

WHITLEY WOOD COMMUNITY CENTRE, READING

ECOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Final Document

September 2025

Preliminary Ecological Appraisals • Protected Species Surveys and Licensing • NVC • EclA • HRA • Management Plans
Habitats • Badger • Bats • Hazel Dormouse • Birds • Reptiles • Amphibians • Invertebrates • Riparian and Aquatic Species

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WHITLEY WOOD COMMUNITY CENTRE, SWALLOWFIELD DRIVE, READING

ECOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ecological Survey and Assessment Ltd (ECOSA) have been appointed by Reading Borough Council to undertake an Ecological Impact Assessment to support a planning application for the demolition of Whitley Wood Community Centre, Reading. The site is located in Whitley Wood, to the south of Reading and comprises a disused community centre and garden and car parking space. The proposals entail the demolition of the old community centre.

The main findings of the Ecological Impact Assessment are:

- The site is comprises a community centre building, a wooden shed and a metal shipping container, with hardstanding, modified grassland, vegetated gardens and individual trees;
- The site has suitability for breeding birds and limited suitability for foraging and commuting bats;
- The proposals will result in the loss of a small area of habitat for foraging and commuting bats, breeding birds and European hedgehog and may result in the harm of breeding birds during demolition works and vegetation clearance;
- It is understood that the building will be demolished and vegetation cleared but there are currently no proposed plans for the development of the site.
- Proposed mitigation measures include sensitive timings of the works, outside of nesting bird season;
- Details of enhancements will be given once redevelopment proposals are known;
- Given the impacts identified, and the mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures proposed it is considered that any future proposals would likely accord with all relevant local and national planning policy.
- If the planning application boundary changes or the proposals for the site alter, a re-assessment of the scheme in relation to ecology may be required. Given the mobility of animals and the potential for colonisation of the site over time, updating survey work may be required, particularly if development does not commence within 18 months of the date of the most recent relevant survey.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Ecological Survey & Assessment Limited (ECOSA) have been appointed by Reading Borough Council to undertake an Ecological Impact Assessment to support a planning application for the prior approval for demolition of Whitley Wood Community Centre, Swallowfield Drive, Reading, Berkshire, RG2 8UH (hereafter referred to as the site).

1.2 The Site

The site is located in to the south of Reading, Berkshire, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) SU 7207 6903 (**Map 1**).

The site comprises a diused community centre, with garden and car parking space. The site is bounded by residential developments in all directions.

In the wider area, the landscape is characterised by residential development associated with Whitley Wood, a suburb of Reading, and interspersed with public open spaces. The M4 motorway is located approximately 430 metres to the south of the site, running from east to west.

1.3 Aims and Scope of Report

The information within this report is based on a field survey and desktop study carried out during July 2025. The report describes the habitats and species (hereafter referred to as ecological features) within the site's Zone of Influence (Paragraph 3.2), and provides a detailed assessment of potential ecological effects of the proposed development of the site. It identifies the need for any measures to avoid, mitigate or compensate for significant adverse effects¹ on ecological features and outlines enhancements to the site's ecology to be implemented as part of the development. The objectives of the assessment are:

- To provide baseline information on ecological features within the site's Zone of Influence;
- To assess, characterise and quantify the effects on ecological features, including cumulative effects, and identify effects in the absence of any mitigation;
- To set out measures to avoid, mitigate and compensate for significant ecological effects in accordance with the 'mitigation hierarchy'²; and

¹ For the purposes of this assessment a 'significant' adverse effect is one which will have an adverse effect on the ecological feature at the site level or higher.

² In accordance with CIEEM Ecological Impact Assessment guidance (CIEEM, 2018) a sequential process is adopted to address impacts on features of ecological interest, with 'Avoidance' prioritised at the top of the hierarchy and Compensation/Enhancement' at the bottom. This is often referred to as the 'mitigation hierarchy'.

- To outline opportunities for enhancement in order to achieve a net gain for biodiversity.

1.4 Site Proposals

The proposals entail the demolition of the existing building on site. Redevelopment proposals have not been established.

A demolition prior approval application will be submitted to Reading Borough Council in September 2025.

2.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This section summarises the planning policy in relation to ecology and biodiversity within the Reading Borough Council administrative area. This information is then used to assess the compliance of the scheme in relation to relevant planning policy and where necessary used to inform the necessary mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures (see Section 5.0).

2.2 Planning Policy

2.2.1 National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's requirements for the planning system in England. The original document was published in 2012 with the most recent revised NPPF published in December 2024. A number of sections of the NPPF are relevant when taking into account development proposals and the environment. As set out within Paragraph 11 of the NPPF "*Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development*". However, Paragraph 195 goes on to state that "*The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a habitats site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), unless an appropriate assessment has concluded that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of the habitats site.*".

The NPPF sets out that development proposals should not only minimise the impacts on biodiversity but also to provide enhancement. Paragraph 187 states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by "*...minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures...*".

A number of principles are set out in Paragraph 193, including that where harm cannot be adequately avoided then it should be mitigated for, or as a last resort, compensated for. Where impacts occur on nationally designated sites, the benefits must clearly outweigh any adverse impact and incorporating biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged. Specific reference is also made to the protection of irreplaceable habitats³, including ancient woodland⁴. Where loss to irreplaceable

³ The NPPF defines irreplaceable habitats as "*Habitats which would be technically very difficult (or take a very significant time) to restore, recreate or replace once destroyed, taking into account their age, uniqueness, species diversity or rarity. They include ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, blanket bog, limestone pavement, sand dunes, salt marsh and lowland fen.*"

⁴ Natural England defines ancient woodland as "An area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. It includes ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)."

habitats occurs planning permission would normally be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and an adequate compensation strategy is in place. Paragraph 193 also states *“development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.”* Paragraph 194 also sets out that potential SPAs, SACs and listed or proposed Ramsar sites or sites acting as compensation for SPAs, SACs and Ramsar sites, should receive the same protection as habitat sites.

In addition to the NPPF, Circular 06/05 provides guidance on the application of the law relating to planning and nature conservation as it applies in England. Paragraph 98 states *“the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat”*. Paragraph 99 states *“it is essential that the presence or otherwise of a protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the Proposed Project Development, is established before planning permission is granted”*.

2.2.2 Local Policy

The Reading Borough Council Local Plan was adopted on 4th November 2019 and sets out planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036. Two policies make specific reference to ecology and biodiversity:

- **EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network**

This policy refers to the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity value of the Reading Borough Green Network, comprising statutory designated sites for nature conservation, the River Thames and its tributaries as well as any retained or newly created green space which may expand or link into the Green Network.

Reference is also made to the required maintenance and net gain in the biodiversity value of a site proposed for development. Where biodiversity loss cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated for on site, off-site provisions should be factored into the development proposals following nationally recognised guidance. The provision of additional ecological enhancements, such as newly planted trees, wildlife ponds and bat boxes, should also be clearly laid out in any development proposals, wherever practicable.

- **EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands**

This policy refers to the protection and increase of the quality and area of important trees, hedgerows, woodlands and waterside vegetation within the borough of

Reading. The designs of new development proposals will consider this at all stages, ensuring the planting and maintenance of these habitats and utilising off-site provisions where required. The success of this policy will ensure the retention and enhancement of the character and biodiversity value of the borough.

Reading's Biodiversity Action Plan was adopted in February 2021 and sets out several 'Themes for Action', one of which makes specific reference to the ecological impacts of planning and development:

- **C: Planning & Building Control**

This 'Theme for Action' refers to the requirement of the Reading Borough Council to continue assessing planning applications for their impact on protected and notable species and habitats. Reference is also made to the provision of additional documents as part of planning applications to set out an approach to achieving measurable biodiversity net gain in line with the council's approach, and for ongoing development projects to continue to provide and monitor the success of required ecological enhancement provisions.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This section details the methods used during the field survey and desktop study carried out as part of the Ecological Impact Assessment. Any significant limitations to the assessment are also considered.

3.2 Zone of Influence

To define the total extent of the study area for this assessment (Zone of Influence⁵), the proposed scheme was reviewed to establish the spatial scale at which ecological features could be affected. The appropriate survey radii for the various elements of the assessment (i.e. desktop study and field survey) have been defined in the relevant sections below. These distances are determined based on the professional judgement of the ecologist leading the appraisal, taking into account the characteristics of the site subject to appraisal, its surroundings and the nature and scope of the proposals.

3.3 Scoping

Protected species considered within this appraisal are those species/species groups considered likely to be encountered given the geographical location and context of the site. These are discussed within the results section (Section 4.0) of the current report. Where such a species is unlikely to be present on site a justification for likely absence is provided. Species considered likely absent from the site are not then considered in the assessment of ecological effects and mitigation measures section (Section 5.0) of this report.

3.4 Desk Study

3.4.1 Biological Records Centre

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) was consulted on 4th July 2025 for the following data:

- Records of non-statutory designated sites (Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) etc.) within one kilometre of the site boundary. See **Appendix 1** for details; and
- Records of legally protected and notable species (flora and fauna) within one kilometre of the site boundary, including priority species and Species of Principal Importance (**Appendix 2**); and

⁵ The Zone of Influence (Zoi), as defined by CIEEM, is the area over which ecological features may be subject to significant effects as a result of the proposed project and associated activities.

- Records of bats within two kilometres of the site boundary. Bat species are highly mobile and therefore the search radius is increased for this species group.
- Records of hazel dormouse within three kilometres of the site boundary. As per current guidance (Wells, et al., 2025), presence of hazel dormouse recorded in connected habitats within three kilometres of the site boundary and in the last five years can be used as evidence for presence within the site. Therefore, the search radius is increased for this species.

3.4.2 Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside

The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) (DEFRA, 2023) database was reviewed on 5th August 2025 to establish the location of statutory designated sites located within the vicinity of the site. This included a search for all internationally and nationally designated sites such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) within one kilometre of the site. Where appropriate, the desk study search area has been extended to take account of any appropriate statutory designated sites which need consideration in terms of potential in-direct effects and which support particularly mobile species⁶. The Impact Risk Zones (IRZ) were also obtained from MAGIC, which are used to help guide and assess planning applications for likely effects on SSSIs.

Sites within two kilometres of the site boundary where European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licences have been granted were reviewed. This information allows a greater understanding of the potential for European Protected Species to be present in the local area.

3.4.3 Other Sources of Information

Online mapping resources, at an appropriate scale, were used to identify the presence of habitats such as woodland blocks, ponds, watercourses and hedgerows, in the vicinity of the site. These habitats may offer resources and connectivity between the site and suitable habitat in the local area, which may be exploited by local species populations.

The presence of ponds or other waterbodies within a 500 metre radius of the site in particular are noted in relation to great crested newt. The 500 metre radius is a standardised search radius to assist in the assessment of the suitability of a site and

⁶ Search areas for bat records are based upon information contained within Collins, J. (Ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (Third Edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London. Relevant distances for consideration of impacts on SPAs, SACs, Ramsar sites have been based on current published guidance available through web-based sources.

its surrounding habitat to support this species, based on current Natural England guidance (English Nature, 2001).

3.5 Field Survey

The field survey followed a modified version of UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) methodology (UKHab Ltd, 2023) and included a search for evidence of, and an assessment of the site's suitability to support, protected and notable species as recommended by CIEEM (CIEEM, 2017). The field survey covered all accessible areas of the site, including boundary features. Habitats described in Section 4.0, and photographs provided, where relevant.

The UKHab Survey Application, developed using the digital survey platform Coreo was used to map habitats in the field, collect the field survey data and photograph the site.

3.5.1 UKHab Survey

An assessment was made of all habitats within the site, which were classified based on the standardised UKHab survey methodology (UKHab Ltd, 2023). Which was modified to make the habitat assessment compatible with the habitat classification within the Biodiversity Net Gain Metric (DEFRA, 2024). The UKHab classification system comprises two major parts, a hierarchical Primary Habitat system and a list of Secondary Codes. The classification of Primary Habitats is hierarchical with five levels.

It should be noted that not all habitats will be classified to Level 5, for example modified grassland is classified at Level 3 and no Level 4 or Level 5 habitat is applicable. In addition, where Level 4 or 5 habitats are considered to be present on site there may be a requirement for further surveys by a specialist botanist to confirm or classify these habitat types.

Where Biodiversity Net Gain Metric habitats are not classified under any of the hierarchical levels within the UKHab methodology the relevant secondary codes definitions have been used to identify these habitats.

During the field survey notes and photographs were taken in order to evidence the surveyor's classification of each habitat type.

Any invasive species⁷ encountered as an incidental result of the survey were recorded.

⁷ Plant species included on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The survey was not specifically aimed at assessing the presence of these species and further specialist advice may need to be sought.

3.5.2 Protected and Notable Species Appraisal

A preliminary appraisal of the site's suitability to support legally protected and notable species was carried out. The following species/species groups were considered during the appraisal.

Bats

The survey conformed to current Bat Conservation Trust guidelines (Collins, 2023). An assessment was made of the suitability of buildings and trees on the site and immediately on the site boundary to support roosting bats based on the presence of Potential Roosting Features such as loose or missing roof tiles or lifted lead flashing for buildings and holes, cracks, splits, loose bark and ivy cladding for trees. A detailed external and internal inspection of accessible structures was undertaken to compile information on potential and actual bat entry/exit points; potential and actual bat roosting locations; any evidence of bats found.

An assessment was made of the suitability of the site and the surrounding landscape to support foraging and/or commuting bat species. The assessment of the suitability of the site to support roosting, foraging and commuting bats is based on a four-point scale as detailed in **Appendix 3**.

Otter

The otter appraisal was based on an assessment of the suitability of the habitat present within the site to support otter by reference to habitat type (such as rivers, streams, ditches, wetlands, reed beds, lakes, ponds and reservoirs), proximity of the site to freshwater and potential important feeding resources (such as fisheries), presence of habitat features which could provide opportunities for resting places and/or holts (such as tunnels, hollows at the base of trees and presence of dense, undisturbed habitat). During the survey attention was paid to the presence of evidence such as spraints, feeding remains, footprints and slides.

Badger

The survey involved an assessment of the suitability of the site to support badger. Evidence of the species was recorded as an incidental result of the Phase 1 habitat survey and included locating badger setts, paths, and signs of territorial activity such as latrine sites.

Hazel Dormouse

The appraisal for the suitability of the site to support hazel dormouse was based on an assessment of habitat features that may indicate that the species is present. This includes the presence of key food sources such as hazel and bramble, or plants used as nesting material such as honeysuckle and clematis. Additionally, the species requires a continuum of food supply so that habitat structure, diversity and connectivity

to adjacent areas of woodland/scrub are important features in determining the suitability of the site for hazel dormouse.

Water Vole

The water vole appraisal was based on an assessment of the suitability of the habitat present within the site to support water vole by reference to habitat type (such as rivers, streams, ditches, wetlands, reed beds, lakes, ponds and reservoirs), bank structure and the bank side vegetation. Water voles generally require sloping banks in which to burrow and well-developed bank side vegetation to provide shelter and food. During the survey attention was paid to the presence of burrows, latrines, feeding remains, trails and footprints.

Birds

The appraisal of breeding birds on the site was based on the suitability of habitat present to support nesting bird communities, the presence of bird species that may potentially nest within the available habitat and evidence of nesting such as old or currently active nests.

The assessment of wintering birds was based on an assessment of the suitability of the habitat on site to support important wintering bird species and populations. Particular attention was paid to the suitability for the site to support wintering farmland bird species, waders and wildfowl.

Reptiles

The reptile appraisal was based on an assessment of the suitability of the habitat present within the site to support a population of reptiles. Reptiles particularly favour scrub and rough grassland interfaces and the presence of these is a good indication that reptiles may be present on-site. In addition, reptiles may utilise features such as bare ground for basking, tussocky grassland for shelter and compost heaps and rubble piles for breeding and/or hibernating.

Great Crested Newt

The appraisal of the site to support great crested newt included establishing the presence of suitable aquatic habitats such as ponds, lakes or other waterbodies within or adjacent to the site and the presence of suitable terrestrial habitat. Waterbodies that are densely shaded, highly eutrophic or that contain fish are likely to be less suitable for this species. The suitability of on-site ponds and terrestrial habitat is considered in relation to the presence of ponds within the wider area, as identified within the desktop study (Paragraph 3.4.3), and their suitability to be used as a network.

Invertebrates

An assessment was made of the suitability of the site to support diverse communities of invertebrates. The assessment was based on the presence of habitat features which may support important invertebrate communities. These features include, for example, an abundance of dead wood, the presence of diverse plant communities, varied woodland structure, sunny woodland edges with a diverse flora, waterbodies and water courses and areas of free draining soil exposures. During the field survey there was no attempt made to identify species present as this is a more specialist area of ecological assessment reserved for targeted surveys.

Other Relevant Species

An assessment was made of site suitability for other notable species such as more rarely encountered protected species, Species of Principal Importance for the Conservation of diversity in England notified under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 and as listed in the England Biodiversity List, and Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) species⁸, specific to the study region.

Invasive Species

During the field survey any incidental records of invasive species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were recorded. However, it should be considered that the survey was not specifically aimed at assessing the presence of these species and further specialist advice may need to be sought.

3.6 Field Survey Details

The field survey was carried out by Jennifer Simpson-Watts, Ecologist of ECOSA on 17th July 2025. The weather conditions were overcast with approximately 80% cloud cover, an ambient temperature of 16°C and a gentle breeze.

During the survey, the surveyor was equipped with 10x40 binoculars, a high powered torch and a digital camera.

3.7 Field Survey Limitations

Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the presence of plants and animals such as the time of year, migration patterns and behaviour. The field survey has therefore not produced a complete list of plants and animals and in the absence of evidence of any particular species should not be taken as conclusive proof that the species is absent or that it will not occur in the future.

⁸ LBAPs identify local priorities for biodiversity conservation by translating national targets for species into effective action at the local level and identifying targets for species important to the local area.

Online mapping resources provide an indication of habitat features present in the wider area, but do not provide a detailed assessment of habitat types.

It is not always possible to provide definitive assessments of a species' presence/likely absence at a site and so in the absence of direct evidence, assessments and recommendations are based on the presence of suitable habitat within/adjacent to a site and the results of species records within the desk study data.

4.0 BASELINE ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

4.1 Introduction

This section details the results of the field survey and desktop study undertaken as part of the Ecological Impact Assessment for the site. It assesses the baseline ecological conditions of the site at the time the desktop study was completed and based on the ecological features recorded during the field survey carried out on 17th July 2025.

4.2 Statutory and Non-statutory Designated Sites

Details of designated sites are provided in the paragraphs below.

4.2.1 Statutory Designated Sites

There are no statutory designated sites of nature conservation interest situated within one kilometre of the site boundary.

4.2.2 Non-Statutory Designated Sites

There are two non-statutory designated sites of nature conservation interest situated within one kilometre of the site boundary. These are:

- The Grove (LWS) – located 785 metres south-east of the site and designated for supporting ancient woodland.
- Shinfield Park, Nore's Hill (LWS) – located 810 metres north-east of the site and designated for supporting ancient woodland and meadow.

Further information on sites designated for nature conservation are provided in **Appendix 4**.

4.3 Habitats

4.3.1 Desktop Study Results

Consultation with TVERC produced records of ancient woodland, lowland mixed deciduous woodland and wood pasture and parkland, approximately 500 metres to the east of the site.

4.3.2 Field Survey Results

Habitats and details of how each habitat has been classified based on the UKHab five-level hierarchical system, with relevant secondary codes, are provided in **Appendix 5**. Habitats are described in general terms using standard UKHab terminology. The main habitats recorded on site during the field survey were as follows:

Modified Grassland

Modified grassland is present to the east and west of the site. The grassland appears to have been well managed in the past, but is starting to develop a longer and tussocky sward since the building stopped being used (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**). The grassland is dominated by perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata*. Other species include ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, common yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, dandelion *Taraxacum* species and white clover *Trifolium repens*.



Figure 1: Modified grassland to the west



Figure 2: Modified grassland to the east

Vegetated Garden

Vegetated garden is present to the south of the site (**Figure 3** and **Figure 4**). Species include common juniper *Juniperus communis*, garden sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, common foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, lavender *Lavandula* species and rose *Rosa* species.



Figure 3: Area of vegetated garden to the south



Figure 4: Vegetated garden

Induvidual Trees

Induvidual trees are present across the site including European mountain ash *Sorbus aucuparia*, elder *Sambucus nigra* and small emergent stands of sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*.

Other Habitats

Other habitats on site include the building itself (Paragraph 4.4.1), a wooden shed, a metal storage container fences and hardstanding.

Summary

The habitats present on site comprise modified grassland, vegetated garden, induvidual trees, the building, sheds, fences and hardstanding. The trees are considered to have the greatest intrinsic value in an otherwise dominated urban area.

4.4 Notable and Legally Protected Species

4.4.1 Bats

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with the MAGIC database produced several records of granted EPSM licences with regards to bats within the desktop study area. The closest two records were returned approximately 100 metres north-west and 280 metres and were granted for the destruction of a breeding place for common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* in 2015 and destruction of a resting place for common pipistrelle between 2009 and 2011, respectively.

Consultation with TVERC returned multiple records of at least 10 bat species including common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, Nathuius' pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii*, noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*, Leisler's bat *Nyctalus leisleri*, brown-long eared *Plecotus auritus*, *Myotis* species, barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus* and Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentonii*.

Building Assessment

A single building is present on the site and is a prefabricated construction with a flat roof (**Figure 5**) .

Externally, the building is in good condition and there are no gaps between the walls and the roof (**Figure 6** and **Figure 7**).

Internally, the building does not have a roof void and there were no gaps or additional features that would allow bat access into internal spaces (**Figure 8**). Therefore, the building is assessed as having negligible suitability to support roosting bats.



Figure 5: Community centre building



Figure 6: Gable end



Figure 7: Shiplap extension to west

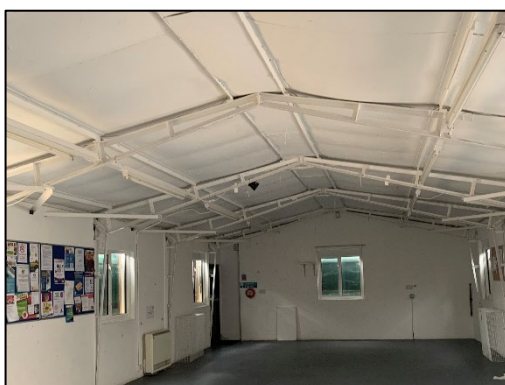


Figure 8: Interior of building

Additionally, a small wooden shed (**Figure 9**) and a metal shipping container (**Figure 10**) are present on the site. These are both well sealed and do not have any holes or gaps which could support roosting bats, therefore, have no potential.



Figure 9: Wooden shed



Figure 10: Metal shipping container

Tree Assessment

The trees on site range in age from immature to semi-mature and appear to be in good condition. No potential bat roosting features were recorded on trees during the survey such as holes or limb scars, therefore the site is assessed as having negligible suitability to support tree roosting bats.

Foraging and Commuting Habitat

The trees and garden shrubs on site offer some foraging opportunities for bats, however they do not have connectivity to any off-site habitats such as the woodland block to the east of the site and therefore offer limited commuting and foraging pathways. Overall, the site is assessed as having low suitability for foraging and commuting bats.

4.4.2 Otter

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with TVERC produced a single record of otter *Lutra lutra* within the desktop study area, approximately 900 metres south-west of the site and separated from the site by the M4.

Field Survey Results

There are no riparian habitats on site or near to the site from which this species might travel to utilise the on-site habitats. The nearest habitat is approximately 3.1 kilometres south-east of the site along the River Loddon and is separated from the site by extensive residential development and major road networks.

The habitat on site is unsuitable for otter and therefore the species is not considered further in this report.

4.4.3 Badger

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with TVERC produced several records of badger *Meles meles* within the desktop study area, largely concentrated to the south of the site beyond the M4.

Field Survey Results

No evidence of badger was recorded on site during the survey. The habitats on site are unsuitable for sett-building due to lack of shelter and suitable vegetated habitats. Foraging badger is not likely to utilise the site as it is surrounded by closed-board fencing and more suitable habitats are present beyond the site boundary in the form of woodland blocks to the south and east.

Overall, the site is unsuitable for badger and therefore the species is not considered further in this report.

4.4.4 Hazel Dormouse

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with the MAGIC database produced no records of granted EPSM licences with regards to hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* within the desktop study area.

Consultation with TVERC produced a single record of hazel dormouse within the desktop study area located approximately two kilometres south-west of the site. The M4 motorway lies between the site and this record and therefore there is no connectivity between the two.

Field Survey Results

There are no hedgerows or tree lines on site suitable for supporting hazel dormouse. Furthermore, the habitats on site are isolated from suitable habitats off-site such as woodland or other linear wooded features.

Therefore, the habitat on site is unsuitable for hazel dormouse and therefore the species is not considered further in this report.

4.4.5 Water Vole

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with TVERC produced no records of water vole *Arvicola amphibius* within the desktop study area, however, this does not confirm the absence of the species in the local area.

Field Survey Results

There are no riparian habitats on site or near to the site from which water vole might travel to utilise the on-site habitats. The nearest habitat is approximately 3.1 kilometres south-east of the site along the River Loddon and is separated from the site by extensive residential development and major road networks.

The habitat on site is unsuitable for water vole and therefore the species is not considered further in this report.

4.4.6 Birds

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with TVERC produced a number of records of common and widespread birds within the desktop study area including the red listed⁹ swift *Apus apus*, starling

⁹ The UK's birds are split into three categories of conservation importance - red, amber and green. Red is the highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action. Amber is the next most critical group, followed by green. Red

Sturnus vulgaris and greenfinch *Chloris chloris* and the the amber listed¹⁰ wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*.

Field Survey Results

During the survey a number of bird species were recorded on site or passing over including the red listed⁹ house sparrow *Passer domesticus* and starling, the amber listed¹⁰ wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*, as well as more common species including carrion crow *Corvus corone*. The trees and garden shrubs and the flat roofed sections of the building provide suitable nesting opportunities for breeding birds.

The grassland habitats on site are limited in extent and subject to periodic management and are therefore unlikely to support notable assemblages of wintering birds.

4.4.7 Reptiles

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with TVERC produced a number of records of common and widespread reptiles within the desktop study area including slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and grass snake *Natrix helvetica*.

Field Survey Results

The grassland habitats on site are subject to infrequent management and at the time of survey was starting to developed a longer and tussocky sward, therefore creating sheltering opportunities for reptiles. The site is isolated from other grassland habitats beyond the site boundary by surrounding roads and and closed-board fencing by surrounding residential gardens. It is considered unlikely that reptiles would have colonised the site, despite the longer grassland sward and therefore this species group is not considered further in this report.

4.4.8 Great Crested Newt

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with the MAGIC database produced a single record of great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* approximately 1.6 kilometres north of the site. *This record may be incorrectly recorded as the listed county for the record is Cheshire, not Berkshire.*

List criteria include species which are: globally threatened; have been subject to historical population decline in UK during 1800–1995; are in severe (at least 50%) decline in UK breeding population over last 25 years, or longer-term period, or; subject to severe (at least 50%) contraction of UK breeding range over last 25 years, or longer-term period.

¹⁰ Amber list criteria include species which are: in unfavourable conservation status in Europe; subject to historical population decline during 1800–1995, but recovering; subject to moderate (25-49%) decline in UK breeding population or contraction of UK breeding range over last 25 years, or the longer-term period; subject to moderate (25-49%) decline in UK non-breeding population over last 25 years, or the longer-term period; rare breeders (1–300 breeding pairs in UK); rare non-breeders (less than 900 individuals), or; internationally important species with at least 20% of European breeding or non-breeding population in UK.

Consultation with TVERC produced no records of great crested newt within the desktop study area, however, this does not confirm the absence of the species in the local area.

Field Survey Results

There are no waterbodies on site, therefore the site is unsuitable for breeding great crested newt. The grassland habitats are well managed and offer no foraging opportunities for great crested newt in their terrestrial phase. The garden shrubs and individual trees on site offer limited sheltering opportunities for great crested newt, they are isolated from other habitats beyond the site boundary by surrounding residential development and roads. Due to the lack of a network of breeding ponds in the surrounding area, great crested newt are not considered present in the wider landscape.

The habitat on site is unsuitable for great crested newt and therefore the species is not considered further in this report.

4.4.9 Invertebrates

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with TVERC produced multiple records of common and widespread invertebrates within the desktop study area, including several record of stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*.

Field Survey Results

The site may support a number of common and widespread invertebrate species however, the site lacks deadwood which is required to support stag beetle. The site also does not support any habitats that could be utilised by other notable invertebrate species or assemblages and therefore this species group is not considered further in this report.

4.4.10 Other Relevant Species

Desktop Study Results

Consultation with TVERC produced multiple records of European hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* within the desktop study area, mostly associated with residential gardens.

Field Survey Results

The grassland habitats are considered to offer foraging opportunities for European hedgehog but due to the presence of closed-board fencing around the perimeter this species is unlikely to be able to utilise the site.

4.5 Summary of Key Ecological Features

The following features are those with greatest ecological value that lie within the site's Zone of Influence:

- The site has low suitability for foraging and commuting bats; and
- The site has suitability for breeding birds.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF ECOLOGICAL EFFECTS AND MITIGATION/COMPENSATION/ENHANCEMENT MEASURES

5.1 Introduction

This section assesses the ecological effects of the proposed development scheme on the identified ecological features as identified in Section 4.0. Methods for addressing potential impacts and effects on ecological features have been approached in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy¹¹ with avoidance of impacts prioritised where possible. Where significant adverse effects cannot be avoided other forms of mitigation are prioritised over compensation. Enhancement measures have been detailed, where relevant, in order to not only minimise the impacts on biodiversity but also to provide enhancement in accordance with Paragraph 174 of the NPPF (Paragraph 2.2.1). It is anticipated that mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures will be secured through the planning process.

5.2 Scheme Design

The proposed development entails the demolition of the existing building on site. Redevelopment proposals have not been established.

The potential ecological impacts and effects of these proposals, in the absence of mitigation, are described for each ecological feature below. For each ecological feature, measures to mitigate and/or compensate for significant effects are described.

5.3 Designated Sites

5.3.1 *Potential Impacts and Effects*

There are no statutory designated sites and two local wildlife sites within the search radius. Due to their distance from the site and the low impact of the demolition, there are no anticipated impacts on designated sites.

5.3.2 *Mitigation and Compensation Measures*

No mitigation or compensation measures are required with regards to designated sites.

5.3.3 *Enhancement*

No enhancement measures are proposed with regards to designated sites.

¹¹ In accordance with CIEEM Ecological Impact Assessment guidance (CIEEM, 2018) a sequential process is adopted to address impacts on features of ecological interest, with 'Avoidance' prioritised at the top of the hierarchy and Compensation/Enhancement' at the bottom. This is often referred to as the 'mitigation hierarchy'.

5.4 Habitats

5.4.1 Potential Impacts and Effects

The proposals will result in the loss of some areas of modified grassland, individual trees and vegetated garden on site.

5.4.2 Mitigation and Compensation Measures

As plans are not yet known, no mitigation or compensation measures are proposed. However, the site should be subject to landscaping once proposals are drawn up.

5.4.3 Enhancement

No enhancement measures are proposed with regards to habitats at this stage.

5.5 Bats

5.5.1 Potential Impacts and Effects

The proposals for vegetation loss will result in the loss of a small amount of foraging habitats.

In England, bats and their habitat are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 through inclusion in Schedule 5. In addition, all bat species are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Refer to **Appendix 3** for details.

5.5.2 Mitigation and Compensation Measures

As plans are not yet known, no mitigation or compensation measures are proposed. However, the site should be subject to landscaping once proposals are drawn up to reinstate foraging opportunities for roosting bats.

5.5.3 Enhancement

No enhancement measures are proposed with regards to bats at this stage but could include the installation of bat tubes within any new buildings or a bat boxes installed onto the exterior of a new building.

5.6 Birds

5.6.1 Potential Impacts and Effects

Demolition of the building and removal of the vegetated will result in the loss of suitable nesting habitats for breeding birds. Breeding birds may be harmed during demolition and vegetation clearance works, if undertaken during the breeding bird season.

All birds, their nests, eggs and young are legally protected, with certain exceptions, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Refer to **Appendix 3** for details.

5.6.2 Mitigation and Compensation Measures

Demolition and vegetation clearance works should be undertaken outside the main breeding bird season of March to August, inclusive. If not possible, an ecologist will be present immediately prior to clearance to check the building and/or vegetation for active nests. Any active nests should be left with a suitable buffer until nesting ends.

5.6.3 Enhancement

No enhancement measures are proposed with regards to birds at this stage.

5.7 Residual and Cumulative Effects

Given the mitigation and compensation measures outlined above, no significant residual effects are anticipated on any of the species considered. Therefore, there will be no cumulative effects on local populations as a result of the development.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The site has suitability for breeding birds and limited suitability for foraging and commuting bats. Adverse impacts on these ecological features have been identified and appropriate mitigation measures proposed including sensitive timings of the works, outside of nesting bird season. No enhancements are proposed but the provision of bat boxes installed onto any new buildings has been suggested.

6.2 Updating Site Survey

If the planning application boundary changes or the proposals for the site alter, a re-assessment of the scheme in relation to ecology may be required. Given the mobility of animals and the potential for colonisation of the site over time, updating survey work may be required, particularly if development does not commence within 18 months of the date of the most recent relevant survey.

7.0 REFERENCES

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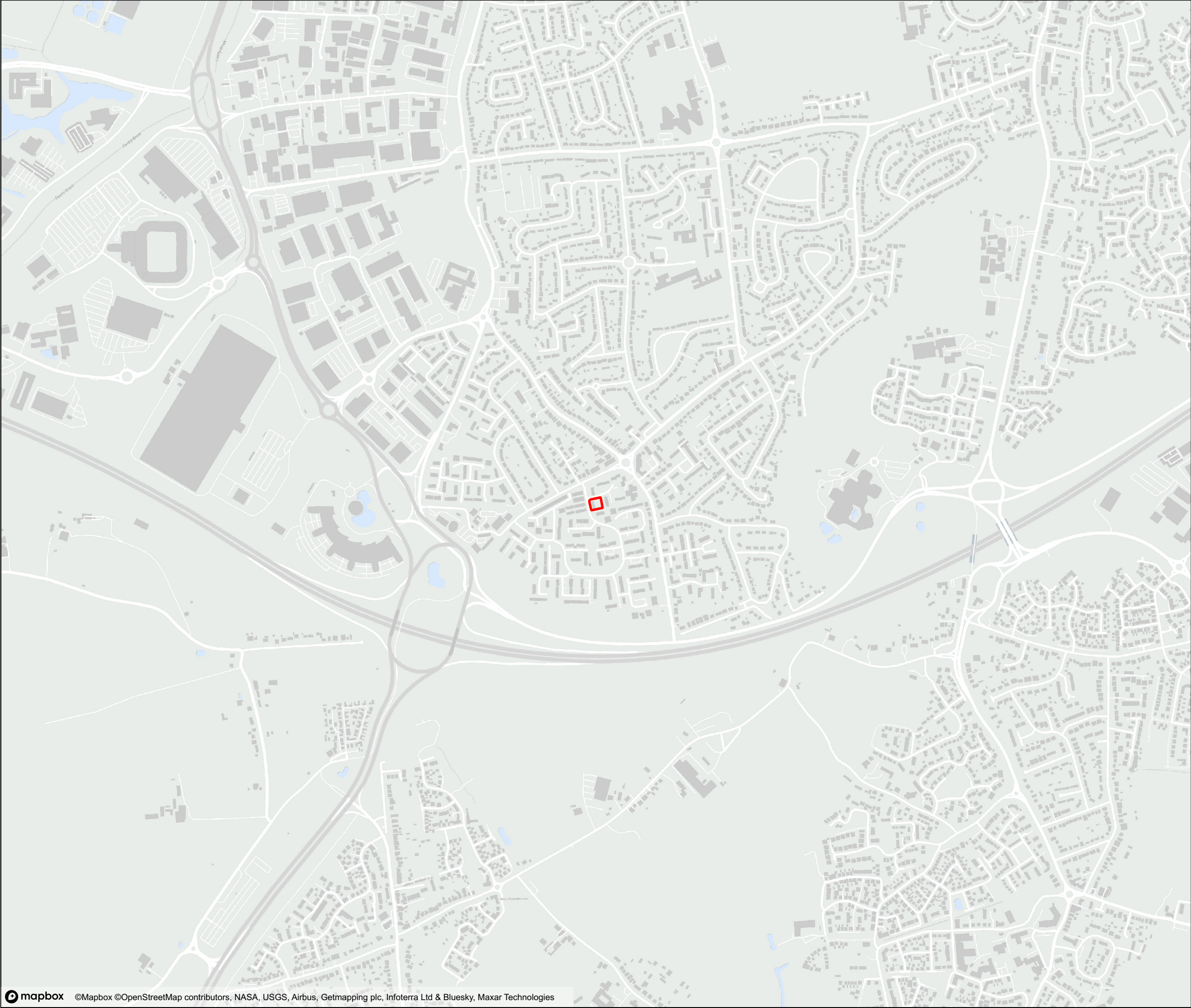
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Map 1 Site Location Plan



**WHITELEY WOOD COMMUNITY
CENTRE, SWALLOWFIELD
DRIVE, READING, BERKSHIRE**

REPORT TYPE IN CAPITALS

Map 1 - Site Location Plan

Client:	Reading Borough Council
Date:	September 2025
Status:	Final

KEY

Site Boundary



Prepared by: KM	Date: 010725
Last amended by: JP	Date: 110925

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Appendix 1 Sites Designated for Nature Conservation

Statutory Sites

Internationally Designated Sites - Ramsar Sites, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) form a network of protected sites across the European Union and United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom the primary legislative protection is afforded to these sites under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Ramsar sites are designated as wetlands of international importance which are afforded similar legislative protection to SPAs and SACs.

SACs are sites which support internationally important habitats or internationally important assemblages or populations of species. SPAs are designated for supporting internationally important populations of birds. SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites are generally also designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Under Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) there is a legal requirement that competent authorities, such as local planning authorities, need to consider whether plans or projects are likely to have a significant adverse effect on SPAs, SACs or Ramsar sites, either alone, or in combination with other plans or projects. In the event that a likely significant effect cannot be ruled out, on the basis of objective information, then the competent authority must undertake an “Appropriate Assessment” to fully assess the plan or project against the site’s conservation objectives. Unless certain defined derogation tests can be met, the competent authority may not authorise nor undertake any plan or project which adversely affects the integrity of a SPA, SAC or Ramsar site.

Nationally Designated Sites – Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserves

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) receive legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Such sites are designated to protect specific areas of biological or geological interest of national importance. Such sites also generally receive strict protection through the planning system.

National Nature Reserves (NNR) are also usually designated as SSSIs and are specifically managed for their wildlife value. They receive legal protection through the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). As with SSSIs, these sites generally receive strict protection through the planning system.

Locally Designated Sites – Local Nature Reserves

Local Nature Reserves (LNR) are designated by local authorities under the National Park and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. These are generally designated not only for their local wildlife value but also for education, scientific and recreational purposes. These sites generally receive protection from development through the planning system.

Non-Statutory Sites

Locally Designated Sites

In addition to statutory designations, local authorities often designate sites of nature conservation importance at the local level. Such designations are named differently by each local authority and may be referred to as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) or Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), amongst others. The exact level of protection afforded to these sites varies and is normally defined through local planning policy.

Appendix 2 Relevant Legislation

Bats

All UK bat species are listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. They are afforded full protection under Section 9(4) of the Act and Regulation 43 of the Regulations. These make it an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill any such animal;
- Deliberately disturb any such animal, including in particular any disturbance which is likely:
 - To impair its ability to survive, breed, or rear or nurture their young;
 - To impair its ability to hibernate or migrate;
 - To affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of that species;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any such animal;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any of these animals while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection; or
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place that any of these animals uses for shelter or protection.

In addition, five British bat species are listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive. These are:

- Greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*;
- Lesser horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*;
- Bechstein's bat *Myotis bechsteinii*;
- Barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*; and
- Greater mouse-eared bat *Myotis myotis*.

In certain circumstances where these species are found the Directive requires the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) by EC member states to ensure that their populations are maintained at a favourable conservation status. Outside SACs, the level of legal protection that these species receive is the same as for other bat species.

Breeding Birds

With certain exceptions, all wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected by Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Therefore, 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; or
- Intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

These offences do not apply to hunting of birds listed in Schedule 2 subject to various controls. Bird species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act receive further protection, thus for these species it is also an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any bird while it is nest building, or is at a nest containing eggs or young; or
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb the dependent young of any such bird.

Species and Habitats of Principal Importance in England

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act came into force on 1st October 2006. Section 41 (S41) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The England Biodiversity List is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 40 of the NERC Act 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions. There are currently 943 species of principal importance and 41 habitats of principal importance included on the England Biodiversity List.

Appendix 3 Appraisal Criteria for Bats

The criteria used to assess the suitability of roosting and foraging/commuting habitat for bats is based on industry guidelines and outlined in **Table 1**¹².

Table 1: Criteria used to Assess Suitability of Roosting and Foraging/Commuting Habitat for Bats

Suitability	Description of roosting habitats	Commuting and foraging habitats
High	A structure or tree 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 due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by commuting bats such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge. High-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by foraging bats such as broadleaved woodland, tree-lined watercourses and grazed parkland. Site is close to and connected to known roosts.
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for commuting such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens. Habitat that is connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland or water.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically/structure that does not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation). A tree 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.	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of commuting bats such as a gappy hedgerows or un-vegetated stream, but isolated (i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat). Suitable, but isolated, habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a lone tree or a patch of scrub.
Negligible	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used as flight-paths or by foraging bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains in order to account for non-standard bat behaviour.
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices/suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any commuting or foraging bats at any time of the year (i.e. no habitats that provide continuous lines of shade/protection for flight-lines, or generate/shelter insect populations available to foraging bats)

¹² Table adapted from (Collins, 2023)

Appendix 4 Baseline Habitats

Table 2: Summary of Baseline Habitats

Habitat Ref.	1
Level 1	Terrestrial
Level 2	Grassland (g)
Level 3	Modified Grassland (g4)
Level 4	N/A
Level 5	N/A
Secondary Codes	Vegetated garden (828); Unmanaged (521); Tree (200)
BNG Habitat Type	Modified Grassland
	
Species List The grassland species present include perennial rye-grass <i>Lolium perenne</i>, cock's foot <i>Dactylis glomerata</i>, ribwort plantain <i>Plantago lanceolata</i>, common yarrow <i>Achillea millefolium</i>, oxeye daisy <i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i> broad-leaved dock <i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>, creeping buttercup <i>Ranunculus repens</i>, dandelion <i>Taraxacum</i> species and white clover <i>Trifolium repens</i>. Vegetated grassland species include common juniper <i>Juniperus communis</i>, garden sorrel <i>Rumex acetosella</i>, common foxglove <i>Digitalis purpurea</i>, lavender <i>Lavandula</i> species and rose <i>Rosa</i> species. Tree species include European mountain ash <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>, elder <i>Sambucus nigra</i> and small emergent stands of sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>.	