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Ecological Impact Assessment- Update

Fressingfield LLP

Land adjacent to Red House Farm, Priory Road,
Fressingfield

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REVISION HISTORY

Rev	Description of change	Date	Initials
1	Original report	13.06.2023	AS

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DISCLAIMER

It should be noted that the information above provides details of the Site’s current ecological situation. In the event that the proposed development does not commence within 12 months of the date of this report, further advice should be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist as to whether the information provided requires updating in light of changing ecological conditions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5

2. INTRODUCTION 6

3. METHODOLOGY 9

4. LEGISLATION AND PLANNING POLICY OVERVIEW 13

5. DESK STUDY RESULTS..... 15

6. HABITAT SURVEY RESULTS 18

7. EVALUATION OF ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT 22

8. HABITAT EVALUATION 23

9. FAUNAL EVALUATION 24

10. RECOMMENDATIONS, FURTHER SURVEYS AND ENHANCEMENTS 27

11. REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY 31

12. APPENDICES 32

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Nicholson's was commissioned by Fressingfield LLP to carry out an Updated Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) Survey including desk study for Land adjacent to Red House Farm, Priory Road, Fressingfield in respect of the granted planning permission (Ref: 4410/16) for proposed redevelopment to include 28 dwellings with gardens and associated public roads and public open space.
- 1.2 The site itself is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory designation. There are no statutory designations within 2km of the Site, and three non-statutory designations, the closest being RNR115, roadside nature reserve, located 0.86km west, this is designated due to its botanical interest. A range of protected mammal and bird species were identified within 2km of the Site by the desk study.
- 1.3 The Ecological Impact Assessment Survey was undertaken on 30th May 2023. The habitat within the Site consisted of other neutral grassland, with a small area of ruderal vegetation bound by trees and scrub to the northern boundary.
- 1.4 Recommendations, in this context, are as follows:
 - Further survey work in respect of great crested newts is recommended due to the extent of suitable habitat at the Site and local records of great crested newts located at 0.18km east.
 - Vegetation clearance should be scheduled outside of the main bird breeding season (March to August inclusive). If in the event works need to proceed within this period, then specialist advice from a suitably qualified ecologist should be sought.
 - Any landscape planting should incorporate native species, including those species known to provide foraging opportunities for breeding birds and nectar sources for invertebrates. Enhancements in the form of bird and bat boxes are also recommended.

2. INTRODUCTION

Terms of Instruction

2.1 Nicholsons has been commissioned by Fressingfield LLP to undertake an ecological assessment of Land adjacent to Red House Farm, Priory Road, Fressingfield in respect of the granted planning permission (Ref: 4410/16 for proposed redevelopment to include 28 dwellings with gardens and associated public roads and public open space.

Aim of the study

2.2 The purpose of this report is to provide an updated assessment of ecological features present within the Site, to identify any ecological constraints and provide appropriate mitigation, compensation and avoidance measures to no important ecological features are negatively impacted as a result of the proposals.

Documents Provided

2.3 As background information, the following documentation was provided:

- Ecology Report, Phase 1 Habitat Survey - Anglian Ecology, September 2014
- Ecological Surveys, Protected Species and Habitat surveys (Adjacent Land) – Anglian Ecology, February 2019
- Site Plan – Ref: 696 101, Studio 303, July 2020

Site Description

2.4 The Site is centred at Ordinance Survey grid reference: TM 25486 77114 (hereafter referred to as “the Site”). The assessment covered the whole of the Site, which is approximately 1.3ha in area.

2.5 At the time of the assessment the Site mostly comprised other neutral grassland, with a small area of ruderal vegetation bound by trees and scrub to the northern boundary.

2.6 The Site was situated within a rural location to the western edge of the village settlement of Fressingfield. The surrounding landscape was arable farmland intersected with hedgerows and trees. Immediately to the north of the Site was New Street, subject to a moderate volume of traffic during commuting times. To the east of the Site was residential areas of Fressingfield, with houses, gardens and public roads. To the south was a small number of large residential properties surrounded with mature gardens and trees. A relatively new residential development of eight properties was located to the east of the Site.

2.7 The Site location plan is provided below at **Figure 1** and a Site boundary plan is provided below at **Figure 2**.



Figure 1: Site Location Plan

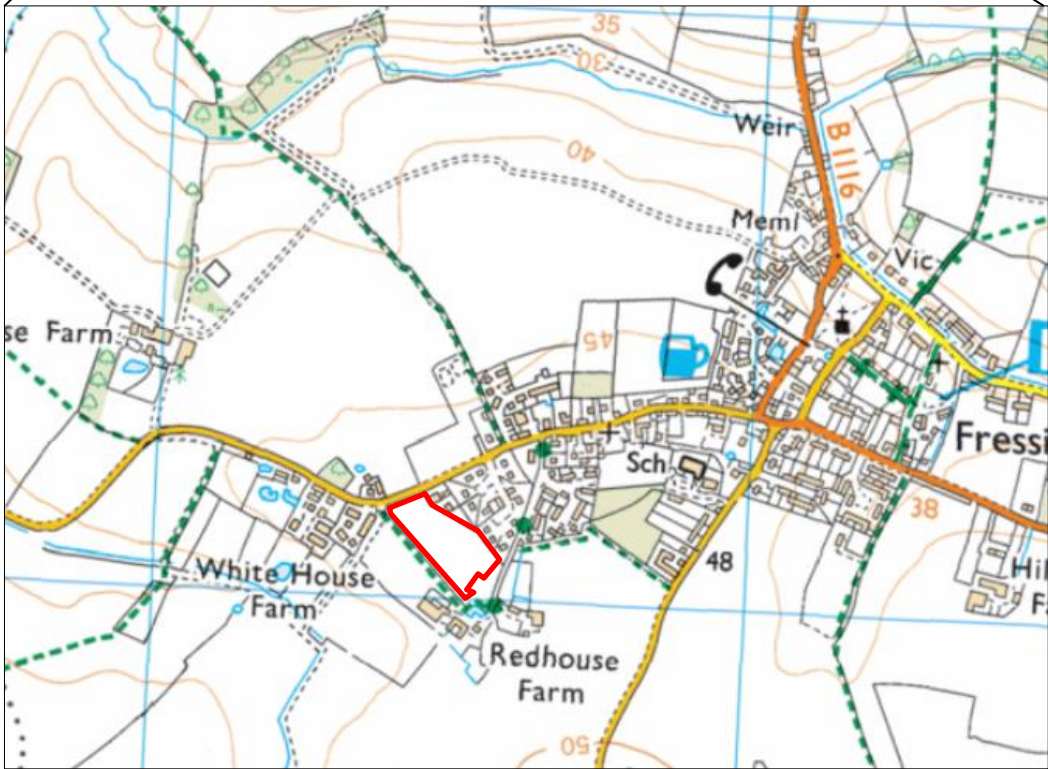


Figure 2: Site boundary

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Proposed Development

2.8 The Site has been granted outline planning permission for 28 residential dwellings (affordable included) with all matters reserved. The proposals include a surface water attenuation pond to the north of the Site, a public road will run along the western edge of the Site connecting New Street at the north and Priory Road to the south. Further areas of hardstanding for roads and parking will be included. An area of public open space will be located within the centre of the Site.



Figure 3: The Proposed Development (Studio303- July 2020)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The methodology for the ecological assessment was split into three main areas: a desk study, habitat survey and faunal survey. These are discussed in more detail below.

Desk Study

3.2 Existing ecological information on the Site and surrounding area was requested from the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS). The purpose of the desk study was to collect baseline information to identify statutory and non-statutory designated sites, legally protected species and species of conservation concern within a 2km radius of the Site in line with CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2017). Full information may be provided on request.

3.3 A review of online resources, including the Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database was also undertaken to establish the ecological context for the Site (accessed 7th June 2023). The MAGIC website was also reviewed to identify any designated sites of European Importance within 2km of the Site.

3.4 In addition, Ordnance Survey and aerial mapping was reviewed to identify any ponds within 500m of the Site.

UK Habitat Classification Field Survey

3.5 A UK Habitat Classification survey was undertaken by Alison Saunders on 30th May 2023 in good weather conditions (14°C, 20% cloud cover, Beaufort Scale 3) in order to ascertain the general ecological value of the Site and to determine the need for further assessment.

3.6 The UKHab survey was undertaken in accordance with standard methodology (Butcher *et al.*, 2020) utilising the UKHab Professional edition up to Level 5 and all secondary codes. The UKHab methodology involves the classification of habitat types based on vegetation present. The Site was classified into areas of similar botanical community types, with a representative species list provided for each habitat type identified. In addition, invasive plants were also searched for during the survey, as listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended).

3.7 Abundance and area coverage were recorded for all botanical species present. This was determined using the DAFOR scale detailed in **Table 1**.

Table 1: DAFOR Scale

Value	Species Abundance Percentage
D – Dominant	>75%
A – Abundant	51-75%
F – Frequent	26-50%
O – Occasional	11-25%
R - Rare	1-10%

- 3.8 The information is presented in accordance with the standard UKHab Survey format with habitat descriptions and a habitat map, provided at **Appendix 1**.

Faunal Surveys

- 3.9 General faunal activity was recorded during the PEA field survey, including mammals and birds observed or heard. Specific attention was also paid to the potential presence of any protected, rare or notable species, as described below.

Badger Appraisal

- 3.10 During the walkover survey conducted on 30th May 2023 any incidental signs of current badger *Meles meles* activity were recorded within the Site and within 30m of the Site where access could be obtained. The survey method was based on a standard approach as in 'The history, distribution, status and habitat requirements of the Badger in Britain, (Cresswell, P. 1990)'.
3.11 The appraisal involved a systematic search of the survey area for all signs of badger activity including badger setts, worn pathways in vegetation and/or across field boundaries, footprints, hairs, dung pits/latrines, bedding and evidence of foraging activity including snuffle holes. Particular attention was paid to habitats of suitable topography or supporting suitable vegetation for sett-building as well as to those features particularly favoured by badgers including hedgerows, areas of dense scrub, woodland, ditches and banks.

Bats

Tree Assessment

- 3.12 A preliminary ground-based assessment of all suitable trees located on or immediately adjacent to the study area was undertaken to determine their potential to support roosting bats (for details on the location of trees with bat roost potential refer to highlighted trees on the habitat map in **Appendix 1**).
- 3.13 All suitable features such as cracks and splits in limbs, hollows and cavities, natural holes, woodpecker holes, loose bark and dense ivy were assessed using binoculars and high-powered torches where appropriate. Evidence of bat roost themselves, including droppings, feeding remains and urine staining were also searched for during the assessment.
- 3.14 Where no direct or indirect evidence of roosting bats were confirmed, trees were categorised as being of high, moderate, low or negligible suitability to support roosting bats based on the type and number of suitable bat features present, in accordance with best practice guidance, Bat Conservation Trust (2016) Bat Surveys: Good Practice Guidelines 3rd Edition.
- High suitability – one or more potential roosting features present within a structure, with enough suitable surrounding commuting and foraging habitat, which is large enough to be able to shelter a large number of bats on a regular basis. These include maternity and hibernation roosts.
 - Moderate suitability – one or more potential roosting features present within a structure that is likely to shelter a number of bats, but unlikely to support a roost of conservation status.
 - Low suitability – one or more potential roost features present within a structure yet is not surrounded by suitable commuting and foraging habitat and does not provide enough

protection and space to shelter a large number of bats. This also includes trees with no visible potential roost features but is of adequate age and structure to offer limited roosting potential.

- Negligible suitability – whereby no evidence of bats was observed and no suitable features for bats are supported, such that their presence is considered negligible.

Principles of Ecological Evaluation

- 3.15 The evaluation of ecological features and an assessment of likely impacts should be based on available resources and the professional judgement of the ecologist concerned. Ecological value of features should be undertaken in accordance with the approach outlined in the Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland (CIEEM, 2018).
- 3.16 A five-point evaluation scale has been applied to assist with the identification of key features of ecological significance in relation to the proposed development. This is an arbitrary scale based upon characteristics of ecological importance as listed in CIEEM (2018), which experience has shown is effective at this level of assessment.
- 3.17 In evaluating ecological features and resources, geographic frame of reference is considered. The value of an ecological feature is determined within a defined geographical frame of reference as detailed in **Table 2**:

Table 2: Classification of the value of ecological features and resources

Value	Importance	Species	Habitat
Very High	International	A regularly occurring population of an internationally important species, which is threatened or rare in the UK, where the population is a critical part of a wider population or where a species is at a critical phase in its life cycle at this scale.	An internationally designated site including SAC, SPA, Ramsar, or one proposed for designation. Sites supporting areas of priority habitats which are scarce at an international level of where it is needed to maintain the viability of a larger area at that level.
High	National	A regularly occurring population / number of a nationally important species which is threatened, or rare, where the population is a critical part of wider population or where a species is at a critical phase in its life cycle at this scale. A regularly occurring population of a nationally important species on the edge of its natural range. A species assemblage of national significance.	A nationally designated site ie SSSI, or one that meets the published criteria. Sites supporting areas of priority habitats which are scarce at a national level or where it is needed to maintain the viability of a larger area at that level.

Value	Importance	Species	Habitat
Medium	Regional / County	A regularly occurring locally significant population of a species listed as being nationally scarce or a county Red Data book or BAP on account of its rarity. A regularly occurring, locally significant number of a regionally / county important species or where the population is a critical part of a wider population or where a species is at a critical phase in its life cycle at this scale. A species assemblage of regional or county significance.	Sites supporting a viable area of a priority habitat which is scarce at a regionally or county level or where is needed to maintain the viability of a larger area. A County designated site or one that meets published criteria. Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites / potential Local Wildlife Sites at that level.
Low	Local	A population of a species that is listed in a district BAP because of its rarity in the locality and a species assemblage of local or district significance. A regularly occurring, locally significant number of district importance or where the population is a critical phase in its life cycle at this scale.	Sites / features that are scarce within the local area or district. Areas of habitat considered enriching appreciably the habitat resource within the context of the locality or which buffer those of a more important nature.
Site	Site Only	Species, which are not protected or rare in the local area and are not at a critical phase in its life cycle at this scale.	Habitats of very low importance and rarity but of ecological importance within the Site.

3.18 Ecological features may also be deemed to be of negligible value if they are deemed to be of very low ecological importance and / or rarity.

3.19 Ecological features may be defined as:

- Statutorily protected (Natura 2000, national Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves) or locally designated sites (local Wildlife Sites or Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation);
- Sites and features of biodiversity value not designated in this way such as ancient woodland; or
- Species of biodiversity value or other significance, including those protected and controlled by law.

Field Survey Limitations

3.20 All of the species that occur within each habitat type would not necessarily be detectable during survey work carried out at any given time of year. The botanical work was undertaken within the optimal survey period, although at any time of the year not all species present are necessarily detectable it is considered that a robust assessment was undertaken.

4. LEGISLATION AND PLANNING POLICY OVERVIEW

- 4.1 A summary of the legislative and planning context which has been used to inform this ecological assessment is provided below.

Legislation

- 4.2 A number of tiers of legislation protect wildlife and habitats within England and Wales, the highest of which being European legislation. A summary of relevant legislation is provided below:

- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC).
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Policy

- 4.3 The planning policy framework that relates to nature conservation in Fressingfield, Mid Suffolk is provided at two levels; nationally through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and locally through policies in the Mid Suffolk Core Strategy 2008 and the Fressingfield Neighbourhood Development Plan 2019.

Local Policy – Mid Suffolk Core Strategy 2008

- 4.4 POLICY CS5 – Mid Suffolk’s Environment

“To protect, manage and enhance Mid Suffolk’s biodiversity and geodiversity based on a network of:

- *Designated Sites (international, national, regional and local)*
- *Biodiversity Action Plan Species and Habitats, geodiversity interests within the wider environment*
- *Wildlife Corridors and Ecological Networks*

and where appropriate increase opportunities for access and appreciation of biodiversity and geodiversity conservation for all sections of the community.”

Local Policy – Fressingfield Neighbourhood Development Plan 2019

- 4.5 POLICY FRES 1 – Housing Provision

“This Plan provides for around 60 dwellings to be developed in the Neighbourhood Plan area between April 2018 and March 2036. This growth will be met through:

The allocation of the following sites for development: Land at Red House Farm – approximately 28 dwellings.”

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and 2006 NERC Act Habitats and Species of Principal Importance

- 4.6 In 2007, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Partnership published an updated list of priority UK species and habitats covering terrestrial, freshwater and marine biodiversity to focus conservation action for species and habitats in the UK. The UK Post-2010 Biodiversity

Framework succeeds the UK BAP. The Framework continues the conservation work initiated by the UK BAP following the establishment of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992.

- 4.7 The purpose of the Framework is to set a broad structure for conservation across the UK until 2020. In summary:
- To set out a shared vision and priorities for UK-wide activities, in a framework jointly owned by the four countries, and to which their own strategies will contribute;
 - To identify priorities at a UK scale which will help deliver biodiversity targets and the EU Biodiversity Strategy;
 - To facilitate the aggregation and collation of information on activity and outcomes across all countries of the UK; and
 - To streamline governance arrangements for UK-wide activities.
- 4.8 The habitats and species are identified as Habitats and Species of Principal Importance for the conservation of biological diversity in England under Section 41 of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. The NERC Act and NPPF make these species and habitats a material consideration in the planning process.
- 4.9 The Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) produced in 2012, lists priority species or habitats of particular relevance to this Site, namely Lowland Meadows and Ponds. The habitats listed have species associated with them which are also afforded protection such as reptiles, great crested newts (GCN) turtle dove and rare stoneworts. The presence of these species and / or habitats within the Site is considered within this report.
- 4.10 The LBAP contains objectives and targets for the species and habitats identified above. They should be considered in regard to the proposed development in order to identify opportunities for avoidance, mitigation and enhancement.

5. DESK STUDY RESULTS

5.1 The full information collected during the desk study from the SBIS is available of request and summarised below.

Sites of Nature Conservation Interest

- 5.2 The Site itself is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designation.
- 5.3 The records search identified no statutory protected sites and three non-statutory sites within 2km of the Site, as summarised in **Table 3**:

Table 3: Summary of Ecology Designations

Designated Site Name	Designation	Proximity to Project	Description
Wingfield Priory Meadow	CWS	1.39km west	A meadow consisting of ancient, herb rich grassland enclosed by a native hedgerow. The meadow is not only of historical interest but also of high conservation value. The low-lying waterlogged areas support a diverse wetland flora which includes many species which are becoming increasingly scarce both nationally and within Suffolk. Other parts of the meadow have drier conditions and are characterised by a range of wildflowers, some of which are indicators of old, unimproved meadows, for example pepper saxifrage <i>Silaum silaus</i> .
Dale Pugh	CWS	1.51km north-west	The linear shaped site has steep west-facing slopes down to a stream which runs along the western boundary. It comprises a number of different semi-natural habitats. Species characteristic of unimproved grassland can be found on the site in good numbers.
RNR115	RNR	0.86km west	Contains sulphur clover <i>Trifolium ochroleucum</i> .
Key:			
CWS: County Wildlife Site			
RNR: Roadside Nature Reserve			

Protected Species

5.4 Below provides a summary of protected species which have been recorded within 2km of the Site. It should be noted that the absence of records should not be taken as confirmation that a species is absent from the search area.

- 5.5 Records of amphibians, badgers, bats, birds, protected / notable or invasive plants, reptiles and water vole were recorded within 2km of the Site. No notable protected species were recorded within the Site.

Amphibians

- 5.6 Five records of GCN were received for within 2km of the Site. The closest record, dated 2014, was located approximately 0.18km east of the Site. This record was of a GCN found in a ditch, a further GCN record from 2014 was located along this ditch. Other amphibians recorded within 2km of the Site include common frog *Rana temporaria* and smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*. No records of amphibians were received for within the Site.

Badgers

- 5.7 No records of badgers were received for within 2km of the Site.

Bats

- 5.8 Four species of bat have been recorded within 2km of the Site, namely common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*, Nathusius's pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii* and serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*. The closest record, dated 2009, relates to a maternity roost of brown long eared bats located approximately 10m east of the Site within a property at Priory Crescent, Fressingfield. No records of bats were received for within the Site.

Birds

- 5.9 59 protected or notable species of birds were received for within 2km of the Site. The majority of records related to farmland and garden birds recorded within the Fressingfield area. No records of protected or notable bird species were received for within the Site.

Water Vole

- 5.10 Two records of water vole *Arvicola amphibious* were received for within 2km of the Site. Both records from 2003 were located at 1.35km east of the Site along a stream at Tithe Farm. No records of otter or water vole were received for within the Site.

Plants

- 5.11 The closest records of protected or notable plants were recorded at the RNR115 designated road verge, species present include bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Spiny Restharrow *Ononis spinosa* and Sulphur Clover *Trifolium ochroleucon*.
- 5.12 Bluebell is protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) against commercial exploitation only.

Reptiles

- 5.13 One record of grass snake *Natrix helvetica* was recorded at 1.3km east of the Site. No records of reptiles were received for within the Site.

Other Species

- 5.14 14 records of west European hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* were received for within 2km of the Site, the closest record was located at 0.52km north-east of the Site in 2016. Hedgehog are

listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC Act. No records of Hedgehog were received for within the Site.

6. HABITAT SURVEY RESULTS

Habitat Descriptions

6.1 The full UKHab Habitat Survey Map detailing the location of the above habitats and other features of ecological interest with Target Notes (TN) is presented at **Appendix 1**. The habitat descriptions below should be read in conjunction with this plan and any associated Target Notes.

6.2 Habitats identified during the UKHab Habitat Survey are detailed below in alphabetical order (not in order of ecological importance):

- Dry Ditch (191)
- Line of Trees with Mixed Scrub understory (w1g6 and h3h)
- Other Neutral Grassland (g3c)
- Ruderal (17)

Dry Ditch (191)

6.3 Located at the northern boundary of the Site was a dry ditch within the scrub and trees. this ditch was approximately 1.5m in depth from ground level to the base.

6.4 There was no aquatic vegetation within the ditch, therefore it is assumed that this is dry throughout much of the year, it likely takes water during periods of heavy rainfall from the adjacent road.

6.5 This habitat was of low ecological value and was not a Habitat of Principle Importance as described and listed within S.41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Line of Trees and Mixed Scrub understory (w1g6 and h3h)

6.6 At the northern boundary of the Site, adjacent to New Street was a line of young and semi-mature trees (LT1).

6.7 The trees were between 8-10m in height and covered an area 5-8m in width. LT1 consisted of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and field maple *Acer campestre*. The understory consisted of scattered hawthorn, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and dogrose *Rosa canina* with some bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and ivy *Hedera helix* present in some areas.

6.8 All of the ash trees were suffering from ash dieback and had many standing dead branches.

6.9 No trees were found to contain features suitable for roosting bats, this habitat was of low ecological value was not a Habitat of Principle Importance as described and listed within S.41 of the NERC Act 2006.



Figure 4: Trees and Scrub at the northern boundary

Other Neutral Grassland (g3c)

- 6.10 The majority of the Site was other neutral grassland habitat. The Site has undergone vegetation clearance in the past and been soil striped. The regrowth vegetation consisted of many pioneer plant species which have naturally colonised the bare soil.
- 6.11 Grass species present included: frequent false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* (F) with occasional rough meadow grass *Poa trivialis* (O), Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* (O) and cocks foot *Dactylis glomerata* (O).
- 6.12 Herbaceous species present include: frequent ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* (F), occasional white clover *Trifolium repens* (O), creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* (O), black medic *Medicago lupulina* (O), dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg. (O), and more rarely encountered cut leaved cranesbill *Geranium dissectum* (R), goats beard *Tragopogon pratensis* (R) oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* (R), bush vetch *Vicia sepium* (R), creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense* (R) and creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans* (R).
- 6.13 Tree seedlings including oak *Quercus* sp. and goat willow *Salix caprea* were growing within the grassland, however covered less than 5% of the area.
- 6.14 This habitat was of low ecological value and was not a Habitat of Principle Importance as described and listed within S.41 of the NERC Act 2006.



Figure 5: Other neutral grassland at the Site

Ruderal (17)

- 6.15 Within the north of the Site was a soil bund created from the previous soil stripped surface of the Site. The soil bund was covered with ruderal vegetation which has naturally colonised the bare soil. Species present include teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, cocks foot, oil seed rape *Brassica napus*, cleavers *Galium aparine*, spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare* and barren brome *Anisantha sterilis*.
- 6.16 This habitat was of low ecological value and was not a Habitat of Principle Importance as described and listed within S.41 of the NERC Act 2006.



Figure 6: Ruderal vegetation on the soil bund at the north of the Site.

Waterbodies- Offsite

- 6.17 Two water bodies were located adjacent to the Site. Neither were accessible at the time of survey. There was a waterbody 30m south-east of the Site (P1) located within the grounds of the adjacent scout hut. This pond was not accessible at the time of survey, although surrounding vegetation was visible.

- 6.18 50m south of the Site within a residential garden was a large pond (P2), this pond was previously described as *“roughly kidney shaped measuring approximately 276m², surrounded by mature trees with outlet pipes to the south and south-west of the pond. At the time of the previous survey there were approximately 20 ducks present (Anglian Ecology, 2014)”*.
- 6.19 It is unknown if there have been any changes to the quality or management of this pond.
- 6.20 These waterbodies were not assessed for their ecological value, however it is likely to be medium to high. Ponds are a Habitat of Principle Importance as described and listed within S.41 of the NERC Act 2006 and are listed within the LBAP.

7. EVALUATION OF ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The Site

- 7.1 The Site was situated within a rural location to the western edge of the village settlement of Fressingfield. The surrounding landscape was arable farmland intersected with hedgerows and trees.
- 7.2 Connectivity to the Site for terrestrial and areal species is good with no barriers to dispersal to the north, west and south. Connectivity for terrestrial species is restricted by residential housing, hardstanding and fence lines to the east of the Site.

Statutory and Non-Statutory Designated Sites

- 7.3 The Site itself is not subject to any nature conservation designation.
- 7.4 Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) are a tool developed by Natural England to provide an initial assessment of the potential risks to SSSIs. The Site falls within one IRZ for the Chippenhall Green SSSI, located 3.4km south-east of the Site. The IRZ does not apply to residential developments and as such further advice need not be sought.
- 7.5 The nearest designated wildlife site is RNR115, roadside nature reserve, located 0.86km west, this is designated due to its botanical interest. Due to the scale and habitats present at the Site is considered that the Proposed Development will not cause any negative impacts to the designated road verge.

8. HABITAT EVALUATION

- 8.1 At the time of the assessment the Site mostly comprised other neutral grassland, with a small area of ruderal vegetation bound by trees and scrub to the northern boundary.
- 8.2 The other neutral grassland, ruderal, mixed scrub and line of trees were of low/ local ecological value as they may provide shelter and foraging habitat for species within the local area.
- 8.3 All of these habitats will be lost for the Proposed Development, although it is noted that an attenuation pond and some tree planting and grassland habitat will be provided.
- 8.4 There were no habitats of regional, national or international ecological value.

Off-site Habitats

- 8.5 OffSite ponds (P1 and P2) and ditches were inaccessible at the time of survey. Ponds are listed as a Habitat of Principle Importance and are mentioned in the LBAP as a priority habitat. It is considered that there are few barriers to dispersal for GCN to the Site from ponds which may provide suitable breeding habitat for the species.

9. FAUNAL EVALUATION

- 9.1 The desk study located a variety of protected species records for the local area.
- 9.2 The Site has been assessed on the suitability of the habitats to support such protected species and the likelihood of those species being present. **Table 5** provides a summary account of protected species within the Site and local area.
- 9.3 In the **absence of mitigation** and further assessment the impacts on each species have been assessed using the following scale:

Table 4: Impact Levels and Criteria

Classification	Criteria
Negative (Significant)	Likely to create a significant effect, including loss, or long-term irreversible damage on the integrity / status of a valued ecological feature
Negative (non-significant)	Likely to create a negative effect without causing long-term or irreversible damage on the integrity / status of a valued ecological feature
Neutral	Effects are either absent or such that no overall net change to the ecological feature occurs.
Positive (non-significant)	Likely to create a beneficial effect on an ecological feature, or providing a new (lower value) ecological feature, without improving its conservation status markedly
Positive (significant)	Activity is likely to create a significant beneficial effect, including long-term enhancement and favourable condition of an existing valued ecological feature, or creation of a new valued ecological feature.

Table 5: Summary of Protected Species Associated with the Site

Species	Recorded in Desk Study	Evidence on Site	Potential on Site to Support Presence	Description of likely Impact on Species	Likely Impact
Amphibians	Yes – Five records the closest GCN at 0.18km east within a ditch. Common toad and smooth newt also recorded within 2km of the Site.	None	Yes – there is suitable terrestrial habitat within all habitats at the Site. Ponds are located just off Site and there are no barriers to dispersal for GCN from these ponds to the Site.	No suitable breeding habitat will be lost however, all of the suitable terrestrial habitat will be lost for the Proposed Development.	Negative (significant)
Badgers	No – there were no records of badger within 2km of the Site.	None	Yes –there is suitable foraging habitat and sett building habitat at the Site.	The Proposed Development will lead to a loss of all of the suitable foraging and sett building habitat, however as there were no records of badger within the local area and no evidence of this species at the Site it is unlikely that local populations of badger will be impacted by the Proposed Development.	Neutral as there is no evidence of the species at the Site.
Bats	Yes – Four species of bat recorded within 2km of the site. the closest record was of a maternity roost of brown long eared bats within a property 10m east of the Site.	None	Yes – Foraging and commuting bats, the line of trees and scrub habitat provides a suitable linear feature which bats may use for foraging and commuting. No suitable roosting features were identified at the Site.	The Proposed Development will lead to the loss of foraging and commuting habitat for bats. No roosting habitat for bats will be lost.	Negative (non-significant)

Species	Recorded in Desk Study	Evidence on Site	Potential on Site to Support Presence	Description of likely Impact on Species	Likely Impact
Birds	Yes – a large number of farmland and garden birds.	Yes – an assemblage of common bird species	Yes – there is potential for birds to be utilising the mixed scrub and line of trees foraging and nesting.	The Proposed Development will lead to a loss of all of the mixed scrub and line of trees at the Site.	Negative (non-significant)
Reptiles	Yes – one record of grass snake, 1.3km east of the Site.	None	Yes – there is some limited potential for reptiles to be present within the scrub for sheltering and within the other neutral grassland for foraging and basking.	The Proposed Development will lead to the loss of suitable habitat at the Site for reptiles.	Negative (non-significant)
Water vole	Yes- two records of water vole were received along a water course located 1.35km east of the Site.	None	No – there is no running water on Site.	N/A	Neutral as there is no suitable habitat on Site
Other faunal interest: Hedgehog	Yes- 14 records of hedgehog were received for 2km of the Site. The closest record was 0.52km north-east of the Site.	None	Yes – There is suitable sheltering habitat for hedgehog within the scrub habitat, and there is suitable foraging habitat within the other neutral grassland at the Site.	There will be a loss of the scrub and other neutral grassland at the Site, therefore hedgehog may be negatively impacted by the Proposed Development.	Negative (non-significant)

10. RECOMMENDATIONS, FURTHER SURVEYS AND ENHANCEMENTS

Overview

- 10.1 Recommendations have been provided within this report that will safeguard the existing ecological interest features within the Site. Wherever possible, measures to enhance ecological and biodiversity value have also been set out.
- 10.2 Based on the survey undertaken to date and the recommendations for further surveys, the presence and potential presence of protected species has been given due regard.
- 10.3 In conclusion, implementation of the measures provided within this report enable the proposals to accord with national and local planning policy for nature conservation.

Designated Sites

- 10.4 Due to the distance between the Site and designated nature conservation sites in the local area it is considered unlikely that there will be any significant adverse effects on these sites as a result of the works. Therefore, no recommendations in relation to the designated sites are made.

Habitats

- 10.5 At the time of the assessment the Site comprised other neutral grassland, mixed scrub with a line of trees and ruderal.
- 10.6 It is recommended that as far as possible, the boundary features including mature trees, should be retained as they offer potential foraging, breeding and sheltering opportunities for a range of species.
- 10.7 In order to increase the biodiversity value of the Site as part of the development any landscape planting should incorporate native species, including those species known to provide foraging opportunities for breeding birds and nectar sources for invertebrates.

Species

Amphibians

- 10.8 Local records confirmed five records of GCN within 2km of the Site, two records were located at a ditch 0.18km east of the Site in 2014. The Site provided suitable habitat for terrestrial GCN within the other neutral grassland, mixed scrub and ruderal habitats. No waterbodies were located on the Site, two water bodies were located adjacent to the Site, P1 50m to the south and P2 30m to the south-east.
- 10.9 The waterbodies were not accessible for Habitat Suitability Index assessment.
- 10.10 It is recommended that further assessment for GCN is undertaken to inform the impacts of the Proposed Development on the local population of GCN. The results of the survey will determine appropriate mitigation and must be undertaken between March and mid-June, with a minimum of three surveys between mid-April and mid-May. Should GCN be found, it may be necessary to obtain a European Protected Species derogation licence from Natural England.
- 10.11 Alternatively, a district level licence may be applied for either with eDNA data only confirming presence or likely absence of GCN within all local waterbodies or a district level licence may be applied for without survey data. The Site is situated in an Amber GCN risk Zone for Natural England District Level Licencing.

Badger

10.12 No evidence of badger activity was found within or immediately adjacent to the Site. Badgers readily establish new setts, therefore should any evidence of badger activity be found prior to construction, a member of the Nicholsons ecology team contacted for advice.

Mammal Safeguards

10.13 General construction safeguards should also be implemented as a precaution, which will also act to safeguard other mammals, such as hedgehog:

- All contractors and Site personnel will be briefed on the potential presence of mammals within the Site.
- Any trenches or deep pits within the Site are to be left open overnight will be provided with a means of escape should an animal enter. This could simply be in the form of a roughened plank of wood placed in the trench as a ramp to the surface. This is particularly important if the trench fills with water.
- Any trenches will be inspected each morning to ensure no animals have become trapped overnight.
- Food and litter should not be left within the working area overnight.

Bats: Foraging and Commuting

10.14 The Site offers foraging opportunities for bats. It is likely that the local arable field margins and hedgerows are used by foraging bats; bats may also commute across or around the Site. It is recommended that the line of trees are retained where practicable, providing foraging and commuting features for bats and other species, along with the maintenance of connectivity between the Site and surrounding, wider landscape.

10.15 Where this is not possible, enhancement of boundary features including hedgerow, shrub and tree planting is recommended as a tool to offset this loss in bat foraging and commuting habitat.

10.16 A sensitive lighting scheme should be designed for the Proposed Development, which must follow best practice guidelines for bats and lighting (ILP, 2018). This should be designed with ecologist input. Measures in relation to the lighting scheme include the following:

- Night working should be avoided where possible, where unavoidable lighting used during the construction phase must be directed away from boundary and adjacent tree lines.
- Any exterior lighting during the operational phase should be minimised as far as possible, and follow best practice guidelines, for example use of LED luminaires (non-UV) using a warm white spectrum (<2700 Kelvin), peak wavelengths above 550nm and the use of hoods/baffles to reduce upwards light spill). Lux levels should be maintained within 0.5 lux of baseline levels as far as practical.
- Construction practices should also follow best practice in terms of dust and noise control.

10.17 As good practice, opportunities should be sought to provide enhanced bat roosting opportunities on the Site through the proposals. For example, bat boxes should be installed on some of the trees to be retained, as well as integrated features within new structures (on elevations facing new or retained greenspace adjacent to the Site).

Nesting Birds

- 10.18 It is recommended that existing habitats with bird nesting suitability (for example line of trees and mixed scrub areas) are retained as far as possible. Where this is unavoidable, to avoid killing or injuring nesting birds and destroying their nests all clearance of trees and shrubs and demolition of buildings associated with the development should be conducted outside the breeding season (March to August inclusive).
- 10.19 If clearance within the breeding season is unavoidable, it may be conducted under the supervision of an ecologist, who will search the vegetation before clearance for nesting birds (please be aware this is only practical for relatively small areas of vegetation). Where nests are found, clearance work will need to be suspended over a suitable buffer area (as advised by the ecologist) around the nest until chicks have fledged, or the nest is confirmed as no longer active by an ecologist.
- 10.20 To compensate for the loss of suitable nesting and foraging habitat for birds, installation of a range of bird boxes (suitable for multiple species) on retained trees. Opportunities should also be sought to include integrated boxes, suitable for urban bird species of conservation concern (for example swift *Apus apus*, house martin *Delichon urbicum* or house sparrow *Passer domesticus*) within new structures on the Site.

Reptiles

- 10.21 The Site offers habitats typically favoured by reptiles for basking and shelter, however, there was only one record of grass snake within 2km of the Site. The scale of the site is such that the loss of habitat would not cause a significant negative impact on the local population of reptiles if the following method statement is followed.

Reptile Method Statement

- 10.22 It is recommended that the reptile method statement given below is implemented to safeguard any common amphibians, small mammals or reptiles which may use the Site on occasion:
- Any areas of longer vegetation to be cleared including the other neutral grassland and tall ruderal will be strimmed initially to a height of 150mm.
 - After a 5-day period this area is then to be strimmed to a height of 50mm or stripped to bare ground as appropriate.

Enhancements

- 10.23 Development proposals should seek to provide enhancement opportunities for species using the Site. This could include the following measures:
- Enhancement of hedgerows across the Site infilling with native species;
 - Enhancement of aquatic habitats through new wetland habitat creation and marginal and aquatic planting of native species within existing ponds / ditches;
 - Enhancement of grassland areas through planting of wildflower areas and appropriate mowing regimes / establishment of tussocky grassland margins;
 - Planting of nectar, fruit and nut producing species;

- Provision of birds and bat boxes;
- Provision of suitable gaps in fence lines to allow the movement of species such as hedgehog;

General

10.24 If in the unlikely event any protected species (e.g. amphibians, badgers, bats, reptiles, or nesting birds) are encountered as part of the works, then all works must stop, with advice sought immediately from Nicholsons (01536 408840).

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12. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: UKHab Habitat Map

Ref: 22-2758 (v1)



LEGEND:

- Site Boundary
- D1 - Dry Ditch
- LT1 - Line of Trees
- 17 - Ruderal
- g3c - Other Neutral Grassland
- h3h - Mixed Scrub

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TITLE:	UKHab	
PROJECT/SITE:	Land off Priory Road, Fressingfield	
CLIENT:	BRIP 7 (Fressingfield) LLP	
MAP REF:	6034/01/22-2758	
VERSION:	v1	
DATE:	13/06/23	SCALE: 1:1,000@A3
APPROVED BY:	AS	PRODUCED BY: SM

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