

AWE 250 Brook Drive

Ecological Appraisal Report

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REPORT

Quality Management

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Elizabeth White

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Prepared by:

RPS

Lucinda Clark

Ecologist

Oxford, UK

T +44 1235 821 888

E Lucinda.Clark1@rps.tetrattech.com

Prepared for:

AWE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- RPS were commissioned by AWE to undertake an Ecological Appraisal of their site, 250 Brook Dr, Reading RG2 6UA. This comprised a review of statutory designated sites within 2 km, a Phase 1 Habitat Survey and an ecological scoping survey which assessed the potential of the site to support species of conservation concern or other species which could present a constraint to the development of the site.
- The site proposals consist of the removal of two trees, a small section of hedgerow, a small area of grassland, and the creation of paths, shelters and security upgrades to the site.
- The site is approximately 0.41 ha in size and comprises hardstanding (both office buildings and car park areas), amenity grassland, individual trees. Outside of the redline boundary, within the wider 250 Brook Drive site, are similar habitats as well as areas of scrub and sparsely vegetated land. Foudry Brook flows to the northern and western boundaries of the site.
- No designated sites are located within 2 km of the redline boundary.
- The site provides suitable habitat for birds and foraging and commuting bats which may be affected by the development due to vegetation removal. Mitigation and enhancement methods have been described within this report.
- Sensitive lighting design will be needed in order to minimise the impacts on foraging and commuting bats in the wider site.
- A 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment also been undertaken and is detailed in a separate BNG report. Other suggested enhancements include insect houses and bird boxes.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and scope of this report

- 1.1.1 RPS was commissioned by AWE to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of their site, 250 Brook Dr, Reading RG2 6UA.
- 1.1.2 To undertake an initial assessment of the potential ecological impact of the proposals, a review of statutory designated sites within 2 km, and a protected species assessment were carried out. This is termed as an Ecological Appraisal Report (EAR) in accordance with CIEEM (2017).
- 1.1.3 The EA aims to:
- undertake a desk-based review of designated sites that could present a constraint;
 - map and assess the habitats present on site;
 - assess the site for potential to support protected species or other species that could present a constraint, and make appropriate recommendations for further survey work if necessary;
 - provide outline options for mitigation measures as appropriate; and
 - make recommendations for appropriate biodiversity enhancements in line with national and local planning policy.
- 1.1.4 This report pertains to these results only; recommendations included within this report are the professional opinion of an experienced ecologist and therefore the view of RPS. The surveys and desk-based assessments undertaken as part of this review and subsequent report including the Ecological Appraisal Notes are prepared in accordance with the British Standard for Biodiversity Code of Practice for Planning and Development (BS42020:2013).

1.2 Study area and Zone of Influence

- 1.2.1 The site is located at 250 Brook Dr, Reading, RG2 6UA. The site is approximately 0.41 ha in size. The National Grid coordinates for the centre of the site are SU704699.
- 1.2.2 The site comprises hardstanding (both office buildings and car park areas), amenity grassland, four individual trees and hedgerow.
- 1.2.3 Aerial imaging available via Google Earth Pro was reviewed to assess the site in relation to its context in the wider landscape.
- 1.2.4 The term Zone of Influence is used to describe the geographic extent of potential impacts of a proposed development. The Zone of Influence is determined by the nature of the development and also in relation to designated sites, habitats or species which might be affected by the proposals.
- 1.2.5 For this site, the Zone of Influence is considered to be land on and immediately adjacent to the site.

1.3 Development proposals

- 1.3.1 The site proposals consist of the removal of two trees, a small section of hedgerow, a small area of grassland, and the creation of paths, shelters and security upgrades to the site.

1.4 Legislation and policy

- 1.4.1 Relevant legislation, policy guidance and both Local and National Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) are referred to throughout this report where appropriate. Their context and application is explained in the relevant sections of this report.
- 1.4.2 The relevant articles of legislation are:
- The Environment Act, 2021;
 - The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023);
 - ODPM Circular 06/2005 (retained as Technical Guidance on NPPF 2023);
 - The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (Amendment) (EU Exit) 2019;
 - The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
 - The Protection of Badgers Act 1992;
 - The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000;
 - The Hedgerow Regulations 1997;
 - The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006; and
 - The Natural Environment in Berkshire Biodiversity Strategy 2020.
- 1.4.3 A summary of legislation relevant to protected or other species identified as potential constraints in this report is provided in Appendix A.

2 METHODS

2.1 Desk Study

- 2.1.1 Locations of statutory designated sites were accessed via the government 'MAGIC' website (MagicMap, 2024).
- 2.1.2 A 1:25,000 OS map was used to identify nearby features such as ponds or green corridors that could provide habitat or connectivity to other areas.

2.2 Ecological Appraisal

- 2.2.1 The ecological appraisal consisted of two components: a Phase 1 Habitat Survey and a scoping survey for protected species and other species of conservation concern which could present a constraint to development.
- 2.2.2 The site walkover was undertaken on 1st May 2024 by RPS Ecologist Lucinda Clark who is suitably experienced in undertaking Phase 1 Habitat Surveys.
- 2.2.3 The Phase 1 Habitat Survey followed the standard methodology (JNCC, 2010), and as described in the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Assessment (CIEEM, 2017). In summary, this comprised walking over the survey area and recording the habitat types and boundary features present.
- 2.2.4 A protected species scoping survey was carried out in conjunction with the Phase 1 Habitat Survey. The site was assessed for its suitability to support protected species, in particular great crested newts *Triturus cristatus*, reptiles, birds, badgers *Meles meles*, bats, and other species of conservation importance that could pose a planning constraint.
- 2.2.5 The surveyor looked for evidence of use including signs such as burrows, droppings, footprints, paths, hairs, refugia and particular habitat types known to be used by certain groups such as ponds. Any mammal paths were also noted down and where possible followed. Fence boundaries were walked to establish any entry points or animal signs such as latrines. Areas of bare earth were inspected for mammal prints. Areas of habitat considered suitable for protected species or those of conservation interest were recorded.

2.3 Impact Appraisal

- 2.3.1 The overall ecological appraisal is based on the standard best practice methodology provided by the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (CIEEM, 2017). The assessment identifies sites, habitats, species and other ecological features that are of value based on factors such as legal protection, statutory or local site designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) or inclusion on Red Data Book Lists or Biodiversity Action Plans.
- 2.3.2 The assessment also refers to planning policy guidance (e.g. NPPF) where relevant to relate the value of the site and potential impacts of development to the planning process, identifying constraints and opportunities for ecological enhancement in line with both national and local policy.

2.4 Limitations

Survey

- 2.4.1 It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive description of the site, no investigation can ensure the complete characterisation and prediction of the natural environment.
- 2.4.2 The protected/notable species assessment provides a preliminary view of the likelihood of these species occurring on the site, based on the suitability of the habitat, known distribution of the species in the local area provided in response to our enquiries and any direct evidence on the site. It should not be taken as providing a full and definitive survey of any protected/notable species group.

Accurate Lifespan of Ecological Data

- 2.4.3 The majority of ecological data remain valid for only short periods due to the inherently transient nature of the subject. The survey results contained in this report are considered accurate for two years, assuming no significant considerable changes to the site conditions.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Designated Sites

- 3.1.1 There are no statutory designated sites for nature conservation value within 2 km of the site.

3.2 Phase 1 Habitat Survey

- 3.2.1 The survey results are presented in the form of a map with the habitat types and boundary features marked (Figure 3.1).
- 3.2.2 Descriptions of the habitat types and boundary features are detailed below. Habitat descriptions are defined by broad habitat types (JNCC, 2010).

Amenity Grassland

- 3.2.3 A section of the site surrounding the main office building is comprised of amenity grassland. The species present included perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, couch grass *Agropyron repens*, and white clover *Trifolium repens*. Other species present include ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*, common daisy *Bellis perennis*, thistle *Cirsium arvense*, and *Geranium sp.* The grass was in poor condition, with several patches of bare ground visible across the entire area due to the high levels of human disturbance in the area.

Bare Ground

- 3.2.4 Areas of bare ground cover a large part of the site. This can be split into 3 categories: tree beds, almost empty flower beds, and bare ground with very small amounts of scattered scrub. The tree beds and flower beds are found in the car park, and the bare ground with scattered scrub is located at the edges of the site, surrounding the car park and entrance to the site.
- 3.2.5 The tree beds and flower beds contained small amounts of ornamental planting, with species such as blue bugleweed *Ajuga reptans* and ladies' mantle *Alchemilla mollis*, and tree species such as silver birch *Betula pendula* and field maple *Acer campestre*. They also feature landscaped areas of bark.

Species – poor Hedgerow

- 3.2.6 Areas of native hedgerow are found within the car park, acting as barriers in between parking spaces. This hedgerow is species poor, comprising of only field maple *Acer Campestre*.

Individual Trees

- 3.2.7 Four small trees are included within the redline boundary, within the car park area. These trees were field maple, and common alder *Alnus glutinosa*. The trees are located within the car park and are surrounded by flower beds, but also hardstanding.

Hardstanding

- 3.2.8 The remainder of the site comprises of hardstanding. The car park is concrete, and so are the paths found on site.

Building

- 3.2.9 The building is flat-roofed and features large glass windows. Large concrete (or similar) tiles comprise the other parts of the building, and areas of metal grates are visible. A 40cm gravel border surrounds the building.

Habitats Outside of the Redline Boundary

- 3.2.10 The amenity grassland continues around the building. This grassland features the same species as above and is also in poor condition. Larger areas of bare ground are present nearer to the water.
- 3.2.11 To the south-west of the site, adjacent the brook, is an area of ephemeral / sparsely vegetated land. A majority of the vegetation found within this area was bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, with this plant covering a majority of this area.
- 3.2.12 Many trees can be found within the wider site. A large quantity of these trees are located to the north-west of the site. Goat willow *Salix caprea* and crack willow *Salix fragilis* are located nearer to the the brook (and particularly in the areas of ephemeral/short perennial vegetation), whereas field maple, aspen *Populus tremula* and silver birch are located nearer to the car park and building.
- 3.2.13 The hedgerow- also continues throughout the car park, acting as a barrier between the sections of car park.
- 3.2.14 Bare ground with scattered scrub is also located within the wider site, particularly near the entrance to the site. The bare ground with scattered scrub appeared to be relatively unmanaged and located surrounding the entrance of the car park.
- 3.2.15 A brook is located to the north and west of the site, with this being the Foudry Brook. The water level was very low during the site visit, with patches of mud showing where it usually covered. This small section to the west was almost dry at the time of the visit.
- 3.2.16 The other habitats recorded around the site were similar to those recorded on site, with mainly offices with associated landscaping, and hardstanding.

Figure 3.1: Phase 1 habitat map



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LEGEND

- Site boundary
- Survey area
- Heathland and shrub - Mixed scrub
- Urban tree
- Buildings
- Hardstanding - paths
- Introduced shrub
- Modified grassland
- Sparsely vegetated land – Ruderal / Ephemeral
- Urban - bare ground
- Hedgerow



101 Park Drive, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 4RY
T: +44(0)1235 821 888 E: rps.ox@tetratech.com

Client **AWE**

Project **250 Brook Drive, Reading**

Title **Baseline UKHab Classification Map**

Status	Drawn By	PM/Checked By
FINAL	LP	LC
Project Number	Scale @ A3	Date Created
LAN5156-770	1:750	SEP 2025

Figure Number	Rev
3.1	04

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3.3 Ecological Scoping Survey

Plants

- 3.3.1 Amenity grassland was present on site and within the wider site, comprising of a low diversity of grass species, with many bare patches. All species found were all common and widespread. These species were typical of the habitats present. No priority species listed within the UK BAP or NERC S41 were recorded.
- 3.3.2 The hedgerow was planted and featured common and widespread native species. Some small areas of ornamental planting existed, but this featured a small number of individual plants which had been planted as opposed to growing naturally.
- 3.3.3 The site has **negligible potential to for plant species**.

Invertebrates

- 3.3.4 The grassland on site and within the wider site was heavily managed, and in poor condition, only growing to around 5 cm. Due to this, the habitat is not considered to be of ecological importance to invertebrate species, and that the site has **negligible potential to support invertebrate species**.

Amphibians and reptiles

- 3.3.5 The site is predominately hardstanding, and low-quality grassland. Some areas of scrub and ephemeral vegetation within the wider site may be of use to amphibian and reptile species, however when factoring in the lack of connectivity to other habitats this may be limited. The site is heavily managed with the grassland cut short, and the site features a large amount of foot traffic that would potentially disturb species present. The site has **negligible potential to support reptile species**.
- 3.3.6 Foudry Brook is located around 15m to the north and west of the site. The vegetation found within this was limited, No Natural England Great Crested Newt Class Survey Licence Returns have been recorded within 2 km. The water is not suitable for GCN as it is flowing, and also due to the lack of vegetation, and the high number of bird species using the water. The site has **low potential to support amphibian species**.

Birds

- 3.3.7 The hedgerow and trees on site provide foraging and nesting habitat for a range of common and widespread breeding bird species. Water birds were recorded using the brook 15m from the site. This site has **moderate potential for supporting breeding birds**.

Dormouse

- 3.3.8 The habitats on site are not suitable for dormouse The site is not well connected to more suitable habitats for dormouse in the wider landscape. The site is considered to have **negligible potential for supporting mammals**.

Bats

- 3.3.9 The building on site was modern and in a good condition consisting of a flat roof with modern architecture and did not display any bat potential. No features were present that displayed bat roost potential, such as any cracks or cavities within the building. The walls of the building are mainly glass, metal, and brick (or similar), and no features suitable for bats were present.
- 3.3.10 The hedgerow on site is limited in their suitability due to their poor condition and lack of connectivity. The trees are present on site, however no features suitable for roosting bats (such as ivy cover or cracks in stems) were observed during the site visit.
- 3.3.11 Two of the trees within the red line are being removed, however these do not provide features suitable for bats.
- 3.3.12 The brook 15m from the site would be of use to bat species such as Daubentons. The site features **low suitability for roosting, feeding and commuting bats**.

Badgers

- 3.3.13 No evidence of badger was recorded on site. The site is predominantly amenity grassland and hardstanding, surrounded by sites that feature the same habitats. The site is considered to have **negligible potential for supporting badgers**.

Water Voles and Otter

- 3.3.14 There is a lack of suitable habitat on site for each of these species, with the banks of the Foudry Brook being quite flat. The bank of the Foudry Brook is over 10m from the red line boundary, and so this species is not considered at risk from the development. Mitigation methods will be provided in section 5 in order to provide adequate protection for the Brook.
- 3.3.15 Whilst no signs of water vole or otter were recorded, some parts of this brook (although not within 50 m of the site) are considered suitable habitat for otter and water vole. The site is considered to have **low potential for supporting otter and water vole**.

4 EVALUATION AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

4.1 Designated sites

4.1.1 No statutory sites are present within 2 km of the site. Due to this there are no potential impacts on statutory designated sites due to the planned development.

4.2 Habitats

- 4.2.1 Foudry Brook is located 15m from the site. Therefore, it is recommended that a Construction Environment management Plan (CEMP) is prepared that details the Pollution Prevention Measures that will be put in place in order to ensure that the brook is not polluted. This is discussed further in Section 5 of this report.
- 4.2.2 Table 4.1 below summarises the habitat types within the site and outlines the potential impacts of the development proposals to each of these habitats.

Table 4.1: Summary of potential habitat impacts

JNCC Code	Habitat Type	Area (ha)	Ecological Importance	Potential impact
J2	Amenity Grassland	0.035	Low	Limited potential for protected and notable species.
J3	Hardstanding	0.339	None.	No potential for protected and notable species.
J4	Bare Ground	0.034	None.	No potential to support protected or notable species.
J2	Native Hedgerow	0.012 km	Moderate	Potential to support breeding and nesting birds, and provide habitat for bats, invertebrates.
	Trees	4 total	Moderate	Provides bat and bird habitat.

4.3 Species

Plants

4.3.1 The species recorded during the Phase 1 Habitat Survey were common and widespread, with no protected or notable species recorded. No further vegetation surveys are necessary.

Invertebrates

4.3.2 The site was not considered floristically diverse and was therefore considered to be of negligible value for invertebrates. No further invertebrate surveys are necessary. The suggested enhancements discussed in Section 5 will benefit invertebrate species.

Amphibians and Reptiles

- 4.3.3 The site has negligible potential to support reptile species, and low potential to support amphibian species. The Foudry Brook has potential to support these species and is located 15m from the site boundary. Further reptile and amphibian surveys are not necessary.

Birds

- 4.3.4 The site has moderate potential to support nesting bird species. Whilst no further bird surveys are necessary, precautions will need to be taken during development on site. This is discussed further in Section 5 of this report.

Mammals

- 4.3.5 The site has negligible potential to support protected mammal species. No further surveys are necessary.

Bats

- 4.3.6 The site has low potential to support bat species. No further bat surveys are necessary.
- 4.3.7 Sensitive lighting is recommended both during the construction period, and afterwards within the development itself. This will ensure that bat features and habitats are not illuminated, as this would impact suitability for bats. This is discussed in Section 5 of this report.

Otter and Water Vole

- 4.3.8 No evidence of either mammal species was recorded on site. The potential for pollution events occurring during any development could affect the quality of the habitat present which in turn could affect otter and water vole using it further downstream.

5 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT

5.1 Habitats

- 5.1.1 During construction activities, there is a low risk of air- or water-borne pollutants impacting retained habitats, such as run-off into the Foudry Brook, which is located 15m away from the redline. This has the potential to impact sensitive habitats and species. Good practice pollution and dust control measures will be implemented to ensure water-borne pollutants do not enter the water.
- 5.1.2 In addition, pollution control measures will be required to ensure air-borne pollutants, particularly dust, are contained.
- 5.1.3 Good practice guidelines should be included within a CEMP prior to construction activities commencing and put in place and followed to ensure that any retained habitats adjacent to the site are not adversely affected by the development.
- 5.1.4 The NPPF (2024) states that to minimise impacts on biodiversity, planning policies should the proposals are recreated and a net gain in biodiversity is achieved for the site.

Trees

- 5.1.6 Two of the trees within the redline boundary are being removed during the development.
- 5.1.7 Measures should be taken to ensure any retained habitats are protected from damage during the construction phase, such as installing sturdy fencing around them. Best practice guidelines provided in British Standard 5837:2012 (Trees in Relation to design, demolition, and construction - Recommendations) would be followed.
- 5.1.8 Any retained trees within the wider site will be protected with fencing and no works would be undertaken within the root protection zone of any tree, where possible.

5.2 Species

Birds

- 5.2.1 A small section of hedgerow is being removed. The removal of bird habitat – such as the trees and shrub on site - should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season (late February-August inclusive) to avoid disturbance. If undertaken during the nesting season, an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) should be consulted prior to the removal of the hedgerow.

Bats

- 5.2.2 Any proposed lighting required for the site should be designed to direct artificial light to where it is needed and directed away from any existing or proposed habitats that would be used by foraging and / or commuting bats (such as the retained trees on site, and the brook 15m from the site).
- 5.2.3 Where practicable, lux levels should be 0.5 lux or less at the interface with any of these habitats. Where this is not practicable advice from an ecologist should be sought to determine the impact on bats.
- 5.2.4 The guidance provided in Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK (ILP, 2018) should be followed.
- 5.2.5 It is recommended that an ecologist is consulted regarding the proposed lighting design for the site to ensure that any artificial light proposed is directed away from suitable bat habitats present.

5.3 Enhancement opportunities

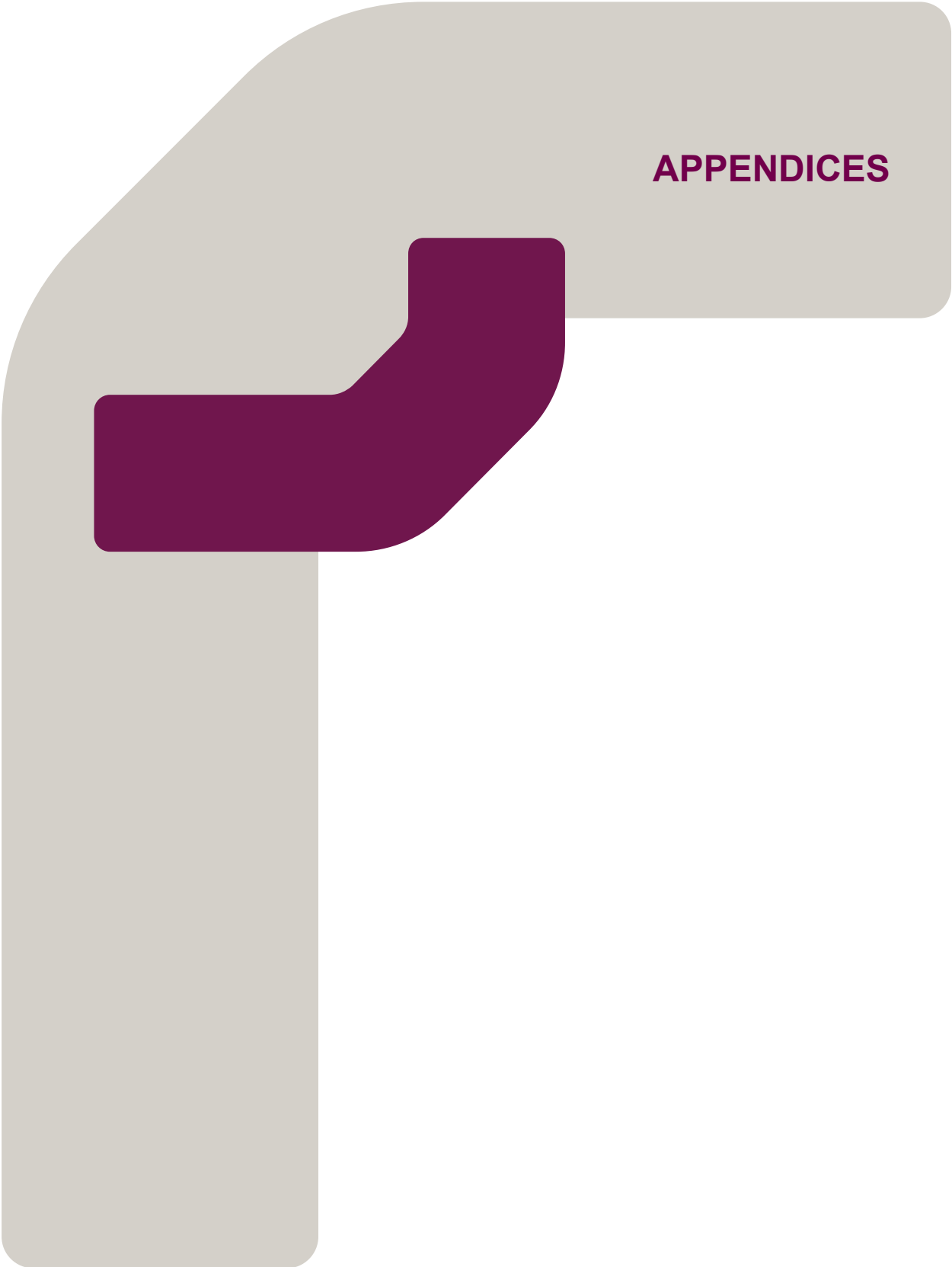
- 5.3.1 A Biodiversity Net Gain report has been provided (RPS, 2024). This states how the development can achieve a 10% net gain following the completion of the development.
- 5.3.2 Bird boxes are recommended to be installed on the building and trees on site to increase nesting opportunities for birds.
- 5.3.3 Insect houses are also recommended, particularly within the wildflower grassland as this habitat will be of particular value to invertebrate species.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1.1 The AWE 250 Brook Drive site comprises hardstanding (both office buildings and car park areas), amenity grassland, a number of individual trees and areas of scrub and sparsely vegetated land. Foudry Brook flows 15m to the northern and western boundaries of the site.
- 6.1.2 No statutory sites are located within 2 km. Therefore, the planned development will not affect any statutory sites.
- 6.1.3 No further surveys are recommended. The trees and vegetation on site that is to be removed provides limited suitable habitat to support bat and bird species. Mitigation and enhancement methods for these species have been provided within this report.
- 6.1.4 It is recommended that the habitats on site are retained and enhanced, where possible. A separate BNG report details the biodiversity net gain potential for this site.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:
Relevant
Legislation

REPORT

Birds

All birds, their nests and eggs are afforded protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as updated by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It is an offence to:

- intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird;
- intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built; and
- intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

Schedule 1 birds cannot be intentionally or recklessly disturbed when nesting and there are increased penalties for doing so. Licences can be issued to visit the nests of such birds for conservation, scientific or photographic purposes but not to allow disturbance during a development even in circumstances where that development is fully authorised by consents such as a valid planning permission.

Bats

All British bat species are fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as updated by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. All British bats are also included on Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019 as European Protected Species. It is an offence to:

- intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or capture bats;
- deliberately or recklessly disturb bats (whether in a roost or not); and
- damage, destroy or obstruct access to bat roosts.

A roost is defined as 'any structure or place which [a bat] uses for shelter or protection'. As bats tend to reuse the same roosts, legal opinion is that a roost is protected whether or not bats are present at the time of survey.

A licence will therefore be required by those who carry out any operation that would otherwise result in offences being committed.

The following bat species are listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, (commonly referred to as UKBAP Priority species): barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*, Bechstein's *Myotis bechsteinii*, noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus*, greater horseshoe *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* and lesser horseshoe *Rhinolophus hipposideros*.