

# **Ecological Appraisal**

**Site: Cheriton Farm, Payhembury**

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## **Background**

1. On 21 July 2021, the Local Planning Authority granted planning permission reference 20/0199/FUL for three residential barn conversions at Cheriton Farm, Lower Cheriton, Payhembury, Honiton, EX14 3JJ. The approved development is shown as being accessed via the existing driveway that runs between Albany and Cheriton Farm Farmhouse. This ecological appraisal relates to the proposed formation of a new access route to the property that will utilise agricultural land to the north and north east of the buildings to be converted.
2. The proposal will involve re-instating and widening an existing gateway that has become overgrown. This will require the removal of hedge plants that have grown up in the gateway and the removal of approximately 3.5 metres of hedgerow either side of the gateway to form an entrance to a new track that will be constructed to access the property. Approximately 8 metres of hedgerow to the east and 12 metres of hedgerow to the west of widened entrance will be cut and/or realigned to improve sightlines of the road.
3. The proposed access track will be 3.2 metres wide and approximately 155 metres in length. Approximately 70m of bank will be formed and planted with a native species hedgerow to the east of the proposed track.
4. On 8 June 2022, Acorn Rural Property Consultants carried out a walkover survey of the site to access the ecological impact of the proposal and to identify any ecological constraints and/or mitigation measures that may be required.

## **Site information**

5. Cheriton Farm is located within the hamlet of Lower Cheriton near Payhembury. The property comprises a residential dwelling, agricultural buildings and agricultural land. Planning permission 20/0199/FUL exists to convert some of the buildings to three residential dwellings. The planning permission includes demolishing and removing other buildings from the property.
6. The application site relates to agricultural land that comprises improved grassland and a small area of rough grassland to the north and north east of the buildings. It also includes part of a roadside hedgerow. There is also a dutch barn on the route of the proposed access track. This building is enclosed on three elevations with metal sheeting and is open sided on the north west elevation. It will be removed under planning permission 20/0199/FUL. An ecological survey that relates to planning permission 20/0199/FUL determined that no bats, or field sign of bat use, were identified in association this building.
7. The aerial photograph at Figure 1 shows the site for the entrance and access track outlined in red.

Figure 1. Aerial photograph of survey site and surrounding area.



Source: Google Earth

### Desk Study

8. Prior to conducting a walkover survey of the site, a desk survey was undertaken to obtain a baseline understanding of the area. Datasets on MAGIC.gov.uk<sup>1</sup> were searched for sites designated for nature conservation and any notable habitats. This resource allowed for searches of statutory and non-statutory designated sites including, but not limited to: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), RAMSAR Sites, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), National Parks, and others. Datasets on MAGIC were also searched for granted European Species Licences in the nearby area. The Devon Environmental Viewer was used to search for local wildlife sites. These searches were conducted within a 4km radius of the site, to ensure all relevant data within the close area has been processed.

<sup>1</sup> <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

9. Aerial photography dated 29 May 2020 from Google Earth Pro was inspected to review landcover in the surrounding area and to assess the potential connectivity between the site and other nearby habitats.
10. A full data search was not considered to be required for this site due to the small scale of the proposed work.

## Baseline Ecological Conditions

### Desk Study

11. The site and adjacent land is not within any designated statutory or non-statutory ecological site. There are no designated ecological sites within 4km of the site.
12. Approximately 220m to the south-east of the site is a priority habitat in the form of deciduous broadleaved woodland.
13. Approximately 400m to the east there is another deciduous broadleaved woodland priority habitat.

### Walkover Survey

14. The survey site comprises roadside hedgerow, a small area of rough grassland and managed improved grassland.
15. The proposed entrance is within the location of an overgrown gateway. As the hedgerow vegetation has grown over the gateway it can be defined, as per the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) J2.1 description, as an intact hedgerow. The hedgerow either side of the overgrown gateway is also intact. It is species rich in having multiple native woody species and containing an array of species within the hedgerow bottom flora. A list of the species observed within the hedge can be located in tables 1 and 2.
16. The woody plant species present within the hedgerow are listed within table 1, other plant species found within the hedgerow are located in table 2.

Table 1 – Woody plants recorded in hedgerow

<b><u>Common Name</u></b>	<b><u>Scientific Name</u></b>	<b><u>DAFOR Scale<sup>2</sup></u></b>
Common Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	A
Field Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>	O
European Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	F
Field Elm	<i>Ulmus minor</i>	F
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	F
Pruinose Bramble	<i>Rubus pruinosis Arrh.</i>	O
Common Ivy	<i>Hedra helix</i>	O

<sup>2</sup> \*DAFOR Scale – Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, Rare

\*Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, Rare

Table 2 – Wild flower and other plant species recorded in hedgerow

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>DAFOR Scale</b>
Cow Parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	F
Common Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	A
Broad-leaved Dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	O
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	A
Red Campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>	O
Meadow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	F
Catchweed Bedstraw	<i>Galium aparine</i>	A
Creeping Thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	R
Herb Robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	O
Bush Vetch	<i>Vicia sepium</i>	R
Lady Fern	<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	R
Smooth Meadow Grass	<i>Poa pratensis</i>	A
Perennial Ryegrass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>	F
Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	O

17. As stated above, the hedgerow is defined as an intact species rich hedgerow. These characteristics are shown in photographs 1-6 at the end of this report. As seen in table 1 there are multiple woody plant species located within the hedgerow and an array of plant species within the hedgerow bottom. This means the hedgerow has moderate ecological value. Photo 12 shows the overgrown gateway earlier in the year before the hedgerow was in leaf.
18. On the eastern side of the proposed entrance, there is a mature English Oak (*Quercus robur*) tree within the hedgerow (seen in photos 3 and 8). This has high ecological value and will be unaffected by the proposed development. Within the west corner of the field there is a young Common Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) tree. This too holds ecological value and will not be affected by the proposed development.
19. To the west of the proposed track is an existing hedgerow that includes mature and young trees that including Common Elder, Lombardy Poplar (*Populus nigra 'Italica'*) (photo 9), Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) (photo 9) and English Elm (*Ulmus procera*), some of which have been affected by dutch elm disease. These will be unaffected by the proposed access track. Near the buildings, the proposed track will pass a mature Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) tree (seen in photo 11). This tree holds ecological value and will be unaffected by the proposed track.
20. The proposed track will replace a strip of improved grassland and an area of rough grassland. During the walkover survey the improved grassland had recently been cut for hay or silage. Earlier this year it was also sprayed to control weeds. Taking into account the landcover and its management, this field holds little ecological value. The small area of rough grassland north of the agricultural buildings comprises ruderals and grasses including perennial rye grass, cock's foot, smooth meadow grass, common stinging nettles and broad-leaved docks. Considering the small size of this habitat, it is of no more than small ecological value.

## **Protected Species**

### **Dormice**

21. Dormice favour deciduous woodlands, especially hazel coppice, and thick hedgerows. As seen in table 1 the hedgerow is species rich and contains hazel. It is, therefore, possible that dormice may be present in the hedge.
22. The desk study found a local deciduous coppice 220m south-east of the site that has the potential for dormice to be present. It also identified two European Species Licenses that have been granted for dormice approximately 2km to the south of the site in the village of Feniton.
23. Due to the availability of other suitable habitat in the immediate area, the small amount of hedgerow that will be removed by proposal is of no more than local ecological value for dormice.

### **Reptiles**

24. The regularly managed improved grassland will not allow for tall ruderal grasses to grow. This means there is no suitable reptile habitat within this field. The small area of rough grassland is in close proximity to the regularly managed improved grassland and is would only be of local value.

### **Badgers**

25. There were no signs indicating the presence of badgers.

### **Bats**

26. Bats use hedgerows for connectivity between roosts and foraging grounds. The desk survey identified several European Species Licenses for bats granted within close vicinity of the site. It is therefore safe to assume that bats are in the nearby area and have high potential to use this hedgerow for commuting. However, the removal of 10m of hedgerow is not seen to damage the ability for bats to commute in the local area.
27. The mature oak tree within the hedgerow boundary has the potential for bats to roost. Due to this tree not being affected by the proposed development, the bat roost potential of the tree will not be affected.
28. As stated, there is also a dutch barn on the route of the proposed access track. This building will be removed under planning permission 20/0199/FUL. A previous ecological survey determined that no bats, or field sign of bat use, were identified in association with this building.

### **Birds**

29. No bird nests were present in the section of hedge that will be removed. However, the nature of the hedge may be suitable habitat for nesting birds.

### **Great Crested Newts**

30. There are no potential habitat features suitable for Great Crested newts within the site. The desktop assessment shows that there is one pond within 500 metres of the site. It is approximately 75m to the north-east of the proposed entrance. There are no records of great crested newts being found within 5km of the site.

### **Hedgehogs**

31. Hedgehogs are a species of principle importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. The nature of the hedgerow provides suitable foraging and shelter habitat for hedgehogs.

### **Ecological Evaluation, Conclusions and Recommendations**

32. There was no evidence of any protected species within the hedgerow, the small area of rough grassland or the improved grassland. However, there is suitable habitat and potential for dormice and hedgehogs within the hedgerow. The removal of the hedgerow could, therefore, result in disturbance to dormice and the destruction of nests.
33. As a precaution, the hedgerow should be inspected for any hedgehogs before commencing work. Any hedgehogs should be moved to a place of safe refuge outside the development site.
34. With regard to dormice, the hedgerow should be removed under an ecological watching brief. In the event any dormice nests are found, work would have to cease and a European Protected Species Licence would need to be obtained from Natural England.
35. Although no nesting birds were present at the time of the walkover survey, if the hedgerow removal work is undertaken between March-August there would be a risk of disturbing nesting birds. If it is not possible to remove it outside this period, then the work should be preceded by an inspection for active nests. If birds are nesting at that time, then work will have to be delayed until young birds have fledged.
36. The removal and cutting back or realigning of hedgerow will not have any significant impact on the commuter ability of any protected species.
37. Overall, the hedgerow removal works will result in a minor negative impact on ecology at a local level. However, the creation of approximately 70m of new native species hedgerow on the eastern side of the proposed track will provide new habitat and create an overall ecological gain. The proposed hedgerow species mix of 70% hawthorn and 30% mixture of blackthorn, field maple, hazel and common dogwood will provide new habitat for nesting birds and any dormice. It will also provide a feature of benefit for foraging and commuting bats.
38. The improved grassland is considered to have low ecological value. The loss of improved grassland to facilitate access into the property is considered to have no significant ecological impact.

39. The area of rough grassland is small and on the border of the improved grassland, this will deter reptiles from the area. It is only deemed to be of local value. The area should be carefully cut using a hand held strimmer and maintained to a height of approximately 50mm to 100mm, with all cuttings raked off and removed, prior to commencing work to render the habitat unsuitable for reptiles and to discourage any from this area
40. Given the small scale of the proposals and the distance from any designated statutory sites the proposals will have no impact on such sites.



## Walkover survey photographs

Photograph 1 – Location of overgrown gateway in hedge where entrance will be located. Looking south.



Photograph 2 – Looking west down the highway along hedgerow.





Photograph 3 – Looking east down the highway along hedgerow. Mature oak tree in background.



Photograph 4 – Looking east along hedgerow from inside the field. Mature oak tree in background.





Photograph 5 – Looking north at hedgerow, approximate removal area in red.



Photograph 6 – Western boundary hedge looking south towards gap.





Photograph 7 – Gap in hedge from previously fallen tree, where track will continue to property, looking west.



Photograph 8 – Western and northern boundary hedges from gap in the western hedge. Looking north. Mature oak in background.





Photograph 9 – Gap in hedge from previously fallen tree, looking east from property. Black walnut in background.



Photograph 10 – View along entire northern boundary and highway from north-west corner looking east.





Photograph 11 – Mature Silver Birch near proposed access.



Photograph 12 – Photo of gateway within hedgerow earlier in the year.

