

peachecology
& environmental services

**Gardeners Farm,
Flowers Lane,
Plaitford, Romsey,
SO51 6HH**

Ecological Assessment

Report Number: 0668

Issue Number: 02

Date of Issue: 22nd February 2024

Prepared by: Davog McCloskey

Peach Ecology
9 Elizabeth Road
Wilton
Wiltshire
England
SP2 0JH

COPYRIGHT: Peach Ecology disclaims any responsibility to the Client and others in respect of any matters outside the scope of this document. This document has been prepared with all reasonable skill, care and diligence, within the terms of the Contract with the Client. The report has been prepared for the exclusive use of the Client and Peach Ecology accepts no responsibility of whatever nature to third parties to whom this report, or any part thereof, may be made known. Any advice, opinions, or recommendations within this document should be read and relied upon only in the context of the document as a whole and do not, in any way, purport to include any manner of legal advice or opinion. No part of this document may be reproduced without the prior written approval of Peach Ecology.

Contents

	Page
1.0 Summary	1
2.0 Introduction	2
3.0 Methodology	3
4.0 Results and Analysis	4
5.0 Requirements and Recommendations	12

Appendices

Appendix A: Site location

Appendix B: Existing site plan

Appendix C: Proposals

Appendix D: Protected sites, habitats and species data from MAGIC database

Appendix E: Mitigation and Enhancements

Appendix F: Protected species legislation

1.0 Summary

The proposals are:

- to convert the existing Open Barns into residential houses

The two open barns are both recorded as having negligible suitability for roosting bats. They show signs of being used by nesting birds.

Some Elm at the entrance to the site are proposed to be removed. These are likely to catch Dutch Elm Disease therefore the loss of the trees will have an insignificant ecological impact. New native tree planting will take place to compensate for the loss of the Elm.

Outline measures and recommendation have been set out in this report in relation to bats, birds and habitats in order that there is no net loss of biodiversity.

A European Protected Species licence will be required to undertake any work

2.0 Introduction

Background

- 2.1 Peach Ecology was commissioned in September 2023 to carry out an Ecological Assessment of the proposed residential developments at Gardeners' Farm, Flowers Lane, Plaitford, SO51 6HH (Appendix A), central Grid Reference: SU 2820 6188, laid out as shown in Appendix B. This report will be submitted to Test Valley Borough Council for permission to convert the existing Stables and Barns into residential houses (Appendix C).
- 2.2 This report describes the existing ecology on site based on the findings of several site visits from September 2023 to January 2024, protected species and habitats data searches, a review of local and national policies and a single bat emergence surveys.

Description of site and surrounding area

- 2.3 The old Stables are empty, as are the open barns adjacent. The small, dilapidated building in the northwest of the parcel has been left as an old wood store. The small courtyard of modified grassland is in a poor state and parts are transitioning to scrub. Surrounding the east, south and west of the site is a hedge of mixed native woody species and punctuated with large Oaks. Connected by a track, to the west of the site, is a small group of commercial buildings on an old traditional Orchard. The site is situated amongst a mosaic of arable and grazing farmland, paddocks and copses – these are all separated by mature hedgerows with trees. There are several solar farms to the south and east within 1km.

Brief

- 2.4 To carry out an Ecological Assessment of the site and inform the clients of any ecological implications associated with the current proposals.

3.0 Methodology

Desk Study

- 3.1 This involved gathering ecological data relating to statutory nature conservation sites from within 2km, the results of which are shown in **Appendix D**. A search was undertaken using Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC), a DEFRA run website, to check for European Protected Species licenses nearby. Ordnance Survey maps and aerial images were assessed to check for other relevant data on notable habitats and species nearby including ponds and wildlife corridors where the site connects into the surrounding area.

Site Assessment

- 3.2 The site was originally assessed on the 12th September 2023 by Angus Layton although repeat visits were undertaken of the site during the emergence survey of the building adjacent (Davog McCloskey was present) and a further internal inspection was undertaken of the buildings in January 2024. The initial survey employed techniques based on standard Phase I Habitat Survey (JNCC) methodology and the CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment (ECIA: CIEEM, 2016). Habitat types on and adjacent to the site were identified according to standard habitat definitions (UKHabs). The site survey included an assessment of the habitats immediately adjacent to the site, where possible, to look at the value of the site within the local landscape and to see whether these sites supported protected species. Indicative methodologies for the most likely protected and notable species that could occur on site and be impacted by the proposals are set out below.

Bats

- 3.3 Buildings and trees within the footprint of the site and any areas potentially impacted by the proposals were inspected in accordance with current survey guidance (BCT, 2016) for potential access points and roosting features which could support bats. Trees were checked for ivy cover, crevices and rotten sections from ground level and using a ladder and binoculars where necessary. Buildings were checked internally and externally for any signs of roosting bats or bat activity including droppings, insect feeding remains, worn entrances and staining. Ladders were used to check for features along with an endoscope, this took place in September 2023 and January 2024.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Desk study

- 4.1 There is only one statutory site located within 2km of the site:
- **New Forest** (RAMSAR, SPA, SAC, SSSI) - The New Forest embraces the largest area of “unsown” vegetation in lowland England and includes the representation on a large scale of habitat formations formerly common but now fragmented and rare in lowland western Europe. They include lowland heath, valley and seepage step mire, or fen, and ancient pasture woodland, including riparian and bog woodland. Nowhere else do these habitats occur in combination and on so large a scale.
- 4.2 Due to the relatively small scale and extent of the proposals it is unlikely that the development will impact directly upon any site of importance to nature conservation. The proposals will result in additional dwellings and therefore this has been shown to have an impact on the New Forest SPA due to recreational pressure. A contribution will be made to off-site mitigation per dwelling in line with the New Forest SPA Mitigation – Interim Framework.
- 4.3 It is important that the proposals follow appropriate pollution prevention and drainage guidelines. The habitats and flora associated with waterways and ground water are sensitive to changes cumulatively from different impacts locally so every development should consider and mitigate for their own impact with regards drainage and pollution.

Protected Species

- 4.4 Eight Bat EPS mitigation licenses have been granted within 2km of the proposals (Table 1):

Case reference of granted application	Species on the licence	Licence Start Date	Licence End Date	Impact on a breeding site	Damage of a resting place	Destruction of breeding site	Destruction of a resting place
EPSM2012-4667	C-PIP;S-PIP;BLE;SER	17/10/2012	30/09/2015	Y		Y	Y
2018-34285-EPS-MIT	BLE C-PIP S-PIP	26/04/2018	23/04/2028	Y	N	Y	Y
EPSM2012-4159	C-PIP;BLE	05/03/2012	31/12/2014	N		N	Y
EPSM2011-2771	C-PIP;BLE	30/08/2011	31/08/2014	N		N	Y
2016-25627-EPS-MIT	C-PIP S-PIP	20/09/2016	31/12/2016	N	Y	N	N
2014-3934-EPS-MIT	C-PIP	28/10/2014	27/10/2019	N	N	N	Y
2015-13750-EPS-MIT	BLE C-PIP S-PIP	07/09/2015	30/09/2025	N	N	N	Y
2014-3934-EPS-MIT-1	C-PIP	09/03/2015	09/03/2020	N	N	N	Y

Table 1: Bat EPS mitigation licenses granted within 2km of the proposals

Site Assessment

Building

Open Barn in the West (Target Note 1, Appendix B)

- 4.5 The Open Barn on the northwest edge of the site (Photo 1) is constructed of breezeblocks with a corrugated iron roof. The building offers very little opportunity for roosting bats and as such, during the initial inspection was deemed negligible.
- 4.6 One poorly formed nest was evident along a roof truss, likely to belong to a pigeon. The north side of the building has an excessive covering of Ivy (photo 2), this offers an excellent opportunity for other species of bird to nest. Below this ivy a noticeable patch of bird faeces was evident, further enhancing the likelihood that the ivy is used by nesting birds.



Photo 1: The front of the open barn, the south-east aspect



Photo 2: Pigeon nest found on roof truss inside the barn.

Corrugated Metal Shed (Target Note 2, Appendix B)

- 4.7 The corrugated metal shed is a long semi-circular shape, similar to an Anderson air raid shelter. It has become completely covered with bramble and ivy (photo 3). Internally the shed has been insulated with spray on foam.
- 4.8 There is evidence of rats burrowing in and behind the insulation. Like these gaps are breaks in the ceiling which present opportunities for bats and birds. Due to the height of the building and the limited gaps internally, the building was deemed as having low-negligible suitability for bats. One gap (photo 4) did show signs of having been used by nesting birds with a substantial pile of bird faeces below.



Photo 3: Corrugated metal shed covered in bramble and ivy.



Photo 4: Internal break in the insulation having been used by nesting birds.

Open Barn (Target Note 3, Appendix B)

- 4.9 This open barn (photo 5), in the southeast corner of the site, is of the same construction as the one in the northwest. It also had limited to no opportunities for roosting bats and as such its suitability was deemed as negligible.
- 4.10 No signs of nesting birds were noted at the time of inspection but, it is as likely as the other barn to be used by birds to nest. A juvenile blackbird was found deceased in the barn though, this is likely to have been left there by a domestic cat.



Photo 5: Open barn in the southeast corner of the site, northeast aspect

Stables (Note 4, Appendix B)

- 4.11 This building is part of a separate planning application.
- 4.12 The old stable block (photo 6) is a long L shaped building, constructed of red brick along its western side and breezeblock along the north. The roof is clad in corrugated metal supported by old untreated wood. The roofs cladding is in a state of disrepair creating lots of access point for bats and birds. The internal construction of the roof offers lots of roosting/nesting opportunities (photo 7 and 8). This building was deemed to have moderate to high suitability for roosting bats.
- 4.13 During both inspections, bat droppings were noted throughout the barn without any notable piles indicating a preferred bat roost.
- 4.14 All identified gaps suitable for hibernating bats were checked in January 2024 with no bats found. Two nests used in the previous season were observed in the north corner (photo 9)



Photo 7: The old stables showing the brick-built construction, southern aspect



Photo 8: Internal view of the old stables showing the variety of old untreated wood used in the roof construction.



Photo 8: A gap between the brickwork and the roof timber with a bat faeces stuck to the wall.



Photo 9: One of two nests found in the northern end of the stables.

Habitats

- 4.15 The grass on site is dominated by broad leaf species (*Holcus Lanatus*, *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, *Pleum pratense*, etc.) due to the courtyard having lower levels of use currently (photo 10). Large parts of the grassland have previously had gravel and hard core laid to aid farm traffic through the site, this has led to patches of bare ground (photo 11) and areas dominated by pioneer species (*Plantago lanceolata*, *Taraxacum officinale*, *Bellis perennis*, etc.). The grassland on site is therefore considered to have limited ecological value.



Photo 10: Grassland dominated by broadleaf species.



Photo 11: Large patches of bare ground showing the gravel that has been historically laid

- 4.16 Bounding part of the east and the whole of the south is a hedge of varying quality. Along the east, the hedge is predominantly made up of tall (>5m) Elm with an understory of bramble (photo 12). The hedge along the southern end of the site is largely defunct and punctuated by large Oak trees (photo 13).

- 4.17 Both hedges have significant ecological value for the site. They offer connectivity to the wider landscape, important foraging opportunities and roosting/nesting sites. It would be best to avoid any impact but if any of the plans require work to these hedges, a CEMP would need to be in place to avoid potential impacts to EPS (European protected species) and appropriate mitigation for the loss of habitat would need to be designed.



Photo 12: Line of tall Elm trees making up the eastern hedge



Photo 12: Largely defunct hedge along the southern boundary.

5.0 Requirements and Recommendations

Bats

- 5.1 New features for crevice roosting bats will be incorporated into each new dwelling as enhancements.

Birds

- 5.2 Impacts on the roofs of the buildings internally or externally will avoid the bird nesting from March – August inclusive, unless it can be shown by an ecologist that there are no nesting birds present. Similarly, all vegetation removal will be undertaken outside the bird nesting season or alternatively under ecological supervision.
- 5.3 A feature for nesting swifts and sparrows will be integrated into each of the new dwellings.

Habitats

- 5.4 The removal of the Elms will be compensated by planting 30m of new native hedgerow along the eastern boundary of the site, this will be a double row, with at least 5 different species, spaced apart by 300mm.
- 5.5 Eight Apple trees will be planted.

Pollution prevention and drainage

- 5.6 It is important that the proposals follow appropriate pollution prevention guidelines (PPG 6) and drainage guidelines (Defra guidelines for Sustainable Urban Drainage) to protect habitats connected hydrologically.

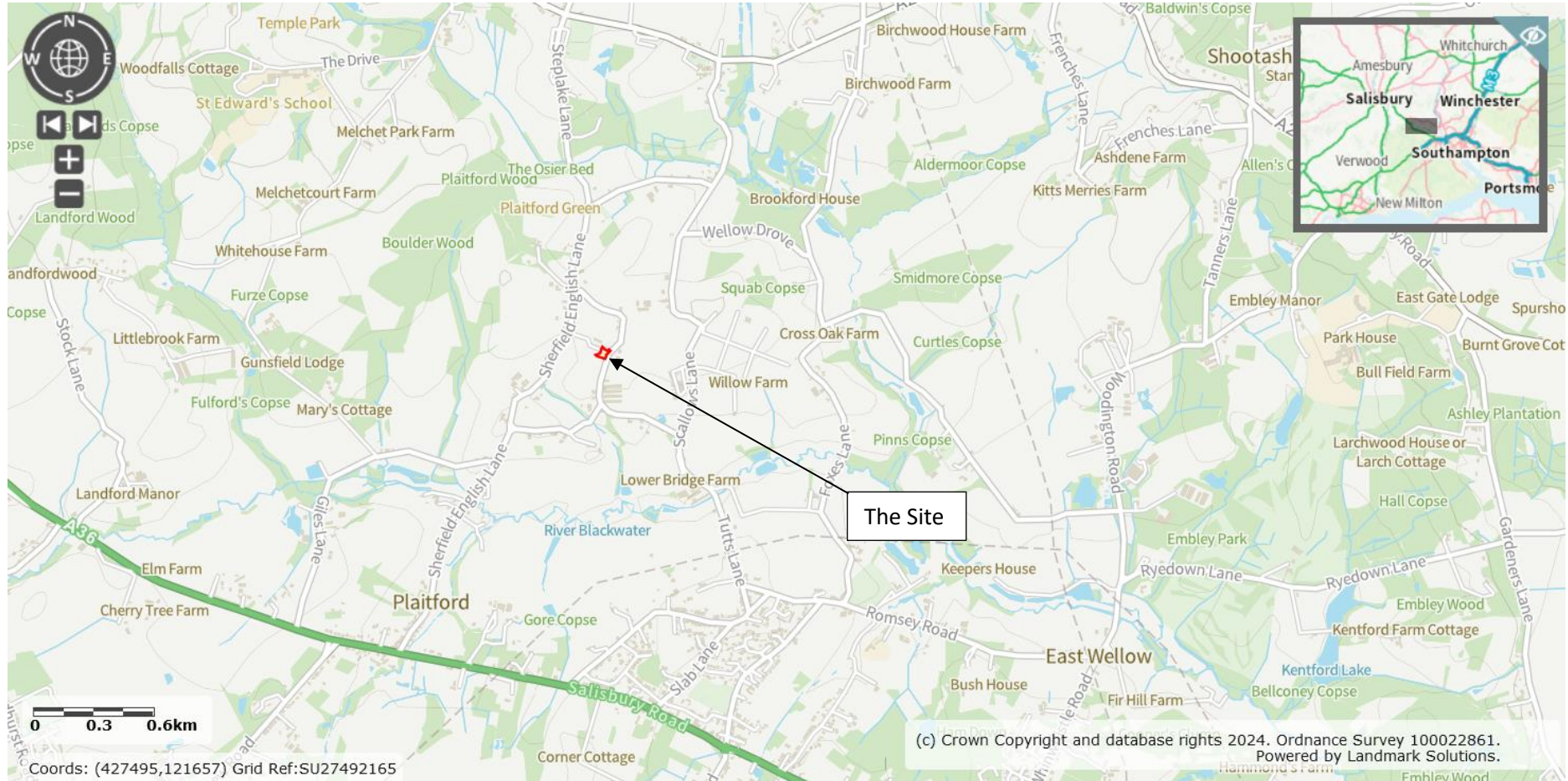
New Forest Special Protection Area (SPA)

- 5.7 The site is located within 13.6km of the New Forest SPA and because there will be a net gain in dwellings a contribution will be paid towards off-site mitigation measures to offset this impact.

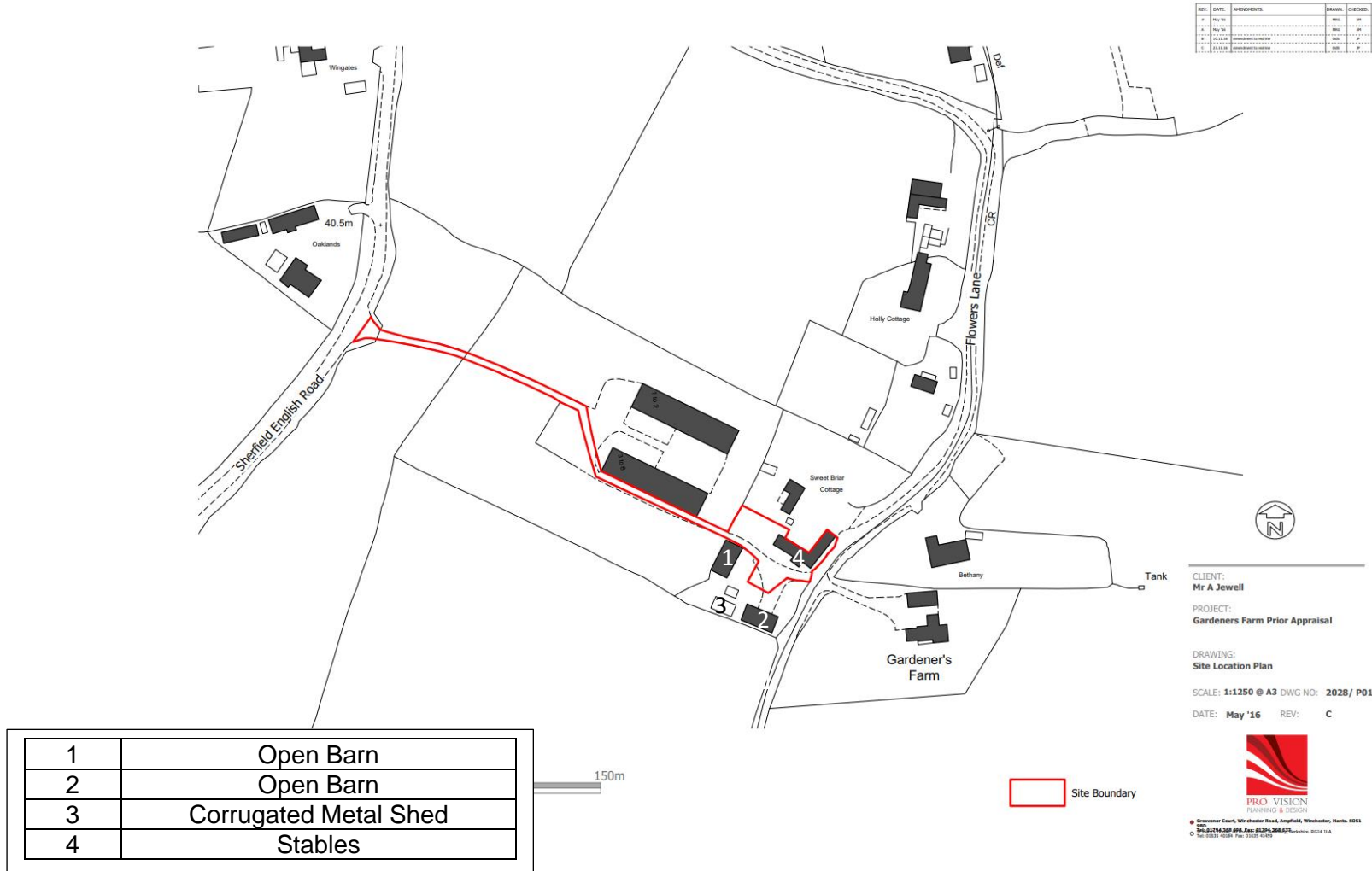
Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP)

- 5.8 A CEMP will be required, this will set out:
- Protection measures for trees
 - Storage of materials and equipment on site
 - Protective fencing
 - Noise and vibration
 - Access to the site
 - Sensitive ecological features including bat roosts and nesting birds
 - Timing for works on site to not impact on ecological receptors

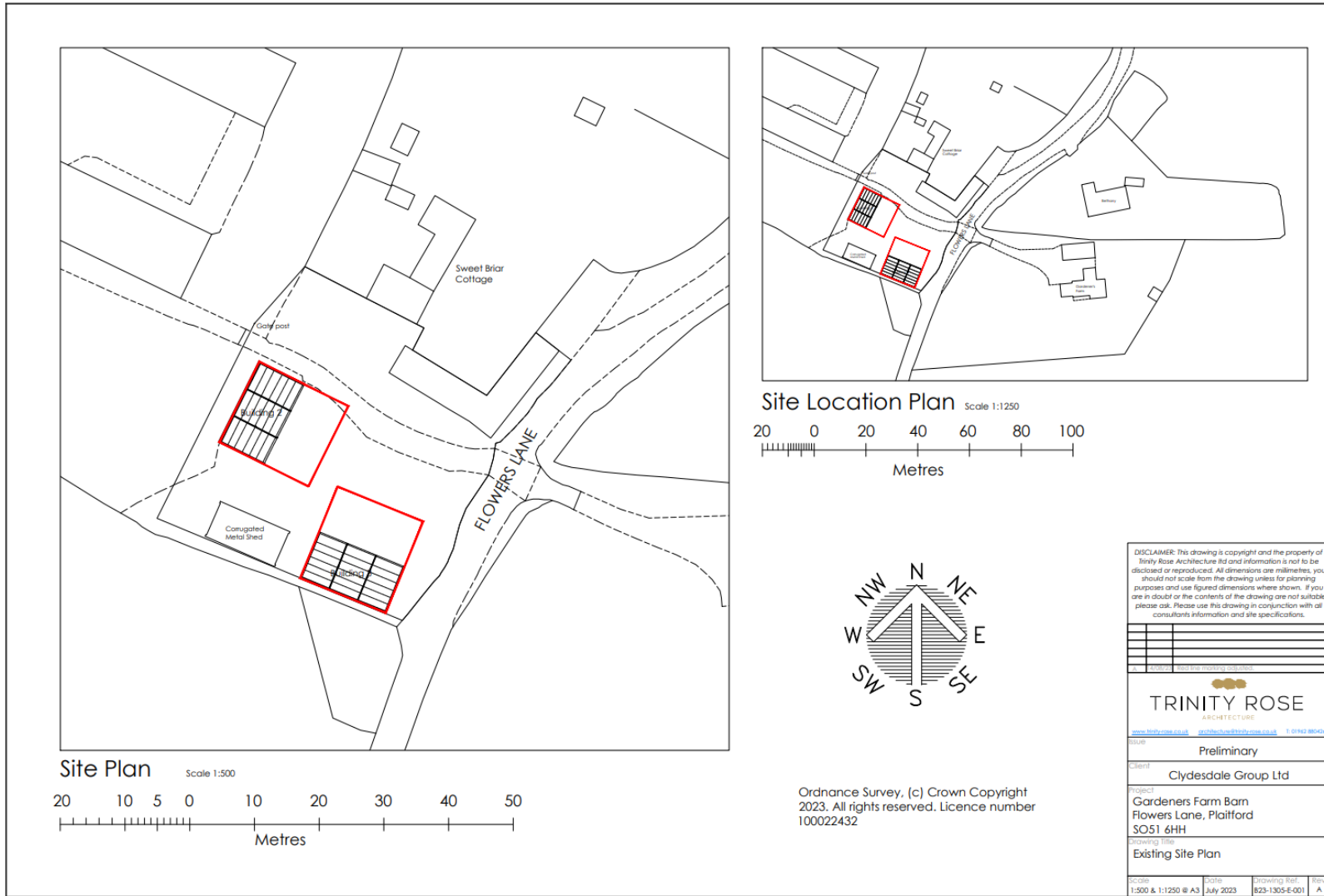
Appendix A: Site location



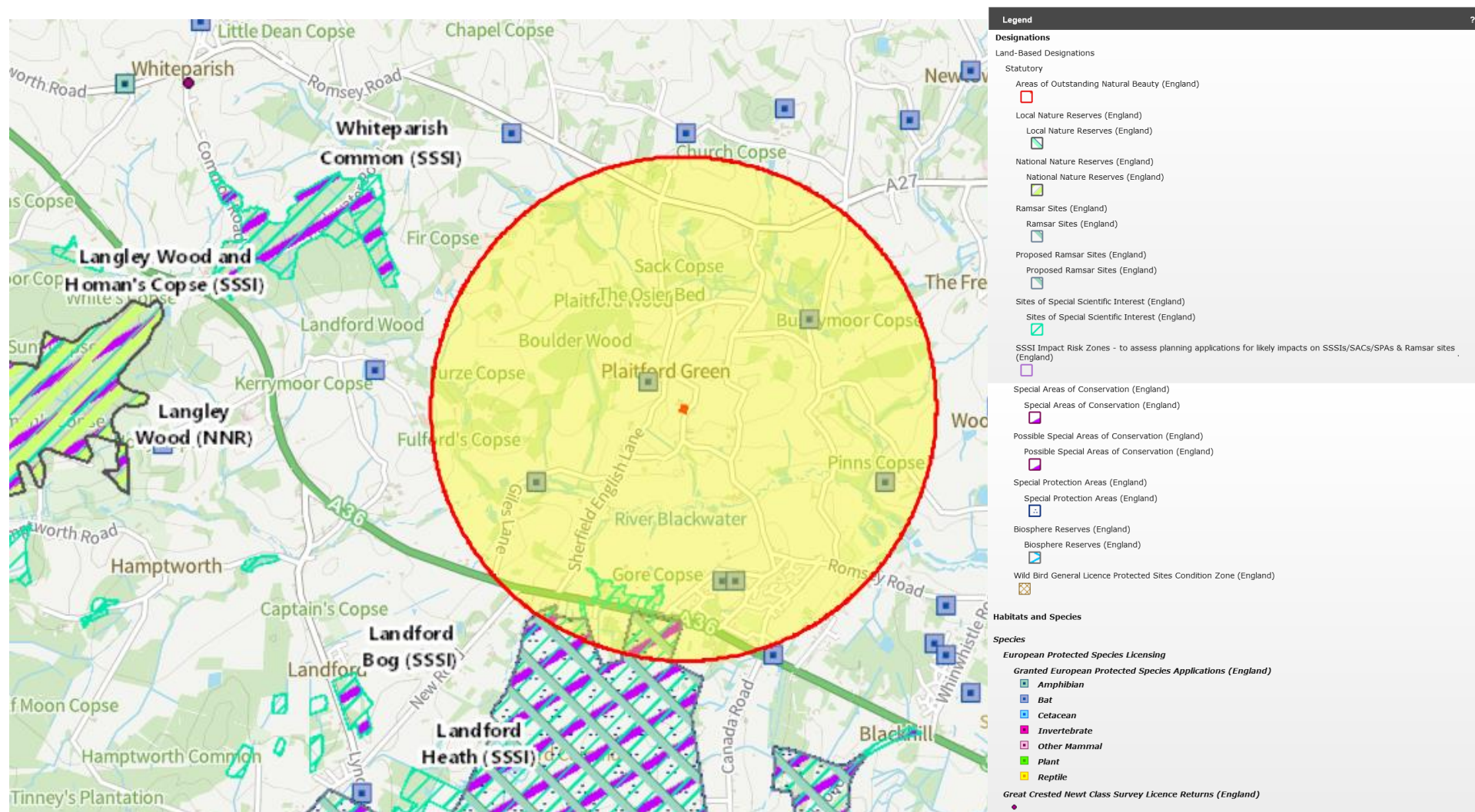
Appendix B: Existing site plan




Appendix C: Proposals




Appendix D: Protected sites, habitats, and species data from MAGiC database




Appendix E: Mitigation and Enhancements

House Sparrow box located in each new dwelling 



Bat crevice roost located in fabric of each new dwelling 



Swift box located in each new dwelling 



30m of new native hedgerow planted along eastern side and 8 x apple trees planted in south-west corner.

Appendix F: Protected species legislation

European Protected Species

Bats

These species are listed in Schedule 5 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended) and Schedule 2 of the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010*. They are afforded full protection under Section 9(4) of the Act and Regulation 41 of the Regulations. These make it an offence, *inter alia*, to:

- deliberately capture, injure or kill any such animal;
- deliberately disturb any such animal, including in particular any disturbance which is likely:
 - to impair its ability to survive, breed, or rear or nurture their young;
 - to impair its ability to hibernate or migrate;
 - to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of that species; or
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any such animal; or
- intentionally or recklessly disturb any of these animals while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection; or
- intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place that any of these animals uses for shelter or protection.

In addition, five British bat species are listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive. These are:

- Greater horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*);
- Lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*);
- Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteinii*);
- Barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*);
- Greater mouse-eared bat (*Myotis myotis*).

In certain circumstances where these species are found the Directive requires the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) by EC member states to ensure that their populations are maintained at a favorable conservation status. Outside SACs, the level of legal protection that these species receive is the same as for other bat species.

Nationally Protected Species

Breeding Birds

With certain exceptions¹, all wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected by section 1 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended). Therefore, it is an offence, *inter alia*, to:

- intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird;
- intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built; or
- intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

These offences do not apply to hunting of birds listed in Schedule 2 subject to various controls.

Bird species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act receive further protection, thus for these species it is also an offence to:

- intentionally or recklessly disturb any bird while it is nest building, or is at a nest containing eggs or young; or
- intentionally or recklessly disturb the dependent young of any such bird.

¹ Some species, such as game birds, are exempt in certain circumstances