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Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Including a Protected Species Assessment of Land at Bungeons Farm, Barking, Suffolk. IP6 8HN.

On behalf of:

Mr D. Bates

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0 SUMMARY

- 1.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr D. Bates to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment of Land at Bungeons Farm, Barking, Suffolk. IP6 8HN. The proposal is for a new swimming pool.
- 1.1.2 The survey was conducted on 6th April 2023 by experienced ecologist Roger Spring BSc MCIEEM (licensed to survey for great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* and licenced to survey for bats – level 2). The survey consisted of an inspection for preferred habitat types and signs and evidence of protected and priority species, such as for bats, great crested newts, reptiles, badgers *Meles meles* and nesting birds following Natural England (English Nature) Guidelines. A local biological record search was undertaken.
- 1.1.3 The site includes short, improved grassland currently used as a dog exercise area with a boundary hedgerow and dry ditch to the west. The new pool will link attach to an existing annex building which is a single-storey, brick structure with a pitched, tiled roof. The northern section of the annex also has timber cladding. The roof of the annex will not be affected by the proposed works.
- 1.1.4 The site is positioned in a rural location dominated by arable and grazed fields with pockets of woodland and hedgerows. Four ponds are present within 250m of the site.
- 1.1.5 The site was considered low in ecological value and unlikely to support protected, priority or rare species. No signs or evidence of such were observed.
- 1.1.6 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary for the proposed development to proceed. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures for hedgehogs, amphibians and bats are provided in this report and should be followed.
- 1.1.7 With the recommendations followed as described, development could proceed with a minimal risk of harm or impact to local ecological value or to protected, priority or rare species and notable habitats. Biodiversity enhancement recommendations are also included in the report in accordance with national planning policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.2 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr D. Bates to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment of Land at Bungeons Farm, Barking, Suffolk. IP6 8HN. The proposal is for a new swimming pool.
- 1.1.3 Wildlife such as nesting birds, bats, reptiles and great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* are protected by law. Protected and priority species and habitats, are also a material consideration for individual planning decisions under the National Planning Policy Framework, 2021 (MHCLG, 2021).
- 1.1.4 This study and report complies with the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 2017 Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals.
- 1.1.5 CIEEM guidelines indicate that ecological surveying typically remains valid for between 12 and 18 months (CIEEM, 2019).

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

- 2.1.1 A local biological record search was obtained through the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) to support the assessment.
- 2.1.2 A search of the Multi-agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) was also conducted, to check for statutory nature conservation sites.
- 2.1.3 These results were then combined with the findings of the site survey, to assess the risk of ecology issues, relevant to planning, occurring on the site.

2.2 Study Limitations

- 2.2.1 Botanical assessment was undertaken at a suitable time of year, though some early flowering species and annuals may not be visible or identifiable to species level.

2.3 Initial Site Survey

Habitats and Surroundings

- 2.3.1 The site was visited on the 6th April 2023 to survey for ecology issues. This included the following:

- Noting the suitability of habitats present on the site, with regard to protected, priority and rare species; including plants, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, nesting birds, invertebrates and protected, priority or red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC);
- Assessing the habitats surrounding the site and in the local area;
- Direct survey for evidence of protected species as far as possible, e.g. for bats, reptiles, great crested newts, badgers *Meles meles*, and nesting birds;
- Checking for invasive species such as Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* and giant hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum*.

Bat Inspection

2.3.2 The assessment for bats was conducted by an experienced ecologist, licensed by Natural England to disturb and take bats for science and education. Boundary trees and the annex were externally inspected for bat activity, suitability and potential for roosting following English Nature Bat Mitigation Guidelines (English Nature, 2004) and Bat Conservation Trust Best Practice Guidelines, therefore considerations were:

- the availability of access to roosts for bats;
- the presence and suitability of cracks, crevices, gaps, fissures, ivy growth and other places as roosts;
- signs of bat activity or presence, such as; the bats themselves, droppings, grease marks, scratch marks, urine spatter and prey remains.

2.3.3 Equipment available for use during the survey included a ladder, high powered torch, digital camera and binoculars.

2.3.4 The availability of access to roosts was assessed based upon the presence of holes large enough to allow entry to bats and lack of cobwebs and dirt.

2.3.5 The outside of trees and the annex were inspected for gaps, cavities, access points and crevices, and any signs of bats (droppings, staining, urine spatter), in accordance with Natural England (English Nature) guidelines (English Nature, 2004).

Reptiles & Amphibians

2.3.6 The site was inspected for potentially suitable terrestrial habitats for foraging, sheltering or dispersing amphibians and foraging, sheltering, breeding and basking habitat for reptiles. High quality terrestrial refuges searched for, included:

- Log piles & rockeries,
- Thick leaf litter,
- Compost & manure heaps,
- Mammal burrows,
- Deep ground cracks;
- Refuse suitable for shelter;
- Tussock grassland;
- Hedgerows and any other potential habitats.

2.3.7 Three nearby ponds were inspected for suitability for great crested newts by undertaking a Habitat Suitability Index assessment as developed by Oldham *et al.* 2000.

Badgers, Hedgehogs, Dormouse & Other Mammals

2.3.8 Signs and evidence of badgers, and other protected, priority and rare mammal activity searched for included the following:

- Setts, holes and burrows;
- Foraging holes and other diggings;
- Latrines, droppings, spraints and scats;
- Mammal hairs;
- Paw prints and other tracks;
- Feeding remains;
- Scratch marks, bedding material and other signs.

3 RESULTS AND RISK

3.1 Site Description & Location

3.1.1 The site includes short, improved grassland currently used as a dog exercise area with a boundary hedgerow and dry ditch to the west. The new pool will link attach to an existing annex building which is a single-storey, brick structure with a pitched, tiled roof. The northern section of the annex also has timber cladding. The roof of the annex will not be affected by the proposed works.

3.1.2 The site is positioned in a rural location dominated by arable and grazed fields with pockets of woodland and hedgerows. Four ponds are present within 250m.

3.1.3 Ponds included:

- Pond 1: a medium sized duck and geese pond approximately 40m south east.
- Pond 2: a large fish pond approximately 45m south.
- Pond 3: A small edge of field pond approximately 180m south west.
- Pond 4 a small garden pond approximately 110m north west.

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 The closest statutorily designated nature conservation site is Barking Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located approximately 760m east and designated for its ancient woodland habitats (MAGIC, 2023).

3.3 Data Search

3.3.1 The following information is a summary of local herpetofauna records collated through the SBIS.

Table 1 - Summary of local biological records.

Species	Approximate Distance	Date
Great crested newt	1.5km north west	2019
Common toad	Battisford	2007
Grass snake	Willisham	2018

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

- 3.4.1 The site includes a short improved grass with a hedgerow to the west.
- 3.4.2 The short improved grass included: violet *Viola* sp., lords and ladies *Arum maculatum*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne*, annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, creeping thistle *Cirsium*
- 3.4.3 *arvense*, nettle *Urtica dioica*, cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, doves-foot cranesbill *Geranium molle*, broad leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius* and broad-leaved plantain *Plantago major*.
- 3.4.4 The boundary hedgerow included blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, dogrose *Rosa canina*, plum *Prunus domestica* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*.
- 3.4.5 No protected, priority or notable plants were found on the site. No Schedule 9 invasive plant species were observed. The boundary hedgerow is a UK priority habitat and is not proposed for impact.

Bats

- 3.4.6 The annex on site will be link attached to the new pool. It is understood that the roof will not be impacted, though this area was well inspected for suitability or potential for roosting bats and no such potential was identified. The annex appeared relatively recently constructed/refurbished and the roof and soffits etc. were well-sealed to bats with bird mesh present below the first row of tiles. No external signs or evidence of bats were observed associated with the annex.
- 3.4.7 Trees present on the site boundary were either too small in trunk diameter or immature to support features suitable for roosting bats. No signs or evidence of bats were observed on trees.
- 3.4.8 The boundary habitats are likely to be used by moderate to high numbers of commuting and foraging bats though is not proposed for impact. The grassland proposed for impact was considered low in ecological value and unlikely to produce significant quantities of flying insects for feeding bats.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

- 3.4.9 The site is dominated by short grassland considered low in suitability for foraging or sheltering by other protected priority or rare mammals such as badgers *Meles meles* and hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus* etc. No signs or evidence of such were noted during the survey. The field is fenced with chain-link fencing to keep dogs in reducing access for ground dwelling mammals.

Birds

- 3.4.10 Birds observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey included; wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*, great tit *Parus major*, chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, robin *Erithacus rubecula*, house sparrow *Passer domesticus* and skylark *Alauda arvensis*. Domestic ducks and geese were present on Pond 1.
- 3.4.11 House sparrow and skylark are UK priority birds and red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC). All other birds recorded are common and widespread species and green-listed BoCC. The skylark were recorded at a distance and not using adjacent fields or the site.
- 3.4.12 No signs or evidence of past nests were observed on the site, though the hedgerow and boundary trees were considered potentially suitable for low - moderate numbers of common nesting birds. The grassland on the field is too short for nesting skylark and with too much human/dog activity.
- 3.4.13 The BoCC ratings are summarised as follows:
- Red-listed - highest conservation concern;
 - Amber-listed - moderate conservation concern;
 - Green-listed - least conservation concern.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

- 3.4.14 The grassland habitats were considered very low/negligible in ecological value as terrestrial habitat for great crested newts and other amphibians. The field is regularly cut and used for dog exercise. Ponds 1-3 were inspected for suitability for great crested newts and all found to be poor in suitability with Pond 1 a domestic waterfowl pond heavily impacted, Pond 2 a fish pond and Pond 3 a heavily shaded small pond which annually dries and lacks aquatic vegetation. Pond 4 could not be surveyed, though is over 100m from the site.

Table 2: Habitat Suitability Index score for Ponds 1 - 3 close to the site at Bungeons Farm.

Pond	Pond 1	Pond 2	Pond 3
SI1 - Location	1	1	1
SI2 - Pond area	0.4	0.9	0.05
SI3 - Pond drying	0.9	0.9	0.1
SI4 - Water quality	0.33	0.67	0.67
SI4 - Shade	1	1	0.4
SI6 - Fowl	0.01	0.67	1
SI7 - Fish	1	0.01	1
SI8 - Ponds	0.65	0.65	0.65
SI9 - Terr'l habitat	0.33	0.67	0.67
SI10 - Macrophytes	0.3	0.3	0.3
HSI	0.39	0.47	0.42

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

Reptiles

- 3.4.15 Habitats present on the site were considered low/negligible in suitability or potential for reptiles of any species with very short grassland habitat present. Adjacent habitats were also considered low in suitability for reptiles.
- 3.4.16 Reptiles were not discovered during the survey visit.

Invertebrates

- 3.4.17 The proposed construction zone was considered negligible in suitability or potential for invertebrates of conservation concern with common and widespread habitat types present.
- 3.4.18 No notable invertebrates were observed during the survey.

Other Protected, Priority or rare Species

- 3.4.19 No signs or evidence of any other protected or priority species were observed on the site, nor were there any suitable habitats for such.

4 DISCUSSION OF RISK AND LEGISLATION

4.1 Protected & Priority Species

Bats

4.1.1 Bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 and under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Some bats are also UK priority species. A summary of the offences likely to be relevant to development are:

- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or take a bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, whether bats are present or not;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection;
- Deliberately disturb a bat anywhere.

4.1.2 Bats are very likely to forage locally. However, the site was considered negligible in suitability for roosting or foraging bats. No signs or evidence of bats were observed.

4.1.3 No trees are proposed for impact.

4.1.4 Therefore, it was considered that the risk of significant impact, to bats, bat roosts or local bat populations is very low/negligible.

4.1.5 Further bat surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Other Protected, Priority & Rare Mammals

4.1.6 The proposed construction zone was considered low in suitability or potential for any other protected, priority or rare species and no signs or evidence of such were discovered during the survey visit. However, it could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog may cross the site.

4.1.7 Further surveys or mitigation for any other protected, priority or rare mammals were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to hedgehogs, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Birds

- 4.1.8 Wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and, with certain exceptions (e.g. pest species) in certain situations, it is an offence to intentionally:
- Kill or injure 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.
- 4.1.9 Some bird species (such as barn owls) are also specially protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and others are UK priority species.
- 4.1.10 The proposed construction zone was considered low in suitability for protected and priority bird species, though the boundary hedgerows and trees were considered suitable for low-moderate numbers of common nesting birds, this habitat will be retained.
- 4.1.11 The risk of significant impact to notable birds or local bird conservation was considered negligible.
- 4.1.12 Therefore, it was considered unnecessary to undertake further bird surveys for rare or protected birds or provide mitigation for such species. However, to prevent harm to actively nesting birds, recommendations, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

- 4.1.13 Great crested newts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000, and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Great crested newts are also UK priority species. A summary of the offences likely to be relevant to development are:
- Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill;
 - Intentionally injure;
 - Deliberately disturb, or intentionally or recklessly disturb in a place of 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.

4.1.14 Great crested newts have been recorded locally (SBIS, 2023). However, the proposed construction zone is relatively small, negligible in suitability as terrestrial habitat for great crested newts or any other amphibians and three out of the four ponds identified locally were poor in suitability for great crested newts. The fourth pond is over 100m from the site. Most great crested newts stay within 100m of a breeding pond (Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, 2003).

4.1.15 Overall, it was considered that the risk of presence or impact to great crested newts or a significant population of other amphibians was negligible.

4.1.16 Therefore, further amphibian surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Reptiles

4.1.17 Widespread reptile species including, grass snake, adder, slow worm and common lizard, are protected from intentional killing and injuring under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They are also UK priority species.

4.1.18 Reptiles have been recorded locally (SBIS, 2023). However, the site is negligible in suitability for reptiles and the scale of proposed works is considered very small.

4.1.19 Therefore, the risk of significant impact or harm to reptiles of any species was considered negligible. Therefore, further reptile surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Plants & Invertebrates

4.1.20 No rare, protected, priority or Schedule 9 invasive plants were present. The boundary hedgerows are proposed for retention in full.

4.1.21 Further botanical surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

4.1.22 Regarding invertebrates, the proposed construction zone is small and habitats present were common and widespread. The risk of presence of a significant assemblage of invertebrates of conservation concern was considered negligible.

4.1.23 Further invertebrate surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Other Protected & Priority species

- 4.1.24 No signs or evidence of other protected, priority or rare species were observed on the site and it was considered that there was a very low risk of such species occurring on the site or being impacted by the proposed development.

4.2 Other Issues

Sensitive Habitats

- 4.2.1 The proposed works are small with a relatively small construction zone. Furthermore, the site is a significant distance from any statutorily or non-statutorily designated nature conservation sites. No new housing stock is proposed. Therefore, the risk of direct or indirect impact to such sites or wildlife using such sites was considered negligible.
- 4.2.2 Further surveys or mitigation for designated nature conservation sites or other sensitive habitats were considered unnecessary.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Precautionary Measures & Compensation

Bats

- 5.1.1 To minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, the following precautionary measures should be undertaken:
- Any new proposed external lighting should be minimised. Where external lighting is required, it should be warm white LED lamps with glass glazing, rather than plastic, as these produce the least amount of heat and UV light possible, minimising the attraction effects on insects and minimising disturbance to local bats;
 - Any external lighting proposed for the development should be aimed carefully, to minimise illumination of boundary habitats and avoid light spillage into the sky, or horizontally out from any buildings, by using hoods or directional lighting;

Hedgehogs & Amphibians

- 5.1.2 The risk of hedgehogs or amphibians being significantly impacted by the development was negligible, to minimise any residual risk of impact or harm or impact, the below recommendations should be followed:

- Before construction commences, vegetation should be maintained short with regular cutting to prevent the site improving in ecological value for wildlife;
- During works, waste materials should be removed off site immediately to prevent wildlife using the materials for shelter and being harmed by subsequent movement;
- Construction materials should be stored on hardstanding or on pallets to prevent wildlife from sheltering in the materials and being harmed by movement of the materials;
- No construction work at night when hedgehogs and amphibians are mostly active;
- Any excavations for the development should be covered at night or should have a roughly sawn plank placed in them to facilitate escape, the plank should not be placed at more than 30° and must be at least 30cm in width;
- If at any stage hedgehogs or amphibians are observed on the site, works should stop immediately, and the animal should be allowed to disperse of its own accord, or an ecologist should be contacted for advice.

Birds

- 5.1.3 It is recommended that to prevent harm to nesting birds, any necessary clearance or reduction of trees and shrubs (not considered likely) should commence outside of the main bird breeding season (March until the end of August). If this timescale is not possible then an ecologist should check the site for active bird nests before vegetation clearance.
- 5.1.4 If an active bird nest was found, it would be necessary to protect the nest from harm or disturbance until the bird had finished nesting.

5.2 Enhancements

- 5.2.1 To further improve the site for wildlife and provide a net-gain in accordance with national planning policy (NPPF, 2021) the below new habitat boxes will be installed on the new stable:
- 1 x Vivara pro sparrow terrace (or similar if out-of-stock).
 - 1 x Beaumaris Bat Box (or similar if out-of-stock).

- 5.2.2 The bat box will be positioned facing a southerly aspect on the new pool building. The bird box will be positioned facing a northerly aspect on the new pool building. Both boxes will be positioned just below the roof.
- 5.2.3 Wildlife boxes can be purchased on-line.
- 5.2.4 Any new proposed soft landscaping should be native and/or wildlife attracting.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 At the time of survey, the proposed construction zone supported common and widespread habitats low/negligible in suitability or potential for protected, priority or rare species. No signs or evidence of such were identified. The risk of significant impact to such species or to local ecological value was considered negligible.
- 6.2 Habitats on the site boundary are the features of highest ecological value on the site. These habitats are proposed for retention in full.
- 6.3 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary for the development to proceed. Recommendations for birds, hedgehogs, bats and amphibians are provided and should be followed accordingly.
- 6.4 With recommendations followed as described, the development could proceed with a minimal risk of harm impact to protected, priority or rare species or notable habitats.
- 6.5 With the biodiversity enhancements followed as described, the proposed development would be enhanced for the benefit of local wildlife in accordance with national planning policy.

7 REFERENCES

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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: Figures

Figure 1 - Habitat map of the site.



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Annex at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 2: Western elevation of the annex at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 3: Southern elevation of the annex at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 4: Main site area looking south east to north west with hedgerow in distance at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 5: Main site area looking from north to south across the site at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 6: Main site area looking east to west at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 7: Pond 1 at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 8: Pond 2 at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 9: Pond 3 at Bungeons Farm.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023