quantity and constancy of water entering the ditch, subject to implementation of the measures outlined above, the proposals for the site are not considered to represent significant impacts in a local context.

5.6 Other habitats

5.6.1 The proposed development provides opportunities for the enhancement of proposed built areas of the site, including formal gardens and surrounding scattered trees, shrubs and

hedgerows, for wildlife through appropriate management and new planting. This could be achieved through the implementation of the following:

- Use of native scrub or hedging as boundary features where appropriate;
- Planting of a diverse range of flowers and shrubs, including fruiting trees and shrubs, nectar and pollen-rich plants, providing possible food sources for birds, invertebrates and mammals;
- Provision of compost heaps, providing habitat for amphibians and invertebrates;
- Use of arisings from open space management to create log and brash piles within informally managed areas for sheltering amphibians, invertebrates and small mammals.

To ensure private dwellings and their gardens are of benefit to a range of wildlife, in addition to the planting proposals described and shown on the *Landscape Masterplan* (CSA, 2024), Hedgehog highways will be integrated in garden fences and walls across the site. Hedgehogs travel around 1 mile every night through a range of habitats, including gardens. Fences and walls inhibit the movement of Hedgehogs within their territory, reducing the amount of land available to them (www.hedgehogstreet.org). In order to separate the gardens of private properties, the provision of hedgerows, fences and walls is proposed. Where possible hedgerows will be provided as these provide habitat for a range of species and do not inhibit the movement of Hedgehogs. Where fences and walls are proposed, holes in these potential barriers will be provided to allow the movements of Hedgehogs and other terrestrial species between the gardens (e.g. www.jacksons-fencing.co.uk/product/sc_667610/hedgehog-gravel-board-for-use-with-slotted-posts-1.83m-x-140-x-28mm-incl.1-x-end-packer-1-x-length-packer-jakcured or similar). These holes can be as small as 13x13cm, which are sufficient for Hedgehogs to pass through but too small for the majority of pets. These holes will be provided at a rate of one per garden fence/wall to ensure multiple routes through the residential gardens are accessible to Hedgehogs. In order to ensure these holes are not blocked by householders and to raise awareness of the issue, holes will be marked with signs to inform householders on the reason for their presence:

(Images sourced from www.hedgehogstreet.org)

The proposed location of these features is indicated in the *Ecological Proposals Plan* (*Figure 3*).

5.7 Bats

5.7.1 *Potential effects*

The *Site Layout* indicates that no trees identified as having potential to support roosting bats will be lost as a result of the proposed development.

Levels of bat foraging and commuting activity recorded during the bat surveys were considered low, relative to the size of the site, and predominantly related to relatively common and widespread bat species. The development proposals show the retention of the hedgerow and tree/scrub line bordering the site. The development of the site will however result in the loss of limited areas of foraging habitat where buildings and hardstanding take the place of areas currently dominated by grassland and scrub/tall ruderal habitats. Although the field interior is currently of limited value for foraging bats, the scrub/tall ruderal soil bund is of higher interest for foraging bats and complements the grassland habitats. Although it is expected that the proposed gardens and areas of open space within the proposed development will provide new opportunities for foraging bats as these mature, recommendations to maximise future opportunities for foraging and commuting bats at the site during the construction and operational phases of the proposed development are provided below.

5.7.2 *Mitigation and enhancement proposals*

The measures outlined below should be implemented in order to avoid any long-term adverse effects on the favourable conservation status of the local bat population. These are based on the more detailed measures to maintain the favourable conservation status of bats provided in the *2022 Bat Survey Report* provided in *Appendix C*.

<u>Roosting bats</u>

Works to trees

Although the development proposals indicate that no trees with potential to support roosting bats will be lost as a result of the proposed development, due to the presence of opportunities for roosting bats within a number of trees bordering the site and the highly mobile nature of bats, an approach to works affecting trees lost to development or affected by future maintenance works (e.g. for health and safety) is set out below. This involves either further survey prior to works commencing to confirm the continued absence of roosting bats or a sensitive approach to works.

In the event that retention of a tree/tree feature identified as providing opportunities for roosting bats is not possible, due to the transitory nature with which bats may use roost sites in trees, it is recommended that felling/pruning works are carried out in accordance with the following procedure[8]:

1. In the event that future pruning or felling works for reasons of health and safety are required to trees with moderate or higher potential to support roosting bats (PRF–M), trees should first be subject to three aerial inspection surveys between May to September, with at least two of the surveys conducted from May to August by a licensed bat worker to inspect potential roost sites for bats (BCT, 2023). If a bat roost is encountered during survey of a tree not covered under an EPS licence, then felling/works to this tree should be delayed until an EPS licence has been sought and obtained from Natural England.
2. Trees with moderate or higher potential to support roosting bats (PRF–M), which an exhaustive climbed inspection is not possible or practical, should be subject to three emergence/re-entry surveys following current BCT best practice guidelines (BCT, 2023) to confirm the absence of roosting bats prior to any works affecting the tree commencing.
3. Trees that are classified as low potential (PRF–I), should be aerial inspected immediately in advance of works to confirm the absence of roosting bats prior to any works affecting the tree commencing. Trees that are unsuitable for aerial inspections and/or have not been subject to an emergence survey immediately in advance of works should be 'soft felled' under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist. Soft felling involves progressive removal of the tree, using ropes to gently lower sections of tree potentially supporting roosting bats to the ground for inspection by a suitably qualified ecologist. Where appropriate, features should be left on the ground overnight before clearing to allow any bats present to escape.

In the event that a roosting bat is discovered during any of the above works to a tree not covered under an EPS licence, trimming/felling works must cease and Natural England contacted to agree an appropriate course of action. A licence may need to be applied for, and approved, before works can continue.

[8] Please note the procedure given below differs from that given in the 2022 Bat Survey Report (HDA, 2023) due to the publication of updated good practice guidelines set out by the Bat Conservation Trust in 2023. The procedure detailed in this report accords with the current published guidelines (BCT, 2023).

Maintenance of roosting opportunities

The integrity of retained roosting opportunities within and adjacent to the site should be conserved through the maintenance of connections to commuting and foraging habitat and sensitive use of lighting throughout the construction and operational phases (see below). In addition, trees not supporting roosting bats at the time of survey have potential to support bats in the future and therefore these trees should be retained and their ability to support roosting bats maintained, where possible to do so.

Further survey

Bats may occupy roost sites on a seasonal or temporary basis and old roost sites may be abandoned and new roosts occupied within relatively short periods of time. Where appropriate, bat survey work including emergence/re-entry surveys and/or climbing inspections of trees with potential to support roosting bats affected by the proposed development should be updated in advance of development commencing. The guidance of a suitably qualified ecologist should be sought to determine if and when surveys should be updated with regard to the development programme. This would ensure that up-to-date information is available to inform the extent of any mitigation and licensing requirements relating to bats.

Enhancement of roosting opportunities

The proposed development would provide opportunity to enhance the value of the site for roosting bats in the long-term in accordance with the 2023 NPPF and the 2006 NERC Act through the provision of additional opportunities for roosting bats. CALA Homes Thames Ltd have an 'Urban Wildlife Strategy' in place for all their new developments. As part of this strategy CALA Homes Thames Ltd will incorporate at least one bat roosting features within each house and apartment block. This strategy will be implemented for the site. In order to provide a variety of bat roosting opportunities suitable for a range of bat species, roost enhancement will consist of (or similar) 48 bat boxes on buildings comprising a mix of Ibstock bat boxes, Wildcare soffit bat boxes and Beaumaris Woodstone bat boxes will be incorporated into/on the buildings (suitable for crevice dwelling bat species). These will integrate the location of suitable habitat connections with avoidance of areas with highest potential future light spill. The proposed location of these features is indicated in the *Ecological Proposals Plan* (*Figure 3*).

By providing a variety of roosting opportunities in different locations and orientations within the new buildings across the site, a range of roost spaces with varied microclimates could be provided that would offer long-term roosting opportunities for bats throughout the year.

Foraging and commuting bats

Notwithstanding the current low interest of the site for foraging and commuting bats, wherever possible development proposals should seek to maintain and enhance the value of the site for this group in accordance with 2023 NPPF and the 2006 NERC Act. The *Landscape Masterplan* show the retention and creation of hedgerows and scrub/trees bordering the site. Although it is expected that the proposed gardens and areas of open space within the development area will provide new opportunities for foraging bats as these mature, the following measures are recommended in the *2022 Bat Survey Report* provided in *Appendix C*:

- Enhancement and creation of rough/meadow grassland, woodland, scrub, hedgerows, tree planting, wetland and marginal habitats across the site to provide a variety of high quality foraging habitat for bats.
- Formal planting schemes in residential areas should seek to include pollen and nectar-rich species in order to encourage invertebrate prey for bats.
- A sensitively designed lighting scheme on the edges of the adjacent residential development to ensure minimal impact on bat commuting routes and foraging areas.

A lighting strategy for the site and wider site was prepared to assess the likely effects of the proposed development on external artificial lighting levels and includes information on the baseline lighting conditions within the site (MMA Lighting Consultancy, 2018). The lighting strategy identifies that the environment surrounding the Land South of Parcel 15 site has 'low district brightness' and is categorised as an E2 Environmental Zone in accordance with the ILP Guidance (See *Table 5* below).

Table 5: Environmental Zone table

Zone	Surrounding	Lighting Environment	Examples
E0	Protected	Dark	UNESCO Starlight Reserves, IDA Dark Sky Parks
E1	Natural	Intrinsically dark	National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty etc.
E2	Rural	Low district brightness	Village or relatively dark outer suburban locations
E3	Suburban	Medium district brightness	Small town centres or suburban locations
E4	Urban	High district brightness	Town/city centres

The integrity of roost features and retained and newly created foraging and commuting habitat, both within the proposed development area and its surrounds, should be conserved through the sensitive use of lighting throughout the construction and operational phases of the proposed development. In accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust and Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance (BCT and ILP, 2023) this could be achieved through

employment of a selection of the following measures in the vicinity of retained/newly created areas of suitable foraging habitat and in the vicinity of trees and buildings providing opportunities for roosting bats:

- Use of only the minimum amount of light required for safety and amenity, and minimise upward reflected light.
- Avoidance of bare bulbs or upward-pointing lights. The spread of light should be kept near to or below the horizontal.
- LED lighting with a correlated 'warm' colour temperature of 3000 Kelvin, which should be lowered to 2700 Kelvin (where practical).
- Avoidance of light-spill into adjacent areas through luminaire design or with accessories, such as hoods, cowls, louvres and shields to direct the light.
- Minimisation of the height of lighting columns.
- For pedestrian lighting, use of low level lighting that is as directional as possible and below 3 lux at ground level.
- Where necessary, use of embedded road lights to illuminate roadways and light only high-risk stretches of roads such as crossings and merges.
- Limiting the times that lights are on to provide some dark periods for wildlife through use of timers and/or use automatic dimmers to reduce lighting outside times of peak use.

All detailed external lighting proposals should be reviewed at appropriate design stages by a suitably qualified ecologist.

5.7.3 *Residual effects*

Following implementation of the avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures described above, current knowledge suggests that it is unlikely that the proposed development would have any adverse long-term effects on the favourable conservation status of the local bat population. Development of the site could in fact create opportunity to provide enhanced roosting, foraging and commuting opportunities for the local bat population in the long term.

5.9 Birds

5.9.1 *Potential effects*

The proposed development area is currently dominated by an improved grassland field and a soil bund recently colonised with Bramble scrub and tall ruderal vegetation, which are of relatively low value to breeding birds. The *Landscape Masterplan* indicate that habitats of higher ornithological interest including hedgerows, scattered mature trees and scrub bordering the site, will be largely retained within areas of public open space, and habitats providing similar opportunities for birds are relatively abundant in the local area.

Whilst it is unlikely that the proposed works, focused on the areas of the site with relatively low value to breeding birds, would result in significant effects on birds in a local context, where possible development proposals should seek to maintain and enhance opportunities at the site for birds and have due regard to nature conservation legislation protecting nesting birds.

5.9.2 *Mitigation and enhancement proposals*

Wherever possible, the development proposals for the site should seek to maintain and enhance opportunities for birds of nature conservation interest recorded holding breeding territories on or over the site. The tree, hedgerow, scrub and grassland habitats indicated in the landscape proposals for the site are expected to maintain opportunities for a range of bird species in the long-term. In order to protect breeding birds at the site and maximise the value of the development for birds, it has been recommended that the following measures be implemented:

- Removal of trees, hedgerows or scrub and/or initial disturbance of open ground should be carried out outside the bird-breeding season (i.e. generally not between March and early September inclusive) unless supervised by a suitably experienced ecologist;
- Enhancement of retained and proposed habitats within proposed public open space including hedgerows, scrub and grassland habitats through the provision of replacement/complimentary species-rich native tree and scrub planting, retention of deadwood habitats where safe to do so, and sensitive management of the existing scrub and hedgerows to improve diversity;
- Use of high value plants for foraging birds within the landscape planting scheme. This should include fruit and nut producing species in addition to those with high pollen and nectar yields (attracting invertebrate prey);

- Hedgerow, scrub and tree management works should be carried out during January/February to allow the majority of fruits and nuts to be eaten prior to cutting/coppicing and to avoid impacts on nesting birds.

As part of CALA Homes Thames Ltd's 'Urban Wildlife Strategy', an average of one Swift nesting feature per house and apartment block will be incorporated. This strategy will be implemented for the site. Nest boxes will comprise 48 bird boxes on buildings comprising a mix of Manthorpe Swift Bird Nesting Brick (built in) or Woodstone Swift nesting box (or similar). These will integrate the location of suitable habitat connections with avoidance of areas with highest potential future light spill. The proposed location of these features is indicated in the *Ecological Proposals Plan* (*Figure 3*).

5.9.3 *Residual effects*

The proposed development is unlikely to result in any significant adverse impact on local bird populations. Subject to the implementation of the measures outlined above, it is considered that the proposed development could enhance the current value of the site for certain birds of nature conservation concern such House Sparrow, Swift and Starling.

5.10 Reptiles

5.10.1 *Potential effects*

The site is considered to support very low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard. Proposals for the site are expected to result in loss of a proportion of the suitable reptile habitat within the site including grassland and scrub/tall ruderal habitats. In the absence of mitigation and avoidance measures there is the potential for the works to result in contravention of nature conservation legislation relating to reptiles by killing or injuring reptiles during the course of the site clearance works.

5.10.2 *Mitigation and enhancement proposals*

Although very low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard may be present within suitable habitat across the site, in view of the limited number and distribution of reptiles recorded, and assuming that the site management remains the same (and subsequently the distribution and character of habitats on site does not change significantly prior to construction), a full reptile translocation exercise is not recommended in this instance prior to development commencing. Instead, it is recommended that a controlled approach is taken to site clearance in those areas where potential reptile habitat is to be lost such as scrub, tall ruderal vegetation or grassland in order to displace any reptiles present into areas of contiguous habitat within the site, wider site and wider area. This should be carried out in accordance with the methodology described in the *2023 Reptile*

Survey Report and Site-Wide Outline Reptile Mitigation Strategy provided in *Appendix E*. The procedure should be detailed within a reptile method statement to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

Habitat retention, creation and enhancement measures outlined above that are compatible with maintenance of opportunities for Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard at the site following development include:

- Enhancement of hedgerow edge habitats through creation of ecotones (a gradation from hedgerow to scrub to rough grassland habitats);
- Inclusion of other high quality reptile habitats within the landscape scheme in the form of rough and meadow grassland and scrub;
- Management of semi-natural areas within areas of informal open space to prevent scrub succession into woodland and maintain a mosaic of scrub and rough/meadow grassland habitats;
- Provision of compost heaps within gardens; and
- Use of arisings from management to create log and brash piles and hibernacula around woodland and scrub edges to provide refuge and future egg-laying opportunities.

5.10.3 *Residual effects*

Following implementation of the measures described above, it is unlikely that the proposed development will have a significant adverse effect on the local reptile population, and the proposals are likely to maintain the value of the site for reptiles in the long-term.

5.11 Invertebrates

5.11.1 *Potential effects*

Habitats of highest, albeit limited, interest to invertebrates bordering the site include the mature trees, hedgerows, scrub and dry ditch habitats which the *Landscape Masterplan* indicate can be largely retained. Development proposals should seek to maintain and enhance the current opportunities provided by the site for invertebrates in the long-term. Measures by which this can be achieved are described below.

5.11.2 *Mitigation and enhancement proposals*

Wherever possible, development proposals for the site should seek to maintain and enhance opportunities for invertebrates. The recommended planting/enhancement/ management of hedgerow, scrub and grassland habitats described above and indicated

on the landscape proposals for the site are expected to maintain and provide new opportunities for a range of invertebrate species in the long-term.

As part of CALA Homes Thames 'Urban Wildlife Strategy', boundary walls to all properties that feature masonry will include bee bricks to encourage solitary bees and other invertebrates. This strategy will be implemented for the site.

5.11.3 *Residual effects*

Following implementation of the measures described above, it is unlikely that the proposed development will have any adverse long-term effect on invertebrates, and the proposals could potentially increase the value of the site for some invertebrate species in the long-term.

5.12 Plants

5.12.1 *Potential effects*

Habitats of highest, albeit limited, interest for plants bordering the site include the mature trees, hedgerows and scrub which the *Landscape Masterplan* indicate can be largely retained within the proposed development. Development proposals should seek to maintain and enhance the current opportunities provided by the site for plants in the long-term. Measures by which this can be achieved are described below.

5.12.2 *Mitigation and enhancement proposals*

Opportunities for the diversification of plant communities at the site would be provided through enhancement and management of the existing hedgerow habitats within the site as indicated on the landscape proposals and described above. Opportunities for the enhancement of vegetation communities across the site would also be provided through new hedgerow, tree, grassland and scrub planting across the site, as described above.

5.12.3 *Residual effects*

Following implementation of the measures described above, it is unlikely that the proposed development will have any adverse long-term effect on plants, and the proposals could potentially increase the value of the site for some plants species in the long-term.

5.13 Management and monitoring

Management

5.13.1 It is recommended that the habitat creation, restoration and enhancement measures outlined in this report form the basis of a detailed habitat management plan, the provision of which could be subject to a condition of planning consent. The detailed plan should be

subject to approval by Wokingham Borough Council and should include detailed prescriptions for management activities including schedules detailing the timing of management works and 'milestones' by which the implementation and success of the proposed management can be monitored. The management plan would ensure the long-term maintenance and enhancement of the ecological value of habitats within the site for wildlife, landscape and public amenity.

Monitoring

5.13.2 In order to assess the effectiveness of the mitigation described within this report during the operational phase of the proposed development, and to ensure the successful establishment of ecological enhancements across the site, it is recommended that a monitoring programme be implemented as part of the ongoing management to assess the condition of retained, enhanced and newly created habitats, and target species of nature conservation interest including bats and reptiles.

5.13.3 In addition, prior to each phase of the site preparation and construction works the advice of a suitably qualified ecologist should be sought with regard to any requirement to update ecological survey work in order to ensure that mitigation proposals reflect the current status of species occurring at the site at the time of the development works.

5.14 Conditions

5.14.1 With regards to the recommendations provided above, it is suggested that consideration be given to the inclusion of ecology-related planning conditions in any planning permission granted for the site. These should cover:

- Agreement of habitat retention, creation and enhancement works (soft landscape).
- Preparation and agreement of a Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEMP) setting out measures to avoid and mitigate effects of construction on features of ecological interest at the site during construction. This should be based on updated surveys for protected and notable species where appropriate.
- Preparation and agreement of a stand-alone Reptile Method Statement to protect and maintain the site's reptile population prior to preparation of a CEMP.
- Preparation of detailed external lighting proposals to ensure avoidance of adverse lighting on nocturnal wildlife and associated habitats.
- Preparation and agreement of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP), setting out measures for the establishment and long-term management of habitats across the site.