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Report for: [redacted]

Commissioned by: [redacted]

Ecological Impact Assessment



Location of proposed new building

Wood Farm, Vicarage Rd, Waresley, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 3DA

Report No: 3281

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SUMMARY

On the instructions of [redacted], MS Ecology carried out an Ecological Impact Assessment for the Wood Farm, Vicarage Rd, Waresley, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 3DA.

Proposals include for the self-build of a garden room building.

The desk study showed that legally protected areas of ecological importance would not be negatively impacted by the proposed development.

Overall, the study site provides nature conservation value in a local (parish) context, containing ecological features such as boundary hedgerow. The mown lawn offered few opportunities.

The site provides negligible potential for roosting bats, badgers and reptiles due to a lack of suitable habitat on site. Should any of these species be found on site, then all works must stop and an ecologist consulted.

There is no suitable habitat for GCN on site, however, the site falls into an amber risk zone and there are two waterbodies within 250m of the site, therefore, it is recommended that an unlicenced method statement be followed to provide a precautionary approach to the works regarding herpetofauna.

No suitable habitat for nesting birds will be impacted by the development.

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The Client:	[redacted]

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Prepared by	[redacted] BSc (Hon's) PhD MCIEEM CEnv Ecologist	[redacted]
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Species identified during this survey, including the date, the location, as well as a brief description of the circumstances of their identification, may be passed on to Biological Records Centre's, local wildlife groups, the Wildlife Trust, Natural England and any other interested parties unless written instructions not to do so are received within 30 days of receipt of this report.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INSTRUCTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

On the instructions of [redacted] MS Ecology carried out an Ecological Impact Assessment for the Wood Farm, Vicarage Rd, Waresley, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 3DA.

Proposals include for the self-build of a garden room building.

The desk study, field survey (carried out on 06/12/2024) and evaluation are intended to provide information on the general habitat characteristics of the site and its surroundings including the likely presence of legally protected species and habitats encountered within the study area.

2 METHOD

2.1 DESK STUDY

A desk study was carried out to identify the presence of any statutory or non-statutory sites within 2,000m of the centre of the study area together with records of any known legally protected, rare, or notable species.

Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) was consulted to find records of Natural England Protected Species (NEPS) and statutory sites within the search area.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre (CPERC) were asked to provide records of legally protected species, Biodiversity Action Plan species and locally rare and notable species within the search area. Details of any designated sites of importance for nature conservation (both statutory and non-statutory) within the search area were also requested.

The GCN Impact Risk Zone Map for Cambridgeshire (Natural England) was checked to see what zone the proposed development site falls within.

2.2 FIELD SURVEY

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the study area was undertaken, broadly following the 'Extended Phase 1' methodology as set out in Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment (Institute of Environmental Assessment 1995) amended where necessary to meet the revisions contained in the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (GPEA) (CIEEM 2017). The PEA provides information on the habitats in the study area and assesses the potential for notable fauna to occur in or adjacent to the study area. Plant names follow New Flora of the British Isles (4th edition, Stace 2019) and the frequency of species presence is represented by the DAFOR scale, where D = Dominant, A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional and R = Rare.

Preliminary investigations were undertaken where appropriate, to assess whether the site is supporting, or capable of supporting legally protected species by:

- Searching for suitable habitats for breeding populations of great crested newts within 500m of the study area.
- Searching for suitable habitat for reptiles by searching under suitable refugia and paying particular attention to potential basking sites.
- Searching for evidence of water vole activity such as the presence of burrows, feeding stations, faeces and latrines along the drainage ditches and streams and ponds where present within the study area.
- Searching for evidence of otter activity such as spraints, feeding remains, holts and laying up areas along the drainage ditches and streams where present within the study area, along with hedge banks, which can be used as holt sites by otter.
- Searching for suitable habitats for white-clawed crayfish in watercourses where present within and around the study area.
- Searching for signs of badger activity including setts, tracks, snuffle holes and latrines (both within the study area and within a zone of 30m around the study area).

- Searching for signs of potential roosting sites for bats, including urine stains, grease marks, droppings and feeding remains, in structures and mature trees with rot holes, peeling bark, split limbs and suitable cracks and crevices where present within the study area.
- Searching for suitable habitats for dormice and undertaking a 'nut search' where appropriate.
- Searching for signs of bird nests and identifying suitable nesting habitats. No bird surveys have been undertaken but all birds observed during study area visits have been noted.

In addition, the presence of any invasive species listed in Schedule 9 Part II of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (such as Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed) was recorded.

2.2.1 Evaluation and Significance of Impact

Ecological features are evaluated for their nature conservation value using the following criteria:

- International importance: Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar sites.
- National importance: Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves.
- Regional/County importance: Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, ancient woodlands, large area of priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitat.
- Local (parish) importance: Significant ecological features such as old hedges, woodlands, ponds.
- Negligible importance: Would usually be applied to areas of built development, active mineral extraction, or intensive agricultural land.

The significance of an adverse/beneficial impact is the product of the magnitude of the impact and the value or sensitivity of the nature conservation resources affected. There is no agreed absolute method for assessing the significance of adverse/beneficial impacts on nature conservation receptors/features. Nevertheless, high levels of significance will generally be ascribed to large impacts on receptors/features of high nature conservation value. Low levels of significance will generally be ascribed to small impacts on receptors/features of high nature conservation value or large impacts on receptors/features of low nature conservation value.

The assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed development needs to consider both on-site impacts as well as those which may occur to adjacent areas of ecological value. Impacts can be permanent or temporary, direct, or indirect and can include:

Adverse

- Direct loss of wildlife habitats.
- Fragmentation and isolation of habitats.
- Disturbance to species from noise, light or other visual stimuli.

Beneficial

- Ecological enhancement
    - Habitat management
    - Habitat enhancement

2.3 LIMITATIONS

Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the presence of plants and animals such as the time of year, migration patterns and behaviour and the ecological survey of this site has not produced a complete list of plants and animals. Nevertheless, the results of the ecological survey allow evaluation of nature conservation value, assessment of the significance of potential impacts that may arise from the proposals and consideration of appropriate mitigation measures.

3 RESULTS

3.1 SITE LOCATION AND SETTINGS

The site is centred on OS NGR TL 25324 54284, post code SG19 3DA, in Sandy, Bedfordshire.

The site is surrounded by low density residential housing and agricultural land.

A large garden pond is found ~175m to the northeast with a second large garden pond found ~175m to the northwest. A collection of smaller waterbodies are found ~400m to the northeast, associated with infrastructure and a small woodland pond is found ~380m to the southwest.

Several large areas of woodland are found nearby, including Waresley and Gransden Woods (priority and ancient woodland) ~ 600m to the east. A small brook runs through this and is located at ~900m to the northeast at its closest point.

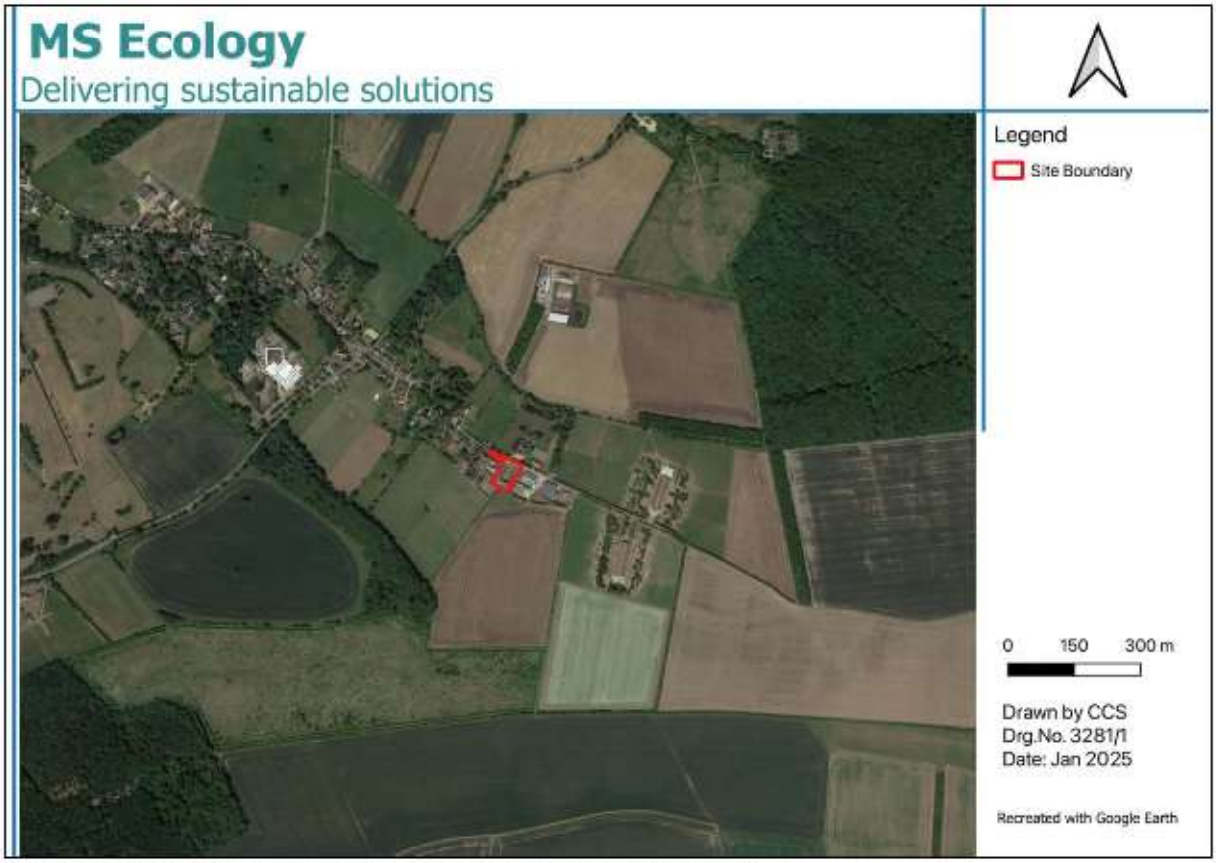


Figure 3-1 Proposed development area with red boundary.

3.2 DESK STUDY

3.2.1 MAGIC

Interrogation of the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) showed that Gamlingay Wood SSSI is located ~911m southwest, Waresley Wood SSSI is located ~588m north-east & Weaveley and Sand Woods SSSI is located ~2km west. The site also falls into the SSSI Impact Risk Zone for Hayley Wood SSSI ~3.5km east, Buff Wood SSSI ~4.4km southeast & Potton Wood SSSI ~3.5km south.

No Natural England Protected Species licences (NEPS) were returned within the search area.

Waresley Wood SSSI and Gamlingay Wood SSSI both consist of Ancient and Deciduous Woodland, with further areas of Deciduous Woodland found throughout the search area. The closest point is located ~170m southwest.

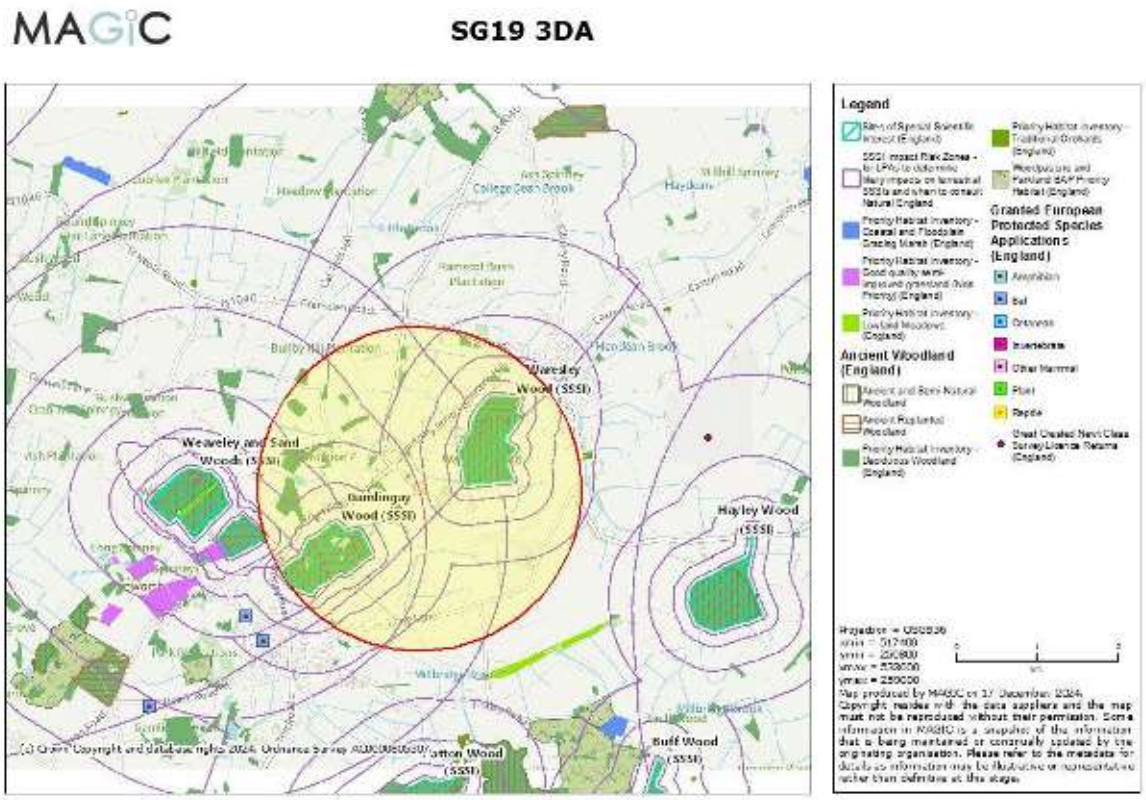


Figure 3-2 MAGIC Map

3.2.2 GCN Risk Zone

The site falls into an amber zone on the Impact Risk Zones map for Cambridgeshire, under Natural England. These zones contain main population centres for GCN and important connecting habitat. Developers can use district level licensing in these zones.

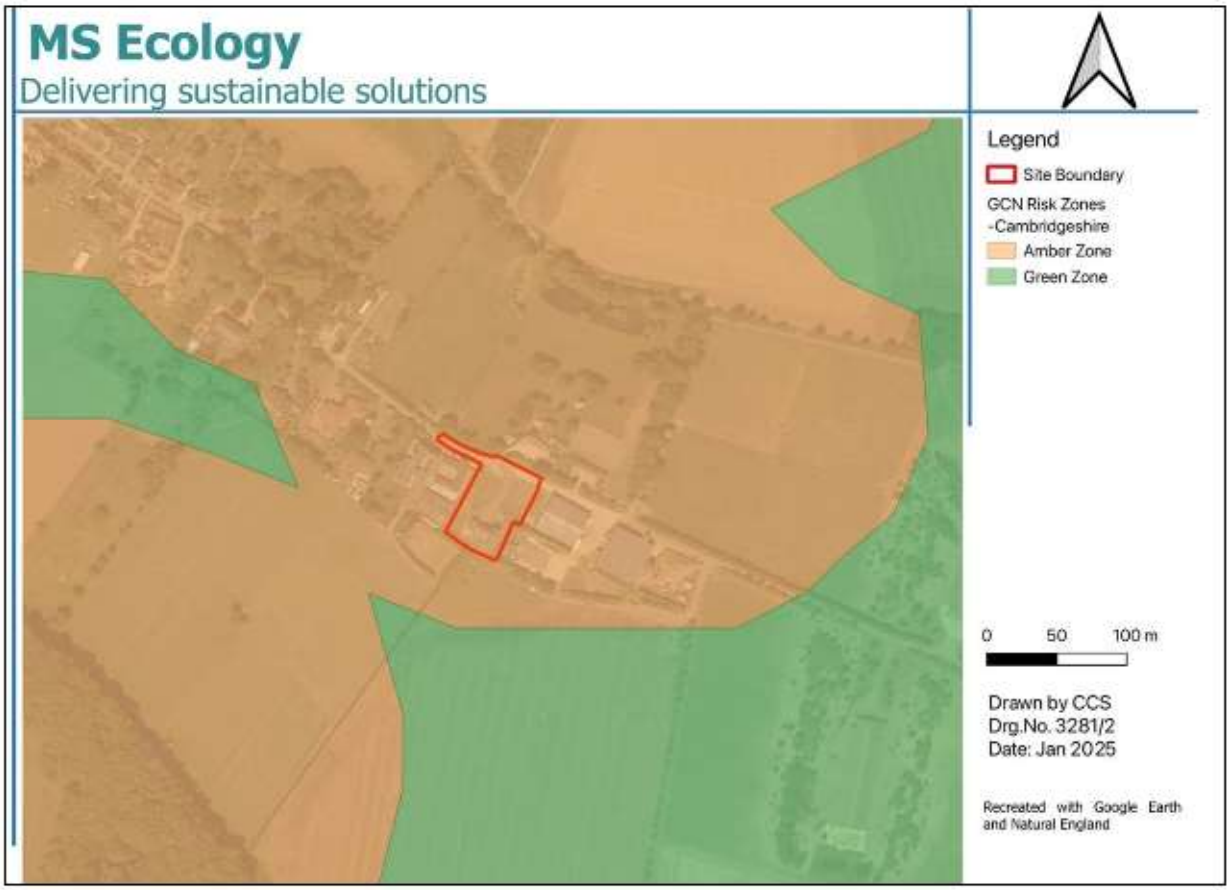


Figure 3-3 Site within an amber risk zone for GCN

3.2.3 BIOLOGICAL RECORDS

There are two non-statutory sites within the search area, none of which fall within or adjacent to the boundaries of the proposed development site, these are:

Table 3.1 Non-Statutory Sites falling within the 2,000m search area

Type	Name
County Wildlife Site	Gamlingay (East) RSV
Protected Road Verges	Gamlingay Long Road

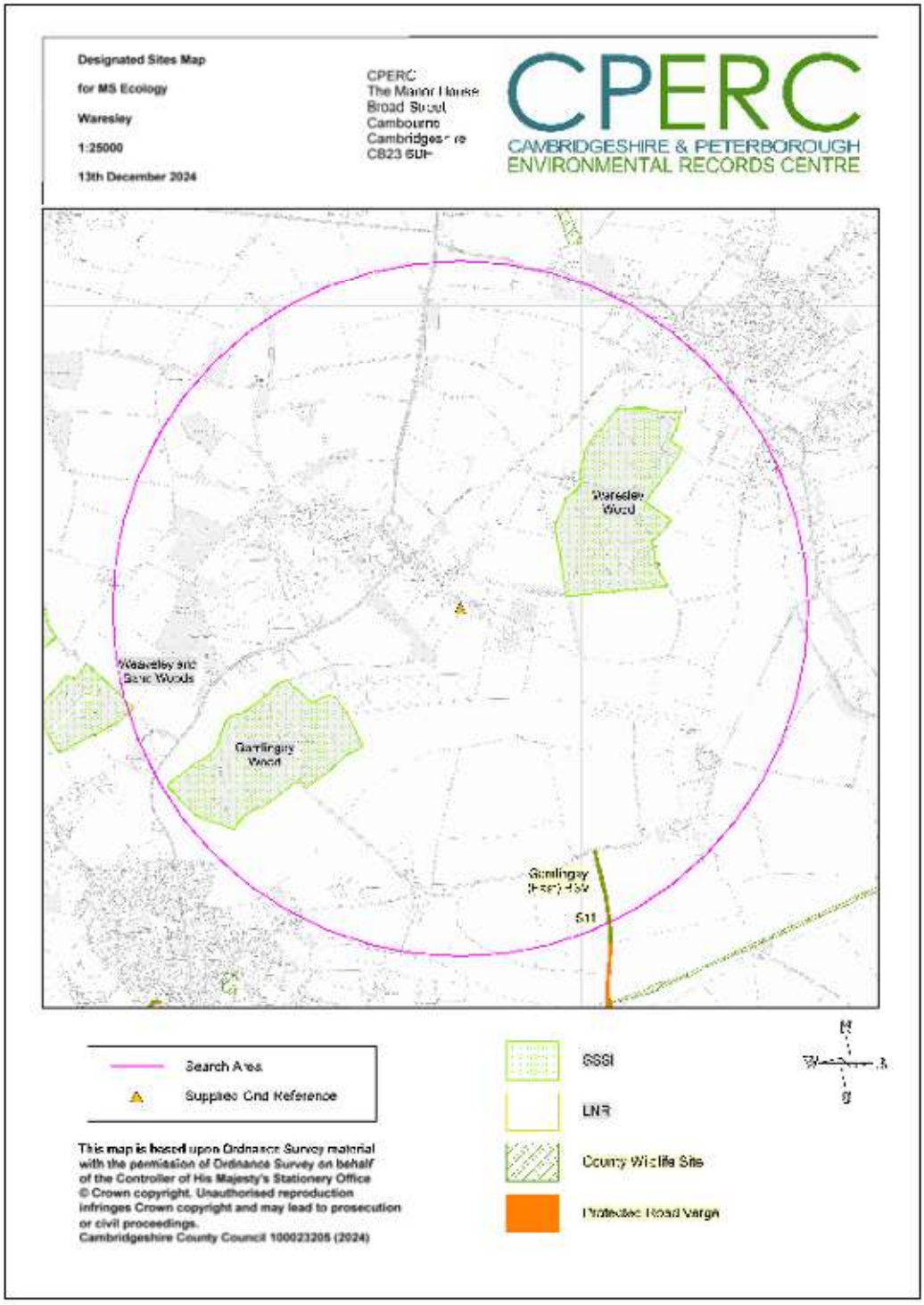


Figure 3-4 Non-Statutory Sites

Protected species records were returned from CPERC.

Of these there were no records for amphibians dated beyond 2009. These included common frog, common toad and a single great crested newt record from 2007, located ~1.7km to the southeast.

For reptiles, only records for grass snake were returned, with the most recent dated 2017 and the closest located ~750m to the northwest.

Several records for badgers were returned, with the most recent dated 2017. None of the more recent records were located within 500m of the site.

Bat records include common and soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared bat, noctule, myotis bat species and Western Barbastelle. The most recent records are dated 2021 and the majority were recorded within Gamlingay Wood SSSI.

3.3 SURVEY - PEA

3.3.1 SITE DESCRIPTION

The site consists of a two-storey residential house (B1) with driveway, patio to the rear and an associated residential garden. The proposals will only impact a small area of the garden within the southwest corner. Therefore, the residential house (B1) will be unimpacted by the development.

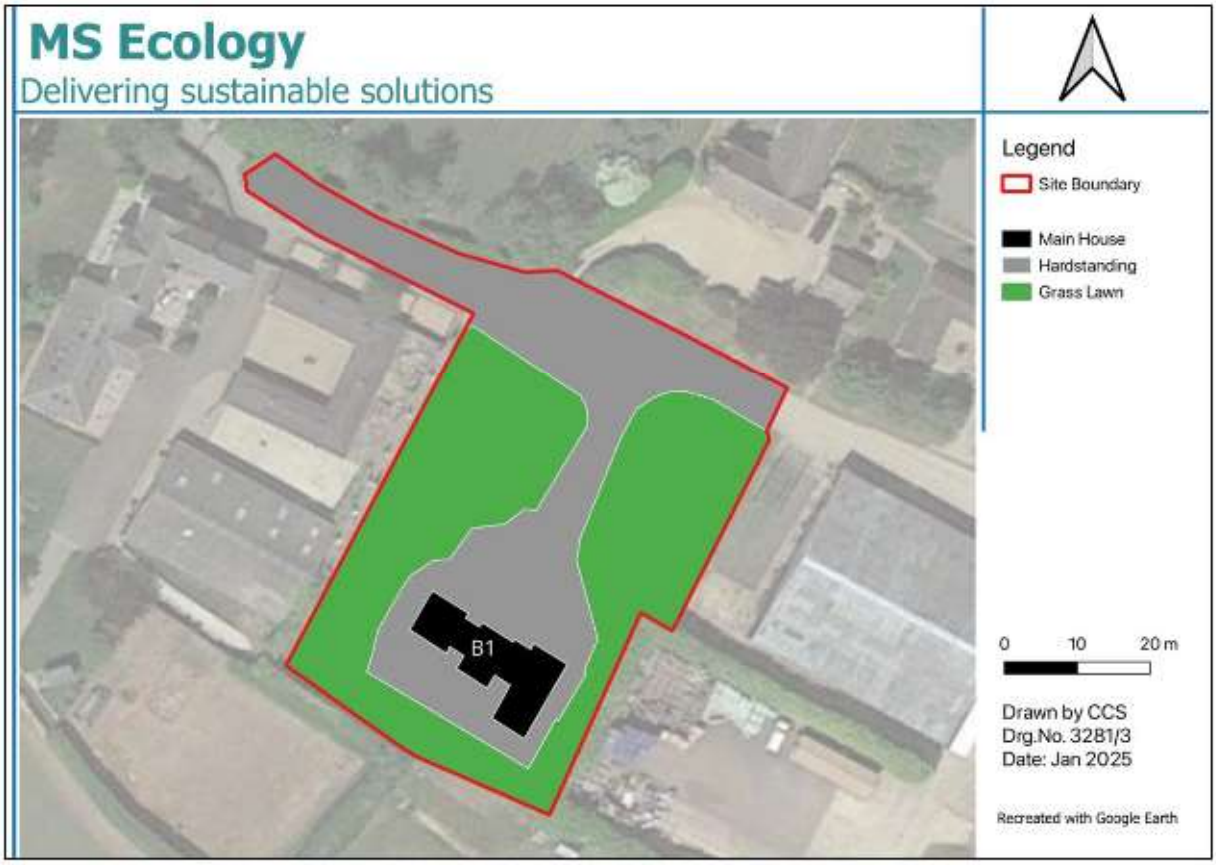


Figure 3-5 Site Plan

3.3.2 HABITATS

3.3.2.1 VEGETATED GARDEN

The proposed development will be located along the boundary wall in the southwest corner of the garden and will cover an existing narrow border and short mown garden lawn which is dominated by perennial rye grass and white clover with occasional stinging nettle, dandelion, bristly oxtongue, daisy and sow thistle.

No other habitat will be impacted by the proposals.



Figure 3-6 Lawn dominated by white clover



Figure 3-7 Brick wall along the western boundary

3.3.2.2 ADJACENT HABITAT (OFF-SITE)

The western boundary of the garden has a substantial brick wall separating the proposed development site from the neighbouring property and will provide the backdrop to the proposed building. The red line boundary along the southern perimeter stops at the edge of the lawn beyond which, for half its length is a low wall topped by a close board wooden fence, with a leylandii hedge behind.

Continuing eastward the rear garden boundary is open, beyond which is a narrow ditch and open fields.

The ditch, at the time of the survey, was grassed and dry and the adjacent open grassland had a short sward height.



Figure 3-8 Dry ditch and adjacent grassland

3.3.3 Evidence of Protected Species

3.3.3.1 Mammals

Surface excavations in the lawn indicated some small mammal activity.

3.3.3.2 Birds

No active or disused nests were found on site.

3.3.3.3 Herpetofauna

No evidence of herpetofauna were found during the survey.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 HABITATS

4.1.1 BAP PRIORITY HABITATS AND LEGALLY PROTECTED SITES OF CONSERVATION VALUE

The proposed development site contains no priority habitat. There will be no impact on any designated sites of conservation value resulting from the proposed development.

4.2 PROTECTED SPECIES

4.2.1 MAMMALS

The brick wall along the western boundary is in good condition providing no cracks or crevices that roosting bats could utilise. The small surface excavations in the lawn indicate the presence of terrestrial mammal and there is suitable access to the garden via the open rear boundary, however, there is little opportunity for badgers to sett build within the garden.

4.2.2 BIRDS

No suitable habitat for nesting birds will be impacted by the development, however, the adjacent hedgerows could support nesting birds.

4.2.3 HERPETOFAUNA

There is suitable habitat for this group in the surrounding area, with hedgerow and the off-site ditch providing some potential commuting routes, however, the habitat on site consists of short mown garden lawn which is largely unsuitable for this group.

The ditch is located ~20m from the proposed location of the building and will not be impacted by the development. There are two waterbodies located ~170m away, with no significant barriers between them and the site.

5 CONCLUSION

The desk study showed that legally protected areas of ecological importance would not be negatively impacted by the proposed development.

Overall, the study site provides nature conservation value in a local (parish) context, containing ecological features such as boundary hedgerow. The mown lawn offered few opportunities.

The site provides negligible potential for roosting bats, badgers and reptiles due to a lack of suitable habitat on site.

There is no suitable habitat for GCN on site, however, the site falls into an amber risk zone and there are two waterbodies within 250m of the site.

No suitable habitat for nesting birds will be impacted by the development, however, there is low potential for nesting birds to be present within adjacent hedgerow habitat.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 MITIGATION

6.1.1 BIRDS

Damaging or destroying the nest of any wild bird (whilst being built or in use) is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Therefore, as a precaution to avoid disturbance of any nearby nests, works should be undertaken outside the breeding season. The bird breeding season can be taken to run between the 1 February and 31 August (in practice, it is usually March to July and is subject to geographical and seasonal factors).

6.1.2 GCN

There is no suitable habitat for GCN on site, however, as the site falls into an amber risk zone, there are two waterbodies within 250m of the site and there is some suitable habitat in the surrounds of the site, it is recommended that an unlicenced method statement be followed to provide a precautionary approach to the works regarding herpetofauna. Should any GCN be found during works, then all works must stop and an ecologist consulted.

6.1.3 GENERAL

The habitats on site should continue to be managed as they currently are until development begins.

Should any protected species be unexpectedly found on site during works, all works must stop and an ecologist consulted.

Any excavations that need to be left overnight should be covered or fitted with mammal ramps to ensure that any animals that enter can safely escape. Any open pipework with an outside diameter of greater than 120 mm must be covered at the end of each workday to prevent animals entering/becoming trapped.

6.1.4 LIGHTING

Any lighting on site should be in accordance with the BCT lighting guidelines (Guidance Note 8 Bats and Artificial Lighting (Bat Conservation Trust, 2023)) to ensure that any commuting routes or foraging areas are unimpacted.

6.2 ENHANCEMENTS

6.2.1 BATS

It is recommended that an integrated bat box be installed within the new building. Ideally, this should face north or south and be no less than 3m above ground level. This requires no maintenance and can be faced in any material for aesthetic purposes.

If the building does not allow for an integrated bat box, then an external box can be attached instead. This should be hung on the building or suitable trees within the grounds, face south/southwest, be no less than 3m above ground level and be placed away from any neighbouring ledge to avoid opportunities for predators to access the box.

Integrated bat boxes do not require any maintenance. External boxes should be checked annually for damage in the winter by observation from a distance. If the boxes are damaged and require replacement, an ecologist must be present.



Example of built in bat box (Bird Brick Houses)

6.2.2 Breeding Birds

Bird boxes could be installed within the garden. It is recommended that a combination of open fronted and songbird boxes be used to provide nesting opportunities for common garden birds. One of each box type can be installed, these should be placed between 2-4m above ground level and face between the north and east (or in a shaded & sheltered area) to avoid strong sunlight and prevailing winds/rain. The front of the nest box should be angled vertically or slightly downwards to prevent rain from entering the nest box.
There should be a clear flight path to and from the box and it should be located away from any neighbouring ledge to avoid opportunities for predators to access the box.

Check the boxes annually, outside of the breeding season (March-August) for any damage and remove nest debris.

6.2.3 Small Mammals & Herpetofauna

As the boundaries to the development site are largely open there is no additional benefit gained by providing 'Hedgehog highways' as small mammals such as hedgehogs and herpetofauna species have access between the garden and green spaces in the area.

7 LEGISLATION

7.1 ANIMALS (EXCEPT BADGERS)

Wild animals listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and/or Schedules 2 and 4 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended)

	Sections of the Act applicable
Bats and GCN	9 (1), (2) (4 a & b) of the WCA and Regulation 39 (1 a-c) of the Habitats Regulation

Species listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) are afforded protection subject to the provisions of Section 9. A person will be guilty of an offence if they:

1. intentionally kill, injurer or take any wild animal included in Schedule 5,
2. have in their possession or control any live or dead wild animal included in Schedule 5 or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal,
3.
4. intentionally or recklessly—
    a. damage or destroy any structure or place which any wild animal specified in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection.
    b. disturb any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; or
    c. obstruct access to any structure or place which any such animal uses for shelter or protection.
5. Subject to the provisions of this Part,
    a. sell, offer, or expose for sale, or have in his possession or transports for the purpose of sale, any live or dead wild animal included in Schedule 5, or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal; or
    b. publish or cause to be published any advertisement likely to be understood as conveying that they buy or sell, or intends to buy or sell, any of those things,
6. In any proceedings for an offence under subsection (1), (2) or (5)(a) relating to an act which is mentioned in subsection (1), (2) or (5)(a), the animal in question shall be presumed to have been a wild animal unless the contrary is shown.

Species listed on Annex II and Annex IV of The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (the Habitats Regulations) which transpose into UK law Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21st May 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (often referred to as the 'Habitats [and Species] Directive.') are afforded further protection. The former Annex relates to the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for some species.

Inclusion on Annex IV ('European protected species') means that member states are required to put in place a system of strict protection as outlined in Article 12, and this is done through inclusion on Schedule 2 of the Regulations. Regulation 39 makes it an offence to:

Deliberately capture or kill an animal listed on Schedule 2 [Regulation 39(1)(a)]

Deliberately disturb an animal listed on Schedule 2[Regulation 39(1)(b)]

Deliberately take or destroy the eggs of an animal listed on Schedule 2 [Regulation 39(1)(c)]

Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of an animal listed on Schedule 2 [Regulation 39(1)(d)]

Where applicable legislation applies to all life stages of a species.

7.2 BADGERS

Species	Sections of the Act applicable
Badgers & their Setts	All

Badgers were initially protected by inclusion on Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The protection has subsequently been strengthened by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The purpose of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 is to protect badgers from the incidental effects of lawful activities and deliberate attempts to inflict injury or kill badgers.

Under the Protection of Badger Act 1992:

1. A person is guilty of an offence if, except as permitted by or under this Act, he willfully kills, injures, or takes, or attempts to kill, injure, or take, a badger.
2. If, in any proceedings for an offence under subsection (1) above consisting of attempting to kill, injure or take a badger, there is evidence from which it could reasonably be concluded that at the material time the accused was attempting to kill, injure or take a badger, he shall be presumed to have been attempting to kill, injure or take a badger unless the contrary is shown.
3. A person is guilty of an offence if, except as permitted by or under this Act, he has in his possession or under his control any dead badger or any part of, or anything derived from, a dead badger.
4. A person is not guilty of an offence under subsection (3) above if he shows that—

a. the badger had not been killed, or had been killed otherwise than in contravention of the provisions of this Act or of the Badgers Act 1973; or

b. the badger or other thing in his possession or control had been sold (whether to him or any other person) and, at the time of the purchase, the purchaser had had no reason to believe that the badger had been killed in contravention of any of those provisions.

c. If a person is found committing an offence under this section on any land it shall be lawful for the owner or occupier of the land, or any servant of the owner or occupier, or any constable, to require that person forthwith to quit the land and also to give his name and address; and if that person on being so required willfully remains on the land or refuses to give his full name or address he is guilty of an offence.

Cruelty.

1. A person is guilty of an offence if—

a. he cruelly ill-treats a badger.

b. he uses any badger tongs in the course of killing or taking, or attempting to kill or take, a badger.

c. except as permitted by or under this Act, he digs for a badger; or

d. he uses for the purpose of killing or taking a badger any firearm other than a smooth bore weapon of not less than 20 bore or a rifle using ammunition having a muzzle energy not less than 160 foot-pounds and a bullet weighing not less than 38 grains.

2.2 If in any proceedings for an offence under subsection (1)(c) above there is evidence from which it could reasonably be concluded that at the material time the accused was digging for a badger he shall be presumed to have been digging for a badger unless the contrary is shown.

Interfering with badger setts.

3 A person is guilty of an offence if, except as permitted by or under this Act, he interferes with a badger sett by doing any of the following things—

(a)damaging a badger sett or any part of it.

(b)destroying a badger sett.

(c)obstructing access to, or any entrance of, a badger sett.

(d)causing a dog to enter a badger sett; or

(e)disturbing a badger when it is occupying a badger sett,

intending to do any of those things or being reckless as to whether his actions would have any of those consequences.

Selling and possession of live badgers.

4. A person is guilty of an offence if, except as permitted by or under this Act, he sells a live badger or offers one for sale or has a live badger in his possession or under his control.

Marking and ringing.

5. A person is guilty of an offence if, except as authorized by a license under section 10 below, he marks, or attaches any ring, tag, or other marking device to, a badger other than one which is lawfully in his possession by virtue of such a license.

7.3 BIRDS

Species
All species of wild birds

All wild birds, with certain exceptions, are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

It is an offence for any person to:

Intentionally kill, injure, or take any wild bird.

Intentionally take damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird whilst it is in use or being built.

Intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

Intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bird listed on Schedule 1 while it is nest building, or at a nest containing eggs or young, or disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

The penalty for each offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act - in respect of a single bird, nest, or egg - is a fine of up to £5,000, and/or six months' imprisonment.

Bird species listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 are further protected from intentional or reckless disturbance whilst nest building or at (or near) a nest with eggs or young; or disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

To avoid disturbance, recommend that no work should be undertaken within 'line of sight' of the nest. Note Certain activities e.g., pile driving, pneumatic drilling and borehole drilling will require a wider buffer zone.