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**Preliminary Ecological
Appraisal Including a
Protected Species
Assessment at:
Gate House Cottage, School
Road, Risby, Suffolk. IP28 6RG.**

On Behalf Of:

Mothersole Builders

September 2023

Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.

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0 SUMMARY

- 0.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mothersole Builders to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Gate House Cottage, School Road, Risby, Suffolk. IP28 6RG. The report is required to accompany a planning application for restoration of the existing period cottage.
- 0.2 The survey was conducted on 10th August 2023 by experienced ecologist Roger Spring BSc MCIEEM (licensed to survey for great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* and licenced to survey for bats - level 2). The survey consisted of an inspection for preferred habitat types and signs and evidence of protected and priority species, such as for bats, great crested newts, reptiles, badgers *Meles meles* and nesting birds following Natural England (English Nature) Guidelines. A local biological record search was undertaken for the assessment.
- 0.3 The site and proposed construction zone is small and includes: a period, timber frame, rendered, thatched cottage with no loft space. A dilapidated, single-storey, brick extension is present on the northern elevation. The cottage is within a walled garden. The garden consists of unmanaged rough, improved grassland on disturbed soils with common herbaceous plants. Scattered ornamental plants are present along with 6 x early mature pollard lime *Tilia* sp. trees on the southern (roadside) boundary. A low and short privet and yew hedgerow is also on the northern boundary. No driveway is present. No new driveway is proposed.
- 0.4 Immediately adjacent to the site habitats included: residential housing to the east and south (across School Road), churchyard to the west and neighbouring gardens to the north.
- 0.5 The features of highest ecological value on the site were the trees and hedgerows which are understood to be proposed for retention. The remaining site was considered low in ecological value. No signs or evidence of protected, priority or rare species were found. No potential for such was found. The risk of significant impact to notable habitats or protected, priority or rare species was considered negligible.
- 0.6 Therefore, further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, birds, and hedgehogs, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.
- 0.7 Biodiversity enhancements are also included in the report in accordance with national planning policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mothersole Builders to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Gate House Cottage, School Road, Risby, Suffolk. IP28 6RG. The report is required to accompany a planning application for restoration of the existing period cottage.
- 1.1.2 Wildlife such as nesting birds, bats, reptiles and great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* are protected by law. Protected and priority species and habitats, are also a material consideration for individual planning decisions under the National Planning Policy Framework, 2021 (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2021).
- 1.1.3 This study and report complies with the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 2017 Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.
- 1.1.4 CIEEM guidelines indicate that ecological surveying typically remains valid for between 12 – 18 months.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

- 2.1.1 A biological record search was obtained through the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) and is summarised below.
- 2.1.2 A search of the Multi-agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) was also conducted, to check for statutory nature conservation sites.
- 2.1.3 The record search results were then combined with the findings of the site survey to assess the risk of bat issues, relevant to planning, occurring on the site.

2.2 Study Limitations

- 2.2.1 The site and surrounds were assessed based on their condition at the time of the survey visit. Botanical assessment was undertaken at a suitable time of year.

2.3 Initial Site Survey

Habitats and Surroundings

- 2.3.1 The site was visited on the 10th August 2023 by experienced ecologist Roger Spring BSc MCIEEM to survey for ecology issues. This included the following:

Noting the suitability of habitats present on the site, regarding protected, priority and rare species; including plants, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, nesting birds, invertebrates and protected, priority or red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC);

Assessing the habitats surrounding the site and in the local area;

Direct survey for evidence of protected species as far as possible, e.g. for bats, reptiles, great crested newts, badgers *Meles meles*, and nesting birds;

Checking for invasive species such as Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* and giant hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum*

Bat Inspection

2.3.2 The assessment for bats was conducted by experienced ecologists, licensed by Natural England to disturb and take bats for science and education. Buildings and trees were inspected externally for suitability and potential for roosting following English Nature Bat Mitigation Guidelines (English Nature, 2004) and Bat Conservation Trust Best Practice Guidelines, therefore considerations were:

the availability of access to roosts for bats;

the presence and suitability of cracks, crevices, gaps, fissures, ivy growth and other places as roosts;

signs of bat activity or presence, such as; the bats themselves, droppings, grease marks, scratch marks, urine spatter and prey remains.

2.3.3 Equipment available for use during the survey included a ladder, high powered torch, digital camera and binoculars.

2.3.4 The availability of access to roosts was assessed based upon the presence of holes large enough to allow entry to bats and lack of cobwebs and dirt.

2.3.5 The outside of buildings and trees were inspected for gaps, cavities, access points and crevices, and any signs of bats (droppings, staining, urine spatter), in accordance with Natural England (English Nature) guidelines (English Nature, 2004).

Reptiles & Amphibians

2.3.6 The site was inspected for potentially suitable terrestrial habitats for foraging, sheltering or dispersing amphibians and foraging, sheltering, breeding and basking habitat for reptiles. High quality terrestrial refuges searched for, included:

Log piles & rockeries,

Thick leaf litter,
Compost & manure heaps,
Mammal burrows,
Deep ground cracks;
Refuse suitable for shelter;
Tussock grassland;
Hedgerows and any other potential habitats.



Badgers & Other Mammals

2.3.8 Signs and evidence of badgers, and other protected, priority and rare mammal activity searched for included the following:

Setts, holes and burrows;
Foraging holes and other diggings;
Latrines, droppings, spraints and scats;
Mammal hairs;
Paw prints and other tracks;
Feeding remains;
Scratch marks, bedding material and other signs.

3 RESULTS AND RISK

3.1 Site Description & Location

3.1.1 The site and proposed construction zone is small and includes: a period, timber frame, rendered, thatched cottage with no loft space. A dilapidated, single-storey, brick extension is present on the northern elevation. The cottage is within a walled garden. The garden consists of unmanaged rough, improved grassland on disturbed soils with common herbaceous plants. Scattered ornamental plants are present along with 6 x early mature pollard lime *Tilia* sp. trees on the southern (roadside) boundary. A low and short privet and yew hedgerow is also on the northern boundary. No driveway is present. No new driveway is proposed.

- 3.1.2 Immediately adjacent to the site habitats included: residential housing to the east and south (across School Road), churchyard to the west and neighbouring gardens to the north.
- 3.1.3 One ponds was identified within 250m of the site. The pond (Pond 1) is a village duck pond adjacent to School Road approximately 195m west. Several waterfowl were present, the water was turbid and lacked aquatic vegetation. Fish may also be present.

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

- 3.2.1 The closest statutorily designated nature conservation site is Breckland Farmland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located approximately 1.5km west and designated for its sandy soils with vegetable and root crop farmland and gamebird management optimal for breeding stone curlew (MAGIC, 2023).
- 3.2.2 The closest non-statutorily designated nature conservation site is Old Broom Local Wildlife Site (LWS) located approximately 800m north and designated for its ancient semi-natural woodland (SBIS, 2023).

3.3 Data Search

- 3.3.1 The following table is a summary of local biological records provided by the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) on behalf of Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.

Table 1: Summary of local biological records

Species	Approximate Location	Year
Mammals: Bats		
Common pipistrelle (EU & UK protected)	Risby	2021
Soprano pipistrelle (EU & UK protected, UK priority)	Risby	2014
Brown long eared (EU & UK protected, UK priority)	Risby	2019
Noctule (EU & UK protected, UK priority)	Risby	2021
Common toad (UK priority)	Risby	2013
Skylark (UK priority)	Risby	2016
Kingfisher (UK protected)	Fornham All Saints	2020
Stone curlew (UK protected)	Risby	2021
Marsh harrier (UK protected)	Risby	2019
Cuckoo (UK red-listed BoCC)	Culford	2023
Yellowhammer (UK priority)	Risby	2017
Linnet (UK priority)	Risby	2020
Spotted flycatcher (UK priority)	Risby	2009
House sparrow (UK priority)	Risby	2009
Starling (UK priority)	Risby	2021
Barn owl (UK protected)	Risby	2019
hedgehog (UK priority)	Risby	2015
Brown hare (UK priority)	Risby	2018

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

3.4.1 Habitats included: unmanaged rough improved grassland with common herbaceous plants on disturbed soils. Scattered ornamental plants were also present in the grassland. Boundary yew and privet hedgerow was present on the northern boundary. Six early mature lime *Tilia* sp. trees were present on the southern (roadside) boundary.

3.4.2 Vegetation recorded included:

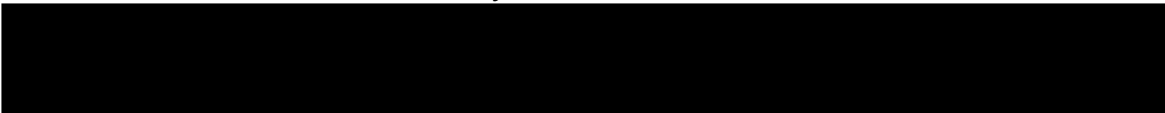
Grassland included: sweet pea, bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, prickly sowthistle *Sonchus asper*, field poppy *Papaver rhoeas*, ornamental poppy *Papaver* sp., greater celandine *Chelidonium majus*, herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*, willowherb *Epilobium* sp., black medick *Medicago lupulina*, board-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, fathen *Chenopodium album*, chervil *Anthriscus cerefolium*, ivy *Hedera helix*, ornamental geranium *Geranium* sp., *Hibiscus* sp., yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, woodavens *Geum urbanum*, False oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, black horehound *Ballota nigra*, nettle *Urtica dioica*, nipplewort *Lapsana communis*, violet *Viola* sp., rose of Sharon *Hypericum calycinum*.

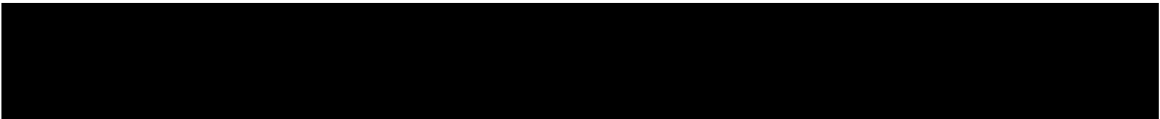
- 3.4.3 No Schedule 9 invasive plants or protected or priority plant species were observed within the main construction zone. No UK priority habitats are present.

Bats

- 3.4.4 The main area of the cottage was well-sealed to bats with thick overhanging thatch covered in wire mesh negligible in suitability for roosting bats and preventing access for bats to roof areas. The single-storey, brick extension was in a dilapidated condition with clear water ingress negligible in potential for roosting bats. The gaps present were all through gaps with cobwebs and dirt, the pitch of the roof was also very shallow meaning that bats would need to sit under tiles rather than perch. All areas around the tiled section of roof were easily accessible with ladder and endoscope and all considered negligible in suitability for external or internal roosting. No signs or evidence of bats were observed associated with the cottage.
- 3.4.5 Trees were either too small in trunk diameter or immature to support roosting bats. No features suitable for roosting were noted. No signs or evidence of bats were found associated with trees.
- 3.4.6 The garden is likely to be visited on occasions by foraging/commuting bats, though is highly unlikely to constitute a significant foraging resource for local bats.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

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- 3.4.8 The construction zone was unsuitable for aquatic mammals such as otter *Lutra lutra* or water vole *Arvicola amphibius*.
- 3.4.9 The site was considered very low in suitability for hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus*, though it could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog may cross the site.

- 
- 3.4.11 No signs or evidence of ground dwelling protected, priority or rare mammals were observed.

Birds

- 3.4.12 The following bird species were observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey: great tit *Parus major*, goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*, dunnock *Prunella modularis*, blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, collard dove *Streptopelia decaocto* and Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*.

- 3.4.13 No signs or evidence of protected birds were found. Potential for such species was considered very low, though it is likely that on occasions foraging by widespread UK protected birds and UK priority birds such as fieldfare and house sparrow etc. does occur on the site. The cottage was considered very low in suitability for nesting birds, trees and the hedgerow were potentially suitable for low numbers of common nesting birds.

- 3.4.15 No amphibians were observed during the survey visit.

Reptiles

- 3.4.16 The site was considered theoretically suitable for reptiles in its unmanaged state, though presumably the site was historically managed and the boundary wall was considered a significant obstacle for reptiles to colonise the site. Surrounding habitats were managed gardens low in suitability or potential for reptiles.
- 3.4.17 Reptiles were not observed during the survey visit which was conducted during optimal conditions for active reptiles. Sunny areas were watched for basking/active reptiles.

Invertebrates

- 3.4.18 The construction zone was considered low in diversity of habitats, size and diversity of flora necessary to support a significant assemblage of invertebrates of conservation concern. It is possible that the occasional priority species may visit the site, though significant use by such species was considered highly unlikely.
- 3.4.19 No protected or priority invertebrates were observed during the survey visit.
- 3.4.20 No areas of deadwood or rotting tree stumps were present for breeding stag beetles.

Other Protected, Priority or Rare Species

- 3.4.21 No signs or evidence of any other protected or priority species were observed on the site. The risk of presence of such was considered negligible.

4 DISCUSSION OF RISK AND LEGISLATION

4.1 Protected Species

Bats

- 4.1.1 Bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 and under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Some bats are also UK priority species. A summary of the offences likely to be relevant to development are:

Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or take a bat;

Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, whether bats are present or not;

Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any bat;

Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection;

Deliberately disturb a bat anywhere.

- 4.1.2 No signs or evidence of bats or bat activity were found. Potential for roosting was considered negligible.
- 4.1.3 The risk of significant harm or impact to bats, bat roosts or local bat conservation was considered negligible.
- 4.1.4 Therefore, further bat surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.
- 4.1.5 However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Birds

- 4.1.6 Wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and, with certain exceptions (e.g. pest species) in certain situations, it is an offence to intentionally:

Kill or injure any wild bird;

Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built;

Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

- 4.1.7 Some bird species (such as barn owls) are also specially protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and others are UK priority species.

- 4.1.8 Protected birds and UK priority bird species have been recorded locally (CPERC, 2020).
- 4.1.9 The proposed construction zone was considered unlikely to support protected, priority or rare birds or indeed be high in value for a diversity of common birds.
- 4.1.10 Therefore, the risk of significant impact to local bird conservation was considered negligible.
- 4.1.11 Further bird surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report.

Other Protected, Priority & Rare Mammals

- 4.1.12 The site was considered low in suitability for any other protected, priority or rare mammals. No signs or evidence of such were observed on the site or adjacent to the site. It could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog might visit the site, though significant use by many hedgehogs was considered unlikely.
- 4.1.13 Further surveys for any other protected, priority or rare mammals was considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to hedgehogs, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.



- 4.1.14 Great crested newts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000, and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Great crested newts are also UK priority species. A summary of the offences likely to be relevant to development are:

Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill;

Intentionally injure;

Deliberately disturb, or intentionally or recklessly disturb in a place of shelter or protection;

Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place;

Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection.

4.1.16 Therefore, further amphibian surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Plants

4.1.17 No rare, protected, priority or Schedule 9 invasive plant species were present. No UK priority habitats will be impacted.

4.1.18 Therefore, further botanical surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Reptiles

4.1.19 Widespread reptile species including, grass snake, adder, slow worm and common lizard, are protected from intentional killing and injuring under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They are also UK priority species.

3.4.22 No reptiles have been locally recorded (SBIS, 2023). This combined with the small size of the site, presence of a boundary wall and low suitability of adjacent habitats for reptiles meant the risk of presence and risk of impact was very low.

4.1.20 Therefore, further reptile surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Invertebrates

4.1.21 Habitats proposed for impact were unlikely to support an assemblage of rare invertebrates of conservation concern. The risk of presence or significant impact to such species was very low.

4.1.22 Further invertebrate surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Other Protected & Priority species

4.1.23 No signs or evidence of other protected, priority or rare species were observed on the site and it was considered that there was a low risk of such species occurring on the site or being impacted by the proposed development.

4.2 Other Issues

Sensitive Habitats

- 4.2.1 The site was a significant distance from any designated nature conservation sites. The risk of significant direct impact from development activities to such sites was considered very low.
- 4.2.2 Therefore, further surveys or mitigation for such were considered unnecessary.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Precautionary Measures

Bats

- 5.1.1 To minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, the following precautionary measure should be undertaken:

During works roof tiles should be removed by hand, if at any point bats or evidence of bats (droppings) are found works should stop and an ecologist called for advice;

Any new proposed external lighting should be minimised. Where external lighting is required it should be warm white LED lamps (<3000k) with glass glazing, rather than plastic, as these produce the least amount of UV light possible, minimising the attraction effects on insects and minimising disturbance to local bats;

Any new external lighting proposed for the development should be aimed carefully, to minimise illumination of boundary habitats and avoid light spillage into the sky, or horizontally out from any buildings, by using hoods or directional lighting;

External security lighting should be set on short timers and be sensitive to large moving objects only, to prevent any passing bats switching them on.

Birds

- 5.1.2 Any trees/shrubs required for removal should be felled outside the main bird nesting season (March to end of August). If this is impractical, then before tree/shrub removal the site should be surveyed for active bird nests and advice followed accordingly.
- 5.1.3 If an active bird nest was found, it would be necessary to protect the nest from harm or disturbance until the bird had finished nesting.

Hedgehogs, Amphibians & Reptiles

- 5.1.4 The risk of impact to hedgehogs, amphibians and reptiles was considered very low. To minimise any residual risk of impact or harm, the following precautionary measures should be undertaken:

Herbaceous vegetation should be strimmed short before groundworks commence in fine and dry weather conditions;

During development, waste material should be removed off site immediately and construction materials should be stored on hardstanding or off the ground on pallets, to prevent wildlife from sheltering in the materials and being harmed by movement of the materials;

The site should be well drained and ground vegetation maintained short throughout the development, to prevent attracting wildlife into harm's way;

Any excavations for the development should be covered at night or have a roughly sawn plank placed in them to facilitate escape for any wildlife which may fall in;

No construction/demolition works at night when hedgehogs and amphibians are mostly active;

In the unlikely event that a hedgehog, amphibian, reptile or other notable wildlife is observed on the site during development, activities in that area should cease and the animal should be allowed to disperse of its own accord. If rescuing is required and ecologist should be called for advice.

5.2 Enhancements

- 5.2.1 By following the below biodiversity enhancements, the development will improve the site for local wildlife and provide a net-gain in accordance with national planning policy (NPPF, 2021).

- 5.2.2 The following bat and bird boxes will be installed on the restored building as biodiversity enhancement:

1 x Beaumaris bat boxes (or similar).

1 x Vivara pro sparrow terrace (or similar).

- 5.2.3 The bird and bat boxes will be installed high (just below the roof) on the newly erected building. The bird boxes will be installed facing a northerly direction or out of direct sunlight. The bat box will be facing a southerly direction.

- 5.2.4 Any new or restored grass areas can be created using a wildflower meadow mixture such as EM1 from Emorsgate Seeds;
- 5.2.5 A new hedgerow could be created on the site boundary the new hedgerow should be planted in a double staggered row, preferably 5 whips per linear metre, with spiral tree guards and include: 60% Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) 20% Field maple (*Acer campestre*), 10% Hazel (*Corylus Avellana*), 5% wild cherry (*Prunus avium*), 5% guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*).
- 5.2.6 Any other new soft landscaping could include native and or wildlife attracting species only.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The site was considered low in ecological value with common and widespread habitats present. The risk of presence and significant impact to protected, priority or rare species or notable habitats was very low.
- 6.2 Further surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.
- 6.3 To minimise any residual risk of impact, recommendations for hedgehogs, birds and bats are included in the report and should be followed.
- 6.4 With the recommendations followed as described in the report, the proposed development could proceed with a minimal risk of impact to protected, priority or rare species or habitats.
- 6.5 Furthermore, by following the biodiversity enhancements, the development would be enhanced even further for the benefit of local wildlife in accordance with national planning policy.

7 REFERENCES

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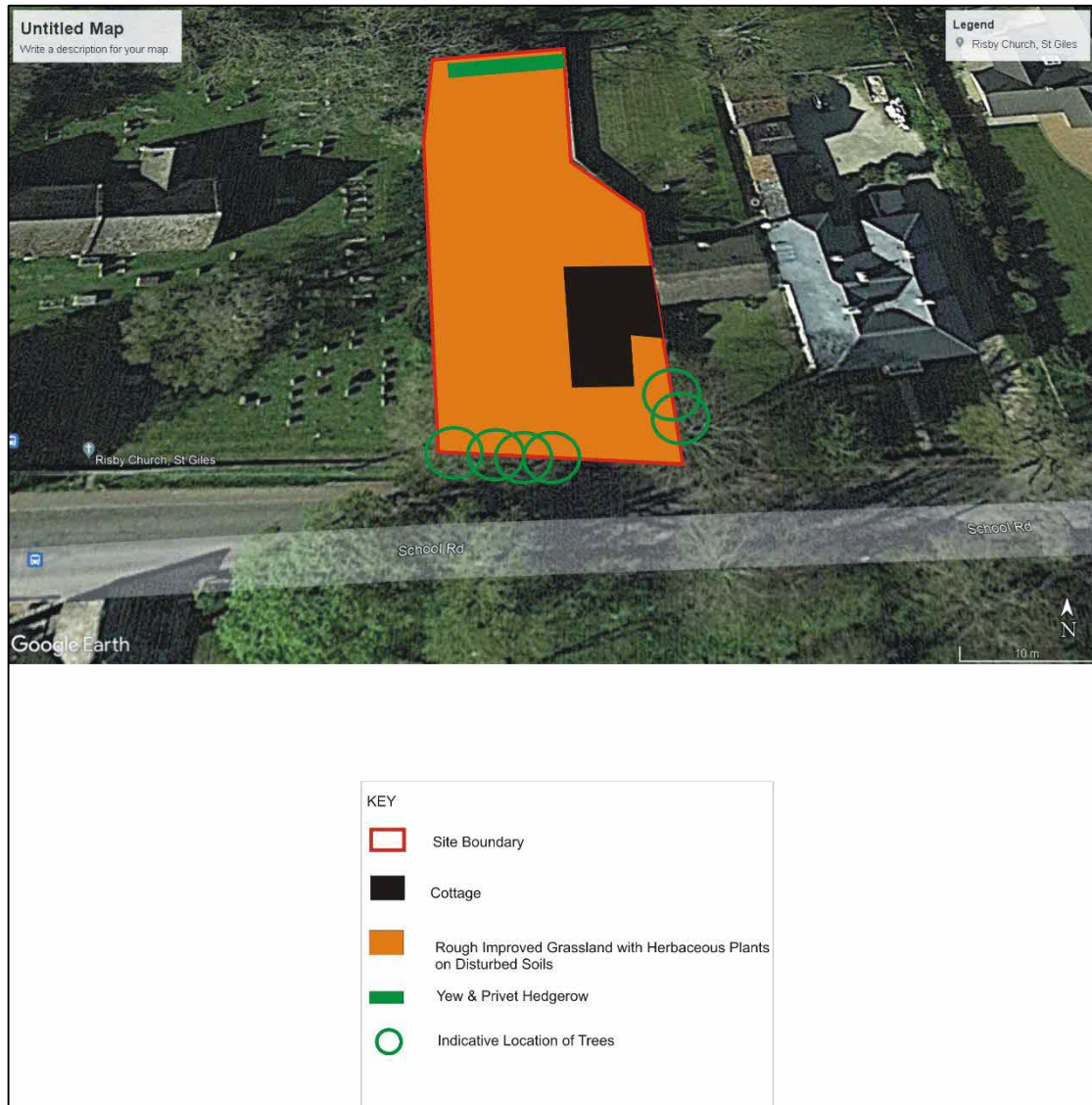
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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: Figures

Figure 1: Habitat map.



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Western & southern elevations at Gate House Cottage



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 2: Northern & western elevations at Gate House Cottage



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 3: Northern extension at Gate House Cottage.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 4: Tile movement allowing water damage and poor conditions for roosting bats at Gate House Cottage

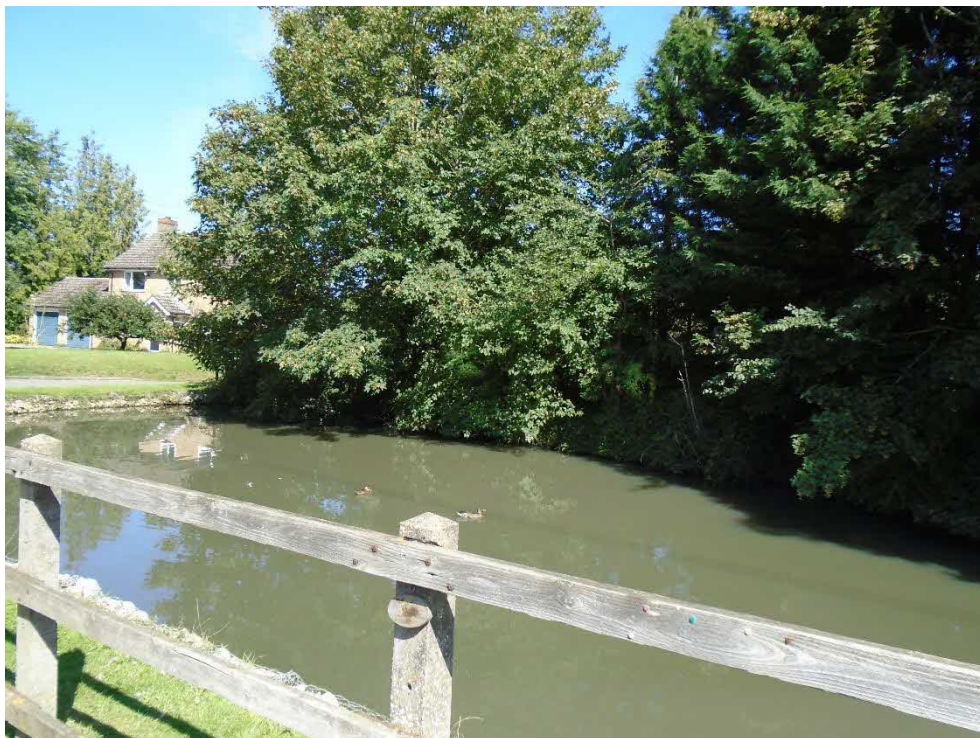
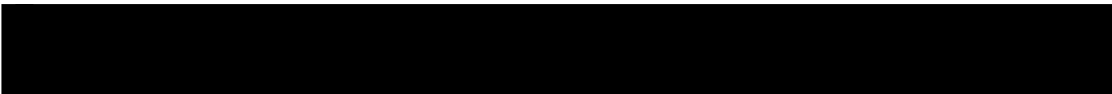


Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 5: Tightly fitting thatch with wire mesh at Gate House Cottage



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023