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PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AT HIGH LAITHE FARM, SKIPTON

Guidelines

This assessment has been designed to meet:

- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management '*Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*' (2013)
- British Standard 42020 (2013) 'Biodiversity – Code of Practice for Planning and Development'
- The Bat Conservation Trust publication *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines* (Collins, J. (Ed) 2016)
- National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF, Para 170(d) and Para 175(d))
- CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA *Biodiversity net gain. Good practice principles for development. A practical guide*. CIRIA C776a. London, 2019

Summary

Carol Edmondson MSc MRSB, undertook a Preliminary Ecological Assessment at High Laithe Farm, Skipton, on 29/01/2024. The aim of the assessment was to complete an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the survey area (all land that will be impacted by the proposals) and to consider the value and suitability of the land and any structures to be affected by the development for protected wildlife species.

The site overall is of low conservation and wildlife value due to the nature of the site, and limited habitat present. No further surveys will be required.

Biodiversity enhancement as recommended at 4.3 and mitigation recommendations will need to be incorporated into any landscaping.

This report is valid for 18 months from the date of release.

Recommendations – This is work you will need to commission to obtain planning permission or comply with legislation.

Ecological Factor	Recommendations
Bats	Lighting scheme in the final design to be in line with Bat Conservation Trust and Institute of Lighting Professionals Guidance Note 08/23 Bats and artificial lighting at night in the UK. See also enhancements at 4.3
Birds	See enhancements at 4.3
Amphibians and reptiles, European Hedgehog and other terrestrial mammals.	No further surveys required. A Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) approach should be adopted. Method statement at Appendix 4 to be strictly adhered to. See also enhancements at 4.3

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1.0 Introduction and Context

1.1 Background

BEK Enviro (BEK) was commissioned to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) at High Laithe Farm, Skipton to inform an Ecological appraisal to support a planning application.

1.2 Site Context

The site is located at central National Grid Reference SD 99357 49841, currently a well grazed pasture adjacent to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

1.3 Scope of the Report

This report describes the baseline ecological conditions at the site; evaluates habitats within the survey area in the context of the wider environment; and describes the suitability of those habitats for notable or protected species. It identifies significant ecological impacts as a result of the development proposals; summarises the requirements for further surveys and mitigation measures, to inform subsequent mitigation proposals, forms the baseline survey data for Biodiversity Net Gain calculations, achieve planning or other statutory consent, and to comply with wildlife legislation.

The aim of the PEA was to obtain data on existing ecological conditions, and to conduct a preliminary assessment of the likely significance of ecological impacts on the proposed development and establishing the baseline conditions for future monitoring and inform the baseline survey data for Biodiversity Net Gain calculations. To achieve this, the following steps were taken:

A desk study has been carried out, including:

- The desk study area (2km radius of site) and field survey area (generally 50m from the site boundary/proposed footprint and including the 'zone of influence' of the scheme) have been identified.
- A desk study has been carried out, including a search on MaGIC, and Google Earth websites.
- Baseline information on the site and surrounding area has been recorded through an 'Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey', including a Phase 1 Habitat Survey (JNCC 2010) and recording further details in relation to notable or protected habitats and species.
- The ecological features present within the survey area have been evaluated where possible (CIEEM, 2006).
- Invasive plant and animal species (such as those listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act [WCA]) have been identified.
- Likely impacts on features of value, as a result of the development proposals, have been identified.
- Recommendations for further survey and assessment have been made where appropriate.

A survey plan is presented in Annex 1, the proposed Project Plan is included in Annex 2, desk study results are provided in Annex 3 and Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) can be found in Annex 4.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Desk Study Methodology

A review of the following information sources has been undertaken to inform the assessment:

- Landscape structure using aerial images from Google Earth and OS maps
- Designated sites, habitat and granted EPSL records held on Magic.gov.uk.

2.2 Site Survey Methodology

The survey was undertaken by Carol Edmondson MSc MRSB (Natural England bat licence number: **2015-12195** CLS-CLS) on 29th January 2024.

The methodology for the Phase 1 habitat survey is based on the best practice publication Phase 1 Habitat Survey Methodology (JNCC, 2010). All land parcels are described and mapped according to JNCC Phase 1 habitat classification (see site map in Appendix 1). Where appropriate, target notes provide supplementary information on habitat conditions, features too small to map to scale, species composition, structure and management.

During the survey, habitats were assessed for their suitability to support protected species, and field signs indicating their presence recorded. The assessment takes into consideration the findings of the desk study, the habitat conditions on site and in the context of the surrounding landscape, and the ecology of the protected species. The likelihood of the presence of protected species is ranked; the habitats on site are evaluated against their likelihood to provide suitable habitat for protected species. The ecological value of the survey area has been assessed based on the Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment (CIEEM, 2018), using geographic frames of reference. The biodiversity value of any identified designated sites, habitat types and associated species assemblages has been considered.

Botanical assemblages were assessed; the site was inspected for the presence of red listed (Stroh *et al*, 2014), NERC s.41 listed and LBAP listed species, alongside specially protected species listed under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) (1981) and/or Schedule 5 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017). The site was also assessed in relation to the presence of invasive species listed under Schedule 9 (Part II) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (as amended).

2.3 Suitability Assessment

The likelihood of occurrence of protected species is ranked according to the criteria listed in Table 1. The habitats on site were evaluated as to their likelihood to provide sheltering, roosting, foraging, basking or nesting habitat.

Table 1: Showing Criteria Considered When Assessing the Likelihood Of Occurrence Of Protected Species

Present	Species are confirmed as present from the current survey or historical confirmed records.
High	Habitat and features of high quality for species/species assemblage. Species known to be present in wider landscape (desk study records). Good quality surrounding habitat and good connectivity.
Moderate	Habitat and features of moderate quality. The site in combination with surrounding land provides all habitat/ecological conditions required by the species/assemblage. Within known national distribution of species and local records in desk study area. Limiting factors to suitability, including small area of suitable habitat, some severance/poor connectivity with wider landscape, poor to moderate habitat suitability in local area.
Low	Habitats within the survey area poor quality. Few or no records from data search. Despite above, presence cannot be discounted as within national range, all required features/conditions present on site and in surrounding landscape. Limiting factors could include isolation, poor quality landscape, or disturbance.
Negligible	Very limited poor-quality habitats and features. No local records from desk study; site on edge of, or outside, national range. Surrounding habitats considered unlikely to support species/species assemblage.

2.4 Limitations

It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to describe the baseline conditions within the survey area, and evaluate these features, this report does not provide a complete characterisation of the site. This assessment provides a preliminary view of the likelihood of protected species being present.

Specific limitations:

- The survey was carried out outside the active growing/flowering period for most higher plants.

3.0 Results and Evaluation

3.1 Desk Study Results

A summary of desk study results is provided below; full details are included in Appendix 3.

3.2 Designated Sites & Priority Habitats

3.2.1 National and internationally designated areas:

The desk study area lies within the Impact Risk Zone for:

- West Nidderdale, Barden & Blubberhouses Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is located 5km from the site.
- South Pennine Moor SSSI is located 7.7km to the south east.

3.2.2 Biological Heritage Sites & Priority Habitats within 2km survey area (*habitat in brackets*):

- Ancient semi-natural woodland 1550m southwest but no connectivity to the site being across the canal, industrial estate & A629.
- Further small areas of Deciduous Woodland are present throughout the survey area.

No priority habitats present within the 50 m survey area.

3.3 Landscape

A review of the designated sites, aerial photographs (Figure 1), the Magic database and OS maps has been undertaken. Collated together, the site's local habitat is described below:

The site is located on the border between open country side and an industrial estate along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal to the south of Skipton. To the west the industrial estate offers little habitat, although the canal will offer some connectivity to the open countryside beyond the site to the east. The rural landscape is predominantly agricultural setting of grazing and haylage/silage fields. The associated ditches and hedges providing breeding and terrestrial habitat for amphibians birds and small mammals in the area. Farms and their associated outbuildings, in addition to areas of woodland providing important habitat for birds, bats and terrestrial mammals in the area. The riparian habitat along Gills running down to the river Aire at 8300m to the east will also provide important foraging for bats, birds and mammals in the area.



Figure 1: Aerial Photo of Site, Showing Landscape Structure.

3.4 Protected species: Species Protected under Schedule 5 Section 9.1a of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Section 41 (S41) of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act.

3.4.1 Bats

A single European Protected Species Mitigation Licence has been granted within the 2km study area for the licence to destroy the resting place (day roost) of common pipistrelle bats. There is good quality foraging habitat along the river and over the canal & tree lines in the area. The site does not have any potential roosting habitat for bats.

3.4.2 Birds

A search of the Magic database for Priority bird species within a 250m radius of the site returned records of curlew, lapwing, redshank, tree sparrow and grey partridge, all local Priority species and shown as vulnerable or near threatened on the IUCN red list.

3.4.3 Great Crested Newts (GCN)

A search of the MAGIC database returned no positive class licence results within the 2km survey area. No potential breeding habitat within the site or 250m zone of influence.

3.5 Field Survey Results

The environmental variables recorded at the time of the survey:

Date: 29/01/2024	
Temperature	5°C
Cloud Cover	25%
Wind	5km/h
Rain	0

3.5.1 Site Feature descriptions and photos

Site description

The site of the proposed development is an area of approx. 2360sqm comprising heavily grazed semi-improved grassland (species poor), with a bank of injurious weeds and tall ruderal herbs along the southwest boundary and track side, with a single hawthorn tree. This vegetation has grown over a bank of stone and earth rubble, which has now become home to a reasonable sized rabbit warren. A line of large Leylandii trees overhang the field on the north west boundary, shading out the vegetation, leaving mainly bare earth. A small area of soft rush denotes a wetter area of the field.



Figure 2: Aerial view of the site taken from Google Earth Pro, 2024.

Phase 1 & UKHABS

Habitats (See survey plan at App.1)

Within the boundary of proposed works the site comprises:

g3c8: Holcus: Juncus neutral grassland with g3c, 16 tall forbs.



Figure 3: view north across the site, showing the overhanging Leylandii and small area of soft rush in the pasture.

B6 poor Semi improved grassland (g3c8: Holcus: Juncus neutral grassland)

The pasture was closely cropped with occasional soft rush *Juncus effusus*. Dominated by Yorkshire Fog *Holcus Lanatus*, with abundant creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, white clover *Trifolium repens* & ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* & occasional meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, common ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* and the odd spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*.



Figure 4: Area of rushes in the well grazed pasture.

**C1.3 Tall ruderal herb
 (Other neutral
 grassland with tall forbs
 g3c, 16)**

On the southwest boundary of the proposed site some tall ruderal plants including injurious weeds and non-native species have grown on piles of stone and earth rubble, including ragwort, creeping thistle, cock'sfoot and false-oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, broadleaved docks *Rumex obtusifolius*, stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*, with Rosebay willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium* dominating. A single snowberry *Symphoricarpos albus* shrub was also present.

This area also includes a hawthorn tree which had split and lost a good portion on the field side.

There are several entrances into a rabbit warren covering most of this area.



Figure 5: Tall herbs and grasses along the southeast boundary, overgrown on piles of stones and earth.

A row of tall mature Leylandii conifers line the northwest boundary, which has been compounded by stock sheltering beneath. There were signs of rabbit activity around this area, with droppings, scrapes & fur.



Figure 6: Areas of bare ground under the conifers with evidence of use as shelter by the sheep.

Rabbit activity

The site had signs of a good number of rabbits occupying the warren in the stone rubble, with multiple entrances, tracks into the field and many scrapes, droppings and fur around the field.



Figure 7: Rabbit droppings in the entrance to a burrow.

<p><u>Potential bat roosts in trees & breeding birds</u></p> <p>There were no trees with potential roosting features present on the site, nor suitable bird nesting areas. There were goose droppings on the are ground under the conifers, most likely Canada geese, which were noted on the anal side.</p>	<p><u>Potential water vole & otter habitat</u></p> <p>No suitable habitat or signs</p>
<p><u>Potential Great crested newt refugia</u></p> <p>No suitable breeding habitat within the area of the proposed works, but the rubble does offer some terrestrial habitat for amphibians and reptiles.</p>	<p><u>Potential Badger habitat</u></p> <p>No sett or signs of foraging within the site, or within 30m of the site.</p>

4.0 Conclusions, Impacts and Recommendations

4.1 Informative Guidelines

The habitats on site were evaluated as to their likelihood to provide sheltering, roosting, foraging, basking or nesting habitat. The likelihood of occupancy of protected species is ranked according to the criteria listed in Table 1.

Where this report supports a planning application, the ecological interest of the study area (including the survey area) and the proposed development has also been evaluated in terms of the planning policies relating to biodiversity. It will be clearly stated where a preliminary value can be given and where further information is required.

Appropriate justification for this assessment is provided in Section 2.3 and Table 1 of this report.

4.2 Evaluation

Taking the desk-based assessment and site survey results into account, the following value for roosting bats has been placed on each site survey feature.

Table 4: Evaluation of Site

Ecological Factor	Survey assessment conclusions (with justification)	Foreseen impacts	Mitigation & Recommendations The following recommendations are valid for two years from the date of this report; if the development is delayed beyond this point, an update survey will be required.
Designated sites	The site is within a SSSI Impact zone.	The proposed development is not likely to impact the SSSI.	LPA may consult with Natural England
Notable habitats and plants	No priority habitats on site. Closest deciduous woodland 770m north, outside the zone of influence.	No impact	N/A
Invasive Non-native species	None present on site	No Impact	N/A
Bats	No potential for bat roosts	No impact	N/A
Birds	There is no habitat for nesting birds on the Site.	No impact	N/A
Reptiles and amphibians	No GCN records within 2km. No breeding habitat within 200m. Small area of terrestrial habitat.	Loss of small area of habitat – potential to harm reptiles or amphibians during site clearance.	No further surveys. Site to be cleared using Reasonable Avoidance Measures see method statement at App.4.
Water voles/otters	No habitat for otter. No habitat for water voles.	No impact	No further surveys.
Badgers, hare, hedgehog, red squirrel.	No badger tracks, latrines, snuffle holes or other signs of presence were recorded. Hedgehog habitat present along the adjacent hedge line.	Negligible potential for impact on these species.	A Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) approach for hedgehogs should be adopted as described at Appendix 4.

4.3 Biodiversity Enhancement

<p>Enhancements The Local Planning Authority has a duty to ask for enhancements under the NPPF and circular 06/2021: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation</p>	<p>Hedgerow planting along the south and east boundaries will help increase wildlife habitat on the site.</p> <p>Any landscape planting should include native pollinator friendly species, including night scented shrubs and fruit producing native species.</p> <p>Guidance can be found at: https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2023/05/best-hedge-plants/</p> <p>Any introduced boundary hedgerows will include a mix of native species eg:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Hawthorn</td> <td>Craetagus montana</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hazel</td> <td>Corylus avellana</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Blackthorn</td> <td>Prunus spinosa</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dog rose</td> <td>Rosa canina agg.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rowan</td> <td>Sorbus aucuparia</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Holly</td> <td>Ilex aquifolium</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Native honeysuckle</td> <td>Lonicera spp.</td> </tr> </table> <p>Yew <i>Taxus baccata</i> offers an excellent evergreen alternative to non-native hedging species.</p>	Hawthorn	Craetagus montana	Hazel	Corylus avellana	Blackthorn	Prunus spinosa	Dog rose	Rosa canina agg.	Rowan	Sorbus aucuparia	Holly	Ilex aquifolium	Native honeysuckle	Lonicera spp.
Hawthorn	Craetagus montana														
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Rowan	Sorbus aucuparia														
Holly	Ilex aquifolium														
Native honeysuckle	Lonicera spp.														
	<p>Bats</p> <p>Hedgerow and tree planting around the site will improve foraging and planting night scented species will attract moths and other night flying insects which will in turn provide food for bats.</p> <p>Also See Bat Conservation Trust Guidance note 8/23 Bats and artificial lighting in the UK.</p> <p>For advice on planning nature friendly lighting plans for the development.</p> <p>Birds</p> <p>The lodges aren't particularly suited to affixing bird boxes, but in time the hedges and trees planted will offer nesting opportunities in the local area.</p>														

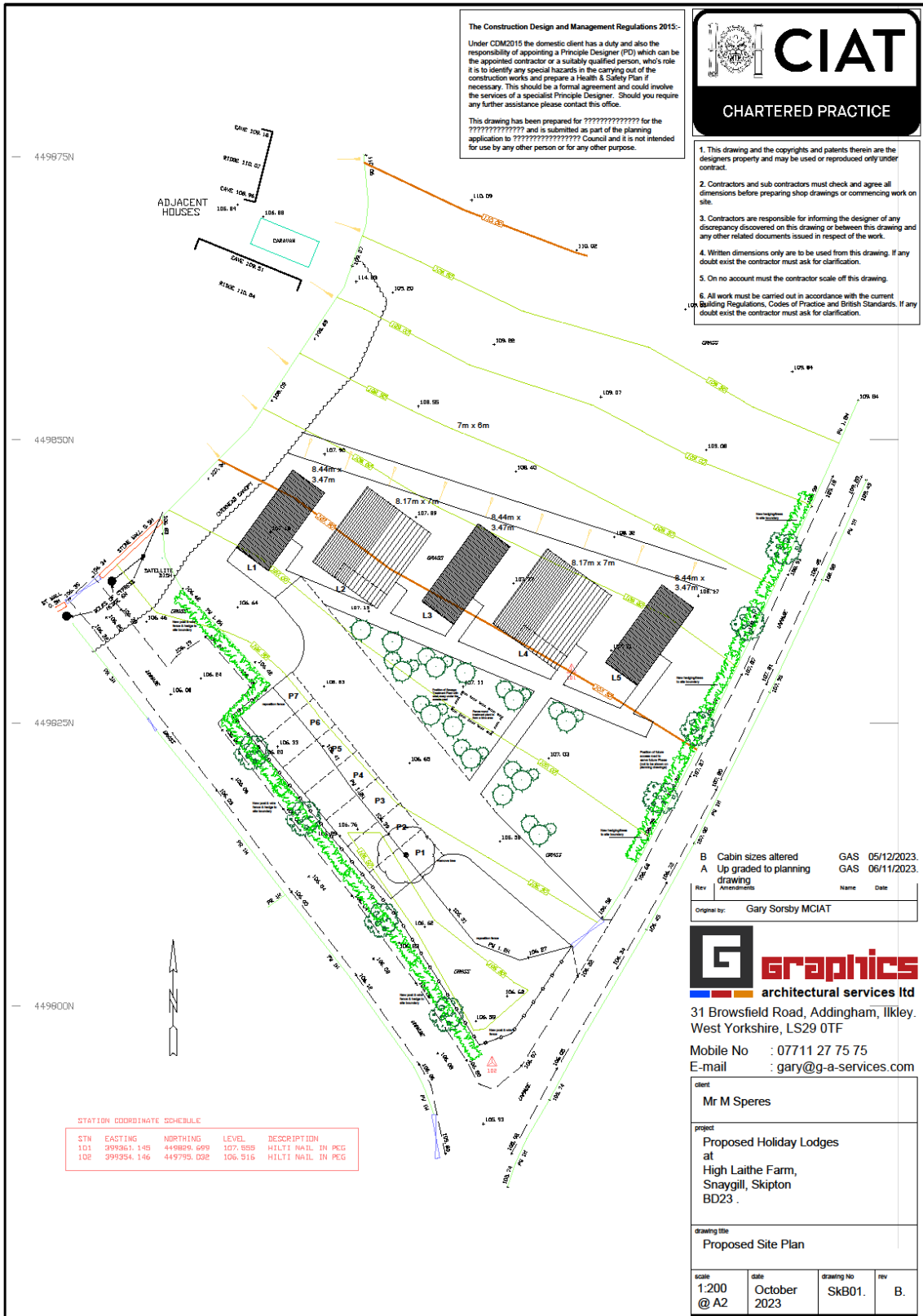
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Annex I: Survey Plan



Annex 2: Proposed Site Plan



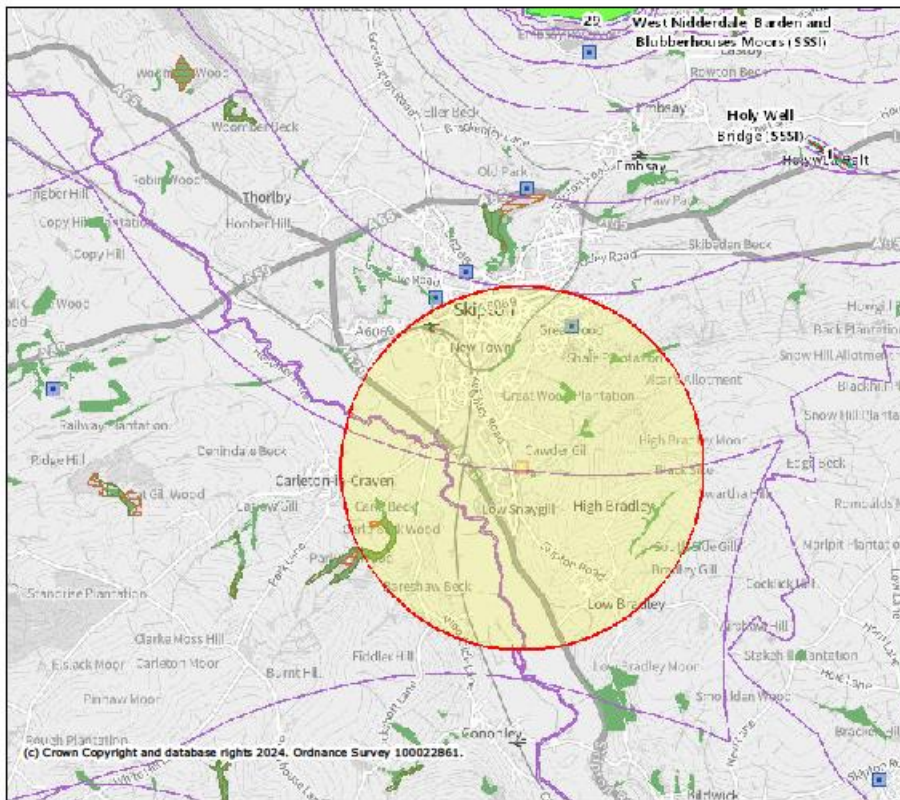
N/A

Annex 3: Desk Study Information

Full historical records can be provided on request.

MAGiC

MagiC Map High Laithe Skipton



Legend

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)

- Favourable Condition
- Unfavourable Recovering
- Unfavourable no change
- Unfavourable Declining
- Part Destroyed
- Destroyed
- Not Assessed
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)
- SSSI Impact Risk Zones - to assess planning applications for likely impacts on SSSIs/SACs/SIPAs & Ramsar sites (England)

Ancient Woodland (England)

- Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland
- Ancient Replanted Woodland
- Priority Habitat Inventory - Deciduous Woodland (England)

Granted European Protected Species Applications (England)

- Amphibian
- Bat
- Cetacean
- Invertebrate
- Other Mammal
- Plant
- Reptile

Projection = OSGB36
 xmin = 388700
 ymin = 445900
 xmax = 408600
 ymax = 455200

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Annex 4: Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS)

Method Statement for Reasonable Avoidance Measures

Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) - Method Statement in relation to:

- Terrestrial Mammals e.g hedgehog, badger, hare
- Amphibians & reptiles

Objectives of the Method Statement

Some development related activities on the site, such as excavation creation and removal of materials from site in areas local to otherwise suitable terrestrial habitat, has the potential to affect common amphibian and reptiles, and some terrestrial mammals, whilst protected mammals are known in the extending area. Therefore, safeguards must be implemented to protect these species and the Method Statement below outlines measures to be implemented in order to ensure this objective is achieved. Following these methods reduces the likelihood of negative impacts.

Timings – preferred timing of scrub clearance to minimise impact

- **Mammals** : All year

During Works

- Habitat manipulation - vegetation that can support reptiles is to be reduced to a height of 150-200 mm, left for 24hrs then cut to ground level and raked bare.
- Habitat manipulation will encourage animals to temporarily move away/abandon the area.
- For the full duration of the work, vegetation will be kept at ground level.
- No works are to extend off site in the areas adjacent to the red line boundary.
- The impact of works on adjacent habitats will be avoided by the clear demarcation of the works area.
- All work must strictly be in accordance with all of the relevant Pollution Prevention Guidelines published by the Environment Agency which may include, but is not limited to, PPG1 (general), PPG5 (works in, near, or liable to affect watercourses) and PPG6 (work at construction & demolition sites). Contingency/emergency plan should be drawn up to address chemical spillage, drainage, collision, etc.

- Machinery and materials are to remain on bare ground and reasonable efforts must be made to avoid accumulated piles. Materials that do require piling will be stored within areas of bare ground above ground level using pallets in order to prevent animals from seeking shelter beneath.
- Any excavated material stored overnight should be searched prior to being used as infill.
- Where open vertical-sided trenches are excavated it should be ensured that they are not left open overnight to avoid amphibians or small mammals falling into them and becoming trapped. If trenches cannot be back filled after the working day planks of 150-200 mm wide should be placed in them at a 45 degree diagonal angle to serve as an escape mechanism.
- Excavations should also be checked in the morning on a daily basis for the presence of any animals that may have fallen in during the night. **In the event that a protected species is located in trenches then it/they should be left in situ and the ecologist promptly contacted to identify and provide further advice.**

Site staff must be made aware that if GCN /water vole are found there is a correct procedure in place to follow, and failure to halt works may result in committing an offence.

At no point should any person handle a water vole or suspected GCN. Unlicensed handling is illegal and untrained handling may cause the animal unnecessary stress and injury.

A Natural England Protected Species Mitigation Licence may be required following the discovery of any protected species on site.