

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

**PLOT FOR STABLE BLOCK & CARAVAN
SOUTH VIEW FARM, RIDGEWAY, SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

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Executive summary	4.3	Badgers
1 Introduction	4.4	Dormice
2 Objectives/Scope	4.5	Birds
3 Methodology	4.6	Reptiles
3.1 Personnel	4.7	Great crested newts
3.2 Historical information	4.8	Other species
3.3 Survey	5	Appraisal
3.4 Constraints	5.1	Outline proposal
4 Results	5.2	Objectives of ecological appraisals
4.1 Habitat	5.3	Significant effects
4.2 Bats	5.4	Minor effects
	5.5	Opportunities
	5.6	Further surveys

<u>Version</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Date</u>
1.0	To inform the project and planning application	19 th April 2022

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This report assesses the ecological impact of the proposal based on wildlife legislation and planning policy. It is an independent assessment and not a statement of support or otherwise to the proposal for the site.

Disclaimer: While all reasonable effort has been made to ensure that the following information is correct and up to date it should not be relied upon as a definitive guide to wildlife and wildlife law. The exact requirements and habits of wildlife can vary and not be fully understood. Surveys and assessments can be restricted snap shots in time and space. Any conclusions and recommendations are made here in good faith. Also, the implementation of law can vary. Those needing to limit impacts and their risk should consult the original legislation and/or a lawyer conversant with wildlife law.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Site

The plot is on the edge of a grass field.

It is currently bare earth.

There is a scrubby roadside bank to the rear.

Proposal

To build a stable block and keep a static caravan.

Significant ecological considerations

- None.

Minor considerations (refer to section 5.4)

- Bat flight lines – avoiding an impact from external lights on night-time bat flight lines along the bank to the rear of the plot.
- Nesting birds – ensure that the impacts of the building activities are limited to the plot and field, and do not affect the scrubby roadside bank to the rear.

Opportunities (refer to Section 5.5)

- Opportunities are limited. Suggestions are given for (1) re-seeding the earth plot with a suitable wildlife seed-mix, (2) any planting to be selected for its wildlife value (nectar, fruit, seeds) and (3) making provision for nesting swallows.

Further survey

- None required.

1. INTRODUCTION

The plot is on the edge of a field next to the B4059 between Rudgeway and Earthcott Green.

The owner proposes to:

- *Build a stable block and have a static caravan on the plot.*

It is understood that the Local Planning Authority has requested a 'biodiversity survey and report'.

2. OBJECTIVES/SCOPE

- *To identify the presence or likelihood of protected or noteworthy habitat and species*
- *To identify ecological constraints to the proposal, opportunities and any need for further surveys.*

Figure 1 Location -grid reference ST 6366 8620



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Personnel

The survey and assessment was undertaken by Colin Menendez BSc (Hons) MCIEEM CEnv. He has 30+ years' experience as a professional ecologist and 20+ years' experience carrying out development-related surveys. His Natural England survey licences include bats and great crested newts.

3.2 Historical information

The owner was quizzed about wildlife at the site. The Government's MAGIC environmental mapping website was checked for information and a supplementary check undertaken on the Council's planning portal. Following the site visit – the commissioning of a data search was determined to not be beneficial.

3.3 Survey

The survey was carried out on 2nd February 2022. Conditions: patchy cloud, dry, breezy and mild 11°C. Equipment: close-focusing binoculars and high-powered torch.

The plot and its environs were walked and checked for any noteworthy habitats, features or species. This included a search and assessment for protected species and signs of them:

- Bats (trees from the ground)
- Badgers
- Dormice
- Nesting birds
- Reptiles
- Great crested newts
- Other noteworthy species.

3.4 Constraints

The preliminary survey was a walkover search and assessment. It can only be a snapshot of those features and species that can be seen at that time. The survey was in the winter when some species may not be present or apparent. The plot was cleared/deposited ground. Survey by an experienced ecologist helps reduce these constraints.

The following are outside the scope of this report: (1) arboriculture assessment, (2) tree preservation orders, (3) landscape assessment and (3) conservation areas (non-ecology).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Habitat

4.1.1 Setting and habitat

The plot is on the northern edge of a field alongside the banked verge of the B4427 where it rises to cross the M5. The field had a short horse-grazed sward and looked to be improved grassland, with flora limited to common species such as clover, creeping buttercup, daisy, dock and hawksbeard. The roadside bank had dense scrubby trees planted on it (alder blackthorn, field maple and hawthorn), taller ash at the top next to the road, mixed bare and ivy-clad ground with some elder and a dry ditch at its base. There is an earth track along this edge of the field to an existing modern barn in the corner of the field.

The plot for the stables and caravan was bare earth and a bank of piled bare earth with some rubble. It is between the field boundary and track to the existing shed, which are separated by an agricultural fence from the grassland in the field.

The plot is not habitat of 'principal importance' (priority habitat) as defined in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

Figure 2 Aerial view – boundary approximate - for reference only, image July 2021



Photo 1 Plot for proposed stable and caravan



Photo 2 Roadside habitat behind the plot



4.1.2 Local wildlife sites & habitat

There is no habitat of 'principal importance' in the vicinity of the plot shown on the Government's MAGIC environmental mapping website. There is a small patch of deciduous woodland 520 m to the south west amongst farmland and another on the other side of the motorway at 380 m.

On a wider scale, the field is not in a National Habitat Network or an Enhancement or Expansion Zone.

The nearest land-based statutory site is Tytherington Quarry SSSI at 3.6 km. This is a geological site of Rhaetian age important for its fossilised vertebrate biotas including reptiles, a crocodile and a dinosaur. The Severn Estuary SSSI RAMSAR is at 7 km. Planning Authorities are not required to consult Natural England on 'rural residential' planning applications at the plot's location, or for livestock units with a floor space of less than 500m² (MAGIC).

It is not known if there are any Local Wildlife Sites within 1 km.

4.2 Bats

There are no structures on the plot. None of the adjacent trees on the roadside bank had obvious potential roosting places for bats. The tree and scrub-lined roadside could be used by bats both as foraging habitat and flight lines. The nearest bat mitigation licence shown on MAGIC is at 2.3 km.

4.3 Badgers

No badger setts or obvious signs of badgers were found.

4.4 Dormice

The bare plot is unsuitable for dormice. Dormice can be found on suitable motorway banks, and scattered populations occur in South Gloucestershire, but there is nothing otherwise to suggest that the adjacent road bank could hold dormice, with no connecting woodland.

4.5 Birds

The bare plot is unsuitable for nesting birds. Birds could nest amongst the scrubby adjacent bank.

4.6 Reptiles

The bare ground as part of a horse-grazed field is not suitable for reptiles. The adjacent roadside bank is too shady to realistically support a population of reptiles.

4.7 Great crested newts

Plot: There are no ponds/waterbodies on the plot and the adjacent roadside ditch was bare (in February) (Photo 2). The roadside bank has some potential as a corridor for newts if they occur locally.

Local ponds/waterbodies: The hedge ditch along the western field hedge was also dry. The ditch on the eastern boundary was wet, with flowing water a couple of cm deep (labelled as Hortham Brook on maps) and is unsuitable for breeding newts (Photo 3) – this is approximately 100+ m from the plot. There are a couple of ponds on the opposite side of the B4427 at 190 m and 430 m from the plot (Figure 3).

Historic records: We are aware from past work of localised populations of great crested newts within 2 km. A check on MAGIC shows the nearest positive record at 2.4 km for the Great Crested Newt Pond Survey 2017 – 2019. There are no great crested newt licences shown within 4 km. *NB:* this does not necessarily mean that they do not occur in other ponds closer to South View Farm.

Photo 3: Hortham Brook on western edge of the field



Figure 4: Local ponds



5. ASSESSMENT

5.1 Outline proposal

The owner proposes to:

- *Build a stable block and have a static caravan.*

The existing vehicular access from the road will be used.

No plans are available at the time of writing.

5.2 Objectives of ecological appraisals

The objective of preliminary ecological appraisals (CIEEM¹ guidelines) is:

- To identify any ecological constraints
- To allow likely impacts to be avoided wherever possible through careful scheme design
- To help ensure that the likely requirements for possible mitigation are understood
- To identify ecological opportunities and
- To identify the need for any further ecological surveys.

Good practice is to follow the standard hierarchy of mitigation that is:

Avoidance → Mitigation → Compensation

5.3 Significant effects

- None.

5.4 Minor effects

The following are assessed to be of low impact, likelihood and/or risk from the proposal, but nonetheless warrant simple precautions to avoid any potential adverse impact on them and/or the inadvertent breaching of wildlife legislation.

- Bat flight lines
- Nesting birds.

5.4.1 Bat flight lines

The proposal has some limited potential to affect universal bat flight lines along the roadside habitat to the rear of the plot, due to the potential introduction of external lights, albeit to a minor extent. It is recommended that:

- **No external lights are to be fitted that illuminate the trees and scrub to the rear of the plot.**

¹ CIEEM = Chartered Institute for Ecology & Environmental Management.

5.4.2 Nesting birds

Birds could nest in the roadside trees and scrub to the rear of the plot.

It is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to damage or destroy the nests of breeding birds.

- **Ensure that the construction activities are limited to the plot and its field, and do not affect the roadside habitat.**

5.5 Opportunities for enhancement

The opportunities for enhancement are limited for a stable block and static caravan. The following enhancements are suggested:

- **Reinstate the bare ground with a mixed seed mixture suitable for a paddock, with a mix of traditional grasses and herbs and a high component of/or added clovers for example.**
- **Any trees/shrubs to be planted could be selected for their wildlife value (nectar, fruit, seeds). For example, berry-producing types would be apt here.**
- **Swallows: (1) Create a small opening around eaves height minimum min 50 mm high and 200 mm wide to allow swallows flying-access to the stable block and (2) if necessary fix a small platform about hand-sized on the roof timbers or wall top for them to build a nest on.**

5.6 Further surveys

- None currently identified.