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BEECH COURT, HURST

Ecological Impact Assessment

August 2024

Report ref: SWE-P24-0098-R1

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PROJECT: Beech Court, Hurst

CLIENT: Pinnacle Property Management Ltd

PREPARED BY: Sam Watson BSc (Hons) MCIEEM

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Construction of storage building

REPORT SCOPE: Ecological Impact Assessment - non-EIA. This report is not part of an Environmental Impact Assessment further to The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

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Drawings

0098-0608-1 - habitat map

0098-0608-2 – UKHabs habitat map

Photos



1.0 INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Introduction

- 1.1 Sam Watson Ecology was appointed by Pinnacle Property Management Ltd to carry out an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) of a proposal to construct a new storage building at a study area known as Beech Court, Hurst.
- 1.2 Beech Court is located just to the southeast of Hurst, Berkshire (approximate central grid reference SU 80192 73173) and contains a building complex used as offices, together with associated parking, landscaping and infrastructure. The wider area around Beech Court includes residential properties along Workingham Road, as well as fields used for pastoral and arable farming.

Methods

Habitat survey

- 1.3 A Phase 1 habitat survey was carried out of the study area on 25th June 2024. The methodology for the survey was based on the Phase 1 approach devised by the former Natural Conservancy Council (now Natural England), and updated periodically by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee¹. This technique categorises and maps the broad habitat types present within the study area, with additional detail gathered in the form of representative lists of species compiled for each habitat (an 'extended' Phase 1 survey).
- 1.4 During the survey attention was also given to identifying any habitats of 'Principal Importance' (HPI) further to Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, (i.e. 'Priority Habitat' types). These were identified based on the descriptions set out by the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group².
- 1.5 In addition, hedgerows within the study area were also assessed for their potential to meet the ecological criteria of an 'Important' hedgerow as defined by the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, by noting the number and type of native woody species present (as listed on Schedule 3 of the Regulations), and recording the presence of relevant hedgerow features, such as ditches, banks, standard trees, lack of gaps, parallel hedgerows and connections with other hedgerows/woodlands/ponds.

¹ JNCC, (2010), *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit*

² BRIG (ed. Ant Maddock) (2008). "UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions"



Other fauna

- 1.6 Throughout the habitat survey, the potential for the study area to support protected and/or notable species, such as reptiles, was assessed. The study area was also searched for evidence of badgers *Meles meles*, including setts, latrines, 'push-throughs' and foraging evidence.



2.0 RESULTS - HABITAT SURVEY

2.1 The following habitats were recorded within the study area.

- Hardstanding
- Amenity grassland
- Ornamental
- Hedgerow
- Buildings/structures
- Individual tree

2.2 Each habitat is mapped on Drawing 0098-0608-1, with the characteristic species described below. Photos of the study area are also provided at the end of this report.

Hardstanding

2.3 By far the most abundant habitat within the study area is hardstanding, which forms the roads, paths and parking areas. This has a sealed surface and is largely devoid of vegetation, other than sporadic colonisation by species such as daisy *Bellis perennis*, annual meadow-grass *Poa annua*, procumbent pearlwort *Sagina procumbens* and greater plantain *Plantago major*.

Amenity grassland

2.4 The most abundant vegetated habitat recorded is well maintained amenity grassland. This has a short sward height suggestive of regular mowing and is characterised by typical mix of ubiquitous species. Grasses recorded include perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and smooth meadow-grass. Herbs recorded include white clover, lesser trefoil, greater and ribwort plantain *Poa pratensis*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, cut-leaved cranesbill *Geranium dissectum* and ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*.

Ornamental

2.5 There are various area of ornamental vegetation within the study area which contain species and cultivated varieties of plants such as euonymus, variegated privet, spotted laurel *Aucuba japonica*, Wilson's honeysuckle *Lonicera ligustrina* var. *yunnanensis* and Mexican orange blossom *Choisya ternata*.

Hedgerow

2.6 There are three hedgerows within the study area. H1 contains Leyland cypress *Cupressus × leylandii* and H2 contains hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. H3 is primarily hawthorn, with ash



Fraxinus excelsior, field maple *Acer campestre*, elm *Ulmus procera* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* also recorded.

Buildings/structures

- 2.7 The main Beech Court building complex is located outwith the study area. The buildings/structures within the study area include a brick plantroom and a wooden shed, as well as various ancillary structures.

Individual tree

- 2.8 The only individual tree within the study area is a damson *Prunus domestica*. A cypress, most likely Leyland or Lawsons, has also recently been felled adjacent to this.

3.0 RESULTS – FAUNA

All fauna

- 3.1 No evidence of protected or notable fauna was found within the study area during the survey and overall, there is limited scope for the study area to support such species. In particular, no evidence of badgers was found and study area has no significant potential to support reptiles. The grassland habitat that dominates the vegetated elements of the study area is also well maintained and is assessed as unsuitable for supporting terrestrial phase great crested newts *Triturus cristatus*. Similarly, the buildings/structures within study area were assessed to have negligible potential to support roosting bats.



4.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Methodology

- 4.1 Ecological Impact Assessment is the process of identifying, quantifying and evaluating potential effects of development-related or other proposed actions on habitats, species and ecosystems. The point of reference for this process when evaluating the study area has been the Chartered Institute for Ecological and Environmental Management's guidelines for EcIA³, with expert judgment used as required during this process. The findings of the assessment are intended to assist the competent authority in understanding the ecological effects arising from the proposal when determining an application for consent.

Habitats

- 4.2 Without exception, the plant species and assemblages of plant species found within the study area are common and widespread throughout much of lowland Britain and are typical of a site of this type. None of the habitats identified is afforded special protection, all are readily recreated, and all are well represented in the wider area. As such, even in the absence of mitigation and/or compensation, the loss of any of the habitats as a result of the proposed development would not be considered likely to result in an ecological impact of significance at anything above the immediate confines of the study area itself.
- 4.3 The only habitats identified within the study area that has an elevated conservation status above the background level are hedgerows H2 and H3. Whilst neither of the hedgerows is considered likely to meet the ecological criteria for designations as an 'Important' hedgerow in accordance with the Hedgerows Regulation 1997, both are assessed to be an HPI on the basis that each contains greater than 80% native species. The presence and extent of an impact on these hedgerows would therefore be a material consideration for the local planning authority when determining the planning application, although the proposal does not have a direct impact on these and both are to be fully retained in any event.

Fauna

- 4.4 No protected or notable fauna or evidence of such fauna, was found; in particular no evidence of badgers was found and the study area has no significant potential to support reptiles, roosting bats or great crested newts. On the basis of these findings, no direct negative effect on protected or notable fauna is assessed as likely to occur as a result of the proposed development and no requirement for direct mitigation for protected species has been identified.

³

CIEEM (2018) *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine* version 1.2. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.



5.0 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN ASSESSMENT

Introduction

- 5.1 In order to assess the probable impact of the proposal on the measured biodiversity value of the study area, a quantitative assessment of the likely change has been carried out using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool v02.24, published by the Government.

Pre-development baseline

- 5.2 A pre-development habitat map of the study area following the UKHabs approach is provided on drawing 0098-0608-2. A condition assessment is provided at Appendix 1 for the modified grassland, individual trees and hedgerows. The condition of the other habitats is locked in the metric.
- 5.3 The completed Metric is provided together with this report. This indicates that the study area has a pre-development baseline habitat value of **1.14 habitat units (HaU)** and a hedge baseline value of **1.07 hedgerow units (HeU)**.

Biodiversity net gain

- 5.4 It is assumed that the planning consent for the proposal, if granted, will be subject to the statutory Biodiversity Condition. As such, details of how the proposal will achieve the mandatory 10% net gain in biodiversity required by the Environment Act 2021, will be agreed via the approval of a Biodiversity Gain Plan submitted pursuant to this condition.
- 5.5 Nevertheless, in order to quantify the likely quantum of enhancement required to achieve 10% net gain, an assessment of possible post-development biodiversity interventions has also been completed. These are incorporated in the completed metric and include planting seven trees targeted to reach moderate size and moderate condition, and the creation of 21m of native hedgerow with trees, that reaches good condition.
- 5.6 Based on these parameters, the Metric indicates that the study area could achieve a post-development biodiversity value of **1.28 HaU** and **1.28 HeU**, which is equivalent to a **11.98% net gain in the biodiversity value of the habitats** and a **11.58% net gain in the biodiversity value of the hedges**.



6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Nesting birds

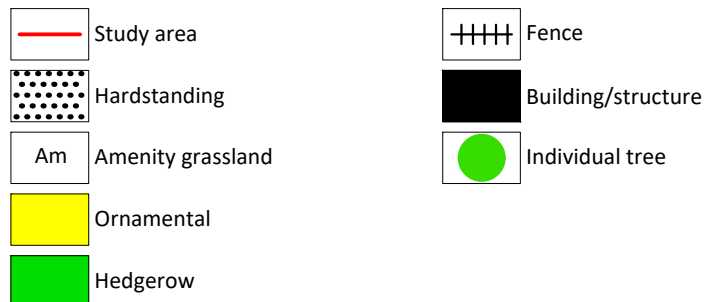
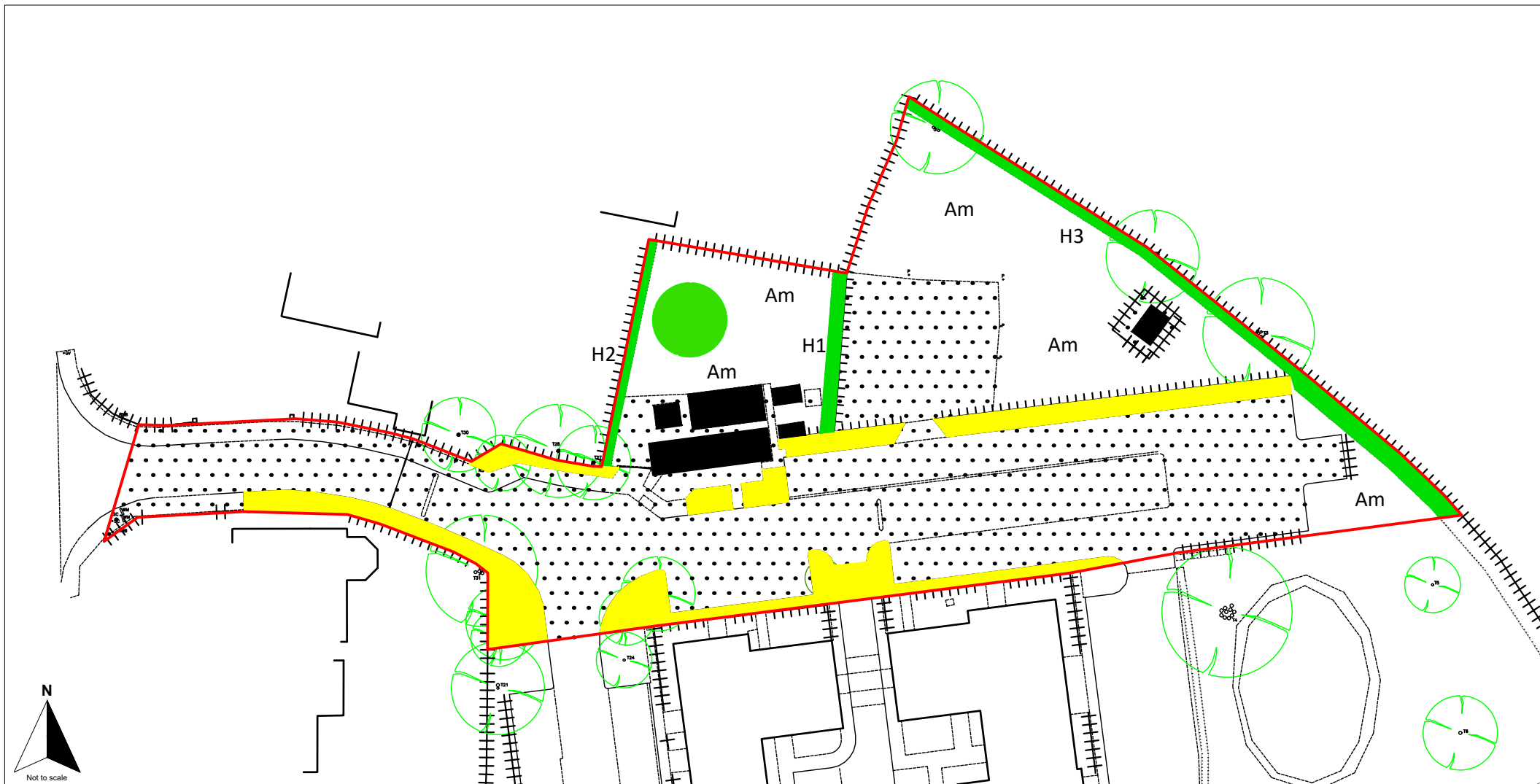
- 6.1 Although no evidence of birds' nesting in the study area was recorded during the survey and overall, it is considered unlikely within the area directly affected by the proposal would be used for nesting, the application of standard avoidance measures for nesting birds would be recommended. This would involve carrying out any clearance works, such as vegetation removal and soil stripping, outside the peak bird nesting season, which typically runs from mid-February to August inclusive, although some bird species will nest all year-round if conditions are suitable. If work is programmed for during the peak nesting period, a prior survey by a suitably experienced ecologist is recommended to identify if any nesting constraints are present at that time. If an active nest is identified within an area to be affected by any works, it is likely that it would have to remain in situ and unaffected until such time as a re-survey confirmed that it was no longer in active use, at which point it is likely that it could be removed.

Enhancement

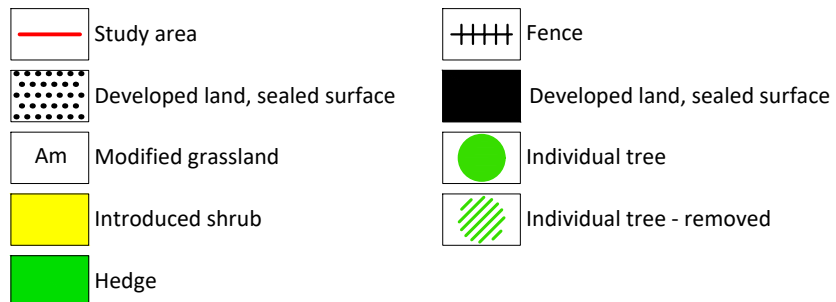
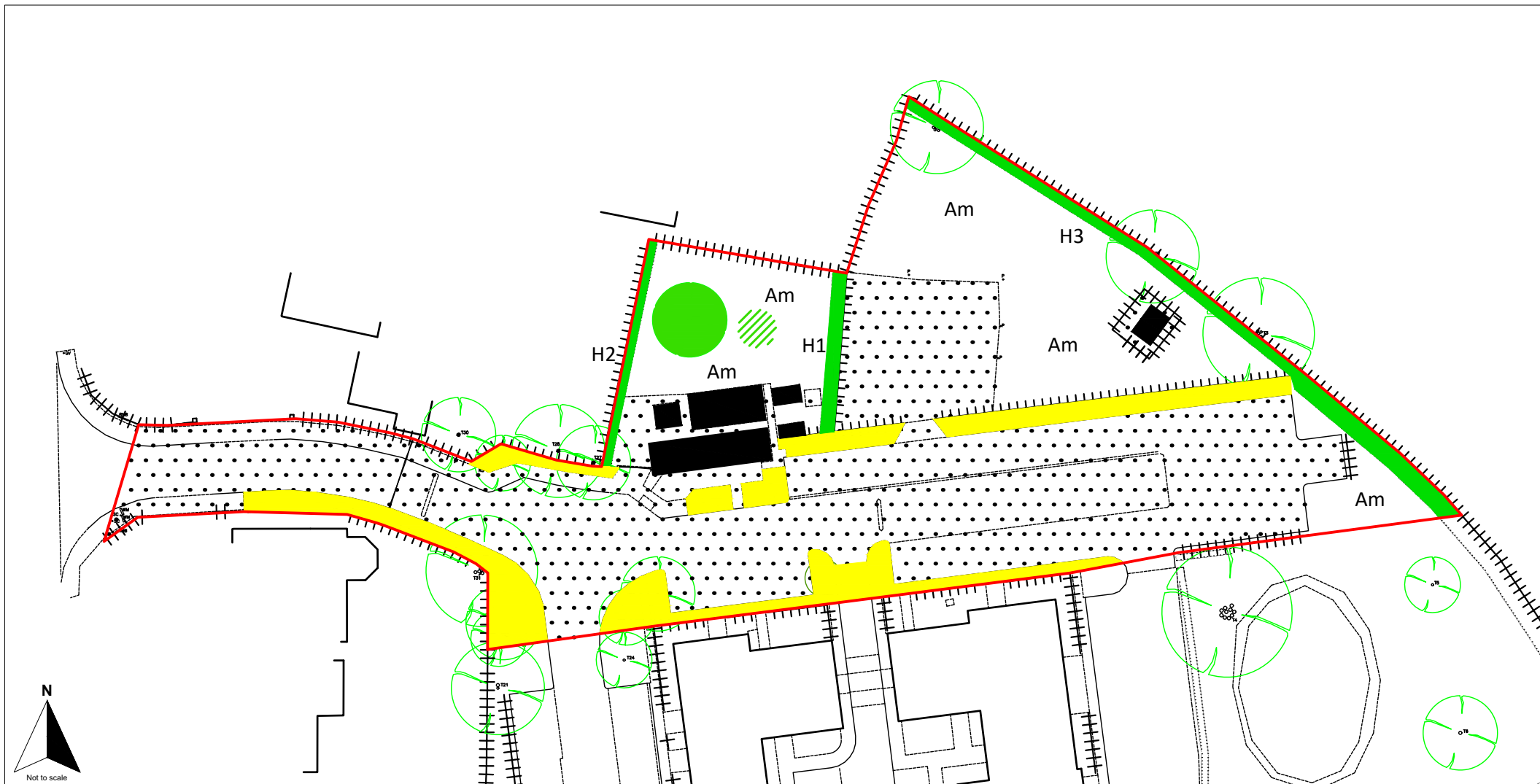
- 6.2 Although not required for legislative compliance, the NPPF⁴ at paragraph 180(d) states '*opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design*'. The following enhancements are therefore recommended to meet this policy requirement:
- Install 1 bird boxes on new the building or a retained tree within the development.
 - Install 1 bat boxes on new the building or a retained tree within the development.

⁴

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (last revision September 2023). National Planning Policy Framework.



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Project - Beech Court, Hurst Client - Pinnacle Property Management Ltd Title - Habitat map Date - August 24 Drawing - 0098-0608-1 Rev -			



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APPENDIX 1



Modified grassland condition assessment

Condition Assessment Criteria		Criterion passed	Notes
A	There are 6-8 vascular plant species per m ² present, including at least 2 forbs (these may include those listed in Footnote 1). Note - this criterion is essential for achieving Moderate or Good condition.	Yes	
B	Sward height is varied (at least 20% of the sward is less than 7 cm and at least 20% is more than 7 cm) creating microclimates which provide opportunities for vertebrates and invertebrates to live and breed.	No	The grassland has a uniform, short height with no significant variation
C	Any scrub present accounts for less than 20% of the total grassland area. (Some scattered scrub such as bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg. may be present).	Yes	No scrub was recorded in the grassland
D	Physical damage is evident in less than 5% of total grassland area. Examples of physical damage include excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, erosion caused by high levels of access, or any other damaging management activities.	Yes	No significant damage was recorded in the grassland
E	Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 10%, including localised areas (for example, a concentration of rabbit warrens) ² .	Yes	
F	Cover of bracken <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> is less than 20%.	Yes	No bracken was recorded in the grassland
G	There is an absence of invasive non-native plant species ³ (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA ⁴).	Yes	No such species were not recorded in the grassland
		Score	6 of 7 criteria passed, including essential criterion A = good condition

Individual tree condition assessment

Condition Assessment Criteria		Criterion passed	Notes
		Damson	Cypress (retrospective)
A	The tree is a native species (or at least 70% within the block are native species).	Yes	No
B	The tree canopy is predominantly continuous, with gaps in canopy cover making up <10% of total area and no individual gap being >5 m wide (individual trees automatically pass this criterion).	Yes	Yes
C	The tree is mature (or more than 50% within the block are mature).	Yes	Yes
D	There is little or no evidence of an adverse impact on tree health by human activities (such as vandalism, herbicide or detrimental agricultural activity). And there is no current regular pruning regime, so the trees retain >75% of expected canopy for their age range and height.	Yes	Yes
E	Natural ecological niches for vertebrates and invertebrates are present, such as presence of deadwood, cavities, ivy or loose bark.	No	No
F	More than 20% of the tree canopy area is oversailing vegetation beneath.	Yes	Yes
Score		5 of 6 criteria passed = good condition	4 of 6 criteria passed = moderate condition



Hedge condition assessment

Core groups - applicable to all hedgerow types				Criterion passed	
				H2	H3
A1.	Height	>1.5 m average along length	The average height of woody growth estimated from base of stem to the top of the shoots, excluding any bank beneath the hedgerow, any gaps or isolated trees.	Yes	Yes
A2.	Width	>1.5 m average along length	The average width of woody growth estimated at the widest point of the canopy, excluding gaps and isolated trees.	Yes	Yes
B1.	Gap - hedge base	Gap between ground and base of canopy <0.5 m for >90% of length	This is the vertical 'gappiness' of the woody component of the hedgerow, and its distance from the ground to the lowest leafy growth.	Yes	Yes
B2.	Gap - hedge canopy continuity	Gaps make up <10% of total length; and no canopy gaps >5 m	This is the horizontal 'gappiness' of the woody component of the hedgerow. Gaps are complete breaks in the woody canopy (no matter how small).	Yes	Yes
C1.	Undisturbed ground and perennial vegetation	>1 m width of undisturbed ground with perennial herbaceous vegetation for >90% of length: · Measured from outer edge of hedgerow; and · Is present on one side of the hedgerow (at least).	This is the level of disturbance (excluding wildlife disturbance) at the base of the hedgerow.	No	No
C2.	Nutrient-enriched perennial vegetation	Plant species indicative of nutrient enrichment of soils dominate <20% cover of the area of undisturbed ground.	The indicator species used are nettles <i>Urtica</i> spp., cleavers <i>Galium aparine</i> and docks <i>Rumex</i> spp. Their presence, either singly or together, does not exceed the 20% cover threshold.	Yes	Yes
D1.	Invasive and neophyte species	>90% of the hedgerow and undisturbed ground is free of invasive non-native plant species (including those listed on Schedule 9 of WCA ³) and recently introduced species.	Recently introduced species refer to plants that have naturalised in the UK since AD 1500 (neophytes). Archaeophytes count as natives.	Yes	Yes
D2.	Current damage	>90% of the hedgerow or undisturbed ground is free of damage caused by human activities.	This criterion addresses damaging activities that may have led to or lead to deterioration in other attributes.	Yes	Yes
E1.	Tree class	There is more than one age-class of tree present and there is on average at least one mature, ancient or veteran tree present per 20 - 50m of hedgerow.	This criterion addresses if there are a range of age-classes or morphologies which allow for replacement of trees and provide opportunities for different species.	No	Yes
E2.	Tree health	At least 95% of hedgerow trees are in a healthy condition.	This criterion identifies if the trees are subject to damage which compromises the survival and health of the individual specimens.	Yes	Yes
Score				Good condition	Good condition



PHOTOS



