

Great Ashfield Airfield

Great Ashfield, Suffolk, IP31 3HP

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

November 2022



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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Plumb Associates Ltd was commissioned by John Miles and Sons to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal of part of the Great Ashfield Airfield site which is subject to a change of use application for two existing buildings.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to ensure that the proposed scheme does not adversely affect any habitats, plants or animals that are legally protected. The report considers:-
- The potential of the site and its environs to support important habitats, protected species or other notable species of wildlife;
 - The conservation value of habitats and species both on the site and its environs;
 - The likely ecological effects of the development;
 - Mitigation measures to be taken to avoid or minimise these effects and identify opportunities to provide enhancement measures to achieve biodiversity net gain.

Methodology

- 1.3 The assessment was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (CIEEM 2017).
- 1.4 A desk study was undertaken which included reviewing Magic Maps (the results are summarised in Appendix 1) and Natural England GCN ArcGIS layers.
- 1.5 A site survey was undertaken on 10th November 2022 by Steve Plumb MCIEEM CEnv CMLI, an ecologist with over 30 years professional experience. The purpose of the survey was to establish the ecological value of the existing habitats on and adjacent to the site and to assess the site's suitability to support protected species and Species of Principal Conservation Interest.

Limitations

- 1.6 The surveys were carried out in good weather conditions and there was access to the whole site and interiors of the buildings included in this application. It is considered that there were no significant limitations to the survey.

2 Summary of relevant wildlife legislation

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

- 2.1 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, consolidates and amends existing national legislation to implement the Convention on

the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (Birds Directive). Under this legislation it is an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or their eggs or nests (with certain exceptions) and disturb any bird species listed under Schedule 1 of the Act or its dependent young while it is nesting;
- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal listed under Schedule 5 of the Act; intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct any place used for shelter or protection by any wild animal listed under Schedule 5 of the Act; intentionally or recklessly disturb certain Schedule 5 animal species while they occupy a place used for shelter or protection;
- Pick or uproot any wild plant listed under Schedule 8 of the Act.
- Carry out any works or management that might damage or destroy the 'interest' for which a Site of Scientific Interest has been designated.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

- 2.2 These regulations transpose Council Directive 92/43/EEC into English law, making it an offence to deliberate capture, kill or disturb wild animals listed under Schedule 2 of the Regulations. It is an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal, even if the animal is not present at the time. These Regulations were consolidated into the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Natural Communities & Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

- 2.3 The NERC Act places a duty on public bodies to have due regard for biodiversity and nature conservation during the course of their operations.
- 2.4 Section 41 requires the Secretary of State to publish lists of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. Species and habitats on this list are material consideration in planning.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992

- 2.5 The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it an offence to kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly mistreat a badger or to interfere with, or obstruct access to a sett.

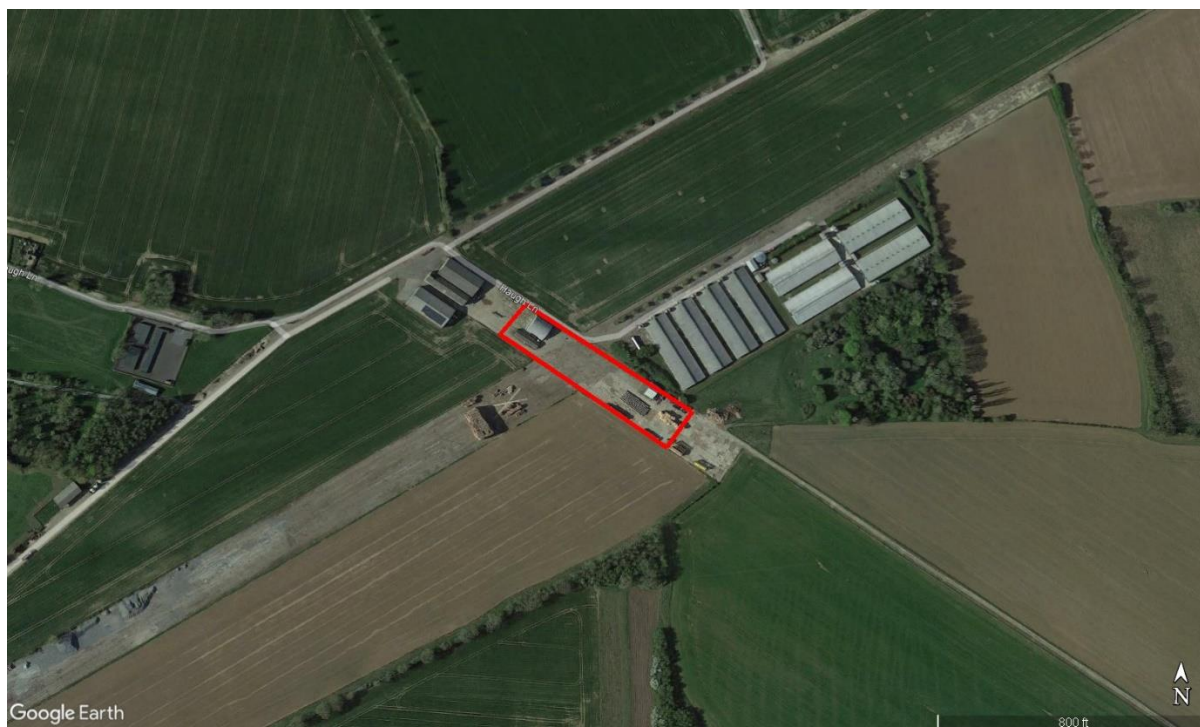


Image 1 – The survey area in context

3 Site description and existing habitat features

- 3.1 The site is within a rural location between Elmswell and Great Ashfield in an area of extensive arable farmland. The site is part of a former airfield and sections of concrete runways and hardstanding remain. Image 1 shows the site (outlined in red) in context.
- 3.2 The part of the site included within the application comprises concrete hardstanding and three buildings. Within the redline boundary the only vegetation are tiny patches of grass and scattered ruderals growing within gaps in the hardstanding.
- 3.3 The buildings comprise a modern ‘hanger’ of exclusively steel construction, a large pitch roofed store with concrete block walls and asbestos roof with large skylights and a disused concrete building with open ends and windows throughout. The buildings are assessed in detail in Section 4.
- 3.4 Outside the redline there are other agricultural buildings, hardstanding and arable farmland. There is a small earth bund adjacent to Building 2 which has a mix of ruderals dominated by Common Nettle. No hedges or other habitat features connect to the site.

4.0 Protected species assessment

The site and adjacent areas were assessed for their suitability to support protected species.

Badgers

- 4.1 Badgers (*Meles meles*) are afforded protection under The Protection of Badgers Act 1992, under which it is an offence to kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly mistreat a badger or to interfere with, or obstruct access to a sett.
- 4.2 The buildings are situated on concrete hardstanding. There is a small section of earth bund on the northern side of building 3 which is covered by ruderal species which had mostly died back. There was no evidence of badger activity within this feature. The site provides no opportunities for foraging.
- 4.3 There are no suitable features within the surrounding area that would support badgers. No additional badger surveys are required.
- 4.4 The proposal is for a change of use to existing buildings with no construction works required; therefore no precautionary method statement is required.

Bats

- 4.5 All bat species are afforded legal protection on a European and national basis, under the Conservation of Species and Habitat Regulations 2010 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(as amended). These Regulations were consolidated into the Conservation of habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU exit) Regulations 2019). In addition to it being an offence to kill or injure an animal it is a criminal offence to disturb or obstruct a bat roost.
- 4.6 The site contains 3 buildings which are subject to the change of use application. The exterior and interior of each was surveyed to look for signs of use by roosting bats and assess their overall suitability to support bats. Buildings 1 & 2 are currently used for storing equipment and materials while Building 3 is unused.
- 4.7 Building 1 is a large 'hanger'-style building constructed out of steel (Photo 3). The sheets were tightly secured, providing no gaps suitable for roosting. There was an overhang on the eaves on the front and rear elevations; however these were relatively wide and formed from smooth steel. They provided no insulation or protection from the weather and the smooth sides do not provide features for animals to grip. These features therefore were unsuitable for roosting.
- 4.8 The inside of the building was unlined steel (Photo 4) and comprised a single space. There are no features within the building that would be suitable for roosting bats.

- 4.9 Building 1 is assessed as having negligible value for roosting bats. No further surveys are required. The building will be retained as part of the change of use application.
- 4.10 Building 2 is a smaller building of more traditional construction. The walls are constructed of concrete blocks with metal doors at each end with gaps around the edges. The roof comprises corrugated fibre cement sheet panels with a series of skylights (Photos 5 & 6). The interior comprises a single space with no roof lining or roof void.
- 4.11 Building 2 lacks external features that would be suitable for roosting bats. The interior is well-lit due to the skylights and subject to draughts. It lacks crevices or other habitat features and the materials do not have thermal properties that would protect against daily temperature fluctuations.
- 4.12 Building 2 is assessed as having negligible value for roosting bats. No further surveys are required. The building will be retained as part of the change of use application.
- 4.13 Building 3 is a long narrow shed with concrete walls with a series of windows. The building is open at each end with a single interior wall dividing the space in two. The roof is made of corrugated fibre cement sheets.
- 4.14 Building 3 is unsuitable for roosting bats as it is open to the elements and provides no features for roosting bats.
- 4.15 There are no features such as hedges which connect the site to any suitable bat habitat and so would not form part of any commuting route. The site contains no vegetation and so is unsuitable for foraging bats.
- 4.16 The site is assessed as having negligible potential to support roosting bats due to the construction of the existing buildings. There are no features of value for commuting and foraging bats. No further bat surveys are required as part of this proposal.

Reptiles

- 4.17 Protection is afforded to the Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*), Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) Adder (*Vipera berus*) and Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) under Section 9 (1) and 9 (5) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
- 4.18 The site comprises concrete hardstanding which is surrounded by arable farmland. It is considered that the site has no potential for supporting reptiles. No further surveys are required.

Birds

- 4.19 All wild species of breeding birds and their nests are protected under Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by later legislation including the

Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. The species listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act are given additional protection.

- 4.20 The buildings were surveyed for signs of nesting birds. None were recorded.
- 4.21 There are no other habitat features that would be affected by this scheme that would support nesting birds.

Great Crested Newts

- 4.22 Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*) are afforded legal protection on a European and national basis, under the Conservation of Species and Habitat Regulations 2010 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(as amended). These Regulations were consolidated into the Conservation of habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU exit) Regulations 2019). In addition to it being an offence to kill or injure an animal it is a criminal offence to disturb or obstruct their breeding or resting places.
- 4.23 The nearest ponds are approximately 190m from the edge of the site set within a small, wooded area which is surrounded by farm buildings, hardstanding and arable farmland. It is separated from the site by a paddock. These ponds have no suitable connection to other habitat features due to the prevalence of arable farmland and lack of features such as hedges.
- 4.24 The site itself comprises concrete hardstanding which has no value for great crested newts. No further surveys are required for this species.

Other protected species

- 4.25 The site does not contain habitat suitable to support Otter, Water Vole, Dormouse or White-clawed Crayfish. No legally protected plant species were recorded.

Invasive species

- 4.26 No invasive species were recorded on site.

5 Discussion of Results

- 5.1 The desktop survey comprised an analysis using Defra's Magic Maps (see appendix 1) and the Mid Suffolk Local Plan.
- 5.2 The site is approximately 1.8km from the closest statutory designated site, The Gardens, Great Ashfield SSSI. This is an ancient meadow designated for its botanical interest. The proposal would have no effect on this statutory site.
- 5.3 The only County Wildlife Site within the 1km buffer is East Wood, Elmswell, approximately 500m south of the site. The proposal would result in no effect on this site.

- 5.4 The site is dominated by concrete hardstanding with only tiny, scattered patches of ruderals having established in the cracks. The buildings have been surveyed and assessed for their potential to support roosting bats. They are considered to have negligible value for roosting bats due to their construction. The lack of habitat features for foraging or commuting mean that bats do not use this area. The existing buildings will be retained as the application is for a change of use.
- 5.5 It is considered that the site has negligible ecological value and has no habitat features that would support protected species. No additional surveys are required. No mitigation measures or specific precautionary method statements are considered necessary due to the lack of potential for protected species to be impacted by the scheme and fact that this is a change of use application.

6 Enhancements for biodiversity

- 6.1 The change of use application does not provide any realistic potential to provide biodiversity enhancements. It could be possible to attach bird or bat boxes to Building 2 although the lack of habitat connectivity means that the bat boxes in particular would probably never be used.

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 The site comprises three buildings within an area of concrete hardstanding within arable farmland setting. Permission is being sought for a change of use for two of the buildings.
- 7.2 The site contains virtually no vegetation on the hardstanding. The interiors and exteriors of the buildings were assessed, and all were considered to have negligible potential for supporting roosting bats. The site is considered to have no potential for supporting protected or important species. The site is of negligible ecological value. As the scheme is for a change of use the buildings will be retained and there will be no additional construction works required.

Site Photographs

Photo 1 – View of the site in context from main access.



Photo 2 – Building 1 and 3 and concrete former runway



Photo 3 – Building 1



Photo 4 – Interior of Building 1



Photo 5 – Building 2



Photo 6 – Interior of Building 2



Photo 7 – Building 3



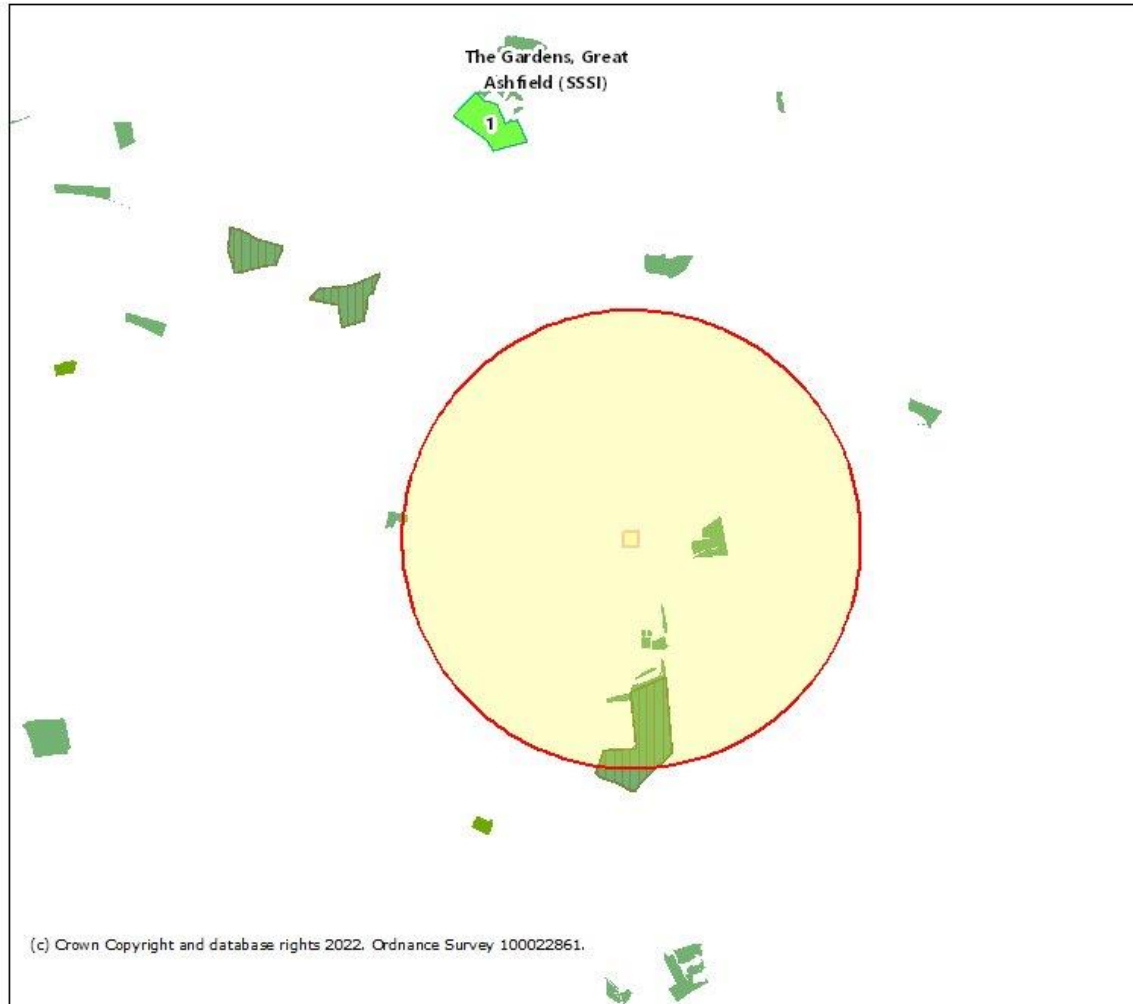
Photo 8 – Interior of Building 3



Appendix 1 - Magic Map – 1km buffer

MAGiC

Magic Map



Legend

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)

- Favourable Condition
- Unfavourable Recovering
- Unfavourable no change
- Unfavourable Declining
- Part Destroyed
- Destroyed
- Not Assessed
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Good quality semi-improved grassland (Non Priority) (England)
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Lowland Meadows (England)
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Reedbeds (England)

OS Priority Ponds with Survey Data (polygons)

- Clean Water for Wildlife and Priority Pond

Surveyed Priority Ponds Points (points)

- CWW no OS pond within 30m
- CWW within 30m of OS pond
- CWW within OS pond
- PP no OS pond within 30m
- PP within 30m of OS pond
- PP within OS pond

Ancient Woodland (England)

- Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland
- Ancient Replanted Woodland
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Deciduous Woodland (England)
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Traditional Orchards (England)

Clean Water for Wildlife

Priority Pond

Projection = OSGB36
 xmin = 594500
 ymin = 263500
 xmax = 605900
 ymax = 269200

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