SUNDOWN FARM, MARTIN

Ecological Impact Assessment

Client: Mrs C Besent

Date: July 2023





Greenwood Ecology & Countryside Management

'Rose Cottage', Chettle, Dorset, DT11 8DB www.gecm.co.uk

Date	Version	Summary of Changes	
July 2023	1.0		

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 Greenwood Ecology & Countryside Management (GECM) was instructed by Mrs C Besent (hereafter referred to as 'the applicant') to undertake an Ecological Impact Assessment to inform an application for the construction of a new residential farm dwelling at Sundown Farm, Martin. This report presents the results of this survey work and recommended mitigation measures (where required).
- 1.2 The application site contains a derelict residential dwelling that was subject to a Preliminary Roost Assessment. It was concluded that the building has high potential to support roosting bats, but further survey work is heavily constrained by encroaching vegetation. The building is also set within a small area of woodland containing a diverse ground flora comprising dog's mercury, wild garlic and other ancient woodland indicator species. An established rookery (rooks are an amber list species of conservation concern) is also present within mature trees that overhang the building.
- 1.3 It was considered that demolition or renovation of this building could warrant significant ecological impacts due to the work required to either demolish or renovate it (not least the potential to disturb/destroy roosting bats, as well as resulting in significant tree loss and nesting bird habitat). Advice was provided to the applicant that this structure should be retained in its current condition, thereby avoiding undue ecological impacts in line with the established ecological mitigation hierarchy.

Site Location & Description

1.4 The site location is shown in **Figure 1** and extends to an area of circa 0.43 ha. The site is located within an agricultural field to the north of Howgare Road, Wiltshire. The Ordnance Survey grid reference for the site is SU049212 and the nearest postcode is SP6 3JT. The application site is surrounded entirely by agricultural fields.

Development Proposals

- 1.5 Full details of the proposed development plans are provided within the plans and drawings that accompany the planning application. A copy of the site plan is provided at **Annex I**.
- 1.6 In summary, the proposed development includes the construction of 1 no. detached residential dwelling along with associated garage, landscaping and car parking.

2.0 PLANNING POLICY & LEGISLATION

Legislation

A range of sites and species that may actually or potentially be relevant to the application site are afforded legal protection under national and international legislation. Further details regarding the legal protection afforded to specific species that may be affected by the proposed development are provided in **Section 5.0** where pertinent.

Biodiversity

- 2.2 Section 41 (S41) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State to publish a list (in consultation with Natural England) of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The Government has a duty to take reasonably practicable steps to further the conservation of the species and habitats that are included in lists published under Section 41.
- 2.3 *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services* sets out the means by which the Government will comply with its duty under Section 41 of the NERC Act to take or promote the taking by others of steps to further the conservation of listed habitats and species, including through the continued implementation of Action Plans.

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2.4 The NPPF advises that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the following principles:
 - "Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
 - a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
 - b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
 - c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
 - d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
 - e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate."

Local Planning Policy

2.5 Development within the New Forest District Council area is currently informed by the *Local Plan 2016-2036 Part One: Planning Strategy* which was formally adopted in July 2020. The following policy relates to ecology & biodiversity:

Policy ENV1: Mitigating the impacts of development on International Nature Conservation sites

- 1. Except as provided for in the first paragraph of Saved Policy DM2: Nature Conservation, Biodiversity and Geodiversity, development will only be permitted where the Council is satisfied that any necessary mitigation, management or monitoring measures are secured in perpetuity as part of the proposal and will be implemented in a timely manner, such that, in combination with other plans and development proposals, there will not be adverse effects on the integrity of any of the following International Nature Conservation sites:
 - The New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the New Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and the New Forest Ramsar site;
 - The Solent Maritime SAC, Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC, the Solent and Southampton Water SPA, and the Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site;
 - The River Avon SAC, Avon Valley SPA and Ramsar site; and
 - The River Itchen SAC.
- 2. For residential development and the provision of overnight visitor accommodation adverse effects can be adequately mitigated by implementing approved measures relevant to the site location, including as set out in the Mitigation for Recreational Impacts SPD and in the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy, and in supplementary guidance on nutrient management.
- 3. For non-residential developments, the requirement for mitigation will be considered on case-by-case basis with regard to the nature, scale and location of the proposed use.
- 4. The approved mitigation measures for residential developments currently include:
 - i) For developments providing 49 or fewer net additional units of residential accommodation, financial contributions towards the provision of recreational mitigation measures as set out below and in the Mitigation for Recreational Impacts SPD:
 - a. Projects for the provision of alternative natural recreational green spaces and recreational routes: new or improved open space and recreational routes of a quality and type suitable to attract residents of new development within the Plan Area who might otherwise visit the International Nature Conservation sites for recreation; and

- b. Access and Visitor Management: measures to manage the number of recreational visits to the New Forest and Solent Coast International Nature Conservation sites; and to modify visitor behaviour within those sites so as to reduce the potential for harmful recreational impacts; and
- c. Monitoring of the impacts of new development on the International Nature Conservation sites and establishing a better evidence base: to reduce uncertainty and inform future refinement of mitigation measures.
- ii) For developments of 50 or more net additional residential dwellings:
 - (a) Direct provision by the developer of at least eight hectares of natural recreational greenspace per 1,000 population located on the development site or directly adjoining and well connected to it; and
 - (b) A financial contribution towards Access and Visitor Management and Monitoring as set out above at i(b) and i(c).
- iii) Additionally for all residential developments within 5.6km of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA, as shown on Figure 5.1, a financial contribution is required towards a Solent-wide programme of visitor management, monitoring and development mitigation projects.
- iv) Additionally for residential developments and the provision of overnight visitor accommodation draining or discharging wastewater to the River Avon in relation to phosphate neutrality or to the Solent and Southampton Water in relation to nitrogen neutrality, a financial contribution or other appropriate mechanisms to achieve nutrient-neutral development.
- v) Additionally for all residential developments, a financial contribution towards monitoring and, if necessary (based on future monitoring outcomes) managing or mitigating air quality effects within the New Forest SPA, SAC and Ramsar site.
- 2.6 In addition to the Planning Strategy, the 'Local Plan Part 2: Sites and Development Management Document' also contains a policy relating to biodiversity:

Policy DM2: Nature conservation, biodiversity and geodiversity

Development proposals which would be likely to adversely affect the integrity of a designated or candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC), classified or potential Special Protection Area (SPA), or listed Ramsar site will not be permitted unless there is no alternative solution and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest which would justify the development.

Development proposals within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which would be likely to adversely affect the site will not be permitted unless the benefits of the development outweigh both the adverse impacts on the site and any adverse impacts on the wider network of SSSIs.

Development which would result in damage to or loss of a site of biodiversity or geological value of regional or local importance (including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation

(SINC), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites (RIGGS), and habitats of species of principal importance for biodiversity) will not be permitted unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the harm it would cause to the site, and the loss can be mitigated to achieve a net gain in biodiversity/geodiversity.

Development proposals will be expected to incorporate features to encourage biodiversity and retain and, where possible, enhance existing features of nature conservation value within the site. Existing ecological networks should be identified and maintained to avoid habitat fragmentation, and ecological corridors should form an essential component of green infrastructure provision in association with new development to ensure habitat connectivity.

Where development is permitted, the local planning authority will use conditions and/or planning obligations to minimise the damage, provide mitigation and site management measures and, where appropriate, compensatory and enhancement measures.

Development will not be permitted which would adversely affect species of fauna or flora that are protected under national or international law, or their habitats, unless their protection can be adequately secured through conditions and/or planning obligations.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 The following chapter outlines the scope of works undertaken and the survey and assessment methods used.

Desktop Study

3.2 The MAGIC website (magic.defra.gov.uk) was accessed in July 2023 to provide information relating to sites designated for their ecological interest. Sites located within 1 km of the application site were assessed. Further online sources of information were used to provide contextual background.

Habitats

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

- 3.3 An Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey (IEA, 1995) was conducted of the application site in July 2023 by Pete Etheridge MCIEEM. The survey covered all parts of the application site and up to 30 m beyond where access was available. The condition and strategic significance of habitats was also recorded to inform Biodiversity Net Gain calculations if required.
- 3.4 The Phase 1 Habitat survey method (JNCC, 2010) classifies and maps habitats using standard colour codes, with further information provided by means of dominant species codes and descriptive target notes. The potential of the habitats within the survey area to support protected/notable species is also assessed in accordance with the Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment (IEA, 1995).

Assessment

- 3.5 Where possible, habitats and species which have the potential to be affected by the proposed development are assigned a level of value as prescribed by The Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment (2nd Edition) (CIEEM, 2019). Levels of value are determined based on a geographical scale as follows:
 - International & European;
 - National;
 - Regional;
 - County;
 - Local;
 - Site¹; and
 - Negligible¹.

¹ 'Site' and 'negligible' values have been included to help better assess sites of limited biodiversity value.

Limitations

- 3.6 The survey was undertaken during the appropriate survey season and in accordance with published best practice guidelines. It is therefore concluded that there are no significant limitations that could affect the integrity of this report.
- 3.7 The ecological value of a site can change rapidly over time and with a change of land management regime. The survey results therefore present a snapshot of the site at a particular point in time. Should more than 18 months lapse between the site survey and development commencing, it is advised that an update assessment should be undertaken to ensure compliance with wildlife legislation.

4.0 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Designated Sites

4.1 The application site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory site designation.

Statutory Designated Sites

4.2 Four statutory designated sites are located within 1 km of the proposed new dwelling and their details are provided in the table below:

Site Name	Location	Description	
Martin Down National Nature Reserve	670 m to the south-west	The reserve is home to an exceptional collection of plants and animals associated with chalk downland and scrub habitats, including a number of rare or threatened species.	
Chickengrove Bottom SSSI	785 m to the north-west	Chickengrove Bottom is an intimate mixture of botanically rich chalk grassland, scrub and woodland, with invertebrates and reptiles well represented. It lies on the northern edge of Vernditch Chase close to the Hampshire border.	
Martin and Tidpit Downs SSSI	670 m to the south-west	Martin and Tidpit Downs form an extensive tract of chalk downland, chalk heath and scrub at the extreme east of the Dorset Downs on the Hampshire-Wiltshire border. They include a gently undulating plain rising to a high east-west ridge, the crest of which is marked by the Bokerley Ditch, a massive linear prehistoric earthwork. The whole area is rich in archaeological features of Bronze Age and subsequent dates, and these, together with the varied topography, soils, and differences in past management, contribute to great habitat variation.	
Knighton Downs & Wood SSSI	900 m to the north	Knighton Downs and Wood SSSI comprises a large area of botanically diverse calcareous grassland, scrub and semi-natural woodland supporting several plant and butterfly species of nationally restricted distribution. The downland forms an extensive, though fragmented, herb-rich grassland of a type once widespread on the south-west Wiltshire chalk. Knighton Wood is dominated by ash and pedunculate oak and encompasses a substantial glade of significant botanical and entomological interest.	

4.3 The designated sites detailed above are unlikely to be negatively affected by the proposed development due to their distance from the site.

River Catchments

The application site falls within the River Avon catchment and therefore has the potential to result in adverse effects upon the River Avon SAC. The proposed development is for a replacement dwelling however, so there would be no net increase in nutrient discharge as a result of the planning application, provided that the existing building is not restored for future residential usage. It should also be noted that since taking ownership, the applicant is managing the farm on regenerative principles, with no addition of artificial chemicals or fertilisers. This is likely to result in an overall reduction in the levels of nutrients leaving the site.

Habitats

- 4.5 Photographs of the application site are found in **Annex II** and an Extended Phase 1 Habitat map is provided at **Figure 2**.
- 4.6 The footprint of the proposed development (Photographs 1 a & 1b) is dominated entirely by semi-improved grassland comprising grass species including cocksfoot (Dactylis glomerata), common bent (Agrostis capillaris) and occasional perennial rye-grass (Lolium perenne). Herb species include ragwort (Senecio jacobaea), field bindweed (Convolvulus arvensis), creeping thistle (Cirsium arvense), smooth hawksbeard (Crepis capillaris) and common hogweed (Heracleum sphondylium). The relative lack of floristic diversity and the presence of species such as creeping thistle and common hogweed, are likely to be a result of past agricultural chemical treatments and soil compaction on the site.
- 4.7 No hedgerow removal is proposed, with the new dwelling being served by an existing farm access gate (Photograph 2).
- The garden around the existing dwelling has developed into a small area of woodland as a result of planting and self-seeding. Tree and shrub species include ash (Fraxinus excelsior), sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus), hazel (Corylus avellana), elder (Sambucus nigra), field maple (Acer campestre), silver birch (Betula pendula), dogwood (Cornus sp.), horse chestnut (Aesculus hippocastanum) and Lawson cypress (Chamaecyparis lawsoniana). The ground flora in this area is dominated by dog's mercury (Mercurialis perennis), wild garlic (Allium ursinum), common nettle (Urtica dioica), ivy (Hedera helix), garlic mustard (Alliaria petiolate), bramble (Rubus fruticosus agg.), cleavers (Galium aparine) and wood avens (Geum urbanum).
- 4.9 The area of woodland surrounding the existing dwelling is considered to be the most ecologically valuable habitat present on site. Several species of ancient woodland indicators are present in this area and it provides habitat connectivity/continuity with a strip of woodland running along the western side of the A354.
- 4.10 The habitats on site have been assigned geographical levels of value based on the species present and their condition. There are no 'habitats of principal importance' or priority habitats present withing the application site that would be affected by the proposed development.
 - Semi-improved grassland site value
 - Mixed woodland local value

Invertebrates

- 4.11 The grassland habitat within the proposed development footprint provides some limited suitability for invertebrates, although is limited in its value due to its small size, lack of habitat structure and lack of habitat connectivity. The site is likely to be of no more than **site value** in relation to its invertebrate interest.
- 4.12 The proposed new hedgerow creation, buffer planting and creation of a new pond is likely to result in enhanced habitat for invertebrates leading to an overall net gain for this species group.

Amphibians

- 4.13 There are no standing waterbodies on site and no standing waterbodies were identified within 1 km of the application site. The terrestrial habitat within the site is considered to be sub-optimal for amphibians, comprising entirely grassland that is regularly grazed or harvested as part of ongoing agricultural practices.
- 4.14 Given the lack of suitable habitat both within and around the site, it is considered highly unlikely that amphibians (including great crested newts) are present on site and they are therefore not considered further within this report.

Reptiles

- 4.15 The grassland within the application site may provide some seasonal value for common species of reptiles such as slow worm (Anguis fragilis) and common lizard (Zootoca vivipara). Given the regular disturbance from ongoing agricultural operations however, coupled with the lack of scrub or 'edge' habitat, it is considered that the site is unlikely to form an important reptile site.
- 4.16 A precautionary method of working is proposed and detailed in **Section 5** of this report to avoid/reduce any impact on reptiles.

Bats

Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA)

- 4.17 There are no trees or structures present on the site of the proposed new dwelling.
- 4.18 A PRA was undertaken of the existing derelict dwelling within the application site to assess its value for roosting bats. The survey was heavily constrained both by the unsafe nature of the building and the significant levels of climbing vegetation (Photograph 3) that obscured most of the building. Numerous Potential Roost Features were recorded including missing/raising roof tiles, holes in boxed soffits and gaps between bricks. As a precaution, it was considered to have high potential to support roosting bats (Photographs 4 & 5).
- 4.19 As a result of the PRA, it was decided that the existing building should be retained in order that it can continue to provide suitable bat roosting habitat. Given the survey limitations, removal of this structure would likely result in negative impacts on roosting bats as bat presence/absence would be difficult to establish through further survey work.
- 4.20 Provided that the existing building is retained, no impacts on roosting bats are predicted.

Bat Activity

- 4.21 The site of the proposed new dwelling is in an area of open agricultural field, well away from any linear features such as hedgerows.
- 4.22 While some external light spill will be inevitable, this will not fall on any features that are likely to be used by foraging/commuting bats. The application site falls within the Cranborne Chase AONB and is therefore required to minimise its light spill.
- 4.23 Renovation of the existing building on site would result in increased levels of light spill within an established woodland area that forms part of a linear wooded corridor alongside the A354. Building a new dwelling in the proposed location is therefore likely to result in reduced lighting impacts on bats, compared to demolishing or renovating the existing property.
- 4.24 The design proposals include the creation of new native species hedgerows to demarcate the property's curtilage from the rest of the field. Gapping up of a derelict hedge and creation of a pond will also increase foraging opportunities and bat connectivity within the local landscape.

Birds

- 4.25 The existing building has become overgrown by self-seeded trees and now supports an established rookery. Rooks are listed as a species of conservation concern, being listed on the Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern. The existing dwelling and the vegetation around it also provide significant nesting opportunities for a range of passerine bird species.
- 4.26 The site of the proposed dwelling is within an agricultural field and does not result in the removal of any scrub, shrub, woodland or hedgerow habitat. It is therefore limited in its suitability for nesting birds. It is possible that skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) may nest within the proposed development footprint, so measures are detailed in **Section 5** to mitigate/compensate for any impacts.

Badger & Hedgehog

4.27 No evidence of badger (*Meles meles*) or hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) activity was recorded on site and the habitat provides sub-optimal foraging habitat for both species. It is recognised that badgers and hedgehogs may occasionally be present on site, so mitigation is provided in **Section 5** to ensure that they are protected during the construction phase of the project.

Dormice, Otters & Water Voles

4.28 Comprising entirely grassland, the application site does not provide suitable habitat for these species. They are therefore not considered further within this report.

5.0 MITIGATION & BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Habitats

The proposed development will result in a loss of semi-improved grassland as a result of the new development footprint. This is not a 'priority habitat' or a 'habitat of principal importance'. New habitat creation forms an integral part of the design proposals, including native buffer planting around the new dwelling, creation and restoration of hedgerows and creation of a new wildlife pond. Impacts on the area of woodland that has developed around the existing dwelling will be avoided through retention of the existing building. Overall it is considered that the habitat creation proposals will sufficiently compensate for the loss of semi-improved grassland.

Reptiles

- 5.2 Given the low potential for reptiles to be seasonally present on site, the following precautionary method of working is recommended.
- 5.3 If vegetation removal within the application site takes place during the reptile active season (which runs between March & October), vegetation clearance will be undertaken with the use of powered hand tools (ie brushcutter). Vegetation will be strimmed directionally towards the outside of the site meaning that, in the low likelihood that any reptiles are present, these would be pushed into the neighbouring suitable alternative habitat.

Roosting Bats

- 5.4 Provided that the existing building is retained in-situ, no impacts on roosting bats are predicted as no other suitable roosting habitat is present on site.
- 5.5 It is recommended that two integrated bat roosting features (WildCare Soffit Bat Box or equivalent) are installed on the southern aspect of the proposed garage. These will face on to newly created habitat (including a pond), will be subject to maximum solar heating and will be away from artificial lighting.

Nesting Birds

- 5.6 Impacts on nesting rooks will be avoided by retaining the existing building and trees in-situ.
- 5.7 To avoid impacts on nesting birds, building works on the new dwelling should commence outside of the nesting bird season (which runs between March & August) or be subject to an advance nesting bird check (within 24hrs prior to works) by a suitably qualified ecologist. Any active nests should be retained until such time as any dependant young have fledged (left the nest).
- 5.8 To provide long-term secure nesting site for birds, it is recommended that two WildCare Soffit Swift Boxes (or equivalent) are installed on the northern aspect of the proposed new dwelling and two Wooden Sparrow Terrace Nest Boxes (or equivalent) are installed on the western aspect of the proposed garage.
- 5.9 It is predicted that there will be no long-term impacts on nesting birds and the proposed enhancement measures will provide long-term secure nesting habitat for notable bird species.

Badger and Hedgehog

5.10 During the construction phase of the project, it is recommended that any open excavations should be backfilled at the end of the day. Where this is not possible, excavations should be left with inclined ends or fitted with a rough sawn plank to allow mammals that may fall into them a means of escape.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The proposed development has been sensitively designed to avoid or reduce ecological impacts as far as possible. This has been achieved predominately by retaining the existing building in-situ, unoccupied, and allowing it to continue to provide high suitability for roosting bats. Retaining the existing dwelling, rather than renovating or demolishing it, also avoids damage to the small area of woodland and avoids removing an active rookery.
- 6.2 The new dwelling will be surrounded by native planting and new native hedgerows will be planted along with the creation of a pond. This will provide increased habitat connectivity as well as increased foraging potential for local bats. This will be complemented by the integration of bat boxes, swift boxes and bird boxes which will provide long-term secure nesting and roosting sites.
- 6.3 Mitigation has been recommended to avoid impacts on nesting birds, reptiles, hedgehogs and badgers during the construction phase of development.
- 6.4 Overall, it is considered that the proposed development can proceed in accordance with local planning policies and wildlife legislation.

REFERENCES

Collins, J (ed) (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd Edition).* The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

English Nature (2004) Bat Mitigation Guidelines

Froglife (2016) Surveying for Reptiles

HMSO (2017). The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

ANNEX I: Site Masterplan



ANNEX II: Site Photographs





Photographs 1a & 1b: Footprint of proposed development



Photograph 2: Existing farm access gateway that will form new driveway



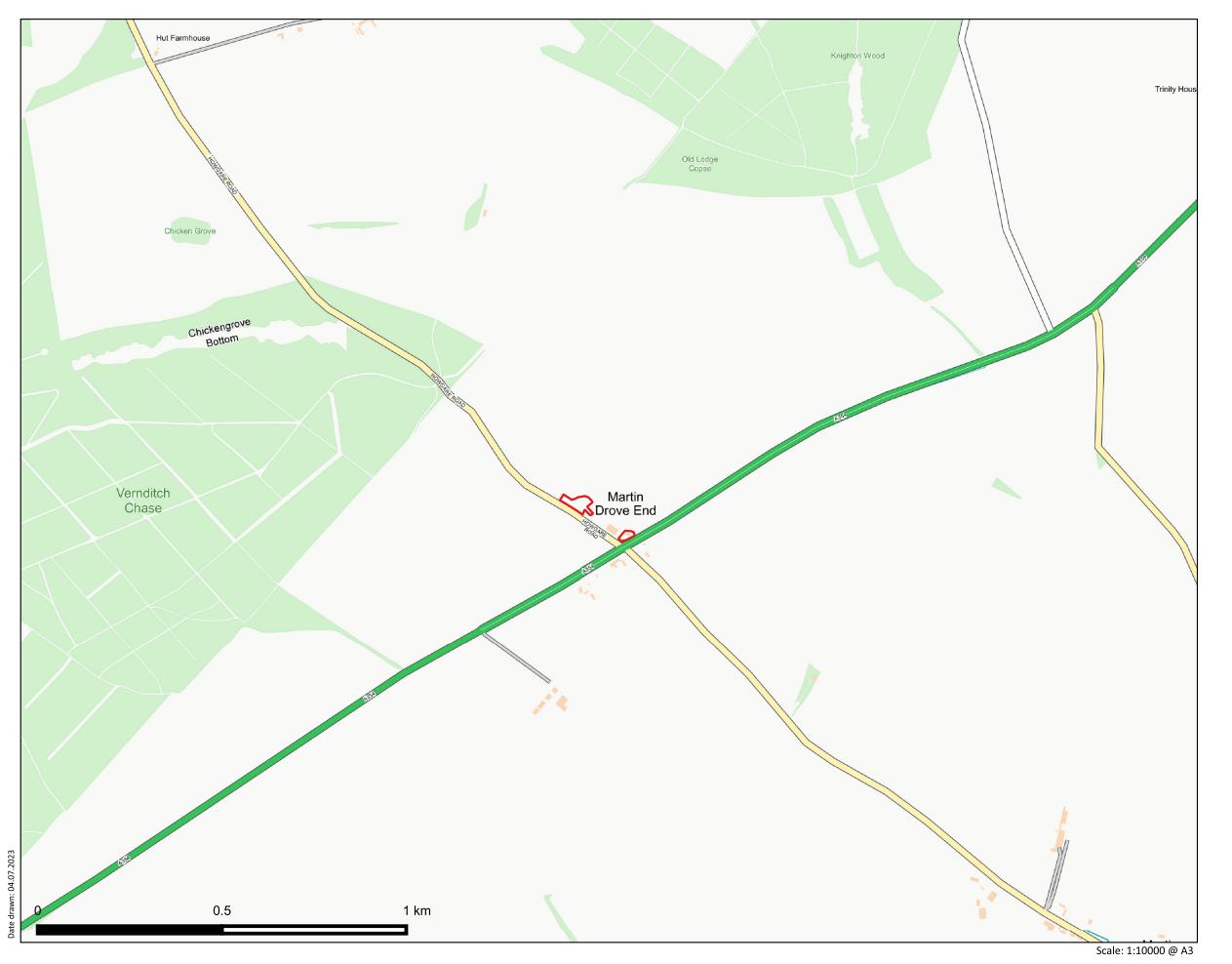
Photograph 3: Significant levels of climbing vegetation on southern aspect of existing dwelling



Photograph 4: Existing dwelling from the west



Photograph 5: Existing dwelling from the north



Site location

SUNDOWN FARM

ECOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 1 Site Location



'Rose Cottage', Chettle, Dorset, DT11 8DB

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Site location

Habitats

Building

Hard standing (gravel)

Mixed woodland

Semi-improved grassland

SUNDOWN FARM

ECOLOGICAL IMPACT
ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 2 Extended Phase 1 Habitat Map



'Rose Cottage', Chettle, Dorset, DT11 8DB

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