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**Preliminary Ecological
Appraisal Including a
Protected Species
Assessment at:
Barn adjacent to: Cobbold,
West Street, Walsham Le
Willows, Suffolk, IP31 3AP**

On Behalf Of:

Jenny Long

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0 SUMMARY

- 0.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Jenny Long to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Barn adjacent to: Cobbold, West Street, Walsham Le Willows, Suffolk, IP31 3AP. The report is required to accompany a planning application for a barn conversion.
- 0.2 The survey was conducted on 15th November 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 includes a modern, well-sealed, metal corrugated sheeting barn with a steel frame. Immediately adjacent to the barn was short improved grass, a row of mature leylandii cypress on the western boundary and native species hedgerow on the southern boundary. Approximately 20m west of the barn is a seasonal pond. Other ponds are also present locally within 250m of the site. Trees or hedgerows are not understood to be impacted under the planning application.
- 0.4 The site is positioned in a rural location with low density housing and large gardens, as well as grassy fields and arable fields the dominant land use.
- 0.5 No signs or evidence of protected, priority or rare species were found. The barn was considered negligible in suitability for roosting bats and nesting birds of any species.
- 0.6 The adjacent pond was identified as average in suitability for great crested newts. For an adjacent planning application (application DC/23/02895) the pond tested negative for great crested newt environmental DNA in April 2023 (Riverdale Ecology Ltd. 2023). Indicating absence of great crested newts.
- 0.7 Therefore, the risk of significant impact or harm to protected, priority or rare species or notable habitats was considered very low/negligible.
- 0.8 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.
- 0.9 However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, birds, amphibians and hedgehogs, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.
- 0.10 Biodiversity enhancements are also included in the report in accordance with national planning policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.2 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Jenny Long to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Barn adjacent to: Cobbold, West Street, Walsham Le Willows, Suffolk, IP31 3AP. The report is required to accompany a planning application for a barn conversion.
- 1.1.3 Wildlife such as nesting birds, bats, reptiles and great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* are protected by law. Protected and priority species and habitats, are also a material consideration for individual planning decisions under the National Planning Policy Framework, 2023 (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2023).
- 1.1.4 This study and report complies with the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 2017 Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.
- 1.1.5 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 Biological 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 15th November 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. The barn and adjacent trees were inspected 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 and inside of the barn and outside of trees were inspected for gaps, cavities, access points and crevices, and any signs of bats (droppings, staining, urine spatter), in accordance with Natural England (English Nature) guidelines (English Nature, 2004).

Reptiles & Amphibians

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

- Log piles & rockeries,

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

2.3.7 The adjacent pond was assessed for suitability for great crested newts by undertaking the Habitat Suitability Index assessment as developed by Oldham *et al.* 2000.

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 includes a modern, well-sealed, metal corrugated sheeting barn with a steel frame. Immediately adjacent to the barn was short improved grass, a row of mature leylandii cypress on the western boundary and native species hedgerow on the southern boundary.

3.1.2 Approximately 20m west of the barn is a seasonal pond. Other ponds are also present locally within 250m of the site. Trees or hedgerows are not understood to be impacted under the planning application.

3.1.3 The site is positioned in a rural location with low density housing and large gardens, as well as grassy fields and arable fields the dominant land use.

3.1.4 Ponds identified locally (Ordnance Survey Maps 2023) included:

- Pond 1: a small seasonal, square pond approximately 20m west of the site.
- Pond 2: a medium sized garden pond approximately 100m north west of the site across West Street.

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 No statutorily designated nature conservation sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) were located within 2km of the site (MAGIC, 2023).

3.3 Data Search

3.3.1 The following is a summary of local herpetofauna records collated through the SBIS.

Table 1 - Summary of Herpetofauna records.

Species	Approximate Location	Year
Great Crested Newts	Stanton & Langham	2008 & 2017
Common toad	Walsham-le-Willows	2021

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

3.4.1 Habitats included: a small area short improved grass surrounding the barn, as well as a mature leylandii cypress treeline to the west and native hedgerows to the south. It is understood that no trees or hedgerow will be impacted for the application.

3.4.2 The hedgerow included: plum *Prunus domestica*, hazel, bramble and dogwood.

- 3.4.3 No Schedule 9 invasive plants were present. No protected or priority plant species were observed within the site. The southern boundary hedgerow is a UK priority habitat, though did not meet criteria for an Important Hedgerow under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

Bats

- 3.4.4 The existing barn is a well-sealed, modern metal sheeting building with a steel frame. The building was considered negligible in suitability for roosting bats with negligible opportunities for roosting found.
- 3.4.5 Adjacent trees were all considered too small in trunk diameter or immature to support features suitable for roosting bats.
- 3.4.6 No signs or evidence of bats were found associated with the building or trees.
- 3.4.7 The site boundary may be visited on occasion by foraging bats during mild weather, though significant foraging was considered highly unlikely. The adjacent pond will be visited by foraging bats.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

- 3.4.8 The construction zone is small in area and low in suitability for foraging by badgers *Meles meles*, if present locally.
- 3.4.9 The construction zone was unsuitable for aquatic mammals such as otter *Lutra lutra* or water vole *Arvicola amphibius*.
- 3.4.10 The site was considered low in suitability for hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus*. It could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog may cross the site for foraging.
- 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: woodpigeon goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, blackbird *Turdus merula* and great tit *Parus major*.
- 3.4.13 No protected birds were recorded. No UK priority birds or red-listed Bird of Conservation Concern (BoCC) were heard or seen, though it is likely that on occasions such species may visit the site for foraging.
- 3.4.14 The barn was considered negligible for nesting birds with negligible access opportunities into the barn. No old bird nests were found.
- 3.4.15 The adjacent trees and hedgerow were potentially suitable for common nesting birds.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

- 3.4.16 The proposed construction zone included a barn with a concrete base unsuitable as terrestrial habitat for amphibians, including great crested newts. However, it is likely that habitats immediately adjacent to the barn will be impacted at least temporarily by the works.
- 3.4.17 Overall, it is estimated that the area of greenspace that may be impacted is less than 0.01ha in area.
- 3.4.18 No amphibians were observed during the survey visit.

Table 1: Habitat Suitability Index score for Ponds 1 adjacent to the site.

Pond	Pond 1
SI1 - Location	1
SI2 - Pond area	0.3
SI3 - Pond drying	0.1
SI4 - Water quality	0.67
SI4 - Shade	1
SI6 - Fowl	1
SI7 - Fish	1
SI8 - Ponds	0.7
SI9 - Terr'l habitat	0.67
SI10 - Macrophytes	0.6
HSI	0.60

HSI Pond suitability
 <0.5 = poor
 0.5 – 0.59 = below average
 0.6 – 0.69 = average
 0.7 – 0.79 = good
 > 0.8 = excellent

- 3.4.19 Please note that Riverdale Ecology Ltd. also undertook a Habitat Suitability Index assessment of the pond in April 2023 indicating a higher score (good) rather than the above average. This was due to the incorrect assumption that the pond holds water permanently. Consultation with the pond owner confirms the pond dries annually every summer, even in wet summers.

Reptiles

- 3.4.20 The site was considered very low in suitability or potential for reptiles with negligible safe basking, foraging or breeding habitat present.
- 3.4.21 Reptiles were not observed during the survey visit.

Invertebrates

3.4.22 The construction zone was considered very 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 unlikely.

3.4.23 No protected or priority invertebrates were observed during the survey visit.

Other Protected, Priority or Rare Species

3.4.24 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. The barn and adjacent trees were considered negligible in suitability or potential for roosting bats.

4.1.3 The risk of significant impact to bats, bat roosts or local bat conservation from the proposed development 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 to foraging bats, 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 may on occasion visit the site, though, given the small size of the site/project it was considered unlikely that the site would be of significant ecological value for such species. No signs or evidence of any nesting birds were noted, though adjacent hedgerow and trees were potentially suitable for common nesting birds.

4.1.9 Further bird surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to prevent harm to actively nesting common birds, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Other Protected, Priority & Rare Mammals

4.1.10 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.

4.1.11 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.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

4.1.12 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.

4.1.13 Great crested newts have been recorded nearby, though not in Walsham-le-Willows (SBIS, 2023). Furthermore, the adjacent pond was tested for great crested newt environmental DNA in April 2023 as part of an adjacent planning application (application no. DC/23/02895). The test results were negative (Riverdale Ecology Ltd.), indicating absence of great crested newts.

4.1.14 The above combined with the very small area of greenspace which may be impacted by works meant that the risk of significant impact or harm to great crested newts was considered very low. Further great crested newt surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures detailed later in the report, should be followed.

4.1.15 The above assessment was confirmed by checking the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool detailed below.

Table 1: Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool.

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.05
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.05
Rapid risk assessment result:	GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY	

Plants

4.1.16 No rare, protected or priority plants or UK priority habitats will be impacted.

4.1.17 Therefore, further botanical surveys or mitigation for rare plants or habitats were considered unnecessary.

4.1.18 No Schedule 9 invasive plants were identified or considered likely to be present.

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.
- 4.1.20 The proposed construction zone is small and considered very low in suitability or potential for reptiles.
- 4.1.21 The risk of presence or impact to reptiles is very low and further reptile surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Invertebrates

- 4.1.22 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.
- 4.1.23 Further invertebrate surveys or strict mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Other Protected & Priority species

- 4.1.24 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 is positioned a significant distance from statutorily designated nature conservation sites.
- 4.2.2 The risk of a significant direct or indirect impact to any nature conservation sites was considered negligible.
- 4.2.3 Further surveys or mitigation for designated nature conservation sites or other sensitive habitats 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:

- Any new proposed external lighting should be minimised. Where external lighting is required, it should be warm white LED lamps (<3000k) 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.

Hedgehogs & Amphibians

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

- The greenspace immediately adjacent to the barn should continue to be maintained with regular cutting until construction commences to prevent the site improving for wildlife before construction commences.
- Removal of any hedgerow habitat or trees should be undertaken by hand with hand tools rather than ripped out by plant machinery.
- 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.
- During works, 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 or amphibian 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.

Birds

- 5.1.3 Any removal or reduction of hedgerows or trees should be undertaken outside the main bird nesting season (March to end of August). If this is not possible then an ecologist should survey the site for nesting birds before clearance commences.
- 5.1.4 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.

5.2 Biodiversity Enhancement

- 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, 2023).
- 5.2.2 The following bat and bird boxes will be installed on the new stables as biodiversity enhancement:
- 1 x Beaumaris bat box (or similar).
 - 1 x Schwegler Kestral Box.
- 5.2.3 The bird and bat boxes will be installed high (just below the roof) on the newly erected cart lodge. The bird box 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 Any other new soft landscaping will include native and or wildlife attracting species only.
- 5.2.6 Planting a small number of new trees in the garden adjacent to the newly converted barn will provide additional biodiversity net gain. The trees should be native broad-leaved species.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The proposed construction zone 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 considered very low/negligible.
- 6.2 Further surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.
- 6.3 To minimise any residual risk of impact, recommendations for hedgehogs, amphibians, 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 notable 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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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: Figures

Figure 1: Habitat map.

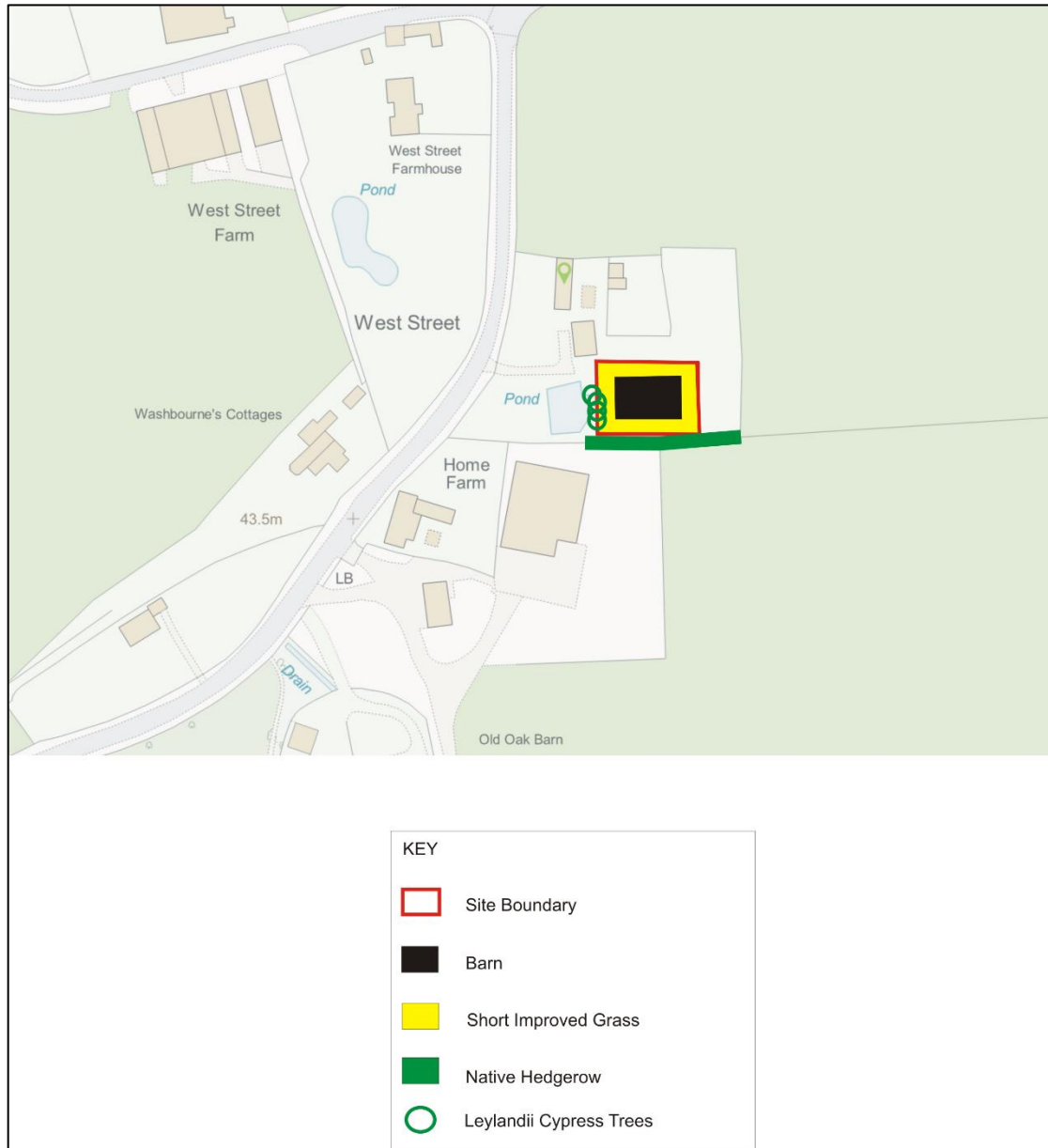


Figure 2: Location Plan.



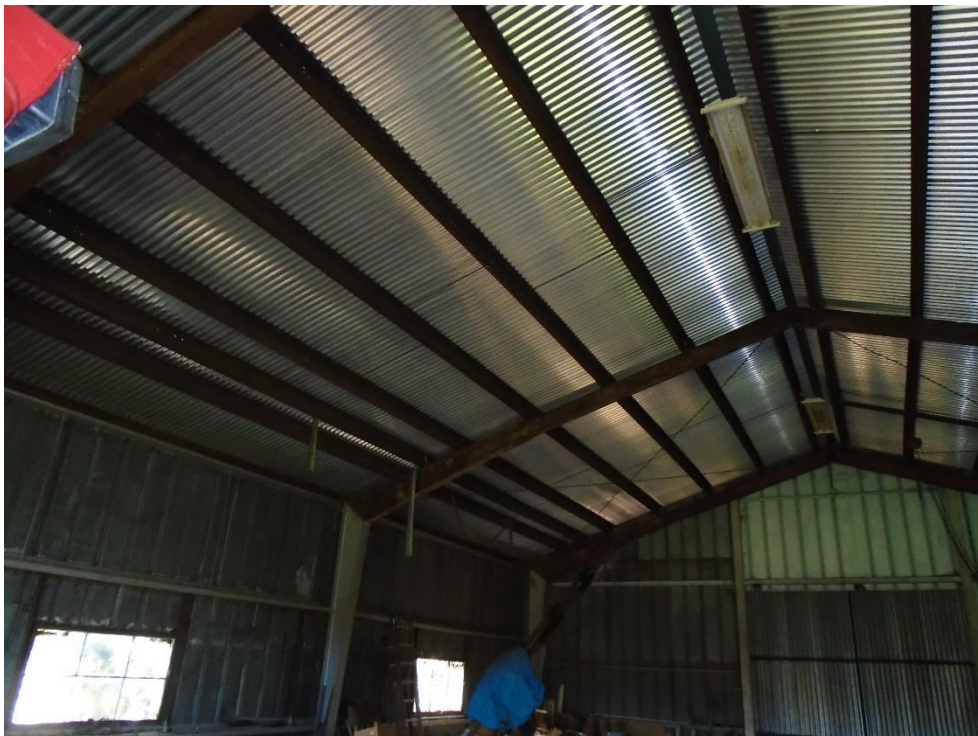
8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Barn adjacent to Cobbold.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 2: Inside the barn adjacent to Cobbold



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 3: Inside the barn adjacent to Cobbold.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 4: Southern boundary at the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 5: Western boundary at the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 6: Pond 1 west of the barn at Cobbold.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023