

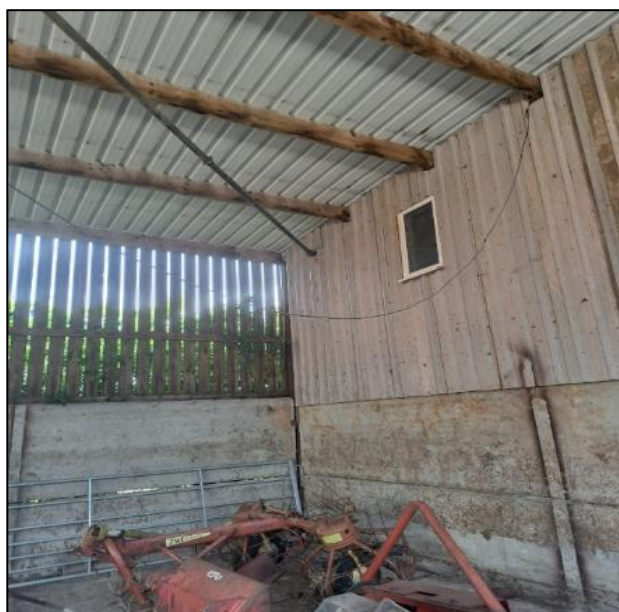


THREE SHIRES LTD
ECOLOGY, FENCING, ARBORICULTURE, INVASIVE WEEDS

Piper Hole Farm
Eastwell Road
Scalford
Leicestershire
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Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

July 2024



Pretty Oak Farm, Stoke Golding

Adam Wykes



Report for:

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c/o HSSP Architects

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Non-Technical Summary

On 6 June 2024, Three Shires undertook a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of an area of land located at Pretty Oak Farm, Stoke Golding, Leicestershire for HSSP Architects Ltd on behalf of the homeowner. The survey also included a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA). The proposed works consist of a class Q barn conversion on the existing barn complex into dwellings.

The survey area was 0.027ha, consisting of two barns directly attached to each other, a block of kennels and stables along with a storage container. Located just off-Site to the north was a hedgerow.

There was one Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Kendall's Meadow located 0.94km to the northeast and the Ashby de la Zouch Canal, lies within 500m. However, the proposed works are not expected to impact on the SSSI or canal due to a lack of connectivity and the small-scale nature of the proposed works.

The class Q conversion is restricted to the same size footprint and so there will be no loss of high-quality habitats.

The buildings were assessed to have negligible potential for roosting bats with no evidence of bats found and therefore no further surveys are required.

The barn demolition should take place outside the bird nesting season (March-August).

Table 1: Overview of Required Mitigation for each Ecological Receptor

Factor	Present	Within 2km	Recommendation(s)
Sites of Nature Conservation			
Statutory Site	No	Yes	No action recommended as the SSSI is isolated from the Site by a road with no connectivity. The small-scale nature of the works is not anticipated to have any direct or indirect impacts on the SSSI.
Habitat			
Hedgerows	No	Yes	The off-Site hedgerow directly adjacent to the Barn should only require minimal trimming.
Waterbodies	No	Yes	No action recommended due to barriers and scale of proposed works.
Protected and Notable Species			
Bats	Unlikely	Record for EPS licence dated 2014	No further surveys required
Nesting Birds	Assumed	-	Barn demolition and hedge trim recommended to occur outside nesting season
Great crested newt	Unlikely	-	No action required

Factor	Present	Within 2km	Recommendation(s)
Widespread Amphibians	Unlikely	-	No action required
Other Mammals	Assumed	-	No action required

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Three Shires Ltd was commissioned by HSSP Architects on behalf of the property owner (Adam Wykes), to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) of a barn complex located on Pretty Oak Farm, near Stoke Golding, Leicestershire, hereafter referred to as 'The Site'. This report is to support a planning application for a class Q barn conversion on the existing barn complex.

1.2 Purpose of this Report

The aim of this report is to provide an assessment of the current biodiversity value of the Site, highlight any other ecological features that have the potential to be impacted by the proposed development, and inform the design of the proposed development. The report follows the good practise guidance and follows the principles of the mitigation hierarchy and British Standard (BS) 42020 2013.

Additionally, the site was assessed to establish whether or not it met the de-minimis exemption under 'The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024'¹. As there is no on-site priority habitat present, with the only habitat present being buildings and hardstanding, the Site meets the de-minimis exemption under The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024.

1.3 Site Location and Context

The Site is small, covering 0.027ha, with the approximate centre at National Grid Reference (NGR) SP 38737 97214 (**Figure 1**).

The Site is located within a farm with a second barn located opposite to the south with pasture fields beyond this. A paddock is present to the east and a private road to the west. To the north of the Site is a hedgerow that runs parallel with Upton Road, oriented in an east-west direction. The village of Stoke Golding is approximately 1km to the east of the Site.

The wider landscape (**Figure 2**) is dominated by pastoral land divided by hedgerows to the north and south with patches of arable land located to the west. There are multiple fishing ponds located to the northeast and the Ashby de la Zouch Canal located 457m to the east. The former RAF Lindley station is located approximately 0.8km southwest of the Site. There is also a strip of deciduous woodland located 0.7km southwest and lowland meadows located 0.4km to the southeast.

1.4 Project Overview

The proposed works are expected to remain within the existing footprint of the barn and include:

- Demolition of the existing barn complex;
- Creation of up to three separate dwellings; and
- Trimming the hedgerow.

¹ The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 (legislation.gov.uk)

Figure 1: Site Location

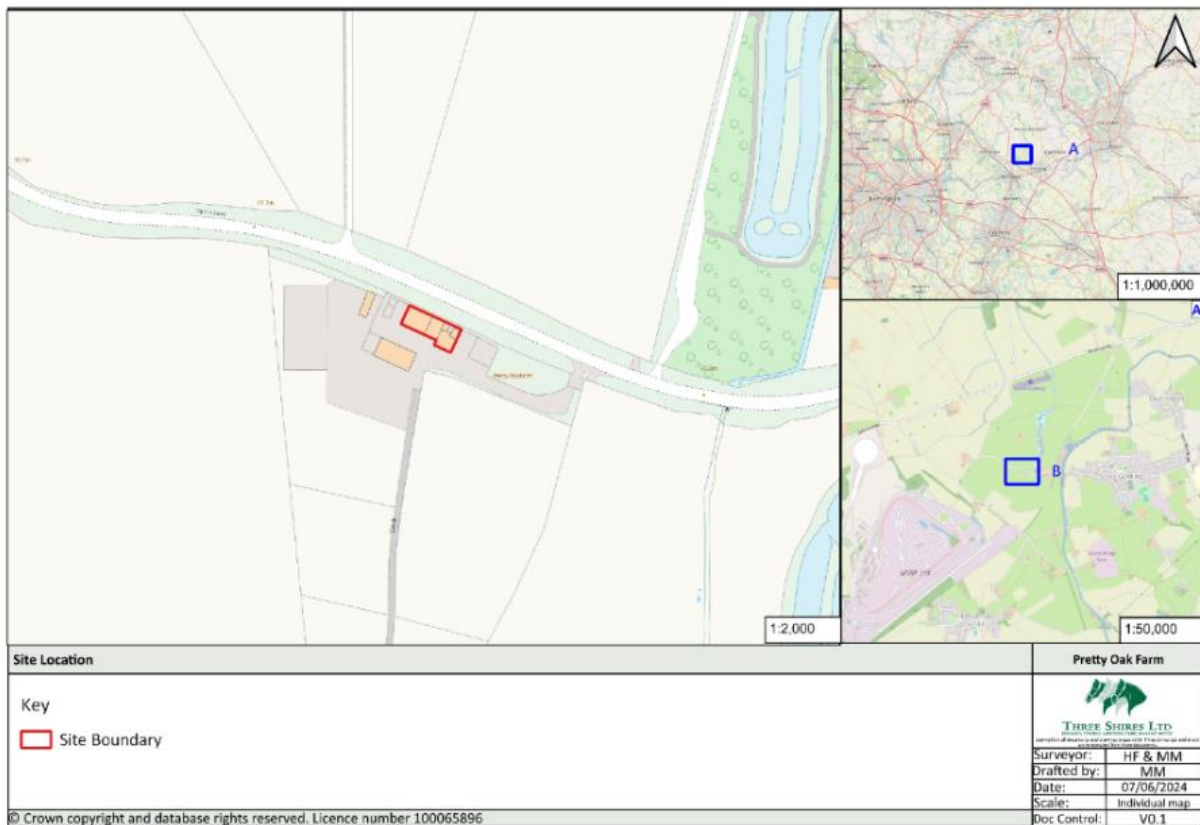


Figure 2: Site Landscape Context



2.0 Relevant Legislation and Local Policy

Relevant legislation and National Planning Policies applicable to the Site can be found in **Appendix A**.

2.1 Local Planning Policies

The Local Plan for the Hinckley and Bosworth area is currently being updated for the period of 2020 – 2041.

Currently, the local plan is set out within the Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy 2006-2026 (adopted 2009)².

“Spatial Objective 10: Natural Environment and Cultural Assets

To deliver a linked network of green infrastructure, enhancing and protecting the borough’s distinctive landscapes, woodlands, geology, archaeological heritage and biodiversity and encourage its understanding, appreciation, maintenance and development”.

Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan 2020-2039³ (Consultation | Draft Plan 2021), although this is not yet an adopted Local Plan, the information within the document provides significant weight for this assessment.

“NAT07 Protecting Biodiversity

Internationally and Nationally Designated Sites

International and Nationally Designated Sites will be safeguarded. Development which is likely to have any adverse impact on the notified features of a nationally designated site will not normally be permitted. In exceptional circumstances, a proposal may be found acceptable where it can be demonstrated that:

- a) A suitable alternative site with a lesser impact than that proposed is not available;*
- b) The on-site benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the impacts on the notified features of the site and where applicable, the overall SSSI or habitat network;*
- c) All appropriate mitigation measures have been addressed through the development management process; and*
- d) Development likely to result in a significant effect on internationally designated sites will be subject to assessment under the Habitats Regulations and will not be permitted unless adverse effects can be fully avoided, mitigated and/or compensated.*

Development proposals should not have an adverse impact on the River Mease Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Where a significant effect on the SAC is identified an ‘Appropriate Assessment’ will be required.

Irreplaceable Habitats

Proposals which are likely to result in the loss or deterioration of an irreplaceable habitat (such as ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees, old species-rich grassland, including that marked by ridge and furrow, and species-rich hedgerows Page 180 of 249 Locally Important Sites that meet Hedgerow Regulations ecological criteria) would only be acceptable where:

² Core Strategy | Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk)

³ Local Plan 2020 - 2041 | Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk)

- e) *The need and benefits of the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss;*
- f) *It has been adequately demonstrated that the irreplaceable habitat cannot be retained with the proposed scheme; and*
- g) *Appropriate compensation measures are provided on site wherever possible and off site where this is not feasible.*

Locally Important Sites

Development proposals affecting locally important sites should always seek to contribute to their favourable management in the long term.

Where a proposal is likely to result in harm to locally important sites (including habitats or species of principal importance for biodiversity, and sites that meet the Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland criteria for designation as a Local Wildlife Site), developers will be required to accord with the following sequential approach:

- h) *Firstly, seek an alternative site with a lesser impact than that proposed;*
- i) *Secondly, and if the first is not possible, demonstrate mitigation measures can be taken on site;*
- j) *Thirdly, and as a last resort, seek appropriate compensation measures, on site wherever possible and off site where this is not feasible.*

NAT08 Enhancing Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity

Development proposals must demonstrate how they conserve and enhance features of nature conservation and geological value including proposals for their long-term future management and how the scheme is pollinator friendly.

All development should provide a measurable 10% net gain in biodiversity on site in the first instance, through biodiversity enhancement off-site, or through off setting where appropriate. All proposals should be supported by evidence to demonstrate a biodiversity net gain using the recognised biodiversity accounting metric and provide details of the long-term maintenance and management of the net gain.

Major developments in particular must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to:

- a) *Restore and enhance existing features on site;*
- b) *Create additional habitats and ecological networks; and*
- c) *The linking of existing habitats to create links between ecological networks and where possible, with adjoining features.*

Biodiversity net gain should be additional to any habitat creation required to mitigate or compensate for impacts on protected local/national BAP priority species. Net Gain can be delivered where there are no losses through development.

Proposals where the primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity or geological interest will be permitted where they comply with other relevant policies in the Plan.

The retention and enhancement of linear features which enables strong connectivity of biodiversity as part of an integrated habitat network will be supported; this includes networks of hedgerows and ditches; enhanced habitats along the River Sence and Ashby Canal; roadside verges; and (cumulatively) private gardens, disused railway lines or other linear landscape features.

On site features should be retained, buffered and managed favourably to maintain their ecological value, connectivity and functionality in the long-term. The removal or damage of such features shall only be acceptable where it can be demonstrated the proposal will result in no net loss of biodiversity and where the integrity of the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites identified in Policy NAT07 is secured.

If the harm cannot be prevented, adequately mitigated against or appropriate compensation measures provided, planning permission will be refused”.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Zone of Influence

The Zone of Influence (Zol) was defined considering the likely effects arising from the proposals, both during construction and in operation.

It is considered that the following impacts may result from the construction of low numbers of housing units:

- Temporary and permanent habitat loss;
- Injury or mortality of protected and notable species;
- Habitat degradation (e.g. dust pollution);
- Disturbance to protected and notable species resulting from works – machinery noise, vibration, light, increased human activity.

The distances from the site for these potential impacts are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Zone of Influence used for this Assessment

Ecological Receptors	Zone of Influence
Special Areas of Conservation with bat species as features of interest	Within 10km of the Site boundary
Statutory protected sites	Within 2km of the Site boundary or where any site Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) covers the development site
Non statutory protected sites	Within 1km of the Site boundary
Habitats of Principal Importance and Ancient Woodland boundaries	Within 50m of the Site boundary
Waterbodies	Within 500m of the site boundary
Protected species evidence • Badger • Bat • GCN • Otter • Water vole	Within the Site boundary plus 30m 30m from the location of disturbance 500m from the Site boundary 200m from the Site boundary along watercourses 200m from the Site boundary along watercourses
Habitats	Within the site boundary plus 50m, where visible

3.2 Desk Study

The following sources were used to provide data for the desk study:

- Aerial photography – in order to aid preliminary ecological and overall assessment of the site;

- Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)⁴ – for statutory sites designated for nature conservation and recently granted (since 2009) European Protected Species (EPS) licences within 2km of the Site; and
- Environment Agency Main River Watercourse database⁵ - to determine whether any waterbodies identified on Site are designated as Statutory Main River.
- GCN Risk Zone (Leicestershire, Rutland, Rushcliffe and South Kesteven)⁶ – to determine if the area is important for GCN populations.
- Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy 2006-2026.
- Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan 2020-2039.

A detailed description of the methodologies for habitats and protected species can be found in **Appendix B**.

3.3 Survey Constraints / Limitations

Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the field evidence visible or presence of plants and animals on the Site such as, the time of year, migration patterns and behaviour.

This survey was undertaken during reasonable weather conditions in June which is considered suitable to identify and classify the predominant habitats present on Site.

Due to surveys being limited to one day on site, a complete list of plants and animals and the absence of evidence of any species on-site should not be taken as conclusive proof that the species is not present, or that it will not be present in the future.

⁴ magic.defra.gov.uk

⁵ environment.maps.arcgis.com

⁶ naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com

4.0 Results

4.1 Statutory Nature Conservation Sites

There were no Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) with bats listed as features of interest within 10km.

There was only one SSSI within 2km of the Site which falls within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ). **Table 3** provides details of the SSSI.

The proposals do not fall within the listed categories that would require the Local Planning Authority to consult with Natural England (NE).

Table 3: Statutory Designated Sites

Site	Designation	Size (ha)	Reason for Designation	Distance (km) and Direction from Site
Kendall's Meadow	SSSI	2.7	Traditionally managed hay meadows with more than a dozen grass species which lies partly on alluvium and partly on boulder clay. Kendall's Meadows is one of the best representations of hay meadow grassland in Central English Midlands.	0.94 North east

4.2 Priority Habitats

There were no priority habitats within 50m of the Site shown on Magic.

The Ashby de la Zouch Canal was located 457m east of the Site, however, it is not recorded as a main river watercourse on the EA Statutory Main River Map.

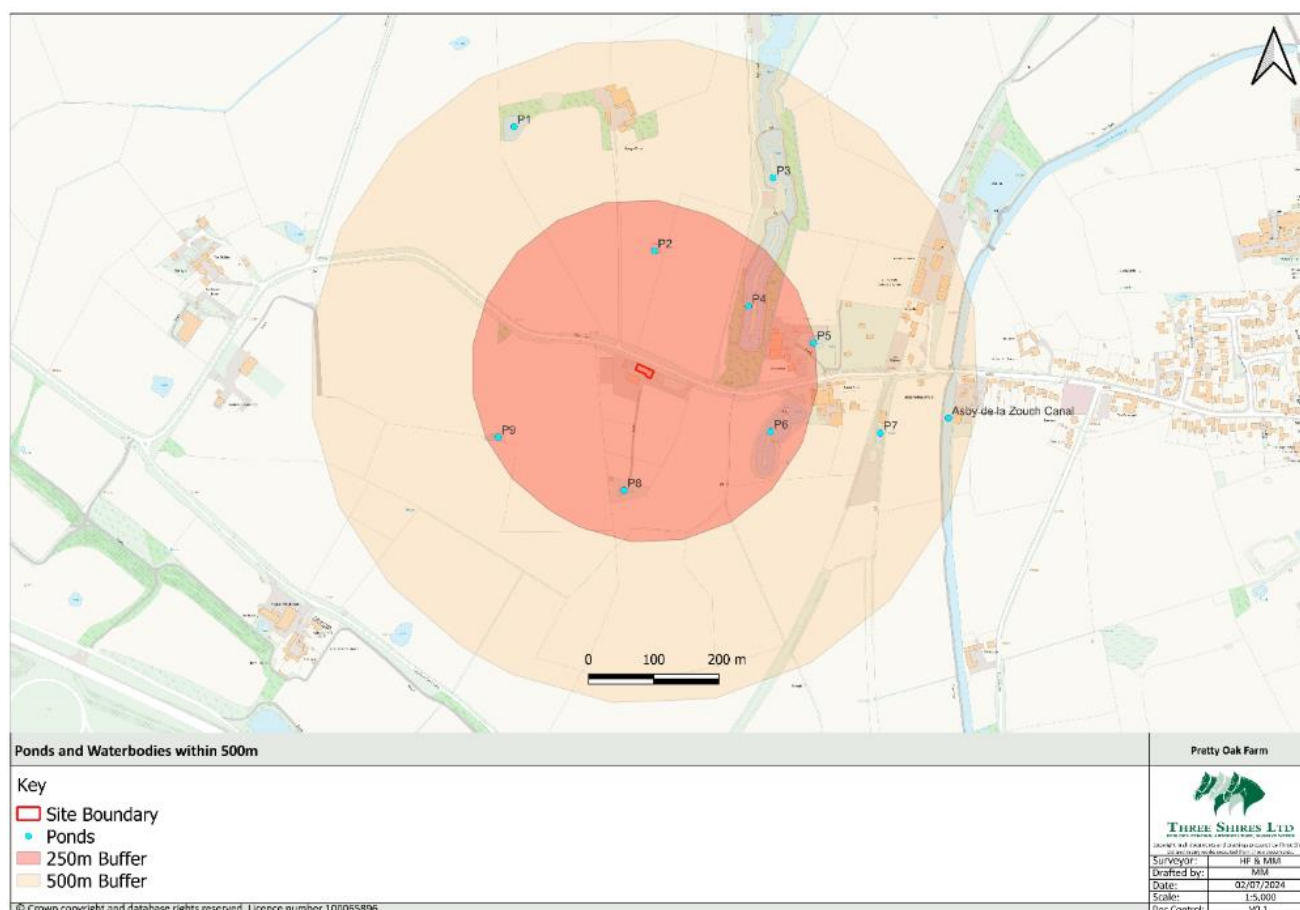
There were nine waterbodies within a 500m radius of the Site, six of which were within 250m. **Table 4** and **Figure 3** below highlights each pond and its distance from Site. P8 is classified as a priority pond.

There is a native hedgerow adjacent to the Site's northern boundary. While this is classified as a priority habitat it is not sufficiently species diverse to be classified as 'important' under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

Table 4: Waterbodies within 500m of the Site

Ponds	Distance and Direction from Site
P1	c. 392m northwest
P2	c. 177m north
P3	c. 335m northeast
P4	c. 140m northeast
P5	c. 243m northeast
P6	c. 197m east
P7	c. 358m east
P8	c. 173m south
P9	c. 226m southwest

Figure 3: Ponds within 500m



The proposed development is unlikely to affect any of the above waterbodies/watercourses due to limited hydrological connectivity with no linking ditches present on Site.

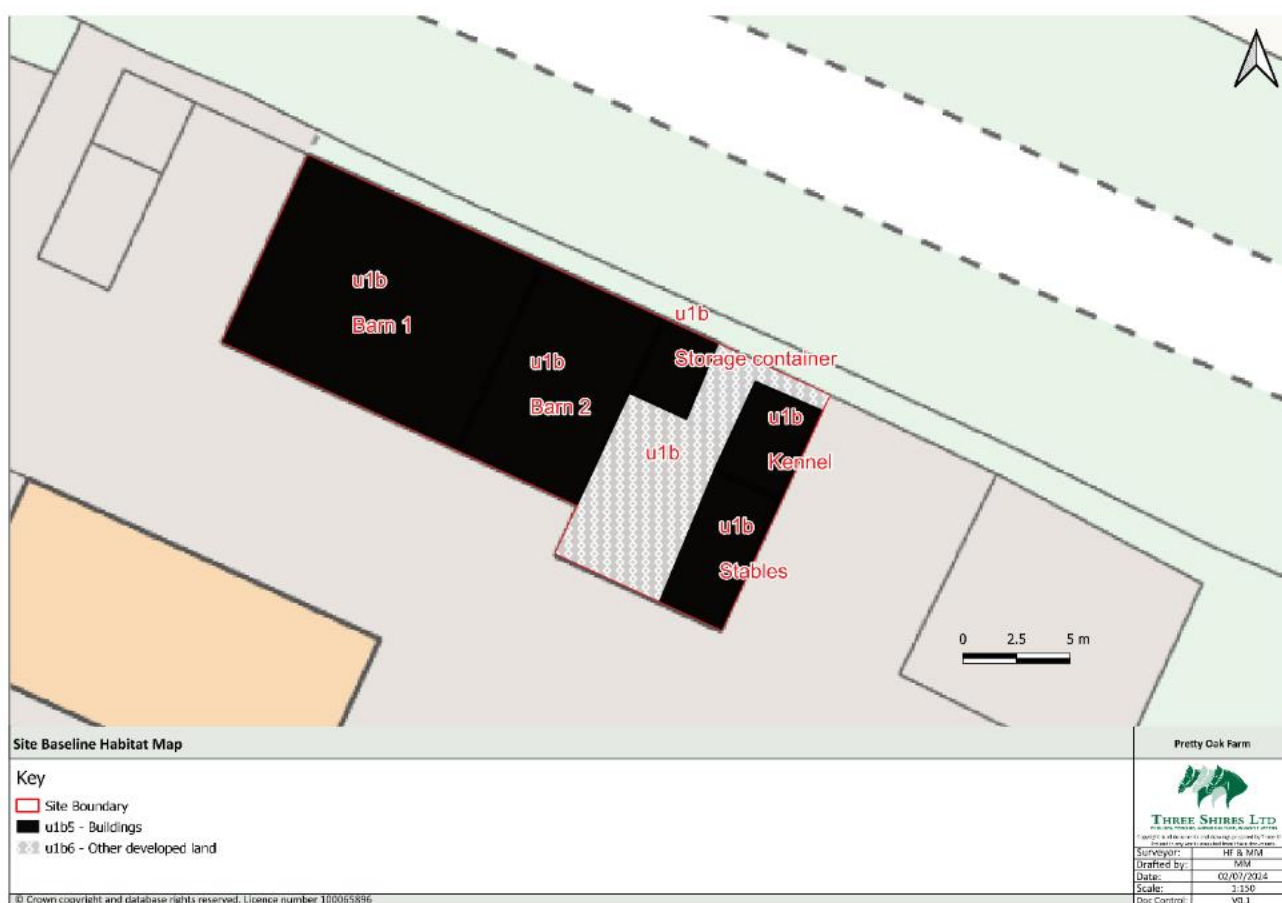
4.3 Habitat Overview

The Site was dominated by large metal-skinned agricultural buildings along with stables and kennels to the east. There is a small area of hardstanding between the building and the kennel/stables area. To the immediate north of the Site is a hedgerow.

A description and record of condition of each habitat is detailed below, along with their UKHab code, with each habitat mapped in **Figure 4 (Appendix C** for an A3 version).

As there is no on-site priority habitat present, with the only habitat present being buildings, the Site meets the de-minimis exemption under 'The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024'.

Figure 4: Site Baseline Habitat Map



4.4 On Site Habitat

4.4.1 Building – ub15

The farm complex consisted of four areas; the first building was a barn which contained a metal frame with slatted wood and metal panelling (Barn 1) (**Photograph 1–2**). Barn 1 was 9.8m x 12.1m in size and 4.5m tall. The lower part of the wall was made of concrete panels with the upper part being made of corrugated metal or slatted wood. There was a large opening on the western elevation (**Photograph 3**).

The second building (Barn 2), attached directly to the east of Barn 1, consisted of brick-and-mortar walls on the lower half and corrugated metal for the top half with a metal roller door on the southern elevation (**Photograph 4–5**). Barn 2 was 9.8m x 5.8m with the roof also made of corrugated metal sheeting. Barn 2

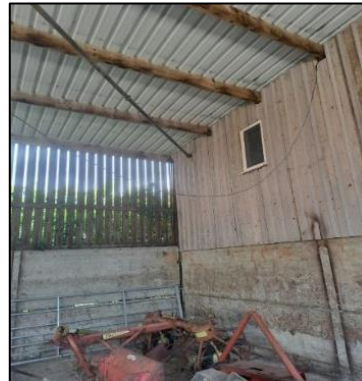
contained artificial lighting inside and was primarily used for storage, with the south part of the building being a large open space while the northern part of the building contained a second floor which was supported using timber beams.

East of Barn 2 were buildings used as kennels to the north and stables to the south. The kennels were 3.6m x 4.2m and constructed on a timber frame with timber and corrugated metal walls and a gable roof of corrugated metal (**Photograph 6**). The stables were 7m x 3.6m and constructed with brick-and-mortar walls with metal cladding and a flat roof of corrugated metal (**Photograph 7-8**).

Between Barn 2 and the stables/kennels was a small area of hardstanding used as access into the buildings with a storage container beside Barn 2 (**Photograph 9**).



Photograph 1: Barn 1 from outside.



Photograph 2: Barn 1 from inside.



Photograph 3: Open end in Barn 1 at western elevation.



Photograph 4: walls within Barn 2.



Photograph 5: interior of Barn 2.



Photograph 6: Kennel area.



Photograph 7: Southern elevation of stable.



Photograph 8: Eastern elevation of stables/kennel.



Photograph 9: Storage container on an area of hardstanding between Barn 2 and the kennel/stable buildings.

4.5 Off Site Habitat

4.5.1 Hedgerows

There was a hedgerow (approximately 2-3m high and 1.5-2m wide) adjacent to the northern Site boundary which was dominated by hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) with frequent bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) and

nettles (*Urtica dioica*) as well as occasional hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), cleavers (*Galium aparine*) and honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) (**Photograph 10**).



Photograph 10: Hedgerow (roadside view)

4.6 Protected and Notable Species

4.6.1 Badger

No badger (*Meles meles*) setts (active/inactive), prints, latrines or foraging evidence was recorded on the Site during the survey, nor were any signs recorded within a 50m radius of the Site boundary.

4.6.2 Bats

MAGIC records show there was one granted European Protected Species (EPS) application for bats 1.9km east of the Site. The licence was for common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*) bats. However, the licence expired in 2014.

The hedgerow located to the north provides connectivity to the surrounding landscape which could provide good foraging and commuting for bats.

Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA)

There was no evidence of bats including droppings, oil stains, urine stains or insect wings inside any of the buildings. **Table 5** below provides a summary of the findings of the overall roosting potential based on the features and criteria in **Table B3** in **Appendix B**.

Table 5: Summary of PRF

Building Reference	PRF Description	Photo(s)	Roost Suitability
Barn 1	Due to the open end and corrugated metal sheets (Photograph 11-12), this building does not provide suitable void spaces or stable temperatures required for roosting bats.	 Photograph 11: Open front on western elevation.  Photograph 12: Corrugated metal roofing.	Negligible

Building Reference	PRF Description	Photo(s)	Roost Suitability
Barn 2	Dark area within the north section (Photograph 13) with potential for access into a cavity area. Access gaps are present between the corrugated sheets in the southern section of the barn (Photograph 14). However, dense cobwebs were present here indicating that the area was not in current use by bats.	 Photograph 13: dark area with gap in boarding (red arrow).  Photograph 14: Access gaps between roof and walls.	Negligible
Kennels	The kennels had an open end on the western elevation with no cavities for bats to roost (Photograph 15). The kennels were also in use to keep dogs.	 Photograph 15: Open area in Kennel.	Negligible

Building Reference	PRF Description	Photo(s)	Roost Suitability
Stables	Horse stalls were open with a metal roof providing little cover for roosting bats (Photograph 16).	 Photograph 16: Open area with gaps in panels on east elevation of stable.	Negligible
Storage container	Storage unit was completely sealed with no access for bats (Photograph 17-18)	 Photograph 17: Exterior of storage unit with no gaps.  Photograph 18: Interior of storage unit, well kept with all sides sealed.	Negligible

4.6.3 Birds

The off-Site hedgerow to the north provides suitable habitat for nesting birds. While there were no nests observed during the survey, a female house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) was observed entering a hole between the roof and wall of barn 1. Other birds that were heard included blackbird (*Turdus merula*), chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) and blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*).

4.6.4 Great Crested Newt and Widespread Amphibians

There was no terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newt (GCN) on Site; however, the adjacent hedge base could potentially provide a commuting corridor.

While there were no ponds present within the boundary of the Site, there were nine ponds within 500m of the Site, the closest being 140m northwest. The Site is located within an amber zone in the Natural England GCN risk zones, suggesting the general area is likely to have GCN present. On MAGIC, a 2019 GCN pond survey found GCN present in pond 8 - P8 (173m south) (**Figure 3**).

4.6.5 Reptiles

No evidence of reptiles was recorded during the survey. The Site offered no potential habitat for reptiles and therefore these will not be considered further within this report.

4.6.6 Invasive Non-Native Species

No Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) were identified on Site during the survey. Therefore, INNS will not be considered further.

4.6.7 Other Mammals

Upon further investigation into the hedgerow, there were two mammal tracks discovered (**Photograph 19**) which were too tall for badger. The most likely species to have created these are deer.



Photograph 19: Mammal track within hedgerow.

5.0 Evaluation

5.1 Designated Sites

It is considered unlikely that there will be any direct or indirect impacts on Kendall's Meadows due to the small-scale nature of the development.

5.2 Priority Habitats

Due to the small-scale nature of the development, and lack of hydrological connectivity, the Ashby de la Zouch Canal and other waterbodies should not be impacted by the proposed works.

The hedgerow adjacent to the Site is made of native species and therefore is considered as priority habitat. The hedgerow will not be directly impacted by the development, but indirect impacts may include noise and disturbance. These impacts will be short-term and temporary.

5.3 Protected and Notable Species

5.3.1 Badgers

The Site offered no potential for badgers and the proposals are not expected to have any impact on this species. Therefore, these will not be considered further within this report.

5.3.2 Bats

There were very few features present on Site as most buildings lacked void spaces and did not provide thermal stability preventing the buildings from being used for roosts. Due to the lack of features present, the buildings were all classified as of negligible potential and impacts upon bats are considered to be unlikely.

5.3.3 Birds

There is a potential for bird's nests to be located within Barn 1 and the hedgerow during nesting season. See recommendations.

5.3.4 Great Crested Newt and Widespread Amphibians

While the surrounding habitat provides suitable habitat for GCN and widespread amphibians, the Site itself does not contain any suitable waterbodies or terrestrial habitat. Therefore, the chances of GCN or other amphibians being present on the Site are negligible.

5.3.5 Other Mammals

While there was evidence of mammals present, this was located off-Site in an area that should not be directly affected by the proposed works.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The ecological impact of the development is considered to be low in terms of impacts to species and habitats.

Due to all the buildings offering negligible potential for bats, no further surveys are required.

Where possible demolition or movement of building/containers should be undertaken outside the bird breeding season (March to August inclusive). If this is not possible then a nesting bird check should be undertaken before removal works begin, and if a nest is found to be active then it must be left until the chicks have fledged.

Ensure that any trimming to the hedgerow is completed outside of the bird nesting season (March-August).

It is recommended that any new lighting for the proposed development is directed away from the existing hedgerow in order to ensure this remains a suitable commuting feature for bats.

The Site meets the de-minimis exemption under the Biodiversity Net Gain Regulations 2024.

Appendix A Relevant Legislation and Policies

Legislation

The main pieces of legislation regarding the protection of species and habitats in the UK are the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Other legislation is in force which gives protection to certain species, such as the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, specific activities, such as the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 and specific habitats, such as the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 (as amended).

Invasive non-native species are regulated via a combination of the Invasive Alien Species (Permitting and Enforcement) Order 2019 and Section 14/Schedule 9 of the 1981 Act.

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, all public bodies are required to have due regard to the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their function. Under this Act, habitats and species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England are identified and published under the provisions of Section 41 (S41).

Planning Policies

The biodiversity policies which are most relevant on a national level are the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)⁷.

National Planning Policies

In terms of planning policy, at a national level, Chapter 15 of the NPPF (which relates to conserving and enhancement the nature environmental) requires Local Authorities to take measures to:

- Refuse planning permission if significant harm to biodiversity results from a development that cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for;
- Develop planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.
- Not usually permit development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments). The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of SSSI;
- Refuse planning permission for development that results in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees), unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- Support development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.

⁷ National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Appendix B Methodology

Habitat Survey

This was conducted by undertaking a systematic walkover over of the Site habitats, using a route which allowed all habitats to be viewed and flora species identified where possible. Habitats were defined and mapped using the 'UKHab V2.01' classification system.

Dominant plant species were noted, as were any protected, uncommon, invasive species or species indicative of a particular habitat type, but there was no attempt to compile exhaustive species lists for this element of the Site assessment. Botanical nomenclature in this report follows Stace (2019)⁸ for both scientific and common names.

The survey also included:

- A preliminary search for evidence of protected or important species and species groups, and for habitats and features likely to host them if direct evidence is absent;
- The identification of other constraints (e.g., invasive non-native plant species) and any further opportunities for ecological enhancement; and
- An assessment to identify any potential roosting features (PRF) of significant buildings and trees providing bat roost potential.

Protected and Notable Species

Badger

Field signs for badger (*Meles meles*) within or adjacent to the Site (within 30m of the boundary, access permitted) were recorded in accordance with the standard methodology outline (Harris et al 1989) which includes surveying for active sett entrances, as well as spoil, bedding, latrines, hairs, prints, foraging signs and pathways.

A walkover of the whole site (including land, where accessible, within approximately 30m of the Site boundary) was undertaken and signs of badger activity were recorded in accordance with the standard methodology outline⁹. Signs of activity include:

- Sett entrances (entrances that are greater than 25cm in diameter with a flattened oval appearance);
- Presence of and size of any spoil heaps outside tunnel entrances;
- Presence of bedding material within or outside tunnel entrances;
- The degree of smoothness, or wear of the tunnel sides;
- The degree of any vegetation covering tunnel entrances, the presence of any debris within the tunnel;
- Faeces;
- Paths between setts or leading to feeding habitats;
- Areas of scratching at the base of tree trunks or branches;
- Scrapes into the ground (snuffle holes) where badgers have searched for food;
- Bundles of vegetation where badgers may sleep above ground (day nests);

⁸ Stace, C (2019) *New Flora of the British Isles*. 4th edn. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

⁹ Surveying Badgers, Harris S. et. al, 1989

- Hair traces;
- Tracks.

When found, the activity level and status of the sett was based on the number of used, partially used and disused entrances. The definition of a badger setts “current use” is outlined in the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (as amended) and further in a guidance by Natural England¹⁰; mainly smooth-sided entrances, clear of debris and vegetation, with spoil heaps and sometimes bedding material and footprints outside.

If setts were located, then they were categorised according to **Table B1**, with the activity status categorised according to **Table B2**.

Table B1: Sett Categories

Sett Type	Definition
Main	Typically, several active entrances with large spoil heaps and obvious paths leading from and between sett entrances. Signs of frequent and constant high levels of activity. May contain inactive entrances.
Annexe	Normally close to a main sett (<50m), comprising several entrances with well-worn paths between the main and annex sett. May not be in use all the time, even if main sett is very active.
Subsidiary	Usually some distance from main sett (>150m) with several entrances, but no obvious paths connecting to other setts. May only be used intermittently.
Outlier	Often comprise one or two entrances with little spoil outside. No obvious paths connecting to other setts and only used sporadically. May also be used by foxes and rabbits.

Table B2: Entrance and Overall Sett Activity Status Criteria

Sett status	Definition	Field signs
Active	Where field signs indicate that the sett or entrance is currently being occupied by badgers.	Field signs include recently excavated spoil, bedding material, footprints, hairs, fresh latrines and with well-worn paths present between entrances and leading into surroundings, entrances generally clear of vegetation and look well used.
Inactive	Where field signs indicate a strong likelihood of no or limited badger activity within the previous three months.	Absence of fresh spoil, bedding or footprints, leaf build up in tunnel entrances, extensive cobwebs in tunnels, seedlings growing in tunnel entrances etc. Paths may be present but less well defined.
Disused	Where field signs indicate that the sett has not been used for some considerable time, typically more than 3 months minimum.	Large amount of leaf litter / debris collected at tunnel entrances and vegetation grown up around or inside entrances. No obvious paths visible leading to and from entrance and spoil heap has dispersed / weathered and become re-vegetated. May be partially collapsed or blocked.

¹⁰ Guidance on ‘Current Use’ in the definition of a Badger Sett, *Natural England 2009*, https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20140523111208/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/WMLG17_tcm6-11815.pdf

Bats

A Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) was undertaken to determine the Potential Roosting Features (PRFs) which could support roosting bats. This was undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced Three Shires Ltd ecologists led by a suitably experienced ecologist for the complexity of the structure being surveyed and the assessment of the buildings and trees and their suitability for roosting bats were carried out from the ground using binoculars and torches (where necessary).

The external surfaces of any buildings were inspected using binoculars to check for loose or lifted roof tiles, soffit boards, fascias, guttering or cracked brickwork. Internal inspections were also undertaken, where access was permitted, to give a broader understanding of the suitability of the building and to identify any potential features that may provide roosting opportunities.

An assessment of the trees and their suitability for roosting bats was also carried out from the ground using binoculars and torches (where necessary). These were assessed for features such as woodpecker holes, fissures, cracks, cavities, and loose bark that could be suitable for use by roosting bats.

Where features were identified, observations of evidence of bat use or activity, such as droppings, urine stains, odour, feeding remains, scratch marks, grease stains, wear marks were recorded.

Table B3 below details the level of suitability for roosts and the features that classify each suitability level.

Table B3: Bat Roost Suitability Levels

Suitability Level	Typical Features / Evidence
Confirmed	Evidence or presence of bats within feature or on/within building/structure
High	A building/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.
Moderate	A building/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 – the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).
Low	A building/structure with one or more potential roost Sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. 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 or hibernation).
Negligible	Negligible features present that are unlikely to support roosting bat species

Birds

The species of birds encountered during the survey were recorded and details of suitable habitats for nesting birds during the breeding bird season (March – August inclusive) were noted, with habitat suitability for notable species or important assemblages being considered, including barn owl. Binoculars were used to aid vision and the presence of nests, where observed, was also recorded.

Great Crested Newt (GCN)

An assessment of all on-site waterbodies and those within the immediate vicinity of the Site boundary were surveyed for their potential to provide suitable habitat for GCN. If available to be surveyed, each pond was

also given Habitat Suitability Index¹¹ (HSI) score. This allowed a numerical value to be given to each pond based on its suitability based on variety of factors. These scores range from < 0.5 being poor to > 0.8 being excellent (Table B4).

Table B4: HSI Scores

HSI score	Pond Suitability
< 0.50	Poor
0.50 - 0.59	Below average
0.60 - 0.69	Average
0.70 - 0.79	Good
> 0.80	Excellent

Reptiles

Suitable habitat for grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) and adder (*Vipera berus*) was identified and recorded. Evidence for field signs for reptile (e.g. sloughs, burrows, eggs) and an assessment of habitat potential for reptiles (e.g. edges/ecotones, ridges, hummocks, sunny slopes, brash heaps) were recorded.

Riparian Mammals

The waterbodies on Site were searched for signs of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*), European otter (*Lutra lutra*) and Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) and evaluated for suitability of habitat using binoculars where surveillance of the opposing bank was not possible. The aim of this survey was to look for and identify any signs of the presence of riparian mammal using field signs such as, visual confirmation by way of seeing the animal, latrines, footprints, (although these on their own do not indicate a positive presence) food caches, burrows, gardens, runways through vegetation, nesting material pulled into and blocking the entrance to burrows.

Otter

The survey for otter was undertaken following best practice guidelines and consisted of a bankside survey 200 metres upstream and downstream of the proposed footbridge on both banks searching for any visible signs of otter activity including visual confirmation by way of seeing the animal, scat, footprints, slides into the river, potential holt locations and any visible feeding remains.

Water Vole

The water vole assessment was undertaken following best practice guidelines and consisted of a bankside survey covering a distance of 200 metres upstream and downstream on both riverbanks. The aim of this survey was to look for and identify any signs of the presence of water vole using field signs such as, visual confirmation by way of seeing the animal, latrines, footprints, (although these on their own do not indicate a positive presence) food caches, burrows, gardens, runways through vegetation, nesting material pulled into and blocking the entrance to burrows.

¹¹ <https://www.arguk.org/info-advice/advice-notes/9-great-crested-newt-habitat-suitability-index-arg-advice-note-5/file>

White-Clawed Crayfish

A bankside assessment of the river habitat and suitability for white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) was carried out. The stream substrate, form, flow, bankside structure, vegetation were noted, as well as any signs of feeding upon crayfish (in the form of remains on banks).

Freshwater and Migratory Fish

The waterbodies on Site were visually evaluated for suitability of habitat for fish and observed for the presence of any species.

Other Notable Species

The Site was also assessed for suitability for other protected species such as barn owl (*Tyto alba*) and hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*).

Appendix C Site Baseline Habitat Map

