



Hillier Ecology

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of Land at Whittlesey Road, March



Prepared for Force One Limited

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Site Name	Land at Whittlesey Road, March
Report Type	Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
Client	Force One Limited

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VALIDITY

Due to the dynamic nature of ecological conditions the results of the survey(s) and related conclusions and recommendations as contained within this report should only be considered valid for up to 24 months from the date the last survey was undertaken.

Any alterations to the site proposals may invalidate the recommendations contained within this report.

Contents

1.0	Summary	4
2.0	Introduction	5
3.0	Site Details	5-9
4.0	Survey Methodology	10-13
5.0	Survey Results	13-14
6.0	Desk Study	15
7.0	Conclusions	15-17
8.0	Recommendations	17-18
9.0	Legal Protection	18-21
10.0	References	22-23
11.0	Appendices	24-36

1.0 Summary

1.1 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been carried out on land at Whittlesey Road, March.

1.2 The survey covered bats *Chiroptera*, birds *Aves*, Badger *Meles meles*, reptiles, Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*, Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*, Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius* and hedgerows.

1.3 All trees were surveyed and found to have negligible potential to support roosting bats.

1.4 The site and surrounds offer moderate suitability foraging and commuting habitat for bat species.

1.5 Four species of bird were recorded during the survey, including Red and Amber List species, and suitable nesting habitats are present on the site and in the surrounds.

1.6 The survey for Badger produced a negative result with no Badger setts and no evidence of Badger using the site or surrounds.

1.7 The habitat assessment for reptiles considered the site unsuitable for sustaining a population of reptiles.

1.8 The site and surrounds offer sub-optimal habitats for Hedgehog.

1.9 A pond was identified close to the site and subject to a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment with a HSI score of 0.49, Pond Suitability of Poor, and a predicted 3% of Poor ponds occupied by Great Crested Newt.

1.10 Whilst HSI assessments cannot be relied on to screen out the presence of Great Crested Newt individual indices can be considered and annual drying of the pond makes it highly unlikely to be suitable for breeding populations of newt.

1.11 The survey of the drains found them to be unsuitable for supporting Water Vole.

1.12 The hedgerows did not meet the criteria for Important Hedgerows under the Hedgerow Regulations.

1.13 To complement the field survey a desk study covering a 2km radius from the site was carried out.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Hillier Ecology Limited were commissioned by Force One Limited to carry out the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and produce the ecological report.

2.2 The survey was carried out to support the planning application for the erection of a tractor shed in the south west corner of the site.

3.0 Site Details

3.1 The site is located at NGR TL3993497356 (Appendix 1).

3.2 The site is situated in open countryside outside the town of March; the site and its surrounds are made up of the following habitats.

- Arable
- Hedgerows
- Running water
- Improved grassland
- Buildings – light industrial
- Standing water - marina

3.3 The diversity of habitats found is thought to be sub-optimal for supporting protected and notable species.

3.4 The survey area is shown in the photographs below and (Appendix 2).



Plate 1 The Site (From Entrance)



Plate 2 The Site (North from Centre)



Plate 3 The Site (East from Centre)



Plate 4 The Site (South from Centre)



Plate 5 The Site (West from Centre)



Plate 6 Hedgerow Adjacent Whittlesey Road



Plate 7 Drain



Plate 8 Pond Surveyed

4.0 Survey Methodologies

Bats (Trees)

4.1 The survey involved a thorough search of all the trees looking for potential roost sites, which are the following:

- Cracks
- Cavities
- Loose Bark
- Broken Limbs
- Ivy

4.2 A search was made for the following signs:

- Faeces
- Urine staining
- Fur rubbing
- Live bats

4.3 The trees were categorised using the criteria below.

Assessment of Potential to Support Roosting Bats - Categories for Trees	
Negligible potential	Tree contains no suitable features for roosting bats. These can include young trees without ivy and without loose bark and obvious cracks / fissures. Usually saplings, semi-mature specimens with a small girth or mature trees which do not tend to form fissures as readily such as sycamore.
Low potential	Tree contains limited features suitable for roosting bats. Usually young (sapling or semi-mature) trees with some ivy or some loose bark but no obvious cracks or fissures. No evidence of bats found (e.g. droppings / staining).
Moderate potential	Tree contains some features suitable for roosting bats. Trees with some cracks or fissures and/or large amounts of ivy / loose bark. Usually semi-mature or mature specimens. Trees tend not to have large splits, hollow trunks or woodpecker holes. No evidence of bats found.
High potential	Tree contains features that are highly desirable for roosting bats. Trees with woodpecker holes / large cracks and/or crevices. Often with a hollow trunk. May support very dense ivy. No evidence of bats found.

Confirmed roost	Bats discovered roosting within the tree or recorded emerging / entering a tree at dusk / dawn. Trees found to contain conclusive evidence of occupation by bats, such as bat droppings. A confirmed roost record (as supplied by an established source such as the local bat group) would also fall into this category.
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Birds

4.4 An assessment of the sites suitability to support breeding birds has been carried out.

4.5 All birds seen and heard were recorded.

Badger

4.6 A walkover survey of the site has been carried out to search for the following signs (Harris et al 1989):

- Setts
- Latrines
- Dung
- Badger Hair
- Footprints
- Pathways

4.7 Evidence of Badger activity, if found, was recorded.

Reptiles

4.8 A walkover of the site has been carried out to assess if the habitat is suitable to sustain a population of reptiles. The following habitats were looked for:

- Bare Ground
- Variety of Sward Heights
- Natural Refugia
- Basking Areas

Hedgehog

4.9 A habitat assessment of the site was carried out to look at its suitability to support Hedgehog.

4.10 Favoured habitats are shown below:

- Gardens
- Hedgerows
- Woodlands
- Grasslands
- Parkland

Great Crested Newt

4.11 A Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment has carried out on the ponds to assess their suitability to support amphibians.

4.12 The HSI for Great Crested Newt was developed by (Oldham et al 2000).

4.13 The HSI is a numerical index, between 0.01 and 1, 0.01 indicates unsuitable habitat, 1 represents optimal habitat.

4.14 The HSI for Great Crested Newt incorporates ten suitability indices, all of which are factors thought to affect Great Crested Newt. The ten suitability indices are as follows:

- Location
- Pond area
- Pond drying
- Water quality
- Shade
- Fowl
- Fish
- Ponds
- Terrestrial habitat
- Macrophytes

4.15 Table 1 shows the categorisation of the HSI scores and PS.

Table 1 Categorisation of HSI Scores and Pond Suitability

HSI	Pond Suitability
<0.5	Poor
0.5 - 0.59	Below Average
0.6 – 0.69	Average
0.7 – 0.79	Good
>0.8	Excellent

Water Vole

4.16 The standard methodology for Water Vole (Strachan et al 2011) was used.

4.17 A metre by metre search of the watercourse to look for the following signs:

- Latrines
- Feeding Signs
- Footprints
- Burrows
- Runways in Vegetation
- Live Sightings

Hedgerows

4.18 The hedgerows were assessed against the ecological criteria for Important Hedgerows under the Hedgerow Regulations.

5.0 Survey Results

5.1 The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was carried out by Malcolm Hillier, who holds Natural England Bat Survey Licence 2015-14930-CLS-CLS and Great Crested Newt License 2015-19048-CLS-CLS, assisted by Susan Hillier.

5.2 The survey was carried out on 17th February 2021 in the following weather conditions; sun and cloud, Beaufort Windscale 3 and a temperature of 10°C.

Bats (Trees)

5.3 All trees were assessed and found to have negligible potential to support roosting bats with an absence of suitable features.

5.4 The habitats present on site and in the surrounds are of moderate suitability for foraging and commuting bats.

Birds

5.5 Four bird species (Appendix 3) were recorded including a Red List species, Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, and an Amber List species, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*.

5.6 There is suitable nesting habitat offered by the hedgerows.

Badger

5.7 No Badger setts were present on site and no evidence of Badger using the site or surrounds was recorded.

Reptiles

5.8 The habitat did not meet the criteria as suitable reptile habitat; the site is mainly an arable field unsuitable for sustaining a population of reptiles.

Hedgehog

5.9 A habitat assessment of the site was carried out to look at its suitability to support Hedgehog, the site and surrounds were considered sub-optimal Hedgehog habitat.

Great Crested Newt

5.10 The HSI results are shown in the table below.

Table 2 HSI Results

Indices	Results
Location	1.0
Pond area	0.38
Pond drying	0.1
Water quality	0.67
Shade	1.0
Fowl	1.0
Fish	1.0
Ponds	0.1
Terrestrial habitat	0.33
Macrophytes	1.0
HSI	0.49
Pond suitability	Poor
Predicted pond occupancy	0.03

Hedgerows

5.11 The hedgerows did not meet the criteria for Important Hedgerows under the Hedgerow Regulations.

6.0 Desk Study

6.1 A search of the Magic Map application did not identify any designated sites within the search area; the site appears to fall within the outer SSSI Impact Zone for Nene Washes but any impact is unlikely given the scale of the proposal and the distance from the SSSI.

6.2 There were no records for European Protected species licences within the search area; there were records for Great Crested Newt nearly two kilometres from the site.

6.3 Mapping of habitats within the search area identified limited areas of priority and notable habitat; none are close to the site and therefore impact from the small scale proposal is unlikely.

6.4 Through a search of the NBN Atlas 1265 species records were obtained including records for insects, amphibians, birds, bats, Hedgehog, Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus* and flora.

6.5 Records for dragonflies and birds are closest to the site; no other records of note relate to the site or immediate surrounds; birds have been considered by the survey and the suitability to support nesting birds has been noted; dragonflies would not be affected by the proposals.

6.6 Other records, including those further afield, warrant little consideration due to the nature of the surrounds and poor quality of the site and surrounding habitats.

6.7 The findings of the desk study are included in (Appendix 4).

7.0 Conclusions

Bats (Trees)

7.1 All trees indicated negligible potential to support roosting bats with an absence of suitable features.

7.2 The site provides moderate suitability foraging and commuting opportunities which need to be protected.

7.3 A bat friendly lighting scheme will prevent disturbance to foraging and commuting bats and new roosting features should be installed to enhance biodiversity.

Birds

7.4 Four bird species were recorded and the site and surrounds offer suitable nesting habitat.

7.5 Whilst less common species were recorded the impact is considered negligible as similar habitat is available in the immediate surrounds.

7.6 Bird boxes installed on site will offer enhancements.

Badger

7.7 The survey for Badger produced a negative result with no Badger setts and no evidence of Badger using the site.

Reptiles

7.8 The habitat did not meet the criteria as suitable reptile habitat; arable land is lacking in a variety of sward heights and the floral diversity necessary to provide an adequate food source.

Hedgehog

7.9 The habitat assessment found the site and surrounds to be sub-optimal for supporting Hedgehog; Hedgehog are much more likely to be found in the urban setting of the town of March across the A141.

Great Crested Newt

7.10 The pond surveyed resulted in Poor Pond Suitability and a predicted 3% of Poor ponds are occupied by Great Crested Newt; the HSI suggests it is unlikely the Great Crested Newt are present.

7.11 Whilst the HSI cannot be used to establish presence or absence of Great Crested Newt we can consider the indices individually and a pond that dries annually would be unable to support a breeding population of newts.

Water Vole

7.12 The drains adjacent to the site are unsuitable for supporting Water Vole, this is due to the lack of bankside vegetation, in particular tall vegetation.

Hedgerows

7.13 Whilst the hedgerows are not considered Important Hedgerows under the Hedgerow Regulations all hedgerows are Priority Habitats which should be retained; it is understood that the hedgerows will not be impacted by the proposal.

General

7.14 Overall the site is of low ecological value and will benefit from the opportunity for enhancement offered by development.

8.0 Recommendations

Bats

8.1 One Eco Crevice Bat Box and one Eco Cavity Bat Box should be installed in the proposed office building in south facing positions at a height not less than three metres.

8.2 If external lighting is required then a bat friendly lighting scheme should avoid lighting to newly created roost features and retained habitats, such as the hedgerows and drains, as well as generally directing light downwards through the use of hoods and cowls as appropriate.

Birds

8.3 Removal of habitats suitable to support nesting birds should take place outside of the nesting season which is between March and August; where this is not possible an inspection should be completed by a suitably experienced ecologist who will denote appropriate buffer zones where required until young have fledged the nest.

8.4 To offer enhancements bird boxes for Sparrow, Swift and Starling should be installed in the proposed office building.

General

8.5 Recommendations are shown in (Appendix 5).

9.0 Legal Protection

Bats

9.1 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 transpose into UK law Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 1992 (often referred to as the Habitats Directive). All bats are listed under Annex IV and some (horseshoe bats, Bechstein's and Barbastelle) are also listed under Annex II which relates to Special Areas of Conservation. These Regulations make it an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat.
- Deliberately disturb bats in a way as to be likely significantly to affect the ability of any significant groups of bats to survive, breed, rear or nurture their young, or to affect the local distribution of abundance of that species.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a bat.
- Keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange a live or dead bat or any part of a bat.

9.2 In addition the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) makes it an offence to:

Intentionally or recklessly;

- Disturb any bat whilst it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection.
- Obstruct access to any structure or place which any bat uses for shelter or protection.

9.3 Penalties are fines of up to £5000 per bat and up to a 6 month custodial sentence.

Birds

9.4 All common wild birds are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Under this legislation it is an offence to:

- Kill, injure or take any wild bird.
- Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built.
- Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

9.5 Certain rare breeding birds are listed on Schedule 1 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and as amended). Under this legislation they are afforded the same protection as common wild birds and are also protected against disturbance whilst building a nest or on or near a nest containing eggs/unfledged young.

Badger

9.6 The Badger receives legal protection under The Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

9.7 The following is a summary of the offences contained in the act. It is a criminal offence to commit any of the following:

- To interfere with a sett by damaging or destroying it.
- To obstruct access to, or any entrance of a Badger sett.
- To disturb a Badger when it is occupying a sett.

9.8 A Badger sett is defined by the legislation as “any structure or place, which displays signs indicating current use by a Badger” and this is taken by Natural England to include seasonally used setts.

Reptiles

9.9 Common Lizard, Slow Worm, Adder and Grass Snake are all protected under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended) against injuring, killing or selling.

9.10 For developers in England, Wales or Scotland to reduce the risk of prosecution under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended), wherever works may impact on reptiles there must be evidence that reasonable effort was made to avoid breaking the law, including proof of adequate surveys.

Hedgehog

9.11 Hedgehog are afforded limited protection under Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) making it illegal to capture or kill them using certain methods. They are also protected from cruelty through the Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996.

Great Crested Newt

9.12 Great Crested Newt are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), through inclusion in Schedule 5. Great Crested Newt are also included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

9.13 Taken together the Act and Regulations make it illegal to:

- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture Great Crested Newt.
- Deliberately disturb Great Crested Newt or intentionally or recklessly disturb them in a place used for shelter or protection.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place.
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection.
- Possess a Great Crested Newt, or any part of it, unless acquired legally.
- Sell, barter, exchange or transport or offer for sale Great Crested Newt or parts of them.

Water Vole

9.14 Water Vole receive full protection through their inclusion in Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

9.15 Full legal protection under the act makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take Water Vole.
- Possess or control live or dead Water Vole.
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb Water Vole whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose.
- Sell Water Vole or offer or expose for sale or transport for sale.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)

9.16 Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006) sets out a list of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The list (including 56 habitats and 943 species) drawn up in consultation with Natural England, provides a guide to local and regional authorities when implementing their duty as defined in Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006;

- “Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”-Section 40(1).
- “Conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.” -Section 40(3).

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

9.17 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) sets out Government Policy on Biodiversity and Nature Conservation and places a duty on planners to give material consideration to the effect of a development on legally protected species when considering planning applications. NPPF also promotes sustainable development by ensuring that developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity and that it is conserved and enhanced within the development.

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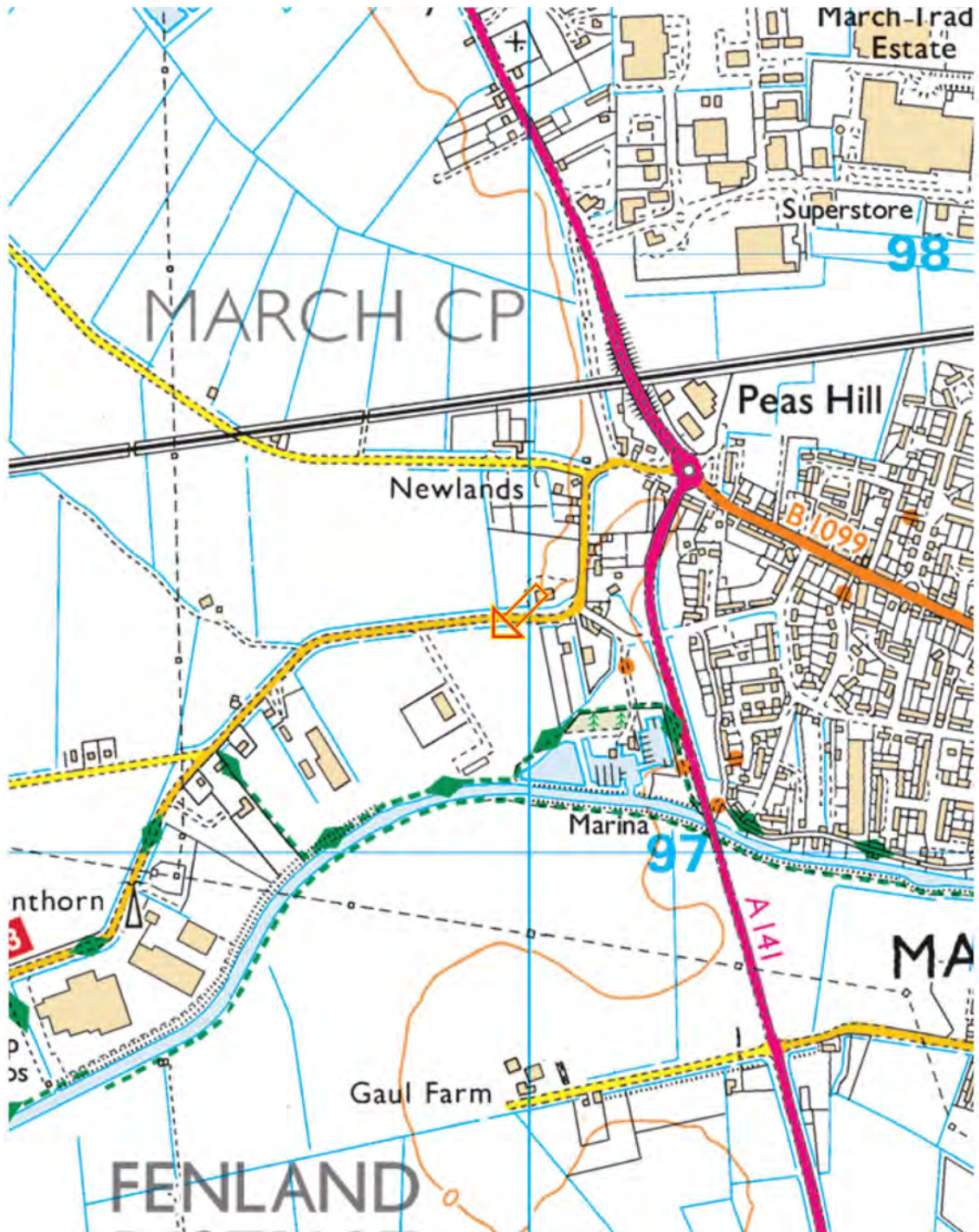
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11.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 Site Location



Appendix 2 Survey Area





Appendix 3 Birds

Blackbird

Black-headed Gull

Herring Gull

Rook

Turdus merula

Chroicocephalus ridibundus

Larus argentatus

Corvus frugilegus

Appendix 4 Desk Study



Legend

SSSI Impact Risk Zones -
to assess planning
applications for likely
impacts on
SSSIs/SACs/SPAs &
Ramsar sites (England)

Projection = OSGB36

xmin = 535100

ymin = 294900

xmax = 544800

ymax = 299600



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Legend

Great Crested Newt Class
 Survey Licence Returns
 (England)

Great Crested Newt Pond Surveys 2017 - 2019

- 10 FIG present
- 10 FIG absent
- 10 FIG inconclusive
- 8 FIG present
- 6 FIG present
- 4 FIG present
- 4 FIG absent
- 4 FIG inconclusive

Projection = OSGB36

xmin = 535100

ymin = 294900

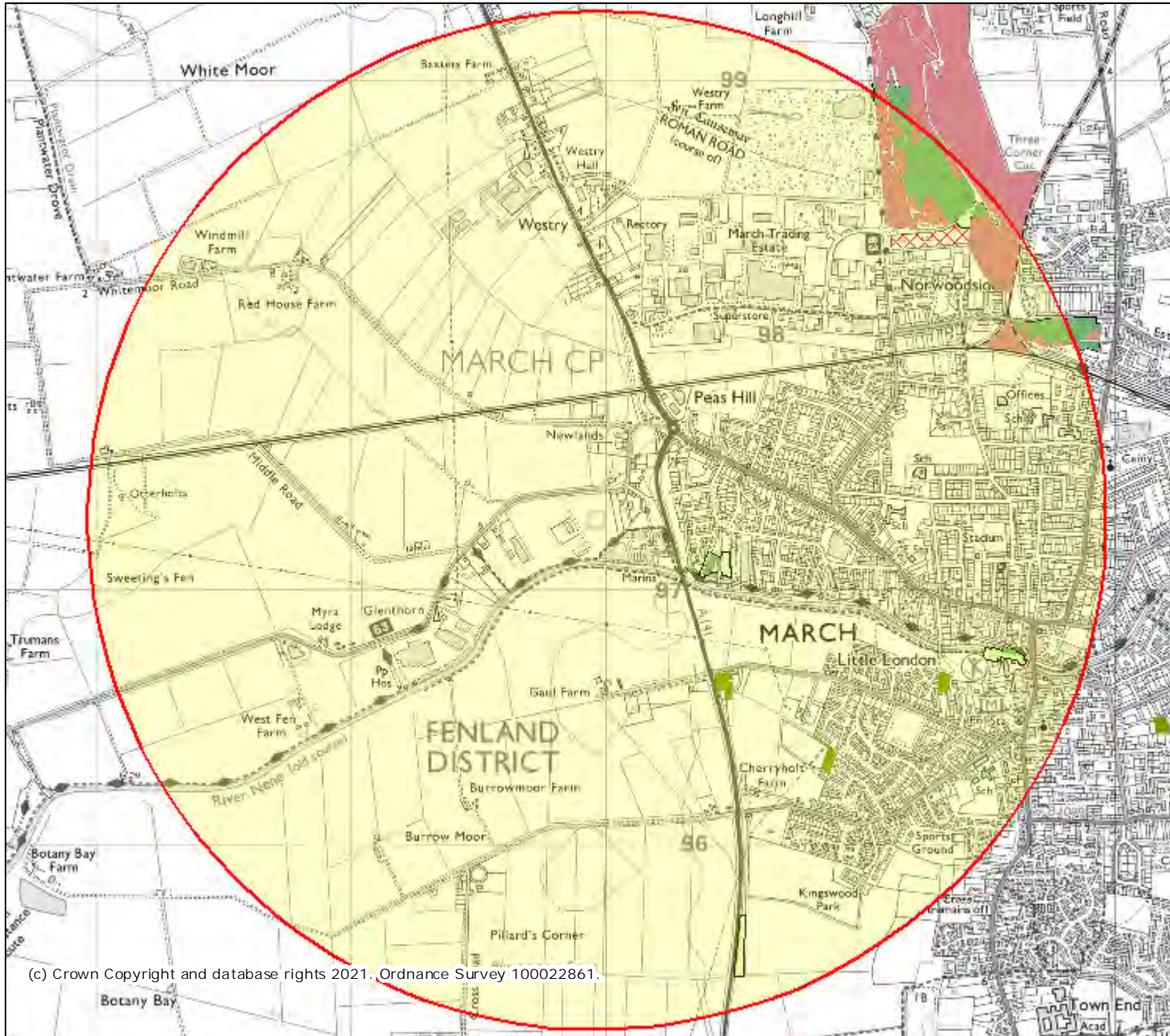
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ymax = 299600



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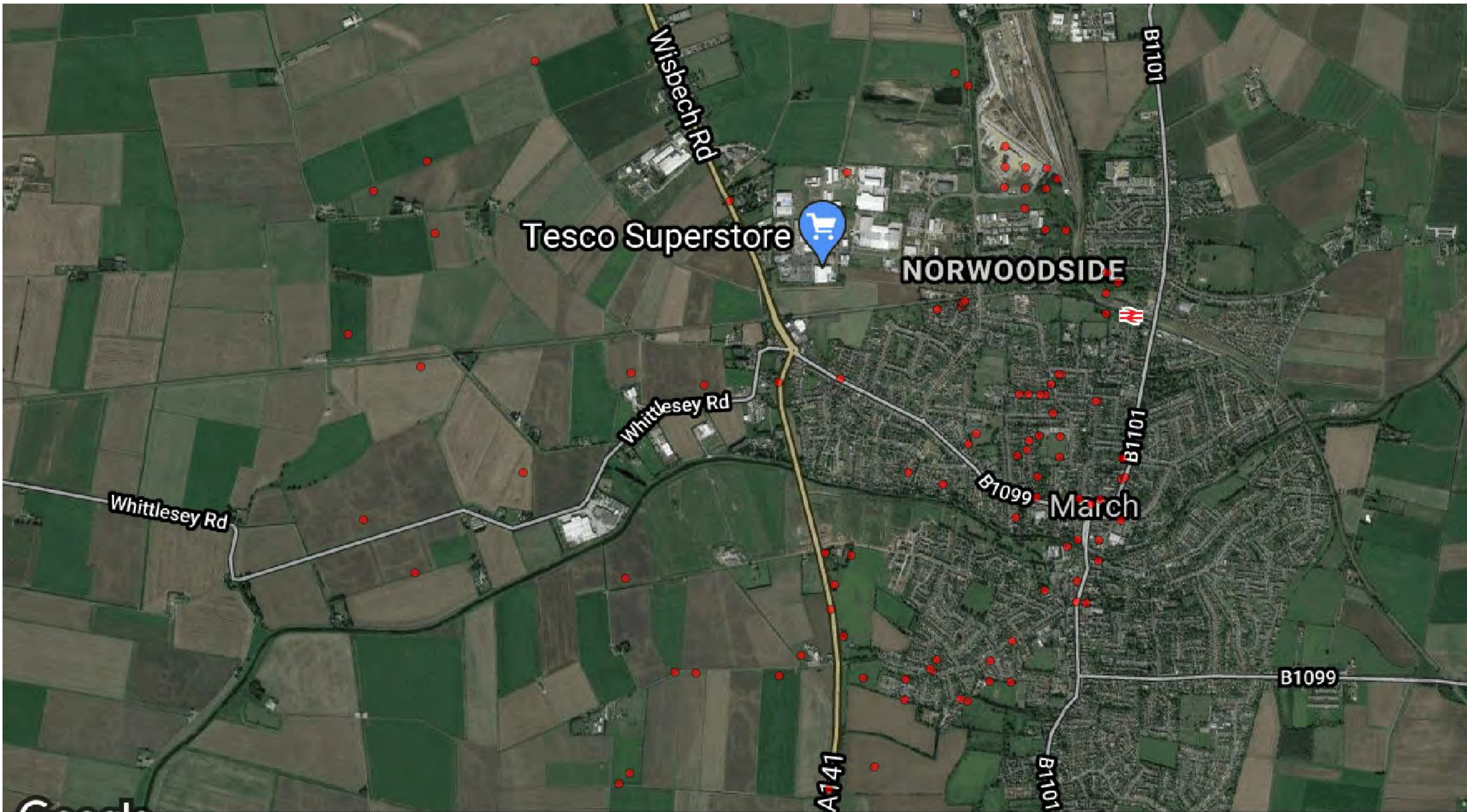
Legend

- Priority Habitat Inventory - Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh (England)
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Lowland Fens (England)
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Deciduous Woodland (England)
- Assumed woodland
- Broadleaved
- Cloud \ shadow
- Conifer
- Coppice
- Coppice with standards
- Failed
- Felled
- Ground prep
- Low density
- Mixed mainly broadleaved
- Mixed mainly conifer
- Shrub
- Uncertain
- Windthrow
- Young trees
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Traditional Orchards (England)
- Priority Habitat Inventory - No main habitat but additional habitat exists (England)

Projection = OSGB36
 xmin = 535100
 ymin = 294900
 xmax = 544800
 ymax = 299600



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March

Appendix 5 Biodiversity Enhancements

Bat Boxes



Integrated Eco Bat Boxes

Integrated Eco Bat Boxes are designed to be built into external walls and are sized to replace six standard UK bricks. These bat boxes are equally well suited to brick walls, timber cladding, random stone or external insulation where they can provide a permanent roost space for bats.

The box consists of an external shell of UV stabilised recycled plastic providing sealed, long lasting weather protection. Inside is a wooden box made from FSC Certified orientated strand board (OSB) providing a single internal roost space for the bats.

- internal cavity is 60mm wide, with rough walls and roof for bats to hang from (cavity box)
- two internal crevices 22mm wide (crevice box)
- entrance slot is 17mm wide
- requires no maintenance as the droppings simply fall out of the entrance slot.
- available in green, red or black.

Bird Boxes



Woodstone Sparrow Nest Box

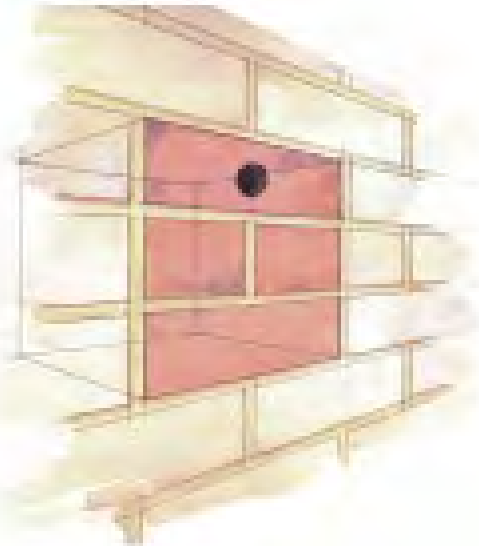
The House Sparrow Nest Box is from the Vivara Pro range and is manufactured from WoodStone - a mix of concrete and FSC wood fibres. This material is strong and highly insulating which helps to provide a thermally stable environment within the box. It also protects against damage from predators such as woodpeckers, squirrels and cats. It has two breeding chambers making it particularly suitable for house sparrows as they prefer to nest in colonies.

The House Sparrow Nest Box can be integrated into the masonry of a new house or fixed onto an external wall using strong screws and wall plugs (not included). If possible, it should be positioned near to vegetation and at a minimum of 2 m above ground.



Cambridge Swift Nest Box System

The Cambridge Swift Nest Box system comprises a nesting block built into a standard block or brick wall and faced with either a red or buff brick entrance. The nesting block has two nesting depressions and a large space for the young to exercise. Cost-effective concrete construction.



Ecosurv Starling Box

The Starling Box is a large, solid box made of insulating concrete with an internal nesting space which can be incorporated into the fabric of a building as it is built or renovated. The box is designed especially to be unobtrusive and aesthetically pleasing.

This box is faced in standard Staffordshire Smooth brick (Red or Blue), and is ideal for new builds. It is supplied unpointed so it can be matched as closely as possible to the building. It is also available as an unfaced box which can be rendered to match your building.