

**Whitcher Wildlife Ltd.
Ecological Consultants.**



FORMER COMBS HOSTEL, DEWSBURY

OS REF: SE 25527 19006

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. Planning permission is being sought for the development of approximately thirty new properties with associated gardens and parking at the site of the former Combs Hostel in Thornhill, Dewsbury.

1.2. Whitcher Wildlife Ltd have been commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site to establish whether there are any issues that may affect the proposed works and to carry out a biodiversity net gain assessment.

1.3. The site survey was carried out on 9th April 2025 and this report outlines the findings of that survey and makes appropriate recommendations.

1.4. Appendix I to V of this report provide additional information on specific species and are designed to assist the reader in understanding the contents of this report.

2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY.

2.1. Prior to visiting the site, the survey area was cross referenced to maps and aerial photographs to give a general idea of the habitats and potential issues within the area and to identify potential access and walking routes.

2.2. The survey area was walked where access was agreed and public rights of way were used where no access was agreed. All habitats within and immediately around the survey area were documented and the dominant species within that habitat listed in line with the UK Habitat Classification methodology to identify the primary habitat types throughout the survey area. All primary habitats are accompanied by secondary codes which are used to add further specific details where necessary. Each primary habitat will be shown individually in the appended annotated map.

2.3. The survey area and immediate surrounding area was thoroughly searched for evidence of badger (*Meles meles*) activity by looking for the following signs in line with Harris S, Cresswell P and Jefferies D (1989). *Surveying Badgers*. Mammal Society: -

- * Badger setts.
- * Badger latrines or dung pits.
- * Badger snuffle holes and evidence of foraging.
- * Badger paths.
- * Badger prints in areas of soft mud.
- * Badger hairs caught on fencing.

2.4. The survey area was searched for watercourses and where found all watercourses within the survey area and for approximately 100m in each direction were thoroughly searched for evidence of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) activity by looking for the following signs, in line with Dean M, Strachen R, Gow D and Andres R (2016). *The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook (The Mammal Society Mitigation Guidance Series)*. Eds Fiona Mathews and Paul Chanin. The mammal Society, London: -

- * Water vole burrows.
- * Water vole faeces and latrines.
- * Water vole feeding stations.
- * Water vole runs.
- * Water vole prints in areas of soft mud.
- * Water vole lawns.
- * Predator field signs.

2.5. The survey area was searched for watercourses and where found all watercourses within the survey area and for approximately 50m in each direction were thoroughly searched for evidence of otter (*Lutra lutra*) activity by looking for the following signs in line with the P Chanin (2003). *Monitoring the Otter and Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers: Monitoring Series No10 Guidelines*: -

- * Otter prints in soft mud.
- * Otter spraints.
- * Otter Holts.

2.6. The survey area was searched for watercourses and waterbodies. Where found, and where safe to enter the water, all were thoroughly searched for the presence of crayfish, for approximately 50m in each direction of the site, by searching under rocks and logs. Where stated, crayfish traps were also deployed into the watercourse. All survey work was carried out in accordance with the *Conserving Natural 2000 Rivers Monitoring Series No 1, Protocol for Monitoring the White Clawed Crayfish*.

2.7. The survey area was searched for trees and structures and where found these were checked for potential bat roosting sites in line with Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition)* by looking for the following signs: -

- * Holes, cracks or crevices.
- * Bat Droppings.

2.8. The land immediately adjacent to the survey area was assessed for bat roosting potential and bat foraging potential. Connective routes and flight lines were also assessed whilst on site and using maps of the area.

2.9. The area within 500m of the survey site was cross referenced to maps to highlight all ponds close to the site. Where possible, all ponds identified were accessed using agreed access or public rights of way to assess the potential for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) to be present.

2.10. The survey area was assessed for the potential for reptiles and suitable reptile habitats. Where applicable the area was also searched for the presence of reptiles.

2.11. Where appropriate, the habitat within and surrounding the survey area was searched for species such as hazel, oak, honeysuckle, bramble and other species which may provide potential habitat for hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*). Field signs such as feeding remains and nests were also searched for where possible, in line

with P Bright, P Morris and T Mitchell-Jones *The Dormouse Conservation Handbook 2nd Edition*.

2.12. Where appropriate, the area within and surrounding the survey area was assessed for its potential to house habitat for red squirrels. Field signs of red squirrels were searched for at least every 50m, looking for any dreys, feeding signs or sightings of red squirrels.

2.13. All surveys were carried out in line with the Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management (CIEEM) survey standards and advice.

2.14. This report is prepared in line with the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act that came into force on 1st Oct 2006. Section 41 (S41) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

2.15. The site survey was undertaken by ecologist Xanthe Walker. Xanthe has studied Wildlife and Conservation since 2016 and acquired a BA (Hons) in Wildlife Media from the University of Cumbria in 2021. She has previous experience working with bats and with badgers throughout her work and studies. Since joining the company in June 2022, she has gained experience in a wide range of surveys including preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA), biodiversity net gain (BNG) assessment, preliminary roost assessment (PRA) and species-specific surveys including badger, bat, great crested newt and breeding bird surveys. Xanthe is a qualifying member of the Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

3. SURVEY RESULTS.

3.1. Data Search Results.

3.1.1. A data search has been requested from West Yorkshire Ecology Service (WYES) detailing all records of protected species along with all non-statutory sites within a 2km radius of the survey area. These results are summarised below.

3.1.2. WYES returned records of multiple bat species including pipistrelle and noctule. The relevant records are as follows:

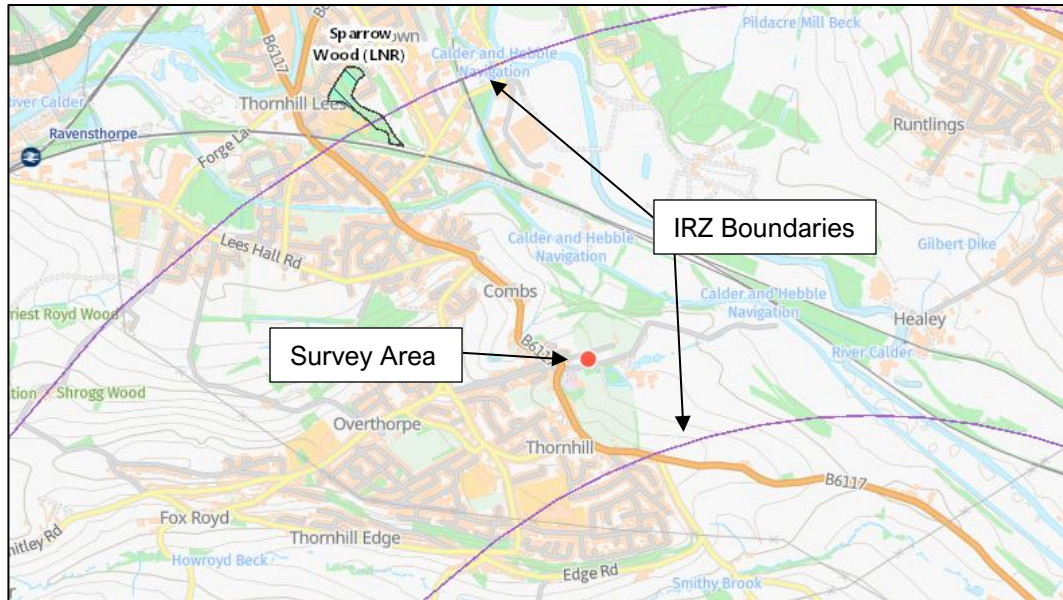
- There is a record of a pipistrelle roost from 2007 within the site. This roost was present within the hostel prior to demolition and was lost as a result of vandalism.
- There are records of foraging and commuting bats within the parkland to the south of the survey area.
- There is also a record of a bat roost from 2004 within a building immediately to the south of the site. This record details 315 bats.

3.1.3. Whitcher Wildlife carried out e-DNA surveys of three ponds situated between 50m and 140m to the southeast of the survey area in 2021. All of these ponds returned a negative result for the presence of great crested newt (GCN).

3.1.4. WYES stated that there are no non-statutory sites within 2km of the survey area and the site does not lie within Kirklees Wildlife Habitat Network.

3.1.5. A search of DEFRA's MAGIC Map found one statutory site within 2km of the survey area. This is Sparrow Wood Local Nature Reserve (LNR) which is situated approximately 1.4km to the northwest of the survey area. The site also lies within the fifth impact risk zone (IRZ) of Denby Grange Colliery Ponds Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is situated approximately 3.6km to the southeast of the survey area. The proposed development does not fall within the criteria in which Natural England would need to be informed of the works.

3.1.6. The MAGIC map below shows these statutory sites in relation to the survey area.



3.2. The Surveyed Area.

3.2.1. The survey area lies between The Combs and Hall Lane and is indicated by the red outline below.



3.2.2. The survey area is situated in the village of Thornhill in Dewsbury. The wider surroundings primarily comprise open farmland with some pockets of parkland and woodland throughout. A residential area extends to the west of the survey area towards the centre of Thornhill. The aerial image below shows the survey area in the wider surroundings.



3.3. Survey Limitations.

During this survey, an excavator was present, clearing the debris and rubble at the eastern side of the site where the former hostel building was located. Therefore, immediate access around the demolished building was limited.

3.4. Description of Habitats.

3.4.1. Appendix VI of this report contains an annotated map marked up with the varying habitats that are cross referenced to target notes in Appendix VII of this report. The primary habitats on and adjacent to the site are: -

- w1g – Other broadleaved woodland.
- h3h – Mixed scrub.
- h3d – Bramble scrub.
- g4 – Modified grassland.
- u1f – Sparsely vegetated urban land.
- h2a – Native hedgerow.
- h2b – Non-native and ornamental hedgerow.
- u1b – Developed land, sealed surface.
- u1b5 – Buildings.
- u1c – Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface.

3.4.2. w1g – Other broadleaved woodland.

On the western boundary of the survey area, there is a small pocket of woodland. The tree species identified include ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and the understorey species include ivy (*Hedera helix*), cleavers (*Galium aparine*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and nettle (*Urtica dioica*). This habitat parcel is given a poor condition assessment.



3.4.3. h3h – Mixed scrub.

Secondary codes: 32 scattered trees.

3.4.3.1. There are three parcels of mixed scrub labelled A to C.

3.4.3.2. Scrub parcel A extends along the northern boundary towards the centre of the site. The species identified include bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), ivy (*Hedera helix*), red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), stonecrop (*Sedum* sp.), dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.) and wood avens (*Geum urbanum*). This habitat parcel is given a moderate condition assessment. There are nine trees within this parcel including seven small silver birch (*Betula pendula*), a small ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and a small pine (*Pinus* sp.) all of moderate condition.



3.4.3.3. Parcel B is situated on the southern boundary of the survey area between the middle and eastern end of the site. The species identified include ivy (*Hedera helix*), cherry (*Prunus avium*) saplings, bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), forsythia (*Forsythia* sp.), cherry plum (*Prunus cerasifera*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.) and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). There are four trees within this parcel including one small mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*) of moderate condition as well as two medium cherries (*Prunus avium*) and a medium cherry plum (*Prunus cerasifera*) of good condition.



3.4.3.4. Parcel C is situated on the northern boundary and the northeastern corner of the survey area. The species identified include spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), narrow-leaved ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.), cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), bamboo (*Arundinaria* sp.), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and Bergenia (*Bergenia* sp.). There are eight trees within this parcel including five sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), one medium and four small, a

small cherry (*Prunus avium*), a small juniper (*Juniperus* sp.) and a medium cypress (*Cupressus* sp.), all of moderate condition.



3.4.4. h3d – Bramble scrub.

Secondary codes: 32 scattered trees.

There are multiple pockets of bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) scrub, one along the boundary of the woodland, and two at opposite ends of the grassland habitat on the western side of the survey area. This habitat is not afforded a condition assessment. There are seven trees within this habitat including four small sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) of poor condition and three small ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) of good condition.



3.4.5. g4 – Modified grassland.

Secondary codes: 32 scattered trees.

3.4.5.1. There are two parcels of modified grassland labelled A and B.

3.4.5.2. Parcel A is a large area of grassland and is situated towards the western end of the survey area on a gentle decline. The species identified include cock's foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), false oat grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), perennial rye grass (*Lolium perenne*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), docks (*Rumex* spp.) and oak saplings (*Quercus* sp.). This parcel is given a poor condition assessment. There are scattered ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) trees extending along the northern boundary of this grassland parcel.



3.4.5.3. Parcel B is a smaller area of grassland situated towards the centre of the survey area, between areas of scrub and developed land. The species identified include cock's foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), narrow-leaved ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), ivy (*Hedera helix*) and horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) saplings. This parcel is also given a poor condition assessment.



3.4.6. u1f – Sparsely vegetated urban land.

Secondary codes: 32 scattered trees.

There is sparsely vegetated land surrounding the area of hard standing in the centre of the survey area. The species identified include stonecrop (*Sedum* sp.), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.), ivy (*Hedera helix*), narrow-leaved ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*), ivy (*Hedera helix*) and oak saplings (*Quercus* sp.). This habitat parcel is given a poor condition assessment. There are two trees within this habitat including a small goat willow (*Salix caprea*) and a small sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). These are both given a moderate condition assessment.



3.2.7. h2a – Native hedgerow.

Secondary codes: 11 hedgerow with trees

There is a native hedgerow extending along the majority of the southern boundary of the survey area. This hedgerow predominantly comprises hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), with holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), cherry (*Prunus avium*) and ivy (*Hedera helix*) interspersed and herb robert (*Geranium robertianum*), cleavers (*Galium aparine*) and nettle (*Urtica dioica*) making up the ground flora. There are sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees throughout the hedgerow.



3.2.8. h2b – Non-native ornamental hedgerow.

There are three very short sections of ornamental hedgerow on the northern boundary of the survey area towards the eastern end. Two of these comprise cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) and the other is solely cedar (*Cedrus* sp.).



3.2.9. u1b – Developed land, sealed surface.

There is a large area of hard standing situated towards the centre of the site comprising tarmac and concrete.



3.2.10. u1b5 – Buildings.

There are two buildings still remaining on site. These include a brick garage and a small brick wall structure in the northeastern corner of the survey area.



3.2.11. u1c – Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface.

There is a large expanse of rubble and gravel where the former hostel was situated as well as bare earth. This is located towards the eastern end of the survey area.



3.5. Survey Results.

3.5.1. No badger setts or other field signs were identified within the survey area.

3.5.2. There is no watercourse within or immediately adjacent to the survey area to provide suitable habitat for otter, water vole or white-clawed crayfish.

3.5.3. *Great crested newt (GCN)*.

3.5.3.1. There are six ponds shown on maps within 500m of the survey area. These are indicated on the aerial map below and numbered accordingly.



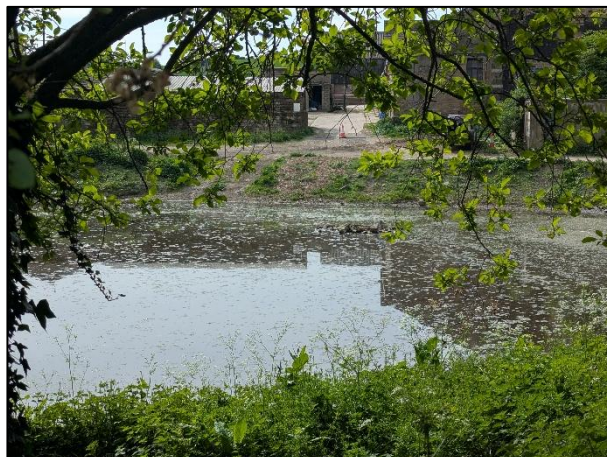
3.5.3.2. Pond 1 is situated approximately 320m to the west and is fragmented from the survey area via a main road. Pond 2 is situated approximately 300m to the north of the

survey area on the opposite side of a bowling club, where the terrestrial habitat is unsuitable for GCN due to the constant maintenance of the grass. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that GCN could access the survey area from these ponds.

3.5.3.3. Pond 3 is situated approximately 50m to the south of the survey area and is a moat extending into a wider pond within parkland and woodland habitat. The photograph below shows this pond.



3.5.3.4. Pond 4 is situated approximately 110m to the southeast of the survey area and is a moderately large pond adjacent to a footpath within a farm. The photograph below shows this pond.



3.5.3.5. Pond 5 is situated approximately 140m to the southeast of the survey area and is also situated within the farm, directly adjacent to pond 4. The photograph below shows this pond.



3.5.3.6. e-DNA samples were taken of ponds on 3, 4 and 5 on 1st June 2021 and all three returned a negative result for the presence of great crested newts. Whilst this results are technically out of outdated, the lack of other ponds in the surrounding area provides little opportunity for GCN to move into this area. Therefore, it is assessed as unlikely that GCN will be present within these ponds.

3.5.3.4. Ponds 1, 2 and 6 could not be accessed for e-DNA sampling. Whilst 1 and 2 are fragmented from the survey area, pond 6 is connected to the Calder and Hebble Navigation via a small channel, which then joins the River Calder, a flowing watercourse. Therefore, it is likely that this pond contains fish from the river, which prey on GCN eggs and efts, creating an unsuitable breeding environment.

3.5.3.5. It is assessed as highly unlikely that GCN will be present within the nearby ponds and the connectivity between the survey area and the two farther ponds is fragmented by the bowling club and a main road. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that GCN will be present within the survey area.

3.5.4. *Bats*

3.5.4.1. The brick wall structure is open and does not possess features to provide suitable roosting opportunity for bats. Furthermore, this is a single skin brick wall providing little opportunity for features to provide shelter from the elements. Therefore, this structure is assessed as providing negligible potential for roosting bats.



3. 5.4.2. The garage structure is brick structure with a cement sheet roof and no door leaving the garage open to the elements and no features throughout the structure. Therefore, this structure is assessed as providing negligible potential for roosting bats.



3.5.4.2. There are multiple trees within the survey area. The majority do not possess features, however, there are some with ivy coverage which can conceal potential roosting features. This is unlikely as the majority of these trees are young, however, as there is potential for individual features to be present, all trees with ivy coverage are assessed as PRF-I.

3.5.4.3. The survey area provides low to moderate value foraging and commuting habitat for bats as the woodland and hedgerow habitats provide connectivity throughout the surrounding habitat, however, the parkland to the south is directly adjacent and is more optimal as the trees are more mature and it extends across a much larger area. Whilst there is a large bat roost recorded adjacent to the site, the record is from 2004 with no record since this date. Furthermore, as the parkland provides good foraging

habitat, it is more likely that any bats roosting within close proximity to the site will use the parkland.

3.5.7. All vegetated habitats within the survey area provide suitable habitat for nesting birds. One corvid nest was identified during this survey, within a tree towards the northern end of the woodland. This is shown in the photograph below.



3.5.8. The survey area provides suitable habitat for common reptiles due to the combination of scrub, grassland and open ground with multiple areas of refugia throughout the rubble and debris of the demolished buildings.

3.5.9. The survey area lies outside the natural known range of the red squirrel and hazel dormouse. Therefore, these species are considered absent.

3.5.10. No non-native invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, were identified during this survey.

3.5.11. The survey area provides suitable habitat for hedgehogs due to the areas of scrub and grassland that will provide a good source of invertebrate prey.

4. BASLINE BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN.

4.1. Baseline units have been calculated for the site, however, part of the site was found to have been cleared which was largely restricted to the demolition of the Combs Hostel building. This also included some habitats within the immediate vicinity of the building, such as grassland and scrub. The below maps show the degradation of habitats between 2020 and 2025.

April 2020



March 2025



4.2. In line with BNG guidelines, any degradation of habitats since January 2020 should be input into the metric as they were at this time based on anecdotal information such as historic maps and photographs. Where it is not possible to ascertain a habit category or condition, a worst-case scenario should be assumed.

4.3. Aerial imagery suggests that the hostel is a building with some areas of grassland and scrub habitat in the surroundings. The previous report drawn up in February 2021, along with photographs taken at this time, suggest that all scrub and modified grassland habitat immediately surrounding the hostel building, was of poor condition.

4.4. The below tables demonstrate the baseline units for the site, using the Statutory Metric, which is the most appropriate metric for this site at the time of this report. A copy of the metric and condition assessments will be provided alongside this report.

4.5. Area habitats.

Habitat Type	Extent (Ha)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Biodiversity Units (BU)
Modified grassland (A)	0.2388	Low	Poor	0.48
Modified grassland (B)	0.0367	Low	Poor	0.07
Bramble scrub	0.0403	Medium	N/A	0.16
Mixed scrub (A)	0.0604	Medium	Moderate	0.48
Mixed scrub (B)	0.0942	Medium	Moderate	0.75
Mixed scrub (C)	0.0606	Medium	Poor	0.24
Vacant or derelict land (Sparsely vegetated land)	0.0419	Low	Moderate	0.17
Other broadleaved woodland	0.0448	Medium	Poor	0.18
Developed land, sealed surface	0.1081	V.Low	N/A	0.00
Developed land, sealed surface (Buildings)	0.0030	V.Low	N/A	0.00
Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface	0.0292	V.Low	N/A	0.00
Urban trees	0.0326	Medium	Poor	0.13
Urban trees	0.1425	Medium	Moderate	1.14
Urban trees	0.0651	Medium	Good	0.78

Modified grassland (Degraded)	0.0332	Low	Poor	0.07
Mixed scrub (Degraded)	0.1116	Medium	Poor	0.45
Developed land, sealed surface (Buildings) (Degraded)	0.1758	V.Low	N/A	0.00
Total	1.32	-	-	5.02 BU
Total without tree areas	1.08	-	-	-

4.3. The total baseline score of the site areas is 5.02 BU including habitats degraded since January 2020. The table shows areas for urban trees generated by the metric in order to calculate a biodiversity score. These are not included in the total area of the site.

4.4. Hedgerow habitats.

Hedgerow Type	Length (Km)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Biodiversity Units (BU)
Native hedgerow	0.1494	Low	Moderate	0.6
Non-native ornamental hedgerow	0.0252	V.Low	Poor	0.03
Total	0.17	-	-	0.62 BU

4.5. The total baseline score of the site hedgerows is 0.62 BU as rounded down by the metric.

5. EVALUATION OF FINDINGS.

5.1. *Designated sites.*

5.1.1. The survey area lies approximately 1.4km from the nearest non-statutory site and is not situated within the Kirklees WHN. Furthermore, as the proposed development will not exceed the red line boundary, there will be no impacts on non-statutory sites.

5.1.2. There are no statutory sites within 2km of the survey area, however, the site does lie within the fifth IRZ of Denby Grange Colliery Ponds SSSI. Housing developments do not fall under the list of activities that require Natural England to be notified in IRZ 5. Therefore, there will be no impacts on statutory sites.

5.2. No badger setts or other field signs were identified during this survey. Therefore, the proposed works will have no impact on this species.

5.4. There is no watercourse within or immediately adjacent to the survey area to provide suitable habitat for otter, water vole or white-clawed crayfish. Therefore, the proposed works will have no impact on these species.

5.5. There are six ponds within 500m of the survey area. Three of these returned negative eDNA results in 2021 and the lack of ponds surrounding suggests that GCN are unlikely to be present now. Two of the remaining ponds are fragmented from the survey area and the last is connected to a flowing watercourse making it unsuitable. Therefore, it is assessed as highly unlikely that GCN will be present within the survey area and precautionary measures will be sufficient in preventing impact on this species.

5.6. *Bats.*

5.6.1. The structures within the survey area are both assessed as providing negligible potential for roosting bats. The roost that was formerly recorded on site within the demolished building was no longer present during bat surveys in 2021 due to vandalism within the building. Furthermore, there is ample habitat in the surroundings to provide foraging habitat for the roost recorded immediately to the south of the site. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the proposed works will have an impact on roosting bats in structures.

5.6.2. Multiple trees within the survey area are assessed as PRF-I, all due to ivy coverage which can conceal potential roosting features. If these are removed, there could be an impact on any roosting bats present.

5.6.3. The survey area provides low to moderate value foraging and commuting habitat for bats and the surrounding commuting corridors and habitat will not be impacted by the works. Furthermore, the development of the site will not create a significant break in the connectivity of the surrounding habitats.

5.7. The vegetated habitats within the survey area all provide suitable habitat for nesting birds. Furthermore, one corvid nest was identified in the northwestern corner of the site. Therefore, if the vegetation is cleared during the nesting season, which extends from March to August inclusive, there could be an impact on any nesting birds present.

5.8. The combination of vegetated habitats, bare ground and debris which can act as refugia, creates a suitable habitat for reptiles. However, the habitats surrounding the site, particularly the parkland to the south, also provide suitable habitat for reptiles and the development will not cause a significant loss of habitat. Furthermore, once the development is complete, gardens will provide suitability for common reptile species. Therefore, suitable precautionary measures will be sufficient to ensure that there are no impacts to reptile species throughout the duration of the works.

5.9. The survey area lies outside the natural known range of the red squirrel and hazel dormouse. Therefore, these species are considered absent and the proposed works will have no impact.

5.10. No non-native invasive plant species were identified within the survey area. Therefore, the proposed works will not result in the spread of any such species.

5.11. The survey area provides suitable habitat for hedgehogs. Suitable adjustments and mitigation measures will ensure that the habitat continues to be suitable post development.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS.

6.1. Biodiversity Net Gain.

6.1.1. It is recommended that upon completion of detailed landscaping, this report is converted into an Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) to arrive at a conclusive assessment of the residual impact of the proposed development. This format will be suitable for submission to the local authority.

6.1.2. During the conversion of this report into an EcIA, a calculation will be undertaken to calculate the post works biodiversity score for the site. A 10% gain will be expected to be achieved, which can prove difficult on small residential schemes, although if as much land as possible is allocated to the retention of habitats, particularly the woodland, this will contribute to any gain.

6.1.3. Woodland and scrub habitat as well as trees, will need to be replaced with the same habitat or one of a higher distinctiveness. Therefore, it is recommended that as much of these habitats are retained as possible. To achieve a net gain, the planting scheme should include as much native scrub as possible, as well as planting of native trees throughout the development.

6.1.4. Grassland areas should be planted with species rich lawn mixtures to help achieve a higher condition score which will contribute to the biodiversity units achieved. It is also recommended that a relaxed mowing scheme is put into place to further enhance grassland areas and allow species to flourish.

6.1.5. There will also be an expectation to provide biodiversity enhancements for fauna on the site, which will not contribute to achieving a biodiversity net gain, but instead provide benefits to any fauna on the site. This should include the installation of an integrated bat box or a pair of integrated swift boxes in fifty percent of the new dwellings. It is also recommended that a bee brick is incorporated within each of the new dwellings on site.

6.1.6. In order to increase the value of habitats for fauna throughout the development, it is recommended that a moderate level of connectivity is maintained. Connectivity throughout habitats can be improved by planting hedgerows and creating other linear habitats to prevent isolation of natural spaces. Connectivity for bats and birds can also be provided by keeping a relatively continuous tree canopy throughout the

development, without large gaps. This can be provided by planting trees and hedgerows in gardens and around the perimeter of the site. This will also maintain connectivity throughout the wider surroundings.

6.2. *Bats.*

6.2.1. As both structures have been assessed as providing negligible potential for roosting bats, no further bat surveys are required. However, individual opportunistic bats can roost almost anywhere and therefore, it is recommended that the works are carried out with due care and attention and in the unlikely event that a bat is found during those works, it should be kept safe and warm and professional advice should be sought immediately.

6.2.2. It is recommended that trees are retained where possible, however if necessary, all trees with ivy coverage should be soft-felled and left on the ground for twenty-four hours before being chipped or removed from site.

6.2.3. It is recommended that if any additional lighting is necessary, the lighting should be kept to a safe working minimum and downlit onto the work site as to avoid impacting upon foraging and commuting bats. A sensitive lighting plan should also be developed to ensure that the surrounding woodland remains free of excess light spill post development.

6.3. It is recommended that any vegetation clearance necessary is carried out outside of the nesting bird season, which generally extends from March to August each year. If vegetation is to be cleared within the nesting bird season, then the works should be immediately preceded by a nesting bird survey, carried out by a competent person. Any nests identified should be left undisturbed until the young have fledged. As a corvid nest was identified during this survey, a 10m exclusion zone should be maintained around this nest until it is no longer active.

6.4. In order to prevent any impact on reptiles or small mammals, the following are recommended:

- All on-site personnel should be briefed on the identification of reptiles and small mammals using the toolbox talks provided in the appendices of this report.
- Any vegetation should be cleared to a minimum of 150mm above ground level initially. After at least 24 hours, a walkover should be undertaken to ensure no

reptiles or small mammals are present, and then the vegetation can be cleared to ground level.

- Clearance of debris and rubble from the demolished building should be done with care and checked by hand prior to removal with an excavator.
- If a reptile or small mammal is identified at any point, it should be allowed to leave the area unharmed.
- If hibernating mammals or reptiles are identified, all works must stop immediately and professional advice should be sought.

6.5. It is recommended that all gardens are fitted with a hedgehog house, to provide suitable shelter for this species. Furthermore, it is recommended that access throughout the site for hedgehogs is maintained by creating small gaps at the bottom of all fences.

6.6. In the unlikely event that a GCN is found on the site, all works should stop immediately and professional advice should be sought.

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Appendix I. BAT INFORMATION.

Ecology

There are currently 18 species of bat residing in Britain, 17 of which of which are known to breed here. They are extremely difficult to identify in the hand and even more so in flight.

Many species appear to be diminishing in numbers, probably due to habitat change and shortage of food, caused by pesticides, as insects are their sole diet.

As their diet consists solely of insects, bats hibernate during the winter when their food source is at its most scarce. They will spend the winter in hollow trees, caves, mines and the roofs of buildings.

Certain species, particularly the pipistrelle (the commonest and most widespread British bat) can quickly adapt to man-made structures and will readily use these to roost and to rear their young.

Surveys

During walkover surveys, bat roosts can be identified by looking for:

- Suitable holes, cracks and crevices within any building, tree or other structure.
- Bat droppings along walls, window cills, or on the ground.
- Prey remains, such as insect wings.

Further investigations can be made using endoscopes, by carrying out aerial inspections of trees or by conducting bat activity surveys during dusk and dawn over summer months.

Legislation

Bats are protected under Appendix II and III of the Bern Convention (1982), Schedule 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), Annex IV of the Habitats Directive (some species under Annex II), Annex II of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010) and EUROBATS agreement. Numerous species are also listed

under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) making them species of principal importance.

All bats and their roosts are therefore protected in the UK. This makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any bat, to interfere with any place used for shelter or protection, or to intentionally disturb any animal occupying such a place.

The UK has designated maternity and hibernacula areas as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) under the Habitats Directive. Implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan also includes action for a number bat species and the habitats which support them.

Where development proposals are likely to affect a bat roost site, a licence is required from Natural England.

Appendix II. NESTING BIRD INFORMATION.

Ecology

The nesting season will vary according to the weather each year but generally commences in March, peaks during May and June and continues until September. It is also worth remembering that some birds nest in trees and scrub but others are ground nesting or prefer man-made structures or buildings.

Surveys

Nesting bird surveys search for potential nest sites in vegetation, buildings etc. Potential nesting sites are observed over a suitable period of time for bird movements or calling male birds that would indicate the presence of a nest. The presence of a nest can be identified from the field signs without the necessity to see the nest itself, thereby avoiding any disturbance of the nests. The best way to avoid this issue is to plan for vegetation clearance to be carried out outside the bird-nesting season.

Legislation

Nesting birds are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Part 1. -(1) Of the Act states that: - If any person intentionally: - kills, injures or takes any wild bird; takes, damages or destroys the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or takes or destroys an egg of any wild bird, he shall be guilty of an offence.

Part 1. -(5) of the Act states that: - If any person intentionally: - disturbs any wild bird included in Schedule 1 while it is building a nest or is in, on, or near a nest containing eggs or young; or disturbs young of such a bird, he shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a special penalty.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 amends the above by inserting after “intentionally” the words “or recklessly”.

Appendix III. REPTILE INFORMATION.

Ecology

There are five main species of reptile that reside in the UK; Common or Viviparous Lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*); Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*); Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*); Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) and Adder (*Vipera berus*). The Adder is the only native species that is venomous although this is rarely harmful to humans.

Reptiles occupy a wide range of habitats including woodland, marshes, heathland, moors, sand dunes, hedgerows and bogs. Sand Lizards are confined to moorland and coastal sand dunes where they lay their eggs in the warm sand. The range of the Sand Lizard in the UK is therefore very limited. Slow Worms can be found in a wide variety of habitats throughout Britain and is the most likely reptile to be found in urban and suburban environments.

Maintaining the right body temperature is vital to reptiles' survival. In the morning, they find a warm basking site to heat up their bodies, then later they may move back into the shade because they do not sweat and have to be careful not to overheat. During hot summers, Adders will try to move to damper, cooler sites.

Over winter reptiles will hibernate in burrows or under logs where they are protected from the cold and predators, emerging from February onwards as the weather warms up.

Reptiles generally begin to mate April to May with young born in late July to September. The Common Lizard gives birth to live young, hence the term viviparous, meaning live bearing.

Surveys

Reptile surveys involve the searching of refuge such as logs and stones for any animal sheltering below. Artificial refuge may be laid out on site for the purpose of reptile surveys.

Legislation

Reptiles are protected under Appendix II (sand lizards) and Appendix III (common lizard, slow worms, smooth snake, grass snake and adders) of the BERN Convention (1982), partially protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), Annex IV of the Habitats Directive and are all listed under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Communities Act (2006) making them a species of principal importance.

This makes it an offence to disturb any reptile while it is occupying a structure or place it uses for shelter or protection or to obstruct access to such a place.

APPENDIX IV. BASELINE MAP OF THE SURVEY AREA.



Appendix V. TARGET NOTES.

T1 – Corvid nest.

T2 – Demolished hostel building.

Toolbox Talk: Reptiles

Whitcher Wildlife Ltd

Ecological Consultants



Identification: Grass Snakes.

The grass snake can be up to 120cm long. It is generally dark green in colour but may occasionally appear grey with vertical black bars and spots that run along its sides. There is usually a yellow marking around the neck.



Other Reptiles.

In addition to the reptiles outlined on this document, there are also two other reptile species in Great Britain, the smooth snakes and the sand lizard. These reptiles are a lot less common than the four species covered with the smooth snake being predominantly found on heathland in southern England and the sand lizard found throughout Great Britain in coastal dune areas.

These species are also afforded a higher level of protection because they are European Protected Species.

Identification: Adders.

The adder is the only native species that is venomous, but it is rarely harmful to humans. Adult adders are generally up to 66cm long. Back ground colouration is a light shade of grey or brown with a black zigzag marking along the length of the back. As with all reptiles, colouration varies and becomes duller as sloughing (skin shedding) approaches.



Habitat.

Maintaining the right body temperature is vital to reptiles' survival. In the morning they find a warm basking site to heat up their bodies and then later they may move back into the shade so as not to overheat. Hence, reptiles require a habitat that provides a range of suitable refugia for shelter such as dense vegetation, rubble or log piles, or crevices and open areas for basking such as bare ground, rocks or railway ballast shoulders. During hot summers reptiles may be found in damper, cooler sites. Reptiles hibernate, spending the winter in burrows or under logs protected from the cold and predators.

Identification: Slow Worms.

Slow worms grow to around 45cm in length. The males and females display a marked difference in colour when fully grown. In general, the species displays colouring that varies from light brown, dark brown, grey, bronze or brick red with the females often displaying a dark vertebral stripe and both males and females displaying occasional markings on the flanks.



Identification: Common Lizards.

Common lizards grow to around 16cm. They are grey brown to dark brown, often with a darker streak that may run the entire length of the spine. A continuous dark band bordered by light yellow or white spots is often seen on either side of the body. The underside of the males is egg yolk yellow to orange spotted with black. Females are yellowish grey.



When disturbed in their natural habitat reptiles will usually move away quickly.

Legislation.

Reptiles are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They received greater protection following reviews of the schedules published in 1988 and 1991. This means they are protected against intentional or recklessly killing and injuring and against sale or transporting for sale.

If reptiles are identified during works, stop all works and contact Whitcher Wildlife Ltd directly on 01226 753271 or at info@whitcher-wildlife.co.uk

Toolbox Talk: Hedgehog

Whitcher Wildlife Ltd

Ecological Consultants



The hedgehog was a common species once widespread throughout the country but suffered a major decline in the 20th Century due to loss of habitat. They are now found distributed across the UK, but the population increases to the south and east. Hedgehogs are therefore rare in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Identification: Hedgehog

The hedgehog is a small, spiny mammal around 20cm long with a long snout. The hedgehog's back and sides are covered in 25 mm (1") long spines. These are absent from the face, chest, belly, throat and legs which are covered with a coarse, grey-brown fur. Hedgehogs roam the countryside at night and can walk one to two miles while foraging.



Habitat

The hedgehog got its name because of its peculiar foraging habits. They root through hedges and other undergrowth in search of their favourite food – small creatures such as insects, worms, centipedes, snails, mice, frogs, and snakes. As it moves through the hedges it emits pig-like grunts — thus, the name hedgehog.



Legislation

The hedgehog is considered an endangered species, but it benefits only from general protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They are listed on schedule 6 of the Act which makes it illegal to kill or capture wild hedgehogs, with certain methods listed. They are also listed under the Wild Mammals Protection Act (1996), which prohibits cruel treatment of hedgehogs and they are a species of 'principal importance' under the NERC Act, which is meant to confer a 'duty of responsibility to public bodies'.

However, none of these deal with the issues that are a threat to the hedgehog. The main threat is the increasing loss of habitat, the increasing traffic on our roads and the increasing use of herbicides, in particular those used to kill garden slugs.

Hedgehog Hibernation.

Hedgehogs hibernate from October/November through to March/April although exact timings are dependent on the weather. However, hedgehogs will still move from one place to another during hibernation and therefore can be seen out and about during the winter. Hedgehogs hibernate under dense dead leaves and vegetation and this can cause another threat to them, the results of disturbance to their hibernacula. Many will seek shelter beneath piles of garden debris and are killed when such piles are set fire to.

Hedgehog Help.

We can help hedgehogs by:

- Leaving wild corners in our gardens.
- Leaving access gaps under garden fences.
- Leaving water bowls out during dry periods.
- Leaving cat food or dog food out at night
- Being careful when starting fires to ensure no hedgehogs are sleeping

If hedgehogs are identified during works, stop all works and contact Whitcher Wildlife Ltd directly on 01226 753271 or at info@whitcher-wildlife.co.uk