

**Land at 90 Stone Street
Reading
Berkshire
RG30 1HU**

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Howard Thomas to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of land at 90 Stone Street in Reading, Berkshire. The PEA was commissioned to accompany a full planning application to be submitted to Reading Borough Council seeking consent for the construction of two semi-detached dwellings and associated landscaping.
- 1.1.2** The desk study revealed that the application site is not designated for its wildlife interest but does fall within the Zone of Influence (Zol) for the Pincent's Kiln Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows SSSI, however, the proposed development is unlikely to have a harmful effect on the terrestrial SSSIs.
- 1.1.3** The application site is a 0.04ha residential garden plot, comprising bare ground in a recently cleared garden. Historical mapping shows that the garden had been left unmanaged since at least 2017 and prior to clearance was assessed to comprise modified grassland and mixed scrub. The site is in an urban setting surrounded by residential properties to the south and commercial buildings to the north. A railway line is situated 125 m to the north, recreational fields 160 m to the north and the River Thames 495 m to the north. Existing habitats were: u-510 bare ground. The habitats observed (from historical mapping) were: g4 Modified grassland and h3h mixed scrub.
- 1.1.4** The proposals are unlikely to affect habitats or species of conservation importance or those that are protected
- 1.1.5** The following recommendations have been made:
- Precautions for reptiles and small mammals prior to and during construction activities.
 - Biodiversity enhancements such as bat and bird boxes, native landscape planting and creation of partially buried log piles for stg beetles.
- 1.1.6** This report will likely be valid for up to 18 months; after which point a professional ecologist may need to review the report's validity (CIEEM 2019).

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

- 2.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Howard Thomas to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) on land at 90 Stone Street in Reading, Berkshire.
- 2.1.2** The PEA was commissioned to accompany a full planning application to be submitted to Reading Borough Council seeking consent for the construction of two semi-detached dwellings and associated landscaping (refer to **Appendix 2**).

2.2 Site Location and Context

- 2.2.1** The application site is a 0.04ha urban plot located on the western corner of Stone Street in Reading, Berkshire (OS grid ref: SU 68757 74236).
- 2.2.2** The site is in an urban setting surrounded by residential properties to the south and commercial buildings to the north. A railway line is situated 125 m to the north, recreational fields 160 m to the north connecting to arable fields and scattered trees along the River Thames which flows 495 m to the north.
- 2.2.3** The aim of this PEA is to understand the nature of the site and assess its ecological value. The key objectives are to:
- identify any likely ecological constraints associated with the planning proposals;
 - establish appropriate mitigation measures in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy (i.e. avoid > mitigate > compensate);
 - determine any additional surveys that may be required following on from this preliminary stage; and
 - recognise opportunities to deliver ecological enhancements in line with national and local planning policy.

3 LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

3.1 Relevant Legislation

3.1.1 The following legislation is considered relevant for the purpose of this Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA):

- Wildlife and Countryside Act (W&CA) 1981 (as amended)
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations ('Habitat') Regulations 2017
- Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996

3.1.2 These acts hold relevance to both protected and invasive species and the degree of protection varies depending on faunal/floral group or species. For example, some species of European importance receive full protection in England and Wales under the Habitat Regulations (e.g. bats), whereas others may only be afforded protection through national legislation such as the W&CA 1981 (as amended) (e.g. common lizard). For a detailed overview of species-specific legislation, please refer to **Appendix 1**.

3.2 European Protected Species Mitigation Licensing

3.2.1 The Government's statutory nature conservation advisory organisation, Natural England, is responsible for issuing European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences that permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations. An EPS mitigation licence can be issued if the following three tests derived from Regulation 55 have been satisfied:

- (2)(e) – the derogation is for the purposes of '*preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment.*'
- (9)(a) – there is '*no satisfactory alternative*' to the derogation; and
- (9)(b) – '*the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.*'

3.2.2 Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have a statutory duty under Regulation 7(3)(e) of the

Habitat Regulations consider and determine whether these three tests are likely to be satisfied by planning proposals affected EPS before granted planning permission. If an EPS mitigation licence is necessary, a licence can be sought once all the necessary planning consents have been granted. Natural England aims to issue a decision on licence applications within 30 working days of submission.

4 PLANNING POLICY

4.1 National Planning Policy

- 4.1.1 The biodiversity duty imposed through the Environment Act 2021 states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must consider what action they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England.
- 4.1.2 The ODPM Circular 06/2005 provides guidance on the application of the law relating to planning and nature conservation in England, stating that *'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.'*
- 4.1.3 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in December 2024, sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. Section 15 of the NPPF sets out the approach local authorities should adopt to conserve and enhancing the natural environment when preparing planning policy and when considering planning applications. Paragraph 193 sets out the principles LPAs should apply when determining planning applications, as follows:

'When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

- a) *if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;*
- b) *development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;*
- c) *development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and*
- d) *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.'

- 4.1.4** In England, BNG became mandatory for major development from the 12th February 2024 and for minor development (small sites) from the 2nd April 2024 under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). In practice, planning permission in England is now subject to a condition to secure a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity, unless the development is a type that is exempt from mandatory BNG requirements.

4.2 Local Planning Policy

- 4.2.1** Planning policy within Reading Borough is defined by the policies within the Local Plan (adopted Nov 2019). The policy relevant to biodiversity and natural environment is as follows:

'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.’

4.2.2 With regards to mandatory BNG for Reading Borough Council, an addendum to the validation requirements was published in February 2024 and gives a full description of how the biodiversity gain condition will function and provides links to relevant government guidelines outlining how it will work in practice and the requirements for both developers and the local authority.

5 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

5.1 Zone of Influence

5.1.1 Ecological assessment guidance (CIEEM 2018) recommends that all ecological features that occur within a 'Zone of Influence' (ZoI) for a proposed development are investigated.

The ZoI includes:

- Areas directly within the land take for the proposed development and access;
- Areas which will be temporarily affected during construction;
- Areas likely to be impacted by hydrological disruption; and
- Areas where there is a risk of wider disbenefits including, but not limited to, any increase in air, water, or noise pollution; or visual or vibrational disturbance during construction and/or operation.

5.1.2 The ZoI is variable depending on the nature of the construction activities and the ecological receptors affected. For this assessment the following zones have been defined as described in Table 5.1.

Ecological features	Zone of influence	Notes
Internationally designated sites- see notes	5km	Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) & Ramsar site
Nationally designated sites – see notes	2km	Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
Local sites – see notes	1km	Local Wildlife Site (LWS), Local Nature Reserve (LNR)
Species records (notable and protected) – see notes	1km	Refer to Table 5.2
Habitats of principal importance for conservation	1km	As defined under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006
Site (species and habitats)	Site and land within 30m (as access constraints allow)	

Table 5.1 – Zone of influence

Legislation and Policy
Annex II of the Habitats Directive (non-priority species) - Endangered animal and plant species that are of Community interest (i.e. endangered, vulnerable, rare or endemic in the European Community) requiring the designation of special areas of conservation.
Annex IV of the Habitats Directive - Animal and plant species of Community interest (i.e. endangered, vulnerable, rare or endemic in the European Community) in need of strict protection. They are protected from killing, disturbance or the destruction of them or their habitat
Schedule 2 of Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (European Protected Species animal) - It is an offence (subject to exceptions) to deliberately capture, kill, disturb, or trade in the animals listed in Schedule 2.
Priority Species listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
Schedule 1 Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) – birds protected from disturbance at their nests, or their dependent young.
Schedule 5 Section 9 Part 1 (taking) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) - Animals which are protected from being taken.

Schedule 5 Section 9 Parts 4b/c of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) - Animals which are protected from intentional disturbance while occupying a structure or place used for shelter or protection / Animals which are protected from their access to any structure or place which they use for shelter or protection being obstructed.

Table 5.2 – Notable and protected species definitions.

5.2 Desk Study

- 5.2.1** A desktop study was conducted by Vicky Potts MCIEEM. The study utilised data from open access online resources to acquire information on the nature of the site and its surroundings and highlight any potential ecological features.
- 5.2.2** Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) was commissioned to undertake a search of pre-existing records of protected and/or notable species and non-statutorily designated wildlife sites held by them within a 1km radius around a central point inside the site.
- 5.2.3** The DEFRA Data Services Platform was used to obtain geospatial datasets for designated sites (i.e. RAMSAR, SPA, SAC, SSSI) and important habitats (i.e. Priority Habitat Inventory, Ancient Woodland Inventory) to be analysed in QGIS. The Multi-Agency Geographical Information Centre (MAGIC) website was examined for granted European Protected Species (EPS) licence applications. These geospatial datasets and Google Earth satellite imagery were used to determine the extent and connectivity of habitats, how the site is linked to the surrounding landscape and whether the development could have wider scale impacts on biodiversity.
- 5.2.4** Reading Borough Council planning portal was searched for pre-existing ecological reports for the application site and other nearby planning applications.
- 5.2.5** Historical OS maps and Google Earth satellite imagery were consulted to provide insight into historical and current land use; such information helps contextualise the continuity of habitats and determine the importance of existing ecological features on site.
- 5.2.6** The type of soil on site was inferred using geological information taken from the British Geological Survey and on-site interpretation.

5.3 Field Survey

Habitat Survey

- 5.3.1** A site walkover was undertaken on the 16th October 2025 by Vicky Potts MCIEEM and Lauren Hayward. The site was surveyed using the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) system (UKHab Ltd 2023) in accordance with the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological

Appraisal (2nd Edition) (CIEEM 2017). Attention was given to evidence of protected and priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principal importance) and the site's potential to support such species.

- 5.3.2** There were no significant survey constraints because full access was available to the site. The survey was subject to seasonal constraints because not all plant and animal species are visible throughout the year and therefore the report represents a snapshot of the site at the time of the survey only.

5.4 Report Validity

- 5.4.1** This report will likely be valid for up to 18 months; after which point a professional ecologist may need to review the report's validity (CIEEM 2019).

6 DESK STUDY FINDINGS

6.1 Designated Sites

6.1.1 The desk study returned no internationally designated statutory sites within a 5km radius of the application site, and no nationally designated statutory sites within 2km, however there were three locally designated statutory sites (Local Nature Reserve) within 1km (see **Table 1** below) and two non-statutorily designated sites (Local Wildlife Sites) and a biodiversity opportunity area within a 1km radius.

Table 1. Statutorily designated sites within the vicinity of the site (Source: DEFRA).

Site name	Designation	Description	Distance from nearest site boundary (m)
Mcilroy Park (part of west Reading woodlands)	Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	A 11.98 ha site comprising an extensive natural park with good views over the River Thames. It is mostly grassland with heather and broom. The semi-ancient woodland, mostly around the edges of the site, has bluebells, wood anemones and butchers' broom. The site has a sunken ancient track "Gypsy Lane" lined with beech trees. Romany Lane bounds the eastern side. There are old chalk pits in the west woodland area from the old clay extraction industry. A possible Saxon mound is at the entrance from Weald Way.	720 W
Round Copse	Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	A 1.66 ha site adjacent to and joining Mcilroy Park, Round Copse is a dense woodland with a variety of birdlife, with the chance for the patient observer of seeing all three species of Woodpecker, as well as Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Thrushes and Blackbirds.	870 SW
Lousehill Copse (part of west Reading woodlands)	Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	A 13.03 ha site comprising semi-ancient woodland surrounded by housing, with mature oak and hazel woodland with some coppice. There are many bluebells and other spring flowers, streams, relics of old ponds and boggy areas. The site is on sand and gravel. There is an open meadow with gorse and broom in the northern section with sandy soil which children use as a digging area.	970 SW

Table 2. Non-statutory designated sites within the vicinity of the site (Source: TVERC).

Site name	Designation	Description	Distance from nearest site boundary (m)
Mcilroy Park	Berkshire Local Wildlife Site	A 14.9 ha site, comprising a hilltop park in Tilehurst, East Reading with views of the surrounding town. The site comprises a large grassland field surrounded by lowland mixed deciduous woodland, including a parcel of ancient woodland in the northern section (Kentwood Grove). The site slopes down on all sides and is surrounded by residential development. It also encompasses two Local Nature Reserves; Mcilroy Park and Round Copse. The includes areas of semi-improved grassland area which is relatively species rich with species that are neutral to acidic in nature, such as common knapweed, common	720 SW

		bird's-foot-trefoil, oxeye daisy, lady's bedstraw, mouse-ear hawkweed, wavy-hair grass and sheep's sorrel. The woodland is variable across the site, with many species typical of long established woodland scattered throughout but concentrated in Round Copse (south-western section) and Kentwood Grove. There are two ancient sunken paths that pass through the woodland. The canopy has mixed coppice including hazel and hornbeam with oak, ash and birch standards as well as some beech. The ground flora is quite rich in places where dog's mercury is abundant and species such as moschatel, sanicle, woodruff, wood anemone, wood spurge, wood millet, yellow archangel, wood sedge and wood melick are found. Butcher's broom is also present. Bluebells dominate in large swathes, particularly in northern areas. The western site boundary is heavily dominated by holly, where a large badger sett is located.	
Lousehill Copse	Berkshire Local Wildlife Site	A 14.91 ha site consisting of three parcels of lowland mixed deciduous woodland within the urban area of Reading. The woodland lies on a escarpment south of the Thames with London Clay overlying Reading Beds and there are some steep slopes dipping north-east. The clays have been worked for bricks and tiles in this area, and the woodlands contain excavations indicating this past use. The largest and central part, known as Lousehill Copse and Compart's Plantation, is the most diverse in terms of structure and botanical species and has areas of coppice and small streams, a pond and an associated wet woodland flora. The woodland is mainly dominated by pedunculate oak with locally abundant ash and locally frequent silver birch. There are small patches of wet woodland with alder and willow associated with the streams. Indicator species for long-established woodland include bush vetch, moschatel, pendulous sedge, ramson, spurge laurel, stinking iris, woodruff, wood anemone, wood millet, wood melick, wood sedge and opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage. Two of the parcels are well-used by the public with many well-worn paths and the site as a whole is an important local amenity. An area of grassland and scattered scrub to the east of the woodland was added as an extension to the site in 2022. This section supports semi-improved neutral grassland with autumn hawkbit, common sorrel and field woodrush. The ichneumon wasp <i>Spilichneumon johansonii</i> was observed during 2021 surveys- this species record is a new record for the UK	750 SW
West Reading Woodlands and LNR	Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA)	The local sites listed above are all part of the Biodiversity Opportunity Area and targets for the area are for woodland management, parkland management, potential for restoration	750 SW

		of grassland habitats on the steeper slopes in the west in particular	
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6.2 Important Habitats

6.2.1 There are no irreplaceable habitats (e.g. Ancient Semi-natural Woodland) or priority habitats (Section 41 NERC Act 2006 habitats of principle importance) on site. The closest habitats of principle importance are within the Local Nature Reserves over 700m to the west and south west of the site, with parcels of lowland dry acid grassland and deciduous woodland.

6.3 Protected Species

6.3.1 The search of the TVERC databases revealed a range of protected and notable species records. Only recent records (defined as fewer than ten years old) are included in report (see **Tables 3a & 3b**). Where there were numerous records for birds only species of highest conservation concern and/or species that are likely to use suburban habitats have been included. The search revealed no records for protected and notable species on the site itself.

Table 3a. Recent protected and/or notable species records within the vicinity of the site (Source: TVERC).

Common name	Scientific name	No. of records	Most recent record	Nearest record (m)	Precision (m)	Status
Amphibians & Reptiles						
Palmate Newt	<i>Lissotriton helveticus</i>	2	2018	1,001	100	WACA-Sch5-s9.5a
Smooth Newt	<i>Lissotriton vulgaris</i>	2	2018	725 NW	10	WACA-Sch5-s9.5a
Slow-worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>	8	2022	780 NW	10	WACA-Sch5-s9.1k/s9.5a, NERC-S41
Birds						
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	1	2020	755 W	100	NERC_s41 BOCC_red
Dunnoek	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	3	2022	1005 W	100	NERC_s41 BOCC_amber
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	5	2022	95 N	100	WCA_1p1 BOCC_red
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	7	2022	870 NW	100	NERC_s41 BOCC_red
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	29	2024	350 NW	100	BirdsDir-A1 WCA_1p1
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	12	2022	795 NE	100	NERC_s41 BOCC_amber
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1	2018	820 SE	100	NERC_s41 BOCC_red
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	7	2020	910 W	100	NERC_s41 BOCC_red
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	1	2028	930 SE	100	NERC_s41 BOCC_red
Plants						
Annual Beard-grass	<i>Polypogon monspeliensis</i>	1	2021	465 NE	10	Status-NS
Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	6	2025	905 SW	10	WCA_8
Corn Mint	<i>Mentha arvensis</i>	1	2020	950 W	10	RL-Eng-post2001-NT

Sanicle	<i>Sanicula europaea</i>	3	2021	905 SW	10	RL-Eng-post2001-NT
Welsh Poppy	<i>Papaver cambricum</i>	1	2021	1000 SW	100	Status-NS
Invertebrates						
Stag beetle	<i>Lucanus cervus</i>	58	2024	90 W	100	HabDir-A2np, WACA-Sch5-s9.5a, NERC-S41
Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	1	2018	385 NW	10	WACA-Sch5-s9.5a, NERC-S41, RL-GB-post2001-NT
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	5	2021	715 W	100	NERC-S41, RL-GB-post2001-NT
Common Club-tail	<i>Gomphus vulgatissimus</i>	5	2017	400 NW	1000	RL-GB-post2001-NT
Cinnabar	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>	2	2019	880 SW	100	NERC-S41
Terrestrial Mammals (bats)						
Brown Long-eared Bat	<i>Plecotus auritus</i>	6	2025	800 SW	100	HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c NERC_s41
Common pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	26	2024	650 SW	10	HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Daubenton's bat	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	4	2018	1050 SW	100	HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Myotis Bat species	<i>Myotis</i>	2	2017	970 NW	100	HabDir-A2np, HabDir-A4 HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b NERC_s41
Natterer's bat	<i>Myotis nattereri</i>	1	2017	1380 NE	1000	HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b
Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>	12	2024	680 SW	100	HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c NERC_s41
Pipistrelle species	<i>Pipistrellus</i>	5	2020	810 SW	1000	HabDir-A4 HabReg-Sch2, WACA-Sch5-s9.4b/s9.4c/s9.5a/s9.5b NERC_s41
Serotine	<i>Eptesicus serotinus</i>	2	2018	920 NW	100	HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c
Soprano pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	22	2024	680 SW	100	HabReg_2 WCA_5s94b/c NERC_s41
Terrestrial Mammals (excl. bats)						
Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	58	2025	N/A	1km record	PBA
Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	9	2023	205 NW	10	NERC_s41

Table 3b. Species status key.

Abbreviation	Legislation
NERC-S41	Priority Species listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
BOCC_red	Birds of Conservation Concern Red list – Globally threatened according to IUCN criteria; those whose population or range has declined rapidly in recent years; and those that have declined historically and not shown substantial recovery.
BOCC_amber	Birds of Conservation Concern Amber list
BirdsDir-A1	Bird Species listed on Annex 1 of EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. Covers birds which are the subject of special conservation measures concerning their habitat in order to ensure their survival and reproduction in their area of distribution.

HDir2	Habitats Directive, Annex 2 – Species whose conservation requires the designation of special areas of conservation
HDir4	Habitats Directive, Annex IV - Species in need of strict protection
HDir5	Habitats Directive, Annex V – Species whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures
RL-NT	IUCN Red List of Threatened Species - Near Threatened
RL-VU	IUCN Red List of Threatened Species – Vulnerable
Status-NS	Nationally scarce species - occurring in 16 – 100 hectads in the UK.
WCA1	Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 - Birds which are protected by special penalties.
WCA5	Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 5 - Animals which are protected
WCA_5s91K	Covers animals which are protected from intentional killing or injuring
WCA8	Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 5 - Plants which are protected

6.3.2 European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences that have been granted within the last 10 years inside a 2km radius of the application site are detailed in **Table 4** below.

Table 4. European Protected Species (EPS) licences granted within a 2km radius (Source: MAGIC).

Case Reference of Granted Licence	Species on the Licence	Licensable Period	Licensable Works	Distance (m)
2017-29064-EPS-MIT	Soprano pipistrelle	01/09/2017 - 01/09/2027	Destruction of breeding place	1570 NE
2015-18545-EPS-MIT-2	Brown Long-eared Common pipistrelle Soprano pipistrelle	06/09/2016 - 31/01/2021	Destruction of resting place	1740 NW

6.3.3 There are no Great Crested Newt Class Survey Licence Returns within 2km from the site and there is one negative result from 2018 at a pond 1480 m to the south.

6.3.4 The NatureSpace District Level Licensing Impact Risk Zone map for Berkshire shows the application site falling within a green zone, i.e. moderate suitable habitat where great crested newts may be present. One body of standing water that could potentially support breeding GCN has been identified within a 500 metre radius of the site (see **Figure 1** below), Pond 1 - approximately 430 metres to the north across the railway line.



Figure 1. Pond Location Plan.

6.3.5 The Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN. The development footprint is approximately 0.04ha and the Tool indicates that the loss of or damage to 0.01ha – 0.1ha of land greater than 250 m from a breeding pond is highly unlikely to result in an

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.001
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
Maximum:		0.001
Rapid risk assessment result:		GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY

Guidance on risk assessment result categories

"Green: offence highly unlikely" indicates that the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that it is highly unlikely any offence would be committed should the development proceed. Therefore, no licence would be required. However, bearing in mind that this is a generic assessment, you should carefully examine your specific plans to ensure this is a sound conclusion, and take precautions (see **Non-licensed avoidance measures tool**) to avoid offences if appropriate. It is likely that any residual offences would have negligible impact on conservation status, and enforcement of such breaches is unlikely to be in the public interest.

Figure 2. Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool.

6.4 Historic and Current Land Use

- 6.4.1** Google satellite imagery shows that the site has been an unmanaged garden to the west of the property at 90 Stone Street since 2017. Prior to this, the site was managed as a garden with more shrubs and trees visible in 2009. The site was cleared sometime between March 2025 and October 2025, after which the site comprised of bare ground.

6.5 Geology, Soils and Topography

- 6.5.1** The geology of the application site is freely draining slightly acid loamy soils; habitats associated with such soils include neutral and acid pastures and deciduous woodlands; acid communities such as bracken and gorse in the uplands and the landcover is arable grassland.

7 HABITAT SURVEY

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 The application site is a 0.04ha residential garden plot, comprising bare ground where it had been recently cleared. The site is in an urban setting surrounded by residential properties to the south and commercial buildings to the north. A railway line is situated 125 m to the north, recreational fields 160 m to the north and the River Thames 495 m to the north.

7.1.2 Existing habitats were: u-510 bare ground. The habitats observed (from historical mapping) were: g4 Modified grassland and h3h mixed scrub.

7.1.3 The UKHab primary habitats and secondary codes are described alongside photographs (see **Photographs 1-7**) and a survey plan (see **Figure 3**), as follows:

7.2 U-510 Bare ground

7.2.1 The site comprised of a recently cleared garden adjacent to the property at 90 Stone Street (**Photographs 1 & 2**).



Photograph 1. The site viewed from the east .



Photograph 2. The recently cleared site viewed from the south east.

7.2.1 Historical mapping shows that the site had been unmanaged for several years and comprised of patches of scrub and grassland (**Photographs 3 & 4**).



Photograph 3. The site viewed from the west from google mapping in 2017.



Photograph 4. The site viewed from the west from google mapping in 2023.



Figure 3. UKHab Survey Plan.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Designated Sites

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.1.1** The desk study revealed that the application site is not designated for its wildlife interest and therefore is not currently recognised as being of international, national or county level conservation significance. The desk study revealed that the application site does fall within the Zone of Influence (Zol) for the Pincents Kiln Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows SSSI, which are more than 4 km from the site.

Impact Assessment

- 8.1.2** The proposed development does not fall into any of the IRZ categories (i.e. infrastructure, minerals, oil and gas, air pollution, residential (over 50 units), combustion, waste, compost or discharge) recognised by Natural England to have an adverse impact on the SSSIs, and therefore impacts on these sites is highly unlikely and consultation with Natural England is not required. Furthermore, considering the nature, scale and distance of the proposed development from the designated sites, no adverse effects are anticipated on the locally designated statutory and non-statutory sites. The erection of a pair of semi-detached dwellings will not directly or indirectly cause degradation of the habitats and biodiversity features for which the sites are designated.

8.2 Onsite Habitats

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.2.1** The site is characterised by suburban habitats – i.e. bare ground (u-510). This a habitat currently of negligible ecological value of no more than site level value.
- 8.2.2** There are no irreplaceable habitats (e.g. Ancient Semi-natural Woodland) or Priority Habitats (a habitat of principle importance for conservation as defined under Section 41 NERC Act 2006) on site or mapped within 500m of the site. Deciduous woodland - priority habitat - is mapped approximately 70m to the south and southwest.

Impact Assessment

- 8.2.3** The loss of bare ground - a habitat of low distinctiveness covering the site will not have adverse ecological impact.

- 8.2.4** The proposed development is subject to mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) (see **Section 9.2**) and for the purposes of the baseline for BNG, the pre-clearance habitats, which were assessed to be mixed scrub and modified grassland i.e. habitats of higher ecological value than bare ground, but unlikely to be of more than site level value were taken to form the BNG baseline.

8.3 Amphibians (Great Crested Newt)

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.3.1** The desk study found no great crested newt (GCN) (*Triturus cristatus*) survey licence return within 2km of the site and there was only one negative result for great crested newts from 2018 at a pond 1480 m to the south. The NatureSpace District Level Licensing Impact Risk Zone map for the Berkshire shows the application site falls within a green zone, i.e. moderate suitable habitat where great crested newts may be present. There is no suitable amphibian breeding habitat on site (i.e. standing water) but there is one body of standing water that could potentially support breeding GCN within a 500 metre radius of the site: Pond 1 approximately 430 metres to the north of the site across a railway line.
- 8.3.2** The cleared garden comprising of unvegetated bare ground (u-510) covering the site is poor terrestrial habitat for GCN and other amphibians with no shelter and poor feeding habitat. A busy road, commercial buildings and the railway line to the north and residential buildings on all other sides mean that it would be highly unlikely that GCNs would traverse the site. The bare ground is considered unsuitable habitat for GCNs. The habitats to the north beyond the railway line are more likely to be used by GCNs including parcels of woodland and grassland along the River Thames. Furthermore, the railway line provides a barrier between the site and closest pond to the north and it is therefore considered unlikely that GCNs would use the site due to a lack of connectivity to nearby ponds and the absence of high quality habitats.

Impact Assessment

- 8.3.3** The proposals will impact unvegetated surfaces, habitats, which are not suitable for use by amphibians such as great crested newt, and others recorded nearby, including the palmate newt (*Lissotriton helveticus*) and smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) that have been recorded over 700 m from the site. Therefore, it is considered highly unlikely that there are any species of amphibians onsite and therefore highly unlikely that they would be affected by the proposals.

8.4 Bats

Evaluation of Baseline

8.4.1 The desk study found two granted bat licences within a 2km radius of the application with the closest covering a breeding roost for soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) bats approximately 1570 m away. The desk study revealed records of at least seven species of bats, with common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) recorded 650 m to the south west of the site, and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) and noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*) recorded at a site 680 m from the site.

8.4.2 The unvegetated garden with bare ground habitats that will be impacted by the proposals, are not high quality foraging habitat and the site has no connectivity to habitats of ecological importance in the wider area.

Impact Assessment

8.4.3 The risk of impact to bats locally is likely to be very low as the site offers no suitable habitats and the site is in a built-up area that is already a well-lit area.

8.5 Hazel Dormouse

Evaluation of Baseline

8.5.1 The desk study data included no records of hazel dormouse within a 1km radius of the application site. A search of MAGIC for granted EPS licence applications returned no records of hazel dormouse within a 2km radius of the site.

8.5.2 The application site does not have suitable habitat for hazel dormice (*M. avellanarius*), which prefer woodland with a dense understory or native, connected hedgerows.

Impact Assessment

8.5.3 The proposals will impact bare ground, a habitat which is not suitable for use by hazel dormice. Therefore, it is considered highly unlikely that there are dormice onsite and therefore that this species will be affected.

8.6 Birds

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.6.1** The desk study data included protected and notable bird species records within the 1km radius search area, with most of the species being linked to the nearby grassland meadows along the river to the north and the woodlands to the west. The application site has no suitable nesting habitat, and it was void of any vegetation in its current condition, therefore the habitats will not be vital to support significant local bird populations.

Impact Assessment

- 8.6.2** The proposals, which will be developing a cleared site, will not result in the removal of any trees or shrubs, and therefore it is considered unlikely that birds will be impacted by the proposals.

8.7 Reptiles

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.7.1** The desk study revealed records of one reptile species within the search radius: slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*), which has been recorded 780 m to the northwest of the site. The site in its current cleared condition offers no suitable terrestrial habitat for use by slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*). The bare ground onsite is poor habitat for reptiles and highly unlikely to support populations. The site is very unlikely to support individual reptiles and is unlikely to be of importance for local reptile populations.

Impact Assessment

- 8.7.2** The risk of individual reptiles occasionally traversing the grassland area is very low. The development of an area of bare ground is unlikely to adversely impact individual reptiles or local populations.
- 8.7.3** The risk of slow-worm presence within the development site is very low and precautionary reasonable avoidance measures will prevent the contravention of legislation protecting these common and widespread reptile species that could be in the neighbouring habitats – refer to **Section 9.3**.

8.8 Badgers (and other mammals)

Evaluation of Baseline

8.8.1 The desk study data included at least 58 records of badger (*Meles meles*) within 1km from the site. No evidence of badger activity (i.e. setts, trails, snuffle holes or mammal diggings) was identified within the application site and there is no habitat to offer shelter or suitable areas for excavation of sett entrances. Therefore, the presence of badger on site is considered highly unlikely.

8.8.2 The desk study included several records of West European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) – a priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principle importance). The onsite habitats offered limited terrestrial habitats suitable for sheltering and foraging by smaller mammals, such as hedgehog, after clearance.

Impact Assessment

8.8.3 The development site involves the loss of areas of bare ground - areas of low potential for use by badger and notable mammals. Therefore, the likelihood of the presence of mammals within the development area is very low. Furthermore, in the long-term the proposals will not impact on the availability of the site for commuting and foraging individuals or fragment the wider landscape; therefore, no adverse effects are anticipated.

8.9 Invertebrates

Evaluation of Baseline

8.9.1 The desk study data included a few records of notable invertebrate species within the search radius, with 58 records for stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) with the closest record being 90 metres from the site. The bare ground within the development site after clearance lacks species and structural diversity to support invertebrates, especially a high diversity or abundance of invertebrates. There was no deadwood on site that could support the larval stages of stag beetles, and the site is therefore considered unlikely to comprise an important resource for local populations of notable invertebrate species.

8.9.2 Overall, the development site in its cleared condition is unlikely to support important assemblages of invertebrates of more than site level value.

Impact Assessment

- 8.9.3** The proposed development is highly unlikely to have a significant impact on invertebrate populations, and it provides opportunities to enhance the site for invertebrate priority species that may be within the local area – refer to **Section 9.4**.

8.10 Invasive Non-native Species

Evaluation of Baseline

- 8.10.1** No invasive non-native species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 were found on site.

Impact Assessment

- 8.10.2** The absence of any non-native species on site means there is no anticipated spread of invasive species by the proposals.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Overview

- 9.1.1** This chapter provides the details regarding proposed avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures, including measures to enable legislative compliance.

9.2 Onsite Habitats

- 9.2.1** The planning application is subject to a condition to secure a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity (refer to the separate report; R3059_BNG_a). The Statutory Biodiversity Metric should be used to calculate the losses and gains in biodiversity unit value resulting from the proposals.

9.3 Reptiles and Small Mammals (Reasonable Avoidance Measures)

- 9.3.1** The following reasonable avoidance measures should be adopted to minimise the low risk of harming individual reptiles and small mammals:

Pre-commencement of construction activities

- The bare ground within the development site will be maintained unvegetated as existing prior to commencement of the works to prevent reptiles and small mammals from colonising the site.

During construction activities

- Any stored building materials or waste, such as bricks or debris etc., that might offer shelter for reptiles or small mammals will be kept raised off the ground on pallets or on existing hard standing, and efforts should be made to process and removed from site as soon as possible; and
- Excavation works will be avoided after dusk and any open excavations or trenches will be backfilled (after a check for reptile or small mammal presence) or left with escape ramps to prevent animals from becoming trapped.
- In the unlikely event that a reptile is found during construction, works will stop immediately and a licensed ecologist will be called onto site to ensure the reptile is not harmed and provide further advice on how to proceed.

9.4 Biodiversity Enhancement Measures

- 9.4.1** The planning proposals provide opportunities for the enhancement of the site's biodiversity value. The inclusion of the following recommendations would be of

ecological benefit and be in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), local planning policy in addition to species specific mitigation measures;

- Installation of wall mounted or integrated bat boxes on the new dwellings;
- Installation of external or integrated bird boxes on the new dwellings;
- Creation of partially buried log piles along the boundary of the site to benefit stag beetles;
- Ensuring the permeability of the site for mammals, such as hedgehogs, by creating 15cm by 15cm hedgehog holes in fences or using traditional post and rail fencing; and
- Wildlife-friendly, native landscaping to include native, species-rich planting to improve connectivity to the wider landscape.

10 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 1 – LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

Amphibians

The seven native species of amphibian receive protection under the W&AC 1981 (as amended). The four widespread and common amphibians (common frog, toad, smooth newt and palmate newt) receive only limited protection – making their sale illegal.

The great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) receives full protection under the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and under the Habitat Regulations 2017. The combined legislation makes it illegal to:

- intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a great crested newt;
- possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a great crested newt;
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a great crested newt; and
- intentionally or recklessly disturb great crested newts; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating animals, to hibernate or migrate.

Great crested newts (*T. cristatus*) and common toads (*Bufo bufo*) are species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England ('UKBAP Priority Species') under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Badgers

Badgers are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The Act makes activities such as development that would harm or disturb badgers or damage, obstruct or destroy their setts illegal. If badgers are to be affected by the proposed development, activities can be undertaken only under a licence issued by Natural England.

Bats

All bat species in Britain are fully protected by the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and by the Habitat Regulations 2017. In summary, the combined legislation makes it an offence to:

- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a bat;

- deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb bats; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of bats to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating bats, to hibernate or migrate; or to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species; and
- deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Birds

All wild birds are protected under the W&CA 1981 (as amended). The Act makes it an offence to kill, injure or take a wild bird or to damage or destroy the nest of a wild bird whilst in use or being built. Species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act, such as barn owls and kingfishers, are afforded additional protection against disturbance while nesting.

Hazel dormice

Hazel dormice receive full protection under the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and under the Habitat Regulations 2017. These make it illegal to:

- intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a dormouse;
- possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a dormouse;
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a dormouse; and
- intentionally or recklessly disturb dormice; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating animals, to hibernate or migrate.

Invasive non-native plants

The W&CA 1981 (as amended) provides the primary controls on the release of non-native species into the wild in Great Britain. It is an offence under Section 14(2) of the Act to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' any plant listed in Schedule 9, Part II. The species listed in the Act include Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) and Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

Otters

Otters are fully protected by the W&CA 1981 (as amended) and by the Habitat

Regulations 2017. In summary, the combined legislation makes it an offence to:

- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by an otter;
- deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb otters; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of otters to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species; and
- deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Reptiles

The four widespread reptiles most likely to be encountered (adder, grass snake, slow worm and common lizard) are protected under the W&CA 1981 (as amended). The Act makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, possess or sell any of the species.

The aforementioned species are all listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England ('*UKBAP Priority Species*') under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Water voles

Since April 2008, water voles have received full protection under Section 9 in Schedule 5 of the W&CA 1981 (as amended). This makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take water voles or to possess or control live or dead water voles or derivatives. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection or intentionally or recklessly disturb water voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose.

The water vole is listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England ('*UKBAP Priority Species*') under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Wild mammals

Under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 it is an offence to intentionally inflict unnecessary suffering, as specified by the Act, on any wild mammal.

