

Hopkins Ecology

**Site: Land off Station Road, Pulham
St Mary**

**Work Ecology Assessment
Item:**

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SUMMARY

Hopkins Ecology Ltd was appointed by Brown & Co to prepare an ecology assessment for Land off Station Road, Pulham St Mary. A small residential scheme is proposed.

The Site is roughly rectangular and ~0.75ha in area, located with residential housing and gardens to the north and west and farmland to the east and south. There are no designated sites within 2km (neither statutory nor County Wildlife Sites).

The application Site is an improved grass pasture (grazed by sheep, probably). The sward is short and 'open' in character, dominated by agricultural grasses, such as rye grass, cock's foot and various meadow grasses; herbs are generally infrequent in the main sward.

On parts of the periphery there are patches of ruderal weeds and taller grass and herb vegetation.

On the south and east boundaries are hedgerows. The east boundary hedgerow is very scrubby and post-dates 1946. The south hedgerow is visible on the 1946 aerial photograph and includes hornbeam as a component along with other woody vegetation; there is a dry ditch on the side of the application Site. Both hedgerows are considered to qualify as Habitat of Principal Importance but not as Important Hedgerows, although the south hedgerow is a higher quality example of an agricultural hedgerow (by virtue of the hornbeam and dry ditch) albeit species-poor.

The other boundaries are fence panels or wire fencing with scrub.

Many species of conservation concern are scoped-out on the basis of the lack of cover on the Site (e.g. for reptiles), or its small size and location (e.g. brown hares). Great crested newts are specifically scoped-out by virtue of the absence of ponds within 250m (notwithstanding the lack of on-Site habitat).

The species scoped-in are breeding birds, hedgehogs, and widespread invertebrates. The Site does not contain rare or particularly specialist resources / habitats and individuals of these species are likely to be present as parts of larger local populations.

The Site is not particularly close to a green infrastructure corridor nor an area proposed as a corridor for pollinating insects, but Site-level measures for biodiversity would be relevant for the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Claylands Living Landscape project.

The scheme includes some open greenspace and boundary planting and it is recommended that structural soft landscaping uses species typical of hedgerows in South Norfolk, and also wildflower planting where possible. Other suitable and relevant measures include bird boxes for house sparrows and raised garden gates to allow hedgehogs to travel through the completed scheme.

A small stream runs ~45m to the south, and although there is no surface water connection from the Site the construction works will need to consider and undertake appropriate methods to avoid run-off from entering the stream. Scrub clearance should be outside of the nesting bird season or otherwise under a watching brief.

1. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Hopkins Ecology Ltd was appointed by Brown & Co to prepare an ecology assessment of a parcel of Land off Station Road, Pulham St Mary. A small residential scheme is proposed on the application Site, which is ~0.75ha in area.

SITE CONTEXT

- 1.2 The Site is a roughly rectangular field with a short, improved sward. There is housing to the north and west and farmland to the south and east. The Site is located within the South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands Natural Character Area, which is typified as an agricultural landscape “*incised by numerous small-scale wooded river valleys with complex slopes*”¹. The application Site is ~45m north of a small tributary of the River Waveney (with the confluence >5km downstream).

LEGISLATION AND PLANNING POLICY

- 1.3 The following key pieces of nature conservation legislation are relevant to legally protected species (with a more detailed description in Appendix 2):
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the Habitats Regulations); and
 - The Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended).
- 1.4 Also, the National Planning Policy Framework (DfCLG, 2012²) requires local authorities to avoid and minimise impacts on biodiversity and, where possible, to provide net gains in biodiversity when making planning decisions. A substantial number of species are of conservation concern in the UK. A small number of these species are fully protected under the legislation listed above, but others in England are recognised as Species of Principal Importance under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and reinforced by the National Planning Policy Framework. For these species local planning authorities are required to promote the “*protection and recovery*” via planning and development control. Examples include the widespread reptiles, house sparrows and noctule bats.
- 1.5 Although the NPPF has an overarching aim of minimise impacts to biodiversity, the majority of species of conservation concern are not specifically recognised by legislation or planning policy. The level of protection afforded to these is undefined and should be considered within the overall aim of minimising impacts on biodiversity.

¹ Natural England (2014) *NCA Profile 83: South Norfolk and high Suffolk Claylands*. Available from: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6625542723862528>

² DCLG (2010) *A National Planning Policy Framework for England*. Department for Communities and Local Government, London.

2. METHODS

PERSONNEL

- 2.1 This ecological assessment was prepared by Dr Graham Hopkins CEnv MCIEEM FRES, with quality assurance by Dr JI Thacker MCIEEM. Both are experienced ecologists with each having over fifteen years of consultancy experience. Graham holds full survey licences for great crested newts and bats.

FIELD SURVEY

- 2.2 The Site visit for the ecological assessment was on 2 June 2017. The description of habitats was based on the methods of JNCC (2010)³ and trees were surveyed from ground level for their potential suitability for roosting bats, looking for gaps, cracks and other voids⁴; searches were also made for signs of badgers.
- 2.3 The local presence of ponds (to a radius of 250m) was determined from OS maps and Google Earth.

DATA SEARCH

- 2.4 The desk study comprises a formal data search from the local records centre and review of relevant data and information from other sources (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of desk study data sources.

Source	Information
Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service	Designated sites, species of conservation concern; 2km search radius
MAGIC (www.magic.gov.uk)	Additional information on statutory sites, habitats of principal importance and wider countryside information
GNPP and South Norfolk DC policy documents	Information regarding local planning policies including a synthesis of related policies
Local planning applications, manual map-based searching of the South Norfolk DC website	Recent survey data for protected species locally, including negative data. In particular, as referred to above, extensive reference was made to the Land North of Hethersett scheme and the associated surveys in 2010
Various literature and web-based searches	Information on local projects and initiatives of potential relevance as well as some species-level data
Historic maps Norfolk (http://www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk/)	Aerial photographs from 1988 and 1946; OS maps from 1880s and earlier

GUIDANCE

- 2.5 The ecological assessment has been prepared with reference to best practice guidance published by the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and as detailed in British Standard 42020:2013 Biodiversity - Code of Practice for Biodiversity and Development.

³ JNCC (2010) *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Surveys*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

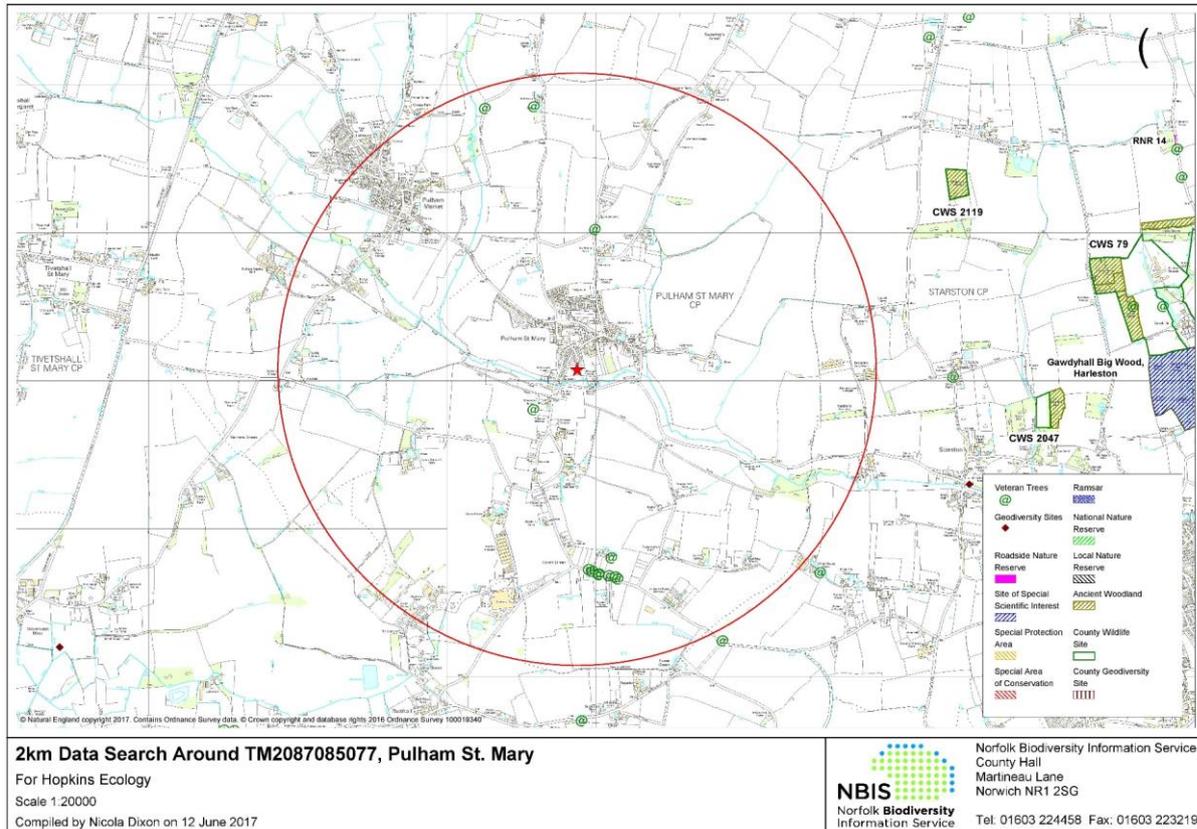
⁴ Collins, J. (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists*. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

3. DESIGNATED SITES

STATUTORY SITES

3.1 There are no statutory sites within 2km (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Designated sites locally.



NON-STATUTORY SITES

3.2 There are no non-statutory County Wildlife Sites within 2km.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

3.3 Green infrastructure is considered to be a key requirement for development in the Greater Norwich Area, with the policy requirements originating in the Joint Core Strategy⁵. The spatial vision for these corridors is informed by a Green Infrastructure Strategy (CBA, 2007⁶ 7) and associated studies (e.g. Green Networks, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, 2007⁸). Such policies are broadly in-line with other countryside restoration schemes, such as the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's 'Claylands Living Landscape' project⁹ within the South Norfolk area:

⁵ Greater Norwich Development Partnership (2014) *Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk*. Available from: <http://www.greaternorwichgrowth.org.uk/planning/joint-core-strategy/>

⁶ CBA (2007) *Greater Norwich Development Partnership. Green Infrastructure Strategy. A Proposed Vision for Connecting People, Places and Nature*. Available from: <http://www.greaternorwichgrowth.org.uk/dmsdocument/201>

⁷ <http://www.greaternorwichgrowth.org.uk/dmsdocument/1590>

⁸ Norfolk Wildlife Trust (2006) *Report of the Ecological Network Mapping Project for Norfolk*. Available from: http://www.norfolkdiversity.org/pdf/news/Final_report_of_indicative_map_July%202006.pdf

⁹ <https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/a-living-landscape/claylands>

“The Claylands Living Landscape project aims to enhance the management of the area’s wildlife habitats and expand its area of grassland and woodland – thereby creating a more joined-up ecological network – as well as to encourage the more sensitive management of farmland. To achieve this aim, (Norfolk Wildlife Trust) will be working closely with community groups and landowners in South Norfolk to raise wildlife awareness, as well as encouraging their active participation in conserving and enjoying the area’s historic natural environment.”

- 3.4 The nearest green infrastructure corridor is the South Norwich - East Diss Corridor, >5km to the west. This is also the route of the nearest B-Line.

4. SITE DESCRIPTION

OVERVIEW

- 4.1 The Site (Figure 2) comprises a single field bounded by housing and gardens on two sides. The housing to the west dates from the late 1980s / early 1990s and the housing to the north is from between the post-war period and the late 1980s. In the 1940s the application Site therefore comprised part of a much larger field.

Figure 2. Habitat plan.



HABITATS

Improved Grassland

- 4.2 The application Site is a small field, apparently grazed by livestock. At the time of survey none were present (nor droppings) but it is thought to be grazed by sheep based on the associated farm apparatus on-Site. Electric fences sub-divide the field and keep stock from the boundaries. The sward is short, with agricultural grasses and few herbs with a moderately high bare earth component (up to ~25% in some areas) and some bryophytes (up to ~20% in some areas):

- The main grasses through the majority of the sward are rye grass *Lolium* species and meadow grass both *Poa pratensis* and *Poa trivialis*, with the following at lower frequency: cock's foot *Dactylus glomerata*, false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, and smaller cat's tail *Phleum bertolonii*.
- Through much of the sward the most conspicuous herb is field bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis*. Other species present across the Site are black medick *Medicago lupulina*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg.
- The bryophyte component appeared to be solely *Calliergonella cuspidata*.

- Alongside the west boundary the sward is seemingly more disturbed and enriched, with a higher cover of rye and false oat grass and also patches of soft brome *Bromus hordaceus*. Also present along this boundary are some small stands of nettle *Urtica dioica* and the lower sward includes black medick *Medicago lupulina*, lanceolate plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, tufted vetch *Vicia cracca*, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius* and ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*.
- Along the entrance track to the Site the ground is moderately disturbed with a high frequency of low growing herbs along the main track and the taller ranker vegetation along the edges. Along the track lanceolate plantain, broad leaved plantain *Plantago major* and pineapple weed *Matricaria discoidea* are frequent, and the flora of the edges includes common, taller herbs of grassland and disturbed areas including: ox-eye daisy, bristly ox-tongue *Helminthotheca echioides*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, nettle, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, broad-leaved dock. Rank grasses are frequent, namely false oat grass and cock's foot, along with some scrub including bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg, honeysuckle *Lonicera* species probably *L. periclymenum*, and hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*. There is also a small patch of meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. There are short lengths of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* hedging.

Hedgerows

4.3 There are two hedgerows:

- South hedgerow. This is shown on the 1946 aerial photograph. There is a dry ditch running alongside on the side of the application Site and the hedgerow is apparently unmanaged, roughly 4-5m in height. The hedgerow is mainly hawthorn but at the western end elder *Sambucus nigra* have grown on the field side in front of the hawthorn. Other woody species comprise bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg, hazel *Corylus avellana*, field maple *Acer campestre*, apple *Malus domestica* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. Of note are a number of hornbeams *Carpinus betulus* that are probably derived from coppice stools but with only a few (2-3) stems from each stool; a number are flowering / in fruit; there are probably 6-10 individual specimens. The ground layer vegetation is apparently cut periodically and comprised mainly rank false oat grass with nettle, with the other plants noted being Alexanders *Smyrniolum olusatrum* and hogweed as ruderals and ivy *Hedera helix* as ground level.
- The east hedgerow is absent in the 1946 photograph. It comprises a dense band of scrub, mainly blackthorn and wild plum *Prunus* species with occasional small-leaved elm *Ulmus minor* and then to the rear (east) of this main band there is field maple, apple, and ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. The ground flora is again rank, mainly false oat grass with the herbs noted comprising cleavers *Galium aparine* and nettle.

4.4 The other two boundaries lack hedgerows:

- The north boundary is marked by a wire fence and post-dates 1946. The eastern end is dense bramble scrub with occasional saplings of ash, oak *Quercus robur*, wild plum *Prunus* species and dog rose *Rosa canina*. Towards the west the scrub is absent and the wire visible with a few young native and ornamental trees in neighbouring gardens, including oak, goat willow *Salix caprea*, and a tree of heaven *Ailanthus* species.
- The west boundary comprises fence panels with a few scattered saplings of ash and elder and a short length of hawthorn hedging. This boundary post-dates the late 1980s.

Trees

- 4.5 There are no trees on the Site and boundary trees are all young and narrow in stature.

OFF-SITE FEATURES

- 4.6 The Site is on the edge of the Pulham St Mary conurbation. There are apparently no ponds within 250m and a small stream is ~45m south of the Site, separated by a field of improved hay meadow.
- 4.7 Both house sparrows and swifts were noted in the village, both being of conservation concern and house sparrows a Species of Principal Importance.

5. PROTECTED SPECIES SCOPING

SCOPING-OUT

- 5.1 The majority of species of conservation concern are scoped-out on the basis of desk study records and on-Site habitats (Table 2).

Table 2. Protected species scoping.

Species / species group	Desk study records	On-Site habitat	Scoping conclusion
Great crested newts and other amphibians	Only records for great crested newts >1km distant	Site lacking cover or shelter other than boundary scrub No ponds sufficiently close for dispersal to Site	Almost certainly absent
Reptiles	Single record of slow worm, from Pulham St Mary	Site lacking cover or shelter	Very unlikely to be present
Brown hare	Records from within 1km	Low quality: lacking longer grass to provide of cover, too close to dwellings and the field itself too small	Almost certainly absent
Badgers	No records	No evidence found	Almost certainly absent
Bats	Foraging records for 10 species: barbastelle, serotine, Daubenton's, Natterer's, Leisler's, noctule, common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, Nathusius' pipistrelle and brown long-eared.	No potential roost locations on-Site or along boundaries Low quality foraging habitat, with main sward unlikely to produce many insects and foraging most likely limited to hedgerows	Roosts absent Foraging by low numbers likely
Water vole	Record from >500m distant from 2001	No habitat on-Site or sufficiently close for water voles (and otters) to be present	Almost certainly absent

SCOPING-IN

- 5.2 The species groups likely to be present are considered to be:

- Breeding birds:
 - A range of common species will likely nest in the boundary scrub, including widespread but declining species.
 - Within the data search the presence of turtle dove from a grid square at least 150m east is of note, as this is a declining species associated with scrub and dense hedgerows¹⁰ (recorded 2005, 2013 and 2014). The Site itself though is probably of limited value for foraging by this species, as its diet is almost entirely seed, either of crops or arable weeds¹¹. The Site is therefore concluded to be of low value for the species even if present locally; locally there appeared to be extensive lengths of similar hedgerow offering potential nesting habitat for the species.

¹⁰ <http://www.norfolkbiodiversity.org/actionplans/speciesactionplans/turtledove.aspx>

¹¹ Browne, S.J., and Aebischer, N.J. (2003) Habitat use, foraging ecology and diet of Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur* in Britain. *Ibis*, 145(4), 572-582.

- Hedgehogs. Although not recorded by the data search they are almost certainly present locally, although the use of the Site is likely to be by transitory individuals or foraging individuals.
- Invertebrates. Both the British and European races of the swallowtail have been recorded locally as vagrants, but no other invertebrate records were returned. The Site and boundary hedgerows appeared to lack specialist microhabitats of value to many species of conservation concern. The scrub habitat is potentially used by a number of widespread moths that have declined nationally and are afforded the status of Species of Principal Importance as a result¹²; these species will comprise habitat generalists.

¹² Butterfly Conservation (2007) *The UK Biodiversity Action Plan – Moths*. Available from: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/files/the-uk-biodiversity-action-plan.pdf>

6. DISCUSSION

EVALUATION

Habitats

6.1 The only Habitat of Principal Importance present is:

- Hedgerows. The south and east hedgerows are considered to qualify as a Habitat of Principal Importance (cf Maddock, 2011¹³):
 - The east hedgerow post-dates 1946; it is considered to be a hedgerow although its physical structure also has elements of a band of linear scrub.
 - The south hedgerow pre-dates 1946 and the ditch and hornbeam are of particular note. It does not qualify as an Important Hedgerow but it is nevertheless a higher quality example of a traditional hedgerow.

Species

6.2 Many species are scoped-out as being potentially present. The species scoped in are:

- Breeding birds;
- Hedgehogs; and
- Widespread invertebrates.

6.3 In all three cases the species or members of the species-groups will include widespread but declining species with the status of Species of Principal Importance. However, it is thought likely that the Site is of lower value, lacking any particularly limiting or scarce / specialist resources, and that any individuals present will be parts of larger local populations.

IMPACTS

Designated Sites

6.4 The scheme itself would be relatively small and the nearest designated sites are all >2km distant. It is not thought that the scheme will impact any designated sites either directly or indirectly.

On-Site Features

6.5 The project masterplan is shown as Appendix 1: Figure 3, the key features being:

- Direct impacts on the improved pasture only;
- Retention of boundary hedgerows; and
- Creation of some informal open space.

6.6 The negative impacts of the scheme are therefore largely restricted to the loss of improved pasture but with the scope for the public open space area to include landscaping of benefit to some local species.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER SURVEY

6.7 It is not thought that additional surveys are required to inform the assessment of the scheme.

¹³ Maddock, A. (2011) *UK BAP Priority Habitat Descriptions*. Available from: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/PDF/UKBAP_PriorityHabitatDesc-Rev2010.pdf

MITIGATION

6.8 The following are recommended to avoid harm during construction works:

- Nesting birds. The nests of all birds are protected from destruction. Clearance of any boundary scrub and long herbage should be outside of the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive). If this is not possible then a watching brief should be employed to confirm absence from areas of habitat prior to clearance.
- Although the application Site is ~45m from the small stream and without direct surface water connections, the construction works should consider the risk of run-off during soil movements and other construction activities. The suggestions contained in 'Guidance for Pollution Prevention 5 Works and Maintenance In or Near water: GPP 5'¹⁴ should be followed.

ENHANCEMENTS

6.9 Although the Site is not located particularly close to an identified green infrastructure corridor or B-Line (bee-line), it lies within the Claylands Living Landscape, where Site-level enhancements are relevant at a landscape scale.

6.10 Soft landscaping is the most appropriate key enhancement for the Site, using appropriate native species and species of known wildlife value. Key points for many species groups is the need for insect prey, for bats and also for the chicks and fledgling birds of many species, such as house sparrows. A range of plant types should be planted to provide a range of resources across the seasons from spring to autumn for insect prey, and also fruit and berry producing species in autumn. Options within the Site include boundary planting for plots and a central area, as shown in an indicative masterplan (Figure 3).

6.11 For woody species those typical of local hedgerows (Norfolk County Council, undated¹⁵) and also appropriate for structural planting are:

- Hawthorn, blackthorn, ash, maple, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, elm and hazel, with lesser amounts of crab apple *Malus sylvestris*, hornbeam and holly *Ilex aquifolium*, and scattered examples of privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, oak, spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, wild cherry *Prunus avium* and guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*.

6.12 Small trees suitable for a small site include silver birch *Betula pendula*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, whitebeams *Sorbus* species, and fastigate forms of hornbeam. Within areas of grassland a number of wildflower seed mixes are available from commercial suppliers, including wetland and pond planting (e.g. Emorsgate EM8 meadow mixture for wetlands), wildflower swards on heavy soils (e.g. EM4 meadow mixture for clay soils and EM10 tussock mixture) and flowering lawns for areas with more intensive use and management (e.g. EL1 flowering lawn mixture).

¹⁴ SEPA (2017) *Guidance for Pollution Prevention Works and maintenance in or near water: GPP 5 January 2017*. Available from: <http://www.netregs.org.uk/media/1418/gpp-5-works-and-maintenance-in-or-near-water.pdf>

¹⁵ Norfolk County Council (undated) *Planting Hedges in Norfolk – Maintaining Regional Character*. Available from: <http://www.norfolkbiodiversity.org/pdf/reportsandpublications/HedgeBookletPROOF4.pdf>

7. APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 4.
Main grassland area from south-west.



Figure 5.
Entrance way along west boundary.



Figure 6.
West boundary.



Figure 7.
South boundary
hedgerow, from
eastern end.



Figure 8.
East boundary.



Figure 9.
North boundary.

8. APPENDIX 2: LEGISLATION SUMMARY

Non-technical account of relevant legislation and policies.

Species	Legislation	Offence	Licensing
Bats: European protected species	Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) Reg 41	Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat; deliberate disturbance of bats; or damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place used by a bat. [The protection of bat roosts is considered to apply regardless of whether bats are present.]	A Natural England (NE) licence in respect of development is required.
Bats: National protection	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) S.9	Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection or disturb a bat in such a place.	Licence from NE is required for surveys (scientific purposes) that would involve disturbance of bats or entering a known or suspected roost site.
Birds	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) S.1	Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird; intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built. Intentionally or recklessly disturb a Schedule 1 species while it is building a nest or is in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; intentionally or recklessly disturb dependent young of such a species [e.g. kingfisher].	No licences are available to disturb any birds in regard to development.
Great crested newt: European protected species	Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) Reg 41	Deliberately capture, injure or kill a great crested newt; deliberate disturbance of a great crested newt; deliberately take or destroy its eggs; or damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place used by a great crested newt.	Licences issued for development by Natural England.
Great crested newt: National protection	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) S.9	Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection or disturb it in such a place.	A licence is required from Natural England for surveying and handling.
Adder, common lizard, grass snake slow worm	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 S.9(1) and S.9(5)	Intentionally kill or injure any common reptile species.	No licence is required. However an assessment for the potential of a site to support reptiles should be undertaken.
Scientific Interest (SSSI) It is an offence	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)	To carry out or permit to be carried out any potentially damaging operation. SSSIs are given protection through policies in the Local Development Plan.	Owners, occupiers, public bodies and statutory undertakers must give notice and obtain the appropriate consent under S.28 before undertaking operations likely to damage a SSSI. All public bodies to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSIs.

Species	Legislation	Offence	Licensing
County Wildlife Sites	There is no statutory designation for local sites.	Local sites are given protection through policies in the Local Development Plan.	Development proposals that would potentially affect a local site would need to provide a detailed justification for the work, an assessment of likely impacts, together with proposals for mitigation and restoration of habitats lost or damaged.