

**Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
for
98 Conisboro Avenue
Caversham
Reading, RG4 7JF**



NKM Associates

23rd November 2023

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SUMMARY

This report contains the results of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal survey completed at 98 Conisboro Avenue, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7JF on 23rd November 2023. The survey and report will inform a planning application for the construction of a new dwelling within the garden.

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal comprised a UKHab survey, a Preliminary Roost Assessment of two outbuildings on site and a Ground Level Tree Assessment of the scattered trees.

The site has negligible suitability for roosting bats and moderate suitability for foraging bats. The hedgerows and scattered trees provide suitable nesting habitat for birds. The site could be used by foraging and commuting mammals and although it is considered unlikely that reptiles are present on site, the compost heap does provide suitable sheltering habitat. No further surveys are recommended regarding protected species.

Measures are recommended in this report to protect wild mammals from harm during site works, to prevent negative impacts on foraging bats and to protect active bird's nests. Sensitive clearance of the compost heap is recommended in case a low number of reptiles are present. Recommendations are also made to enhance the site for nesting birds, roosting bats and hedgehogs.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Survey Objectives

Mr and Mrs Smith commissioned a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal at 98 Conisboro Avenue, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7JF to determine the impact of planning proposals on habitats and protected species. A Preliminary Roost Assessment was conducted of two outbuildings on site, and a Ground Level Tree Assessment was completed of all scattered trees. The report will be submitted to Reading Borough Council to inform a planning application for a new dwelling.

1.2 Site Description

The site is situated in the north-west of Caversham in Reading (central grid reference SU 70232 76468). The site comprises the garden of 98 Conisboro Avenue (the existing house is unaffected by the proposals and was not included in the survey), the following habitats are present: buildings, modified grassland, other developed land, suburban/ mosaic of developed/ natural surface (introduced shrub and vegetable patches), scattered trees and hedgerows. The site is surrounded by residential properties with vegetated gardens in all directions. There is Caversham Heath golf course to the west, the River Thames to the south and fragments of woodland in all directions in the wider landscape.

1.3 Proposed Works

The proposals involve the construction of a new house with associated landscaping and parking within the garden of the existing house, creating two distinct properties. The proposals will result in the loss of other developed land, suburban/ mosaic of developed/ natural surface (introduced shrub and vegetable patches), modified grassland, a hedgerow, and scattered trees.

1.4 Personnel

The survey was completed by Beth England BSc (Hons), MSc on behalf of NKM Associates. Beth has been completing surveys of this scale for over four years and holds CIEEM membership. Beth has had training in all survey methods covered in this report and follows the CIEEM Code of Professional Conduct (CIEEM, 2022) at all times.

1.5 Survey Validity

Site habitats and their value for protected species can change over time, therefore a re-survey will be required if works do not proceed within two years.

2. METHODS

2.1 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was completed of all areas to be impacted under the proposals. It was conducted using printed aerial images and site plans.

The survey was conducted according to UKHab guidance (Butcher et al., 2023). The site visit took place on 23rd November 2023, the temperature was 11°C, with 40% cloud cover and no rain.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal includes a description and mapping of each habitat on site, an assessment of the likelihood of protected species being present on site, an examination of local and national planning policies, and recommendations for further surveys, protective measures, and site enhancement. Any invasive species encountered on site are recorded.

A habitat map is provided in Appendix II, and a species list is provided in Appendix IV.

2.2 Desk Study

Ecological data was obtained from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). The records were provided on 22nd November 2023. This included a search for protected species records and locally designated sites within a 2km radius of the site. MAGIC maps was used to obtain information regarding internationally designated sites within a 7km radius, and nationally designated sites within a 5km radius.

2.3 Protected Species Survey

2.3.1 Badgers

Badgers are generally nocturnal and evidence of their presence in an area often comes from field signs rather than sightings of the animals.

Useful field signs include:

- ❑ Setts (main, outlying, annex or subsidiary);
- ❑ Tufts of hair caught on barbed wire fences;
- ❑ Conspicuous Badger paths;
- ❑ Footprints;
- ❑ Latrines – small excavated pits in which droppings are deposited;
- ❑ 'Snuffle holes' – small scrapes where Badgers have searched for insects and plant tubers;
- ❑ Day nests – bundles of grass and other vegetation where Badgers may sleep above ground;
- ❑ Scratch marks on trees (usually near the sett).

Daytime surveys looking for field signs can be carried out at any time of the year, and should be non-intrusive, but nocturnal surveys of setts (if required), are only likely to be effective from April to November, when Badgers are most active, and any cubs present will have emerged.

Main setts

These usually have a large number of holes with large spoil heaps, and the sett generally looks well used. They usually have well used paths to and from the sett and between sett entrances. Although normally the breeding sett is in continual use, it is possible to find a main sett that has become disused because of excessive digging or for some other reason, in which case it is recorded as a disused main sett.

Annex setts

These are always close to a main sett, usually less than 150 m away, and are usually connected to the main sett by one or more obvious, well-worn paths. They consist of several holes, but are not necessarily in use all the time, even if the main sett is very active.

Subsidiary setts

These often these have only a few holes, are usually at least 50 m from a main sett, and do not have an obvious path connecting them with another sett. They are not continuously active.

Outlying setts

These usually only have one or two holes, often have little spoil outside the hole, have no obvious path connecting them with another sett, and are only used sporadically. When not in use by badgers, they are often taken over by foxes or even rabbits. However, they can still be recognised as badger setts by the shape of the tunnel (not the entrance hole), which is at least 250 mm in diameter and rounded or flattened oval in shape.

A search for evidence of Badger presence on site was undertaken as part of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

2.3.2 Bats

To fully assess bat occupation of a particular site, the Bat Conservation Trust (2023) recommends that information gathered from a desk study of known bat records, and a daytime site walkover, is used to inform the type and extent of future bat survey work, potentially including nocturnal emergence surveys.

The preliminary roost assessment (PRA) is usually in the form of a diurnal walkover and can be carried out at any time of the year. It provides an opportunity to check for signs of bat occupancy and/or the suitability for bat roosting.

Evidence of bat activity includes droppings, scratch marks, feeding remains, carcasses, or even roosting animals, whilst suitability is determined by the type and number of potential roost features (PRFs) typically used by bats.

Roosting places vary depending on the species. Pipistrelles usually inhabit narrow cracks or cavities around the outside of buildings, but they will roost in similar niches inside larger barns. Typical sites include soffit spaces, gaps behind fascia boards and end rafters, crevices around the ends of projecting purlins, under warped or lifted roof and ridge tiles, or in gaps in stone and brickwork where mortar has dropped out.

Larger species such as Brown Long-eared Bats *Plecotus auritus*, Myotis bats (Natterer's *Myotis nattereri* and Whiskered/Brandt's *M. mystacinus*/*M. brandtii*), and Lesser Horseshoes *Rhinolophus hipposideros*, like to roost in the roof voids of buildings, and can often be found hanging singly or in small groups from ridge boards or roof timbers, especially where they butt up against gable walls or chimney breasts. They especially favour older structures with timber frames. Here they squeeze into tight crevices making them difficult to observe.

Where bats are found, or there is evidence of bat occupation or activity, i.e., that bat use is confirmed, a roost characterisation survey is undertaken. The results are used to inform the impact assessment and design of mitigation measures. Roost characterisation includes nocturnal emergence surveys unless sufficient information has already been collected using robust survey methods with no significant constraints.

Nocturnal emergence surveys allow numbers and species of bats to be confirmed and should only be undertaken when bats are out of hibernation and in their summer roosts.

The bat active period is generally considered to be between April and October, although particularly cold weather will affect the level and extent of bat activity. Indeed, the air temperature at the start of each survey should be at least 10°C or above, with no strong wind or heavy rain. The nocturnal survey starts 15 minutes before sunset and continues for one and a half to two hours after sunset.

Nocturnal surveys visits will be a minimum of three weeks apart, and the number of surveys and timing is dependent on the evidence found or the suitability of the site to bats. This will be determined by the ecologist. In general, at least two emergence nocturnal surveys will be carried out, but a third visit may be necessary if the results are inconclusive or further information is required.

Nocturnal emergence surveys are also used to determine the presence or absence of bats, where signs of bat activity are indeterminate or absent but the suitability for bat roosting is considered low, moderate or high.

For a site with no evidence but low suitability, just one nocturnal emergence survey is required, this to be in the period May to August.

For moderate suitability, a minimum of two visits are needed between May and September, of which one must be in the period May to August.

With high suitability, three visits will be necessary between May and September, of which two must be in the period May to August.

Where there is no evidence of bat presence, and no suitability for roosting, no nocturnal surveys will be needed.

The number of surveyors and/or the use of night vision aids (NVAs) is determined by the ecologist and is dependent on the complexity of the structure. For simple structures just one surveyor using an appropriate number of NVAs will be sufficient, but for larger sites and/or more complex or irregularly shaped structures, e.g., those with multiple elevations and/or roof slopes, more surveyors will be required.

On 23rd November 2023 a thorough inspection of the garden sheds was made by Beth England, including the exterior and interior walls, roof coverings, eaves, gables, window casements and door frames.

8x42 binoculars and a Fenix TK75 torches were used for the inaccessible / unreachable areas. On this occasion an endoscope was not used, as there were no crevices and cavities that could not be inspected with a torch or by use of binoculars from a ladder.

The result of the daytime inspection is detailed in Section 3.

A Ground Level Tree Assessment (GLTA) was undertaken of the scattered trees on site. Binoculars were used to inspect the trunk and limbs of the tree for suitable features for roosting bats. Features include lifted bark, knot holes and limb splits.

2.3.3 Birds

Most resident and migrant birds breed in the spring and summer, although Woodpigeons *Columba palumbus* and Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* nest throughout the year, and as a result could be on eggs in almost any month.

In season, signs of breeding include singing males, display and copulation, birds gathering nesting materials, adults carrying food, calling chicks, etc.

In winter none of these activities may be occurring, so a survey for old nests and/or nest holes is the most reliable method of determining the presence or absence of breeding birds.

This was carried out during the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, along with a general site walkover to identify the presence of foraging birds.

2.3.4 Great Crested Newts

A survey for Great Crested Newts (GCN) may be indicated when background information on distribution suggests that they may be present. More detailed indicators are:

- ❑ *Any historical records of Great Crested Newts on the site or in the general area;*
- ❑ *A pond on or near the site (within around 500 m), even if it holds water only seasonally;*
- ❑ *Sites with refuges (such as piles of logs or rubble), grassland, scrub, woodland or hedgerows within 500 m of a pond.*

There are several field survey methods which can be employed depending on the time of year:

- ❑ *Bottle or funnel trapping – adults ideally February to May, with June and July sub-optimal, and August to September for detection of larvae (i.e. young);*
- ❑ *Egg search – April to June ideally, with March and July sub-optimal;*
- ❑ *Torch survey – March to May for adults, with February and June to July sub-optimal, and August to September for larvae;*
- ❑ *Netting – March to May for adults, with February and June to July sub-optimal, and August to September for larvae;*
- ❑ *Pitfall trapping – March to May and September for adults, with February, June to August and October sub-optimal;*
- ❑ *Refuge search – April to September ideally, with March and October sub-optimal.*

The latter two methods involve terrestrial habitats, the others aquatic habitats, for which a minimum of 4 visits per year are recommended, with at least 2 visits between mid-April and mid-May to record peak numbers (English Nature, 2001).

Habitat Suitability Index

Outside the optimum survey periods, an evaluation system devised by Oldham *et al* (2000) can produce a figure that indicates the suitability of a pond for Great Crested Newts. The index is based on an analysis of ten factors that affect Great Crested Newts. A figure of '0' indicates unsuitable habitat and '1' represents optimal habitat.

2.3.5 Otters

Otters are nocturnal and are active all year round. They are large with an adult male reaching up to 1.2 m from nose to tail and -weighing about 10 kg. Feeding mainly on fish and amphibians, Otters live by undisturbed waters where there is plenty of cover, mostly by freshwater lakes, rivers and quiet small streams as well as some coasts.

An Otter may use over 40 km of river and needs many resting places throughout this range. A female otter will give birth to 1 to 3 cubs in a natal holt, which is often away from the main river and must be completely undisturbed.

Field signs include:

- ❑ Prints in soft mud;
- ❑ Spraints (faeces);
- ❑ Holts.

A search for evidence of Otter presence on site was undertaken as part of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

2.3.6 Reptiles

Commoner reptiles which may be encountered in rural areas include Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, and Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*.

During the winter months, from mid-October to late February or early March, they are in hibernation, usually deep in underground hibernacula, such as holes and cracks in the ground, among rocks or the roots of large trees, down animal burrows, or in piles of rubble or stone.

In the spring and summer, they live above ground in well-vegetated places, with Grass Snakes often near or in water. Being cold-blooded all reptiles like to bask and can often be found in open places.

There are very few signs of reptile presence, but these include:

- ❑ Shedded skin (snakes);
- ❑ Eggs (but not Common Lizard which gives birth to live young).

All potential refugia on site were checked where possible as part of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

2.3.7 Water Voles

The Water Vole is the largest of the British voles. It lives in a series of holes or burrows at the water's edge and can be found along the banks of ditches, streams, rivers, lakes and canals.

Although Water Voles live in colonies, the breeding females are territorial, each defining their contiguous territory with latrines during the breeding season. This lasts from March to October.

The Water Vole is herbivorous, feeding primarily on the lush aerial stems and leaves of waterside plants. Its activity is normally confined to the area within two metres of the watercourse, the bankside vegetation in this area not only essential for food, but also for cover from predators.

Water Vole activity can be assessed by looking for the following signs:

- ❑ Burrows;
- ❑ Faeces and latrines;
- ❑ Feeding stations;
- ❑ Runs;
- ❑ Paw prints in areas of soft mud;
- ❑ Feeding 'lawns';
- ❑ Predator field signs.

A search for evidence of Water Vole presence on site was undertaken as part of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

2.4 Constraints

The survey was conducted during a sub-optimal period for UKHab surveys, due to the majority of plants not being in flower. However, it is considered that an appropriate assessment was made of habitats on site.

The data search from TVERC should not be considered a definitive list of protected and notable species within the area. The data held by TVERC relies on reported sightings, other species may be present but not recorded.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 Designated Sites

There are no internationally designated sites within 7km of the site. There are five nationally designated sites within 5km, all sites are Local Nature Reserves (LNR). Site details are provided in Table 1 below.

Site Name and Designation	Site Size (ha)	Distance and Direction from Application Site	Site Description
Clayfield Copse LNR	8.7	2.1km W	Ancient woodland with Wild Service Trees <i>Sorbus torminalis</i> , Bluebells <i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i> and common Orchid species <i>Orchidaceae</i> present.
McIlroy Park LNR	11.9	3.1km SW	A natural park with grassland, semi-ancient woodland and old chalk pits.
Round Copse LNR	1.7	3.3km SW	Dense woodland with a broad range of bird species recorded.
Lousehill Copse LNR	13	3.5km SW	Semi-ancient woodland with mature Oak <i>Quercus</i> sp. and Hazel <i>Corylus avellana</i> . There is an open meadow area.
Blundells Copse LNR	5.6	4km SW	Ancient woodland with a stream. The woodland comprises Alder <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> , Cherry <i>Prunus avium</i> , Willow species <i>Salix</i> sp., Oak and Hazel.

Table 1: Nationally designated sites within 5km of the site

There are seven locally designated sites within 2km of the site. Site details are provided in Table 2 below.

Site Name and Designation	Site Size (ha)	Distance and Direction from Application Site	Site Description
Hemdean Bottom Berkshire Local Wildlife Site (BLWS)	31.2	0.4km E	A chalk valley with grassland, small areas of woodland and planted scrub.
Reading Golf Course (West) Oxfordshire Local Wildlife Site (OLWS)	1.4	0.7km NE	Diverse chalk grassland on a steep bank to the west of Reading Golf Course.
Furzeplat BLWS	1.1	0.8km E	Mixed semi-natural woodland with diverse tree and shrub species.
Highdown Wood BLWS	2.6	0.9km SE	Broadleaved woodland dominated by mature Beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> .
Reading Golf Course (East) OLWS	3.5	1.1km NE	A strip of woodland and grassland on a south facing chalk bank on Reading Golf Course.
The Warren Woodlands Complex BLWS	7.7	1.3km SW, S, SE	Consists of six woodland sites situated on the chalk scarp of The Warren in Caversham, Reading.

Rotherfield Way Copse BLWS	1.3	1.5km SE	Lowland mixed deciduous woodland.
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Table 2: Locally designated sites within 2km of the site.

3.1.2 Protected Species

Bats

TVERC returned 703 records of bats within 2km of the site, including Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, Brown Long-eared Bat, Daubenton's Bat *Myotis daubentonii*, Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, Leisler's Bat *Nyctalus leisleri*, Nathusius's Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii*, Natterer's Bat, Serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*, Western Barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*, Whiskered Bat, Pipistrelle species *Pipistrellus* sp., Long-eared Bat species *Plecotus* sp., Myotis species *Myotis* sp. and unidentified bat species *Chiroptera*. According to MAGIC maps, there are 12 previous European protected species licence applications related to bats within 2km of the site.

The site provides moderate foraging opportunities for bats, and the hedgerows could be used for commuting. The results of the Preliminary Roost Assessment and Ground Level Tree Assessment are presented in Sections 3.2 and 3.3. Recommendations are made in Section 4 to enhance the site for roosting and foraging bats.

Hazel Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*

TVERC returned three records of Hazel Dormouse, all dated 2022. There is very limited suitable habitat on site, which is isolated from habitat of better suitability, therefore the species is considered absent.

Eurasian Badger *Meles meles*

TVERC returned 58 records of Badger within 2km of the site. No evidence of Badger (such as setts, latrines and snuffle holes) were recorded on site, however Badger could use the site for foraging and commuting. Recommendations are made in Section 4 to protect wild mammals during site works.

West European Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

TVERC returned 78 records of Hedgehog. The site provides good foraging habitat. Recommendations are made in Section 4 to enhance the site for Hedgehogs, and to protect them during site works.

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

TVERC returned no records of Brown Hare within 2km of the site. There is no suitable habitat on site, therefore the species is considered absent.

Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra*

TVERC returned no records of Otter within 2km of the site. There is no suitable habitat on site, and the closest watercourse (the River Thames) is 1.5km south of the site, therefore the species is considered absent from site.

European Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius*

TVERC returned one record of Water Vole within 2km of the site, dated 1998. There is no suitable habitat on site, and the closest watercourse (the River Thames) is 1.5km south of the site, therefore the species is considered absent from site.

Birds

TVERC returned 866 records of birds within 2km of the site, including Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, House Martin *Delichon urbicum* and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. The site provides nesting opportunities within the hedgerows and scattered trees on site. No nests were observed during the survey. Recommendations are made in Section 4 to protect bird's nests and to enhance the site for nesting birds.

Amphibians

TVERC returned three records of Common Toad *Bufo bufo* and no records of Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*. According to MAGIC maps there are no previous licence applications or survey data related to Great Crested Newts within 2km of the site. The shrub beds and hedgerows could provide suitable sheltering habitat for amphibians. There is one ornamental pond directly adjacent to the site boundary (photo 1), however this has steep brick sides and ornamental fish, therefore it is not accessible or suitable for amphibians. There are no other ponds within 500m of the site, therefore, amphibians are considered likely absent from site.

Reptiles

TVERC returned seven records of reptiles within 2km of the site, comprising Slow-worm and Grass Snake. There are no records within 1km of the site. The hedgerows provided limited suitable sheltering habitat for reptiles, there is also a compost heap on the northern boundary (target note 1). It is considered unlikely that reptiles are present on site due to the poor quality of on-site and surrounding habitats. However, recommendations are made in Section 4 for sensitive clearance of the compost heap, in the unlikely event that reptiles are using it to shelter.

Invertebrates

TVERC returned 326 records of invertebrates within 2km of the site. The site is likely to support common species of invertebrates, but it is not considered to be important habitat.

Plants

TVERC returned 113 records of protected or notable plant species. No protected plants were recorded on site during the survey.

Invasive species

TVERC returned 19 records of invasive plants within 2km of the site, and one record of American Mink *Neovison vison*. Buddleia *Buddleja davidii*, Rhododendron *Rhododendron* sp. and Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster* sp. were recorded on site, care must be taken to prevent the spread of the species into adjoining habitats.

3.2 Preliminary Roost Assessment

Building 1 (B1) (photos 2 and 3) is a single skin wooden shed c. 2m in height with a pitched, felt roof. It has no internal or external features suitable for roosting bats, and no evidence of bats was recorded.

Building 2 (B2) (photos 4 and 5) is a shed c. 2m in height with a flat corrugated metal roof and a combination of timber and corrugated metal walls. It has no internal or external features suitable for roosting bats, and no evidence of bats was recorded.

Both buildings were assessed as negligible suitability for roosting bats, no further surveys are required.

3.3 Ground Level Tree Assessment

None of the trees on site have suitable features for roosting bats, therefore it is considered highly unlikely that bats are roosting within the trees.

3.4 Habitat Survey

The following habitats were recorded on site:

Modified grassland with scattered trees (g4) (secondary code 32)

The site is dominated by well mown modified grassland with a short sward (photos 6 and 7). The grassland comprises Cock's Foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Bent grass *Agrostis* sp. and Annual Meadow Grass *Poa annua*. Herb species present include frequent Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* and occasional White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Geranium species *Geranium* sp., Daisy *Bellis perennis* and Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*. Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata* was recorded rarely within the grassland. There are several scattered trees within the grassland including Apple *Malus domestica*, Plum *Prunus domestica* and Silver Birch *Betula pendula* (photos 8 and 9). There is evidence of Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* activity within the lawn.

Modified grassland with bare ground and scattered trees (g4) (secondary codes 510 and 32)

There is a strip of bare ground on the eastern boundary (photo 10). It is bare due to a lack of sunlight caused by the hedgerow and scattered trees. The scattered trees present are mature Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and Norway Maple *Acer platanoides*.

Species-rich native hedgerow (h2a5)

Hedgerow 1 (H1) is located on the northern boundary (photo 11). The hedgerow is c. 2.5m in height and 7m in length and comprises Field Maple *Acer campestre*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Beech and Holly *Ilex aquifolium*. The hedgerow is well managed.

Other native hedgerow (h2a6)

Hedgerow 2 (H2) is c. 2.5m in height and 3m in length and is located on the northern boundary (photo 12). It comprises Field Maple and Hawthorn. The hedgerow is well managed.

Hedgerow 3 (H3) is located on the eastern boundary and comprises Privet *Ligustrum vulgare* (photo 13). It is c. 3m in height and 19m in length and is showing signs of damage on the eastern side. The hedgerow is well managed.

Non-native and ornamental hedgerow (h2b)

Hedgerow 4 (H4) is located on the southern boundary and comprises Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* with an area of Holly at the eastern end (photo 14). The hedgerow is c. 3.5m in height and 20m in length and is well managed.

Hedgerow 5 (H5) is located on the western boundary (photo 15) and comprises Cotoneaster. It is c. 70cm in height and 7m in length.

Buildings (u1b5)

There are two outbuildings on site, the results of the Preliminary Roost Assessment and Ground Level Tree Assessment are presented in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 above.

Other developed land (u1b6)

There is a gravel path that reaches across the centre of the site (photo 16). There are also paving stone slabs forming paths in the north and south of the site. There is an area of wooden decking in the south-eastern corner of the site (photo 17).

Suburban mosaic of developed and natural surface with scattered trees (u1d) (secondary code 32)

There are two former vegetable patches close to the eastern boundary of the site, they are currently disused (photo 18). There is a young Apple tree c. 2.5m in height within the more easterly bed. Species present include Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, Potato species *Solanum* sp., Carrot species *Daucus* sp., a planted Cherry *Prunus avium* in a pot, Raspberry species *Rubus* sp., Golden Rod *Solidago* sp., Spurge species *Euphorbia* sp., Dandelion, Laurestine *Viburnum tinus*, Willowherb species *Epilobium* sp., Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, Primrose *Primula vulgaris* and Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*.

Suburban mosaic of developed and natural surface (introduced shrub) with scattered trees (u1d) (secondary codes 32 and 847)

There are several introduced shrub beds on site (photo 19). There is a young Apple tree c. 1.6m in height within one of the beds. Species present include Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula*, Cock's Foot, Creeping Buttercup, Golden Rod, Common Toadflax, Foxglove, Ribwort Plantain, Hollyhocks species *Alcea* sp., Californian Poppy *Eschscholzia californica*, Yorkshire Fog, Camellia species *Camellia* sp., Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Daisy, Marigold species *Calendula* sp., Garlic Mustard *Alliaria petiolata*, Primrose, Cranesbill species *Geranium* sp., Violet species *Viola* sp., Sage *Salvia officinalis*, Pheasant Berry *Leycesteria formosa*, Mexican Orange Blossom (*Choisya ternata*), Japanese Pieris (*Pieris japonica*, Hydrangea species *Hydrangea* sp., Lily species *Lilium* sp., Alstroemeria species *Alstroemeria* sp., Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*, Sneezeweed *Helenium* sp., Japanese Spiraea *Spiraea japonica*, Viburnum species *Viburnum* sp. and Rhododendron species.

Target notes

Target note 1: a compost heap adjacent to B1 (photo 20).

Target note 2: Storage boxes and other materials adjacent to B2.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Designated Sites and Protected Habitats

SSSI impact risk zones assess the likelihood of negative impacts of development on nearby SSSIs/ SACs/ SPAs and Ramsar sites. The site does lie within an impact risk zone, but it does not meet the criteria where further consultation is required.

There is priority habitat deciduous woodland 0.2km east and 0.6km north-west of the site. There is lowland calcareous grassland 0.6km north-east of the site.

Hemdean Bottom BLWS is located 0.4km east of the site and comprises chalk grassland with small areas of woodland and scrub. It is considered that due to the small scale of the proposed works and distance from protected sites and priority habitats, that the works will not result in a negative impact on these habitats.

4.2 Habitats On-site

The modified grassland and shrub beds on site have low ecological value. The scattered trees have moderate ecological value and the buildings and other developed land have negligible ecological value. H1, H2 and H3 are native hedgerows and are therefore classed as priority habitat. The proposals include the removal of H3. The hedgerow is showing signs of damage and will be replaced by proposed additional hedgerow planting on site.

Modified grassland, scattered trees, a hedgerow, other developed land and suburban mosaic of developed land and natural mosaic will be lost under the proposals. This will result in a loss of biodiversity which should be mitigated for. The proposals include new hedgerow planting on the northern, eastern, and southern boundaries, and tree planting on the western boundary. Suggested native species for the hedgerow include Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Field Maple, and Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. Suggested native tree species include Hornbeam, Cherry and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*. Retained trees and hedgerows must be protected during construction works.

4.3 Protected Species

Bats

The site currently has negligible roosting value and moderate foraging value for bats. No further surveys are necessary regarding bats. To enhance the site for roosting bats, it is recommended that one bat box is integrated into the design of the proposed new building (see Appendix V). The box should be installed at a height of at least three metres, facing south or west. There must be a clear flight path to the box.

The proposals are likely to result in increased lighting on site. This could be detrimental to foraging and commuting bats. The new lighting on site must avoid the site boundaries and the retained trees, and security lighting must be set to short timers with reduced sensitivity. Site works should be limited to daylight hours only.

Nesting birds

Bird's nests are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The hedgerows and scattered trees on site could be used by nesting birds, therefore removal of such habitats must avoid the nesting bird season (March to September inclusive). If vegetation removal must take place during this period, a suitably qualified ecologist must first check the vegetation and confirm the absence of nests. Once checked, vegetation must be cleared immediately. If a nest is found, a buffer must be put in place until the nest is abandoned.

To enhance the site for nesting birds, it is recommended that one bird box is installed onto a retained tree on site (see Appendix V). The box should be installed at a height of at least three metres, facing north or east in a sheltered location.

Reptiles

It is considered unlikely that reptiles are present on site, however the compost heap on site provides suitable habitat for grass snake and slow-worm. If the compost heap is to be removed, it must be taken apart by hand, to prevent harm to any animals using it to shelter.

Mammals

Mammals such as badger and hedgehog could use the site for foraging and commuting. The following precautions are recommended to protect mammals during construction work:

- ❑ The storage of food on site must be avoided as this could attract mammals;
- ❑ Any holes or trenches should be covered overnight or left with a ramp to allow any animals that enter to escape;
- ❑ Aggregate bags or other stored materials should be kept on pallets;
- ❑ If log or brash piles are created, they should be removed by hand; and
- ❑ If an animal burrow is discovered on site, an ecologist should be contacted prior to the commencement of any works that could impact the burrow.

The proposals include fencing around the new dwelling. In order to allow hedgehogs to move between gardens, holes should be created in all proposed new fences. The holes should be 15x15cm in size and should have signs installed to prevent closure/blocking (see Appendix V).

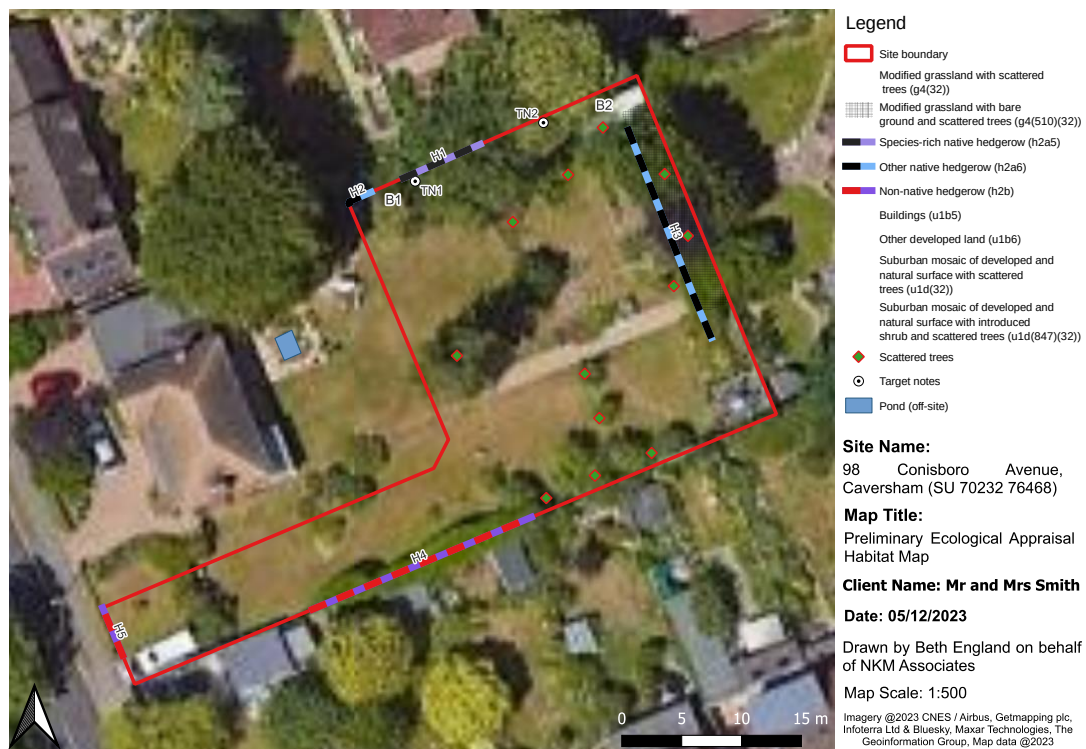
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Appendix I - CAVEAT

Any and all information supplied to NKM Associates by/on behalf of the client is assumed to be accurate unless otherwise informed. | This advice is limited to the observations made on the date of inspection as detailed herein and any deletion, editing or alteration will result in the advice being null and void in its entirety. | This advice in its entirety may be deemed null and void if remedial works are undertaken on any area of the site, on or after the date of the survey. | No liability is assumed by the author or by NKM Associates for any misuse, misinterpretation, or misrepresentation of this advice. | This advice is not valid in adverse or unpredictable weather conditions or for any failure due to 'force majeure' or unpredictable events. | No responsibility is assumed either by the author of this advice or by NKM Associates for any legal matters that may arise as a consequence. | Neither the author nor NKM Associates will be required to attend court or give testimony as part of this agreement. | The responsibility for any works undertaken on the basis of the recommendations of this advice does not form part of this agreement.

Appendix II – HABITAT MAP



Appendix III – SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1: Pond adjacent to site boundary.	Photo 2: Southern elevation of B1.
	
Photo 3: Interior of B1.	Photo 4: Southern elevation of B2.
	
Photo 5: Interior of B2.	Photo 6: Modified grassland.
	

Photo 7: Modified grassland.	Photo 8: Silver birch centre of the site.
	
Photo 9: Scattered apple trees in the south of the site.	Photo 10: Bare ground with scattered trees on the eastern boundary.
	
Photo 11: H1 on the northern boundary.	Photo 12: H2 on the northern boundary.
	
	

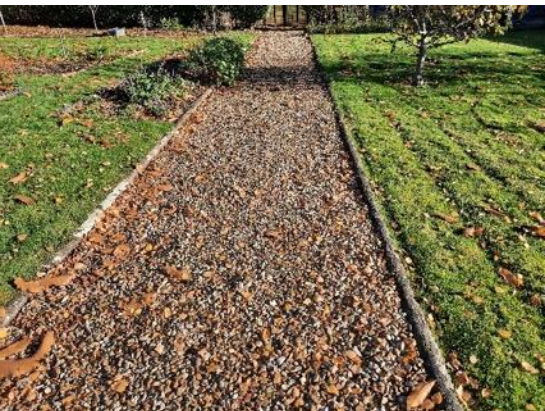
Photo 13: H3 on the eastern boundary. 	Photo 14: H4 on the southern boundary. 
Photo 15: H5 on the western boundary. 	Photo 16: Gravel path in the centre of the site. 
Photo 17: Wooden decking in the south-eastern corner of the site. 	Photo 18: Former vegetable patch close to the eastern boundary. 

Photo 19: Introduced shrub close to the eastern boundary.



Photo 20: Compost heap (target note 1).



Appendix IV – SPECIES LIST

English Name	Latin Name
Alstroemeria species	<i>Alstroemeria</i> sp.
Annual Meadow Grass	<i>Poa annua</i>
Apple	<i>Malus domestica</i>
Baggesen's Gold	<i>Lonicera nitida</i>
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Bent species	<i>Agrostis</i> sp.
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>
Buddleia	<i>Buddleja davidii</i>
Californian Poppy	<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>
Camellia species	<i>Camellia</i> sp.
Carrot species	<i>Daucus</i> sp.
Ceanothus species	<i>Ceanothus</i> sp.
Cherry Laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>
Cistus species	<i>Cistus</i> sp.
Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia vulgaris</i>
Common Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Common Toadflax	<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>
Cranesbill species	<i>Geranium</i> sp.
Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>
Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>
Epilobium species	<i>Epilobium</i> sp.
Field Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
Garlic Mustard	<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>
Geranium species	<i>Geranium</i> sp.
Golden Rod	<i>Solidago</i> sp.
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Hollyhocks species	<i>Alcea</i> sp.
Honeysuckle species	<i>Lonicera</i> sp.
Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>

Hydrangea species	<i>Hydrangea</i> sp.
Japanese Pieris	<i>Pieris japonica</i>
Japanese Spiraea	<i>Spiraea japonica</i>
Koromiko	<i>Veronica salicifolia</i>
Laurestine	<i>Viburnum tinus</i>
Lily species	<i>Lilium</i> sp.
Marigold species	<i>Calendula</i> sp.
Mexican Orange Blossom	<i>Choisya ternata</i>
Norway Maple	<i>Acer platanoides</i>
Osmanthus species	<i>Osmanthus</i> sp.
Ox-eye Daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>
Pendulous Sedge	<i>Carex pendula</i>
Pheasant Berry	<i>Leycesteria formosa</i>
Photinia species	<i>Photinia</i> sp.
Plum	<i>Prunus domestica</i>
Potato species	<i>Solanum</i> sp.
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>
Privet	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>
Red Claws	<i>Escallonia rubra</i>
Rhododendron species	<i>Rhododendron</i> sp.
Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
Sage	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>
Sneezeweed species	<i>Helenium</i> sp.
Strawberry	<i>Fragaria</i> sp.
Viburnum species	<i>Viburnum</i> sp.
Violet species	<i>Viola</i> sp.
White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Yorkshire Fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>

Appendix V – RECOMMENDED ENHANCEMENTS

Bat Box



Ibstock Enclosed Bat Box 'C'

A bat box designed to be installed into walls, suitable for crevice dwelling species.

Bird Box



1B Schwegler Nest Box

A box suitable for a variety of bird species, to be installed onto a tree.

Hedgehog Highways Sign



Hedgehog Highways Sign

Sign to prevent closure of hedgehog fence holes. A sign should be installed on either side of the hole.

Appendix VI – RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Text in italics is taken directly from legislation.

The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted in November 2019. The following policies are of relevance to the proposals.

EN12: Biodiversity and The Green Network

- a) *The identified Green Network, the key elements of which are shown on the Proposals Map, shall be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced. Permission will not be granted for development that negatively affects the sites with identified interest or fragments the overall network. The Green Network comprises:*
- *Sites with identified biodiversity interest - Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, protected and priority species and their habitats, Priority and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, and the River Thames and all its tributaries (including the River Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal); and*
 - *Areas with potential for biodiversity value and which stitch the Green Network together – designated Local Green Space and open green spaces, and existing and potential Green Links.*

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

- b) *On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. Development should:*
- *Protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and*
 - *Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable. In exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site, and it is demonstrated that the impacts cannot be: 1) avoided; 2) mitigated or; 3) compensated for on-site; then new development will provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is “no net loss” of biodiversity. Provision of off-site compensation shall be calculated in accordance with nationally or locally recognised guidance and metrics. It should not replace existing alternative habitats, and should be provided prior to development.*

EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands

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

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

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated in July 2021.

Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

174. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- (a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- (b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- (c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;*
- (d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
- (e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and*
- (f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.*

179. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

- (a) identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity ⁶¹; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation ⁶²; and*
- (b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.*

180. 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 reasons⁶³ 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.

181. The following should be given the same protection as habitats sites:

- (a) potential Special Protection Areas and possible Special Areas of Conservation;
- (b) listed or proposed Ramsar sites⁶⁴; and
- (c) sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on habitats sites, potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation, and listed or proposed Ramsar sites.

National Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

The National Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (adopted in October 2006) Section 41 places responsibilities on the Secretary of State to produce a list of species and habitats of principal importance in England. The list is kept under review and is designed to be used by public bodies and authorities when implementing Section 40 of the Act, relevant to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

European protected species are listed within Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitat and Species Regulations 2017.

Protection of certain wild animals: offences

43.—(1) A person who—

- (a) deliberately captures, injures or kills any wild animal of a European protected species,
 - (b) deliberately disturbs wild animals of any such species,
 - (c) deliberately takes or destroys the eggs of such an animal, or
 - (d) damages or destroys a breeding site or resting place of such an animal,
- is guilty of an offence.

(2) For the purposes of paragraph (1)(b), disturbance of animals includes in particular any disturbance which is likely—

- (a) to impair their ability—
 - (i) to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young;
- or
- (ii) in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or

(b) to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.

(3) It is an offence for any person—

- (a) to be in possession of, or to control,
 - (b) to transport,
 - (c) to sell or exchange, or
 - (d) to offer for sale or exchange,
- anything to which this paragraph applies.

(4) Paragraph (3) applies to—

(a) any live or dead animal or part of an animal—

(i) which has been taken from the wild, and

(ii) which is of a species or subspecies listed in Annex IV(a) to the Habitats Directive; and

(b) anything derived from such an animal or any part of such an animal.

Licences for European protected species in England are issued by Natural England.

Licences for certain activities relating to animals or plants

55.—(1) Subject to the provisions of this regulation, the relevant licensing body may grant a licence for the purposes specified in paragraph (2).

(2) The purposes are—

(a) scientific or educational purposes;

(b) ringing or marking, or examining any ring or mark on, wild animals;

(c) conserving wild animals or wild plants or introducing them to particular areas;

(d) protecting any zoological or botanical collection;

(e) 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;

(f) preventing the spread of disease; or

(g) preventing serious damage to livestock, foodstuffs for livestock, crops, vegetables, fruit, growing timber or any other form of property or to fisheries.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 gives protection to threatened native species and complies with the European Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds. All nesting birds are covered under the Act. Schedule 5 lists animals that are covered under the Act.

1. Protection of wild birds, their nests and eggs

Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person intentionally—

(a) kills, injures or takes any wild bird;

(aa) takes, damages or destroys the nest of a wild bird included in Schedule ZA1;

(b) takes, damages or destroys the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or

(c) takes or destroys an egg of any wild bird,
he shall be guilty of an offence.

Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person intentionally [or recklessly]—

(a) disturbs any wild bird included in Schedule 1 while it is building a nest or is in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; or

(b) disturbs dependent young of such a bird,
he shall be guilty of an offence.

9. Protection of certain wild animals.

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person intentionally kills, injures or takes any wild animal included in Schedule 5, he shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person has in his possession or control any live or dead wild animal included in Schedule 5 or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal, he shall be guilty of an offence.

(3) A person shall not be guilty of an offence under subsection (2) if he shows that—

(a) the animal had not been killed or taken, or had been killed or taken otherwise than in contravention of the relevant provisions; or

(b) the animal or other thing in his possession or control had been sold (whether to him or any other person) otherwise than in contravention of those provisions and in this subsection "the relevant provisions" means the

provisions of this Part and of the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act 1975

(4) Subject to the provisions of this Part, a person is guilty of an offence if intentionally or recklessly—

- (a) he damages or destroys any structure or place which any wild animal specified in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection;
- (b) he disturbs any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; or
- (c) he obstructs access to any structure or place which any such animal uses for shelter or protection.

Schedule 9 of the Act lists species of animals and plants that are non-native. These species may be subject to control measures.

Reptiles

All reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) and smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*) are also protected as European protected species under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Protection of Badgers Act 1992

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 protects badgers in England and Wales. It is an offence to:

- Wilfully kill, injure or take a badger;
- Treat a badger cruelly;
- Intentionally or recklessly destroy, obstruct or damage a sett;
- Cause a dog to enter a sett; or
- Disturb a badger when they are within a sett.

Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996

The Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 protects wild mammals from cruel treatment caused by certain methods. This would apply to the removal of rabbit warrens, fox dens and other mammal burrows on development sites.

If, save as permitted by this Act, any person mutilates, kicks, beats, nails or otherwise impales, stabs, burns, stones, crushes, drowns, drags or asphyxiates any wild mammal with intent to inflict unnecessary suffering he shall be guilty of an offence.

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