Allied Ecology

Ecological Appraisal

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Land off High Street,

Great Paxton,

St. Neots,

PE19 6TU

-

February 2025

Site Details	Land off High Street, Great Paxton, St. Neots, PE19 6TU
Client	Mr. Jason Key
Date of Issue	17/02/2025
Report Reference	25399 – Ecological Appraisal

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Validity / 'Shelf-life'

Unless otherwise stated at Section 6, in relation to specific habitats and faunal species, the findings of the surveys and assessments detailed within this report should be considered as valid and able to be relied upon for a period of up to 18 months. Any alterations to the site boundary and / or proposals may invalidate the recommendations contained within this report.

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Executive Summary

Summary of Proposals	
It is understood the proposals are for the erection of two new residential dwellings, with associated landscaping and access infrastructure	
Designations	
The site falls within a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zones (IRZs), albeit none of the IRZs that relate to the site itself are relevant to the proposals and as such, no impacts on SSSIs are considered likely under the proposals. No statutory designations are present within or adjacent to the site boundary, with all such designations being well separated from the site by existing development, access infrastructure, and open countryside. Given the nature and scale of the proposed development, and physical distance from all statutory designations, it is considered that these designations are unlikely to be affected.	
Habitats	Recommendations
The site currently comprises part of a vacant or derelict builders' yard, with a track running down the centre and a short section of native hedgerow at the north-eastern corner. The site is located within a rural setting and is bound by existing residential curtilages to the south-west and grassland to the north and east.	New habitat creation proposed should comprise ecologically diverse and locally appropriate species, managed to benefit biodiversity.
Fauna	Recommendations
Bats – No trees are present within the site, and an on-site timber shed is assessed to provide negligible bat roosting potential. Existing habitats are assessed to be sub-optimal / unsuitable to support foraging and / or commuting bats.	Introduce new bat roosting opportunities. Implementation of a sensitive lighting strategy for bats.
Badger – No evidence of Badger setts or Badger foraging / commuting behaviour was recorded within the site, albeit an active 'Outlier' Badger sett and fresh tracks are located off-site (>30m), to the north-east. As such, it is possible that Badger may occasionally make use of or pass through the site.	No further Phase 2 survey work proposed. General construction safeguards.
Other mammals – Other mammal species likely to be present are widespread and not afforded specific legislative protection.	No further Phase 2 survey work proposed. General construction safeguards.
Great Crested Newt – An off-site pond identified within 250m of the site boundary is assessed to provide 'good' suitability to support Great Crested Newts. The overall habitat of the site is unsuitable, albeit the small section of boundary hedgerow, which would be retained under the proposals, may afford terrestrial / overwintering opportunities.	No further Phase 2 survey work proposed. General construction safeguards.
Reptiles – Limited potentially suitable terrestrial opportunities present within and adjacent to the site.	No further Phase 2 survey work proposed. General construction safeguards.
Birds – Suitable nesting habitat in the form of the boundary hedgerow.	Avoid vegetation clearance within the nesting bird season. Introduce new nesting habitats.
Invertebrates – Common and widespread species likely to be present.	No specific measures proposed.
Fauna	
Subject to implementation of the recommended mitigation and safeguarding measures, it is considered that no significant harm to any habitats or faunal species of interest will occur as a result of the proposals.	

1 Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Allied Ecology has been appointed to undertake an Ecological Appraisal in respect of Land off High Street, Great Paxton, St. Neots (grid reference TL 20739 63563), as shown on Plan 25399-AE1.

1.1.2. The site is located at the southern extent of Great Paxton, north of St. Neots, and currently comprises vacant or derelict urban land with a track running down the centre, and a short section of native hedgerow to the north of the site. The site is located within a rural setting and is bound by existing residential curtilages to the south-west, and a grassland field to the north and east. Beyond the site lies largely agricultural land, with a railway line to the west.

1.2. Summary of Proposals

1.2.1. It is understood that proposals are for the erection of two new residential dwellings, with associated landscaping and access infrastructure.

1.3. Basis of Reporting

1.3.1. This report documents the findings of the baseline ecological survey work and desktop study, carried out in order to establish the current ecological features of interest at the site. This report sets out the likely effects of the proposals in respect of the habitats and faunal features present and, where necessary, any requirements for further Phase 2 survey work, in line with relevant best practice guidance.

1.3.2. Where appropriate, proportionate recommendations for mitigation and / or compensation measures are provided, in order to ensure that habitats and species of interest remain fully safeguarded under the proposals. Specific ecological enhancement recommendations are also provided, in order to ensure that that the proposals are able to increase the ecological potential of the site.

1.4. Surveyor and Author's Experience

1.4.1. The lead surveyor and author is Jon Byrd. Jon is a Chartered Ecologist (CEcol) and Full Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (MCIEEM), with over 16 years of relevant experience within an ecological consultancy setting and is suitably authoritative to assess the potential effects of the proposals on the habitats and faunal species present.

1.4.2. In addition to being an experienced botanical and habitat surveyor, Jon holds Natural England protected species survey licences for UK bats (Class 2 - CL17/CL18), Barn Owl (CL29), Great Crested Newt (CL08), Dormouse (CL10a), and White-clawed Crayfish (CL11). Jon also holds Natural England Mitigation Class Licences for bats (BMCL - CL21) and Badger (CL35), and has held or been named on numerous standard Natural England mitigation licences for the above species. As such, the findings and assessments detailed within this report can be relied upon to inform the proposals.

2 Planning Policies

2.1. Local Planning Policy

2.1.1. Planning policies and considerations relevant to Huntingdonshire District Council are set out within Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (adopted in May 2019) and the Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (adopted in March 2017). Policies and considerations of relevance to ecology and nature conservation within the above documents include the following:

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan (May 2019)

Local Policy 3: Green Infrastructure

2.1.2. Under LP3, the Council states that a proposal will be expected to support green infrastructure and will therefore be supported where it demonstrates that it:

- *'protects and where possible enhances existing green infrastructure, concentrating efforts on protecting, enhancing or creating links within, to and between green infrastructure priority areas and the Cambridgeshire Strategic Green Infrastructure Network;*
- *improves the accessibility, naturalness and connectivity of green spaces, assisting in achieving Natural England's Accessible Natural Green Space Standards (ANGSt);* and
- *provides replacement provision where the proposal would result in harm to or loss of existing green infrastructure where the replacement provides a net benefit, judged in terms of the factors set out in the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011).'*

Local Policy 30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity

2.1.3. Under LP30, the Council states that a proposal will be required to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity have been investigated. Where a proposal is likely to have an impact, either direct or indirect, on biodiversity, it will need to be accompanied by an appropriate appraisal, identifying all individual and cumulative potential impacts on biodiversity. Where a proposal has potential to affect an internationally important site, an 'appropriate assessment' in accordance with the Habitats Directive will be required.

2.1.4. The Council also states that all possible efforts must be taken to avoid adverse impacts. If it is demonstrated that adverse impacts are unavoidable, they must be minimised as far as possible and then mitigated. Only where this process of avoidance, minimisation and then mitigation is insufficient to fully address adverse impacts will consideration be given to compensation measures. Following this process, a proposal will only be supported subject to a hierarchy where:

- *'a site of international importance, being a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) or Ramsar site would be affected there has to be exceptional overriding reasons of human health, public safety or environmental benefit;*
- *a site of national importance, such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or National Nature Reserve (NNR) would be affected there has to be exceptional circumstances where the need for, and the benefits of, the proposal significantly*

outweigh both the potential impacts on the features of the site that make it of national importance and any broader impacts on the national network of such sites; and

- *a protected species, a priority habitat or species, a site of local or regional importance, the achievement of water body good ecological potential, or the biodiversity value of the proposed development site as part of the wider network would be affected, the need for and the benefits of the proposal must clearly outweigh the assessed impacts.'*

2.1.5. Under LP30, the Council also states that a proposal will not be supported if potential impacts would lead to deterioration of water body ecological status/potential. A proposal will ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type and location of development. Large scale development proposals should provide an audit of losses and gains in biodiversity produced according to a recognised methodology. In seeking to provide net gains for biodiversity reference should be had to the Natural Cambridgeshire publication 'Developing with Nature Toolkit' and the proposal should prioritise measures that:

- *'complement or enhance existing features of biodiversity value within the design and layout of development;*
- *provide new biodiversity features within the development;*
- *help reverse the decline of species;*
- *assist in achieving local targets for priority habitats and species including those set out in Habitat Action Plans;*
- *improve public access to nature;*
- *ensure the effective management of biodiversity or geological features;*
- *contribute to the provision of multi-functional green infrastructure to enhance ecological networks and the Green Infrastructure Priority Areas*
- *contribute towards the achievement of good ecological status in water bodies (or not compromise achievement of good ecological potential) in accordance with the Anglian River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) and accompanying catchment action plans; or*
- *will help species adapt to climate change.'*

Local Policy 31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows

2.1.6. Under LP31, the Council states that a proposal will be required to demonstrate that the potential for adverse impacts on trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows has been investigated. Where investigations show that such adverse impacts are possible, a statement will be required that:

- *'assesses all trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows that would be affected by the proposal, describing and assessing their value;* and
- *sets out how the details of the proposal have been decided upon in terms of their impact on the value of trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows and how adverse impacts will be avoided as far as possible, or if unavoidable how they will be minimised as far as possible.'*

2.1.7. The Council states that a proposal will only be supported where it seeks to conserve and enhance any existing tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of value that would be affected by the proposed development. Loss, threat or damage to any tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of visual, heritage or nature conservation value will only be acceptable where:

- *'it is addressed firstly by seeking to avoid the impact, then to minimise the impact and finally where appropriate to include mitigation measures; or*
- *there are sound arboricultural reasons to support the proposal.'*

2.1.8. Where impacts remain, the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location must clearly outweigh the loss, threat or damage.

2.1.9. Where loss, threat or damage cannot be fully addressed through minimisation and/ or mitigation measures, the Council states that the proposal may be supported if alternative measures such as reinstatement of features, additional landscaping, habitat creation or tree planting will compensate for the harm and can be implemented and established before development starts.

2.1.10. The Council also states that a proposal for major scale development will be required to include additional new trees to form part of landscaping for the proposal, the form of which will be determined by negotiation.

Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (March 2017)

The Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD supports the policies set out within the Local Plan, to ensure that good design is integral to all new development in the district. The SPD sets out guidance in relation to ecology and green infrastructure, and states that the five main ecological objectives that can be achieved through the planning process are:

- *'Protect current habitats and species;*
- *Enhance existing habitats and create new areas;*
- *Mitigate against potentially damaging impacts;*
- *Compensate where damage is unavoidable;* and
- *Monitor and enforce to assess the success of enhancement, mitigation and compensatory measures.'*

2.2. National Planning Policies and Position Summary

2.2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. In particular, Chapter 15 details relevant policies to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

2.2.2. The British Standard for Biodiversity BS:42020 sets out a code of practice for biodiversity planning and development and seeks to integrate biodiversity into all stages of the planning process. Embedding the principals of the 'mitigation hierarchy' into all stages of decision making seeks to avoid impacts then to mitigate unavoidable impacts, and, as a last resort, to compensate for unavoidable residual impacts that remain after avoidance and mitigation measures.

3 Desktop Study and Ecological Designations

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. A review of information published on the online Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database, which sources data provided by Natural England, was undertaken on the basis of a search radius of 2km from the site. Information relating to Priority Habitats within or adjacent to the site, along with any published protected species licensing records, was also searched for. In addition, records of ancient, veteran or notable trees within or adjacent to the site were searched for using the Woodland Trust's online database.

3.1.2. Information obtained from the sources detailed above is shown on Plan 25399-AE1, where appropriate.

3.2. Priority Habitats and Species, Ancient Woodland, and Trees

3.2.1. No Priority Habitats are located within or adjacent to the site, as identified in MAGIC. No records of any ancient, veteran or notable trees were returned from within or adjacent to the site. As such, it is unlikely that any Priority Habitats or notable trees will be affected by the proposals.

3.3. Statutory Designations

3.3.1. Relevant statutory ecological designations, within a 2km radius, are identified within Table 3.1 below, and shown on Plan 25399-AE1.

Table 3.1. Summary of statutory designations in proximity to the site and of relevance to the evaluation.

Designation	Distance (km)	Direction	Reason for Designation
Little Paxton Pits Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	0.39	SW	The Little Paxton Pits LNR is designated for comprising an extensive area of flooded gravel workings of varied age, with a correspondingly diverse vegetation structure. The pits are of national importance for wintering wildfowl and an important stopping point for migrants. The invertebrate fauna is extremely rich and includes a number of national rarities.
Little Paxton Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	0.45	W	The SSSI is designated for the same reason as the above LNR.

3.3.2. The site falls within a number of SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZs), including for Little Paxton Pits SSSI identified at Table 3.1. None of the IRZs that relate to the site itself are relevant to the proposals and as such, no impacts on SSSIs are considered likely under the proposals.

3.3.3. The statutory designations listed above are not located within or adjacent to the site boundary, and are separated from the site by existing development, access infrastructure, and open countryside. Given the nature and scale of the proposed development, and physical distance from all statutory designations, it is considered that these designations are unlikely to be affected.

4 Habitats

4.1. Survey Methodology

4.1.1. An 'extended' habitat survey was carried out on the 28th January 2025, based on the UK Habitat ('UK Hab') Classification[1] methodology, whereby habitat types present were noted and mapped, together with an assessment of the general 'ecological value' and condition of each habitat. Based on the setting, character, botanical species diversity, and structure able to be distinguished during the survey, the Primary Habitat 'level' can be distinguished. Secondary codes / attribute descriptions are then used to provide further supplementary information to classify and characterise habitats present. This approach enables a detailed and informed appraisal of the habitat types present to be undertaken and can also identify where areas of potentially greater diversity / importance are present, that may require further detailed botanical assessments to fully characterise.

4.1.2. Species identification utilises the current Botanical Society for the British Isles (BSBI) UK Vascular Plant List 'English Names' naming conventions.

4.1.3. A further appraisal of any ecological features of interest, such as areas capable of supporting protected faunal species, was undertaken in line with CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal[2], whereby details regarding the presence or potential presence of any notable or protected species or habitats was noted (see Section 5).

4.2. Survey Constraints and Limitations

4.2.1. All of the species that occur in each habitat would not necessarily be detectable during survey work carried out at any given time of the year, since different species are apparent during different seasons. The habitat survey was undertaken outside the optimal general botanical survey period, albeit within an entirely acceptable time of year for the type of habitats present and, as such, it is considered that a proportionate level of assessment was able to be undertaken and the findings can be relied upon to inform an appraisal of their importance and likely impact of the proposals.

4.2.2. The survey area was surveyed for the presence of invasive species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). However, given the varying detectability of such species depending upon a number of external factors (e.g. time of year, site management, etc.), the absence of such species should not be assumed even if none were recorded during the Phase 1 survey.

4.2.3. No overriding constraints or limitations were encountered during the survey work undertaken, such that the subsequent assessments and safeguarding recommendations are considered to be robust and proportionate.

4.3. Evaluation Methodology

4.3.1. The evaluation of ecological features is largely based on professional judgement, whilst also being sure to reflect the latest available best practice guidance and literature. The approach taken in this report is based on that described by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 'Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK

[1] UKHab Ltd (2023). *UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0 (at https://www.ukhab.org)*
[2] Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (2013) '*Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.*'

and Ireland' (2018)[3]. Once a particular ecological feature is established as likely to be 'important', based on the relevant criteria, the geographic level of that importance can then be ascertained.

4.4. Results and Evaluation

4.4.1. The habitats and features of interest identified within the site are described below and evaluated in terms of their status and level of ecological value, taking into consideration the local and national context, and the presence of any rare or notable plant species / communities. The likely effects on the habitats and features of interest as a result of the development proposals are also assessed. The potential for any of the habitats within or adjacent to the site to support faunal species is discussed in the relevant faunal section in Section 5.

4.4.2. The habitats and features of interest are shown on Plan 25399-AE2 and described in detail below, with a summary of their Habitat Classifications detailed at Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Habitat Classification Summary.

UK Habitat Classification	UK Habitat Classification Code	UK Habitat Relevant Secondary Code(s)	
Sparsely vegetated urban land	u1f	82 511 516	Vacant or derelict land Compacted substrate Active management
Other developed land	u1b6	839	Track
Buildings	u1b5		
Other native hedgerow	h2a6	521	Unmanaged

Sparsely vegetated urban land (UK Hab – Primary Habitat u1f)

4.4.3. The site is dominated by currently unvegetated / sparsely vegetated vacant and derelict land. It is understood that the site has largely been used by a farmer / developer as a yard for storage of machinery / vehicles, albeit has not necessarily been subject to regular and ongoing management / usage. The current landowner is understood to have reinstated the yard, and cleared overgrowing vegetation to re-reveal the hardstanding / compacted aggregate that forms the basis of the site. Available aerial photography / Street View imagery indicates that the overgrowing vegetation is likely to have comprised botanical species associated with adjacent grassland habitat, with remnant Annual Meadow-grass, Common Nettle, Groundsel, Common Ragwort, Cock's-foot, and Dove's-foot Crane's-bill remaining sparsely distributed across the hardstanding areas.

4.4.4. In its current condition, the sparsely vegetated vacant / derelict land is not considered to represent an important ecological feature, and any removals / impacts associated with the proposals would be of negligible ecological significance.

Other developed land (UK Hab – Primary Habitat u1b6)

4.4.5. A hardstanding / sealed surface track extends through the centre of the site, providing access to off-site areas to the north and agricultural land to the north-east.

[3] *CIEEM (2018) 'Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine', ver. 1.1, Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester*

4.4.6. The track does not support vegetated habitat and as such, does not represent an important ecological feature and any removals / impacts associated with the proposals would be of negligible ecological significance.

Buildings (UK Hab – Primary Habitat u1b5)

4.4.7. A small timber shed is present within the site, referred to as B1 on Plan 25399-AE2.

4.4.8. The shed does not support vegetated habitat and as such, does not represent an important ecological feature and any removals / impacts associated with the proposals would be of negligible ecological significance.

Other native hedgerow (UK Hab – Primary Habitat h2a6)

4.4.9. A small section of otherwise largely off-site native hedgerow is located at the north-eastern boundary of the site, as shown on Plan 25399-AE2, and described in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2. Descriptions of hedgerows.

No.	Dimensions	Canopy Species (no. per 30m)	Ground Flora & Climbers	Associated Features	Management
H1	8-10m height 2-3m width	Hawthorn and Elder	Common Ivy, Ground-ivy, Common Nettle, Daffodil and Lords-and-Ladies	<10% gaps	Unmanaged

4.4.10. Based on an initial assessment, the hedgerow is not considered to be species-rich and is therefore unlikely to qualify as ecologically 'important' under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, based on the relevant criteria. However, the hedgerow is likely to qualify as a Priority Habitat based on the standard definition[4], and on this basis, the hedgerow constitutes as an important ecological feature, albeit given the limited network within and surrounding the site, is only of importance at the local level. It is understood that the hedgerow would be retained under the proposals, albeit incorporated into the curtilage / boundary of a proposed new dwelling.

4.5. Additional Considerations

4.5.1. The potential for on-site habitats and immediately adjacent areas to support faunal species is detailed at Section 5 below.

[4] Based on: Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (2011) '*UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitat Descriptions'*, ed. Ant Maddock

5 Fauna

5.1. Bats

Relevant Legislation

5.1.1. All British bats receive protection under both European (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended) and domestic (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended) legislation. The legislative protection refers to both bats and their roosts (i.e. sites used for resting and breeding). A number of bat species are also listed as Section 41 Priority Species, and are therefore afforded a greater level of consideration within development under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, representing a material consideration at planning.

Survey Methodology

5.1.2. Apart from a small timber shed, which is assessed to be of inherently negligible suitability to support an active bat roost, no other buildings / structures or trees are present within the site. A general assessment of the site's suitability to support foraging and commuting bats was undertaken in January 2025, in line with relevant best practice guidance at the time of survey[5,6,7].

Survey Constraints and Limitations

5.1.3. No constraints or limitations to the survey or assessment were encountered. It is considered that the level of survey work carried out provides an accurate baseline to assess the potential for impacts on bats under the proposals, including the requirement for further survey work.

Survey Results and Evaluation

5.1.4. The site itself comprises habitats which are considered unlikely to support foraging and commuting bats, being dominated by hardstanding and otherwise largely unvegetated habitats. As such, it is unlikely that bats rely on the site, and overall, the site is considered to be of low importance to bats at the local level. Nonetheless, it is likely that bats may occasionally make use of or pass through the site, and may utilise the retained short section of otherwise off-site native hedgerows and as such, a number of mitigation measures have been recommended in Section 6 to ensure that bats are fully safeguarded during the proposed works.

5.2. Badger

Relevant Legislation

5.2.1. Badgers *Meles meles* receive protection under domestic legislation (Protection of Badgers Act 1992), which aims to protect this species from persecution.

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5 Collins, J. (ed.) (2016) '*Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (3rd edn).' Bat Conservation Trust

6 Surveys based on: English Nature (2004) '*Bat Mitigation Guidelines'* and Collins, J. (ed.) (2016) '*Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (3rd edn).' Bat Conservation Trust

7 Stebbings, RE, Yalden DW and Herman, JS (2007). '*Which bat is it? A guide to bat identification in Great Britain and Ireland.'* The Mammal Society

Survey Methodology

5.2.2. A detailed Badger presence / absence survey was undertaken by Allied Ecology on 28th January 2025. The survey consisted of a search for the presence of any Badger setts within and adjacent to the site. For any setts identified, information on the number and location of sett entrances was noted and mapped, including an assessment of whether the entrances were active, inactive and disused (see Table 5.1 below).

Table 5.1. Descriptions of the status of Badger sett entrances.

Sett Entrance Status	Description / Features
Active	Active entrances are clear of any debris or vegetation, are obviously in regular use, and typically exhibit fresh spoil from recent excavation activity. Other evidence of activity associated with the sett entrance includes snagged Badger hair on surrounding vegetation, fresh Badger prints within/leading up to the entrance, and the presence of fresh bedding in proximity to the entrance.
Inactive	Inactive entrances are not in regular use and have debris such as leaves or twigs in the entrance, and vegetation growing in or around the entrance.
Disused	Disused entrances have not been in use for some time, are partially or completely blocked, and cannot be used without a considerable amount of clearance. If the hole has been disused for a considerable amount of time, all that may remain of the entrance is a depression in the ground and the remains of a spoil heap, which may have vegetated over.

5.2.3. Based on the results of the Badger presence / absence survey, Badger setts can be classified based on the descriptions detailed in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2. Descriptions of Badger sett categories.

Sett Category	Description / Features
Main Sett	Main setts usually have a large number of entrances with conspicuous spoil heaps, and the sett generally appears to be active. Main setts are usually in continuous use and used for breeding, and as such, well-worn pathways to and from the sett and between entrances will be present. Bedding is frequently dispelled from the site, and will be located in close proximity.
Annexe Sett	Annexe setts are typically located in close proximity to the main sett (<150m away) and are usually connected to the main sett by one or more obvious well-worn paths. The Annexe sett will typically have several entrances, albeit not all will be in use at one time.
Subsidiary Sett	Subsidiary setts typically comprise 3 – 5 entrances, and will be located at least 50m from the main sett. A subsidiary sett will not exhibit obvious pathways connecting with another sett, and are not continuously active.
Outlier Sett	Outlier setts typically comprise one or two entrances, and will have little spoil associated with the entrances. Outlier setts are only used sporadically and will have no obvious pathways connecting with another sett.

5.2.4. In addition, evidence of any general Badger activity was searched for during the survey, so as to assess the use of the site by Badger for foraging and / or commuting. Evidence in the form

of field signs, such as commuting pathways, hair, footprints, latrines / dung pits and general foraging signs, was noted and mapped where present.

Survey Constraints and Limitations

5.2.5. No constraints or limitations to the survey or assessment were encountered. It is considered that the level of survey work carried out provides an accurate baseline to assess the potential for impacts on Badger under the proposals, including the requirement for further survey work.

Survey Results and Evaluation

5.2.6. No evidence of Badger setts or Badger foraging / commuting behaviour was recorded within the site or within 30m of the site boundary. However, an active likely 'Outlier' Badger sett is located off-site, approximately 70m to the north, and comprises a single entrance. As such, it remains entirely likely that Badger may occasionally make use of or pass through the site and as such, a number of mitigation measures have been recommended in Section 6 to ensure that Badgers are fully safeguarded during the proposed works.

5.3. Other Mammals

Relevant Legislation

5.3.1. Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius* receives protection under domestic legislation (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended). The legislative protection refers to both individual Water Voles and their breeding sites and sheltering places. Water Vole is also listed as a Section 41 Priority Species.

5.3.2. Otter *Lutra lutra* receives protection under both European (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended) and domestic (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended) legislation. The legislative protection refers to both individual Otters and their breeding sites and resting places. Otter is also listed as a Section 41 Priority Species.

5.3.3. Other UK mammals do not represent protected species and as such, are not afforded direct legislative protection. A number of other mammal species are listed as Section 41 Priority Species and are therefore afforded a greater level of consideration within development under the NERC Act 2006, representing a material consideration at planning.

Survey Methodology

5.3.4. A general assessment of the habitats within the site was undertaken on the 28th January 2025, in respect of their suitability to support other mammals. Any field signs suggesting the presence of other mammal species was observed, including evidence of sheltering, foraging and commuting activity. Information on the presence or potential presence of other mammals was noted and mapped.

Survey Constraints and Limitations

5.3.5. No constraints or limitations to the survey or assessment were encountered. It is considered that the level of survey work carried out provides an accurate baseline to assess the potential for impacts on other mammals under the proposals, including the requirement for further survey work.

Survey Results and Evaluation

5.3.6. The site primarily consists of compacted substrate/hardstanding, which is unsuitable to support Water Vole and Otter, and no evidence to suggest Water Vole or Otter may be present was encountered during the survey work.

5.3.7. Other common species in both a local and national context, such as Fox *Vulpes vulpes* and Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* are likely to utilise the site. Fox and Hedgehog are not afforded specific legislative protection, albeit Hedgehog constitutes a Priority Species and as such, represents a material planning consideration. Mitigation measures are proposed at Section 6 to safeguard Hedgehog and other mammals, should they enter the site during the proposed works.

5.4. Great Crested Newt

Relevant Legislation

5.4.1. Great Crested Newts receive protection under both European (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended) and domestic (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended) legislation. The legislative protection refers to both Great Crested Newts and habitats utilised by this species for foraging, resting and breeding. All other British amphibian species receive limited protection under Section 9 (5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*, Common Toad *Bufo bufo*, Natterjack Toad *Epidalea calamit*a, and Pool Frog *Pelophylax lessonae* are also listed as listed as Section 41 Priority Species, and are therefore afforded a greater level of consideration within development under the NERC Act 2006, representing a material consideration at planning.

Survey Methodology

5.4.2. A general assessment of the terrestrial habitats within the site was undertaken on the 28th January 2025, in respect of their suitability to support Great Crested Newt and other amphibians. In addition, any aquatic habitats (waterbodies) at the site and within 250m[8] of the site boundary (identified using Ordnance Survey and satellite imagery) were assessed for their suitability to support Great Crested Newt using the Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) [9, 10]. Guidance set out by Natural England states that a HSI assessment incorporating an extended search area of 500m of the site boundary is required where the following factors are identified:

- Data indicates that the pond(s) has the potential to support a large Great Crested Newt population (informed by the results of the desktop study);
- The site footprint contains particularly favourable habitat;
- The development would have a substantial negative effect on that habitat; and
- There is an absence of dispersal barriers.

[8] 250m is the typical maximum migratory range of this species, see English Nature (2004) '*An assessment of the efficiency of capture techniques and the value of different habitats for the great crested newt* Triturus cristatus'. English Nature Research Report 576

[9] Oldham RS, Keeble J, Swan MJS & Jeffcote M (2000) '*Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (Triturus cristatus)*'. Herpetological Journal 10 (4), 143-155

[10] Amphibian & Reptile Groups of the UK (2010) '*ARG UK Advice Note 5: Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index*'

5.4.3. Habitats within the site are considered not to be particularly favourable and barriers to Great Crested Newt dispersal are present, such that an assessment of ponds within 250m of the site remains proportionate.

5.4.4. The HSI incorporates 10 criteria relating to a number of environmental factors which are considered to affect the presence or absence of Great Crested Newts within waterbodies. A calculation is made based on an assessment of these criteria for each waterbody to determine the overall suitability, which can then be classified into one of five categories; 'poor', 'below average', 'average', 'good' or 'excellent'.

Survey Constraints and Limitations

5.4.5. It is considered that the level of survey work carried out provides an accurate baseline to assess the potential for impacts on Great Crested Newt under the proposals, including the requirement for further survey work.

Survey Results and Evaluation

5.4.6. Habitats within the site are currently considered to provide negligible foraging and sheltering opportunities for Great Crested Newt and other amphibians, being limited in size and comprising a compacted substrate/hardstanding. A short section of hedgerow habitat (which would not be impacted under the proposals) may provide terrestrial opportunities for Great Crested Newts.

5.4.7. Ordnance survey mapping indicates that a single pond is present within 250m of the site, referred to as P1 on Plan 25399-AE2. As such, a Habitat Suitability Index Assessment was undertaken, as detailed at Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3 Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment results.

Ref	Distance(m)	Direction	Suitability Indices										HSI Score	Suitability
			Location	Pond Area	Pond Drying	Water Quality	Shade	Water Fowl	Fish	Ponds	Terrestrial Habitat	Macrophytes		
Off-site Ponds / Waterbodies														
P1	40m	NE	1	0.2	0.9	0.33	1	1	1	0.6	1	0.9	**0.70065**	Good

5.4.8. As detailed in Table 5.3 above, the off-site pond (P1) is assessed to provide 'good' suitability to support Great Crested Newts.

5.4.9. Given the general unsuitability of the on-site habitats to support Great Crested Newts, it is considered highly likely that they would not rely on the site or necessarily be present terrestrially (if present within P1). However, a small section of boundary hedgerow, which would be retained under the proposals, may afford terrestrial / overwintering opportunities for Great Crested Newts.

5.4.10. On the basis that P1 is assessed to provide suitable aquatic habitat for Great Crested Newts, and it remains possible that a population of this species could be present, there remains a slight risk that Great Crested Newt could utilise the on-site hedgerow features at the time of works (entirely retained). As such, on a precautionary basis, mitigation measures are proposed

at Section 6, in order to further safeguard Great Crested Newts should they be present at the time of initial construction works.

5.5. Reptiles

Relevant Legislation

5.5.1. All British reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which protects all six species from intentional killing or injury, albeit the legislation does not extend to protection of habitats utilised by reptiles. All British reptiles are also listed as Section 41 Priority Species, and are therefore afforded a greater level of consideration within development under the NERC Act 2006, representing a material consideration at planning. Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca* also receive European protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Survey Methodology

5.5.2. A general assessment of the habitats within the site was undertaken on the 28th January 2025, in respect of their suitability to support reptiles. Any evidence suggesting the presence or potential presence of reptile species at the site was noted and mapped.

Survey Constraints and Limitations

5.5.3. No constraints or limitations to the survey or assessment were encountered. It is considered that the level of survey work carried out provides an accurate baseline to assess the potential for impacts on reptiles under the proposals, including the requirement for further survey work.

Survey Results and Evaluation

5.5.4. The site primarily consists of compacted substrate/hardstanding, which offers limited terrestrial foraging and sheltering opportunities for reptiles. Given that the on-site habitats are assessed as largely unsuitable for reptiles, it is considered unlikely that reptile populations rely on the site or would be adversely impacted by the proposals.

5.5.5. Nonetheless, it is recommended that a precautionary approach be implemented, as detailed in Section 6 below, to ensure that reptiles are fully safeguarded under the proposals in the unlikely event that they may be present during any works.

5.6. Birds

Relevant Legislation

5.6.1. All British birds and their nests are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This legislative protection refers to killing or injury of individuals, and their nests, while being created or in use, cannot be taken, damaged or destroyed. A number of species are also listed on Schedule 1 of the Act and therefore receive a greater level of protection and are subject to special penalties.

Survey Methodology

5.6.2. A general assessment of the habitats within the site was undertaken on the 28th January 2025, in respect of their suitability to support birds. Any birds which were observed utilising the site were identified using sight or sound, which was noted and mapped where appropriate during

the survey work. Other field signs, including any evidence of nesting or foraging by birds, was also noted.

Survey Constraints and Limitations

5.6.3. No constraints or limitations to the survey or assessment were encountered. It is considered that the level of survey work carried out provides a proportionate baseline to assess the potential for impacts on birds under the proposals, including the requirement for further survey work.

Survey Results and Evaluation

5.6.4. During the survey work undertaken, no birds were recorded within the site. Habitats within the site are largely unsuitable to support nesting birds, comprising mostly compacted substrate/hardstanding, albeit the site's boundary hedgerow may provide nesting opportunities for birds. It is understood that potential nesting habitat associated with hedgerow, would be retained under the proposals. Should minor clearances / management ultimately be required, this could potentially affect any nesting birds which may be present at the time of works and as such, safeguarding measures in respect of nesting birds are set out in Section 6 below. The proposals include the creation of new nesting habitat, as detailed in Section 6 below, which will ensure that long-term nesting opportunities will continue to be provided at the site.

5.7. Invertebrates

Relevant Legislation

5.7.1. A number of invertebrates are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Large Blue Butterfly *Maculinea arion*, Fisher's Estuarine Moth *Gortyna borelii lunata* and Lesser Whirlpool Ram's-horn Snail *Anisus vorticulus* also receive European protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). A number of invertebrates are also listed S41 Priority Species, and are therefore afforded a greater level of consideration within development under the NERC Act 2006, representing a material consideration at planning.

Survey Methodology

5.7.2. A general assessment of the habitats within the site was undertaken on the 28th January 2025, in respect of their suitability to support invertebrates. Any invertebrate species were identified, where possible, and noted during the survey work.

Survey Constraints and Limitations

5.7.3. No constraints or limitations to the survey or assessment were encountered. It is considered that the level of survey work carried out provides an accurate baseline to assess the potential for impacts on invertebrates under the proposals, including the requirement for further survey work.

Survey Results and Evaluation

5.7.4. The survey work did not record the presence of any protected, rare or notable species within the site. The site is dominated by compacted substrate/hardstanding, which is likely to only support a limited diversity of widespread invertebrate species. As such, given the habitats present on-site and the absence of any sites specifically designated for invertebrate interest

within the surrounding area, it is unlikely that the site supports an important invertebrate assemblage. As such, it is considered that the proposed development is unlikely to significantly affect local invertebrate populations.

6 Recommended Mitigation and Safeguarding Measures

6.1 Based on the results of the survey work undertaken at the site, it is recommended that the following measures are implemented. In accordance with best practice guidance (BS 42020:2013), detailed mitigation strategies / method statements can be secured through appropriate planning conditions.

Protection of Hedgerows

6.2 The hedgerow to be retained under the proposed development will be protected during all stages of the development in accordance with standard arboriculturalist best practice guidance (BS 5837:2012), or as recommended by a suitably qualified arboriculturalist. This will involve the installation of protective fencing, or similar methods, to fully safeguard the root protection areas of the retained hedgerow.

Bats – Sensitive Lighting

6.3 In order to avoid unnecessary light-spill onto retained boundary habitats, it is recommended that an ecologically sensitive lighting scheme be implemented. This would intend to keep any new lighting provision to a minimum, and avoid vegetated habitats where practicable. Particular consideration should be given to avoiding upward light trespass, skyglow, and unnecessary lighting.

Badger – Update Survey

6.4 Badgers are highly mobile and can excavate new setts at any of time of year. Given the presence of an off-site, nearby, active outlier Badger sett, it is recommended that an update Badger presence / absence survey is undertaken prior to commencement, to establish the current status of Badger at the site prior to development works.

General Faunal Safeguards

6.5 In order to fully safeguard faunal species during the consented works the following measures are recommended:

- Construction workers will maintain a watching brief for faunal species within the site, during any clearance works;
- Any trenches or excavations left overnight will include a feature(s) for faunal species to escape. Such feature could include a plank of wood or gently graded edge; and
- Any temporarily exposed drains or pipes will be capped off or suitably blocked if left overnight, to avoid occupation by faunal species.

Hedgehog – Site Permeability

6.6 In order to maintain permeability through the site for Hedgehogs, it is recommended 13cm x 13cm cut-outs are included at the base of any proposed boundary features. This would aim to ensure that Hedgehogs and other small mammals can forage within and commute through the site.

Amphibians and Reptiles – Habitat Manipulation Exercise / Two-stage Clearance

6.7 The majority of the site currently provides negligible suitability to support amphibians and reptiles, with boundary features likely to represent the only refuge locations. However, as a precautionary measure to safeguard amphibians and reptiles, and to avoid an offence under the relevant legislation being unintentionally committed, it is recommended that a destructive search (under Ecological Clerk of Works Supervision) of vegetated features present at the time of works is undertaken prior to / during their removal. Vegetated habitats (where present) would be reduced in height as part of a 'two-stage' clearance process, which would see suitable vegetation managed to a height of ~15cm before being hand-searched. Any reptiles or amphibians encountered would be captured and moved out of harm's way, to a retained and unaffected suitable area, before any remaining clearance activities are carried out.

6.8 In the highly unlikely event that Great Crested Newt is identified during the habitat manipulation exercise, all site works would cease and consideration given to obtaining a Natural England mitigation licence, or registering the site with the Natural England District Level Licence for Great Crested Newts, prior to recommencement. The Local Planning Authority would be provided with an immediate update, and confirmation of further actions / licensing undertaken.

Nesting Birds – General Safeguards

6.9 Habitats capable of supporting nesting birds should not be subject to clearance and / or management works during the recognised nesting bird season (March – August inclusive). Where this is not practicable, any habitats capable of supporting nesting birds should only be subject to works following a Nesting Bird Survey. This would aim to establish whether any active bird nests are present, and instate an appropriate buffer to the proposed works. Such a buffer should remain in place until the chicks have fledged and the nest becomes inactive. Such surveys must be carried out within three days of vegetation works commencing.

7 Recomended Ecological Enhancements

7.1 Based on the results of the survey work undertaken at the site, it is recommended that the following measures are implemented. It is considered that subject to the implementation of such enhancement measures, the delivery of biodiversity net gains at the site can be achieved under the proposals. In accordance with best practice guidance (BS 42020:2013), detailed ecological enhancements and management / monitoring plans can be secured through appropriate planning condition wording.

New Native Planting

7.2 To maximise the deliverable net gains at the site, where practicable it is recommended that any new tree and shrub planting within the site comprise native species of relevance within the local context. Species identified as being of particular benefit to wildlife include a range of early and late flowering / fruiting species such as Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, Aspen *Populus tremula*, Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, Oak *Quercus* sp., Wild Cherry *Prunus avium*, Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana*, to ensure that foraging opportunities are available for local faunal populations throughout the year.

7.3 Any non-native species included within the proposals should include varieties listed on the RHS' 'Plants for Pollinators' database, which are of elevated value for nectar-consuming invertebrate species, such as bees, moths and butterflies.

Faunal Enhancements

7.4 **Bat Boxes** – It is recommended that new bat roosting opportunities be incorporated within the proposals. The detail of such measures, including location and number of features can be secured via a suitably worded planning condition, once the detailed design of the proposals is finalised. However, it is recommended that two new artificial bat roosts be incorporated within the development proposals. These two features are recommended to be integrated to the fabric of the proposed building(s), comprising Integrated Eco Bat Box, Crevice features / Ibstock bat bricks (or similar).

7.5 **Bird Boxes** – It is recommended that new bird nesting opportunities be incorporated within the development proposals. The detail of such measures, including location and number of features can be secured via a suitably worded planning condition, once the detailed design of the proposals is finalised. However, it is recommended that two new artificial bird nest boxes be incorporated within the development proposals. These two features are recommended to be integrated to the fabric of the proposed building(s), comprising multi-use boxes.

7.6 **Hedgehog Dome** – It is recommended that a new sheltering opportunity for hedgehogs be incorporated within the development proposals. It is proposed that a single hedgehog dome be integrated within sheltered areas of the landscaping proposals, contiguous to off-site connecting habitats where practicable.

8 Conclusions

8.1 Allied Ecology has undertaken an Ecological Appraisal in respect of the proposed development at Land off High Street, Great Paxton, St. Neots. This report sets out the results of the baseline ecological survey work and desktop study, carried out in order to establish the likely effects of the proposals in respect of the features of interest identified and, where necessary, any requirements for further Phase 2 survey work, in line with relevant best practice guidance.

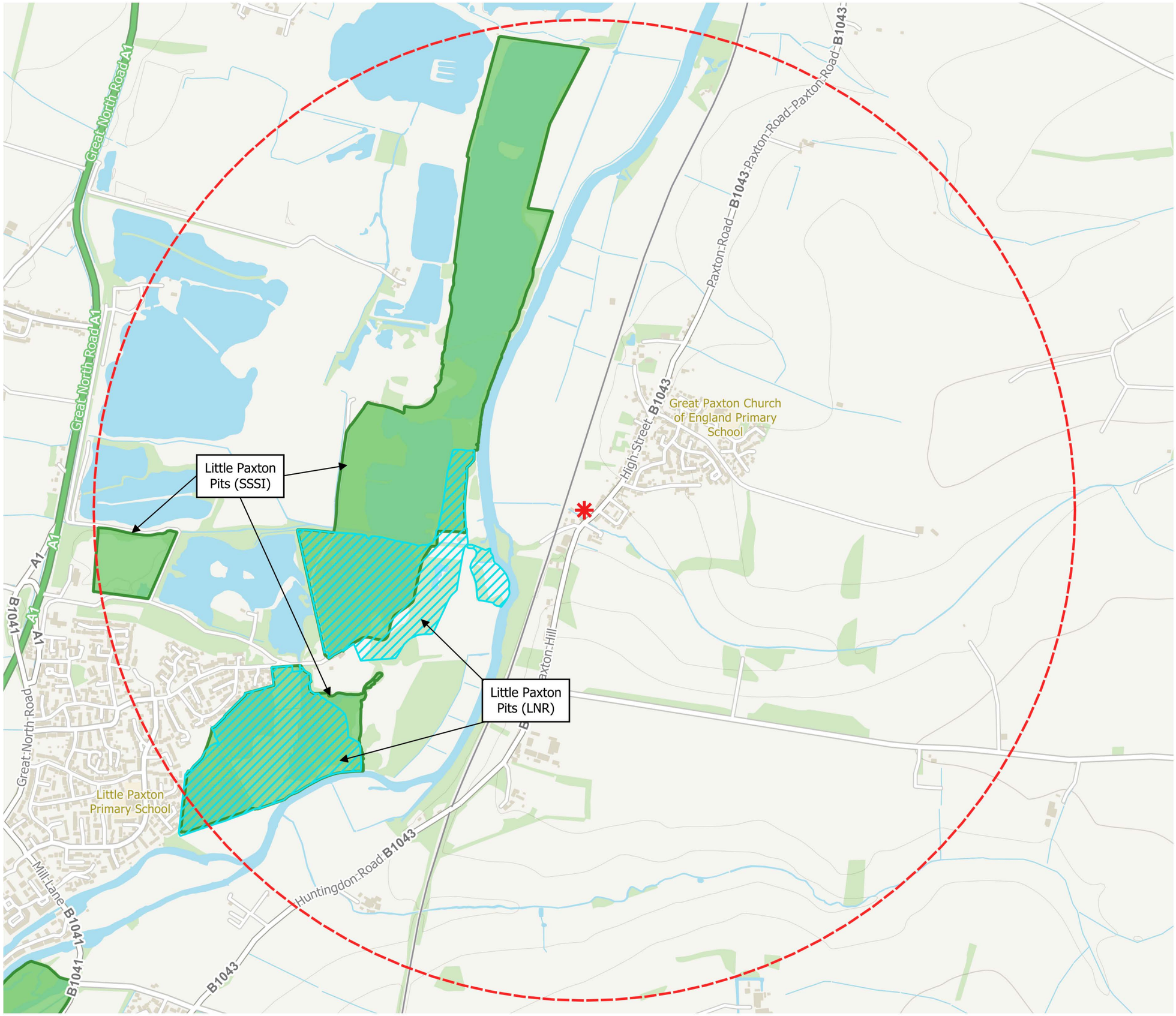
8.2 Information returned from the desktop study confirms that no statutory designations are present within or immediately adjacent to the site, with all designations sufficiently separated from the site such that no material adverse impacts are predicted.

8.3 Survey work undertaken has established that the boundary hedgerow represents an important ecological feature, whilst the other on-site habitats are of negligible ecological importance. Habitats within the site provide limited potential to support protected species, and proportionate recommendations for mitigation and / or compensation measures are provided in respect of habitats and faunal species, in order to ensure that these features of interest remain fully safeguarded under the proposals.

8.4 To summarise, subject to the recommended mitigation and safeguarding measures, it is considered that no significant harm to any habitats or faunal species of interest will occur as a result of the proposed development. On the contrary, there are a number of opportunities to improve the site for biodiversity, through implementation of the recommended enhancement measures.

Plan 25399-AE1

Site Location and Ecological Designations



Key:

- Site location
- 2km buffer to site location

Statutory Designations

- Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Land off High Street, Great Paxton, St. Neots, PE19 6TU

Statutory Ecological Designations

25399-AE1

February 2025

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Plan 25399-AE2

Habitats and Features of Interest



Key:

Site boundary

Habitats

Native hedgerow

Vacant/derelict land

Buildings

Hardstanding

Pond (off-site)

Land off High Street, Great Paxton,
St. Neots, PE19 6TU

Habitats and Features of Interest

25399-AE2

February 2025

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Appendix 25399-AE1

Photographs



Photo 1. Timber shed.



Photo 2. Vacant or derelict land.



Photo 3. Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface comprising of a gravel track.



Photo 4. Native hedgerow.

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