Brooks Ecological
Grounded advice

The Homestead, Hurst Knowle Almondbury

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report

Report Ref. ER-8178-01

29/01/2025

Highstone Building Services Ltd

Report reference	**ER-8178-01 – Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report**
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Report duration	In accordance with CIEEM (2019), unless otherwise stated the findings of this report remain valid for a period of 18 months. After this period advice should be sought on the scope of any updating work required.

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Summary

This report is produced to inform Highstone Building Services Ltd of potential ecological constraints associated with their proposed development site and the need for further reporting or output to support a planning application.

This report is based on a desk study of designated wildlife sites and records of protected or notable species, and an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey carried out in January 2025.

Key Findings

The Site encompasses a derelict former care home facility comprising a mix of man-made habitats, within the village of Almondbury. Existing trees and lines of trees within former landscaping areas and bordering the Site represent the features of greatest ecological value. These should be retained and protected, or suitably mitigated where this is not feasible.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Details on measurement of the Site's biodiversity and the implications of complying with the requirement to provide a net gain for biodiversity are provided in our separate report ER-8178-02.

Further surveys

Further surveys have been recommended to establish the presence or likely absence of roosting bats within the former care home building.

Introduction

1. Brooks Ecological Ltd was commissioned by Highstone Building Services Ltd to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of land at The Homestead, Hurst Knowle Almondbury, grid ref. SE172158. The survey includes land within the red line boundary shown in Figure 1, opposite, with a total area of 0.44ha.
2. This report is produced with reference to British Standard BS:42020 'Biodiversity Code of Practice for Planning and Development' and the CIEEM (2017) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

Purpose of a PEA

3. A PEA is an *initial assessment* of the baseline for a proposed development site and establishes whether the Site is likely to be constrained by ecology, and whether more information is needed to identify the ecological baseline.
4. The subsequent Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (PEAR) is intended to give guidance to a developer and assist with the early stages of project planning and design. Where a site is not complex or constrained, and no additional ecological input is necessary, the PEAR *may* be sufficient and suitable to support a planning application.
5. Biodiversity Accounting metrics are used separately to quantify the value of a Site in Biodiversity Units, which helps in the later stage of assessing the ecological impacts of the proposed development. This process is set out separately in the Biodiversity Gain Report which accompanies this PEAR.

Proposals/Reason for PEA

6. The PEA has been commissioned to inform proposals to redevelop the Site as a new dementia day care facility.

The Site

7. The application site 'the Site' encompasses a former care home for the elderly within the village of Almondbury. For the purposes of metric calculations, the Site area has been measured using GIS against the provided red line boundary as 0.44ha.

Figure 1 The Site (red line boundary).

Desk Study

Landscape

8. The site is located within a sub-urban centre, surrounded a mix of housing and public greenspace.
9. Small woodland blocks, enclosed by housing, provide a network of stepping stones through the local area; which will be of higher ecological value and likely facilitate the movement of

Wildlife Corridors

10. The Site does not form part of any landscape scale corridor.
11. The most significant potential corridors locally are small watercourses to the east and south. neither of which are connected to the Site.
12. Woodlands are likely to provide stepping stones for mobile groups such as birds and bats but again are not functionally linked to the Site.
13. The Site will offer some small-scale connectivity, with mature tree lines along the boundaries connecting to other tree cover in surrounding parks and greenspaces.

Figure 2 Analysis of wildlife corridors and structured habitat visible on mapping in relation to the Site.

Designations

14. The assessment uses a 2km area of search around the Site for records of protected and notable species and locally or nationally designated wildlife sites.

Statutory Designations

15. A search has been made to identify any nationally designated sites within a 2km radius of the Site, or internationally designated sites within a 10km radius. The results are shown in the below table.

Table 1 Statutory Designated Sites.

Site Name	Distance from Site	Designation	Summary Interest
Denby Grange Colliery Ponds	9.5km E	Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Designated for its Annex II species of great crested newt.

16. The Site is separated by an expanse of developed land. Direct and indirect impacts on this site as a result of this development are unlikely.

SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZs)

17. The Site lies within the IRZ for the Dark Peak and Denby Grange Colliery Ponds SSSIs but does not fall into any of the highlighted categories which require the LPA to consult with Natural England in relation to potential impacts.

Non-Statutory Designations

18. There are seven Local Wildlife Sites in the search area. However, direct and indirect impacts on all sites as a result of this development are unlikely due to the Site's separation and distance.

Nature Improvement Area

19. The Site is not within any Nature Improvement Area.

Wildlife Habitat Network

20. The Site is not within any mapped Wildlife Habitat Network.

Granted EPSM Licences

21. There are no granted European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licences shown within 1km of the Site.

Mapped Ancient Woodland and Trees

22. There is no mapped ancient woodland (AW) or Plantation on an Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) within 15m of the Site; the nearest being at Round Wood just over 800m to the north.

Mapped Priority Habitat

23. There is no mapped Priority Habitat within, or within influencing distance of the Site.

Redacted

Survey

24. The survey was carried out during January 2025[1] and followed the principles of Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC, 2010).

25. Although out of the main growing season, the nature of habitats present here, and the expertise and training of the surveyor meant that it was still possible to confidently classify the type and condition of habitats present on this Site.

26. Enough time was afforded the surveyor to carry out the survey. The survey was not constrained by poor weather.

27. Whilst the majority of the Site was accessible, at least 10% of the Site was inaccessible due to very dense vegetation, which could not be closely inspected. This could have concealed invasive species or protected species evidence.

Habitat Appraisal

28. The Site's habitats are described in order on the following pages. In line with the requirement to provide information on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), habitats are named in accordance with the UK Habitats classification system. We have used the UK Habitats v2.01 guidance in identifying habitats. Habitat descriptions are divided into the 'distinctiveness' categories used in the calculations presented in the Biodiversity Gain Assessment, with more weight being afforded the more distinctive/important habitats.

29. Generally, the following apply to each tier of distinctiveness, although some authorities might highlight some lower distinctiveness habitats as having a higher importance locally. Where relevant we have highlighted these.

Very Low Distinctiveness Habitats

30. Habitats of little or no habitat value, i.e., lacking any significant native vegetation, but could still provide supporting habitat for protected or notable fauna such as birds or bats. In the context of BNG, their areas are included in calculations, but mitigation or compensation is not required.

Low Distinctiveness Habitats

31. Habitats which are ubiquitous, often which have been created or modified intentionally. They tend to lack diversity of species and structure. They are unlikely to support notable flora but could still provide supporting habitat for protected or notable fauna. In the context of BNG, they are included in calculations, but compensation/mitigation needs only to provide habitat of similar or higher distinctiveness.

Medium Distinctiveness Habitats

32. Habitats which are common but provide a higher level of structural and species diversity. Though unlikely to support more notable assemblages, species of interest could be present here and they are more likely to be important supporting habitat to fauna. In the context of BNG, mitigation needs to provide habitat of the same broad habitat type, or that of higher distinctiveness.

High Distinctiveness Habitats

33. Habitats which are more natural and contain more important assemblages of plants and potentially species which are rare in their own right. They will provide good habitat for fauna. These habitats are likely to be targeted as conservation priorities and will be the subject of additional policy guidance or legislation. In the context of BNG, whilst mitigation or compensation for loss or damage is possible, provision of more of the same type of habitat would be required, which (with a few exceptions) is likely to be difficult.

Very High Distinctiveness Habitats

34. These are the UK's rarest/best habitats. They will be present in very particular locations and a range of rare or important plant and animal species will depend on the particular conditions they provide. These habitats will be the subject of restrictive policy guidance or legislation. Whilst the BNG metric does not preclude mitigation or compensation in respect of these habitats, creation of the same habitat type would be required, and this would range between very difficult/expensive and impossible.

Irreplaceable Habitats

35. These are habitats of high biodiversity value, which are so difficult to recreate that it would be impossible to achieve the requirement to increase biodiversity on top of no net loss. These habitats have significant protection in the NPPF; any impacts from development require a strong justification and will flag as unacceptable in the Biodiversity Metric. Bespoke compensation for any loss of these habitats must be agreed with the LPA.

Each habitat is mapped and an area for each type is provided in the format of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool. The areas can be used to quantify the impacts of development in an Ecological Impact Assessment if this is required by the Local Planning Authority..

[1] This Report has been prepared during January 2025 following a visit to the Site in January 2025, and our findings are based on the conditions of the Site that were reasonably visible and accessible at that date. We accept no liability for any areas that were not reasonably visible or accessible, nor for any subsequent alteration, variation, or deviation from the Site conditions which affect the conclusions set out in this report.

Habitats of Low/Very Low Distinctiveness

Figure 4 Approximate location and extent of these habitats.

Table 2 Summary – Habitats of Low/Very Low Distinctiveness.

UK Habitats	Summary Description
Developed land; sealed surface	The site is a former elderly care home facility, which has been vacant for several years. Hardstanding areas encompass the care home building and associated parking, service yard and footpaths. These remain largely unvegetated.
Modified Grassland	Former amenity lawns are present throughout the site, which until recently have been intensively mown. The lawns are dominated by perennial rye grass, with smaller components of red fescue, common bent and cock's-foot. Forbs are poorly represented within the sward, with only small amounts of ribwort plantain and dandelion noted. A single patch of common sorrel was also recorded in one area and wood avens was found beneath some of the trees. An average of 3-4 spp./m² was recorded through quadrats.
Introduced shrubs	Ornamental shrub beds are noted along the western boundary, and within the southern half of the Site, surrounding paved footpaths and seating areas. These comprise typical exotic species, such as cotoneaster spp., forsythia, euonymus, flowering currant, hypericum, snowberry, rose and spirea, as well as self-seeded scrub, such as bramble, holly, elder and ash saplings.

Habitats of Low Distinctiveness

Figure 5 Sealed surface – former car park

Figure 6 Derelict building

Figure 7 Former amenity lawns

Figure 8 Former amenity lawns

Figure 9 Former soft landscaping

Figure 10 Former soft landscaping

Habitats of Medium Distinctiveness

Figure 11 Approximate location and extent of these habitats.

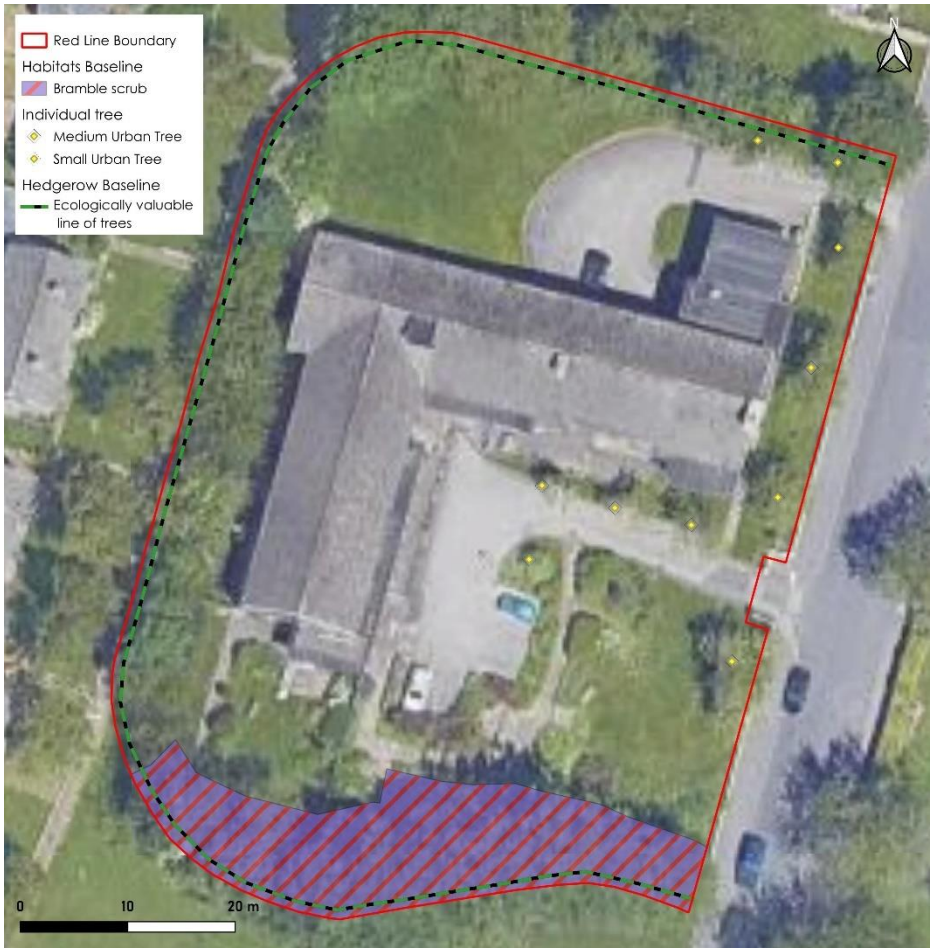

Table 3 Summary of Medium Distinctiveness habitats.

UK Habitats	Summary Description
Bramble scrub	A block of low-growing bramble scrub is present along the southern boundary, growing within the shade of a mature line of trees.
Individual trees (Urban)	Ten individual trees have been planted within the site, within former lawns. Except for a single weeping goat willow, all these trees are semi-mature to mature ornamental cherries. These range in size from small to medium.
Line of Trees (Ecologically valuable)	A line of mature trees is present around the full length of the north, west and south boundaries. These comprise primarily of beech and cherry, with the occasional ash.

Habitats of Medium Distinctiveness

Figure 12 Bramble scrub

Figure 13 Bramble scrub

Figure 14 Individual trees

Figure 15 Individual trees

Figure 16 Line of trees

Figure 17 Line of trees

Faunal Appraisal

36. The following pages discuss only the groups and species that could be reasonably expected to be found on the type of habitats present on, or adjacent to, the Site.

Amphibians

Desk evidence

37. Records have been returned for common frog and great crested newt (GCN) within the 2km search area. A total of 46 records were returned for GCN. The closest, and most recent, was recorded in 2017 and located 1.8km northeast of the Site.

Field Evidence

38. There are no ponds on Site, and none are shown on mapping within a 500m radius. As such, there is no potential breeding habitat within the zone of influence.

39. The areas of bramble scrub and introduced shrubs provide suitable terrestrial habitat for this group, however, these are relatively small in extent and poorly connected to other areas of suitable habitat locally.

Summary Evaluation

40. Based on the absence of potential breeding habitat and the paucity of suitable terrestrial habitat, the risk of GCN being present on Site is considered to be very low.

Further Surveys and Recommendations

41. No further surveys or precautions are considered necessary.

Bats

Desk evidence

42. There are 65 records of bats returned within the search area, of these 16 relate to confirmed roosts which include indeterminate vesper species. The closest and most recent was recorded in 2023 and located 280m west of the Site.

Field Evidence (Roosting)

43. A single large building is present on Site: The Homestead. This is of two-storey brick construction, with cavity walls and a series of double pitch roofs covered in concrete tiles. Soffit boxes enclose the eaves and verges and are generally well sealed. Only a few areas of damage are noted, either where services have been installed or where weather damage is present. Masonry is likewise in good condition, with only a few incidents of damage noted.

44. The roof is in generally good condition; however, several areas of damage are noted where roof and ridge tiles are broken or missing. These provide access to the roof structure and loft space and are assessed as being of Low Suitability.

45. A ground-based assessment of all onsite trees found no potential roost features.

Field Evidence (foraging and commuting)

46. The Site presents a relatively small and isolated parcel of land within an urban setting. Mature trees bordering the Site are likely to attract low level foraging and commuting by local bat populations, namely pipistrelle. However, this group is not likely to be dependant on the Site.

Summary Evaluation

47. The former care home building has been assessed as having Low bat roost suitability.

48. The Site's size and location suggest that it will not be important to this group for foraging or commuting activity.

Further Surveys and Recommendations

49. Further survey is recommended on the former care home building, to assess the status of roosting bats. This should take the form of a single evening emergence survey between May and August.

Bat Roost Suitability Assessment

Figure 18 Typical view of the building

Figure 19 Typical view of the building

Figure 20 Typical view of the building

Figure 21 Damaged/ missing roof tiles

Figure 22 Damaged / missing ridge tiles

Figure 23 Typical view of the building

Birds

Desk Evidence

50. An extensive list of bird species has been returned within the search area. Species of note include, brambling, bullfinch, collard dove, cuckoo, dunnock, fieldfare, goldfinch, greenfinch, grey wagtail, house sparrow, kestrel, lapwing, lesser spotted woodpecker, mistle thrush, redwing, skylark, song thrush, starling, swallow, swift, tree sparrow, wood pigeon and wren.

Field Evidence

51. A small number of common bird species were noted during the survey including blackbird, robin and wood pigeon.

Summary Evaluation

52. A small number of territories could be expected on Site during the main nesting period, with common garden birds nesting in structured habitats (trees, scrub and shrubs) and buildings. However, based on its size and habitats present, the Site will not be important to local bird populations.

Further Surveys and Recommendations

53. No further surveys are considered necessary to demonstrate current baseline in respect of birds.

54. Standard precautions apply in respect of restrictions on clearing vegetation during the nesting season.

Badgers

Desk evidence

55. There are no records of badgers in the area.

Field Evidence

56. No evidence of badger activity was found on Site.

Summary Evaluation

57. Given the Sites urban setting, together with the absence of records and lack of field signs, the risk of badgers being present on Site is considered to be very low.

Further Surveys and Recommendations

58. No further surveys are considered necessary to demonstrate current baseline in respect of badgers. Standard precautions are recommended during site clearance.

Hedgehogs (NERC Act 2006/Local BAP)

Desk evidence

59. Hedgehogs are recorded within the search area.

Field Evidence

60. No evidence of hedgehog activity was found on site during the walkover, however the survey was completed at the sub-optimal time of year for this species.

Summary Evaluation

61. The Site provides suitable habitat for this species and at least occasional presence should be assumed.

Further Surveys and Recommendations

62. Presence assumed; no further surveys are considered necessary however measures to allow them continued access to gardens should be planned for.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

63. INNS are species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), for which it is an offence to cause or allow it to grow in the wild.

64. The following INNS were noted during survey[2]:

    - *Cotoneaster* spp.

65. Several species of *Cotoneaster* have been identified within former soft landscaping beds.

Survey constraints

66. This survey is constrained by the presence of areas that were inaccessible due to the density of vegetation.

67. Although no INNS have been identified in this preliminary survey, it is not always possible to conclude absence from preliminary survey alone due to factors such as season, accessibility, third-party attempts to hide evidence, or undisclosed treatment programmes. For this reason, this report should not be relied upon as definitive evidence of absence of INNS.

68. This site presents a small risk of supporting undetected INNS based on the following factors:

    - Proximity to nearby potential sources of infection
    - Potential for tipping of material

69. Should further assurances be needed in relations to INNS, a dedicated Invasive Weed Survey should be commissioned.

[2] Whilst our ecologists are trained in the identification of invasive species, this report is not a dedicated invasive species survey. Detectability of invasive plant species can be affected by several factors, and conclusive determination status, or extent, is not possible through preliminary survey alone. As the presence of invasive species can generate significant costs to development, the client may wish to instruct a dedicated invasive species survey prior to entering into contracts.

Ecological Constraints & Opportunities

Habitat Value

70. The usual approach to development is to minimise any net loss of biodiversity towards a gain in biodiversity value where this is possible on-Site. Our separate report on Biodiversity Gain sets out the position of the Site in terms of measured biodiversity.

71. Irrespective of the Biodiversity Gain process, development should still seek to retain what is best about the Site.

72. The plan opposite shows the Site in the context of mapped habitat distinctiveness (as assessed at the time of the survey) with the aim of informing the design of any layout. Individual trees within the Site and mature trees lining the boundary represent the features of greatest ecological value; these should be retained and protected, with any losses being suitability mitigated. In terms of structure and connectivity, the line of trees will also contribute to the local treescape.

73. Bramble scrub is medium distinctiveness habitat, which within realms of BNG should be retained, protected and enhanced. This could be planted up with native woody species to create 'Mixed scrub' in moderate condition.

Faunal constraints

74. Bat emergence survey of the former care facility building is recommended.

Opportunities

75. Ecological opportunities at the Site relate to:

    - Incorporate native planting within new landscaping
    - Installing roosting or nesting features on new buildings and existing mature trees.

76. A Biodiversity Management Plan would be useful in defining these enhancements and can be secured by standard condition.

Figure 24 Habitat distinctiveness.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Planning considerations		
Recommendation	**Rationale**	**When**
R1 Additional Surveys	Bat emergence survey	May to August, inclusive.
R2 Produce a layout which minimises loss of biodiversity	Engage with the Constraints and Opportunities set out above, involve your ecologist in designs at an early stage. The proposals will need to consider the NPPF hierarchy of Avoid–Mitigate–Compensate in minimising any loss of biodiversity. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) policy mandates a minimum 10% Net Gain in Biodiversity Units, and the LPA may request additional gains. Your layout may need to change to accommodate your findings from R1 surveys.	During the design process
R3 Design	Make sure your design team follows ecological advice to and make sure there are no design conflicts. Produce a habitat retention plan at an early stage which can be used to inform BNG and maximise scores. A habitat retention plan should identify areas which can be excluded from any impacts of clearance and construction. In producing a plan you should consider the need to provide (amongst other things) Site compounds, to store and move materials, to install drainage, flood storage, access and services, all with suitable easements. Decide on the extent of red-line vs blue/black-line land. Minimising the extent of your red line can limit exposure to BNG, but can also leave you needing separate legal agreements to use off-Site land for BNG delivery. Work out at an early stage what is right for your project. Your planning consultant should be able to help with this decision.	During the design process
R4 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	Carry out a BNG Assessment using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool and accompanying Condition sheets produced by Defra. It is important that the baseline survey is undertaken during the appropriate season for the habitat type being assessed, so as to ensure the accuracy of habitat mapping and calculating condition scores. Where an initial survey is undertaken at a sub-optimal time of year, it is recommended that updating surveys be carried out during the optimal season for that habitat, prior to the BNG assessment being finalised. Failure to do this could mean that the finial Biodiversity score calculated for a project is incorrect, which could then impact on any financial contribution that has been budgeted for to address Biodiversity Offsetting.	During the design process. Baseline survey to be completed during the appropriate season.
R5 Produce a Biodiversity Management Plan	To specify in detail how the development will cater for biodiversity on-Site and to show how habitats incorporated will be managed.	Delivery report Suitable for planning condition
R6 Produce a CEMP (Biodiversity)	To show how the site will be built without affecting surrounding habitats and minimising risk of affecting protected or notable fauna. The CEMP will detail the following protection measures: • Location of Biodiversity Protection zones or fences • Dealing with known or discovered invasive species • Pre- or during- clearance ecology checks for protected species. • Protected/notable species method statements where licensing in not needed. • Nesting bird management	Delivery report Suitable for planning condition

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Appendix 1 Habitats and Ecological Features

Appendix 2 List of species recorded

Common Name	Scientific Name
Annual meadow grass	*Poa annua*
Ash	*Fraxinus excelsior*
Beech	*Fagus sylvatica*
Bent	*Agrostis sp.*
Brachythecium rutabulum	*Brachythecium rutabulum*
Bramble	*Rubus fruticosus*
Butterfly bush/buddleia	*Buddleia davidii*
Cherry	*Prunus sp.*
Cleavers	*Galium aparine*
Cock's-foot	*Dactylis glomerata*
Common bent	*Agrostis capillaris*
Common ivy	*Hedera helix*
Common moss	*Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*
Common sorrel	*Rumex acetosa*
Cotoneaster	*Cotoneaster spp.*
Dandelion	*Taraxacum officinale agg.*
Elder	*Sambucus nigra*
Fescues	*Festuca spp.*
Flowering currant	*Ribes sanguineum*
Forsythia	*Forsythia × intermedia*
Goat willow	*Salix caprea*
Hebe	*Hebe sp.*
Holly	*Ilex aquifolium*
Honeysuckle	*Lonicera sp.*
Lawson's cypress	*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*
Nettle	*Urtica dioica*
Perennial rye grass	*Lolium perenne*
Rat's tail/ greater plantain	*Plantago major*
Red fescue	*Festuca rubra agg.*
Ribwort plantain	*Plantago lanceolata*
Rose	*Rosa sp.*
Snowberry	*Symphoricarpos albus*
Spirea	*Spirea sp.*
White clover	*Trifolium repens*
Willowherbs	*Epilobium sp.*
Wood avens	*Geum urbanum*
Yorkshire fog	*Holcus lanatus*

Appendix 3 Explanatory Notes and Resources Used

Site Context

Aerial photographs published on commonly used websites were studied to place the site in its wider context and to look for ecological features that would not be evident on the ground during the walkover survey. This approach can be very useful in determining if a site is potentially a key part of a wider wildlife corridor or an important node of habitat in an otherwise ecologically poor landscape. It can also identify potentially important faunal habitat (in particular ponds) which could have a bearing on the ecology of the application site. Ponds may sometimes not be apparent on aerial photographs so we also refer to close detailed maps that identify all ponds issues and drains.

Designated Sites

A search of the MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside) website was undertaken. The MAGIC site is a Geographical Information System that contains all statutory (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest [SSSIs]) as well as many non-statutory listed habitats (e.g. ancient woodlands and grassland inventory sites). It is a valuable tool when considering the relationship of a potential development site with nearby important habitats. In addition, information from the local record holders was referred to on locally designated sites.

Functional linkage with off-Site habitats

When assessing these we consider whether the Site could be functionally linked to them, considering links such as:

- Hydrological links – is the Site upstream downstream, or could ground water issues affect it?
- Physical links – is the site in close proximity and could it be directly or indirectly affected by construction and operational effects? Conversely it may be that despite proximity major barriers separate the two.
- Recreational links – do footpaths and roads make it likely that increased recreational pressure could be felt?
- Habitat links – is the site part of a network of similar habitat types in the wider area? These could be joined by linear corridors or could simply be 'stepping stones' of habitat of similar form or function.

Method

Phase 1 habitat survey methodology (JNCC, 2010). This involves walking the site, mapping and describing different habitats (for example: woodland, grassland, scrub). The survey method was "Extended" in that evidence of fauna and faunal habitat was also recorded (for example droppings, tracks or specialist habitat such as ponds for breeding amphibians). This modified approach to the Phase 1 survey is in accordance with the approach recommended by the Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment (IEA, 1995) and Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (CIEEM 2017).

Faunal Appraisal

This section first looks at the types of habitat found on Site or within the sphere of influence of potential development, then considers whether these could support protected, scarce, or NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species (referred to collectively as 'notable species').

Records of notable species supplied from a 2km area of search by WYE are used to inform this appraisal.

We discuss further only notable species or groups which could be a potential constraint due to the presence of suitable habitat and their presence (or potential presence) in the wider area. We screen out and do not present accounts of notable species or groups which do not meet these criteria – in some cases it may be necessary to explain this reasoning.

Consideration is given to the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), which for this site is the 'Kirklees Biodiversity Action Plan'.

Species/group	Habitat
Floating water plantain	Semi-natural pasture
Great crested newt	Lowland and upland meadows
Marsh helleborine	Lowland dry acid grassland
Northern wood ant	Blanket bog
Twite	Upland heathland
Water vole	Upland flushes
White clawed crayfish	Lowland heathland
	Upland oak woodland
	Lowland deciduous and other woodlands
	Upland mixed ashwoods
	Wet woodland
	Arable field margins
	Hedgerows
	Rivers, riverine corridors and associated habitats
	Reedbeds
	Scrub and habitat mosaics on previously developed land

Bats

Bat roosting potential is classified according to the following criteria set out below, taken from the Bat Conservation Trust Good Practice Guidelines (2023).

Bat Roosting Suitability of Buildings

Suitability	Criteria
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices/suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).
Negligible	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically at any time of the year. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity and not a classic cool/stable hibernation site, but could be used by individual hibernating bats).
Moderate	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only, such as maternity and hibernation – the categorisation described in this table is made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).
High	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat. These structures have the potential to support high conservation status roosts, e.g. maternity or classic cool/stable hibernation site.

Bat Roosting Suitability of Trees

Suitability	Criteria
None	Either no PRFs in the tree, or highly unlikely to be any.
FAR	Further assessment required to establish if PRFs are present within the tree.
PRF-I	Potential roost feature suitable to support individual or low numbers of bats
PRF-M	Potential roost feature suitable to support multiple bats and possibly be used by a maternity colony

Evaluation

In evaluating the Site, the ecologist will take into account a number of factors in combination, such as:

- the baseline presented above,
- the Site's position in the local landscape,
- its current management and
- its size, rarity or threats to its integrity.

There are a number of tools available to aid this consideration, including established frameworks such as Ratcliffe Criteria or concepts such as Favourable Conservation Status. Also of help is reference to Biodiversity Action Plans in the form of the Local BAP and Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006) to determine if the Site supports any Priority habitats or presents any opportunities in this respect.

The assessment of impacts considers the generic development proposals from which potential effects include:

- Vegetation and habitat removal
- Direct effects on significant faunal groups or protected species
- Effects on adjacent habitats or species such as disturbance, pollution and severance
- Operation effects on wildlife such as noise and light disturbance

Appendix 4 Bat Activity Survey Rationale

The Bat Conservation Trust Guidelines (BCTG) (Collins 2023) is now widely accepted as providing a basis and rationale for scoping and conducting bat surveys. It is acknowledged that the guidelines provide a wealth of background and are a very useful tool in standardising approaches to survey, it is also felt that an over reliance on some of the guidelines within this document can result in the provision of complicated surveys where they have significant consequences for the cost, or timescale of a large project, but could never deliver positives for bat conservation.

Taking the BCTG document as a whole, Chapter 2 helps the reader understand whether or not surveys are required, and that in the context of planning and development survey is required in relation to ensure;

- the avoidance of legal offences, and;
- the provision of a sufficient level of information – such that will allow the Local Planning Authority to make an informed decision on the proposals and their potential impacts on the Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) of bats.

Attendance at seminars presented by, and discussions with, those involved in production of the BCTG document has emphasised the point that it is within the remit of the consultant ecologist to make a decision on the necessity and scope of surveys – they will use the guidelines in doing so but are not in any way bound by them: this is reflected in Section 1.1 of the guidelines –

'The Guidelines do not aim to either override of replace knowledge and experience. It is accepted that departures from the guidelines (e.g. either decreasing or increasing the number of surveys carried out or using alternative methods) are often appropriate. However, in this scenario an ecologist should provide documentary evidence of (a) their expertise in making this judgement and (b) the ecological rationale behind the judgement. '

Such decisions require a consideration of the potential of the project to impact on bat habitat, alongside analysis of the value of habitat on and around the site and of local records and the likelihood that bats might occur in significant numbers. Our reports aim to present information on how we have arrived at our decision on the Site, what assumptions we have based this on, and where further survey is recommended we indicate what the objective of this survey should be and how best this would be achieved.

The Site is small, not strategically located and does not contain any potential key habitat features for bats, its use by this group can be easily predicted making any requirement for additional survey disproportionate.

This assessment was made by Surveys were directed by Christopher Shaw BSc (Hons) MCIEEM. Chris has over 13 years' experience of carrying out bat surveys in a professional capacity and is registered to use the Class Survey Licence WML CL18 (Bat Survey Level 2) and Bat Mitigation Class Licence WML CL21 Annex B.

Appendix 5 Wildlife Legislation, Policy and Guidance

This is not an exhaustive list but sets out briefly the relevance of Legislation, Policy and Guidance in terms of planning applications and this assessment.

Legislation

Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EC Habitats Directive).

Provides framework at an international (EU) level for the consideration/protection of European Protected Species (EPS), and habitats through the designation of sites.

Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of wild birds (EC Birds Directive) and The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (1971)

Provides framework at an international (EU) level for the consideration/protection of important bird populations and the sites on which they are dependant.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010)

This transposes the EC Habitats Directive into UK law and provides the basis on which all EPS are protected and impacts on them can be licensed in the UK.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended

This provides the basis on which UK species are legally protected or restricted and confers protection on Sites of Special Scientific Interest SSSIs. It contains annexes of plants and animals which are legally protected as well as those which are considered to be invasive or harmful. It provides the basis on which impacts on such species can be licensed in the UK and provides controls on work on or near SSSIs.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW)

Provides a statutory basis for nature conservation, strengthens the protection of SSSIs and UK protected species and requires the consideration of habitats and species listed on the UK and Local Biodiversity Action Plans (UKBAP/LBAP).

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC)

Sets out the responsibilities of Local Authorities in conserving biodiversity. Section 41 of the Act requires the publishing of lists of habitats and species which are "of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity". At present these largely reflect those making up the UKBAP lists.

Hedgerows Regulations (1997)

Define and provide protection for Important Hedgerows.

Protection of Badgers Act (1992)

Protects badgers from persecution, this includes excavation/development in the proximity of setts.

Protected Sites

Statutory EU/International Protected Sites

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar Sites contain examples of some of the most important natural ecosystems in Europe. Work on or near these sites is strictly protected and Local Authorities will be expected to carry out 'Appropriate Assessment' of development in proximity of them. In this case there is often an increased burden on the developer in relation to provision of information and assessment.

Statutory UK Protected Sites

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs); National Nature Reserves (NNRs); Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) all receive strict protection under UK legislation. Work in or in proximity to these sites would be restricted with any needing to be agreed with Natural England. Natural England now provide guidance on the nature of development which could impact on SSSIs through Impact Risk Zones.

Locally Protected Sites

Local Authorities have a variety of protected wildlife sites designated at a local or regional level. These are gradually being brought under the banner of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) but at present a plethora of different designations exist – all subject to local policy.

Protected Species

European Protected Species

A number of species (most relevantly bats, great crested newts [GCN], and otters) receive strict protection from killing, injury and disturbance under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010). Protection is also conferred on the habitats on which they rely such as roost space in the case of bats and ponds and fields etc. in the case of GCN.

UK Protected Species

A number of species (including bats, GCN, watervole and white clawed crayfish) are strictly protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended, from killing, injury, disturbance and damage or destruction of their resting places etc. Certain species (such as reptiles) and some birds (such as barn owl) receive partial protection e.g. at certain times of the year or form certain activities only. All nesting bird species are protected from damage or destruction of their nests – whilst active.

Invasive species

Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended,

Lists these species and makes it an offence to cause or allow their spread in the wild. This often has impacts on development and planning in relation to the presence of invasive plant species such as: Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera),* Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*), and giant hogweed *(Heracleum mantegazzianum*).

Planning Policy/Guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework was updated in December 2023. The most relevant paragraphs from the NPPF are set out below.

The approach to assessing the natural environment is now embedded within the definition of what 'sustainable development' is and this falls under one of three objectives of the planning system – the 'environmental objective' applying in this case. Paragraph 8c (P8c) of the NPPF states that sustainable development should "protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment", including "improving biodiversity". P10 sets out the Framework's presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Section 11 of the NPPF details making effective use of land. The Framework states that planning policies and decisions should "take opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation" and should "recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife" (P124).

Section 15 details conserving and enhancing the natural environment; policies and decisions should be "protecting and enhancing valued landscape [and] sites of biodiversity […] value", "recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside" and contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution (P180). Allocations of land for development should, "allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework" and "take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats" (P181).

The Framework sets out ways to minimise the impacts on biodiversity through plans which "identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity" and promote the "conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity" (P185).

It is made clear in P186 that local planning authorities should apply a set of principles when determining planning applications. Planning permission should be refused "if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from development cannot be avoided […], adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for". Development should not normally be permitted where an adverse effect on a SSSI is likely, and "opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity".

UK Biodiversity Indicators 2023; update to Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services

The UK Biodiversity Indicators 2023 provide updates to the indicators set out in Biodiversity 2020 including new species abundance targets as set out in the Environment Act 2021. Biodiversity 2020 builds on the Natural Environment White Paper (June 2011) – Setting out the current UK Government's approach to nature conservation. It promotes a more coherent and inclusive approach to conservation and the valuing in economic and social terms of economic resources.

The strategy promotes initiatives such as Biodiversity Offsetting, Nature Improvement Areas and a focus on well-connected natural networks and introduces the concept of securing a 'no net loss' situation with regard to UKBAP/Section 41 habitats and species.

ODPM circular 06/05 (2005) Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and Their Impact Within the Planning System
Provides guidance to Local Authorities on their obligations to biodiversity – particularly in relation to assessing planning applications and ensuring the adequacy of information.

BSI (2013) British Standards Institute BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity – Code of Practice for Planning and Development

Provides a standard for the biodiversity assessment and development industries and decision makers such as Local Planning Authorities to work to.