

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report

Cottage Farm, New Road, Pamber Green, RG26 3AG

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Report conditions

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Contents

Su	mmary	
1.	Introduction	
	Objectives	2
	Site Description	2
	Proposed works	3
	Limitations	3
2.	Methods	4
	Desk Study	4
	Field Survey	
 4. 	Results	
	Desk study	7
	Designated sites and notable habitats	
	Protected and notable species	
	Field survey	
	Habitats	
	Badger	
	Hazel dormouse	
	Breeding birds	
	Reptiles	
	Water vole and otter	
	Great crested newt	
	Bat roosts	
	Bat foraging and commuting habitat	
	Discussion	
T •	Planning policy and legislation	
	Potential impacts on sites, habitats, and species	
	Designated sites	
	Vegetation and habitats	
	Badger	
	Hazel dormouse	
	Breeding birds	
	Reptiles	
	Great crested newts	
_	Bats	
5.	Recommendations	
6.		
References		
-	Appendix 1 – Photos	
ДD	pendix 2 - MAGIC Map	20

Summary

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was carried out in July 2019 to assess the potential for a plot of land at Cottage Farm, Pamber Green, to support a range of legally protected and notable habitats or species and for the proposal to affect other ecological receptors.

The development proposal is for small-scale residential development.

The plot comprises an area of managed and improved pasture grazed by livestock with an associated livestock building. The building is a typical modern stable / livestock shed structure, largely of concrete blockwork construction with some timber elements and with a flat roof of profiled metal sheeting.

The plot is found to support habitats of limited ecological interest, including short ephemeral / perennial vegetation, tall ruderal vegetation, and improved grassland pasture. No notable habitats or plant species are noted.

The survey finds no evidence that the site supports badgers, dormice, water vole, otter, bats, reptiles, or great crested newts.

The building has the potential to support small numbers of common and widespread breeding birds, although no direct evidence was noted. Recommendations are made to ensure active nests are not harmed.

Pamber Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest lies approximately 200m from the northern boundary of the site, although this is sufficiently far that it will not be affected by redevelopment proposals.

It is concluded that the development will have no adverse impacts on biodiversity and will deliver biodiversity gains in accordance with policy.

1. Introduction

Objectives

- 1.1. The purpose of this study was to gather ecological information about the site at Cottage Farm, Pamber Green and assess the impacts of the development proposals for the site on these features in order to support a planning application with Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
- 1.2. This took the form of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), incorporating an Extended Phase 1 habitat survey and Preliminary Roost Inspection for bats. A PEA may need to be followed up where necessary by species-specific survey work as identified in the initial appraisal. If necessary, the report recommends further species-specific survey work.
- 1.3. If the PEA and any recommended additional work identifies likely impacts to biodiversity, the information gathered would be used to develop an appropriate and proportionate strategy to avoid, mitigate and where necessary, compensate for any such impacts.

Site Description

- 1.4. Cottage Farm lies to the eastern edge of the hamlet of Pamber Green, between Tadley and Basingstoke. The hamlet of Little London lies further to the east. It is set in an agricultural landscape with extensive woodland and hedges nearby.
- 1.5. The site is set in a large area of managed livestock pasture subdivided into separate parcels with post and wire fencing. The plot itself comprises an existing building and small area of surrounding pasture. The site is currently grazed by cattle.
- 1.6. The livestock building at the site is largely of single-skinned concrete blockwork construction on a concrete slab. This has been extended to the northern side elevation. This northern extension is of timber frame construction clad in a single external skin of timber weatherboarding. The building has a profiled metal sheet flat roof. See Photo 1 in the photo sheet in Appendix 1.

Proposed works

1.7. It is understood that the proposals are to redevelop the site. This will require the removal of the existing structure and the construction of new residential development with associated landscaping and access.

Limitations

1.8. All areas of the site were fully accessible and visible during the survey work. The weather was dry, with negligible wind and a temperature of 21°C. There were therefore no significant limitations to the survey work.

2. Methods

Desk Study

- 2.1. A desk-based assessment was carried out on 8th July 2019. This used a variety of information. Online ecological data (MAGIC¹) was used to gain information on designated sites and priority habitats within 1km of the Site. Aerial photos and Ordnance Survey mapping (again via MAGIC and Google.co.uk) were used to gain an understanding of the landscape context of the site.
- 2.2. A data request from the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) or the Hampshire Bat Group was not carried out at this time. Consideration of the value of seeking additional records on the context of the bat use of the site (if present) was taken after the site survey work.

Field Survey

- 2.3. A visual survey was carried out on 10th July 2019 by Adam Egglesfield of AE Ecology, an experienced ecological surveyor with over ten years' experience of a range of ecological survey work and who holds a current licence to survey bat roosts. The surveyor carried out a methodical investigation of all accessible areas of the site, examining adjacent contextual areas to identify the presence of, or habitat considered suitable for supporting, legally-protected or notable species or habitats. Key and representative areas of habitats within the site were identified and assessed.
- 2.4. An assessment was made of the presence of and potential impacts to adjacent notable habitats and designated sites.
- 2.5. The site was inspected for field signs of badger *Meles meles* such as badger setts, latrine sites, dung piles, well-used trails, prints, foraging activity, and hairs.
- 2.6. An assessment was made of the suitability of habitat on site to support hazel dormice *Muscardinus avellanarius*. Key habitats for this species are woodland, scrub and hedgerows, particularly where these offer dense vegetation to nest

¹ Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside - http://magic.defra.gov.uk/

- or hibernate in along with food resources such as hazelnuts, fruiting and nectar-rich plants (e.g. hawthorn, bramble) and honeysuckle (for nesting material). The presence of important landscape-scale habitat linkages between suitable habitats was considered.
- 2.7. The survey also included a consideration of the site's suitability to support breeding bird species. These will utilise a broad range of habitats, including structures such as houses and outbuildings, trees, scrub, isolated shrubs, dense herbaceous vegetation (terrestrial and aquatic) and open grassland.
- 2.8. The site's suitability to support reptiles was also considered. Key habitat features for reptiles include tussocky or patchy grassland, scrub edge, linear watercourses, ponds, compost heaps, brash piles, and rubble/soil heaps. Linkage to suitable habitat within the surrounding landscape will increase the potential for reptiles to occur, although populations can occur within isolated or fragmented habitats even within urban areas.
- 2.9. An assessment was made of all water bodies and terrestrial habitat within the site and within the surrounding landscape for their suitability to support populations of amphibians, particularly great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* (GCN).
- 2.10. Visual bat survey work on the buildings was guided by and consistent with that set out in the Bat Conservation Trust's 'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines' 3rd edition, (Collins, J. (ed) 2016).
- 2.11. The buildings were subject to detailed internal and external searches. The aims of this were to identify evidence of bat activity and/or identify the presence of any features that could potentially support roosting bats or features through which bats could gain access to possible roost locations. External areas were inspected to identify potential bat access points and roosting features. Such features typically include missing, slipped, broken or bowed roof coverings, gaps around fascias and soffits, gaps in brickwork (such as missing mortar or expansion gaps), lifted flashing, gaps to weatherboarding / cladding, and gaps around window and door casements.

- 2.12. The external inspection also aimed to identify any actual direct evidence of bat use such as droppings adhering to walls, floors, or windowsills below gaps, or staining around possible access gaps.
- 2.13. Features were inspected using Opticron Discovery 10x42 close-focusing binoculars and where necessary and safely possible, a ladder. High-powered torches (Clulite Clubman CB2 and Lenser P7.2) were used to illuminate potential roost and roost access features.
- 2.14. Where present and safely accessible, any internal voids and similar spaces were inspected for evidence of bat presence such as live bats, corpses, droppings, feeding remains, and staining. The buildings were subsequently assessed for their suitability to support roosting bats, from 'negligible' to 'high', in line with the survey guidelines.
- 2.15. An assessment was made of the suitability of the site and the surrounding landscape to support foraging and/or commuting bats. The assessment was based on the presence of key habitat features such as woodland, scrub, hedgerows, grassland, and open water and watercourses, which are highly attractive to bats as both a foraging resource and as commuting routes. The presence of such habitats, particularly in a mosaic with other suitable habitats, typically increases the potential for structures to be exploited by bats where suitable roost and access opportunities are present. The presence of unlit semi-natural vegetation and habitat linkages between the site and the surrounding landscape were also considered.

3. Results

Desk study

3.1. Appendix 2 shows the location of the site and its surrounding relevant ecological interest features produced from MAGIC.

Designated sites and notable habitats

- 3.2. The site lies close to Pamber Forest and Silchester Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which is approximately 200m to the of the plot. This is also a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
- 3.3. The SSSI comprises an extensive ancient oak woodland (Pamber Forest), also encompassing two heathland commons (Tadley and Silchester Commons) and a series of agriculturally-unimproved wet meadows. This association of ancient woodland, heath and grassland supports a great diversity of plants and animals, including many nationally rare species². The woodland areas are also largely designated as Ancient Woodland i.e. land that has been continuously wooded for over 400 years.
- 3.4. The site is also close to Ron Ward's Meadow SSSI, which lies just outside the search area to the north-west. This is an agriculturally-unimproved herb-rich meadow rich in grassland flora and associated invertebrate, animal and plant species³.
- 3.5. There is also a small number of smaller patches of woodland within the 1km search area, some of which are also designated Ancient Woodland. There are several strong hedgerows and treelines linking some of these features. However, the majority of the rest of the surrounding landscape is intensive arable or pasture.

Protected and notable species

3.6. There one record of a license having been granted within the search area for a development affecting European protected species. This was for a

² https://necmsi.esdm.co.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1002748.pdf

³ https://necmsi.esdm.co.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1004254.pdf

- development affecting a roost for brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus* bats, approximately 800m to the east. This was not a breeding or hibernation roost.
- 3.7. A review of nearby planning applications in the postcode area identified a development approximately 100m to the west of the site that affected a house that supported day roosts for small numbers of brown long-eared, common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and Natterer's *Myotis nattereri* bats.

Field survey

Habitats

- 3.8. The majority of the site is grazed pasture grassland. It is heavily dominated by common and agricultural grasses including barren brome *Bromus sterilis* and other *Bromus* species, annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, cocksfoot *Dactylus glomerata*, ryegrass *Lolium* sp., Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, and false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*.
- 3.9. Common herb species are present within the sward and, to a greater extent, around the more worn / poached areas near the structures and around the edges of the paddock. Species noted include broad-leaved plantain *Plantago major*, ribwort plantain *P. lanceolata*, common nettle *Urtica dioica*, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., silverweed *Argentina anserina*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg., birds-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, and scentless mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum*.
- 3.10. Photos 2 and 3 show these habitats.
- 3.11. A denser strip of tall ruderal vegetation dominated by common nettle and bramble lies along the post and rail fence that forms the north-western boundary of the plot (Photo 4). There are occasional young self-seeded trees such as hazel *Corylus avellana* along the boundary (Photo 5), although the majority of this boundary is open fence and ruderal vegetation.
- 3.12. There are two large mature oak *Quercus robur* trees to the south-west of the plot boundary (see Photos 3 and 4).

Badger

- 3.13. No signs of badger (e.g. setts, latrines, runs, hairs, or footprints) were noted within the site or immediate surrounding accessible areas. It is therefore concluded that there are no setts within the site or in the immediately adjacent areas and that badgers are likely absent from the site.
- 3.14. However, the site is close to the extensive woodland at Pamber Forest to the north, and this is likely to support an established badger population. The habitat at the site do not offer extensive areas of high-quality badger foraging habitat, but badgers may occasionally disperse across the site.

Hazel dormouse

- 3.15. Dormice are highly associated with areas of woodland (particularly Ancient Woodland and woodland with coppice management), hedgerows and continuous scrub. There are no habitats present at the site that are suitable for supporting dormice. Pamber Forest to the north is likely to provide extensive habitats suitable for supporting dormice and they are considered potentially present within the SSSI.
- 3.16. The short section of bramble, ruderal, and occasional scrub along the north-western site boundary does present some more structurally diverse habitat; however, this is small in extent (too small to support a viable population), highly disturbed, and unconnected to other areas of suitable habitat such as Pamber Forest.
- 3.17. It is therefore considered that dormice are likely absent from the site.

Breeding birds

- 3.18. No direct evidence of historic or recent nesting activity was seen in the existing building.
- 3.19. However, the building is suitable for a range of species such as barn swallow *Hirundo rustica* and a range of other common and widespread bird species.
- 3.20. The habitats at the site are of limited value as a foraging resource due to the general lack of species and structural diversity, although the small fragments

of taller herb / ruderal vegetation are likely to be used opportunistically by small numbers of common bird species.

Reptiles

3.21. The narrow fringe of ruderal vegetation along the north-western edge the site does nominally present as a small area of suitable reptile habitat due to the structural diversity and the interface of taller rough herb vegetation and shorter grassland. However, the open areas of grassland are much disturbed, and the area of habitat is small in extent, with managed domestic garden to the other side, meaning this area is isolated from other nearby reptile habitat patches. Therefore, it is considered that reptiles are likely absent from this area.

Water vole and otter

3.22. Water vole and otter are associated with watercourses and larger lakes / ponds. There are no suitable habitats at or adjacent to the site to support these species.

Great crested newt

3.23. There are no ponds on site. Examination of aerial photos and Ordnance Survey maps shows no ponds within 500m of the site. It is therefore considered unlikely that GCN would be present at the site.

Bat roosts

- 3.24. The building is of simple flat-roofed construction with no loft voids and no cavity walls. It is open, light, and airy, and experience a high degree of regular disturbance from animals and people.
- 3.25. A detailed inspection of all internal surfaces, including floors, structural timbers, and any ledges and stored materials, found no evidence of recent or historic bat use see Photos 6 to 8.
- 3.26. Externally, there is timber weatherboarding to the northern part of the building (Photo 9). This cladding was closely inspected, and the panels were all found to be tight-fitting with no gaps sufficiently large for bats to gain entry

- (Photo 10). This weatherboarding is an external feature only; there is no internal wall to this building, as can be seen in Photo 8.
- 3.27. The oak trees along the site boundary were assessed from ground level. These are of an age and girth where they may reasonably expected to support a range of potential roost features; the presence of bat roosts in these trees cannot therefore be discounted at this time, although no obvious features were noted.

Bat foraging and commuting habitat

3.28. The site is characterised by improved grass pasture, bare ground / hardstanding, building, and small areas of ruderal and ephemeral vegetation. The site presents habitat of low quality in terms of a bat foraging and commuting resource.

4. Discussion

Planning policy and legislation

- 4.1. Paragraph 175 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2018) requires that when determining planning applications, if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.
- 4.2. Policy EM4 of the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council Local Plan 2011-2029 (Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, 2016) identifies, broadly, that development proposals will only be permitted if significant harm to biodiversity would be avoided or adequately mitigated. Basingstoke and Deane have also adopted a Supplementary Planning Document that specifically covers biodiversity interests. The following section sets out recommendations that would ensure that these requirements are met, and that the development meets planning policy requirements.
- 4.3. Many species of animal are legally protected under both domestic or international law (the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)⁴ and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017⁵ respectively).
- 4.4. With reference to bats, hazel dormice, and great crested newts, these are European Protected Species (EPS). This legislation makes it an offence to kill, injure or disturb them, or to destroy or damage their breeding sites and resting places (even when the animals are not present). For such work to legally proceed, Natural England (the Government's statutory nature conservation agency) will issue a licence for the work to be able to proceed legally, subject to the proposals meeting certain criteria.

⁴ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69

⁵ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made

4.5. The following sections consider the potential impacts on any identified ecological features and whether the development would be in accordance with policy and legislation.

Potential impacts on sites, habitats, and species

Designated sites

- 4.6. The site lies close to Pamber Forest and Silchester Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This SSSI lies approximately 200m to the north. Woodland SSSIs can be particularly vulnerable to impacts from residential development through, for example, unauthorised accesses from adjacent gardens, cutting back of boundary trees, and dumping of garden waste which can result in the spread of undesirable plants.
- 4.7. However, at this site, the development will not adjoin the SSSI and there will be an expanse of horse grazing continued as the current use of the land between the development plot and the woodland. There will be no access provided between the application site and the woodland.
- 4.8. The distance between the plot and the SSSI is such that there would be no potential for there to be unauthorised access from the plot, or for there to be a risk of dumping of waste or spread of undesirable plants.
- 4.9. Furthermore, given the scale of the proposed development, it is not considered that there would be any potential for there to be construction-related impacts to the SSSI, for example through pollution from fuel spills from construction machinery or dust deposition.

Vegetation and habitats

4.10. The habitats within the development footprint are of negligible intrinsic ecological interest beyond the site level. There are no notable / Priority habitats present at the site. Therefore, the development is unlikely to result in any adverse impacts to notable habitats.

Badger

4.11. Badgers are considered likely absent from the site. It is therefore concluded that the development will have a negligible impact on badgers.

Hazel dormouse

4.12. Hazel dormice are considered likely absent from the site. It is therefore concluded that the development will have a negligible impact on hazel dormice.

Breeding birds

4.13. The building on site has the potential to support nesting birds. Removal of the buildings may therefore result in destruction of active bird nests if present at the time of demolition.

Reptiles

4.14. Reptiles are considered likely absent from the site. It is therefore concluded that the development will have a negligible impact on reptiles.

Great crested newts

4.15. The survey concluded that GCN are unlikely to be present at the site. It is therefore concluded that the development will have a negligible impact on GCN.

Bats

- 4.16. The on-site building was found to have no potential roost features and no evidence of bat use was seen. It is concluded that the building offers negligible roost suitability. The mature oak trees on the boundary of the site are not affected by the development.
- 4.17. There are nearby roosts as demonstrated by the record identified during the data search of a bat roost approximately 100m to the north. The woodland to the immediate north-east of the wider application site is also likely to be of some local value to bats; however, the proposed development at the application site will not affect this. The on-site habitat was judged to be of low quality as a bat foraging and commuting resource.
- 4.18. There will be no new external illumination that could affect key foraging and commuting habitat. It is therefore concluded that the development would have negligible impact on bats.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1. In summary, the development is considered to have minimal adverse impacts to biodiversity. However, clearance of the site could result in harm to birds' nests if present when the building is demolished.
- 5.2. It is therefore recommended that demolition of the building is timed to take place between September to March inclusive, as there are unlikely to be active nests during this winter period.
- 5.3. There is an increasing need to deliver net gains to biodiversity in new developments, and local planning policy places considerable weight on this. It is therefore strongly recommended that the final development plan for the site include a range of ecological enhancements to demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity.
- 5.4. Recommended measures would include:
 - The use of an extensive palette of native plants in any landscaping scheme, particularly native hedge species in boundary treatments.
 - The installation of integrated in-wall bat roost units in new houses.
 - The installation of bird nest boxes.
 - The use of a wildflower-rich seed mix in any communal areas of grass / verge planting.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site at Cottage Farm concluded that the site supports habitats of low ecological value.
- 6.2. Pamber Forest and Silchester Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies 200m from the northern boundary of the site; however, given the nature and scale of the development proposal and the intervening habitat, it is concluded that the development would not adversely affect the SSSI.
- 6.3. The survey found no evidence that the site supports badgers, dormice, water vole, otter, reptiles, or great crested newts.
- 6.4. The on-site building has been assessed as presenting negligible bat roost suitability.
- 6.5. The site may support small numbers of common and widespread breeding birds in the future, and recommendations are made to avoid impacts to these.
- 6.6. Recommendations are made that would deliver biodiversity gains.
- 6.7. Provided these recommendations are followed, it is concluded that the development will have no adverse impacts on biodiversity and will deliver biodiversity gains in accordance with policy.

References

- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). (2013), Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. CIEEM; Winchester.
- Collins, J. (ed.) (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (3rd edn). Bat Conservation Trust; London.
- JNCC (2010) Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey a technique for environmental audit; JNCC, Peterborough
- MHCLG, (2018). *National Planning Policy Framework*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; London.

Appendix 1 – Photos



Photo 1 Livestock building on site



Photo 2 Grazed pasture on site



Photo 3 Grazed pasture on site



Photo 4 Mature oak and ruderal vegetation to NW boundary



Photo 5 South-west boundary



Photo 6 Internals of southern part of building



Photo 7 Internals of southern part of building



Photo 8 Internals of northern part of building



Photo 9 Cladding to northern part of building



Photo 10 Cladding to northern part of building

Appendix 2 – MAGIC Map

