

# Ecological Assessment

The Cowshed, Meadow View, Earsham Street,  
Wingfield, Suffolk, IP21 5RH



Mr & Mrs Feavearyear, Town Farm, Earsham Street, Wingfield, Diss IP21 5RH

**October 2023**

**Ref 20288 r1 v1**

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	4
1 Introduction .....	6
1.1 Terms of Reference .....	6
1.2 Site Description.....	6
1.3 Proposed Development.....	8
1.4 Aim of this Report .....	9
2 Legislation and planning policy.....	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 National Planning Policy.....	10
2.3 Legislation .....	11
3 Review of 2019 Ecological Assessment.....	12
3.2 Desk Study Information.....	12
3.3 Habitats Present .....	12
3.4 Potential to Support Protected Species.....	13
3.5 Summary of 2019 Assessment .....	16
4 Desk Study and Ecological Walkover Survey - July 2023 .....	16
4.1 Methodology .....	16
4.2 Desk Study Results.....	17
4.3 Habitats - July 2023 Survey .....	18
4.4 Potential for Ecologically Important Species .....	19
4.5 Summary of Scoping Survey.....	21
5 Bat Surveys.....	22
5.1 Introduction.....	22
5.2 Preliminary Roost Assessment- .....	22
5.3 Bat Activity Survey Methodology .....	27
5.4 Bat Activity Survey Results .....	29
5.5 Conclusion of Bat Activity Surveys .....	31
5.6 Discussion and Recommendations.....	32
5.7 Precautionary Method Statement - Bats.....	34
6 Great Crested Newt Precautionary Method Statement.....	36
6.1 Introduction.....	36
6.2 Background Information .....	37
6.3 Measures to Avoid Offences to Great crested newts.....	37
6.4 Action Required if Great crested newts are suspected or recorded during the Works .....	39
7 Other Ecological Mitigation and Enhancement Measures .....	40
7.1 Introduction.....	40
7.2 Habitats.....	41
7.3 Badgers.....	41
7.4 Bats.....	41
7.5 Birds .....	42
7.6 Great crested newts.....	42
7.7 Reptiles .....	42
8 Conclusions .....	43

9 References ..... 44

Appendices ..... 45

Appendix 1 - Summary of Legislation - Bats ..... 45

Appendix 2 - Results of Bat Activity Surveys ..... 47

    Bat Emergence Survey 1 - 15.08.2023 ..... 47

    Bat Emergence Survey 2 - 07.09.2023 ..... 49

    Bat Emergence Survey 3 - 27.09.2023 ..... 50


<b>Version History:</b>	
20288 R1 v1	Draft for Client Review

Disclaimer: Surveys and ecological assessments are undertaken on the understanding that nothing in the final report will be omitted or amended by the client or any other interested party. This report remains the property of Huckle Ecology Ltd until payment has been received in full. Photographs included in the report are for illustration purposes and may be used by the client only in relation to the project. Huckle Ecology will not be liable for the use of the any documents for purposes other than those for which they have been prepared and provided.

Report prepared by Dr J. Huckle for Huckle Ecology Ltd

Declaration: The information and advice which we have prepared and presented it true and has been developed in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management Code of Professional Conduct. We confirm that any opinions expressed are our own and my true and bona fide opinions.

Digital Signature:



Dr Jon Huckle CEnv MCIEEM MSc BSc (Hons)

## Executive Summary

- In July 2023, Huckle Ecology was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Feavearyear to undertake an Ecological Assessment of The Cowshed, Meadow View, Earsham Street, a small farm outbuilding located to the north of Meadow View a period cottage located to the north of Town Farm and to the west of Earsham Street, hereafter referred to as 'the Site'.
- The surveys were commissioned to inform a planning application to Mid Suffolk District Council for the conversion of the existing outbuilding for residential use as a one-bedroom holiday let. A Pre-application enquiry with MSDC (Ref.: DC/23/01097) noted that although a previous planning application (Planning Ref.: DC/19/04902) for a larger, extended development was refused planning permission, this application removes the extension aspect from the proposed scheme, and subject to repairs to the roof being undertaken, the proposal would likely be supported in principle.
- A preliminary ecological appraisal combined with an initial bat preliminary roost assessment was undertaken in July 2023 to determine the potential ecological constraints associated with the Site, with a focus on the presence or likely absence of roosting bats in the existing building proposed to be converted.
- A review of the previous ecological assessment undertaken in 2019, combined with an updated desk study was undertaken in July 2023 to review and update existing information regarding designated sites, habitats or species that benefit from statutory protection and/or are of nature conservation concern, including records of statutory and non-statutory designated sites within 1 km of the Site.
- The desk study and data search have confirmed that the Site does not benefit from any statutory nature conservation designation and no statutory or non-statutory are likely to be adversely affected by the proposed development.
- The habitats present within the Site in 2023 were not materially different to those present in 2019 and included the outbuilding itself and three other main habitat types: amenity grassland, improved grassland and a hedgerow and ditch to the north of an existing farm track. The existing barn is of negligible intrinsic ecological value but has the potential to support bats and breeding birds.
- The ecological baseline has identified a number of ecological features which are of nature conservation value and/or benefit from statutory protection. These features are potential material considerations for any planning decision maker, and the potential impacts on these features have been assessed. These ecologically important features include bats and great crested newts.
- The proposed development will comprise the conversion of the existing outbuilding, and utilise the existing footprint of the building with no requirement for groundworks or excavations. Roof repairs have been undertaken to meet the requirements of a pre-application consultation with Mid Suffolk District Council.
- No habitats will be directly affected by the proposed development, and hedgerow to the north of the current access track is proposed to be enhanced through planting up gaps and improved management. Further habitat enhancements will be achieved through the creation of new hedgerows to be planted around the site perimeter. These hedgerows will be managed to provide net gain for biodiversity, as well as enhancing local habitat connectivity and supporting habitat for a range of animal taxonomic groups.
- Reasonable avoidance measures have been proposed for badgers, reptiles and breeding birds. Surveys for great crested newts have not been undertaken; however, due to the

presence of ponds within 100m, a Precautionary Method Statement has been detailed which would ensure that if present, potential effects on great crested newts would be avoided.

- Bat surveys undertaken confirmed that the building present provided low potential habitat for roosting bats. However, a single Common pipistrelle was recorded emerging on the first survey and consequently further bat activity surveys were undertaken to characterise the roost status present. No further bats were recorded emerging and the bat activity surveys recorded low levels of bat activity, consistent with use by a small number of bats, but from a variety of species, including Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, noctule, brown long-eared bat, Daubenton's bat, Natterer's bat and Western barbastelle.
- The single bat roost recorded was of a Common pipistrelle, that emerged from a corner of the roof, from a section of the building that requires no further external works. Consequently, a Precautionary Method Statement for bats has been provided which will ensure that the conversion of the outbuilding into a holiday let can proceed without an offence being committed.
- Further enhancements for bats and birds have been recommended which will result in a net gain for biodiversity for these species groups.
- Consequently, if the recommendations detailed in this report are followed, it is concluded that the proposed development would be compliant with statutory legislation regarding biodiversity and nature conservation and planning policy including recommendations set out in the NPPF and in local planning policies.

# 1 Introduction

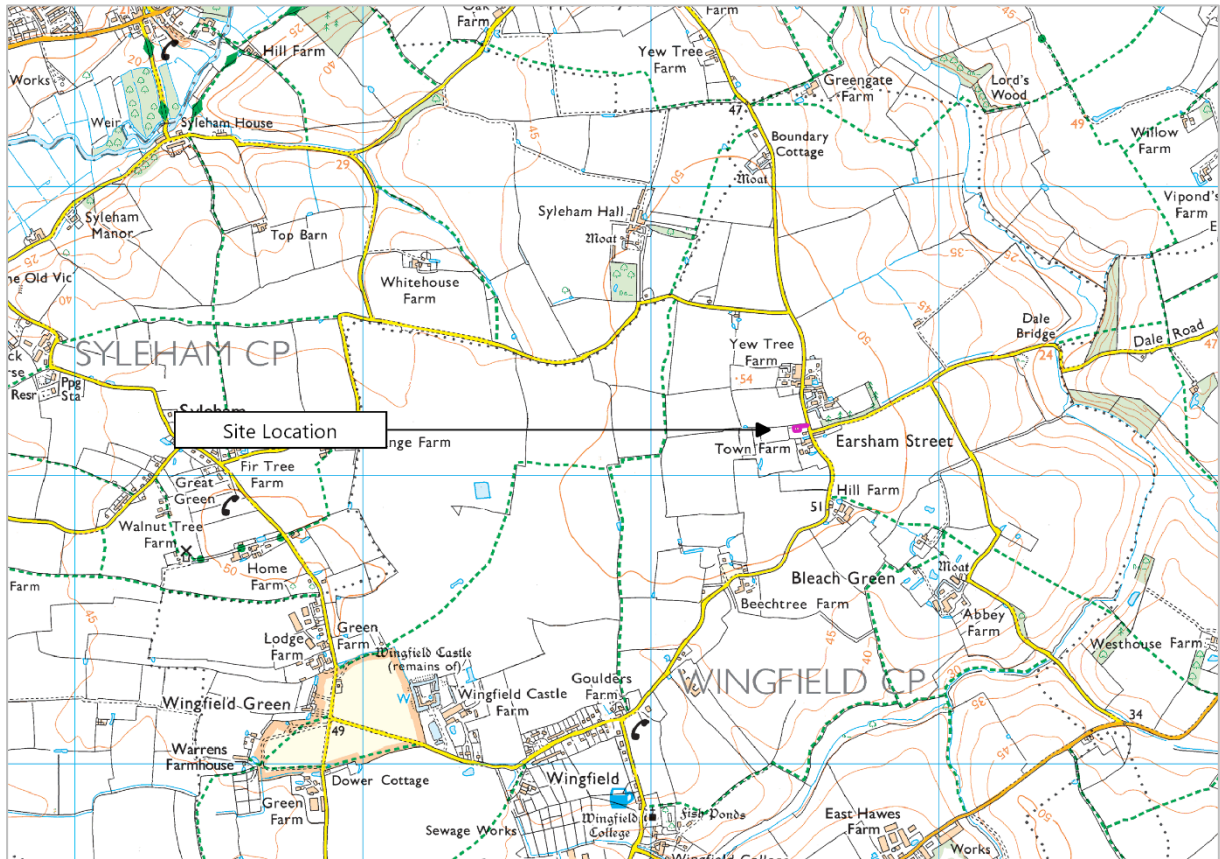
## 1.1 Terms of Reference

- 1.1.1 In July 2023, Huckle Ecology was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Feavearyear to undertake an Ecological Assessment The Cowshed, Meadow View, Earsham Street, a small farm outbuilding located to the north of Meadow View a period cottage located to the north of Town Farm and to the west of Earsham Street, hereafter referred to as 'the Site'.
- 1.1.2 The surveys were commissioned to inform a planning application to Mid Suffolk District Council for the conversion of the existing outbuilding for residential use as a holiday let. A Pre-application enquiry with MSDC (Ref.: DC/23/01097) regarding the proposed development recommended that a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal be submitted with any future application.
- 1.1.3 The Pre-application enquiry noted that although a previous planning application (Planning Ref.: DC/19/04902) for a larger, extended development was refused planning permission, this application removes the extension aspect from the proposed scheme, and subject to repairs to the roof being undertaken, the proposal would likely be supported in principle.

## 1.2 Site Description

- 1.2.1 The proposed development site comprises the existing agricultural outbuilding with associated amenity grassland to the east and rank, improved grassland to the west. The outbuilding is accessed via a track the connects to the north of the barn, which has a ditch that extends along the northern edge of the track.
- 1.2.2 The Site is located within a small hamlet, known as Earsham Street, with Meadow View and Town Farm located to the west of the north-south Earsham Street. This small farm cluster is surrounded by arable farmland which constitutes the primary land use in the local area.
- 1.2.3 The Site Location is presented below (Figure 1) and the Location Plan showing the application boundary (red line - as prepared by the applicant) is presented at Figure 2.

**Figure 1 Location Plan Showing location of The Cowshed, Earsham Street**



**Figure 2 Existing Location Plan (courtesy of the applicant)**

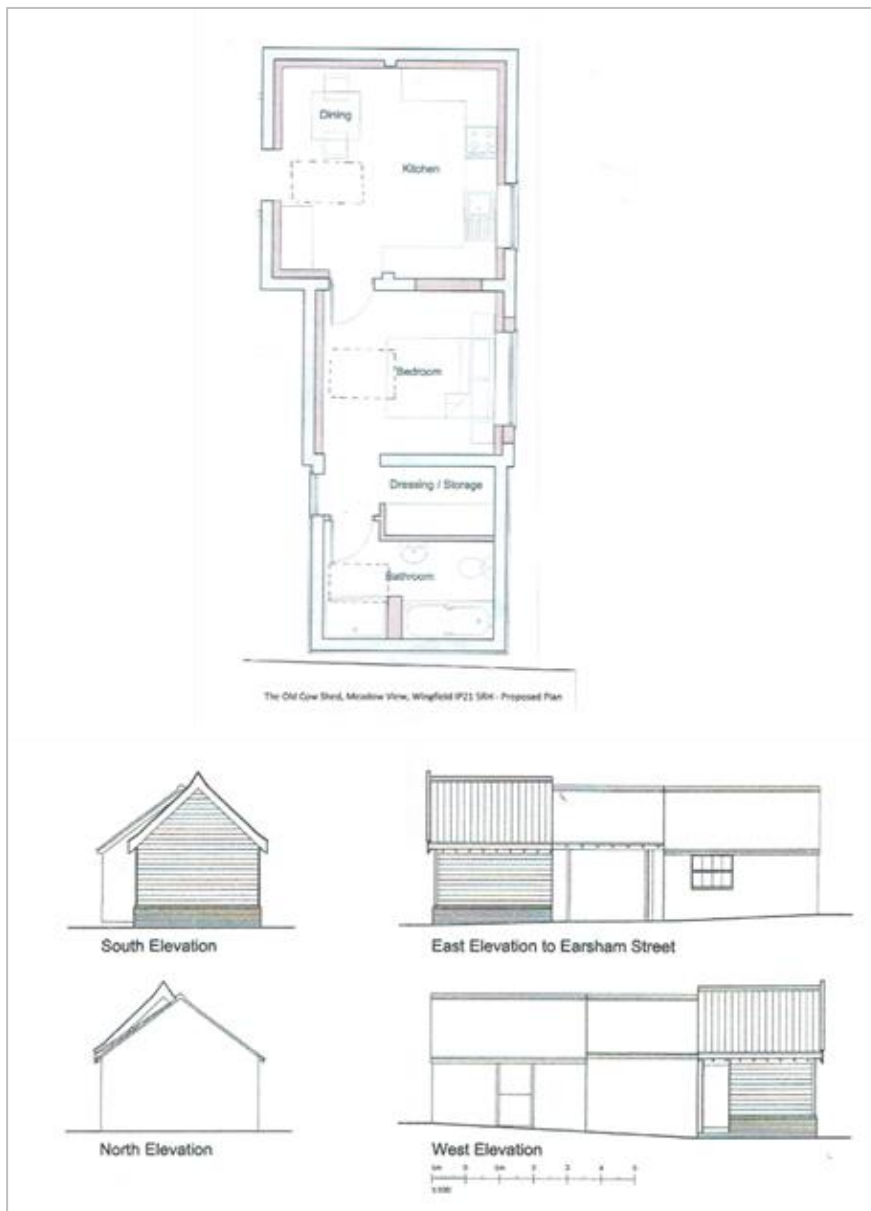




### 1.3 Proposed Development

- 1.3.1 Current proposals are to convert the existing agricultural building to form a one-bedroom holiday let, using materials that reflect the existing fabric of the barn, with the overall appearance of the outbuilding remaining the same. The repairs of the roof were completed in early 2023, prior to commencement of the current ecological assessment.#
- 1.3.2 The proposed access to the holiday let would be via the existing access drive from Earsham Street to the east, with a parking space located to the north of the current building. The proposed development is detailed on Figure 3 below.
- 1.3.3 It is understood that the proposed development will not require any excavations or ground works, and will comprise a conversion of the existing outbuilding, with internal modification to the fabric of the building and the conversion of existing rooms as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3 Proposed Site Layout (courtesy of the applicant)**





## 1.4 Aim of this Report

- 1.4.1 This report presents the results of an ecological assessment, including a PEA and further bat surveys undertaken in 2023. The ecological assessment incorporated a review of the previous Ecological Assessment (Torc Ecology, October 2019), undertaken to inform the previous application, and which included the results of surveys completed at the Cowshed in 2019.
- 1.4.2 This report also provided advice on the effective validity of the baseline data, taking into account guidance on the lifespan of ecological reports and survey information published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, April 2019). For mobile species, including bats and badgers, this was for a duration of 1 year until August 2020, while for other species a three-year timespan was applicable until August 2022. The CIEEM advice note recommends that for periods of more than three years, as is applicable here, that:

*"The report is unlikely to still be valid and most, if not all, of the surveys are likely to need to be updated (subject to and assessment by a professional ecologist, as described above)."*

- 1.4.3 Consequently, the scope of the protected species surveys undertaken in 2023 was determined based on a habitat suitability assessment for bats (as reported below) and an evaluation of the potential of the proposed development to affect other protected species. Other than bats, the only protected species likely to be an ecological constraint are birds, using the building structure for breeding.

## 2 Legislation and planning policy

### 2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 Following the exit of the UK from the European Union in January 2021, legislation has been implemented by the UK Government to ensure that domestic law that transposed EU Directives remained operable from 1 January 2021. The land and marine aspects of the EU Habitats and Wild Birds Directives were transposed into domestic law by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Changes were made through 2019 Regulations which ensure they were operable from 1 January 2021 and were applicable to England and Wales including inshore waters up to 12 nautical miles.
- 2.1.2 This section of the report provides a brief guide to legislation and planning policy, and it is recommended that the full text of policy and legislation is consulted.

### 2.2 National Planning Policy

- 2.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published by the government in March 2012 and updated in July 2018, with the most recent update in July 2021 (MHCLG, 2021). The NPPF provides guidance for local authorities, setting out the UK Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced. Planning Policy Guidance for the Natural Environment is updated via the UK Government website (UK Government, 2021).
- 2.2.2 The initial publication of the NPPF in 2012 (DCLG, 2012), replaced existing planning policy guidance, including that relating to biodiversity, Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9): Biological and Geological Conservation. However, the Government Circular 06/05: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and their impact within the Planning System (ODPM, 2006), which accompanied PPS9, remains valid at the time of writing.
- 2.2.3 Section 15 of the NPPF specifies the requirements for conserving and enhancing the natural environment, much of which reaffirms the protection previously afforded by PPS9 to designated sites, priority habitats and species and ancient woodland. The NPPF places a greater emphasis on ecological networks and states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Paragraph 175 provides the following advice in relation to the consideration of biodiversity in the determination of planning applications:

*“When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:*

- *if significant harm 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;*
- *development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest likely to have an adverse effect on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (either individually or in combination with other developments) should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site*

*that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;*

- *development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons<sup>58</sup> and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and*
- *development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.”*

*Footnote 58 states “For example, infrastructure projects (including nationally significant infrastructure projects, orders under the Transport and Works Act and hybrid bills), where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat.”*

2.2.4 In the context of the implementation of the NPPF, guidance in relation to biodiversity provided by Circular 06/05 remains valid and is supplemented by the UK Government’s Planning and Development Guidance (UK Government, 2018). Nature conservation legislation relating to protected species is unchanged and is outlined below.

2.2.5 The Environment Act 2021 seeks to introduce a mandatory approach to Biodiversity Net Gain whereby there will be a requirement for developments to demonstrate at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity. At the time of writing there is no mandatory requirement to demonstrate or quantify net gains; however, it is good practice to adopt the use of a Biodiversity Metric to quantify the habitat losses and gains associated with a proposed development.

## 2.3 Legislation

2.3.1 All public authorities have a requirement to pay due regard to the conservation and enhancement of habitats and species through Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC), which states, “Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”. To this end, Section 41 of the NERC Act provides for the establishment of a list of habitat and species that are considered to be of “principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity in England”. This list can be viewed on the DEFRA website at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk).

2.3.2 National legislation for the special protection of selected species is provided in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended (WCA). Under Section 1(1) and 1(2), all British bird species, their nests and eggs (excluding some pest and game species) are protected from intentional killing, injury or damage. Under Sections 1(4) and 1(5), special penalties are applied to bird species included in Schedule 1 of the Act and protection is extended for these species to disturbance to birds whilst building, in or near a nest and disturbance to dependant young. Schedule 5 provides special protection to selected animal species other than birds, through Section 9(4) of the Act, against damage to “any structure or place which any [wild animal included in the schedule] uses for shelter and protection” and against disturbance whilst in such places. Section 14 of the WCA prohibits the release of non-native species into the wild, including plants and animal species that are potentially invasive.

2.3.3 The Protection of Badgers Act 1992, as amended, provides protection to badgers and their setts and is primarily concerned with animal welfare and makes it an offence to kill or harm a badger or to interfere with a sett.

2.3.4 A number of animals, known as European protected species (EPS), are provided full

protection through inclusion in Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended. The Regulations provide protection against deliberate disturbance to those animals wherever they are present and provides tests against which the permission for a development that may have an effect on a Schedule 2 protected species must be assessed before permission can be given.

2.3.5 In addition to species protection, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Habitats Regulations also set out requirements/procedures for the notification, designation and protection of a range of statutory site designations in order to preserve important nature conservation resources.

### **3 Review of 2019 Ecological Assessment**

3.1.1 The 2019 Ecological Appraisal (Torc Ecology, October 2019), was undertaken to inform the previous planning application for the conversion and extension of the outbuilding to create a larger dwelling, which was subsequently unsuccessful. The Ecological Assessment included several elements including:

- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal – including a desktop study and a field survey, the latter comprising an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the site and an assessment of the potential for the presence of protected species and other notable species of conservation value.
- Bat Roost Inspection Survey – an inspection of buildings and trees for the potential of these features to support bat roosts.
- Nocturnal bat surveys – two separate nocturnal surveys were completed, including a dusk emergence survey (27<sup>th</sup> August 2019) and a dawn survey (11<sup>th</sup> September 2019).

### **3.2 Desk Study Information**

3.2.1 The 2019 report included a search for the relevant statutory and non-statutory designated sites within 2km of the Site. The report concluded that there were:

- No statutory designated sites within 2km of the site and that there would be no direct or indirect impacts on any statutory designated sites.
- Four non-statutory designated sites, including three County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and one Roadside Nature Reserve (RNR) within 2km of the Site. The closest CWS was Dale Pugh CWS located 1km east of the site, and which supported a mosaic of scrub and grassland. It was concluded that there would be no direct impacts and the Site was sufficiently distant from the CWS that indirect impacts were highly unlikely to occur.

### **3.3 Habitats Present**

3.3.1 The Phase 1 Habitat Survey undertaken in 2019 recorded the following habitats:

- Buildings – the outbuilding
- Track/hardcore – compacted hard core along the track with amenity grassland growing over it. An area of unvegetated gravel was present to the east of the barn and comprised part of the drive to the adjacent cottage.

- Amenity grassland - to the east of the outbuilding, a lawned areas with regularly mown grassland
- Scattered trees - three immature/semi-mature trees present within the amenity grassland
- Improved grassland - to the west of the barn, with a longer sward cut infrequently to a height of approx. 20cm, but with some tussocky structure, and dominated by perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, meadow grass species *Poa* sp., and occasional herbs such as common nettle *Urtica dioica*, mallow *Malva* sp. and creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*.
- Hedgerows and ditch - a fragmented hedge along the northern boundary of the ditch, the latter being approx. 1m wide by 1m deep. The hedgerow included a mix of ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Field Maple *Acer Campestre*, and Elder *Sambucus nigra*.

Along the south side of the track there was a low hedgerow, 0.75m high and 0.75m wide, a mix of Hawthorn, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, and Beech *Fagus sylvatica* with abundant bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg.

3.3.2 The 2019 report concluded that the Site was of "...low botanical interest in its current state with no notable species identified. The hedgerows on/adjacent site are not considered to meet the ecological conditions to be considered 'Important' hedgerows under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 as they have too few woody species and/or associated features. However, the ditch and hedgerows do have ecological value by providing a habitat link for species movement through the local area".

## 3.4 Potential to Support Protected Species

### Bats

- 3.4.1 The 2019 desk study included a data search of records held by the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS), and which returned records of nine confirmed species of bat within 2km of the Site. Most records were of field records, but there were records of two brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus* roosts, 1.5km southwest and 2km northeast of the site respectively.
- 3.4.2 The building inspection (Preliminary Roost Assessment) noted that the small outbuilding was in three sections: an enclosed room to the north, an open-fronted section in the centre, and a more recently constructed timber frame section with timber cladding to the south. There were no roof voids, with all sections open to the ridge with exposed timber beams.
- 3.4.3 The report concluded that two further bat activity surveys were required, this survey effort being "...considered appropriate to the site i.e. a building with low bat roost suitability but where bat activity on the initial survey indicated that a further survey was needed to fully establish the bat roost status of the building."
- 3.4.4 Two nocturnal bat surveys (one at dusk and one at dawn) were undertaken in August and September 2019, with no confirmed bat roosting activity recorded at the outbuilding. The report noted that "Low levels of commuting and foraging Common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* activity was recorded, with bats using the hedgerows and aspects of the outbuilding as structured habitat to forage. Very occasional individual noctule bats *Nyctalus noctula* were also recorded commuting over offsite fields to the north of the site."

### 3.4.5 The report concluded that:

*"Neither the outbuilding nor the trees on site are considered to support any roosting bats. The site does support low levels of commuting and foraging common and soprano pipistrelle bats; although activity levels were not high enough to indicate that the site provided important connectivity compared to other local habitats. Overall the site was considered to have moderate suitability for commuting and/or foraging bats with the hedgerows the most optimal connective features."*

## **Birds**

3.4.6 The 2019 report desktop study noted records of several bird species associated with the habitats present in the site, including swift *Apus apus*, house martin *Delichon urbicum*, song thrush *Turdus philomelos* and house sparrow *Passer domesticus*. All bird records were post 2007.

3.4.7 The report concluded that the hedgerows on and around the site were considered the most optimal bird habitat for nesting by species including blackbird *Turdus merula*, great tit *Parus major*, blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*, wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, and robin *Erithacus rubecula*. The outbuilding could also offer nesting opportunities for other observed bird species i.e. wren. The hedgerows were considered to provide habitat connectivity, however, the wider environment offered similar opportunities for nesting birds, and the site was not considered to be more favourable for nesting birds than other local habitats.

## **Great crested newt**

3.4.8 The Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service data search returned five records of great crested newt: four records from a cluster of ponds 1.6-1.8km SW of the site from 2014, and one from 1.8km south of the site from 2002.

3.4.9 Much of the terrestrial habitat within the site was considered unfavourable for great crested newts, including the amenity grassland and hardstanding, however the outbuilding, hedgerows, ditch and improved grassland were suitable for great crested newt if present in the local area.

3.4.10 The Field Survey identified 20 ponds within 500m of the site, with 11 considered to have good or partial connectivity to the site. Seven ponds were subject to an HSI assessment to assess their suitability for newts, and were all within 250m of the pond. These ponds included four ponds within 100m of the Site which were evaluated as :

- Pond 1 - 15m SW of Site - Good Suitability
- Pond 2 - 35m S of Site - Average
- Pond 3 - 40m NE of Site - Excellent; and
- Pond 4 - 90m S of Site - Poor

3.4.11 The 2019 report concluded that there was "...suitable habitat features present on or immediate adjacent site that great crested newts could utilise in their terrestrial phase i.e. to forage and seek shelter. Ponds 1 - 3 were assessed as potentially suitable breeding habitat for this species and given their proximity to the site, if great crested newts were present in these ponds, it is considered highly likely that great crested newts would be active on site".

3.4.12 It was also concluded that "...works to dig excavations, clear vegetation and remove ground

level parts of the outbuilding risk killing and/or injuring this species. These works could also result in the loss/damage of small areas of suitable newt terrestrial habitat e.g. resting/refugia habitat."

3.4.13 Further surveys were recommended to determine the presence or likely absence of great crested newt within the most suitable ponds closest to the Site (Ponds 1-3), due to potential for the excavation to result in potential impacts on great crested newts as noted above. Such surveys would inform any requirement for licensing and associated mitigation; however, it was concluded that "...there was no reason why a mitigation licence would not be obtainable, should one be required".

### **Other Ecologically Important Species**

3.4.14 The Previous PEA considered the potential suitability of the site for other protected species or species of conservation concern. The potential effects of the previous, larger proposed development are summarised as follows.

#### ***Badger***

3.4.15 No evidence of badger activity was recorded during the field survey. However, as the habitats were suitable for badger activity it was assumed that badger may on occasion access the site to commute and/or forage.

3.4.16 Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) were recommended to ensure no significant negative impacts on badgers.

#### ***Reptiles***

3.4.17 Habitats upon the site were considered to be generally poorly suited for reptiles as most of the grassland was too short to provide cover. Opportunities for shelter were noted under the hedgerow on the north boundary and within the ditch, although the lack of ground vegetation under the managed hedgerow south of the track made that feature less suitable.

3.4.18 It was considered unlikely that reptiles will be regularly active on site, with only limited opportunities for these species within the site boundary; it was considered possible that individual animals may access the site to bask and/or shelter in the hedgerow/ditch vegetation on an occasional basis.

3.4.19 Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) were recommended to ensure no significant negative impacts on reptiles.

#### ***Invertebrates***

3.4.20 The habitats present within the site were considered likely to support a range of common invertebrate species; however the habitats present were common and widely distributed in the immediate wider environment. Therefore, invertebrates were not considered likely to be negatively impacted by the proposed development of the site.

#### ***Hedgehog and Common Toad***

3.4.21 The proposed development was considered unlikely to have any significant impacts upon



local hedgehog or common toad populations, if present in the locality. RAMS were recommended to prevent harm to individual animals during the construction phase.

### 3.5 Summary of 2019 Assessment

- 3.5.1 The 2019 PEA Report included the results of a Habitats Survey of the Site, as well as further surveys for bats (Preliminary Roost Assessment and Nocturnal activity surveys) and great crested newts (Habitat Suitability Assessment)
- 3.5.2 No bats were recorded roosting and further surveys for great crested newts were recommended to determine whether there would be potential impacts on local great crested newts if present within local ponds.
- 3.5.3 With the implementation of appropriate RAMs it was considered "...that the proposed development can be undertaken with a neutral impact upon all ecological features on site, with the exception of great crested newts to which impacts are yet to be fully assessed."
- 3.5.4 This report also provided advice on the effective validity of the baseline data, taking into account guidance on the lifespan of ecological reports and survey information published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, April 2019). For mobile species, including bats and badgers, this was for a duration of 1 year until August 2020, while for other species a three-year timespan was applicable until August 2022. The CIEEM advice note recommends that for periods of more than three years, as is applicable here, that:

*"The report is unlikely to still be valid and most, if not all, of the surveys are likely to need to be updated (subject to and assessment by a professional ecologist, as described above)."*

- 3.5.5 The

## 4 Desk Study and Ecological Walkover Survey - July 2023

### 4.1 Methodology

- 4.1.1 A Desk Study and ecological walkover survey was undertaken in July 2023 to identify the habitats present within the Site and to update and validate the findings of the previous PEA undertaken in 2019.
- 4.1.2 The walkover survey comprised an extended Phase 1 habitat survey, as described in the Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment (IEA, 1995) , which was undertaken on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023.
- 4.1.3 Phase 1 habitat survey is a standardised method of recording habitat types and characteristic vegetation, as set out in the Handbook for Phase I Habitat Survey - a technique for Environmental Audit (JNCC, 2010). This survey method is extended through the additional recording of specific features indicating the presence, or likely presence, of protected species or other species of nature conservation significance. This survey method is an established and accepted approach for developing an ecological baseline for a site and is an integral part of both a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (CIEEM, 2017) and a more comprehensive Ecological Impact Assessment (CIEEM, 2016).

4.1.4 Whilst not a full protected species or botanical survey, the extended Phase I method enables a suitably experienced ecologist to obtain sufficient understanding of the ecology of a site that it is possible either:

- to confirm the conservation significance of the site and assess the potential for impacts on habitats/species likely to represent a material consideration in planning terms; or
- to ascertain that further surveys of some aspect(s) of the site's ecology will be required before such confirmation can be made.

4.1.5 The survey was undertaken by an experienced surveyor (Dr Jon Huckle has over 25 years professional experience of undertaking Phase 1 habitat and other ecological surveys), in good weather conditions and at a time of year (June) that is generally suitable for identifying the habitats present within the survey area.

## 4.2 Desk Study Results

4.2.1 The desk study was undertaken in July 2023 to review and update existing information regarding designated sites, habitats or species that benefit from statutory protection and/or are of nature conservation concern. A revised search for biological records was not considered necessary and the data from the 2019 search were considered sufficiently up to date to be valid for use in this ecological appraisal.

### Designated Sites and Priority Habitats

4.2.2 The 2023 Desk Study confirmed that there were no statutory designated sites within 2km of the Site and that the Site did not fall within the Impact Risk Zone of any SSSIs greater than 2km. The closest statutory designated site was Chippenhall Green SSSI, located approximately 5.6km ESE from the Site, and designated as supporting ecologically important lowland unimproved grassland.

4.2.3 There was no change in the status of non-statutory designated site with the closest being Dale Pugh CWS, located approximately 1km east of the Site.

4.2.4 A review of the UK Government internet site MAGIC and the Natural England Geoportal identified that there were three categories of Priority Habitats (as listed in the Priority Habitat Inventory (PHI) for England) located within 1 km of the Site (Figure 4 below). These habitats included the following:

- Wood Pasture and Parkland - located within grounds of Syleham Hall approx. 600m NE of the Site at its closest point;
- Deciduous woodland - several small blocks of woodland all between 500m and 1km from the Site; and
- Good quality semi-improved grassland - located 1km east of the Site.

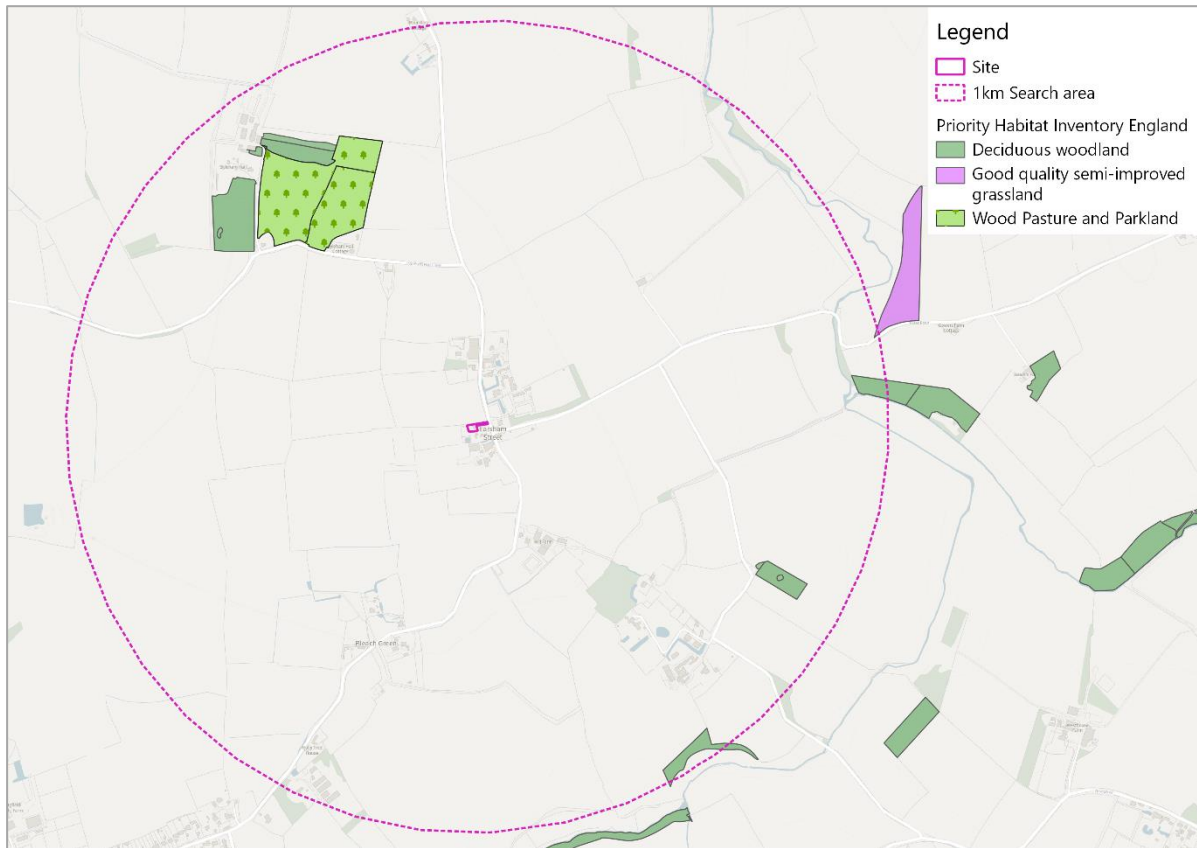
### Summary

4.2.5 The desk study and data search have confirmed that the Site does not benefit from any statutory nature conservation designation. Within 2 km of the Site, there were no statutory designated sites, with the closest being Chippenhall Green SSSI, located approx. 5.6 km from the Site at its closest point; there are no internationally designated sites within 2km of the Site.

4.2.6 Furthermore, within 2 km of the Site, there were four County Wildlife Sites, with the closest being Dale Pugh CWS located approx. 1km East of the Site at its closest point.

4.2.7 The Site does not support Priority Habitats as listed on the Priority Habitat Inventory, with the closest confirmed priority habitat being areas of Wood Pasture and Parkland approx. 600m NW of the Site at its closest point.

**Figure 4 Distribution of Priority Habitats located within 1 km of Site (Pink buffer)**



### 4.3 Habitats - July 2023 Survey

4.3.1 The ecological walkover confirmed that the habitats present within the Site in July 2023 were consistent with those described in the 2019 PEA report (Torc Ecology, October 2019).

4.3.2 The habitats were not materially different to those described, with the exception of the modifications to the roof of the outbuilding which is described in more detail below.

4.3.3 Other than the outbuilding itself the habitats comprised three main habitat types:

- Amenity grassland - to the east of the outbuilding. This area remained a short sward lawned area regularly mown to provide a garden lawn character.
- Improved grassland - to the west of the outbuilding. An area managed in a less intensive manner with infrequent cutting, estimated to be no more than twice a year. The grassland was dominated by grass species and characteristic of nutrient enriched grassland vegetation.
- Hedgerows and Ditch - as noted in the 2019 report, the hedgerow to the north of the access track was gappy and fragmented located to the north of the ditch which was dry and approximately 1m wide and 1m deep, and vegetated with rank grassland species.

- Track/gravel drive/hardcore - scattered areas of developed, but generally unsealed surfaces were present providing access drives to the outbuilding.

4.3.4 In addition, records relating to great crested newt data held by Natural England were reviewed, these data include records from Environmental DNA surveys (presence/absence) and from Survey Licence returns (Presence only), retrieved from the Natural England Open Data Geoportal (<https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/>).

### **Limitations to the Survey**

4.3.5 In any ecological survey, it is important to establish any limitations to the survey that may affect the conclusions that may be drawn from the survey results.

4.3.6 The Site was surveyed in optimal conditions for undertaking ecological surveys to map habitats. Consequently, there were no limitations that would affect the ability to record the general habitat types present or the dominant species present; therefore, based on the habitats present within the Site, it is concluded that there are no significant limitations associated with the habitat survey.

## **4.4 Potential for Ecologically Important Species**

4.4.1 The UK Government has provided advice for local authorities to consider when reviewing planning applications (UK Government, 2021), which highlights that an extended phase 1 survey (as provided in this report) is useful for assessing whether further species-specific surveys are required.

4.4.2 This guidance recommends that planning proposals should take steps to avoid affecting protected species, such as by timing works to avoid sensitive times of year, or siting works far enough away from protected species or habitats to avoid any harm. The need for further surveys should be proportionate to the likelihood of protected species being present, and to the risk of them being adversely affected by the development.

4.4.3 The habitats within the site itself located within the footprint of the development, summarised above, comprised amenity grassland, improved grassland, hedgerows and a ditch, and scattered, young, recently planted trees and shrubs typical of a garden setting.

4.4.4 These habitats are not materially different to that recorded as part of the PEA habitats survey undertaken in 2019 and summarised above (Torc Ecology, October 2019), and the information from the 2019 survey combined with the updated walkover survey undertaken in July 2023 provide a robust baseline dataset regarding the potential presence of protected species or species of conservation concern.

4.4.5 Consequently, the potential effects on the following taxonomic groups has been evaluated, to inform whether further surveys or specific mitigation measures were required to inform the planning application. An updated Preliminary Roost Assessment for Bats was undertaken in July 2023 and is reported in Section 5 below.

### ***Otters and water voles***

No suitable habitat is present within Site itself and no indirect effects likely. The ditch was considered to be dry for most of the year, receiving field drainage only, with no aquatic

vegetation present and not suitable for either species.

No further survey or mitigation measures considered necessary to inform the planning application.

### **Badgers**

4.4.6 No evidence or signs of badgers recorded and no suitable sett-building habitat present within the site; the Site itself is small, and subject to regular disturbance and unlikely to be important habitat for badgers. No further survey considered necessary to inform the planning application.

4.4.7 However, badgers may commute through the site and/or forage within areas of grassland and if excavations are required, RAMS are recommended to avoid animals becoming trapped in trenches or excavations left overnight.

### **Birds**

4.4.8 No evidence of Barn owl *Tyto alba* was recorded during the inspection and/or bat activity surveys; this species is not considered likely to be present in the outbuilding.

4.4.9 No birds were recorded using the buildings present within the site. However, some small passerine bird droppings were noted during the building inspection located along the edges of the eaves of the roof of the outbuilding and within timber soffit boxes located at the corner of the repaired roof. This suggests that small birds such as blue tit, wren, or house sparrow may be utilising the building and potentially nest in the local area.

4.4.10 No further survey considered necessary to inform the planning application. However, RAMS are recommended to avoid potential impacts on breeding birds, and enhancements recommended to provide new nesting opportunities within the Site.

### **Reptiles**

4.4.11 Habitats suitable for reptiles within the site are relatively small and limited to the small area of tussocky grassland and the ditch habitats to the north of the site. Neither of these habitats are likely to be directly impacted by the proposed conversion of the outbuilding (in contrast to the previous, larger application) and consequently reptile populations, if present, are unlikely to be impacted by the proposed development.

4.4.12 No further survey considered necessary to inform the planning application. However, individual reptiles may be present locally, and therefore RAMS are recommended for any vegetation clearance that may be required. In addition habitat enhancements that will benefit reptiles, particularly grass snakes are recommended.

### **Amphibians (including great crested newts)**

4.4.13 No ponds are present within the Site, and although there are three ponds within 100m of the Site, none of these are likely to be directly impacted. The 2023 surveys were commissioned in July 2023, which was after the recommended survey season for great crested newts with eDNA surveys carried out between mid-April and June and conventional great crested newt surveys between mid-March and mid-June.

- 4.4.14As noted in the 2019 PEA report, if great crested newts are present and breeding in the ponds within 100m of the Site, there is a reasonable likelihood that species may be active on the Site.
- 4.4.15However, the proposed development comprises the conversion of the existing outbuilding to a holiday let, which will not require ground works or excavations, and consequently the potential risks to great crested newts are significantly less compared to the 2019 proposed scheme which involved excavation of tussocky grassland and a more substantial construction phase.
- 4.4.16Consequently, while further surveys to determine the presence or likely absence of great crested newt would provide clarity about the risks to great crested newts if they are present, it is recommended that a Precautionary Method Statement be adopted for the construction phase of the proposed development which will ensure that potential impacts on individual newts will be avoided and therefore, works can proceed without an offence being committed.
- 4.4.17The details of the Precautionary Method Statement for great crested newts are provided below; it is subject to the requirement that if any great crested newt is found within the Site, that the works will immediately be stopped and a formal EPS licence application submitted.

### ***Other Terrestrial Species***

- 4.4.18The 2019 data search undertaken by the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service provided local records of brown hare and hedgehog from within the 2km search area. The habitats present are considered to be suitable with areas of grassland, as well as the hedgerow and ditch habitats, potentially used by both species. Brown hares are likely to be present in the surrounding arable farmland, but the Site itself is small and subject to regular disturbance and unlikely to be important habitat for local brown hares. The proposed conversion of the outbuilding will have negligible impacts on the tussocky grassland or hedgerow/ditch habitats and these species are unlikely to be affected.
- 4.4.19No further survey considered necessary to inform the planning application. However, RAMS are recommended to avoid potential impacts on individual animals, and enhancements recommended to provide new nesting opportunities within the Site
- 4.4.20No potential impacts are likely to occur on other taxonomic groups including invertebrates, notable plant species, or other animal not included above.

## **4.5 Summary of Scoping Survey**

- 4.5.1 The Site was evaluated for its potential to support species that benefit from statutory protection under wildlife legislation, as well as Species of Conservation Concern that would constitute a material consideration in the determination of a planning decision.
- 4.5.2 The grassland, hedgerow and ditch habitats are not materially different to those reported in 2019, and the potential for these habitats to support ecologically important species is consistent with the previous survey. The outbuilding was considered to provide potential roosting habitat for bats, as well as limited potential to support breeding birds, with full details provided in Section 5 below.
- 4.5.3 In addition, there were three ponds within 100m of the Site, and although the presence of

great crested newts has not been confirmed, if present, it is likely that individuals may be present within the Site. A Precautionary Method Statement for great crested newts is provided in Section 6 below.

## **5 Bat Surveys**

### **5.1 Introduction**

- 5.1.1 The 2019 PEA Report included a Preliminary Roost Assessment of the outbuilding, followed by two nocturnal bat activity surveys. The PRA concluded that there were Potential Roost Features (PRFs) associated with the outbuilding, including with the poor condition roof, as well as numerous access points where bats could enter into the interior of the barn.
- 5.1.2 Following a pre-application consultation with MSDC in March 2023, repairs to the roof were identified as being "...the only outstanding concern in regards to the conversion and compliance with policy H9. Thus, subject to the roof being repaired... the proposal would likely be supported in principle".
- 5.1.3 It is understood that subsequent to the pre-application consultation, the applicant undertook the roof repairs, prior to commissioning the current ecological assessment.

### **5.2 Preliminary Roost Assessment-**

#### **Methodology**

- 5.2.1 A Site Visit was undertaken on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023, concurrently with the Phase 1 Habitat Survey, to provide a bat preliminary roost assessment (PRA) of the buildings present within the proposed development Site and to confirm the scope of further surveys that would be required to accompany the planning application, in line with best practice guidance on bat surveys (Collins, 2016).
- 5.2.2 The building inspection surveys were undertaken by Dr Jon Huckle, an experienced professional ecologist with over 25 years of postgraduate experience and over 20 years operating as an ecological consultant. He has undertaken numerous bat surveys, including building inspections, bat activity transects, emergence and return roost surveys and has managed ecological input to numerous ecology chapters of Environmental Statements. He has provided evidence as an expert witness on bat ecology at several planning inquiries.
- 5.2.3 The preliminary roost assessment comprised a detailed inspection of the exterior and interior of the building to look for features that bats could use for entry/exit and to search for signs of bats, in accordance with methodological guidance produced by the Bat Conservation Trust (Collins, 2016). The objective of the survey was to determine the actual or potential presence of bats and to identify potential emergence points to focus on during emergence surveys.
- 5.2.4 For each building or tree, the preliminary roost assessment assigns a category to each structure according to its potential for supporting bat roosts using the criteria detailed in the BCT survey guidelines (Collins, 2016) and summarised in Table 1 below.



**Table 1 Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats, taken from Collins 2016.**

Suitability	Description of roosting habitats	Description of commuting and foraging habitat
Negligible	Negligible habitat features onsite likely to be used by roosting bats.	Negligible habitat features on-site likely to be used by commuting or foraging bats.
Low	<p>A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation.)</p> <p>A tree of sufficient size and age to contain potential roost features but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.</p>	<p>Habitat that could be used by small numbers of commuting bats such as a gappy hedgerow or unvegetated stream, but isolated, i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat.</p> <p>Suitable, but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a lone tree (not in a parkland situation) or a patch of scrub.</p>
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only - the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for commuting such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens.
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.	<p>Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by commuting bats such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge.</p> <p>Site is close to and connected to known roosts.</p>

### ***Bird Survey***

5.2.5 During the building inspections, signs of any old or active bird nests were recorded or potential locations within the building that could be used as nesting sites.

### **Results of Preliminary Roost Assessment**

5.2.6 The existing outbuilding is a single-storey, former agricultural barn, with an approx. north-south orientation in three sections:

- An enclosed brick walled room approx. 4m x 4m with a dilapidated door to the west, a defunct, boarded window to the east elevation and an internal doorway to the south, leading to;
- A central open-fronted cart lodge section, approx. 3m x 3m, with an open front to the east elevation, and an internal brick wall separating it from;
- A recently constructed room, approx. 3m x 3m, with an external door to the west elevation.

5.2.7 The northern and central sections comprised brick walls with mortar pointing that although

in need of repair was generally intact with few cracks and mortar holes present. The southern section was of recent construction, with timber weatherboard cladding on the exterior walls of the west, south and east elevation.

5.2.8 The roof of the whole outbuilding had recently been repaired with the north and central section roof repaired to match that of the southern section (which was noted as being in good condition in 2019). The roof had been repaired with clay pantiles, and internally lined with a Non-Bitumen Coated Roofing Membrane (NBCRM), attached to timber roof supports. The roof repairs had also included the installation of new soffits and fascia boards, and barge boards fitted to the north gable wall.

### ***External Inspection***

5.2.9 The roof was relatively shallow in pitch, with clay flat tiles on both the east and west elevations, and clay ridge tiles; given the recent repairs, all ridge tiles were in excellent condition with fully intact mortar along the whole length of the roof. The soffits were of recent construction, with unfinished timber in places; at the corners of the roof, the soffits included a 'soffit box' which extended diagonally under the roof and provided ventilation (and potentially access for bats) into the interior of the building.

5.2.10 The roof was considered to be in good overall condition; however there were several potential roost features (PRFs) associated with raised pantiles where there was a potential access under the tile and with the soffit ventilation boxes at each corner.

5.2.11 The walls of the building were inspected and there were no apparent PRFs associated with mortar holes and all timber cladding (on the southern section) was in excellent condition with no warped edges.

5.2.12 Based on the presence of the PRFs identified it was considered that the building features were consistent with a structure providing **Low** potential suitability as roosting habitat (Collins, 2016), specifically comprising "...one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation.)".

### ***Internal Inspection***

5.2.13 Full access to the interior of each section of the outbuilding chalet was possible and revealed that each section was open to the roof, which was lined with NBCRM. The north and central section had recently been re-roofed with new timber supports and roofing material beneath the clay pantiles. It was noted however, that the poor condition doors present on the west elevation of the north section and internally between the north and central section had substantial gaps above the doors; these gaps would provide access to the interior of the northern section for bats. Similarly access to the interior would be possible via the soffit boxes present at each corner.

5.2.14 Internally, there was a brick wall between each section, which was partly painted or whitewashed. There was evidence that the brick walls had recently been repaired with fresh pointing present where the bricks were unpainted. There were no loft spaces present.

5.2.15 In the southern section, the south wall was boarded with fibre board with the external cladding attached to the external surface.

5.2.16 A thorough search of the internal areas and surfaces was made for bats or signs of bats.; there were no bat droppings present or evidence of feeding remains such as moth or butterfly wings beneath a roof beam. There were no obvious accumulations of droppings or evidence of urine staining within the barn which would indicate the presence of an internal roost.

5.2.17 It was concluded likely that the interior of the barn was accessible to bats and provided potential roost locations for bats, but that the recent repair work meant that bats may have not located these since the works were undertaken. However, the interior of the barn was considered to be consistent with a structure providing Low potential suitability as roosting habitat.

### Summary

5.2.18 Based on the external and internal building inspection, it was concluded that the existing dwelling supported a number of PRFs, particularly associated with raised pan tiles, the ventilation boxes on the soffits and internally via gaps at the tops of existing doors and windows. The presence of these PRFs was consistent with a structure providing **Low** potential suitability as roosting habitat.

Photo 1 West elevation -showing three sections of barn



Photo 2 Southwest corner - showing new extension with timber cladding and new roof



Photo 3 North section west elevation showing door with gap above door - and new roof and fascia boards



Photo 4 North elevation - new barge boards and re-pointed mortar work





Photo 5 Soffit box / ventilation - on NE corner - connects to interior of barn



Photo 6 East elevation- showing three sections and open fronted central section



Photo 7 North section - interior. View north towards north wall.



Photo 8 North section - interior. View south towards internal brick wall.



Photo 9 Central section - interior view of west wall and stored building materials



Photo 10 Central section - view of roof and internal brick wall



Photo 11 South section - timber frame structure and lined roof and walls



Photo 12 South section - internal brick wall between south and central section d



Photo 13 Pan tile roof - east elevation showing several raised tiles.



Photo 14 PRF at South east corner of roof - cavity behind timber boards. Bird droppings present



## Bird Survey results

- 5.2.19 During the building inspections, signs of any old or active bird nests were recorded.
- 5.2.20 No birds' nests were noted within the loft spaces that were inspected internally. Externally, several bird droppings were noted, including at a cavity behind timber boards (Photo 18) which suggested that birds may use the space for roosting or nesting.

## 5.3 Bat Activity Survey Methodology

- 5.3.1 Following the Bat PRA assessment, a minimum of one bat activity surveys was recommended to be undertaken, in order to provide confidence of a negative result for a structure assessed as providing **Low** potential roosting habitat (Collins, 2016).
- 5.3.2 The initial bat emergence survey was undertaken by two surveyors on August 15th 2023, and during that survey one bat were recorded emerging from the south east corner of the roof of the barn.
- 5.3.3 Consequently, a bat roost was confirmed within the roof and a further two activity surveys were carried out in September 2023 to record any bats emerging from or re-entering roosting sites within the buildings and to enable characterisation of the status of bat roosts within the building.
- 5.3.4 Observations were made from outside, from positions to the northwest, east and southwest with two surveyors on each side of the building, with an additional, unmanned night vision aid (infra-red camera and bat detector) positioned in the third location (VP3). These locations were selected to provide vantage points of the building features and elevations considered likely to support bat roosts or where bats may access the buildings, as shown in Figure 5 below.



**Figure 5 Surveyor and camera locations around dwelling (Vantage Points 1-3 - Survey 1)**



- 5.3.5 All dusk surveys commenced fifteen minutes before sunset until ninety minutes after sunset, by which time any bats present were expected to have emerged (Collins, 2016).
- 5.3.6 All emergence surveys were undertaken by Jon Huckle, assisted by Monty Huckle.
- 5.3.7 Bat activity was surveyed using full spectrum handheld bat detectors: Elekon Batlogger M2 or an EMTouch Pro attached to a tablet or smartphone. Time-expanded (x10) recordings were later analysed using computer software (e.g., Bat Explorer or Kaleidoscope).
- 5.3.8 All surveyors were assisted by the use of Night Vision Aids (NVAs), including Infrared Video recorders (2x Sony AX-53, a Nightfox Red and Nightfox Whisker video recorder) with infrared illuminators used to provide additional infrared lighting. In addition, a Guide IR 19 Pro Thermal Camera was used to provide an additional NVA as appropriate.
- 5.3.9 The bat surveys were conducted during the bat activity season (May to September) using the correct methodology as per The Bat Conservation Trust Bat Survey - Good Practice Guidelines (Collins, 2016).

### **Survey Limitations**

- 5.3.10 The bat emergence surveys were undertaken in optimal weather conditions for bat activity surveys, in dry weather and at appropriate temperatures. The vantage points were selected to provide coverage of the gable end walls that could be easily viewed and accessed. All surveys were undertaken at dusk and no dawn surveys were considered necessary; the use of night vision aids was compliant with recent updated guidance on undertaking bat activity surveys (Bat Conservation Trust, May 2022), which also noted that the improved quality of dusk survey results resulting from the use of NVAs means that survey guidelines will transition away from the standard use of dawn surveys towards the use of dusk surveys supported by NVAs, as has been undertaken here.

## 5.4 Bat Activity Survey Results

### Activity Survey 1 – Dusk Emergence Survey – 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2023

5.4.1 Weather conditions were optimal for bat activity surveys, warm and humid with scattered cloud:

- Air temperature - 20°C (start) - 19°C (end)
- Wind - Beaufort scale 1 (light air)
- Precipitation - none
- Cloud - scattered cloud (4/8 oktas)

5.4.2 The survey commenced at 20.15 with sunset scheduled for 20.20.

5.4.3 Observations were made from outside the outbuilding with surveyors located to the NW and East of the barn (VPs 1 and VP2) with an Infrared camera and static detector located SW of the barn (VP3) providing good visual coverage of the entire roof and elevations of the building.

### **Summary of Survey on 15.08.2023 (detailed results provided at Appendix 2)**

5.4.4 Following a review of the bat calls recorded during the survey and the infrared video and thermal scope coverage from each vantage point, it was confirmed that one bat emerged from the southeast corner of the roof of the barn: this bat was identified from analysis of the call signature as being a Common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*. This bat appeared to emerge from the soffit at the south east corner of the roof, and likely to have roosted in the cavity noted in the timber boards present in the corner of the soffit (Photo 18 above).

5.4.5 No other bats were observed emerging from the video footage from any of the three VPs.

5.4.6 At the northwest corner of the building, VP1, activity was generally relatively low with a total of 18 bat passes recorded during the survey. These passes were identified as Common pipistrelle (9x passes), soprano pipistrelle (2x passes), noctule bat (5x passes) and brown long-eared bat (2x passes). The first bat was recorded at 20.38 and comprised 4x passes of a Noctule bat commuting and foraging high above the field to the north of the site.

5.4.7 To the east of the barn at VP2, bat activity consistent with that recorded at VP1, but with the Common pipistrelle recorded emerging from the SE corner of the barn at 20.34, approx. 14 minutes after sunset. Bat activity comprised a total of 20 bat passes, including 9x Common pipistrelle, 5x soprano pipistrelle, 4x noctule bat, and two Myotis sp. of which one was identified as Natterer's bat.

5.4.8 At the third VP, at the south west corner of the barn, a static bat detector recorded bat activity with 31 bat passes comprising: 18x Common pipistrelle, 4x soprano pipistrelle, 7x noctule, 1x Natterer's bat and 1x Daubenton's bat which was coincident with the unidentified Myotis bat recorded at VP2.

5.4.9 A static detector was also deployed within the northern section of the barn for the duration of the survey to detect any activity of bats within the interior of the barn: no bats were recorded inside the barn.

5.4.10 In summary, one Common pipistrelle bat was observed emerging from the south east corner



of the roof, likely to have emerged from the corner of the soffit box. Bat activity was generally relatively low at both survey locations with a total of six taxa recorded: Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, noctule, Natterer's bat, Daubenton's bat and brown long-eared bat.

### **Activity Survey 2 – Dusk Emergence Survey – 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2023**

5.4.11 Weather conditions were optimal for bat activity surveys, with clear skies, no cloud cover and a no breeze throughout the survey:

- Air temperature - 20°C (start) - 17°C (end)
- Wind - Beaufort scale 0 (still)
- Precipitation - none
- No cloud with clear skies (0/8 oktas)

5.4.12 The survey commenced at 19.20 with sunset scheduled for 19.32.

5.4.13 Observations were made from outside, from positions to the southwest and northeast of the building providing good visual coverage of the entire roof and elevations of the building.

### ***Summary of Survey on 07.09.2023 (detailed results provided at Appendix 2)***

5.4.14 Following a review of the bat calls recorded during the survey and the infrared and thermal video coverage from each vantage point, it was confirmed that no bats were recorded emerging from the outbuilding.

5.4.15 At the NW corner of the building, at VP1, bat activity was again relatively light, with a total of only 8x passes recorded including 5x Common pipistrelle, 2x soprano pipistrelle, and 1x pass identified as a Daubenton's bat. No bats were observed emerging and many passes were relatively faint indicative of bats being relatively distant from the barn. The first bat record was at 20.15, the bat identified as Daubenton's bat, and recorded at 20.15, approx. 45 minutes after sunset.

5.4.16 At the second vantage point at the SE corner of the barn, no bats were recorded emerging and bat activity was slightly higher with a total of 25 passes recorded, comprising 12x Common pipistrelle, 10x soprano pipistrelle, 2x passes of a Western barbastelle and 1x pass of a Myotis bat, possibly identified as a Daubenton's bat.

5.4.17 A static detector was also deployed within both the northern and southern sections of the barn for the duration of the survey to detect any activity of bats within the interior of the barn: no bats were recorded inside the barn.

5.4.18 In summary, **no bats** were observed emerging the barn. Bat activity was generally relatively low at both survey locations with a total of four taxa recorded: Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, Western barbastelle and a Myotis bat (probably Daubenton's bat).

### **Activity Survey 3 – Dusk Emergence Survey – 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2023**

5.4.19 Weather conditions were optimal for bat activity surveys:

- Air temperature - 18°C (start) - 16°C (end)
- Wind - Beaufort scale 3-4 (gentle to moderate breeze)

- Precipitation - none
- Cloudy with clear intervals (5/8 oktas)

5.4.20 The survey commenced at 18.40 with sunset scheduled for 18.45.

5.4.21 Observations were made from outside, from positions to the southwest and northeast of the building providing good visual coverage of the entire roof and elevations of the building.

### ***Summary of Survey on 27.09.2023 (detailed results provided at Appendix 2)***

5.4.22 Following a review of the bat calls recorded during the survey and the infrared and thermal video coverage from each vantage point, it was confirmed that no bats were recorded emerging from the outbuilding.

5.4.23 At the southwest vantage point, VP1, bat activity recorded was low with just eight passes recorded, consisting of 6x Common pipistrelle, 1x soprano pipistrelle and 1x brown long-eared bat.

5.4.24 At the northeast vantage point, VP2, bat activity recorded was very low with just five passes: 2x Common pipistrelle, 1x soprano pipistrelle and 1x Myotis sp., potentially identified as a Daubenton's bat. Four of these bats were also recorded at the third vantage point, south east of the barn, where a static detector was deployed.

5.4.25 A static detector was also deployed within the southern section of the barn for the duration of the survey to detect any activity of bats within the interior of the barn: no bats were recorded inside the barn.

5.4.26 In summary, **no bats** were observed emerging the barn. Bat activity recorded during the survey was very low with a total of four taxa recorded: Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared bat and a Myotis bat (probably Daubenton's bat).

## **5.5 Conclusion of Bat Activity Surveys**

### **Roosting Sites**

5.5.1 Bats were observed emerging on the first bat activity survey from one location on the outbuilding, with a single Common pipistrelle bat recorded emerging from the corner of the roof at the south east corner of the outbuilding. This corner was located at the corner of the southern section of the barn, which was of recent construction, with a new roof structure, clay pantiles, and timber cladding to the walls. On close inspection, it was likely that the Common pipistrelle emerged from a gap in the timber boards at the corner of the roof, located at the interface of the soffit on the east elevation and the barge board on the south elevation. This gap, shown in Photo 18 above, appeared to have bird droppings present, suggesting use as nesting or roosting site by small passerine birds, perhaps, blue tit, wren or house martin.

5.5.2 No bats were observed on the second or third survey, suggesting that the roost was being used occasionally by a single bat in an opportunistic manner, and in a transient temporal way, presumably one of a network of roost sites in the local area.

5.5.3 No other bats were observed emerging from other Potential Roost Features that had previously been identified and no bats were recorded on bat detectors that were deployed inside the northern and southern sections of the barn, indicating that no bats were roosting

inside the rooms.

5.5.4 The bat emergence location is shown below on Figure 6.

**Figure 6 South East corner of outbuilding showing location of emergence point (Red circle)**



### **Foraging and Commuting Habitat**

5.5.5 Foraging and commuting habitats for bats in the local area are relatively poor quality where the landscape is dominated by large open arable fields. However, localised opportunities for foraging and commuting were associated with hedgerows, extensive gardens, ponds and arable farmland located in the vicinity of the site.

5.5.6 Based on the evidence of the surveys, which recorded relatively low levels of bat activity on all three surveys, the Site itself is not considered to provide important foraging resources for local bat populations, and is considered to be of value at the Site level only.

## **5.6 Discussion and Recommendations**

### **Evaluation**

5.6.1 The roosting location identified at the southeast corner of the roof of the was considered to represent a Common pipistrelle day roost. A day roost is defined as “A place where individual bats, or small groups of males, rest or shelter in the day, but are rarely found by night in the summer” (Collins, 2016).

5.6.2 A European Protected Species mitigation licence (EPSL) application would be required to be submitted to Natural England to undertake any disturbance to, damage of or destruction of bat roosts at the outbuilding.

5.6.3 However, it is important to note that the roost location was present within the south east corner of the barn in a section that is of recent construction (as an extension to the northern and central sections) and which will require no external restoration as part of the proposed conversion (see below). The survey effort undertaken is sufficient to provide confidence in

the conclusion that no other bat roosts were present and regarding the status of the roosts present within the barn.

- 5.6.4 In the event that an EPS licence is required, then due to the low numbers of bats present emerging from the roosts and the low number of roosts present it is considered that the proposed development could proceed under a Bat Low Impact Class Licence (BLICL) from Natural England. This licence permits the disturbance and capture of bats and/or damage/destruction of roost/s of no more than three low conservation significance roosts (i.e. feeding roosts, day, night and transitional / occasional roosts), affecting no more than three of the more common species of bats present in small numbers. As common pipistrelle is included in the list of common species of bats to which this Class Licence applies, and no more than three of either species were recorded emerging, it can be used in this case.

### **Potential Impacts**

- 5.6.5 Without any mitigation, the conversion of the outbuilding into a holiday let, will not result in the loss of the roost present in the south east corner of the roof of the barn. However, without mitigation, there is a risk that pipistrelle bats could be disturbed or harmed if they are present when work is carried out.
- 5.6.6 Disturbance, damage, and destruction of roosts is most likely during the removal of roof tiles, barge boards and soffits. As this work is not required as part of the proposed development, and has recently been undertaken, these potential impacts will be avoided. It is also relevant to note that the roost was identified at the south east corner of the outbuilding, adjacent to a gravel drive providing vehicle access to the adjacent property, Meadow View. Consequently, the location of the roost is subject to regular disturbance, including noise and lights from vehicles as well as from residents using the adjacent gardens.
- 5.6.7 Nevertheless, the proposed works have the potential to disturb bats if present, through noise and light pollution during the construction phase; the works will require internal plastering and insulation of the roof and the fitting of roof windows on the west elevation, which could result in noise and changes in lighting in the vicinity of the roost. However, it is proposed that these potential impacts can be avoided entirely through sensitive working practices adopted as part of a Precautionary Method Statement for bats.
- 5.6.8 The CIEEM EclA guidelines (2018) note that 'various approaches can be adopted for defining local importance, including assessment within a district, borough or parish context or within other locally defined areas.' A day roost of a Common pipistrelle bat that will be impacted during the development will result in a negative impact at a local level.

### **Mitigation and Compensation Measures**

- 5.6.9 For the existing outbuilding, which has been identified as having a day roost supporting one Common pipistrelle bat the works can proceed via a Precautionary Method of Working that is outlined in the Precautionary Method Statement detailed below. As noted above, if the works are amended in any way that could potentially affect the roost, then it those works could be carried out under a European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) from Natural England. As noted above, due to the low numbers of bats recorded roosting, and that a species of the more common species was recorded roosting (Common pipistrelle), the most appropriate approach to undertaking the works would be by registering the site using the

BLICL scheme.

## 5.7 Precautionary Method Statement - Bats

### Introduction

- 5.7.1 The details of the mitigation measures required to avoid the risk of disturbing individual bats are detailed below and provide an effective mitigation strategy that reflects the survey effort undertaken to determine the presence or likely absence of bats within the barn and to characterise the nature of the roost identified. This Precautionary Method Statement will provide the LPA with the requisite level of certainty regarding the potential impacts on legally protected species (bats) and will also provide advice to the developer and appointed contractors about the best working practices to be adopted to ensure that no offence with respect of bats is committed.
- 5.7.2 Details of the relevant legislation that protects bats and their roosting habitats are summarised at Appendix 2. Bats are European protected species (EPS), and as such are provided full protection against deliberate disturbance wherever they are present and provide tests against which the permission for a development that may have an effect on a protected species must be assessed before permission can be given.
- 5.7.3 Natural England's advice in relation to EPS and the Planning Process (Natural England, 2010) recommends that "Licence applications for a development should be regarded as the last available option where all other reasonable alternative ways of avoiding or minimising impacts on the protected species have been discounted and the action is nonetheless likely to result in an offence or offences under the species protection provisions of the Regulations."
- 5.7.4 A Precautionary Method Statement that adopts a non-licensed mitigation strategy is consistent with avoiding a risk-averse application for a licence, and for the proposed development is considered sufficient to enable the works to proceed without an offence being committed, provided that the works are undertaken under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist (SQE), in the manner outlined below; and subject to the requirement that if any great crested newt is found within the Site, that the works will immediately be stopped and a formal EPS licence application submitted.

### Mitigation Measures to Avoid Offences to Bats

- 5.7.5 It is important to note that this method statement, is dependent on the results of surveys undertaken and the conclusions above. Bats are highly mobile species, and may change their use of the barn in the relatively short term.
- 5.7.6 Consequently, in the event that an individual bat is discovered during any works on Site, then work must be stopped immediately, and an EPS licence application submitted. If bat is found on site, all works will be immediately suspended and a suitably qualified ecologist (see below) consulted for advice on identification and how to proceed in a lawful manner.

### *Ecological Clerk of Works / Project Ecologist*

- 5.7.7 The appointment of an Ecological Clerks of Works/ Project Ecologist, which would be appointed for the duration of the construction phase and would consist of a Suitably

Qualified Ecologist with experience of bat ecology, legislation and implementation of appropriate mitigation strategies (including licensed mitigation work).

- 5.7.8 Prior to the commencement of construction works, information on bats and their legal status will be communicated to all contractors, via a tool box talk by the Project Ecologist, with a poster and information sheet erected on site and in welfare units. This information will include details of the location of the identified bat roost. The Project Ecologist will be available to provide site supervision of works, as required, as well as providing advice and recommendations on a call-off basis where a permanent on-site presence is deemed unnecessary.
- 5.7.9 Prior to the commencement of works, a minimum of 2x no. bat boxes suitable for use by pipistrelle bats will be erected in trees or buildings adjacent to the Site - these boxes should be erected prior to any works being carried out to ensure that bats are provided with replacement roosts available for any bats displaced by the works.

### ***Location of Construction Activities***

- 5.7.10 The proposed conversion of the outbuilding will involve no excavations, but will involve modifications to external and internal walls and the installation of windows and other domestic features to enable the building to be used as a holiday let.
- 5.7.11 To avoid potential disturbance the works will involve a construction phase that will aim to use a small footprint with construction materials being stored on adjacent areas of hardstanding or gravel/hard core. These storage areas should be located adjacent to the north and west elevations of the barn to reduce the risk of potential disturbance.
- 5.7.12 Prior to construction, it is recommended that a 2m buffer be demarcated around the outside of the south east corner of the building with protective fencing or clear signage used to prevent vehicle incursion and avoid pedestrian disturbance during construction.

### ***Timing and Duration of Works***

- 5.7.13 Timings of works are recommended to avoid the bat maternity season (May - August) in locations where these types of roosts have been found. However, for day roosts, the timings of works are not so restrictive unless they are in proximity to maternity roosts. It is good practice to avoid undertaking works during the hibernation season (roughly December to February inclusive), as at this time of year bats are generally hibernating or in torpor, and there is a high risk of mortality if they are disturbed. Therefore, works will be timed in order to take advantage of milder weather conditions after several nights where temperatures are no lower than 8 degrees Celsius. The ideal times of year to undertake building works is either Spring or Autumn, where bats will be moving between hibernation and mating areas or vice versa.
- 5.7.14 The following measures would minimise the risk of impact to bats within the proposed construction area:
- Works will ideally be timed to avoid the maternity season (generally from May to August) and when bats are potentially hibernating. The optimum time for works in the vicinity of the SE corner would be in Spring (March - April) or Autumn (Sept - November) However, as the roost itself will not be directly impacted, it is preferable for the work to be completed as swiftly as possible if these periods cannot be avoided.



- No works to the exterior of the SE corner of the building are required. Internal works are recommended to be completed in the south section of the barn rapidly to ensure that insulation and plaster boards or rendering is completed and internal fitting of the south section interior minimises the risk of disturbing bats present.

### ***Use of Safe Roofing Membranes***

5.7.15 The roof repairs of the outbuilding have been undertaken and consequently it is not practical for any re-roofing works to specify the use traditional type 1F bitumen felting to minimise the risk of bat mortality arising from bat becoming entangled within the fibres of Non-Bitumen Coated Roofing Membrane (NBCRM). If any sections of roof do require repair, it is recommended that Type 1F bitumen felt be used.

### ***Wildlife Sensitive Lighting***

5.7.16 No works to increase the overall level of lighting are proposed but it is recommended that all temporary and permanent lighting will be in-line with lighting guidelines (Bats and Lighting in the UK, Bat Conservation Trust 2018). This lighting should be of low level, be on downward deflectors and ideally be on PIR sensors. Using LED directional lighting can also be a way of minimizing the light spill affecting the adjacent habitat. No up-lighting should be used. This will ensure that any roosting, commuting and foraging resources that the bats are likely to be using is maintained. This includes any lighting near buildings and trees where mitigation and compensations features have been installed.

### **Action Required if bats are recorded during the Works**

5.7.17 If an individual bat is recorded during the works specified above, to ensure that an offence is not committed, an application for an EPS licence will be required. This will involve registering the site on a Bat Low Impact Class Licence, as noted above.

## **6 Great Crested Newt Precautionary Method Statement**

### **6.1 Introduction**

6.1.1 As detailed in the 2019 PEA report (Torc Ecology, October 2019) and in the section above, there are several risk factors relating to great crested newts which indicate that the species may be present within the local area. These risk factors include the following:

- Records of great crested newt from the 2019 SBIS data search, with confirmed records 1.6-1.8km SW of the Site and 1.8km S of the Site respectively;
- The presence of ponds within the local area - the 2019 report noted the presence of 20 water bodies within 500m of the Site; of these 11 had good or partial connectivity to the Site. Of these three ponds within 100m were evaluated as being Average, Good or Excellent Suitability for great crested newts using the Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) methodology (ARG UK, 2010); and
- The Site is located within a great crested newt Amber Risk Zone as identified within the Norfolk and Suffolk District Level Licence scheme.

6.1.2 The PEA Report included a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment of the seven ponds



considered to be suitable for great crested newt and which were accessible at the time of survey (Torc Ecology, October 2019). Although no presence/absence surveys were undertaken, it was noted that if great crested newts were present and breeding in the three ponds within 100m of the Site, there was a high likelihood of the species being active on site, and that "...works to dig excavations, clear vegetation, and remove ground level parts of the outbuilding risk killing and/or injuring this species".

- 6.1.3 It is important to note that the current planning application incorporates a reduced scheme that does not involve ground excavations or works that would remove the ground level of the outbuilding; the proposed development (Figure 3 Proposed Site Layout (courtesy of the applicant) is limited to the conversion of the existing outbuilding with access provided by the existing track located to the north east of the building.
- 6.1.4 Consequently, given the minimal disturbance to newt terrestrial habitats it is considered that the production of a Great crested newt Precautionary Method Statement provides a satisfactory mitigation strategy that reflects the limited area affected by the proposed development and the low risk of great crested newts being affected negatively by the works required to convert the outbuilding.
- 6.1.5 This Precautionary Method Statement will provide the LPA with the requisite level of certainty regarding the potential impacts on legally protected species (great crested newts). It will also provide advice to the developer and appointed contractors about the best working practices to be adopted to ensure that no offence with respect of great crested newts is committed.

## **6.2 Background Information**

- 6.2.1 Great crested newts are European protected species (EPS), and as such are provided full protection through inclusion in Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended. The Regulations provide protection for great crested newts against deliberate disturbance wherever they are present and provide tests against which the permission for a development that may have an effect on a Schedule 2 protected species must be assessed before permission can be given.
- 6.2.2 Natural England's advice in relation to EPS and the Planning Process (Natural England, 2010) recommends that "Licence applications for a development should be regarded as the last available option where all other reasonable alternative ways of avoiding or minimising impacts on the protected species have been discounted and the action is nonetheless likely to result in an offence or offences under the species protection provisions of the Regulations."
- 6.2.3 A Precautionary Method Statement that adopts a non-licensed mitigation strategy is consistent with avoiding a risk-averse application for a licence, and for the proposed development is considered sufficient to enable the works to proceed without an offence being committed, provided that the works are undertaken under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist (SQE), in the manner outlined below; and subject to the requirement that if any great crested newt is found within the Site, that the works will immediately be stopped and a formal EPS licence application submitted.

## **6.3 Measures to Avoid Offences to Great crested newts**

- 6.3.1 This section outlines the non-licensed avoidance and mitigation measures design to reduce

the risk of an offence being committed to 'Highly Unlikely', as defined in Natural England's Licence Method Statement (Natural England, 2015).

- 6.3.2 This information is intended to act as a reference document to be retained on site during construction and therefore, for completeness these measures are detailed to provide a single point of reference.
- 6.3.3 At all times, in the event that a great crested newt individual is discovered during any works on Site, then work must be stopped immediately, and an EPS licence application submitted. If a great crested newt or suspected great crested newt is found on site, all works will be immediately suspended and a suitably qualified ecologist (see below) consulted for advice on identification and how to proceed in a lawful manner.

#### ***Ecological Clerk of Works / Project Ecologist***

- 6.3.4 The appointment of an Ecological Clerks of Works/ Project Ecologist, which would be appointed for the duration of the construction phase and would consist of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist with experience of great crested newt mitigation.
- 6.3.5 The Project Ecologist will be available to provide site supervision of any vegetation clearance, or excavation works that involve the breaking of new ground, as required, as well as providing advice and recommendations on a call-off basis where a permanent on-site presence is deemed unnecessary.
- 6.3.6 Prior to the commencement of construction works, information on amphibian identification will be communicated to all contractors, via tool box talk, with a poster and information sheet erected on site and in welfare units. An example of amphibian information sheet (produced by Amphibian and Reptile Groups UK – ARGUK) is attached at Appendix 1.

#### ***Location of Construction Activities***

- 6.3.7 The proposed conversion of the outbuilding will involve no excavations, but will involve modifications to external and internal walls and the installation of windows and other domestic features to enable the building to be used as a holiday let. The works will involve a construction phase that will aim to use a small footprint with construction materials being stored on adjacent areas of hardstanding or gravel/hard core.
- 6.3.8 Prior to construction, the boundary of the construction zone should be clearly demarcated from the surrounding habitat with a buffer of at least 2m between hedgerows and the site; with protective fencing or clear signage used to prevent vehicle incursion into sensitive habitats. The construction area will be accessed via the existing track to the north east of the site.
- 6.3.9 This construction will not require excavation and/or construction of a concrete pad; existing areas of hard standing will be used to store construction materials for both the barn conversion and the new cartlodge. Construction materials will be stored on pallets (above ground) to prevent the creation of potential refuges that could be used by amphibians as shelter. Similarly, all welfare units, site office and temporary workers accommodation must be restricted to existing hard standing.
- 6.3.10 The outbuilding and the access drive to it are located in areas that currently comprise habitats considered unsuitable as terrestrial habitat for great crested newt. By limiting the

construction activities to these areas, the risk of affecting great crested newts is reduced significantly.

### ***Timing and Duration of Works***

6.3.11 The following measures would minimise the risk of impact to great crested newt within the proposed construction area.

- Before and during construction, all grassed areas on and adjacent to the Site will be maintained with a short sward of approx. 5cm, and no more than 10cm;
- Although no excavations are considered necessary, in the event that some excavations are required, the following measures will be applied:
  - Duration of all ground works minimised with the site cleared, and foundations dug in as short a period as possible – any excavation on site should be ideally filled the same day or covered overnight with plywood boards with gaps filled;
  - Access ramps should be installed in any excavations left overnight, to allow animals to escape.
  - Immediately prior to infilling, all excavations will be inspected for the presence of great crested newts or other animals – with the exception of great crested newts, any animals found in excavations should be moved to appropriate habitats nearby providing shelter and cover;
- To reduce the risk of animals coming into contact with wet concrete:
  - footings and slabs should be poured during the morning where possible to ensure it has solidified before dusk;
  - Hand mixing of mortar or concrete should be done on ply boarding over a tarpaulin;
  - Any excess concrete should be disposed of in a concrete skip.
- All downpipes will be sealed at ground level with a lead and debris screen.

## **6.4 Action Required if Great crested newts are suspected or recorded during the Works**

6.4.1 If a great crested newt individual is recorded during the works specified above, to ensure that an offence is not committed, an application for an EPS licence will be required. This will involve either applying to register the site on the Norfolk and Suffolk District Level Licence scheme for great crested newts or through the completion of a Natural England EPS application form, for example using the Great crested newt Method Statement (Natural England, 2015).

## 7 Other Ecological Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

### 7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 The details of the ecological mitigation required with respect of bats (section 5) and great crested newt (Section 6) have been detailed above and included details of Precautionary Method Statements for these taxa.
- 7.1.2 As noted in the 2019 PEA report (Torc Ecology, October 2019), Reasonable Avoidance Measures were recommended for other taxonomic groups which were designed to mitigate the risk of potential effects on individuals of animals or habitats that could potentially be affected the original proposed development.
- 7.1.3 Although the current proposed development is reduced in scale with no excavations required, these RAMS are considered relevant to ensure compliance with wildlife legislation as well as national and local planning policies with regard to ecology and biodiversity. In addition, ecological enhancements are recommended below, that will provide benefits for wildlife and contribute to delivering a net gain for biodiversity within the site.

#### **Biodiversity Net Gain**

- 7.1.4 Following the issue of Planning Policy Statement 9 by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM, 2005) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2019), all planning decisions should aim to minimise impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.
- 7.1.5 Paragraph 118a of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) states: "Planning policies and decisions should: a) encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains - such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside"
- 7.1.6 Paragraph 170d states: "Planning policies and decisions should: d) contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;"
- 7.1.7 Paragraph 174b states: "To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should: b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity."
- 7.1.8 Ecological enhancements are proposed to provide BNG that are proportionate to the small size of the site and considered appropriate for the habitats and species recorded. The following ecological enhancement are considered appropriate to the Site conditions and potential for the species likely to be present.
- Erection of a minimum of 4x bird boxes - it is recommended that a minimum of 4x bird boxes be deployed; these should include integrated bird boxes, for species that typically

nest in buildings such as swift and house sparrow as well as boxes mounted on walls for small passerine species. It is recommended that the bird boxes be erected on a range of elevations at a height of at least 3-4m above ground level.

## 7.2 Habitats

### ***Mitigation***

- RAMS - during the construction phase of the proposed development hedgerows should be protected from accidental damage

### ***Enhancements***

- Filling gaps in the hedgerow along the north of the access track by planting up with native hedgerow species. This will enhance the local hedgerow resource and habitat connectivity provided by the hedgerow.
- Planting of native, species-rich hedgerow along the other site boundaries to increase the extent of hedgerows and provide benefit to animal species that inhabit hedgerows.

This hedge planting will create new hedgerow that will reinforce the existing poor-condition hedgerows and provide potential nesting habitat for birds, as well as terrestrial habitat for amphibians, reptiles and small mammals. The hedgerow should include a range of native hedgerow species, including hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, crab apple, oak, and spindle. The hedgerow will be managed to provide a 3-4m high perimeter hedgerow.

## 7.3 Badgers

### ***Mitigation***

7.3.1 No excavations are required for the proposed development. Consequently no RAMS are required.

## 7.4 Bats

### ***Mitigation***

7.4.1 See Section 5 above, which includes the installation of 2x bat boxes suitable for pipistrelle bats to provide alternative roosting opportunities on trees or buildings close to the barn.

### ***Enhancements***

7.4.2 To provide enhancements for local bat populations, it is recommended that the following measures be implemented as part of the proposed development:

- Provision of 2x wall mounted bat boxes, one located at each end of the building, attached close to the apex of the gable wall and suitable for use by a range of bat species. The bat boxes should be of standard woodcrete construction such as the 'Schwegler 2F' or equivalent to maximise the durability of the bat boxes while minimising maintenance requirements.



- Provision of a further 2x no. bat box suitable for use by pipistrelle bats to be erected in trees or on other buildings close to the Site; and
- Hedgerow planting – filling gaps in existing hedgerows and planting new hedgerows where possible, will enhance the foraging and commuting habitat for local bat populations.

## 7.5 Birds

### ***Mitigation***

7.5.1 As breeding birds are statutorily protected, to avoid impacts on breeding birds and committing an offence, removal of any structures should be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season (March – July inclusive). Should this not be possible then all areas identified for clearance must be checked for nests by an ecologist prior to clearance. If any nests are identified, then this area should be clearly delineated, and no works allowed until after chicks have fledged and the nest has been abandoned.

### ***Enhancements***

7.5.2 To provide enhancements for local bird populations, it is recommended that the following measures be implemented as part of the proposed development:

- a total of at least four bird nesting boxes be installed in semi-mature or mature trees in appropriate locations along the west and north site boundaries. The nest boxes should be sheltered from wind, rain and strong sunlight and approx. 3-5 m above ground level.
- Hedgerow planting – filling gaps in existing hedgerows and planting new hedgerows where possible, will enhance the nesting habitat and shelter provided by hedgerows.
- 

## 7.6 Great crested newts

### ***Mitigation***

7.6.1 See Section 5 above.

### ***Enhancements***

7.6.2 If present, it is likely that the hedgerow planting recommended above will also provide enhanced terrestrial habitat for great crested newts.

## 7.7 Reptiles

### ***Mitigation***

- RAMS – vegetation clearance, including any management of grassland vegetation should be undertaken using a phased cut, and from the centre of the site towards the hedgerows to encourage dispersal of any reptiles present towards the hedgerows. Vegetation clearance should be undertaken outside the hibernation period when reptiles are generally inactive.

## **Enhancement**

- If implemented, it is likely that the hedgerow planting recommended above will also provide shelter and improved habitat connectivity and for reptile species.

## **8 Conclusions**

- 8.1.1 An ecological impact assessment of the proposed application for the conversion of an outbuilding into a holiday let at Meadow View, Earsham Street, has been undertaken, taking into account baseline ecological information derived from a previous ecological report undertaken in 2019 for a previous scheme, as well as ecological site surveys undertaken in 2023 to update the ecological baseline information.
- 8.1.2 The ecological baseline has identified a number of ecological features which are of nature conservation value and/or benefit from statutory protection. These features are potential material considerations for any planning decision maker, and the potential impacts on these features have been assessed. These ecologically important features include bats and great crested newts.
- 8.1.3 The proposed development will comprise the conversion of the existing outbuilding, and utilise the existing footprint of the building with no requirement for groundworks or excavations. Roof repairs have been undertaken to meet the requirements of a pre-application consultation with Mid Suffolk District Council.
- 8.1.4 No habitats will be directly affected by the proposed development, and hedgerow to the north of the current access track is proposed to be enhanced through planting up gaps and improved management. Further habitat enhancements will be achieved through the creation of new hedgerows to be planted around the site perimeter. These hedgerows will be managed to provide net gain for biodiversity, as well as enhancing local habitat connectivity and supporting habitat for a range of animal taxonomic groups.
- 8.1.5 Reasonable avoidance measures have been proposed for badgers, reptiles and breeding birds. Surveys for great crested newts have not been undertaken; however, due to the presence of ponds within 100m, a Precautionary Method Statement has been detailed which would ensure that if present, potential effects on great crested newts would be avoided.
- 8.1.6 Bat surveys undertaken confirmed that the building present provided low potential habitat for roosting bats. However, a single Common pipistrelle was recorded emerging on the first survey and consequently further bat activity surveys were undertaken to characterise the roost status present. No further bats were recorded emerging and the bat activity surveys recorded low levels of bat activity, consistent with use by a small number of bats, but from a variety of species, including Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, noctule, brown long-eared bat, Daubenton's bat, Natterer's bat and Western barbastelle.
- 8.1.7 The single bat roost recorded was of a Common pipistrelle, that emerged from a corner of the roof, from a section of the building that requires no further external works. Consequently, a Precautionary Method Statement for bats has been provided which will ensure that the conversion of the outbuilding into a holiday let can proceed without an offence being committed.
- 8.1.8 Further enhancements for bats and birds have been recommended which will result in a net

gain for biodiversity for these species groups.

- 8.1.9 Consequently, if the recommendations detailed in this report are followed, it is concluded that the proposed development would be compliant with statutory legislation regarding biodiversity and nature conservation and planning policy including recommendations set out in the NPPF and in local planning policies.

## 9 References

- ARG UK. (2010). *Great crested newt: Habitat Suitability Index*. Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom.
- Bat Conservation Trust. (May 2022). *Interim Guidance Notes: Use of Night Vision Aids for bat emergence surveys and further comment on dawn surveys*. BCT.
- CIEEM. (April 2019). *Advice Note: On the Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys*. Winchester: CIEEM.
- Collins, J. (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn)*. London: The Bat Conservation Trust.
- DCLG. (2012). *National Planning Policy Framework*. London, UK: Department for Communities and Local Government.
- MHCLG. (2019). *National Planning Policy Framework*. London, UK.: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- MHCLG. (2021). *National Planning Policy Framework*. London, UK: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- Natural England. (2010). *European Protected Species and the Planning Process*. Peterborough UK: Natural England.
- Natural England. (2015). *Great Crested Newt Method Statement for EPS Licence Application (WML-A14-2 Version December 2015)*. Natural England.
- Torc Ecology. (October 2019). *Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of Outbuilding at Meadow View, Earsham Street, Wingfield, Suffolk*.
- UK Government. (2018, July). *Planning and development: Protected sites and species*. Retrieved from Gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/topic/planning-development/protected-sites-species>
- UK Government. (2021, April). *Planning Policy Guidance - Natural Environment*. Retrieved from UK Government: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#biodiversity-and-ecosystems>

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Summary of Legislation - Bats

This section provides a brief guide to legislation and planning policy, and it is recommended that the full text of policy and legislation is consulted for the correct legal wording.

All bat species benefit from statutory protection provided by the 'Habitats Regulations' and the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which have been enshrined within national and local planning policy throughout England and Wales.

All bat species are included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Under Regulation 43 it is an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat;
- Deliberately disturb bats including:
  - impairing their ability to survive, breed or rear young;
  - impairing their ability to hibernate or migrate;
- Significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of that species
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a bat;
- Possess, control, transport, sell or exchange any live or dead bat, or any part or thing derived from a bat.

Bats are listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended, and as such are protected under Section 9 of the Act, which applies to all stages in their life cycle and makes it an offence to:

- intentionally kill, injure or take bats. [Section 9(1)]
- to possess or control a bat, live or dead or any part or thing derived from them. [Section 9(2)]
- to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy, or obstruct access to any structure or place which bats use for shelter or protection. It is also an offence to intentionally disturb them while occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose. [Section 9(4)]
- to sell, offer or expose for sale, or possess or transport for the purpose of sale, any live or dead bat or any part or thing derived from them. [It is also an offence to publish or cause to be published any advertisement likely to be understood as conveying that bats, or parts or derived things of them are bought, sold or are intended to be]. [Section 9(5)]

Prosecution could result in imprisonment, fines of £5,000 per animal affected and confiscation of vehicles and equipment used.

This legislation provides defences so that necessary operations may be carried out in places used by bats, provided the appropriate Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (in England this is Natural England) is notified and allowed a reasonable time to advise on whether the proposed operation should be carried out and, if so, the approach to be used. The UK is a signatory to the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe, set up under the Bonn Convention. The Fundamental Obligations of Article III of this Agreement require the protection of all bats and their

habitats, including the identification and protection from damage or disturbance of important feeding areas for bats.

Paragraph 98 of Circular 06/2005 states that 'the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat'.

Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2019) states that 'the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by .... minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.'

Exemptions can be granted from the protection afforded to bats under the Habitat Regulations, by means of an EPS (European Protected Species) Habitats Regulations licence obtained from Natural England.

An 'EPS Habitats Regulations Licence' could be required for:

- Demolition of a building known to be used by bats prior to development of a site
- Conversion of barns or other buildings to be used by bats
- Removal of trees known be used by bats as well as tree pruning
- Significant alterations to roof voids known to be used by bats
- Road building or widening
- Bridge strengthening

There are three tests, which must be satisfied before a licence can be issued to permit otherwise prohibited acts;

- Regulation 55(2)(e), for the purpose of preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment; or
- Regulation 55(9)(a) and there is no satisfactory alternative; and
- Regulation 55(9)(b) that the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the species concerned at favourable conservation status in their natural range.

A European Protected Species Licence is required before the commencement of any development that might impact on bats and their roosts.



## Appendix 2 - Results of Bat Activity Surveys

### Bat Emergence Survey 1 - 15.08.2023

**Table 2 Results of Activity Survey 1 - Emergence Survey on 15.08.2023. Sunset: 20.20 hrs**

Time	Species	Observation
<b>Vantage Point 1 (MH) - NW of barn viewing west elevation and gable wall at north end</b>		
No bats observed emerging		
18x bat passes recorded: 9x Common pipistrelle, 2x soprano pipistrelle, 5x noctule and 2x brown long-eared bat.		
20.15		Survey start
20.38	Noctule	4x passes - flying high over barn and field to north
20.49	Noctule	1x pass - heard but not seen
20.53	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass
20.58	Brown long-eared bat	2x passes- did not emerge and approached from north and flew from north to south to west of barn
21.01- 21.03	Common pipistrelle	4x passes - flying around barn, feeding
21.23	Common pipistrelle	3x passes - heard but not seen
21.27	Common pipistrelle	2x passes - heard but not seen
21.31	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass flew from west and along north side of barn towards VP2
21.50		Survey end
<b>Vantage Point 2 (JH)- E of building - viewing east elevation</b>		
<b>1x Common pipistrelle emerged from SE corner of outbuilding</b>		
20 bat passes recorded: 9x Common pipistrelle, 5x Soprano pipistrelle, 4x noctule, 1x Natterer's bat and 1x Myotis sp.		
20.15		Survey start
<b>20.34</b>	<b>Common pipistrelle</b>	<b>1x Emergence - from South East corner of roof, likely from corner of soffit and bargeboard</b>
20.36	Noctule	1x pass
20.38	Noctule	2x passes - flying high over field to north of Site, then flew to north
20.48	Noctule	1x pass - heard but not seen
20.48	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen
20.49	Common pipistrelle	1x pass
20.55	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - Foraging near farmhouse to south of barn
21.01- 21.02	Common pipistrelle	5x passes - feeding around barn, flying around garden to east of barn
21.12	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen
21.27	Common pipistrelle	1x pass
21.31	Soprano pipistrelle	1x brief pass - flew from direction of VP1
21.39	Natterer's bat	1x pass - heard but not seen
21.42	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen
21.50	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass
21.51	Myotis sp.	1x pass - ID not clear, but prob Daubenton's bat from bat recorded at VP3 at same time
21.55	Common pipistrelle	1x pass
22.50	-	Survey end
<b>Vantage Point 3 (SM minibat recorded and NVA only)- SW of building - viewing southwest elevation</b>		
No bats observed emerging		

Time	Species	Observation
31 bat passes recorded: 18x Common pipistrelle, 4x soprano pipistrelle, 7x noctule, 1x Natterer's bat and 1x Daubenton's bat.		
20.15		Survey start
20.36	Noctule	2x passes
20.38	Noctule	2x passes
20.40- 20.48	Noctule	3x passes
20.55	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass
21.00- 21.10	Common pipistrelle	2x passes
21.10- 21.20	Common pipistrelle	4x passes
21.20- 21.30	Common pipistrelle	3x passes
21.31	Soprano pipistrelle	2x passes
21.39	Natterer's bat	1x pass
21.50	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass
21.51	Daubenton's bat	1x pass
21.55- 22.02	Common pipistrelle	9x passes
22.02		Survey end

## Bat Emergence Survey 2 - 07.09.2023

**Table 3 Results of Emergence Survey on 07.09.2023. Sunset at 19.32 hrs**

Time	Species	Observation
<b>Vantage Point 1 (MH) - NW of barn viewing west elevation and gable wall at north end.</b>		
No bats observed emerging		
8x bat passes recorded: 5x Common pipistrelle, 2x soprano pipistrelle, 1x Daubenton's bat		
19.20		Survey start
20.15	Daubenton's bat	1x pass - brief pass, heard but not seen
20.20	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen
20.27	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - faint, commuting call
20.34	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen
20.44	Common pipistrelle	1x pass
20.46	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - very faint and distant
21.04	Common pipistrelle	1x pass with social call
21.05	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen
21.05		Survey end
<b>Vantage Point 2 (JH) - SE of barn viewing south and east elevations including corner where emergence recorded on survey 1.</b>		
No bats observed emerging		
25 bat passes recorded: 12x Common pipistrelle, 10x soprano pipistrelle, 2x Western barbastelle, and 1x Myotis sp., probably Daubenton's bat.		
19.20	-	Survey Start
20.10	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - observed foraging near road to east of barn
20.15	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - Flew from SW direction to south of barn and then south towards farmhouse
20.16	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - flew from NE direction and then off to SE
20.20	Myotis sp.	1x pass - flew from R to L in front of VP - from direction of pond, possibly Daubenton's bat
20.27	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - very faint and distant
20.34	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - very brief and faint
20.38	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen with social calls
20.39	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - with social call
20.40-	Common pipistrelle	4x passes - brief pass not seen
20.50	Soprano pipistrelle	5x passes
20.46	Western barbastelle	2x passes - seen flying near farmhouse to south
20.50-	Common pipistrelle	3x passes- occasional and faint passes
21.00		
21.00-	Common pipistrelle	3x passes - heard but not seen
21.05		
21.06		Survey end

## Bat Emergence Survey 3 - 27.09.2023

**Table 4 Results of Emergence Survey on 27.09.2023. Sunset at 18.45 hrs.**

Time	Species	Observation
<b>Vantage Point 1 (JH) - SW of barn viewing south and west elevations of barn</b>		
No bats observed emerging		
8x bat passes recorded: 6x Common pipistrelle, 1x soprano pipistrelle, 1x brown long-eared bat.		
Continuous noise from crickets during survey		
18.40	-	Survey Start
19.07	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - very faint and distant - heard but not seen
19.10	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen, very brief pass
19.16	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - very brief and faint
19.20	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - heard but not seen
19.35	Soprano pipistrelle	1x pass - commuting call
19.42	Common pipistrelle	1x pass
19.46	Brown long-eared bat	1x pass - flew E to W over top of roof
19.53	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - with social call
20.10		Survey end
<b>Vantage Point 2 (MH)- NE of building - viewing east and north elevations.</b>		
No bats observed emerging		
5 bat passes recorded: 3x Common pipistrelle, 1x brown long-eared bat and 1x Myotis sp (likely Daubentons bat)		
18.40	-	Survey Start
19.07	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - observed flying around barn - did not emerge
19.10	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - flew from south and off to NW
19.22	Myo sp.	1x pass - Prob Daubenton's bat
19.46	Brown long-eared bat	1x pass - flew from road and then over roof of barn towards West
19.53	Common pipistrelle	1x pass with social call
20.15		Survey end
<b>Vantage Point 3 (static bat detector)- SE of building - with IR camera viewing east and south elevations.</b>		
No bats observed emerging		
4 bat passes recorded: 3x Common pipistrelle, and 1x brown long-eared bat		
18.40	-	Survey Start
19.07	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - observed flying south to north along side of barn - did not emerge
19.10	Common pipistrelle	1x pass - flew south to north along east side of barn
19.46	Brown long-eared bat	1x pass
19.53	Common pipistrelle	1x pass with social call
20.15		Survey end