

ORACLE CENTRE, READING
ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL – VUE CINEMA

Prepared for Hammerson Ltd.

by

Hankinson Duckett Associates

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hankinson duckett associates

† 01491 838175 † 01491 838997 e consult@hda-enviro.co.uk w www.hda-enviro.co.uk

The Stables, Howbery Park, Benson Lane, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 8BA

Hankinson Duckett Associates Limited Registered in England & Wales 3462810 Registered Office: The Stables, Howbery Park, Benson Lane, Wallingford, OX10 8BA

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report describes an Ecological Appraisal, including a Phase 1 bat scoping survey, of approximately 0.5ha of land at the Vue Cinema, Oracle Centre, Reading hereinafter referred to as 'the site'. The site centre is located by National Grid Reference SU 71728 73224. The study was commissioned by Hammerson Ltd. in October 2022.
- 1.2 The site is located in the centre of Reading and comprises the Vue Cinema and bordering areas of hardstanding and formal planting. The site is bordered to north by the Kennet and Avon Canal with commercial development beyond; to the east by Yield Hall Place road and London Street with commercial development beyond; to the south by Queen's Road A329, beyond which is Mill Lane with commercial development beyond; and to the west by The Oracle shopping centre. The location and boundary of the site are shown in *Appendix B*.
- 1.3 The site is proposed for residential development with associated landscaping.
- 1.4 The aims of this study are:
- i. To assess the likely nature conservation importance of habitats within the site;
 - ii. To assess the likely presence of protected species and Habitats and Species of Principal Importance identified under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act;
 - iii. To identify any potential constraints to development due to the above;
 - iv. To identify requirements for any additional ecological surveys in support of a planning application; and
 - v. To identify measures to avoid and mitigate potential effects of development on identified features of ecological interest.

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 'Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside' (MAGIC) online database (magic.defra.gov.uk) 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 statutory designated sites located within an area of up to 10km from the site boundary was carried out using the MAGIC database. The findings of the desk study are summarised in *Section 3* below and the full results are given in *Appendix A*.

2.2 Field survey

- 2.2.1 The field survey comprised an extended Phase 1 habitat survey (JNCC, 2016) and a Phase 1 bat scoping survey carried out by Clare Bird MCIEEM of HDA on 31st October 2022. A

total of 2 hours was spent carrying out the field survey. Weather conditions were bright and dry.

Extended Phase 1 habitat survey

- 2.2.2 The Phase 1 habitat survey involved walking over the site, mapping the main habitat types and compiling detailed 'target notes'. Target notes record habitat features, and a list of vascular plant species noted, together with a qualitative assessment of relative abundance where appropriate. An initial assessment was also made of the potential for the site to support protected and notable species based on the character of habitats present.

- 2.2.3 The full results of the Phase 1 habitat survey are given in *Appendix B*. Botanical names follow Stace (2019) for higher plants.

Phase 1 bat scoping survey

- 2.2.4 During the Phase 1 bat scoping survey, all trees and buildings within the site were assessed for their potential to support roosting bats and classified accordingly.

Phase 1 building survey

- 2.2.5 All buildings within the site were inspected externally from ground level using binoculars and a powerful torch to identify and investigate any potential entry and exit points such as missing roof tiles, loose fascias and lifted lead flashing, and to look for evidence of entry/exit in the form of staining, discolouration and/or scratch marks.

- 2.2.6 Buildings were also searched internally where possible to look for evidence of current or former occupation by bats. A powerful torch was used to investigate any accessible cavities, crevices and recesses in each building.

- 2.2.7 In view of the findings of the building inspections, the potential of the buildings to support roosting bats ('confirmed roost', 'high', 'moderate', 'low' or 'negligible') was assessed in accordance with current best practice guidelines (BCT, 2016). Assessment of bat roosting potential requires consideration of a number of criteria, including the design and construction of the building or structure, the size and location of potential features and access points, the position of the building or structure, aspect, geographical location, surrounding land use and adjacent landscape linkages.

Phase 1 tree survey

- 2.2.8 All trees within and immediately adjacent to the site were inspected from ground-level with the aid of binoculars and a powerful torch to identify potential features suitable for use by roosting bats. Potential features include splits, cracks and cavities, peeling bark, woodpecker

holes, broken branches and a covering of Ivy where this is of a sufficient age to provide a suitable microclimate between the tree and Ivy stem(s).

2.2.9 In accordance with current best practice guidelines (BCT, 2016), trees were placed into one of five categories. Categorisation was based on the nature, size, location and quality of features present in each tree:

- Negligible suitability - Trees with no or negligible features for roosting bats;
- Low suitability - Trees of sufficient size and age to contain potential roost features but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential;
- Moderate suitability - Trees with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats but are unlikely to support roost types of high conservation status;
- High suitability - Trees with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time; or
- Known or confirmed bat roost.

Other species

2.2.10 Observations on the presence, or potential presence, of other protected species were recorded as incidental information to the extended Phase 1 habitat survey and this information should not be relied on as a comprehensive assessment of the presence or otherwise of all protected species on the site. This is because there is a wide range of protected species, many of which can occur on one site and most require specialist expertise to locate them and/or season-critical survey techniques to confirm their presence, and this is outside the scope of the present report.

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
- Regional
- County / Metropolitan
- District / Borough
- 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 E*.

2.3.4 The potential for protected species and Habitats and Species of Principal Importance identified under Section 41 of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act to be present within the site has been assessed on the basis of the habitats and features present and the results of the desk study.

2.4 Limitations

2.4.1 No limitations were encountered during the field survey or desk study, and these surveys are considered adequate to allow a robust assessment of the likely nature conservation significance of the site and its development, and to form the basis of the recommendations provided in *Sections 7 and 8* of this report.

3 DESK STUDY

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The following section summarises the findings of the desk study. The original data is provided in *Appendix A*.

3.2 Designated sites

Statutory designated areas

3.2.1 No statutory nature conservation designations pertain to the site or adjacent land. This is confirmed by information from the MAGIC online database and Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC).

3.2.2 No internationally designated sites, including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsars, are located within 10km of the site and no nationally designated sites, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are located within 5km of the site. In addition, no Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are located within 2km of the site.

3.2.3 IRZs are used by Natural England to identify development activities in the vicinity of SSSIs, SPAs and SACs which in the absence of mitigation and avoidance measures may adversely affect designated features, thereby requiring planning authorities to consult with Natural England where potentially damaging activities are proposed. The site does not fall within any

Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) and therefore Natural England would not be expected to be consulted on the proposed development in this regard.

Non-statutory designated areas

3.2.4 Eight Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) and two Proposed LWSs are located within 2km of the site.

These comprise:

- Holy Brook LWS is a 4.5km stream that carries water from and back to the River Kennet chalk stream and flows directly through the Fobney & River Kennet Meadows LWS (see below) located approximately 570m south-west of the site.
- River Kennet/Kennet & Avon Canal LWS is a 9.48ha high quality chalk stream with a diverse range of marginal flora forming important habitat for Water Vole and invertebrates located approximately 590m to the south of the site.
- The Coal, Kennetmouth and Kings Meadow East LWS is a 3.62ha area comprising broadleaved semi-natural woodland, wet woodland, rough grassland and scrub habitats located approximately 1.1km to the north-east of the site.
- Cow Lane Depot LWS is a 1.54ha area of mature trees, Willow scrub, open standing water, swamp, ruderal and tall herb grassland located approximately 1.2km to the north-west of the site.
- Fobney & Kennet Valley Meadows LWS is a 154ha complex, comprising a series of meadows within a floodplain, ranging from rough grassland to swamps being dissected by hedgerows and trees located approximately 1.2km to the south-west of the site.
- Whitely Park Farm/St Patrick's Hill LWS is a 2ha parcel of mixed broadleaved semi-natural woodland with a diverse range of habitats within including two ponds located approximately 1.5km south of the site.
- Henley Road Gravel Pit LWS is a 53.7ha former gravel pit noted for the wintering wildfowl it supports, located approximately 1.5km north-east of the site. In addition, an 29.64ha Proposed LWS extension is located to the immediate north of Henley Road Gravel Pit LWS.
- The Warren Woodlands Complex LWS is a 7.64ha area comprising 6 sites of semi-natural broadleaved woodland on the chalk scarp of The Warren. The closest parcel is located approximately 1.8km north-west of the site.
- Dingley Dell Proposed LWS is a 27.5ha area comprising woodland and semi-improved grassland, located approximately 1.8km to the north-east of the site.

3.2.8 No areas of woodland included in Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory are located within 2km of the site.

- 3.3 **Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and NERC Act Habitats and Species of Principal Importance**
- 3.3.1 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.
- 3.3.2 These species and habitats 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 2021 National Planning Policy Framework (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.
- 3.3.3 The Berkshire Local Nature Partnership has developed a spatial approach to biodiversity action planning in the county through the identification of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (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 and although the site is not situated within any of these, the closest BOA to the site is Kennet Valley East BOA, located approximately 1.2km to the south of the site at its closest point. This BOA comprises the River Kennet chalk river, reedbeds, fen, wet woodland, lowland meadow, wet grassland and standing water. Objectives for the BOA include:
- River management, restoration and protection.
 - Management and re-creation of reedbed and fen.
 - Management of gravel pits and associated habitats.
 - Potential for some nature conservation after use in future mineral extraction.
 - Management, restoration and re-creation of lowland meadow and wet grassland habitat.
- 3.3.4 In addition, the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership lists Habitats and Species of Principal Importance within the county including Adder, Common Lizard, Slow-worm, Common Toad, Great Crested Newt, Brown Long-eared bat, Hazel Dormouse, Harvest Mouse, Hedgehog, Noctule and Soprano Pipistrelle as well as a number of birds, invertebrates and plant species. Habitats of Principal Importance listed include lowland meadow, mixed deciduous woodland, Beech and Yew woodland, ponds, reedbeds, traditional orchards and wood pasture and parkland.
- 3.3.5 Consideration of the presence, or potential presence, of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and NERC Act Habitats and Species of Principal Importance at the site is given in *Sections 5 to 8* of this report.

3.4 Protected species

3.4.1 No records of protected or notable species relating directly to the site were provided during the desk study. TVERC did however provide records of protected and notable species occurring in the wider desk study area including bats, Otter, Water Vole, Badger, Great Crested Newts, birds, reptiles, invertebrates, plants and fish. A summary of the records is given below.

3.4.2 Bats

3.4.2.1 Records of at least eight bat species were provided for the desk study area. These included Common Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared bat, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule, Barbastelle, Serotine, Daubenton's bat and Nathusius' Pipistrelle as well as unidentified bat species. The closest record to the site pertains to a Common Pipistrelle approximately 250m north-west of the site, dating from 2009.

3.4.2.2 All UK bat species are protected as European Protected Species (EPS) under the 2019 Conservation of Habitats and Species (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations. In relation to EPS, the 2019 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 (a) be in possession of, or to control; (b) to transport any live or dead animal or any part of an animal; (c) to sell or exchange or (d) offer for sale or exchange any live or dead animal or part of an animal of an EPS.

3.4.2.3 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.

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

3.4.2.5 Seven species of bat (Barbastelle, Bechstein's, Noctule, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared, Greater Horseshoe and Lesser Horseshoe) are also listed as Species of Principal

Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act. Section 40 of the Act requires planning authorities to regard these species as a material consideration in the planning process.

3.4.3 *Otter*

3.4.3.1 Eleven records of Otter were provided for the desk study area. The closest of the records is located along the Kennet and Avon Canal approximately 70m to the east of the site, dating from 2019.

3.4.3.2 The Otter is protected through its inclusion on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (see Section 3.4.2.3) and is a EPS under the 2019 Conservation of Habitats and Species (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations (see Section 3.4.2.2). It is also a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.4.4 *Water Vole*

3.4.4.1 Nine records of Water Vole were provided for the desk study area. The closest of these is located approximately 1.4km to the south-west of the site along the Kennet and Avon Canal, dating from 2020.

3.4.4.2 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.

3.4.4.3 The Water Vole is also listed as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.4.5 *Badger*

3.4.5.1 Forty records of Badgers were provided for the desk study area. The closest of these is located approximately 810m to the north-east of the site, dating from 2020.

3.4.5.2 Badgers and their setts are protected under the 1992 Protection of Badgers Act. Unless permitted under a licence issued by Natural England, this makes it an offence to:

- Kill, injure or capture a Badger;
- Damage, destroy or obstruct access to a Badger sett; and/or
- Disturb Badgers while they are occupying a sett.

3.4.6 Birds

3.4.6.1 All nesting birds are afforded a basic level of protection under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). Species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act receive additional protection against disturbance when breeding. 98 notable bird species were recorded within the desk study area, none of which pertain directly to the site. *Table 1* below details the protected and notable bird species recorded within 2km of the site.

Table 1: Specially protected and notable bird species recorded within desk study area

Common Name	Scientific Name	Annex I ¹	WCA 1 ²	NERC 41 ³	BOCC5 (2021) ⁴
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				Amber
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>				Green
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>				Amber
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				Amber
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>				Amber
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>				Former breeding species
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				Amber
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				Red
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>				Green
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				Amber
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				Amber
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				Green
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>				Amber
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>				Amber
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>				Red
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				Amber
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				Red
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>				Amber
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>				Red
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>				Green
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				Amber
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>				Amber
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>				Amber
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>				Amber
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>				Red
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				Amber
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				Amber
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				Amber
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>				Red
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				Green
Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>				Amber
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>				Red
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>				Red
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				Amber
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				Green
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				Red
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				Amber

Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>				Red
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>				Red
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>				Red
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				Green
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				Amber
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				Red
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>				Amber
Common Mealy Redpoll	<i>Arcanthis flammea</i>				Amber
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>				Amber
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>				Red
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				Red
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				Red
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				Amber
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>				Red
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				Amber
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				Green
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				Amber
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				Red
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>				Green
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				Amber
Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				Amber
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>				Amber
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				Amber
Rook	<i>Corvus fruilegus</i>				Amber
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>				Red
Sandpiper (Common)	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				Amber
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>				Amber
Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>				Red
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				Amber
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>				Amber
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				Amber
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				Red
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				Amber
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				Amber
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				Amber
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				Red
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>				Red
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				Amber
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>				Red
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				Amber
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				Amber
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>				Amber
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>				Amber
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				Red
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				Amber
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>				Amber
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				Amber
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>				Amber
Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>				Red

Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>				Amber
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				Amber
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>				Red
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>				Amber
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>				Red
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>				Amber

Notes on Table 1:

- 1 Species listed on Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive (Codified version: 2009/147/EC) (EC, 2009). For the conservation of these species the 2019 Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations provides for the setting up of SPAs where internationally important populations exist.
- 2 Species specially protected by Schedule 1 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended).
- 3 Priority Species included in the Species of Principal Importance under the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act.
- 4 Species included in the Birds of Conservation Concern 4 red and amber lists (RSPB, 2021). Red list – rapidly declining species and species of global conservation concern. Amber list – moderately declining species, rare breeders, internationally important and localised species, and those with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe.

3.4.7 Reptiles

3.4.7.1 61 records of reptile were provided for the desk study area. These include records of Common Lizard, Grass Snake and Slow-worm. The closest of these records pertains to a Slow-worm located approximately 1km to the north-east of the site, dating from 2016.

3.4.7.2 All native reptiles are protected against killing and injuring under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) and are listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act. Due to their rarity, Sand Lizards and Smooth Snakes have additional protection.

3.4.8 Great Crested Newt

3.4.8.1 One record of Great Crested Newt was provided for the desk study area. This record is located approximately 990m to the north-east of the site and dates from 2017.

3.4.8.2 The Great Crested Newt is protected through its inclusion on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (see *Section 3.4.2.3*) and is a EPS through the 2019 Conservation of Habitats and Species (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations (see *Section 3.4.2.2*). The Great Crested Newt is also listed as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.4.9 Invertebrates

3.4.9.1 TVERC provided 682 records of protected and notable 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 via the 2019 Conservation of Habitats and Species (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations allows the setting up of SACs where key populations exist and as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act;

- White-letter Hairstreak butterfly which is protected against commercial exploitation under Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended), a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act and listed as 'Endangered'¹ on the IUCN Red List;
- White Admiral butterfly which is identified as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act and listed as 'Vulnerable'² on the IUCN Red List;
- Small Heath butterfly which is a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act and listed as 'Near Threatened'³ on the IUCN Red List; and
- Brindled Beauty, Blood-vein, Buff Ermine, Centre-barrowed Swallow, Cinnabar and Red-shanked Carpenter Bee which are listed as Species of Principle Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.4.9.2 In addition, records were provided of invasive invertebrate species within the desk study area. These include records of Chinese Mitten Crab (*Eriocheir sinensis*) and Signal Crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*) both of which are listed on Schedule 9 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). It is an offence to release or grow in the wild any species included on this schedule of the Act.

3.4.10 *Plants*

3.4.10.1 TVERC provided 47 records of protected and notable plant species for the desk study area, none of which pertain directly to the site. These include:

- Bluebell which is protected under Schedule 8 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) against commercial exploitation;
- English Sticky Eyebright which is listed as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act and 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List;
- Chicory which is listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List; and
- Corn Mint, Field Scabious, Heath Speedwell, Hoary Plantain, Quaking Grass, Ragged Robbin and Wild Strawberry which are listed as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN Red List.

3.4.10.2 Records were also provided of invasive plant species within the desk study area. These include records of Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) all of which are listed on

¹ **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.

² **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.

³ **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.

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.

3.4.11 *Fish*

3.4.11.1 TVERC provided records of protected and notable fish species for the desk study area, none of which pertain directly to the site. These include records of:

- Atlantic Salmon within the River Kennet, approximately 2km to the south of the site dating from 2003. This fish is protected under 1992 EC Habitats Directive: Annex II and V(a) which via the 2019 Conservation of Habitats and Species (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations allows the setting up of SACs where key populations exist. In addition, it is listed as a Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act; and
- Brown Trout and European Eel which are listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.4.12 *Other species*

3.4.12.1 Other notable species for which desk study records were provided include Hedgehog and Common Toad which are both identified as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act.

3.4.12.2 No records of Hazel Dormice were received for the desk study area.

3.5 **Planning policies**

3.5.1 Relevant policies from the Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted November 2019) relating to nature conservation and the environment include:

EN11: Waterspaces

Reading's waterspaces will be protected and enhanced, so that they can continue to contribute to local and regional biodiversity and ecology, flood mitigation, local character, heritage and visual amenity, the provision of accessible leisure and recreational opportunities and, where appropriate, navigation. There will be no adverse impact on the functions and setting of any watercourse and its associated corridor.

Where development in the vicinity of watercourses is acceptable, it will:-

- *Provide appropriate, attractive uses and buildings that enhance the relationship of buildings, spaces and routes to the watercourse, including through creating or enhancing views of the watercourse, and create a high quality public realm;*
- *Make positive contributions to the distinct character, appearance, historic significance, landscape and amenity of the watercourses;*
- *Provide a strengthened role for watercourses as important landscape features, wildlife corridors, historic features and recreation opportunities;*
- *Wherever practical and consistent with its biodiversity role, provide good, level access to and along the waterside for all those who want to use it;*
- *Be set at least ten metres back from the watercourse wherever practicable and appropriate to protect its biodiversity significance;*
- *Improve the quality of watercourse environment through protecting and enhancing habitats and ensuring that habitat creation is balanced with access and urban uses; and*

- Pursue opportunities for deculverting of watercourses.

EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network

a) The identified Green Network, the key elements of which are shown on the Proposals Map, shall be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced. Permission will not be granted for development that negatively affects the sites with identified interest or fragments the overall network. The Green Network comprises:

- Sites with identified biodiversity interest - Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, protected and priority species and their habitats, Priority and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, and the River Thames and all its tributaries (including the River Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal); and
- Areas with potential for biodiversity value and which stitch the Green Network together – designated Local Green Space and open green spaces, and existing and potential Green Links.

New development shall demonstrate how the location and type of green space, landscaping and water features provided within a scheme have been arranged such that they maintain or link into the existing Green Network and contribute to its consolidation. Such features should be designed to maximise the opportunities for enhancing this network. All new development should maximise opportunities to create new assets and links into areas where opportunities are as yet unidentified on the Proposals Map.

b) On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. Development should:

- Protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and
- Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable.

In exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site, and it is demonstrated that the impacts cannot be: 1) avoided; 2) mitigated or; 3) compensated for on-site; then new development will provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is “no net loss” of biodiversity. Provision of off-site compensation shall be calculated in accordance with nationally or locally recognised guidance and metrics. It should not replace existing alternative habitats, and should be provided prior to development.

EN14: Trees, Hedges, Woodlands

Individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading’s vegetation cover will be extended. The quality of waterside vegetation will be maintained or enhanced.

New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained.

4 PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY

4.1 General description

4.1.1 The results of the Phase 1 habitat survey are presented in map form with target notes (represented by numbered dots) in Appendix B. A brief non-technical description of the habitats and features of the site is given below. Numbers in brackets refer to target notes.

4.1.2 In general terms, the site comprises the Vue Cinema and bordering areas of hardstanding and formal planting. The site is bordered to north by the Kennet and Avon Canal with commercial development beyond; to the east by Yield Hall Place road and London Street with commercial development beyond; to the south by Queen's Road A329, beyond which is Mill Lane with commercial development beyond; and to the west by The Oracle shopping centre.

4.2 Building and hardstanding

4.2.1 The site is dominated by the Vue Cinema and adjacent hardstanding (1). A detailed description of the building is provided at *Section 5* below.

4.3 Trees and scrub

4.3.1 A line of Small-leaved Lime trees are located along the walkway bordering the off-site canal in the north of the site and London Plane trees are located to the east and south of the Vue Cinema (3).

4.3.2 Located approximately 2m below the walkway in the north-eastern corner of the site, and at the level of the off-site canal, is an area of Willow and Dogwood scrub (4).

4.4 Ornamental planting

4.4.1 Raised planters and flowerbeds bordering the Vue Cinema are planted with a mix of ornamental species. Species include Griselinia, *Fatsia japonica*, Cotoneaster and Box (2). To the south of the cinema are also a number of flowerbeds supporting bare earth and woodchips (5).

5 PROTECTED AND NOTABLE SPECIES

5.1 Bats

Phase 1 bat scoping survey

5.1.1 The building within the site was inspected during the Phase 1 bat scoping survey. The results of the Phase 1 building survey are summarised in *Table 2* below and the location of the building is shown in *Appendix C*. Photograph references (in brackets) relate to the supporting photographs provided in *Appendix D*.

Table 2: Phase 1 bat scoping building survey results

Building	Description	Findings	Bat roost potential
B1 (Photos 1 to 3)	Vue Cinema A multi-storey cinema with brick and glass walls, partly clad with metal sheeting. The roof is mostly flat with sloping metal sheeting on the northern and southern elevations to hide the presence of ventilation systems present on the roof.	External The walls and roof are well sealed, with no features with potential to support roosting bats identified. The metal cladding located on the northern elevation has been well sealed, however the cladding on the other elevations has a small gap along the base. The building is subject to high-levels of external lighting in association with the adjacent footpaths and roads. Internal No loft void present. No evidence of roosting bats recorded.	Negligible

5.1.2 All trees within and immediately adjacent to the site were also inspected during the Phase 1 bat scoping survey. All trees identified as having potential to support roosting bats within the site are described in *Table 3* below and their locations are illustrated in *Appendix C*.

Table 3: Phase 1 bat scoping tree survey results

Tree	Species	Findings	Bat roost potential
T1	London Plane	Number of small trunk cavities from removed branches which may not lead anywhere.	Low
T2	London Plane	Number of small trunk cavities from removed branches which may not lead anywhere.	Low

Foraging and commuting habitat

5.1.3 Habitats within and immediately adjacent to the site including scattered trees, scrub and the off-site canal provide some opportunities for foraging bats. However the habitats within the site are extremely limited and although these are enhanced by the off-site canal, similar and higher quality opportunities for foraging and commuting bats are found extensively in the surrounding area. The site is therefore considered to be of negligible value for foraging bats at a local level. Notwithstanding this, measures are given in *Section 8* to maintain opportunities at the site for foraging and commuting bats following development.

5.2 Dormouse

5.2.1 The trees and scrub within the site are of limited suitability for Dormice and the site has negligible connectivity with substantial areas of high-quality Dormouse habitat in the wider area. In addition, no records for Dormouse were received for the area within 2km of the site during the desk study. In view of this it is considered highly unlikely that Dormice are present within the site.

5.3 Otter and Water Vole

5.3.1 The off-site Kennet and Avon Canal to the north of the site provides suitable habitat for Otter and in view of the desk study records in close proximity to the site, in association with the canal, it is anticipated that Otters are present within this off-site watercourse on at least an occasional basis.

5.3.2 Records of Water Vole were obtained for the Kennet and Avon Canal, however the closest record is located approximately 1.4km to the south-west of the site. In view of the highly urbanised, reinforced nature of the banks of the canal adjacent to the site, it is not likely that Water Voles use this section of the canal. However, records were provided for both up- and down-stream of the site and subsequently it is anticipated that Water Voles may travel along the canal to disperse between territories.

5.4 Badgers

Badger setts

5.4.1 No Badger setts or any other evidence of Badger activity (e.g. paths, latrines or foraging signs) were recorded within or adjacent to the site. No suitable sett building habitat was recorded.

Foraging habitat

5.4.2 The ornamental shrubs and bare flowerbeds provide very low quality Badger foraging habitat. No evidence of Badger foraging such as scratching or snuffle holes was recorded during the Badger survey. In view of the abundance of similar and higher quality foraging habitats within the surrounding area it is considered highly unlikely that the site is of importance to the local Badger population.

5.5 Birds

5.5.1 The trees and scrub within the site offer nesting and foraging opportunities for common and widespread bird species and it is possible that the site supports a small number of breeding birds typical of garden habitats. Similar habitat is abundant in the wider area however and the site is unlikely to be of significant ornithological interest in a local context. Notwithstanding this, measures to maintain opportunities for birds within any development proposals for the site and to protect nesting birds during construction are provided in *Section 8* below.

5.6 Reptiles

5.6.1 The majority of the site is dominated by buildings and hardstanding with small areas of ornamental shrubs which is unsuitable for reptiles. Potentially suitable habitat for reptiles such as Grass Snakes is limited to the small area of scrub bordering the canal, however in view of the very limited extent of suitable habitat present at the site and its isolation, it is highly unlikely that the site supports reptiles on a regular basis or that a notable reptile

population is present in a local context. Consideration should however be given to the nature conservation legislation afforded to common and widespread reptile species and this is discussed further in *Section 8* below.

5.7 Great Crested Newts

5.7.1 There are no suitable waterbodies for Great Crested Newts within the site and this species is therefore not expected to breed within the site. The site is dominated by hardstanding and buildings, with small and isolated areas of ornamental shrubs and scrub that provide very limited areas of suitable terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newt.

5.7.2 In addition, a review of the OS 1:10,000 scale map and aerial photographs of the site's surrounds suggest that there are no suitable waterbodies⁴ within 300m of the site with the potential to support Great Crested Newts. In view of the above, it is considered highly unlikely that Great Crested Newts would use the site during either terrestrial or aquatic phases.

5.8 Invertebrates

5.8.1 Although the ornamental shrubs, scattered trees and scrub habitats at the site provide limited opportunities for a range of invertebrate species, similar and higher quality habitats are widespread in the surrounding area. It is therefore highly unlikely that the site supports a notable assemblage of invertebrates in a local context.

5.9 Plants

5.9.1 No protected or notable plant species were recorded during the Phase 1 habitat survey and the majority of the site comprises hardstanding and buildings. In view of the limited areas of semi-natural habitats present including ornamental shrubs, trees and scrub, the site is highly unlikely to support a notable assemblage of plants in the local context.

5.9.2 No records for any invasive species were within the site were provided during the desk study however Cotoneaster was recorded within the site during the Phase 1 habitat survey. Several Cotoneaster species (including Wall Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster horizontalis*, Entire-leaved Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster integrifolius*, Himalayan Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster simonsii*, Hollyberry Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster bullatus*, and Small-leaved Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster microphyllus*) are non-native invasive species included on Schedule 9 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended), and it is an offence to release, plant or cause to grow in the wild any plant included on this schedule of the Act. Unless further survey confirms that only non-invasive forms of Cotoneaster are present at the site, management works within the site should include the necessary control of Cotoneaster to prevent its spread within or outside of the site as discussed further in *Section 8*.

⁴ The only waterbodies within 300m of the site comprise the Kennet and Avon Canal and the River Kennet which are not considered to support suitable habitat for breeding Great Crested Newts in proximity to the site.

6 NATURE CONSERVATION EVALUATION

- 6.1 The habitats within the site have been assessed against the findings of the Phase 1 habitat survey with consideration given to the criteria summarised in *Appendix E* of this report (Ratcliffe, 1977; CIEEM, 2018). A summary of the site habitat evaluation is given in *Table 4* below.

Table 4: Site habitat evaluation

Value	Habitats present
International	None
National	None
Regional	None
District	Kennet and Avon Canal [off-site] (6)
Local	High: - None Moderate: - None Low: - Network of trees and scrub, in combination (3, 4)
Site/ negligible	All other habitats recorded

- 6.2 There are no habitats of International, National or Regional nature conservation value within or adjacent to the site.
- 6.3 The habitat of highest value in association with the site is the Kennet and Avon Canal, located immediately beyond the northern site boundary. Although the section of canal adjacent to the site is relatively short and heavily canalised with limited aquatic vegetation, the habitat forms an integral part of a wider riparian corridor across the wider landscape considered to be of **district value**.
- 6.4 The habitats of highest value within the site comprise the network of trees and scrub located around the site boundaries which are considered in combination to be at most of **low local** value. Although these are of limited ecological interest individually and similar features are widespread in the surrounding landscape, together these provide habitat for a range of species and combine to form a network of semi-natural habitats across the site, providing habitat connectivity within the site and contributing towards that of the wider area.
- 6.5 All other habitats within the site, including the ornamental planting, buildings and hardstanding, have been assessed as being of negligible value for nature conservation at a local level in their own right. Where appropriate, consideration of the potential presence of protected or notable species within these habitats is however given below.

7 ADDITIONAL DATA REQUIREMENTS

- 7.1 No further surveys for protected or notable species are proposed in support of the application for the proposed redevelopment of the site.
- 7.2 Two trees were identified as having 'low' potential to support roosting bats. In the event that retention of either of these trees identified as having BCT 'low' potential to support roosting bats is not possible within the proposed redevelopment, although further surveys would not be required in support of a planning application, the tree(s) should be subject to an appropriate further survey in advance of felling either in the form of a single emergence survey or a climbed inspection. This is discussed further in *Section 8* below.
- 7.3 Although breeding birds are likely to occur at the site and there is limited potential for very low numbers of common and widespread species of reptile to occur, it is unlikely that locally significant populations would be affected by the proposed redevelopment. In addition, Otters and Water Voles are anticipated to utilise the Kennet and Avon Canal to the north of the site. Nature conservation legislation relating to birds, reptiles, Otters and Water Voles would however still apply and this is discussed in *Section 8* below.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 This section provides a review of the possible implications of redevelopment proposals on identified features of ecological interest at the site and the surrounding area and outlines recommended measures for the avoidance and mitigation of potential effects. In addition, opportunities are identified by which development of the site could enhance its current value for species of conservation concern in accordance with planning policy and the 2006 NERC Act.

8.2 Designated sites

- 8.2.1 The proposals for the site would not be expected to result in adverse effects on any statutory or non-statutory designated areas occurring in the wider area. This is due to a combination of the nature and scale of the proposed redevelopment, the distance between the site and the designated areas, the limited ecological connectivity with the site and/or the character habitats and features for which the areas are designated.
- 8.2.2 Notwithstanding the above, the measures described in *Section 8.3* below should be employed during construction to avoid pollution of the adjacent Kennet and Avon Canal should be employed to avoid contamination of this receptor and downstream habitats.

8.3 Habitats

- 8.3.1 Current knowledge suggests that there are no areas of International, National, Regional or County nature conservation importance within or immediately adjacent to the site.

- 8.3.2 The habitat of highest nature conservation interest associated with the site is the Kennet and Avon Canal, located immediately beyond the northern site boundary. The habitat forms an integral part of a wider riparian corridor across the wider landscape considered to be of district value. In order to protect the quality and quantity of water entering the Kennet and Avon Canal, construction works should be carried out in accordance with the Environment Agency's 'Pollution Prevention for Businesses' guidelines⁵, or subsequent guidance. Despite the currently heavily urbanised corridor through which this section of the canal flows, potential enhancements of the Kennet and Avon Canal corridor are given in *Section 8.5* below.
- 8.3.3 The habitats of highest value within the site comprise the network of trees and scrub located along the site boundaries which are considered in combination to be at most of low local value. Development proposals indicate that several low value trees will be lost from the site to facilitate the proposed redevelopment. Development proposals should however seek to minimise loss of trees where possible and to protect retained trees within and adjacent to the site during the course of development, with works carried out in accordance with 'BS5837 Trees in relation to construction' unless otherwise agreed with a suitably qualified arboriculturist. Where tree loss is unavoidable, comparable replacement habitat should be provided within the site and the emerging proposals indicate this could be achieved through new tree planting, including native and wildlife-friendly species, and provision of complementary habitats such as new shrub planting.
- 8.3.4 The remaining habitats within the site, including ornamental vegetation, hardstanding and buildings, are considered to be of negligible value in a local context. Although these habitats are of limited nature conservation interest in their own right, some provide opportunities for protected species such as bats and nesting birds. This is discussed further in *Section 8.4* below.
- 8.3.5 Development proposals should seek to enhance the site to provide new opportunities for wildlife in accordance with national and local planning policy and guidance (NPPF, 2021; ODPM, 2005) and the 2006 NERC Act. Opportunities arising from the development of the site for the enhancement of retained habitats and creation of new habitats are identified in *Section 8.5*.
- 8.4 Protected and notable species**
- Bats*
- 8.4.1 Further survey is not required in support of a planning application for the trees identified with low bat roost potential (T1 and T2). In the event that removal of either tree with low bat roost potential is required, in accordance with current best practice guidelines (BCT, 2016) it is

⁵ www.gov.uk/guidance/pollution-prevention-for-businesses

recommended that works affecting either tree with potential to support roosting bats is carried out in accordance with the following procedure:

1. Trees suitable for climbing inspections should first be climbed by a licensed bat worker to inspect potential roost sites for bats. In the event that a bat (or evidence of bats) is encountered, and the tree cannot be retained, then felling/works to this tree should be delayed until an EPS licence has been sought and obtained from Natural England prior to soft felling in accordance with the methodology described under point 2 below. In the event that no bats (or evidence of bats) are encountered during an exhaustive search then any features should be 'soft stopped' to prevent occupation prior to felling.
2. 'Low' potential trees that are unsuitable for climbing 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.

8.4.2 In the event that a roosting bat is discovered during any of the above works, 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.

8.4.3 Notwithstanding the current low interest of the site for this group, wherever possible, development proposals should seek to maintain and enhance the value of the site for foraging and commuting bats. This could be achieved through the retention of mature trees where appropriate, and through provision of new planting.

8.4.4 It is also recommended that the lighting scheme for the site be designed to minimise light spill onto any new and retained semi-natural areas, landscape planting and the Kennet and Avon Canal, to maximise the value of existing and newly created foraging and commuting habitats and maintain opportunities for bats and other nocturnal wildlife during the operational phases of the development. Consideration should be given to the use of directional, hooded and low-level lighting where appropriate, together with use of narrow spectrum and/or low UV bulbs, whilst maintaining a minimum level required for safety.

8.4.5 Additional measures to maintain and potentially enhance foraging, commuting and roosting opportunities for bats within the site in line with planning policy and the 2006 NERC Act are given in *Section 8.5* below.

Water Vole and Otter

- 8.4.6 Although it is anticipated that both Otter and Water Vole travel along the Kennet and Avon Canal, to access more suitable habitats up- and down-stream and subsequently pass the site, it is highly unlikely that either species is living along this stretch of the canal due to the presence of reinforced banks, current levels of disturbance and very little suitable habitat. In the event however, that works are proposed to the small area of scrub located at the level of the canal in the north-eastern corner of the site, it is proposed that an ecological check is carried out prior to the works to confirm the absence of these species⁶.

Reptiles

- 8.4.7 The only habitat on site potentially of interest to reptiles is the small area of scrub located at the level of the canal in the north-eastern corner of the site which may be utilised on a very occasional basis by Grass Snake. A full reptile survey of the site is not proposed due to the potential for only very small numbers of reptiles to be present within the site. It is recommended however that a precautionary approach is taken to clearance of the small area of scrub (if these works are required) during construction in order to ensure that reasonable measures to avoid contravention of legislation protecting common and widespread reptile species (i.e. protection against injury and killing) are employed. This would involve the displacement of any reptiles present into areas of contiguous habitat away from construction works using the following procedure:

- Vegetation within affected areas should be removed from the centre outwards using hand-held tools, where appropriate, allowing any reptiles present to escape to contiguous areas of retained habitat;
- Where any shrubs are to be cleared, this should be carried out in two phases. The first cut should be to >100mm to decrease its suitability for reptiles and encourage any reptiles present to move to retained areas of habitat. Where the potential for reptiles to be present remains, following a minimum period of seven days, a second cut to ground level should be carried out in order to render the habitat unsuitable;
- Cleared areas should be maintained to prevent re-colonisation prior to works commencing; and
- Potential hibernacula or refugia such as loose stones, bricks or discarded debris should be removed by hand.

- 8.4.8 Any ground level clearance works or removal of refugia or potential hibernacula should be carried out during suitable climatic conditions at a time of year when reptiles are active (generally April to September inclusive) under the supervision of an appropriately qualified ecologist who would relocate any reptiles encountered to an area of suitable retained habitat elsewhere within the site or wider area.

⁶ If either species is identified then mitigation and potentially licenses would be required before works can progress.

Birds

- 8.4.9 The site is considered unlikely to support an important assemblage of breeding birds and no further survey for this group is recommended. Notwithstanding this, small numbers of breeding birds may be present, and therefore the legislation relating to this group will apply. It is recommended that any shrub/tree clearance and demolition works are carried out outside of the bird breeding season (March to August inclusive), as wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). Where this is not possible, it is recommended that an ecologist carries out a check for nesting birds immediately before the commencement of these works.

Plants

- 8.4.10 Cotoneaster was recorded during the Phase 1 habitat survey. Unless further survey confirms that only non-invasive forms of Cotoneaster are present at the site, management works within the site should include the necessary control of Cotoneaster to prevent its spread within or outside of the site.

8.5 Enhancements

- 8.5.1 In addition to the recommendations given to maintain the habitat resource of the site and prevent conflict with protected species potentially occurring at the site, development proposals should seek to enhance the site to provide new opportunities for wildlife in accordance with national and local planning policy and guidance (NPPF, 2021; ODPM, 2005) and the 2006 NERC Act. A selection of measures is given below which could be included within the development scheme to increase the long-term nature conservation interest of the site and provide enhanced habitat for protected and notable species:
- Provision of new opportunities for movement of wildlife within and around the site, such as new linear habitats including tree and shrub planting. Where possible these should complement off-site areas of connective habitat;
 - Provision of roosting bat opportunities and bird boxes on buildings and retained trees. Consideration could be given to:
 - Provision of a Peregrine Falcon nest box on the northern or eastern elevation on the edge of the roof;
 - Provision of nesting habitat for Black Redstart comprising aggregate mix allowed to colonise naturally on the flat roof area of the building⁷;
 - Swift nest boxes on the northern or eastern elevations of the building⁸;
 - Bat boxes on the southern or western elevation of the building such as Greenwood Ecohabitat Half and Half bat box (or similar).

⁷ Further information is available at www.blackredstarts.org.uk

⁸ Swift boxes are known to be utilised by a variety of bird species.

- Use of nectar-rich and fruit-producing species within formal landscaping schemes to benefit species including birds, invertebrates, bats and foraging Badgers;
- Prioritise the use of native species typical of the local area in landscape planting where appropriate to do so. Where possible these should be sourced from stock of local provenance;
- Inclusion of other habitats of high nature conservation interest within areas of open space including rough and meadow grassland and native species-rich scrub habitats, ideally in locations where they complement existing habitats and/or improve connectivity around the site and the wider area;
- Provision of log and brash piles within semi-natural areas of planting to provide habitat for invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles;
- Sensitive use of lighting to avoid adverse effects on nocturnal wildlife (e.g. restrictions on lighting in public areas to the minimum levels required for safety, use of hooded and bollard lighting, low UV bulbs, presence detectors, timers etc.).

9 CONCLUSION

9.1 Subject to the implementation of the recommended measures for habitat retention, creation and enhancement, no reduction in the ecological interest of the site or its surrounds is likely to arise as a result of the proposed development. It is therefore concluded that, beyond the normal requirements to avoid impacts on protected species and maintain key elements of the habitat resource of the site, there appear to be no overriding nature conservation constraints that would preclude the proposed development of the site.

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	Personnel	Position
Author	Clare Bird MCIEEM	Principal Ecologist
Approved for issue	Adrian Meurer MCIEEM	Director

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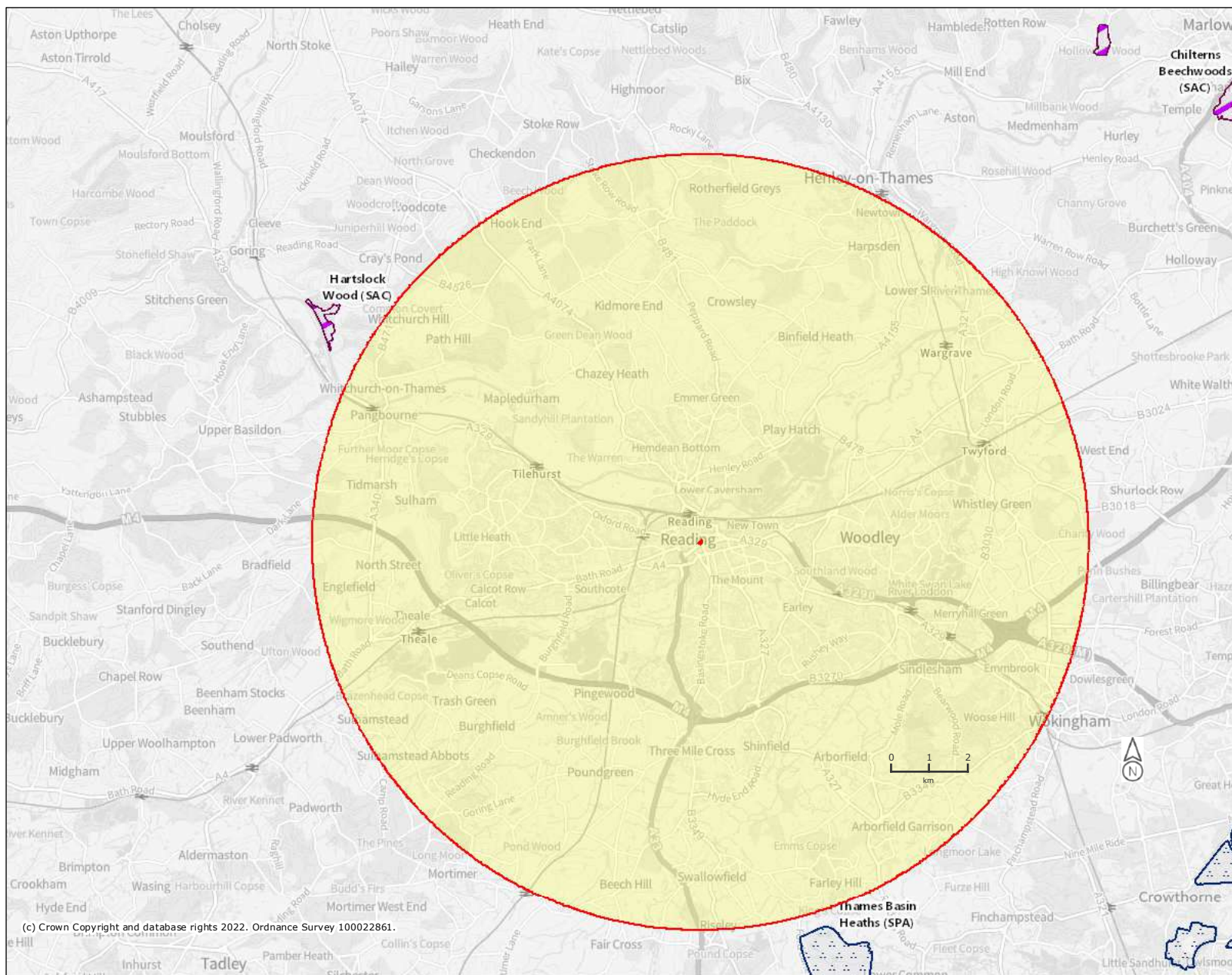
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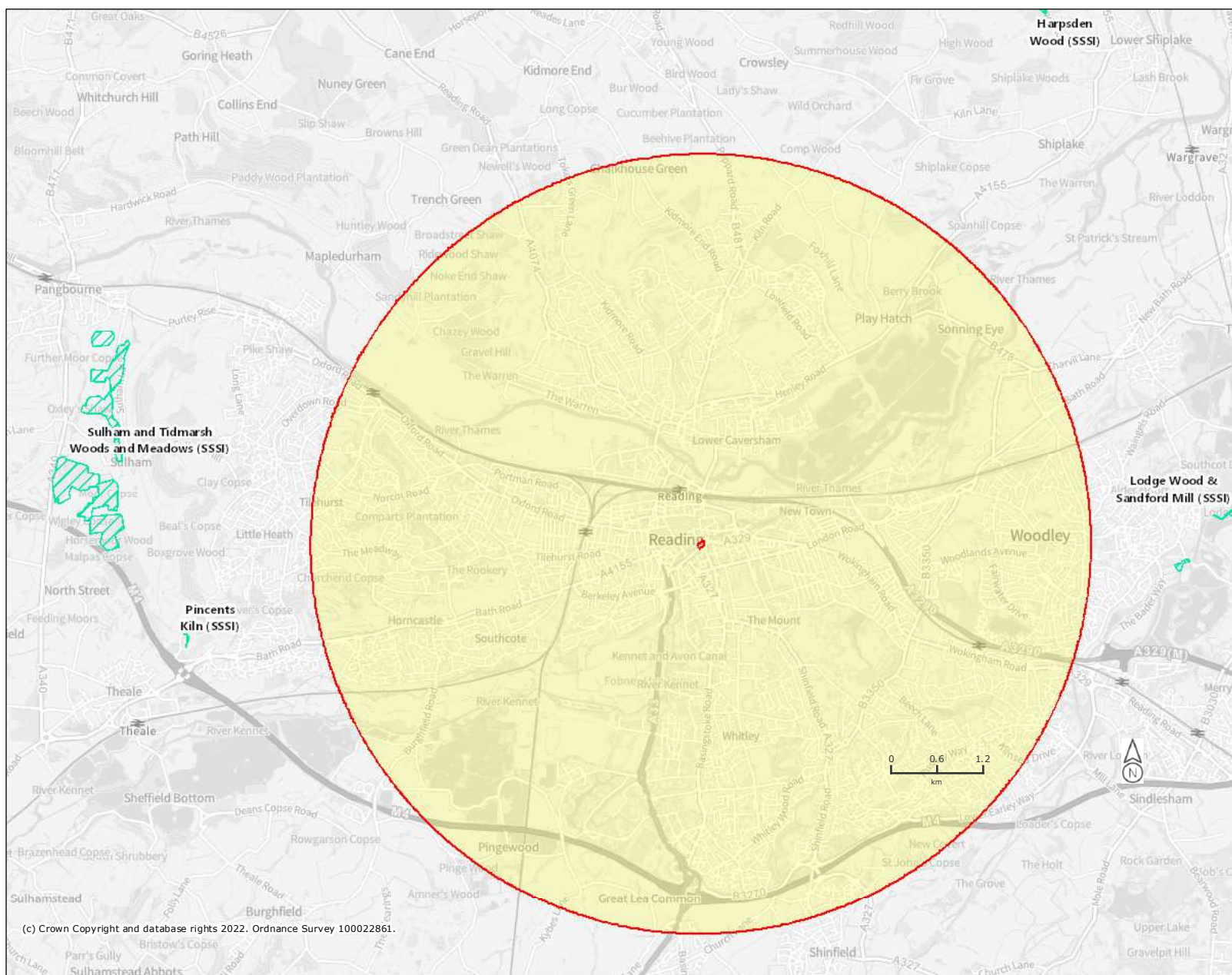
APPENDIX A

Desk study results

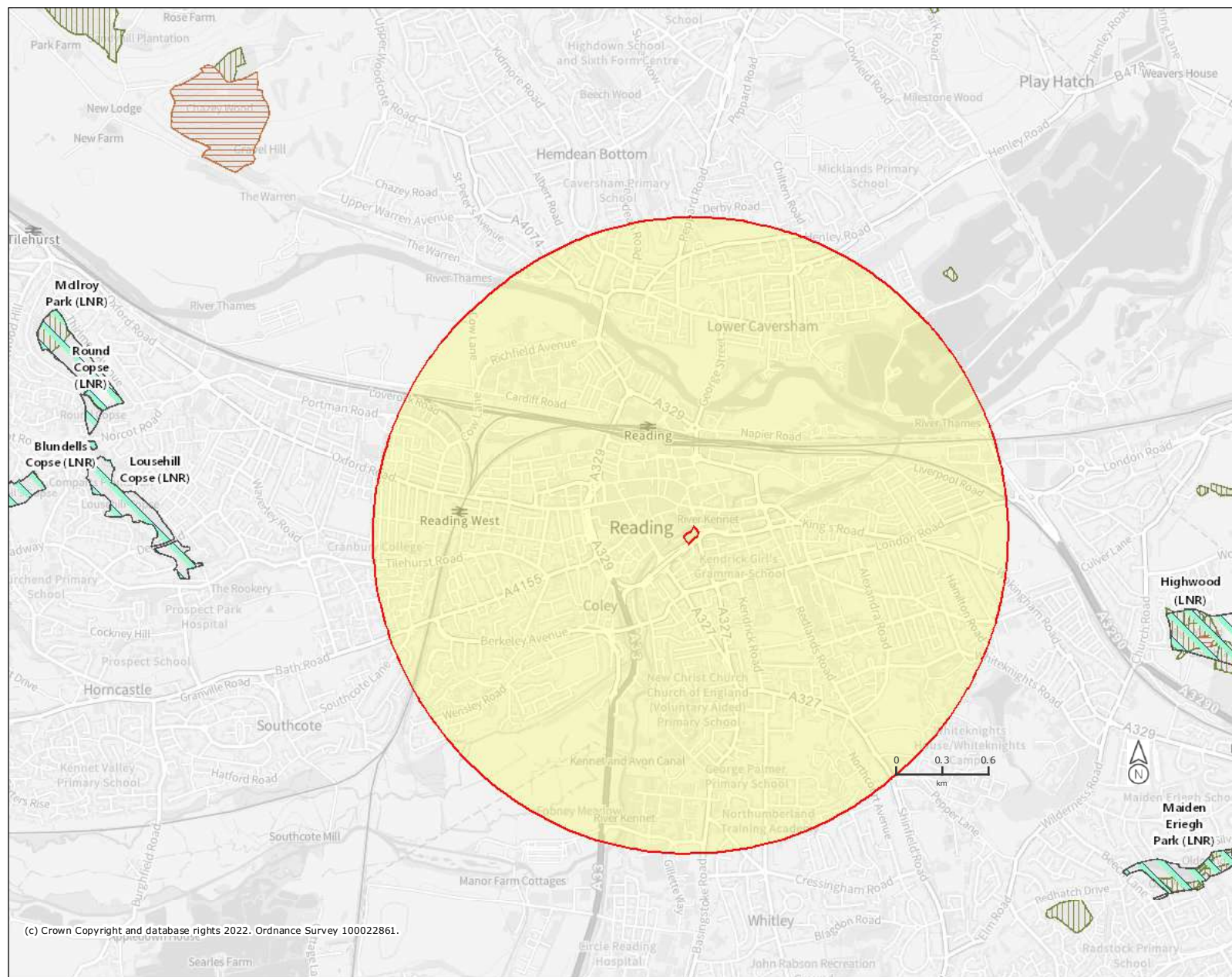
SPAs, SACs and Ramsars within 10km



NNRs and SSSIs within 5km



LNRs and Ancient Woodland within 2km



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Legend

 Local Nature Reserves (England)

Ancient Woodland (England)

 Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland

 Ancient Replanted Woodland

Projection = OSGB36
xmin = 465000
ymin = 170300
xmax = 477600
ymax = 176600

Map produced by MAGiC on 11 November, 2022.
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West Reading Woodlands and LNR

An urban fringe and urban site. In the west it encompasses the escarpments at the edge of the Pang Valley where there is much woodland and land owned by Englefield Estate. The rest of the area includes the Reading Woodlands Local Nature reserve, a group of mainly wooded sites within Tilehurst as well as a number of other woodlands in this area.

Joint Character Area: Thames Valley. The northern sections fall into The Chilterns.

Geology: The western slopes are chalk with Reading beds to the south and a small area of London Clay clay, silt and sand near Calcot. At the top of the slope there are more areas of Reading Beds with some glacial Winter Gravel. The rest of the area is a mixture of the same London Clay Formation, Reading Beds, a little Winter Gravel and at McIlroy Park the glacial Black Park Gravel Formation.

Topography: There is a west facing escarpment in the west while most of the areas in Tilehurst area on the slopes of the plateau in the area

Biodiversity:

- Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland: There are extensive areas of ancient woodland on the western escarpment and a number of sites located within Tilehurst which are form the West Reading Woodlands LNR.
- Parkland: There is a small area of parkland at Purley Hall near Pangbourne.

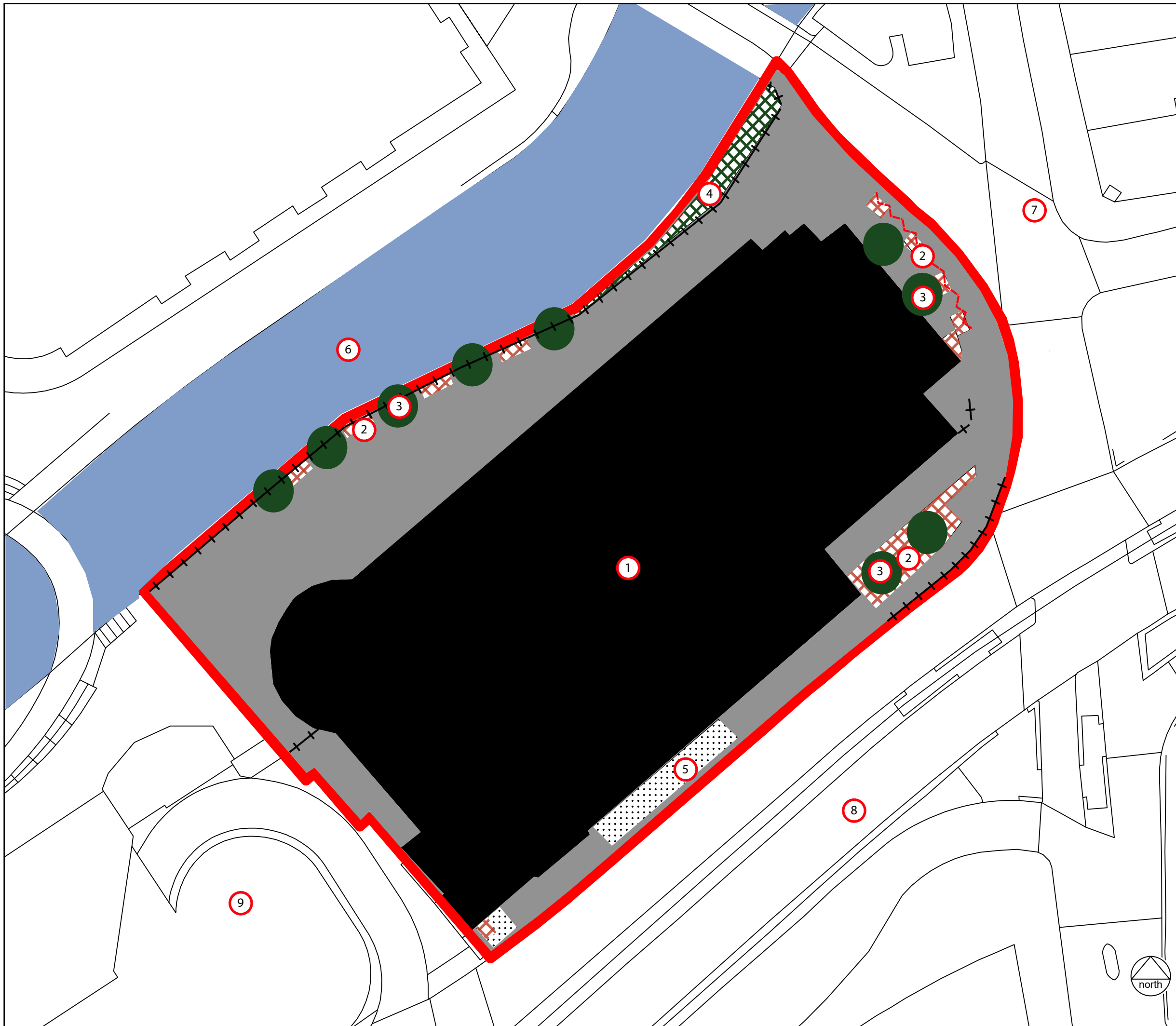
Geodiversity: Includes the exposures at Pincents Kiln SSSI.

Access: A number of accessible LNR sites in an urban location. A number of bridleways in the west including parts of the Berkshire Circular Routes.

Targets and Opportunities: woodland management, parkland management, potential for restoration of grassland habitats on the steeper slopes in the west in particular. The LNR provide good opportunities for woodland management within an urban setting. Much of the western area is owned by the Sulham Estate who are keen to enter the HLS scheme at the time of writing.

APPENDIX B

Phase 1 habitat survey plan and target notes



KEY

- Site boundary
- Scattered trees
- Ornamental planting
- Dense scrub
- Hardstanding
- Buildings
- Bare ground
- Kennet and Avon Canal
- Wall
- Fence
- Target note

CLIENT:
Hammerson Ltd.

PROJECT:
Oracle Centre

TITLE:
Vue Cinema - Phase 1 Habitat Survey Plan

SCALE AT A3:
Not to scale

DATE:
November 2022

1092.1 / 03

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The Stables, Howbery Park, Benson Lane, Wallingford, OX10 8BA
t 01491 838175 e consult@hda-enviro.co.uk w www.hda-enviro.co.uk

Landscape Architecture
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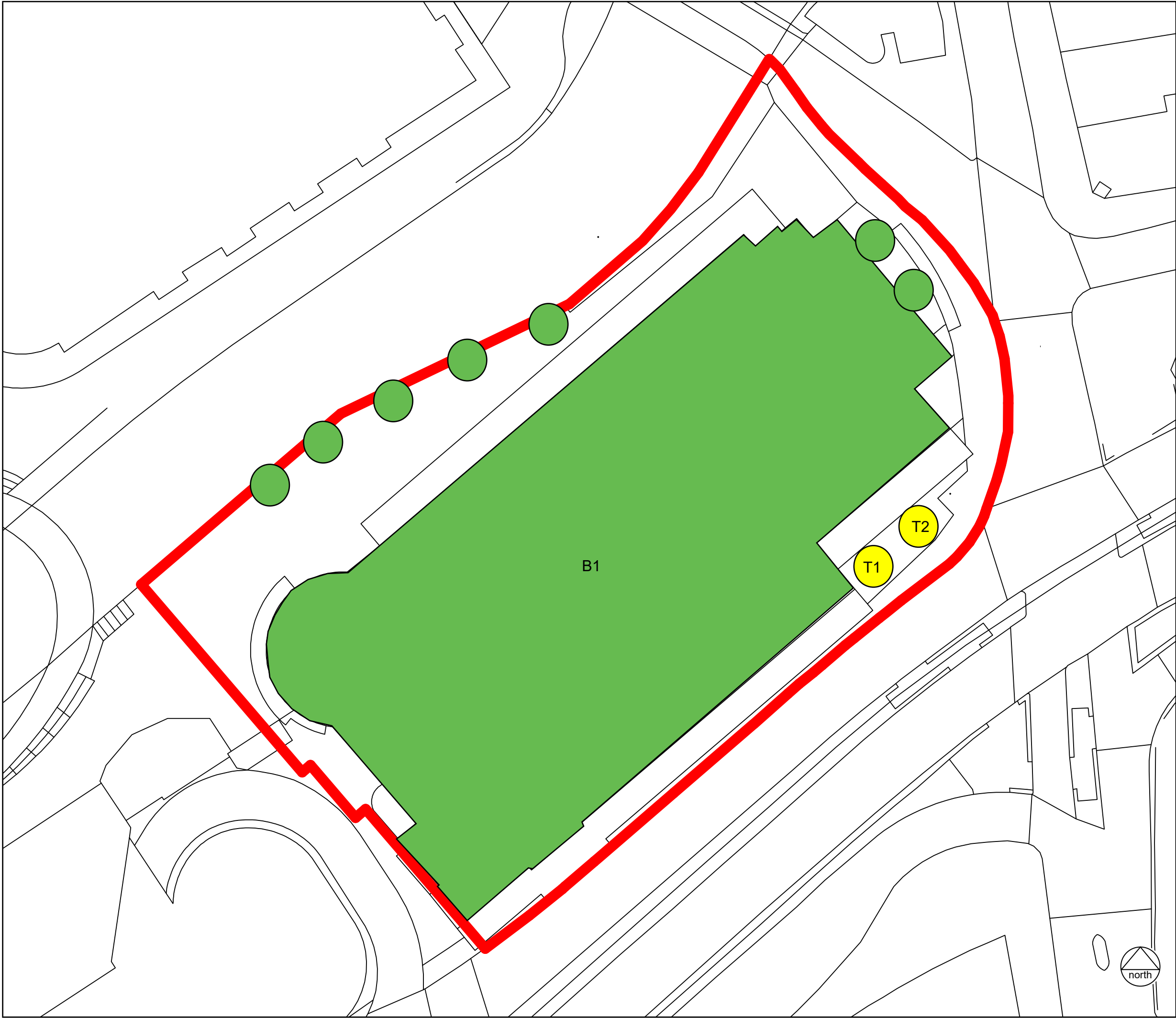
hda

Target Notes

1. **Buildings and hardstanding** – The site is dominated by the Vue Cinema. The building comprises a multi-storey brick and glass building partially clad with metal and a flat and sloping metal roof. On the ground floor along the northern aspect of the building, in association with the off-site Kennet and Avon Canal, are several restaurants with an approximately 3m wide brick walkway between the building and off-site canal. Separating the walkway from the off-site canal is a metal 3-bar fence. The building is surrounded on the southern, eastern and western elevations by areas of hardstanding footpaths and pavements.
2. **Ornamental plants** – Raised planters and flower beds bordering the Vue Cinema are planted with a mix of ornamental species. Species include *Griselinia* *Griselinia* sp., *Fatsia japonica*, *Cotoneaster* *Cotoneaster* sp. and Box *Buxus sempervirens*.
3. **Trees** – A line of five Small-leaved Lime trees *Tilia cordata* are located along the walkway adjacent to the off-site canal, below which is brick paving. To the east of the building below which is hardstanding are two London Plane *Platanus x hispanica* trees and to the south-east of the building within an ornamental flower bed are two London Plane trees.
4. **Scrub** – Located approximately 2m below the walkway, and at the level of the off-site canal, is an area of Willow *Salix* sp. and Dogwood *Cornus* sp. scrub. This area was observed from the walkway above and the ground flora comprised Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Rosebay Willowherb *Chamaenerion angustifolium*, Dandelion *Taraxacum* sp., Dock *Rumex obtusifolius* and Thistle *Cirsium* sp..
5. **Bare earth and wood chips** – Bare earth flower beds bordering the Vue Cinema, covered with wood chips.
6. **Kennet and Avon Canal** – To the north of the site is the Kennet and Avon Canal which at this location is approximately 18m across with approximately 2m high sheet-piled banks. Beyond the canal is further commercial development. To the north-east the canal is crossed by a road bridge and to the north-west the canal is crossed by a pedestrian ellipse bridge.
7. **East of the site** – To the east of the site are tarmac roads associated with Yield Hall Place and London Street, beyond which is further commercial development.
8. **South of the site** – To the south of the site is a tarmac road associated with Queen's Road A329, beyond which is Mill Lane and further commercial development.
9. **West of the site** – To the west of the site is commercial development associated with the Oracle Shopping Centre.

APPENDIX C

Phase 1 bat scoping survey plan



KEY



Site boundary

Buildings and Trees



Low bat roost potential



Negligible bat roost potential

Roosting categories relate to roost potential in accordance with the BCT 2016 guidelines.

CLIENT:
Hammerson Ltd.

PROJECT:
Oracle Centre

TITLE:
Vue Cinema - Phase 1 Bat Survey Summary Plan

SCALE AT A3:
Not to scale

DATE:
November 2022

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APPENDIX D

Phase 1 bat scoping survey photographs



Photo 1: Southern and western elevations of B1.



Photo 2: Northern elevation of B1.



Photo 3: Roof of B1.

APPENDIX E
Evaluation criteria

Criteria used for the evaluation of ecological receptors (based on Ratcliffe, 1977; CIEEM 2018)

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, experience and professional judgement (Usher, 1986; Spellerberg, 1992). Evaluation of an ecological receptor was based on a number of criteria (Ratcliffe, 1977; CIEEM 2018) summarised below:

- Site designations; SPA, SAC, Ramsar, SSSI, NNR, LNR, SINC or equivalent.
- Site designation criteria; e.g. Guidelines for the Selection of Biological SSSIs, JNCC, 1989.
- Conservation status; whether a habitat or species is rare, declining or threatened at a given geographic scale.
- Geographic location; the value of a habitat or species may change depending on whether it is being assessed in the south of England or the north of Scotland.
- Distribution; habitats or species on the edge of their distribution, particularly where that distribution is changing as a result of global trends and climate change and endemic species or locally distinct sub-populations of a species are more valuable;
- Rarity; the presence of habitats, species, subspecies or varieties that are rare or uncommon at a given geographic scale.
- Diversity; of habitats, or species, particularly of vascular plants. Species-rich assemblages of plants or animals are likely to be important in terms of biodiversity;
- Naturalness; habitats least affected by human disturbance are normally of relatively higher importance.
- Size; larger areas are generally more valuable than lots of small ones. Notably large populations of animals or concentrations of animals considered uncommon or threatened in a wider context may be important.
- Fragility; sensitivity to, and probability of, human impact.
- Typicalness; a good example of the type, particularly plant communities (and their associated animals) that are considered to be typical of valued natural/semi-natural vegetation types, including examples of naturally species-poor communities.
- Potential value (if restored to favourable conservation status).
- Secondary or supporting value; value of a receptor in supporting the integrity or conservation status of another valued receptor.
- Ability to be recreated; the more difficult a habitat is to re-create, were it to be destroyed, the greater the importance usually attached to it.