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Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Including a Protected Species Assessment at Land to the South of Cox Hill, Kersey Tye, Hadleigh, Suffolk. IP7 6EU.

On behalf of:

Carol Abbott

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0 SUMMARY

- 1.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Carol Abbott to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Land to the South of Cox Hill, Kersey Tye, Hadleigh, Suffolk. IP7 6EU. The proposal is for one new dwelling.
- 1.1.2 The survey was conducted on 20th March 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 herpetofauna record search was undertaken.
- 1.1.3 The site is a small section of arable field with boundary improved grassland field margin to the east (roadside) and north. North of the site is also a mature native hedgerow which will be retained in full. The site is positioned in a rural location with arable field habitat immediately south, east and west. Residential properties are present to the north.
- 1.1.4 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.
- 1.1.5 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 bats, hedgehogs, amphibians and birds are provided in this report and should be followed.
- 1.1.6 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 Carol Abbott to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Land to the South of Cox Hill, Kersey Tye, Hadleigh, Suffolk. IP7 6EU. The proposal is for one new dwelling.
- 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 herpetofauna 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 20th March 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 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 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 The closest four 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 is a small section of arable field with boundary improved grassland field margin to the east (roadside) and north. North of the site is also a mature native hedgerow which will be retained in full. The site is positioned in a rural location with arable field habitat immediately south, east and west. Residential properties are present to the north.

3.1.2 Ponds present locally included:

- Pond 1 a small heavily shaded edge of field pond which dries annually located approximately 100m east.
- Pond 2: a recently excavated ornamental garden pond with jetty and no aquatic plants located approximately 105m east.
- Pond 3 a small manmade garden pond which dries annually present approximately 60m west.
- Pond 4 a ditch widening which dries annually and no aquatic vegetation present approximately 65m north west.

3.1.3 Another pond is indicated on Ordnance Survey Maps being approximately 110m south west of the site at the rear of The Kedges, this is a dry ditch and not a true pond.

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 The closest statutorily designated nature conservation site is Groton Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The SSSI is located approximately 650m north west and designated for its woodland habitats with rare flora and fauna (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 herpetofauna records.

Species	Approximate Distance	Date
Great Crested Newt	Several records within 2km the closest were approximately 1km north west and 1km south west	2007 & 2013
Common toad	Groton Wood	2007

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

- 3.4.1 The site includes an arable field sown with Oilseed Rape and an improved grassland field to the west and north and native boundary hedgerow to the north.
- 3.4.2 The short improved grass included: cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, white dead nettle *Lamium album*, groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*, wheat *Triticum* sp., field speedwell *Veronica persica*, germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, white dead nettle *Lamium album*, perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne*, ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris*, great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, nettle *Urtica dioica* and common comfrey *Symphytum officinale*.
- 3.4.3 The boundary hedgerow included: blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, with an understorey including, ivy *Hedera helix*, lords and ladies *Arum maculatum* and daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*.
- 3.4.4 No protected, priority or notable plants were found on the site. No Schedule 9 invasive plant species were observed. The hedgerow is a UK priority habitat, though did not meet criteria for an Important Hedgerow. The hedgerow is proposed for retention in full.

Bats

- 3.4.5 No structures were present on the site.
- 3.4.6 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.

- 3.4.7 The boundary habitats are likely to be used by low numbers of commuting and foraging bats though was not considered a high value foraging/commuting habitat given the lack of large mature trees and limited length of hedgerow.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

- 3.4.8 The site is dominated by arable field 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 boundary hedgerow will be retained.

Birds

- 3.4.9 Birds observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey included; wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*, great tit *Parus major*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, red-legged partridge *Alectoris rufa*, goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, collard dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, robin *Erithacus rubecula* and rook *Corvus frugilegus*.

- 3.4.10 No protected, UK priority birds and red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) were recorded, though on occasions such species may visit the site given the rural location. All birds recorded are common and widespread species and green-listed BoCC.

- 3.4.11 No signs or evidence of past nests were observed on the site, though the hedgerow was considered potentially suitable for low numbers of common nesting birds. The field is too small and close to hedgerows and residential housing to be suitable for nesting skylark.

- 3.4.12 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

3.4.13 The site is dominated by arable field with a narrow field margin all considered low in ecological value as terrestrial habitat for great crested newts and other amphibians, the hedgerow base was considered higher in potential suitability for amphibians, though this is proposed for retention. Local ponds were surveyed for suitability for great crested newts, with three out of the four being small and drying annually identified as poor in suitability for breeding great crested newts and the fourth a newly excavated ornamental garden pond too recently created to be suitable for breeding great crested newts. See Table 2 below for the Habitat Suitability Index assessment results.

Table 2: Habitat Suitability Index score for Ponds 1-4 close to the site.

Pond	Pond 1	Pond 2	Pond 3	Pond 4
SI1 - Location	1	1	1	1
SI2 - Pond area	0.05	0.2	0.05	0.05
SI3 - Pond drying	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.1
SI4 - Water quality	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.67
SI4 - Shade	0.3	1	1	1
SI6 - Fowl	1	0.67	0.67	1
SI7 - Fish	1	0.67	1	1
SI8 - Ponds	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
SI9 - Terr'l habitat	0.33	0.33	0.67	0.33
SI10 - Macrophytes	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.3
HSI	0.39	0.58	0.48	0.44

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

3.4.14 Habitats present on the site were considered very low in suitability or potential for reptiles of any species with arable field habitats and a narrow field margin in an isolated location. Adjacent habitats were also low in suitability for reptiles.

3.4.15 Reptiles were not discovered during the survey visit.

Invertebrates

3.4.16 The proposed construction zone was considered negligible in suitability or potential for invertebrates of conservation concern with common and widespread habitat types present.

3.4.17 No notable invertebrates were observed during the survey.

Other Protected, Priority or rare Species

3.4.18 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, particularly along the boundary hedgerows. However, the site was considered negligible in suitability for roosting bats.

4.1.3 No hedgerow reduction is proposed.

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 Therefore, 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 is low in suitability for protected and priority bird species, though the hedgerow was considered theoretically suitable for low numbers of common nesting birds, this 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 within 2km of the site, though not particularly close to the site (SBIS, 2023). This combined with the small size of the site and small scale of the project, poor and below average suitability of local ponds to support great crested newts, combined with the arable field habitats proposed for impact, meant the risk of presence and risk of impact to great crested newts was considered very low.

4.1.15 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

4.1.16 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.

4.1.17 Reptiles have not been recorded locally, though the occasional grass snake may be present in this rural location (SBIS, 2023). However, the site is isolated from suitable reptile habitat and is very low in suitability for reptiles. The scale of proposed works is also considered small.

4.1.18 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

4.1.19 No rare, protected, priority or Schedule 9 invasive plants were present. The hedgerow on the northern boundary is a UK priority habitat, though not proposed for impact.

4.1.20 Further botanical surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

4.1.21 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.

4.1.22 Further invertebrate surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Other Protected & Priority Species

4.1.23 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. Therefore, the risk of direct or indirect impact to 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, the site should continue to be farmed as arable land or 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;
- To allow continued access for hedgehogs, any new boundary fencing should have a gap in the base every on every boundary. The gap should be at least 13cm in diameter.

Birds

5.1.3 It is recommended that to prevent harm to nesting birds the field should continue to be farmed as arable land or be regularly cut to prevent the site becoming more suitable for ground nesting birds.

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 Beaumaris Bat Box (or similar if out-of-stock).

- 1 x Vivara pro sparrow terrace (or similar if out-of-stock).
- 5.2.2 The bat box will be positioned facing a southerly aspect just below the roof. The bird box will be positioned facing a northerly aspect just below the roof.
- 5.2.3 Wildlife boxes can be purchased on-line.
- 5.2.4 New hedgerow planting along the site boundary. The new hedgerow will be planted in double staggered rows, preferably 5 whips per linear metre, with spiral tree guards and include: 60% Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) 20% Field maple (*Acer campestre*), 10% Hazel (*Corylus Avellana*), 5% wild cherry (*Prunus avium*), 5% guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*).

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.
- 6.3 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary for the development to proceed. Recommendations for bats, birds, hedgehogs 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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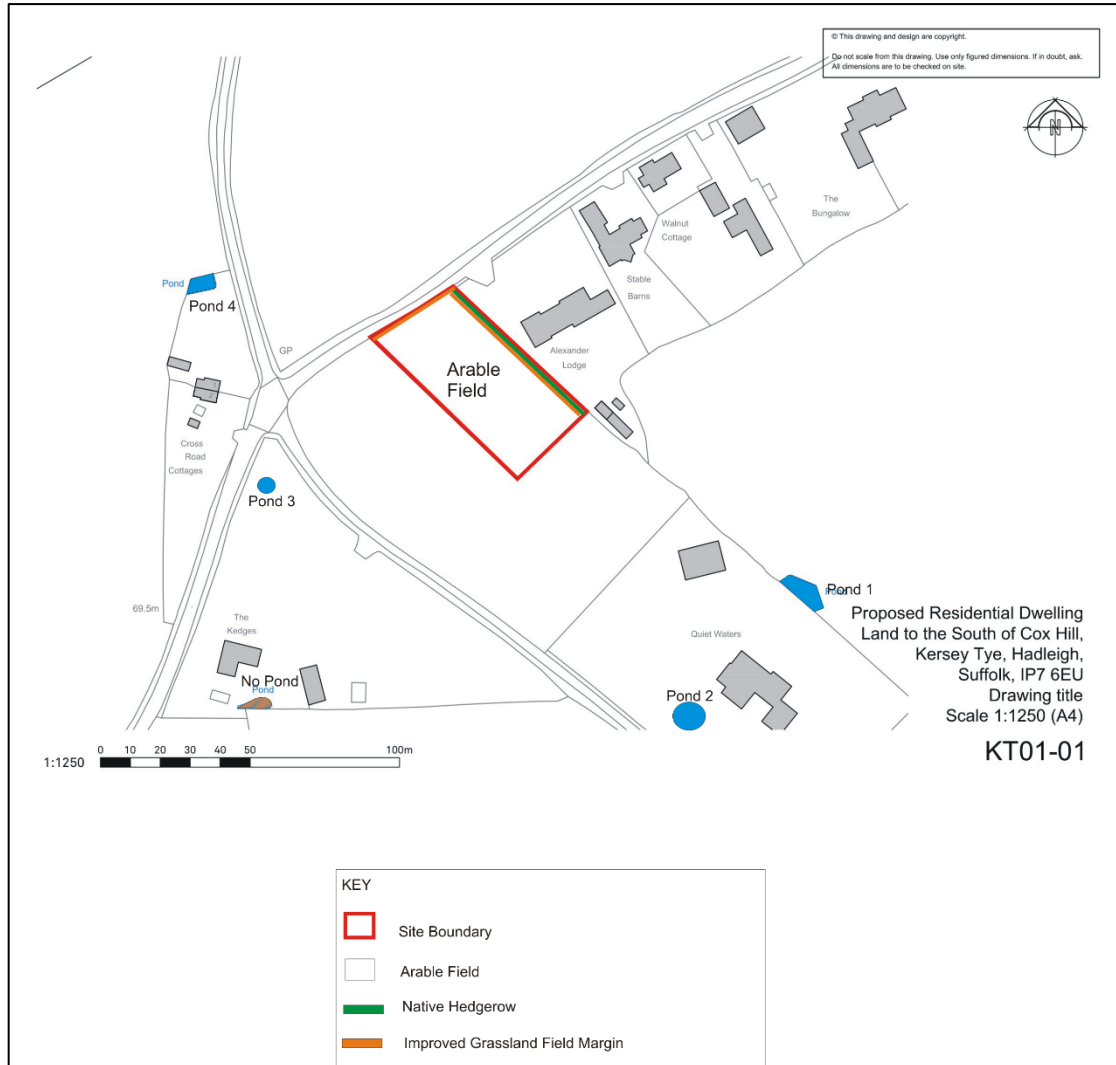
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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: Figures

Figure 1 - Habitat map of the site.



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Main site area (set out with tape) south of Cox Hill.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 2: Main site area looking east to west across the site South of Cox Hill.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 3: Main site area looking north to south across the site at land South of Cox Hill.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 4: Main site area looking along the north east boundary at land South of Cox Hill.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 5: Pond 1 near the site at Land South of Cox Hill.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 6: Pond 2 (recently excavated) near the site at Land South Cox Hill.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 7: Pond 3 near to the site at Land South Cox Hill.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 8: Pond 4 close to the site at Land South Cox Hill.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023