PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Planning Support Statement

Site	Halefields, Colne Road, Somersham, PE28 3DQ
Proposal	Construction of one detached dwelling to the rear of Halefields, with access via the existing vehicle access and new drive connection.
Document status	Planning application supporting document

Important scope note: This statement draws on available ecological information for the surrounding area, including a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal undertaken on nearby land. It is not presented as a site-specific ecological survey of the rear of Halefields.

Prepared for planning purposes

1. Introduction

This statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the construction of a single detached dwelling at the rear of Halefields, Colne Road, Somersham.

The proposal includes a new dwelling, associated parking and access arrangements, a cycle and bin store, a new hedge and indicative landscaping. The existing vehicle access is to remain, with the proposed drive connecting to the existing access arrangement. The submitted plan also identifies an existing water culvert/drain pipe between the footpath and the site.

This assessment uses available ecological information for the surrounding area, including the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal undertaken on nearby land adjacent to 26 Colne Road in December 2023.

It should be noted that the neighbouring appraisal was not a survey of the rear of Halefields. Accordingly, this statement does not claim that protected species or habitats identified in that report are present within the application site.

2. Ecological Context

The surrounding area comprises residential properties and gardens together with agricultural land, grassland, hedgerows, drainage features and scattered trees.

The neighbouring ecological assessment identified improved grassland, hedgerows, scattered trees, scrub and a drainage ditch and considered some of these habitats capable of providing opportunities for wildlife movement, foraging and nesting.

A local ecological records search undertaken for the neighbouring site identified records of bats, amphibians, reptiles, hedgehogs and badgers within the wider area. These records demonstrate the ecological value of the surrounding locality but do not establish the presence of these species within the application site.

3. Potential Protected Species

Bats

The neighbouring appraisal identified bat activity within the wider area. It found no potential bat roosting features in the building inspected on that site, although surrounding vegetation and linear features were considered capable of providing foraging and commuting habitat.

The proposed development should therefore avoid unnecessary removal of mature vegetation and should use wildlife-sensitive external lighting. Lighting should be directed towards the dwelling and access areas and away from hedges, trees and other potential wildlife routes.

Birds

Existing vegetation around the site may provide opportunities for nesting birds. Where vegetation removal is required, this should preferably be undertaken outside the main nesting period.

If clearance is necessary during the nesting season, vegetation should be checked beforehand by a suitably qualified person. Any active nests should be retained and protected until the young have fledged.

Hedgehogs and Small Mammals

The surrounding habitat has potential to support hedgehogs and other small mammals.

Construction trenches and other excavations should not be left accessible to wildlife overnight. Where practicable, small openings beneath garden fencing should be retained to allow hedgehogs and other small mammals to move between adjoining gardens.

Amphibians and Reptiles

The wider area contains drainage features and ponds and has records of amphibians and reptiles, including great crested newt, common lizard and grass snake.

The neighbouring appraisal identified potential terrestrial habitat for amphibians and reptiles and recommended appropriate precautions during development. Construction should therefore proceed carefully where vegetation, grassland or other potential refuge areas are disturbed.

Badgers

No badger setts were identified on or immediately adjacent to the land surveyed in the neighbouring appraisal.

As a precaution, the application site should be visually checked before construction begins for any evidence of badger activity or newly established setts.

4. Proposed Ecological Mitigation

1. Retain existing mature trees, hedges and other established vegetation wherever practicable.
2. Keep vegetation clearance to the minimum necessary to construct the dwelling, access and associated works.
3. Undertake clearance outside the main bird nesting period where possible.
4. Check vegetation for active bird nests before any clearance undertaken during the nesting season.
5. Avoid unnecessary external lighting of hedges, trees and other potential wildlife corridors.
6. Prevent wildlife becoming trapped in open trenches or excavations.
7. Retain suitable small gaps beneath garden boundaries where practicable to maintain movement routes for hedgehogs and other small mammals.
8. Check the site for evidence of badgers before construction commences.
9. Protect the existing drainage/culvert arrangements during construction.

5. Landscaping and Biodiversity Enhancement

The submitted proposal includes a new hedge and indicative landscaping. Where possible, landscaping should incorporate native or wildlife-friendly planting.

- Native flowering shrubs and plants.
- Areas of longer grass or wildflower planting.
- Bird boxes.
- A bat box where suitably located.
- Hedgehog-friendly garden boundaries.
- Retention and enhancement of existing boundary vegetation.

These measures would help provide additional habitat and maintain ecological connectivity through the development.

6. Biodiversity Net Gain

The proposal should comply with any Biodiversity Net Gain requirements applicable to the planning application. The neighbouring ecological appraisal identified the need for biodiversity net gain to be considered using the applicable DEFRA biodiversity metric.

The proposed new hedge and landscaping provide opportunities for ecological enhancement within the site.

7. Conclusion

The proposal is for a single detached dwelling at the rear of Halefields, using the existing vehicle access and a new drive connection. The submitted plans also include a new hedge, landscaping and a cycle/bin store.

The available ecological information indicates that the wider area supports a range of wildlife, including bats, birds, amphibians, reptiles, hedgehogs and badgers. However, the available neighbouring survey does not establish that these species are present on the application site.

Subject to the precautionary measures and ecological enhancements set out above, the proposed development can be undertaken with appropriate consideration for local wildlife.