



### Windermere Grange, Stourport on Severn

### On Behalf Of:

Taylor Wimpey (West Midlands) and Severn Academies Educational Trust

#### Prepared By:

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**Preliminary Ecological Appraisal** 

Windermere Grange, Stourport on Seven

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Harris Lamb Property Consultants (HLPC) was commissioned by Taylor Wimpey (West Midlands) and Severn Academies Educational Trust to undertake an ecological appraisal at land at Windermere Grange, Stourport on Severn.

HLPC carried out an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the site in March 2019 and updated again in January 2021 by suitably experienced ecologists. In addition, a desk-based consultation was undertaken with Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) for records of protected species and habitats within 2km of the site.

The proposed development is not anticipated to affect internationally or nationally statutorily designated sites for nature conservation. No non-statutorily designated sites, ancient woodland or Priority Habitats are anticipated to be affected.

The site is dominated by species-poor semi-improved grassland (former amenity grassland) with small areas of scrub and a mixed plantation woodland. The site is boarded by wire mesh fencing with some scattered trees also on the boundary. Surrounding the site are school playing fields, allotments and a disused golf course. The proposed development includes native tree, shrub and grassland within the strategic landscaping to mitigate and enhance the biodiversity of the site.

Vegetation removal should be undertaken outside nesting bird season which runs March-August. Installation of bird boxes on retained trees would enhance the value of the site for nesting birds. Construction should be` undertaken following a Reptile Method Statement as a precautionary measure. Building 1 has low bat roost potential. Whilst no bats were recorded during emergence surveys in 2017 or an update internal inspection in 2021 as a precaution a bat emergence survey is recommended prior to demolition in the core maternity season (May-July). Trees to be felled were considered to have negligible interest to roosting bats and a sensitive felling approach is recommended. Installation of bat boxes on retained trees would enhance the value of the site for roosting bats. No evidence of badger was recorded during survey, but a precautionary pre-commencement survey is recommended. Boundary treatments should include a gap for hedgehogs where appropriate.

Mitigation and enhancement measures in this report could be secured through planning condition and therefore it is considered that the proposed development accords with biodiversity planning policy.

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Terms of reference

1.1.1 Harris Lamb Property Consultancy (HLPC) was commissioned by Taylor Wimpey (West Midlands) and Severn Academies Educational Trust to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal<sup>1</sup> at land at Windermere Grange, Stourport on Seven (national grid reference SO 81011 72666) hereafter termed the 'site' (see Figure 1 below).



Figure 1: Site location and boundary shown. Not to scale. Note all but one building has been demolished under a separate planning consent,

### 1.2 Site location

- 1.2.1 The site is located on the northern edge of Stourport on Severn and c. 4km south of central Kidderminster.
- 1.2.2 The site is approximately 4.08 ha. Directly south of the site is a primary school and residential dwellings, to the north west of the site is the former Burlish Park golf course and to the north east are allotments.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2017) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. CIEEM.



1.2.3 The site is dominated by semi-improved grassland (former amenity grassland associated with the school) and boarded by wire mesh fencing with scattered broadleaved trees. Surrounding the site are school playing fields, allotments and a disused golf course.

### 1.3 The proposed development

1.3.1 Full planning application for the development of 110 dwellings (gross), 109 (net) public open space and associated infrastructure.

### 1.4 Purpose of this report

- 1.4.1 The purpose of this report is to:
  - Identify key ecological constraints associated with the proposed development and input into the scheme design to minimise ecological impacts where possible.
  - Set out mitigation measures required to ensure compliance with nature conservation legislation and address potentially significant ecological effects.
  - Identify how mitigation measures could be secured.
  - Provide an assessment of significance of residual effects.
  - Identify appropriate enhancement measures.
  - Identify appropriate post-construction monitoring if relevant.



### 2.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

### 2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2.1.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF<sup>2</sup>) is the top tier of planning policy. The Framework provides guidance to local authorities and other agencies on planning policy and the operation of the planning system. Section 15 relates to 'Conserving and enhancing the natural environment'.
- 2.1.2 Relevant policies in relation to planning application include Paragraph 170:

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

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;

e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government



2.1.3 Paragraph 174. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity56; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and

b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

2.1.4 Paragraph 175. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;

b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;

c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons58 and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and

d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be



encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity."

### 2.2 Relevant local planning policy

2.2.1 The following local planning policies relevant to the site have been identified in Table 1.

Policy	Summary
Wyre Forest Distric	t Council Core Strategy <sup>3</sup>
CP13	Developing a Green Infrastructure Network
	The existing green infrastructure network within the District, as
	set out within the emerging Green Infrastructure Strategy, will
	be safeguarded. New development will be required to
	contribute positively towards the District's green infrastructure
	network. The Green Infrastructure Study and Green
	space contributions are spent and the requirements on
	individual sites. Open space typologies identified within the
	PPG17 audit as being deficient will be prioritised for further
	provision. The following features have been identified as key
	green infrastructure assets and essential to the District's local
	distinctiveness:
	• The Rivers Severn and Stour and the associated wetlands;
	<ul> <li>The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal;</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>The District's heathlands and acid grasslands;</li> </ul>
	• The Wyre Forest and associated areas of high landscape and
	biodiversity value.
	These features will be safeguarded and new developments
	must positively contribute towards the enhancement of their
	Provision of Open Space in New Developments
	All new development will be expected to provide open space
	where technically feasible. Where private garden space is not
	provided for each dwelling, communal gardens or allotment
	spaces will be required in order to improve health and
	wellbeing, support local biodiversity and, where possible,
	strengthen landscape characteristics. Roof-top gardens and
	green roofs will be encouraged in order to help address climate
	change and enhance biodiversity.
CP14	Providing Opportunities for Local Biodiversity and Geodiversity
	EXISTING BIODIVERSITY SITES Biodiversity eites (Site of Special Scientific Interact (SSSI)
	National Nature Reserve (NNR) Local Nature Reserve (INR)
	Special Wildlife Site (SWS)) and species and babitate
	recognised within the Worcestershire BAP will be safeguarded
	from development. The District Council will support the
	establishment of new sites where this is considered to be
	appropriate. Development which has a detrimental impact on
	habitats or provision for protected species will not be permitted.

 Table 1: Relevant local policies

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> <u>http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/media/89829/Adopted-Core-Strategy-DPD.pdf</u> accessed March 2019

Policy	Summary
-	New Development and Biodiversity
	New development will be required to contribute towards
	biodiversity within the District, either by enhancing opportunities
	for biodiversity within the site or by making a contribution to off-
	site biodiversity projects. On brownfield sites, consideration
	should be given to incorporating existing flora and fauna where
	appropriate in order to preserve the site's ecological and
	biodiversity value. New developments should take account of
	the location of and aim to contribute to the priorities
	established by the Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership
	within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas
	New developments must take measures to ensure that they
	have a positive impact on the ability of species to migrate to
	ensure diversity and as a response to climate change
	The biodiversity value of the Rivers Severn and Stour and the
	Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal will be safequarded
	New development alongside these watercourses should
	maintain and enhance their biodiversity value
	Trees and Woodlands
	In order to provide opportunities for increased hindiversity
	existing trees and woodlands which have Tree Preservation
	Orders (TPOs) will be conserved and enhanced and on
	appropriate development sites new trees and woodlands will
	be planted in keeping with the landscape character of the area.
	Geodiversity
	New development must strive to enhance and not have a
	detrimental impact on the geodiversity of the District.
Wyre Forest Distric	t Council Site Allocations and Policies and Local Plan 2006-2026
Adopted July 2013	4
Policy SAL.UP3	Providing a Green Infrastructure Network The existing green
	infrastructure network, as set out within the Green Infrastructure
	Strategy, and the open spaces identified within the Wyre Forest
	District Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment, will be
	safeguarded from development. Proposals should create new,
	or enhance and retain existing, open space or green/blue
	infrastructure. New development should incorporate open
	space in accordance with the quantity, quality and accessibility
	standards set out within the most up-to-date open space, sport
	and recreation assessment. 1. Green Infrastructure Corridors
	The Green Infrastructure Strategy identifies the following key
	green infrastructure corridors which new development will be
	required to contribute towards the delivery and enhancement
	of: i. River Severn and River Stour Corridors - development
	along these corridors will be required to improve the
	attractiveness of the riverside environment, remove culverts
	where appropriate, enhance the biodiversity value and water
	quality of the river corridor, and ensure that the functional
	floodplain is maintained and restored. Development should
	recognise and enhance the multi-functional nature of these
	corridors and seize opportunities to link them with the wider
	green infrastructure network. ii. Staffordshire and
	Worcestershire Canal - development along the canal corridor
	must not have a detrimental impact on the existing sustainable

 $<sup>^{4}\</sup> https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/media/106049/Adopted-Site-Allocations-and-Policies-LP-1-.pdf$ 

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transport route or the character of the Conservation Are Development should seek to enhance the biodiversity ar water quality of the canal corridor whilst recognising the mul functional nature of the corridor. iii. Public Rights of Wa Network - where appropriate. To the north of Kidderminst Town Centre, the Council will safeguard the areas shown of the Policies Map in the Stour Valley for future development as Country Park. Proposals for development which wou prejudice the provision of a Country Park in these areas will n be permitted. 2. Public Rights of Way Developments which	Policy	Summary
affect Public Rights of Way will be required to make adequa provision for the continuation or diversion of the route. Ne developments will be required to link into Public Rights of Wa where appropriate. New Rights of Way will be established where possible.		transport route or the character of the Conservation Area. Development should seek to enhance the biodiversity and water quality of the canal corridor whilst recognising the multi- functional nature of the corridor. iii. Public Rights of Way Network - where appropriate. To the north of Kidderminster Town Centre, the Council will safeguard the areas shown on the Policies Map in the Stour Valley for future development as a Country Park. Proposals for development which would prejudice the provision of a Country Park in these areas will not be permitted. 2. Public Rights of Way Developments which affect Public Rights of Way will be required to make adequate provision for the continuation or diversion of the route. New developments will be required to link into Public Rights of Way where appropriate. New Rights of Way will be established where possible.
Policy SAL.UP5 Providing Opportunities for Safeguarding Local Biodiversity and Geodiversity 1. Priority Species and Habitats All me developments should take steps to enhance biodiversity bow within and outside of designated areas. Development should wherever possible and feasible, retain, enhance and manage and, if appropriate, reintroduce the District's indigenoo biodiversity and in particular those species and habitat identified in the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Pla Development which would have an adverse significant impation or conservation status of protected species priority species or habitat, as identified within a Biodiversi Action Plan, will be refused permission unless the impact carbon be adequately mitigated or compensated for by measure secured by planning conditions or obligations 2. Designate Sites Sites designated under national legislation are shown of the Policies Map (Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs and National Nature Reserves (INRS)), and will be protected under the terms of that legislation. Local Wildlife Site (LWSs) and Local Geological Sites, are identified and will be protected and enhanced due to their importance locall Outside the areas designated or an existing or proposed nationa important or locally important site will be not be permittit unless: i. There are no reasonable alternative means meeting the need for the development nationally, or within the region, County or District, as appropriate to the particular lev of importance of the site; and ii. The reasons for the development outweigh the nature conservation value of the site and the need to safeguard the nature conservation value of the sites itself and the need to safeguard the nature conservation and importance or fundeveloped, natural or semi-natuu land around such sites. 3. Ecological Surveys and Mitigati Plans Where evidence suggests that development may have a impact on a site of national, regional or local importance or priority head.	Policy SAL.UP5	Providing Opportunities for Safeguarding Local Biodiversity and Geodiversity 1. Priority Species and Habitats All new developments should take steps to enhance biodiversity both within and outside of designated areas. Development should, wherever possible and feasible, retain, enhance and manage and, if appropriate, reintroduce the District's indigenous biodiversity and in particular those species and habitats identified in the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan. Development which would have an adverse significant impact on the population or conservation status of protected species or priority species or habitat, as identified within a Biodiversity Action Plan, will be refused permission unless the impact can be adequately mitigated or compensated for by measures secured by planning conditions or obligations 2. Designated Sites Sites designated under national legislation are shown on the Policies Map (Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and National Nature Reserves (NNRs)), and will be protected under the terms of that legislation. Locally important sites, including Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) and Local Geological Sites, are identified and will be protected and enhanced due to their importance locally. Outside the areas designated, the interests of nature and biodiversity conservation must be taken into account, in accordance with national policy. Any development which would have a detrimental impact on an existing or proposed nationally important or locally important site will be not be permitted unless: i. There are no reasonable alternative means of meeting the need for the development nationally, or within the region, County or District, as appropriate to the particular level of importance of the site; and ii. The reasons for the development outweigh the nature conservation value of the site itself and the need to safeguard the nature conservation value of the national, regional, County or District network of such sites. If harm is caused, appropriate mitigation



Policy	Summary
	provide: 1. A detailed ecological survey undertaken at an
	appropriate time, which assesses cumulative impacts, and
	other surveys as appropriate; and 2. A mitigation plan that
	includes measures where appropriate, as follows: i. To
	minimise the adverse effect. ii. To make provision for the
	protection, and where desirable, the enhancement and
	management of the remainder of the site. iii. The provision,
	enhancement and management of compensatory land. iv. To
	facilitate the protection and survival of individual members of
	species protected under European law and their habitat, in situ;
	or in the case of species protected under British law, where this
	is not feasible, to provide adequate alternative habitat in the
	vicinity, and relocation. v. To relocate other material of
	importance to nature conservation. vi. To assist with habitation,
	including the provision of nesting boxes, lofts, dens, holts and
	setts, and appropriate ground preparation. vii. To facilitate
	natural movement of species via installation of features such as
	passage tunnels, and creation of links to other areas. viii. To
	maintain balanced and viable communities of flora and fauna.



### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study area

3.1.1 The study area is the site as shown in Figure 1. The study area was extended beyond the site area where appropriate to undertake species-specific appraisals as detailed below.

### 3.2 Desk study

- 3.2.1 The desktop study was informed by a review of existing available information provided by Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) a 2km search radius from the centre of the site in March 2019.
- 3.2.2 In addition, the following resources were used for additional information and context:
  - Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website<sup>5</sup>;
  - Ordnance Survey (OS)<sup>6</sup>, and
  - Aerial imagery<sup>5</sup>.
- 3.2.3 The geographical extent of the search area for biodiversity information was related to the significance of sites and species and potential zones of influence which might arise from development within the site. For this site the following search areas were considered to be appropriate:
  - 10km around the site boundary for sites of International Importance (e.g. Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar site));
  - 2km around the site boundary for sites of National or Regional Importance (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)), protected or otherwise notable species and non-statutory designated sites of County Importance (e.g. Local Wildlife Sites (LWS);
  - 1km for ancient woodland, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> <u>www.magic.gov.uk</u> accessed March 2019, December 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> www.bing.co.uk accessed March 2019 and December 2020



• 2km for biological records.

### 3.3 Consultation and previous data

- 3.3.1 No formal pre-application consultation relating to ecology was undertaken at the time of writing this report.
- 3.3.2 In 2017 Ecus Ltd carried out an ecological appraisal of the site, including the wider school site which was being considered at that time. Data provided has been drawn upon where relevant in this report and referenced accordingly.

### 3.4 Field survey

- 3.4.1 The site was initially assessed by an Ecus Ltd ecologist on 26th July 2017 and updated by experienced HLPC ecologists on 20th March 2019, April 2020 and 6th January 2021. Surveys were undertaken in accordance with 'Extended Phase 1' methodology<sup>7</sup>. The weather was dry and visibility good during all visits.
- 3.4.2 During the extended Phase 1 Habitat survey, observations, identification and signs of any protected species protected were noted<sup>8</sup>:
- 3.4.3 Specific habitat features are mapped using Target Notes (TN) to record ecological features of note.

### Fauna

- 3.4.4 The fauna included within this assessment is based on the habitats present, data from the desk-based searches, and the following legislation<sup>9</sup>:
  - Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
  - The Protection of Badgers Act 1992;
  - The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010) Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey. A Technique for Environmental Audit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See <u>www.legislation.gov.uk</u> for full details

<sup>9</sup> See www.legislation.gov.uk



• The NERC Act 2006 – S41 Species of Principal Importance (SPI) for the conservation of biodiversity.

### Amphibians

3.4.5 Waterbodies within 250m of the site boundary were identified using online Ordnance Survey maps and aerial imagery<sup>10</sup> and were assessed if necessary, for their suitability to support great-crested newts *Triturus cristatus* using a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI). The HSI is a numerical index, between 0 and 1. Values close to 0 indicate unsuitable habitat, 1 represents optimal habitat (Oldham *et al.*, 2000)<sup>11</sup>.

### Reptiles

3.4.6 An assessment of the suitability of the habitats present to support common reptile species was undertaken. In accordance with current guidance, this assessment involved a review of habitats and habitat structure for suitable shelter for reptiles such as areas of scrub and woodpiles, grassland with well-developed and varied structure, areas suitable for basking, large tussocks etc.

Birds

3.4.7 Bird species identified at the time of survey were noted and nesting birds recorded as seen. An assessment of habitats was undertaken to determine the likely value to breeding and foraging birds.

Bats

3.4.8 Ecus Ltd conducted two nocturnal bat emergence surveys on 21st June 2017 and 24th August 2016 on B1 (see Figure 2 for location). Survey was undertaken by experienced bat surveyors. Weather conditions were dry and suitable for bat survey. Emergence survey commenced 15 minutes before sunset and continued for 1.5 h after sunset. Nocturnal surveys were undertaken following best practice guidance (Collins, 2016) with surveyors using a combination of Wildlife Acoustics EM3 and EM Touch bat

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> www.bing.com/maps accessed January 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Oldham *et al.*, 2000. Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). Herpetological Journal 10, 143-155



detectors and an Elekon Batscanner coupled with a Anabat Express recorder.

- 3.4.9 Surveyors were positioned to cover those elevations of the building displaying features with potential suitability for use by roosting bats. Bat activity, including passes, foraging, roosting locations and species type were recorded onto field maps, along with other incidental bat activity observed on site.
- 3.4.10 An internal inspection of B1 was carried out on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 by HLPC ecologist to reappraise the building for bat roost potential, including hibernation potential. With reference to guidance contained within the Bat Conservation Trust's (BCT)<sup>12</sup> Good Practice Guidelines, 2nd edition (Collins, 2016), the survey comprised an internal (where safe to do so) and external inspection of the building using a Clulite torch and ladders, where necessary.
- 3.4.11 The building was searched for signs of roosting bats (i.e. live or dead bats, guano, feeding remains, staining etc.) and all potential bat roosting locations within the structure were recorded. During the survey Potential Roosting Features (PRF) for bats were recorded following current best practice. On the basis of visual inspection findings, the building was assigned a level of bat roosting potential from the categories negligible, low, moderate and high.
- 3.4.12 Trees were assessed externally from ground level with the use of torch and binoculars, where required. During the survey Potential Roosting Features (PRF) for bats following current best practice<sup>13</sup>,<sup>14</sup> were recorded.
- 3.4.13 The potential for the site and immediate surrounds to support foraging and commuting bats was also assessed, with particular regard given to the presence of continuous treelines providing good connectivity in the landscape, and the presence of varied habitat such as scrub, woodland, grassland in the vicinity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) 2016. Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists, Good Practice Guidelines, 3rd Edition

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Mitchell-Jones, A.J, & McLeish, A.P. Ed. 2004. Bat Workers' Manual 3rd Edition

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> BCT (2015) Surveying for Bats in Trees and Woodland – Guide



### Badgers

3.4.14 Evidence of badger *Meles meles* survey was searched for, where accessible up to 30m from the site boundary. Areas of suitable habitat were surveyed for evidence of badger activity, such as mammal paths, setts, snuffle holes or latrines.

### Other notable species

3.4.15 Signs of other notable species were recorded as seen.

### Legally controlled species

3.4.16 Evidence of species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended were recorded as seen.

### Scoped out

- 3.4.17 Survey for hazel dormice were scoped out due to lack of records for this species in this locality and poor habitat suitability.
- 3.4.18 No watercourses within 30m of the site boundary were recorded and therefore the potential for the presence of otter *Lutra lutra*, water vole *Arvicola amphibius* and white-clawed crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* were scoped out of this assessment.

### 3.5 Assessment methodology

3.5.1 The importance of ecological features and impact assessment methodology is based on CIEEM guidelines for ecological impact assessment in the UK and Ireland<sup>15</sup>. Significant effects are defined as "an effect that either supports or undermines biodiversity conservation objectives for important ecological features" (CIEEM, 2016). A significant effect does not necessarily equate to an affect so severe that consent for a project should be refused planning permission if they can lawfully permit following the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, mitigate, compensate) has been applied as part of the decision-making process. Significant effects are qualified with a scale:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> CIEEM (2016) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland Guidelines for Ecological for Ecological Impacts Assessment in the UK and Ireland Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine.



international and European, national, regional, metropolitan/county, local or within the zone of influence (defined here as site level).

3.5.2 This report assumes that construction will commence within 2-3 years of the date of the assessment in accordance with the British Standard 42020:2013<sup>16</sup> unless otherwise stated.

#### Determining importance

- 3.5.3 Determining the importance of identified ecological features is based on CIEEM guidance<sup>17</sup>. Various characteristics contribute to the importance of ecological features including:
  - naturalness;
  - animal or plant species, sub-species or varieties that are rare or uncommon, either internationally, nationally or more locally, including those that may be seasonally transient;
  - ecosystems and their component parts, which provide the habitats required by important species, populations and/or assemblages;
  - endemic species or locally distinct sub-populations of a species;
  - habitat diversity;
  - habitat connectivity and/or synergistic associations;
  - habitats and species in decline;
  - rich assemblages of plants and animals;
  - large populations of species or concentrations of species considered uncommon or threatened in a wider context;
  - plant communities (and their associated animals) that are considered to be typical of valued natural/seminatural vegetation types, including examples of naturally species-poor communities;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> BSI (2013) Biodiversity – Code of Practice for Planning and Development.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> CIEEM (2016) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater and Coastal, 2nd edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester



- species on the edge of their range, particularly where their distribution is changing as a result of global trends and climate change.
- 3.5.4 Geographic context is also considered within a defined geographical context.
  - International and European
  - National
  - Regional
  - Metropolitan, County, vice-county or other local authority-wide area.
  - Local (including district or borough context or within a zone of influence) here termed the site.

### 3.6 Assessment limitations

- 3.6.1 Ecological surveys are limited by factors that affect the presence of plants and animals, such as the time of year, weather, migration patterns and behaviour. The initial survey was undertaken in July which is a peak month for botanical survey and verified in April.
- 3.6.2 Any absence of desk study records cannot be relied upon to infer absence of a species/habitat as the absence of records may be a result of underrecording within the given search area.
- 3.6.3 Phase 1 Habitat survey aimed to characterise the habitat on site and is not intended to give a complete list of plant species present.
- 3.6.4 A thorough inspection of the second floor and roof void of B1 was not possible due to health and safety concerns about the structural integrity of the building.



### 4.0 RESULTS

### 4.1 Ecological designations

### Internationally designated sites for nature conservation

4.1.1 No internationally statutorily designated sites for nature conservation were identified within 10km of the site.

### Nationally designated sites for nature conservation designation

- 4.1.2 Hartlebury Common & Hillditch Coppice Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and is designated for its dry swarf shrub heathland and is located c. 1.7 km to the south-east of the site.
- 4.1.3 River Stour Flood Plain SSSI is designated for its paleohydrological value and is located c. 1 km to the east of the site and is scoped out of further consideration within this report.
- 4.1.4 Wilden Marsh and Meadows SSSI is located c. 1 km to the east of the site and designated primarily for its diverse wetland habitat.
- 4.1.5 Devils Spittleful SSSI is located c. 1.7 km north of the site and is designated primarily for thin acidic soils derived which support one of the largest remnants of lowland heathland in Worcestershire.
- 4.1.6 Burlish Top LNR is located c. 800m north west of the site, it comprises heath and high-quality acid grassland, surrounded by oak and birch scrub.
- 4.1.7 These sites are considered to be of regional to national importance to nature conservation.

### Non-statutorily designated sites for nature conservation designation

4.1.8 Eight non-statutorily designated sites for nature conservation were identified within 2km of the site as summarised in Table 2 below.



Name of Site	Status	Approximate distance and direction from the site	Brief description of reason for designation
Vicarage Farm Heath	LWS	1.3km north	Acidic grassland, heath and scrub.
Ribbesford Wood	LWS	1.7km west	A large mixed wood, a small deciduous wood and a two kilometre stretch of the Gladder Brook. The brook supports areas of rich and diverse native woodland
River Severn	LWS	1.4km south west	Worcestershire's biggest river and a major ecological corridor running north to south for the whole length of the county.
Wilden Marsh and Meadows (also a Wildlife Trust Reserve)	LWS	1.1km north east	A small fragment of rushy grassland, still of high quality as it is bounded by swampy ditch systems and tussocky pasture.
River Stour	LWS	0.6km east	Provides a very important corridor through the landscape and in the more urban stretches is the principle ecological corridor in the area.
Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal	LWS	0.5km east	A canal running through the Stour valley in the north of the county.
Burlish Camp	LWS	0.7km north	An area of heathland and young secondary woodland comprised of rich and varied flora including grey hair grass.
Blackstone Rock and Mucky Marsh Meadow	LWS	1.6km north west	A complex site which follows the line of the Severn valley-side sandstone.

### Table 2: Non-statutorily designated sites for nature conservation

4.1.9 Four Worcestershire Grassland Inventory Sites records were recorded all over 1 km to the east of the site. These sites are considered to be of local to regional importance to nature conservation.

### Ancient woodland

4.1.10 No ancient woodland was identified within 1km of the site.

### 4.2 Habitats

4.2.1 All habitats recorded within the site are described, below and are shown on Figure 2. Target notes are provided in Appendix 8.1 and site photographs are provided in Appendix 8.2.





Figure 2: Phase 1 habitat map



### Sem-improved grassland

- 4.2.2 The site is dominated by tussocky, species poor semi-improved grassland (former amenity grassland associated with the school) dominated by perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne* with frequent dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, broadleaved dock *Rumex obstusifolius*, common mouse-ear *Cerasium fontanum*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, occasional cat's ear *Hypochoeris radicata*, and locally abundant common stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*, occasional bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., red dead nettle *Lamium purpureum*, white dead nettle *Lamium album* and creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*.
- 4.2.3 A former area of bare ground, associated with the demolition of old school buildings, has now been colonised by species from the adjacent grassland and now comprises a mosaic of bare ground and species-poor semi-improved grassland.
- 4.2.4 This habitat is limited in extent with limited species richness. This habitat is widespread both locally and nationally and is therefore considered to be of importance to nature conservation at site level only.

### Broadleaved scattered trees and plantation woodland

- 4.2.5 The boundaries of the site have scattered immature semi-mature broadleaved trees, there is also a line of planted, semi-mature trees within the middle of the site. Areas of semi-mature plantation trees are located on the southern and north-eastern boundaries of the site (Figure 2).
- 4.2.6 Species recorded across the site included silver birch *Betula pendula*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, lime *Tilia* sp., Scot's pine *Pinus sylvestris*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, field maple *Acer campestre*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Leyland cypress *Cupressus* × *leylandii*, willow *Salix* spp., crab apple *Malus sylvestris*.
- 4.2.7 The southern mixed plantation woodland had a canopy layer of Scots pine Pinus sylvestris, ash, silver birch, larch Larix *decidua* with an understory of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, bramble *Rubus*

*fruticosus* agg. The north-eastern woodland had a canopy layer of ash and poplar *Populus* sp. with an understorey of bramble.

4.2.8 Scattered broadleaved trees and plantation mixed woodland is limited in extent on site and appear to be immature- to young mature in age. These habitats are considered to be of site to local importance for nature conservation.

### <u>Scrub</u>

- 4.2.9 The north-eastern section of the site contained areas of dense scrub which was dominated by blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* with frequent bramble.
- 4.2.10 Due to the limited extent of the habitat and as only common species were recorded the scrub is considered to be of site level importance to nature conservation only.

### 4.3 Species

### <u>Amphibians</u>

- 4.3.1 No records of great crested newts within 2km of the site were identified by WBRC.
- 4.3.2 The habitats on site are considered suitable to provide foraging and sheltering opportunities for amphibians. The nearest identified pond to the site is located c. 160m to the north-east of the site *via* ordnance maps and aerial images. When attempting to collect an eDNA sample in April 2019 it was found that the pond was dry. Given the only identified pond within 250m of the site was dry in the core amphibian breeding season great-crested newts are not considered likely to be a receptor with respect to the proposed development.

### Reptiles

- 4.3.3 Multiple records of common lizards *Zootoca vivipara*, grass snake *Natrix helvetica*, adder *Vipera berus* and slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* were provided by WBRC within 2km of the site.
- 4.3.4 The site is dominated by semi-improved grassland and was used by dog walkers during the site visit. The grassland typically lacked areas features typically favoured by populations of reptiles, as the sward lacked structural



diversity or areas if topographical variations. However, the area of scrub and woodland within the north-eastern section of the site provides sheltering opportunities and a rubble pile (TN2) recorded within the scrub could provide hibernation opportunities for common reptiles.

4.3.5 The former gold course adjacent to the north of the site provides habitat for populations of reptiles. Whilst the majority of habitats on site are considered sub-optimal for supporting populations of common reptiles, it cannot be entirely ruled out that common reptiles may be present on site from time to time as part of a wider territory and a precautionary approach is recommended.

<u>Birds</u>

- 4.3.6 Several records of bird species were provided by WBRC within 2km of the site.
- 4.3.7 During site walkovers a number of urban bird species were recorded including; house sparrow *Passer domseticus*, carrion crow *Corvus corone*, magpie *Pica pica*, robin *Erithacus rubecula* and wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*.
- 4.3.8 The site may provide a limited range of nesting and foraging opportunities for the passerine bird species recorded. However, habitats on site are not considered to be critical to any one bird species. Given the abundance of similar grassland and garden habitat in the local area, the habitats present on site are considered to be of importance to nesting and foraging birds at site level only.

<u>Bats</u>

- 4.3.9 Biological records of multiple bat species were provided by WBRC within 2km of the site.
- 4.3.10 No evidence of bat presence was discovered during external inspection of B1 in 2017 by Ecus Ltd (i.e. sightings, droppings, urine staining). Ecus Ltd considered B1 to display low bat roost potential and described B1 as c. 1970 two storey brick house with pitched concrete tiled roof. Broken wooden soffit board and hole drilled in north west gable may allow bat access.



- 4.3.11 A small derelict storage building is adjacent to B1 it is constructed from concrete gravel boards and corrugated sheeting roof. It was considered to have negligible bat roost potential and not considered further in this report.
- 4.3.12 On 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017 a dusk emergence survey was undertaken by Ecus Ltd on B1. No bats were recorded emerging from any of the surveyed buildings. The first bat recorded was a noctule heard flying over the site at 22:09 h, 34 minutes after sunset. Low levels of noctule, common pipistrelle and soprano pipistrelle bats were recorded between 22:09 and 23:02 h with the majority of passes recorded along the east. No other bat species were recorded during the survey.
- 4.3.13 On 24<sup>th</sup> August 2017 a dusk emergence survey was undertaken on B1 by Ecus Ltd. No bats were recorded emerging from the building during the survey. No bat activity was recorded around Building 1 during the survey. Low levels of soprano pipistrelle activity were recorded during the survey with a total of seven passes recorded. No other bat species were recorded during the survey.
- 4.3.14 On 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020 the building was reassessed and was considered to still provide low bat roost potential. Observations from the ground identified that a bird's nest had been built within the broken soffit, identified by Ecus Ltd, which would likely prevent bats entering the roof space. However, a broken facia was recorded on the south-eastern corner of the building which could allow bats to enter to roof space behind the tiles.
- 4.3.15 South of the site is in a highly urbanised area and lacks features typically required for foraging bats. Areas of larger scattered trees around the school buildings and car parking areas may provide some foraging opportunity for bats, although most of the site (e.g. areas of grass) displayed negligible foraging suitability. Scattered trees around the perimeter of the site may provide linear commuting features, but given the more suitable foraging habitat outside the site and activity levels recorded in 2017 the site is considered to be of site level importance to foraging and commuting bats.
- 4.3.16 The trees on site are well maintained young/semi-mature specimens and displayed negligible suitability for roosting bats.



**Badger** 

- 4.3.17 Multiple biological records of badgers were provided within 2km of the site by WBRC.
- 4.3.18 No signs of badger occupation were recorded during the site surveys and the site. Therefore, badgers are not currently considered a receptor to the proposed scheme. Badgers are highly mobile and can establish a sett at any time and therefore whilst no evidence was recorded of badger presence during any survey visit, given the proximity of the golf course to the site (which typically provides foraging and shelter habitats for badger), a precautionary approach is recommended.

### Invasive species

- 4.3.19 No evidence of invasive species on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended were recorded at the time of survey.Other notable species
- 4.3.20 Hedgehogs have been recorded within 2km of the site. The habitats on the site are suitable for supporting this species.



### 5.0 ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS AND MITIGATION MEAURES

### 6.1 **Proposed development**

- 6.1.1 Full planning application for the development of 110 dwellings (gross), 109 (net) public open space and associated infrastructure. Building 1 will be demolished. This assessment assumes that tree groups G18, G19 and G20 and T13<sup>18</sup> will be removed and all other trees will be retained, including the mixed plantation. It assumes access will be taken from Coniston Crescent.
- 6.1.2 The following assessment is based on the following drawing by Geoff Perry Associates Planning Layout dated 4<sup>th</sup> November 2020 (reference A928\_02).
- 6.1.3 Please refer to <u>www.legilsation.gov.uk</u> for full details of habitat and species legal protection.

### 6.2 Ecological designations

6.2.1 Given the distance and separation between the site and identified nonstatutory designated sites, no mechanism has been identified that is considered likely to significantly affect the integrity of interest features of these sites, either directly or indirectly.

#### 6.3 Habitats

### Potential Impacts

- 6.3.1 The proposed development will result in the permanent loss of semiimproved grassland and felling of trees immature/semi-mature tree groups G18, G19 and G20 and T13.
- 6.3.2 The proposed development has a detailed landscape design which includes native grassland, native tree and native hedgerow planting to mitigate the loss of habitats on site and enhance habitat connectivity.

#### Mitigation measures

6.3.3 The proposed development has been designed to mitigate the loss of existing habitats through new proposed native planting including native hedgerow planting to enhance habitat connectivity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> BEA Landscape Design Limited (2020) Consiton Crescent Stourport Tree Survey



6.3.4 Retained trees and hedgerows should be protected through the construction phase following advice set out within the British Standard Tree Survey.

### Enhancement

6.3.5 The proposed development has been designed to enhance the loss of existing habitats through new proposed native planting and enhance habitat connectivity.

### Monitoring

6.3.6 Standard landscape establishment monitoring should be sufficient to ensure landscaping proposals are successful and can be controlled by a planning condition.

### Significance

6.3.7 Assuming the above measures are undertaken and secured through a planning condition as required, it is anticipated that the proposed development would result in a net enhancement to the botanical diversity and habitat connectivity of the site.

### 6.4 Species

### <u>Reptiles</u>

6.4.1 All species of common reptile are protected only by Section 9(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Several species are also Priority Species under the NERC Act 2006.

### Potential impacts

6.4.2 The habitats within the site are considered suboptimal for common reptiles but it cannot be entirely ruled out that reptiles may use the site from time to time as part of a wider territory.

### Mitigation measures

6.4.3 Prior to construction commencing a Reptile Method Statement should be agreed with the LPA when timings and construction methods are known. The method statement should include details of the role of an appointed Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW). It should identify locations for reptiles, should they be found (e.g. retained mixed plantation woodland).



### Enhancement

6.4.4 The proposed development retains the plantation woodland and habitat connectivity around the site. Consideration could be given to creating a log pile within the mixed plantation woodland, should reptiles be found.

### Monitoring

6.4.5 Monitoring the success of reptile mitigation, if required, should be included within the Reptile Method Statement and agreed with the LPA.

### Significance

6.4.6 Assuming the above measures are undertaken and secured through a planning condition, it is anticipated that the proposed development would not result in impact to reptiles, should they be present at the time of works.

### <u>Birds</u>

6.4.7 All species of native British birds are protected only the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) making it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any species of wild bird, and to take, damage or destroy their nests or eggs. Several species receive higher levels of protection from disturbance under the Schedule 1 of the Act. Several declining bird species are also Priority Species under the NERC Act 2006.

### Potential impacts

- 6.4.8 Loss of scattered trees will be required to facilitate access and construction of the proposed development. Without mitigation loss of vegetation could affect nesting birds. The proposed development includes native berry bearing shrubs for the benefit of foraging birds.
- 6.4.9 The proposed development has been designed to mitigate the loss of existing bird nesting habitats through new proposed native planting including native hedgerow planting.

### Mitigation measures

6.4.10 As a precautionary approach suitable vegetation should be removed outside the nesting bird season (nesting season runs March-August, inclusive) where practicable. Should these works be scheduled during the nesting bird season they should be checked by a suitably experienced ecologist



immediately beforehand. In order to prevent disturbance or harm to individuals, work should not be carried out within a minimum of 5m of any inuse nest, although this distance could be more depending on the sensitivity of the species.

### Enhancement

6.4.11 Bird nesting boxes for a variety of urban bird species could be installed on suitably retained trees for the benefit of local bird populations.

### Monitoring

6.4.12 No additional monitoring is considered to be required outside the standard landscape planting and bird/bat box maintenance requirements.

#### Significance

6.4.13 Assuming the above measures are undertaken and secured through a planning condition, it is anticipated that the proposed development would result in a net enhancement of bird nesting and foraging habitat.

<u>Bats</u>

6.4.14 In Britain all bat species and their roosts are legally protected, by both the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. Several species are also Priority Species under the NERC Act 2006.

### Potential impacts

- 6.4.15 Based on the proposed layout and Tree Survey<sup>19</sup> it is anticipated that G18, G19, G20 and T13 will be felled. These trees were considered to have negligible bat roost potential. This assessment assumes all other trees will be retained.
- 6.4.16 Building 1 will require demolition to accommodate the proposed development. No evidence of bat occupation was recorded during inspection and emergence surveys in 2017 or inspection survey in January 2021. The building has features that are considered to have potential for use by bats.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> BEA Landscape Design Limited (2020) Consiton Crescent Stourport Tree Survey



6.4.17 The works have the potential to adversely impact roosting bats, if present at the time of works, in absence of mitigation.

### Mitigation measures

- 6.4.18 Prior to demolition of B1 an emergence survey should be undertaken during the core bat maternity season (May-July inclusive) by experienced ecologists to confirm the current status of roosting bats. One survey is required under current BCT survey guidelines. Should bats be found an additional two surveys will be required and no demolition works should be undertaken until an appropriate Natural England licence is in place, as advised by a licensed bat ecologist.
- 6.4.19 It should be appreciated that bats require only very small crevices for roosting. Should a bat be found at any time, works should cease in that area and a licensed bat ecologist contacted for further advice.
- 6.4.20 As a precautionary measure, it is advised that all sub-mature trees i.e. trees with a Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) of >300mm are felled in a sensitive manner. The trees should be sawn in sections and workers should avoid sawing through any observable potential roosting features (such as lifted bark, knot holes, splits and crevices). Each section should then be carefully lowered to the ground with any potential roosting features left on the uppermost surface. The sawn sections should then remain on the ground for a period of 24 hours to allow any bats to leave overnight before they are removed from site.
- 6.4.21 A sensitive lighting scheme should be implemented taking into consideration the foraging and commuting value of the site for bats. The scheme should include dark areas and avoid light spill over any potential foraging, roosting and commuting features, including all boundary habitats. Any light outputs should aim for a maximum of 1lux (comparable to twilight conditions) and directed away from tree lines where safe to do so.
- 6.4.22 The proposed development has been designed to enhance habitat connectivity for the benefit of foraging and commuting bats.



### Enhancement

6.4.23 Artificial bat roosting in the form of bat boxes, should be included within the scheme on suitable retained trees. The installation of the bat boxes should be supervised by an experienced ecologist and follow manufacturers' guidance.

### Monitoring

6.4.24 No additional monitoring is considered to be required at this stage.

### Significance

6.4.25 Assuming the above measures are secured through a planning condition it is anticipated that the proposed development would not result in an adverse impact to foraging and commuting bats and provision of artificial bat roost provision and through new building (over time) would enhance the value of the site for roosting bats.

### **Badgers**

6.4.26 Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. It is an offence under the act to kill, injure or take a badger. It is also an offence to destroy, damage or obstruct a currently active badger sett, or to disturb animals within the sett.

### Potential impacts

6.4.27 Badgers are not considered to be resident on site. Whilst there is some potential for foraging badgers to utilise the site as part of a wider territory, the areas to be impacted by the proposals considered to be a suboptimal resource. As such, landtake associated with the proposed development is not considered to be of importance to badger at greater than the site level.

### Mitigation measures

6.4.28 As a precautionary measure a pre-construction badger survey should be undertaken by an experienced ecologist. Should badgers be found appropriate mitigation measures should be put in place prior to works commencing.



6.4.29 Deep excavations should be completely covered overnight unless completely fenced off. Any unfenced/uncovered shallow excavations should have scaffold boards or equivalent placed in them to act as a ramp to allow any badgers to exit, should they fall in.

#### Enhancement

6.4.30 None anticipated to be required at this stage.

### Monitoring

6.4.31 No additional monitoring is considered to be required at this stage.

### Significance

6.4.32 Assuming the above measures are secured through a planning condition it is anticipated that the proposed development would not result in an adverse impact to badgers should they be found.

### Other notable species

### Potential impacts

- 6.4.33 The habitats on site could be used by hedgehogs. Hedgehogs are listed as a Priority Species under the NERC Act 2006.
- 6.4.34 The introduction of boundary treatments (e.g. fences) has the potential to reduce the accessibility of the site for foraging and commuting hedgehog.

### Mitigation measures

6.4.35 Where relevant the boundary fences should include a small gap (13cm by 13cm) to allow hedgehog to pass through.

### Enhancement

6.4.36 No enhancement measures considered to be required.

### Monitoring

6.4.37 No monitoring is considered to be required.

### Significance

6.4.38 Assuming the above measures are secured through a planning condition it is anticipated that the proposed development would not result in an adverse impact to hedgehog, should they be present.



### 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1 Based on the data collected and information provided about the proposed development, it is not anticipated that the development as proposed would result in adverse ecological impact over the medium to long term.
- 7.1.2 Impacts to species and habitats identified within this report could be mitigated, enhanced and secured through appropriate planning conditions.
- 7.1.3 On this basis the proposed development accords with planning policy.



### 8.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 8.1 - Target notes for Phase 1 Habitat Se	urvey
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Target Note	Description
TN1	Outdoor classroom in mixed planation woodland
TN2	Rubble pile

## Appendix 8.2 - Site photographs





