



**Fenswood
Ecology**

**43 Sidcot Lane, Winscombe
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
March 2023**

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Summary

Fenswood Ecology was commissioned by Mr. Farmer to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal at 43 Sidcot Lane, Winscombe (centred around Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: ST 42538 57429). An ecological assessment of the site was undertaken by Jamie Edmonds in February 2023.

The ecological value of the site was assessed, along with the likely presence of protected or notable species, and any potential ecological constraints to the proposed development.

Recorded site habitats were building, hard standing, amenity grassland, introduced scrub, bare ground, trees and a pond. Site habitats were considered to be of low importance to nature conservation.

The buildings on site were assessed both internally and externally and no evidence of bats was found. The builds are well maintained and lack features suitable for roosting bats and therefore are considered to have negligible bat roost potential.

Whilst the onsite buildings offer negligible bat roosting potential, it should be appreciated that almost any structure may be used by an individual or transient bat from time to time. Bats require very limited cavity space and only very small roost entry gaps and can be found in any structure which provides close shelter. Should bats be discovered on site at any time, works should be halted in the immediate area and an appropriately trained, qualified, and licensed ecologist consulted immediately.

No evidence of badgers was observed during the walkover and given the extent of suitable habitat for badgers in the wider landscape it is considered that the site is not important for badgers. However, it is possible that badgers use the site from time to time for foraging. Therefore, taking a best practice approach, all deep excavations should be covered overnight during demolition/construction works. Shallow excavations should have a scaffold board or equivalent placed in them overnight to allow any badgers to exit, should they fall in, and all chemicals should be stored securely.

Within the site boundary, potential for nesting birds was identified. It is recommended that the development of the site is at least started and completed as much as possible outside of the nesting bird season (March – August inclusive) to minimise disturbance to nesting birds within the site vegetation.

Recommendations for post development ecological enhancement measures are provided where relevant.

Introduction

Fenswood Ecology was commissioned by Mr. Farmer to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal at 43 Sidcot Lane, Winscombe (centred around Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: ST 42538 57429). An ecological assessment of the site was undertaken by Jamie Edmonds in February 2023.

The purpose of survey work at the site was to carry out an ecological assessment and to review the potential for the site to contain, or be used by, species protected or considered to be of primary importance under UK legislation, namely the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

This report details the findings of the survey work and subsequent assessment. Methodologies employed are described including site surveys and evaluation and the need for any further survey work and/or mitigation measures are included, where appropriate.

Methodology

Data Consultation

A full search of biological records was not considered appropriate due to the small size of the site, and the lack of semi natural habitats with the potential for notable species.

The Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website (<http://magic.defra.gov.uk>) was consulted in February 2023 for information on statutory designated sites of nature conservation interest within 1 km of the application area.

Information obtained from MAGIC and any other relevant sources are included within the report where appropriate.

Ecological Site Assessment

The site was surveyed by Jamie Edmonds on 22nd February 2023 following an extended Phase 1 habitat survey methodology (JNCC, 2010). This survey method aims to characterise habitats and communities present but is not intended to provide a complete list of all plants occurring across the site.

The habitats and vegetation types present were recorded on to a field map and any evidence of protected species encountered during the survey was recorded. This included observations of field signs and an assessment of the suitability of the habitats present to support protected species.

Habitats and species of principal importance that are listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and the

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP) were noted where necessary.

Site photographs are provided in Appendix 1. Information on habitat distribution is presented in Appendix 2, and identify features of interest, where appropriate.

The value and sensitivity of ecological features present on site was determined based on the guidance given in 'Guidelines on Ecological Impact Assessment' (IEEM, 2016). Individual ecological receptors (habitats and species that could be affected by the development) for the scheme were assigned levels of importance for nature conservation. The highest level is international, then decreasing in order of importance through national, county, district, local to lastly, zone of immediate influence only.

European Protected Species

Based on the habitats present on site and within the immediate area survey for the following species/species groups was undertaken during the Phase 1 habitat survey.

Amphibians

A desk-based search was undertaken prior to the site visit using a 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey (OS) map to identify any water bodies within 500m of the application area that are not separated from the site by a major barrier (i.e. rivers, motorways, A roads) to amphibian dispersal.

There is one pond on site but there is no evidence of other ponds within 500m of the site.

Bats

All trees and buildings on site were inspected to assess their potential to support roosting bats, in accordance with current best practice guidelines (Collins, 2016).

An individual tree or building may have several features of potential interest to roosting bats. It is not always possible to confirm usage of a feature by bats as often the animals may be present on one day and no evidence of occupation may be found on the next. Consequently, it is normal practice when undertaking such surveys to assign each feature to a defined category of roosting potential as follows:

Negligible: This category is usually used where a feature appears initially to have significant bat roost potential but is considered on closer inspection to have no or very limited potential to support roosting bats. It is usually used during surveys to confirm that inspection of a feature has been carried out and has found that the feature is not considered to comprise suitable habitat for roosting bats.

Low: This category is used to describe a feature that may have some superficial interest to roosting bats but is considered suboptimal to the extent that bats are not considered likely to use the feature for shelter. A cavity that is open at the top allowing access to wind and rain may be considered to be of low bat roost potential.

Moderate: This category is used to describe a feature that has some potential to support roosting bats but is considered to be less than ideal in some way. For example, the feature may be occupied by other animals, such as birds or squirrel; it may be subject to disturbance or have sub-optimal connectivity with navigational features.

High: This category is used to describe an optimal feature considered to be ideally suitable for use by roosting bats where no evidence of occupation by bats has been found. Features considered to be of high bat roost potential may include upwards-leading cavities of appropriate dimensions and height from the ground, with no obstructions below the cavity entrance. The tree may be particularly prominent within the landscape and is likely to have good connectivity with navigational features and sufficient suitable foraging habitat in the vicinity.

Confirmed: This category is used where positive evidence of bats usage has been recorded from a feature. For example, bats or bat droppings may be present, or existing bat records may be associated with the feature. A licence from Natural England is likely to be required if the bat roost is to be disturbed by the development.

The habitats on site were also assessed for their potential to be used by foraging and commuting bats.

Birds

A formal bird survey was not undertaken as part of this assessment, however whilst on site the opportunity was taken to record all species of birds encountered.

Hazel dormouse

The habitats present on site were assessed for their suitability to support hazel dormice and for connectivity with other suitable habitat within the surrounding area.

Reptiles

The habitats present on site were assessed for their suitability to support basking, foraging and hibernating reptiles and for connectivity with other suitable habitat within the surrounding area.

Riparian Mammals and White-clawed Crayfish

A desk-based search was undertaken using an OS map to identify any

watercourses within 30m of the application area.

There are no watercourses within 30m of the proposed site, therefore otters (*Lutra lutra*), European water voles (*Arvicola amphibious*) and white clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) are not considered receptors and subsequently not mentioned again in this report.

Other Protected and Notable Species

The opportunity was taken whilst on site to assess habitats for the potential to support nationally or locally scarce or notable species, or any species protected under domestic legislation.

Badger

Signs of badger (*Meles meles*) activity were searched for within the application area, and within 30m of the site where accessible, as part of the extended Phase 1 survey. Survey followed standard methodology detailed in Surveying Badgers (Harris *et al.*, 1989). This included survey for badger setts, along with survey of linear features and boundaries for signs of badger activity including dung pits, foraging marks, feeding signs and pathways.

Invasive Species

During the initial protected species walkover survey, the opportunity was also taken to record the presence of any invasive plant or animal species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), if present.

Limitations to Survey

Access to the full application site was provided.

The survey was undertaken outside of the optimal botanical survey season but it is considered that a robust evaluation of habitat types, potential species constraints and the overall site character has been made.

Where it was not possible to make a robust evaluation, recommendations for further assessment and surveys have been included.

Findings and Evaluation

Site Description

The site consists of a bungalow which is occupied by the client. The walls of the dwelling are rendered and the roof is pitched and tiled, the soffits, fascia boards and guttering are a mixture of wooden and PVC.

There is a garage along the western side of the dwelling which is block built and has a pitched tiled roof. A small wooden shed is also situated at the rear of the garage.

The curtilage of the dwelling is a mix of hardstanding, amenity grassland, planted scrub and a small pond. Screening and ornamental trees are dotted around the boundary of the site at the front of the property and apple and cherry trees are located in the rear garden.

The site is within the village of Winscombe, which is surrounded by agricultural and pasture land.

Designated Sites

There are two statutory designated sites within 1km of the proposed development. The Mendip Hills AONB is situated 50m northeast of the site and the Cheddar Valley Railway Walk LNR is approximately 530m to the west of the site.

The site falls within Band C of that North Somerset and Mendip Bat SAC Consultation Zone.

The Mendip Hills AONB covers most of the Mendip region for its “*landscape of steep slopes and undulating plateau punctuated by spectacular gorges and rocky outcrops. On the hilltops there are hundreds of ancient monuments, whilst on steeper slopes flower rich grasslands and wooded combes offer varied habitats for a wide variety of wildlife.*” (Mendip Hills AONB, 2020).

Habitats

The habitats below are listed in order of dominance across the site.

Amenity Grassland

A large area of amenity grassland is situated at the front and rear of the dwelling. This habitat has been well maintained and offers limited value to local species.

This habitat is species poor and therefore is considered to be of importance to nature conservation within the zone of immediate influence only. This habitat will not be discussed later in this report.

Buildings

The bungalow has been well maintained, with no gaps around tiles or fascia boards. The garage is block built with a tiled roof and in good condition and is currently well used by the client. The wooden shed is in good condition.

This habitat is species poor and man-made and therefore is considered to be of importance to nature conservation within the zone of immediate influence only.

Hard Standing

Hard standing consists of a tarmac/ concrete driveway to the garage along the western side of the site, there are also slab paths for access around the dwelling. Slabbed patios feature at the front and rear of the dwelling.

This habitat is species poor and man-made and therefore is considered to be of importance to nature conservation within the zone of immediate influence only and will not be mentioned again in this report.

Bare Ground

There is currently an area of bare ground along the northern boundary at the rear of the dwelling.

This habitat is species poor and therefore is considered to be of importance to nature conservation within the zone of immediate influence only and will not be mentioned again in this report.

Introduced Scrub

The garden boundaries have been planted with cultivated shrubs. This habitat offers some limited suitability for nesting birds.

This habitat is species poor and introduced and therefore is considered to be of importance to nature conservation within the zone of immediate influence only.

Trees

There are a number of small ornamental and screening trees situated around the edges of the front garden. The rear garden also has a number of trees around the edges but also has three apple and one cherry trees within the amenity grassland. The trees do offer some limited potential for nesting birds. With many larger trees in the local area, the trees on site are considered to be of importance to nature conservation within the zone of immediate influence only.

Pond

One small pond (approx. 1m x 2m) is situated at the front of the dwelling on the edge of the patio. The pond is in very poor condition and only has a very shallow level of water (<100mm) and leaves within it. It is believed that the rigid plastic liner is split and needs replacing.

Due to the condition of the pond it is considered to be of importance to nature conservation within the zone of immediate influence only and will not be discussed further in this report.

Species

Amphibians

There is one small pond at the front of the dwelling. The small pond (approx. 1m x 2m) is in very poor condition and only contains a small amount of water (<100mm), it is assumed that the rigid liner is split. Due to the condition of the pond it is considered that the site is of low importance to amphibians within the immediate zone of influence and will not be discussed further in this report.

Badgers

There was no evidence of badgers on the site, although with Cheddar Valley Railway LNR and open farmland to the west it can be expected that badgers may visit the site from time to time to forage. As such it is considered that the site is of low importance to badgers within the immediate zone of influence.

Bats

The dwelling has no features that would allow access for roosting bats, all tiles were secure and in place and no gaps were seen and all soffits and fascia boards were in good condition. The loft space was inspected and no evidence of bats was found. The garage has large windows which allow a lot of light in and is well used by the clients. No evidence of bats use was found during the garage inspection. As such it is considered that the site is of negligible importance to bats within the immediate zone of influence.

The site is situated along a main road with a number of other properties and it is not considered that the proposed changes to the site will significantly increase light spill to affect commuting and foraging bats.

Birds

In 2009, a re-assessment of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) was published by Eaton *et al.* (2009), which defined rare and threatened bird species on two lists (Red and Amber) describing the level of threat to each species of concern.

“Red” is the highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action due to either a historical decline in breeding population, severe (>50%) decline in breeding or non-breeding population, or severe decline in breeding range over 50 years or more. “Amber” is the next most critical group, with species qualifying for this status as a result of either recovery from red list criterion, being classed as rare breeders in the UK, moderate (>25%) decline in breeding or non-breeding population or moderate decline in breeding range over 25 years or more. These categories are followed by Green, indicating that the species are relatively unthreatened.

No formal bird survey was undertaken during the site visit in February 2023 but the site was assessed for its suitability for nesting birds. No birds were seen using the proposed site at the time of the survey but the introduced scrub and trees do offer some limited nesting opportunity. There is an abundance of potential nesting sites in the surrounding environment, as such it is considered that the site is of low importance to birds within the immediate zone of influence.

Hazel Dormouse

There is no connectivity of suitable habitats on site to support dormice and with the site being within the village it is considered unlikely they will be present. Therefore, it is considered that the site is not important to hazel dormice and the species is not discussed further in this report.

Reptiles

Due to the lack of natural habitat on site and high levels of disturbance it is considered that reptiles would not be present. Given the extent of suitable habitat in the wider landscape, it is considered that the site would be of low importance to reptiles within the immediate zone of influence.

Other Key and Protected Species

Invertebrates

Habitats typically considered of high value to invertebrates include deadwood, wetland and significant expanses of brownfield. The proposed site comprises manmade structures and is very small in size. As such, the proposed site is considered to support a range of common invertebrate species only and is not considered to be of importance to invertebrates within the immediate zone of influence and are not discussed further in this report.

Invasive Species

No invasive species were noted during the site survey and as such invasive species are not discussed further in this report.

Ecological Assessment and Mitigation

The Scheme

The project is to extend the property at the rear so that it becomes a uniform shape, the roof will be removed and a second storey will be added to give additional living space. Any additional land-take will only be of hardstanding and possibly a very limited amount of amenity grassland. No plans or drawings were available at the time of surveying.

Designated Sites

The project is to work on an existing property and therefore it is considered that no detrimental effects will impact the nature reserve which is more than 500m away.

Habitats

Building

The buildings on site offer negligible bat roosting potential and no further surveys are recommended. See '*Bat*' section for details.

Trees

No plans were available at the time of survey but it is assumed that no trees will need to be removed as part of this project.

In accordance with British Standard 5837 (2012): Trees in relation to design, retained onsite trees, and those up to 5 m out with the boundary should be protected by the implementation of Root Protection Areas (RPAs) during construction works.

Species

Badger

Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. It is an offence under the act to kill, injure or take a badger. It is also an offence to destroy damage or obstruct a currently active badger sett, or to disturb animals within the sett.

No evidence of badgers was observed during the walkover and given the extent of suitable habitat for badgers in the wider landscape it is considered that the site is not important for badgers. However, it is possible that badgers use the site from time to time for foraging. Therefore, taking a best practice approach, all deep excavations should be covered overnight during demolition/construction works. Shallow excavations should have a scaffold board or equivalent placed in them overnight to allow any badgers to exit,

should they fall in, and all chemicals should be stored securely.

Bats

All species of bat occurring within the UK are included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). Under Regulation 41 bats are protected from deliberate capture, injury or killing, from deliberate disturbance and from deliberate damage or destruction of a breeding site or resting place (roost).

All UK bats are also included on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). However, their protection is limited to certain offences. Under the 1981 Act (as amended) it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb bats while they are occupying a structure or place used for shelter or protection, or to obstruct access to any such place.

Barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*), Bechstein's (*Myotis bechsteinii*), brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), greater horseshoe (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*), lesser horseshoe (*R. hipposideros*), noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) bats are included as priority species within Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

The onsite buildings offer negligible bat roosting potential; however it should be appreciated that almost any structure may be used by an individual or transient bat from time to time. Bats require very limited cavity space and only very small roost entry gaps and can be found in any structure which provides close shelter. Should bats be discovered on site at any time, works should be halted in the immediate area and an appropriately trained, qualified, and licensed ecologist consulted immediately.

Birds

All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) against destruction of the nest during the bird nesting season, which falls between March and August, inclusive.

Within the site boundary, potential for nesting birds was identified. It is recommended that the development of the site is at least started and completed as much as possible outside of the nesting bird season (March – August inclusive) to minimise disturbance to nesting birds.

Reptiles

Reptiles are protected against intentional killing and injuring under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). They are also all listed on Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

The proposed development site offers limited suitable habitat to support reptile species. Therefore, it is considered that reptiles will not be present within site. However, if a reptile species is discovered during the works, the animal should be allowed to leave site independently or encouraged by a gloved hand to suitable safe habitat.

Enhancements

The site contains low quality habitat and the following enhancements are suggested to mitigate for their loss:

If the garden were to be landscaped or planted, insect friendly species such as lavender and heather should be considered to help provide habitat and food sources for invertebrates.

It is suggested that two bird boxes should be added to the proposed building and surrounding garden. Swallow cups at gable ends could be installed if suitable to the development.

Repair and reinstate the garden pond and plant with native aquatic plants, such as water mint (*Mentha aquatica*).

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Appendix 1: Site photographs



Photo 1. Front of the dwelling, with hardstanding and amenity grassland



Photo 2. Looking from the house to the main road



Photo 3. Rear of the dwelling



Photo 4. Fruit trees at rear of dwelling



Photo 5. Front of garage



Photo 6. Pond at front of the dwelling/ patio



Photo 7. Inside the dwelling loft space.

Appendix 2: Site Maps

Figure 1 – Phase 1 Habitat Map

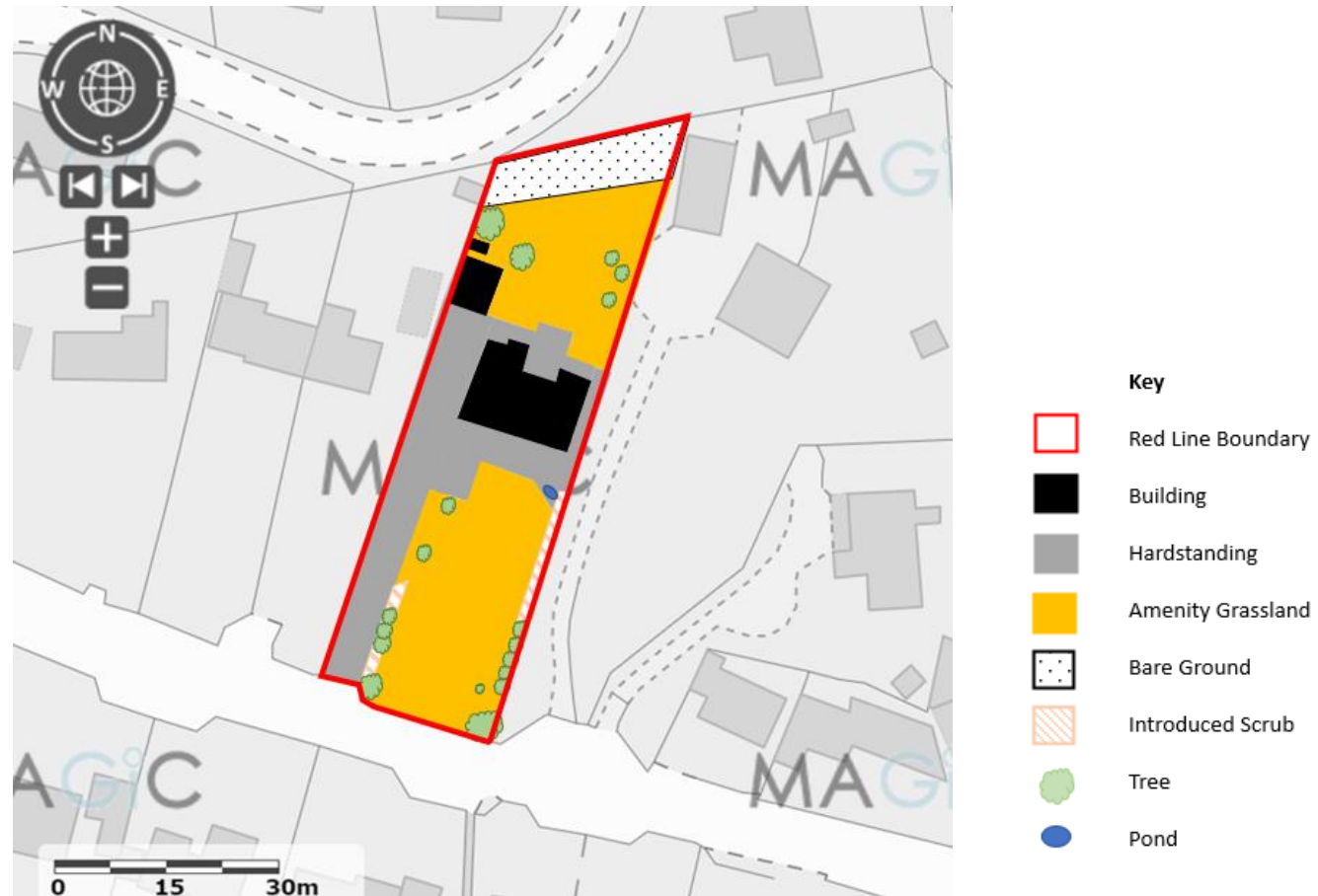


Figure 2. Designated Site Map (1km buffer)

