

Church Lane Junction

Ecological Appraisal & Bat Building Inspection Report

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Ecological Planning & Research (EPR) has been commissioned by the University of Reading to conduct an ecological appraisal and bat building inspection to inform proposed highways improvement works at the roundabout junction of Church Lane and Basingstoke Road in Three Mile Cross, Berkshire.
- 1.2 The proposals are understood to require the clearance of the existing footway and verge on the roundabout approach and the removal of an existing garage structure.

Site Location

- 1.3 As represented in **Map 1**, the application site, which extends to some 400m², lies within the settlement of Three Mile Cross and is surrounded by residential development on all sides and to the east by the Spencers Wood Allotments. A small barn, understood to be a feature of some antiquity, stands just beyond the site, to the west of the garage.

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

- 1.4 All bats and bat roosts are fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Bats are also 'European Protected Species', protected under the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended).
- 1.5 All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), making it an offence, with certain exceptions (e.g. game birds), to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird and to take, damage or destroy their nests or eggs.

2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The appraisal and building inspection was conducted on 10 June 2021 by Chris Jack of EPR, a Natural England licensed bat surveyor.
- 2.2 The habitats present within the application site and its immediate surrounds were recorded and their suitability to support protected or otherwise notable species was assessed. The interior of the garage was fully accessible for survey and was exhaustively inspected for evidence of bats using a powerful torch and endoscope.

Survey Limitations and Constraints

- 2.3 The west and east facing external elevations of the garage could not be exhaustively searched due to the presence of dense bramble scrub. This is not, however, considered to represent a significant constraint upon the assessment, in view of the construction of the building (as discussed below) and the impediment that this scrub would present to any bats intending to roost within these areas.

3. RESULTS

Habitats and Vegetation

- 3.1 **Map 2** represents the distribution of habitats within the application site. These include a tightly-mown verge of roadside amenity grassland and an adjacent surfaced play area. The garage structure is surrounded by dense ornamental shrub planting, principally including laurel, and overgrown in places with bramble.

Summary and Evaluation

- 3.2 The habitats present within the site boundary are of very low inherent ecological importance. The shrub planting may present nesting opportunities for common garden bird species, although no evidence of breeding behaviour was recorded during the survey.

Bat Building Inspection

- 3.3 The garage appears to be a late twentieth century structure. The walls are constructed from a single skin of wooden boards (in the style of a garden shed) resting on a low, single-skin brick base. There is no overlap between the boards and the brick base, and only a very slightly overlap, insufficient to accommodate roosting bats, between the individual boards.
- 3.4 The roof is pitched and constructed of corrugated tin sheets supported by a square-sawn timber frame. The interior was largely bare but did not appear to have been recently swept or cleaned.
- 3.5 No droppings, feeding remains, or other evidence of bats was found.
- 3.6 The adjacent, off-site barn is a larger and more antiquated structure, although similarly constructed. The boards which form the external walls of the barn are more substantial, presenting larger gaps, and there appears to be a second timber wall inside the boarding. Potentially suitable gaps under boards on the elevation facing the garage were endoscopically inspected, as far as the intervening bramble would permit: no bats or evidence thereof was observed.
- 3.7 The interior of the barn was not accessible for inspection.

Summary and Evaluation

- 3.8 The garage has negligible suitability for roosting bats: no potentially suitable bat roosting features were observed.

- 3.9 The adjacent barn was not fully accessible for survey but is provisionally considered to have at least a low level of suitability for bats, given the occurrence of occasional gaps under weatherboarding and an apparent cavity between the outer boarding and an inner timber wall.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF PROTECTED SPECIES

Birds

- 4.1 The shrub planting in the vicinity of the barn and garage presents potentially suitable nesting opportunities for garden bird species. Clearance of this vegetation should either be timed to avoid the breeding bird season (which occurs from March to August inclusive) or immediately preceded by a nesting bird check undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist. In the event that an active nest is found, it should be retained *in situ* within a suitable buffer until such time as the nestlings fledge or the nest otherwise naturally ceases to be active.

Bats

- 4.2 The garage has negligible suitability for roosting bats and can be removed without further ecological consideration.
- 4.3 The neighbouring barn appears to have at least a low level of suitability for roosting bats. However, the risk of bats incurring harm or significant disturbance during the removal of the adjacent garage is considered to be low. Any bats occupying the barn will be habituated to a certain degree of disturbance due to its adjacency to the roundabout. Moreover, notwithstanding ecological considerations, the removal of the garage will need to be carefully and sensitively undertaken to avoid damage to the adjacent building, and this will be facilitated by the garage's lightweight and insubstantial structure.

5. SUMMARY

- 5.1 The habitats within the application site have very low ecological importance and present no over-riding constraint to the proposals.
- 5.2 Ornamental scrub planted in the vicinity of the garage provides potentially suitable nesting habitat for garden bird species. Measures required to avoid damage to nests or eggs are set out in **Section 4** above.
- 5.3 No evidence of bats was recorded during the inspection. The garage has negligible suitability to support roosting bats.

Document Prepared By: Alex Weeks BSc (Hons)

Document Approved By: Chris Jack BSc (Hons) MA PgC MCIEEM

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Appendix 1: Site photographs



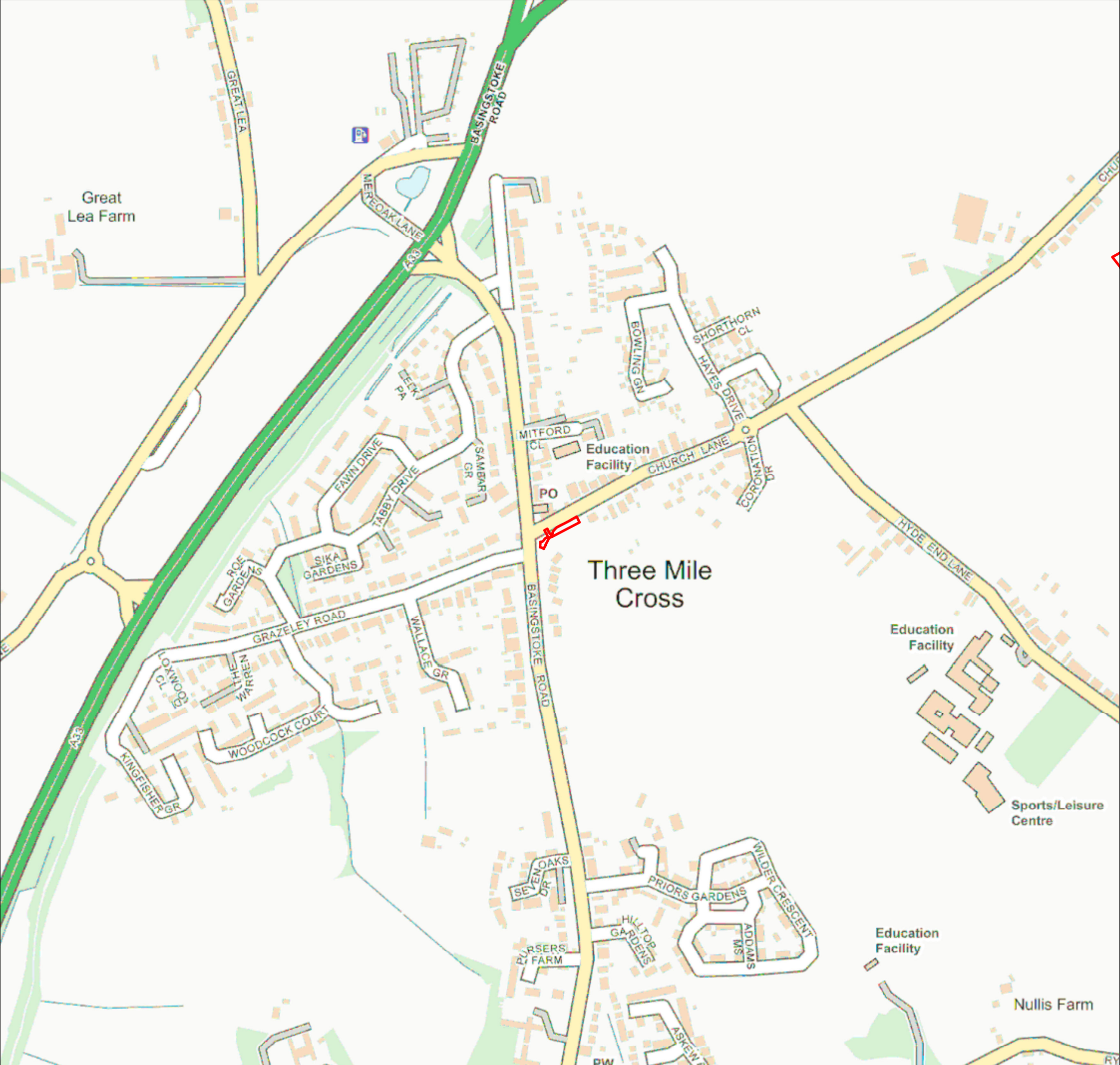
Front (north) elevation of garage (left) and barn



Interior of garage



Detail of boarding at rear (south) elevation of garage



MAP 1 Site Location

KEY

Site boundary

SCALE: 1:5,000 at A3

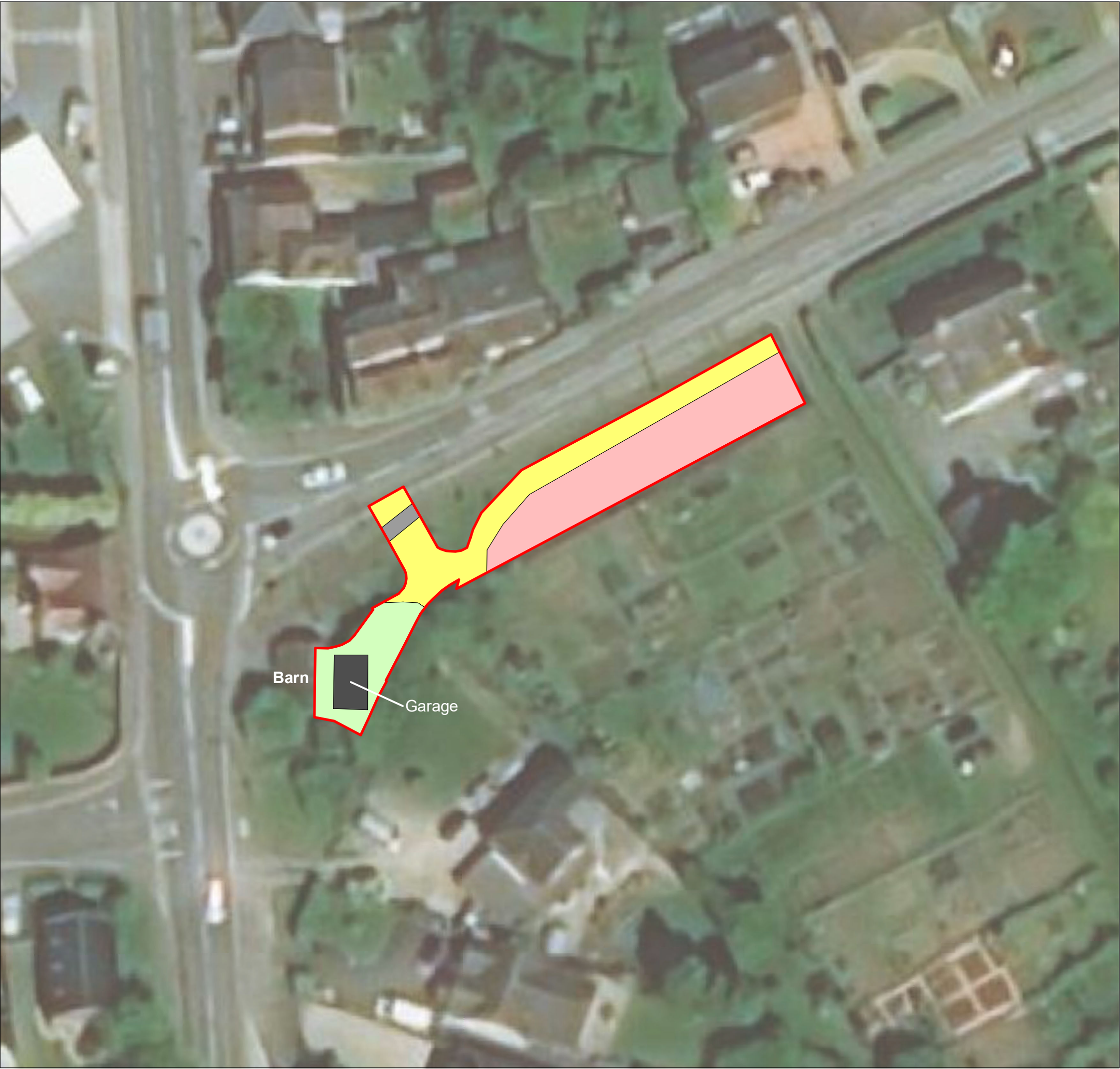
0 50 100 150 200 Metres



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DATE: 17 June 2021



MAP 2 Habitats

KEY

- Site boundary
- Amenity grassland
- Building
- Hardstanding
- Ornamental scrub
- Surfaced play area

SCALE: 1:400 at A3

0 5 10 15 20 Metres



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