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7057: LAND AT BICESTER GATEWAY, BICESTER, OXFORDSHIRE

ECOLOGY BRIEFING NOTE

Introduction

1. Ecology Solutions were commissioned by Bloombridge LLP to consider proposals for an area of land known as Phase 1B at Bicester Gateway, Bicester, Oxfordshire (the 'application site'). Development Proposals for the site are for an innovation community, comprising mixed employment and residential development.
2. It is noted that the application site is located within a wider area of land already in receipt of planning permission (ref: 16/02586/OUT) for the delivery of a new business park, hotel, car parking and associated infrastructure. The consented scheme forms the westernmost part of the Strategic Development site, Bicester 10 – Bicester Gateway. Ecology Solutions has been involved in the promotion of Bicester Gateway since 2014.
3. The approved scheme, which is partially built out (Phase 1A in advanced stages of construction), was supported by a comprehensive ecological assessment, with this detailing the ecological baseline for the site alongside a suite of appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures. These measures, alongside the delivery of a financial contribution towards local biodiversity initiatives (secured through legal agreement) were agreed as sufficient to enable a biodiversity net gain as a result of the development of the Phase 1 site overall.
4. The Development Proposals which are the subject of this planning application relate solely to the Phase 1B site at Bicester Gateway. For clarity, the location of the Phase 1B site is identified on Plan ECO1.
5. Noting the similarity of the Development Proposals to the previously consented scheme for Phase 1B (insofar as there is potential for impacts on biodiversity), it is considered that the previously approved mitigation and enhancement strategy for the site will be equally suitable in respect of the revised Development Proposals for the site. For example, Bloombridge LLP have already paid £5,000 under the extant consent for a consultancy report and this is waiting sign off from the Ecology Officer at Cherwell District Council. A suite of ecology net gain measures will then flow from this, paid for by the extant s106. On this basis, this note primarily serves as a 'signpost document', summarising the biodiversity strategy that has been approved for the application site (as part of the wider Phase 1 development) and identifying where further opportunities for betterment have been identified as part of the current Development Proposals.

6. Subject to the measures set out in this note, it is considered that the Development Proposals will secure comparable (and indeed enhanced) biodiversity opportunities relative to the consented scheme, ensuring enhanced biodiversity opportunities overall, and this clearly accords with local and national planning policy.

Background and Baseline Situation

7. As set out above, Ecology Solutions initially undertook a suite of ecological surveys at the application site (as part of a wider land holding) in 2016 and 2017. The detailed baseline for the site has been set out in the following documents prepared by Ecology Solutions and reproduced at Appendix 1:
 - Ecological Assessment, Bicester Gateway, April 2016 (Ecological Solutions Ltd, December 2016);
 - Reptile Survey Report, Bicester Gateway, September 2017 (Ecological Solutions Ltd, October 2017)
 - Bat Survey Report, Bicester Gateway, April 2017 (Ecological Solutions Ltd, October 2017)
8. Ecology Solutions undertook an updated habitat walkover of the site in October 2019 to reassess the habitats present on site and consider any changes in the intervening period since surveys were last undertaken. These surveys confirmed that the habitats within the application site remain broadly comparable, albeit with some minor changes, as described below, leading to a modest degradation of the ecology.
9. **Semi-improved grassland.** Semi-improved grassland remains the pre-dominant habitat present on site and is broadly as described within the Ecological Assessment (2016), although it is understood to have been sprayed off annually as part of the land management regime following the grant of planning permission and agreed s106 financial contribution to achieve an ecological net gain..
10. At the time of survey in October 2019, the grassland within the application site had developed a rougher structure, being dominated by coarse grass species such as Cock's-foot, Yorkshire Fog and False Oat Grass. A modest assemblage of herbs indicative of damp, neutral conditions were again recorded.
11. **Hedgerows / Treelines / Ditches.** The linear features which form the boundaries of the application site remain as described within the Ecological Assessment (2016).
12. **Scrub.** Some areas previously comprising dense scrub within the application site have since been cleared and now support bare and re-colonising ground which is of negligible ecological significance. An area of dense woody scrub remains in the south of the site, being separated from the wider site by an existing road. Areas of scattered scrub remain present within the grassland field and primarily comprise Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Willows *Salix* sp.
13. Given the broad similarity in habitats, it is considered that opportunities for faunal species will remain as described in previous reporting by Ecology Solutions. For clarity, this reporting identified that opportunities for faunal species were limited to:
 - Foraging and commuting habitat of low importance to common bats; and
 - Suitable nesting and foraging opportunities of low importance for birds.

14. Given its small size, its isolation as a result of the existing road network, and the limited range of habitat present, it is not considered that the application site is of any significant value for any other protected or notable faunal species. This view is consistent with the planning decision made in 2017.

Mitigation Strategy and Overview

15. As set out in the introduction to this note, the application site sits within a larger area of land (known as Phase 1) for which an appropriate mitigation and enhancement strategy has previously been approved. Noting the similarity of the Development Proposals to the consented scheme (insofar as there is potential for impacts on biodiversity), the previously approved mitigation and enhancement strategy for the site will be equally suitable in respect of the revised Development Proposals for the site. Indeed, the proposals offer significant opportunities for betterment relative to the approved scheme, with a net gain in the quantum of semi-natural habitats being delivered on site (see below).
16. The following sections of this note serve to summarise the mitigation and enhancement proposals for the application site. It is noted that the mitigation strategy for the wider Phase 1 site was approved following extensive consultation with Cherwell's Ecological Advisors.

Mitigation and Enhancement Measures Secured by 16/02586/OUT

17. As set out previously, a wide ranging suite of mitigation and enhancement measures were secured as part of the consented proposals for Phase 1 (which includes the application site). These measures are summarised below for ease of reference. All of these measures will be equally secured through the Proposed Development.
- **Habitats.** Implementation of an appropriate landscape strategy utilising local species of local provenance. This to include the provision of areas of species rich grassland, SuDS, tree and shrub planting and the retention and enhancement of treeline T3. It is noted that these measures would be secured through a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP);
 - **Bats.** Securing an appropriate lighting strategy. Provision of 6 bat boxes on buildings and/or trees;
 - **Birds.** Timing vegetation clearance to avoid the nesting bird season where possible. Provision of 6 bird boxes.
 - **Financial contribution to local biodiversity initiatives (off-site).** A sum of up to £30,000 has been agreed by the applicant to be directed towards an appropriate 'Biodiversity Scheme' in the local area. The Banbury Ornithological Society (BOS) has been appointed to prepare this Biodiversity Scheme at a cost of £5,000. The draft Scheme was achieved in January 2020. BOS own and manage the site where the agreed financial contribution will be used.
 - The scheme prepared by BOS will deliver ecological enhancements at Bicester Wetland Reserve. As detailed in the report prepared by BOS, the financial contribution will allow for significant ecological enhancements at the reserve, more than compensating for development at the application site.
 - There is the potential for linkage and further enhancements emanating from the Phase 2 (Catalyst) planning application submitted by Albion in 2019.

Additional Mitigation and Enhancement Measures to be Secured by the Proposed Development

18. The proposed move away from a 'traditional' business park, which included large areas of at grade car parking, offers the opportunity to secure further ecological enhancements for the application site, over and above that consented as part of the previous scheme. The following additional measures are proposed as part of the Proposed Development.
 - **Net gain in semi-natural habitat within the application site.** The revised proposals will allow for an increased quantum of semi-natural habitat creation within the site, not least a significant net gain in the quantum of tree and woodland planting. Overall, the extent of built form on site will reduce from approx. 2.01ha to 1.71ha. This will allow an additional 10% of the Phase 1B site to be created as on site greenspace.
 - **Provision of minimum 25 bat roosting features,** with these to be integrated into new buildings and/or installed on retained trees. These boxes to be strategically located to avoid areas of high light spill and be situated in close proximity of semi-natural habitats. Appropriate examples of bat roosting features are provided at Appendix 2.
 - **Provision of minimum 40 bird nesting features,** with these to be integrated into new buildings and/or installed on retained trees. Following discussions with the Cherwell Swifts Conservation Project, it is proposed for at least 20 of these features to comprise integrated Swift boxes. Noting the colonial nature of Swifts, and their preference for nesting at height, Swift bricks would be installed in clusters at the apex of buildings. Clusters will be located on the northern and eastern elevations of new buildings. Appropriate examples of bird nesting features are provided at Appendix 3. Chris Mason has offered his help in this regard – which is appreciated.
 - **Provision of minimum 25 bee bricks,** with these to be integrated into new buildings, structures or walls within the application site. Bee bricks should ideally be installed in an area of full sun, in close proximity to semi-natural habitats such as wildflower grassland. It is proposed for the 'Green & Blue' bee brick to be utilised on site.
 - **Additional financial contribution.** Bloombridge LLP is keen to contribute towards local ecology initiatives and facilitate strategically led ecological enhancements. As such and notwithstanding that the Development Proposals already secure ecological betterment at the application site, a further ecological contribution of £6,000 is proposed to ensure additional ecological enhancements as part of the revised development proposals for Phase 1B.
 - This additional contribution is understood to be sufficient to facilitate all habitat creation and management works that BOS wish to undertake at Bicester Wetland Reserve, as identified in their draft report for Phase 1, received in January 2019.
 - This offer is made in good faith and on a without prejudice basis. It is intended to remove the uncertainty on the financing of the scheme proposed by BOS, mindful of the of the impending commencement date.
19. The above measures will realise a significant enhancement relative to the previously improved scheme, greatly increasing the number and range of nesting and roosting features available for faunal species. This is made possible, in part, owing to the greater amount of green space (and less surface parking) associated with residential

development and the landscape strategy proposed for Phase 1B by Mark Cooper Associates.

20. The types of nesting / roosting features will specifically benefit species of conservation interest in the local area, not least urban birds such as Swifts and House Martins and Priority Species of bat such as the Soprano Pipistrelle bat and Brown Long-eared bat, both of which were recorded during previous survey work.

Consideration of Planning Policy

21. There have been changes to planning policy at the national and local level since the approval of the previous scheme (ref: 16/02586/OUT). Changes of relevance to biodiversity and nature conservation are set out below. The Development Proposals are considered to remain fully compliant with adopted policy at the local and national level.
22. **National Planning Policy.** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated in February 2019 and remains broadly identical to previous iterations. The latest version provides clarity on matters such as the application of the ‘*presumption in favour of sustainable development*’ (i.e. clarifying that this is retained where adverse impacts on Habitat Sites are avoided) and considers the protection that should be afforded to ‘irreplaceable’ habitats.
23. **Local Planning Policy.** Local planning policy in Cherwell remains as described within the Ecological Assessment (2017), with the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 to 2031 being the principle planning document.
24. It is noted that the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (February 2018) has been adopted in the intervening period since planning permission was granted for the consented scheme. Amongst other matters, this SPD secures the mechanism by which Cherwell District Council can receive and allocate funds for off-site biodiversity mitigation. The SPD identifies that, where “*on-site mitigation or compensation cannot be achieved contributions may be sought towards a scheme that closely offsets the impact of the development*”.
25. In respect of the application site, it is noted that the previous application secured funds in advance of this formal mechanism being adopted, ensuring that an appropriate and proportional contribution could be secured as part of the re-development of the site. The scheme in question (enhancement of Bicester Wetland Reserve) has been designed with input from various local ecological groups and specialists and has been identified as more than sufficient to more than mitigate the impact of the consented scheme. Noting that the revised development proposals allow for biodiversity betterment within the site (relative to the consented scheme), it is axiomatic that the revised proposals would also be fully mitigated by this (soon to be paid for) scheme and so the requirements of this policy are met.
26. For clarity, the Development Proposals offer opportunities to provide betterment for biodiversity, both through on-site habitat creation and through greater financial contributions towards off-site mitigation and enhancement schemes. The revised proposals therefore clearly accord with planning policy of relevance to nature conservation at all administrative levels and will deliver further net gains over that previously secured.

Summary and Conclusions

27. Ecology Solutions were asked by Bloombridge LLP to consider proposals for an area of land known as Phase 1B at Bicester Gateway, Bicester, Oxfordshire (the 'application site'). Development Proposals for the site are for an innovation community, comprising mixed employment and residential development.
28. The application site is located within a wider area of land already in receipt of planning permission (ref: 16/02586/OUT) for comparable development and indeed forms part of the wider 'Bicester 10 - Bicester Gateway' allocation. The Development Proposals would supersede the consented scheme for Phase 1B.
29. Noting the similarity of the Development Proposals to the previously consented scheme for Phase 1B (insofar as there is potential for impacts on biodiversity), it is considered that the previously approved mitigation and enhancement strategy for the site will be equally suitable in respect of the revised Development Proposals. Notwithstanding this conclusion, a suite of additional biodiversity measures are proposed to secure further enhancements for the site, with these specifically targeted to locally identified species of conservation significance (in liaison with local ecology groups). These additional measures are made possible by the residential elements of the revised proposals and, in particular, the resultant change in approach to public realm, notably as part of the 'place-making' strategy for the new innovation community.
30. Subject to the measures set out in this note, it is considered that the Development Proposals will secure comparable (and indeed enhanced) biodiversity opportunities relative to the consented scheme, ensuring enhanced biodiversity opportunities overall. This clearly accords with local and national planning policy. Indeed, the proposals go significantly beyond what could be required by policy.

PLANS & APPENDICES

PLAN

PLAN ECO1

Application Site Location



KEY:

- APPLICATION SITE (PHASE 1B)
- PHASE 1A SITE



ecology solutions ltd

7057: BICESTER GATEWAY

PLAN ECO1: APPLICATION SITE
LOCATION

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.1

Ecological Assessment

December 2016

Ecology Solutions



BLOOMBRIDGE LLP

BICESTER GATEWAY,
BICESTER,
OXFORDSHIRE

Ecological Assessment

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PLANS

PLAN ECO1	Application Site Location and Ecological Designations
PLAN ECO2	Ecological Features

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1	Bicester Gateway, Bicester, Masterplan – Phase 1. Drawing Ref 16084_P102 (UMC Architects, December 2016)
APPENDIX 2	Information obtained from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC)
APPENDIX 3	Information obtained from MAGIC

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Ecology Solutions was commissioned by Bloombridge LLP in April 2016 to undertake an Ecological Assessment of Land at Bicester Gateway, Bicester, Oxfordshire, hereafter referred to as the application site, which forms the westernmost part of the Strategic Development site Bicester 10 – Bicester Gateway. This site comprises Phase 1 of the Bicester Gateway site.
- 1.2. Ecological survey and assessment work was undertaken at the application site to establish a robust baseline, including a desk study, extended Phase 1 habitat survey, assessment of potential opportunities for protected and notable species, and specific surveys for bats and badgers.
- 1.3. On the evidence of the ecological surveys undertaken, the application site is not considered to be of particularly high intrinsic interest from an ecology and nature conservation perspective. The design of the proposed development and the implementation of mitigation measures, as recommended in this report, will ensure that there are no adverse effects on any designated sites or protected species as a result of development at the application site.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background & Proposals

- 2.1.1. Ecology Solutions was commissioned by Bloombridge LLP in April 2016 to undertake an Ecological Assessment of Land at Bicester Gateway, Bicester, Oxfordshire (see Plan ECO1), hereafter referred to as the application site.
- 2.1.2. The development proposals are for new business space and hotel development, including associated infrastructure, access and landscaping. A masterplan for the site has been produced by UMC Architects and is included at Appendix 1.

2.2. Application Site Characteristics

- 2.2.1. The application site is located to the south of Bicester in Oxfordshire. Wendlebury Road forms the eastern boundary of the application site, whilst the A41 dual carriageway lies immediately to the west. The land beyond to the south, east and west comprises agricultural pasture land, with a larger retail development situated to the north-east.
- 2.2.2. The application site comprises two semi-improved grassland fields, separated by a road and bordered by hedgerows / treelines, ditches (predominantly dry) and areas of dense scrub.

2.3. Ecological Assessment

- 2.3.1. This document assesses the ecological interest of the application site as a whole. The importance of the habitats present is evaluated with regard to current guidance published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)¹.
- 2.3.2. The report also sets out the existing baseline conditions for the application site, setting these in the correct planning policy and legal framework and assessing any potential impacts which may occur from the proposed development. Appropriate mitigation where necessary is identified such that it will offset any negative impacts and where possible provide for the ecological enhancement of the application site, in accordance with relevant planning policy.

¹ CIEEM (2016) *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater and Coastal, 2nd Edition*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

- 3.1. The methodology utilised for the survey work can be split into three areas, namely desk study, habitat survey and faunal survey. These are discussed in more detail below.

3.2. Desk Study

- 3.2.1. In order to compile background information on the application site and its immediate surroundings, Ecology Solutions contacted Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC), Oxfordshire Bat Group, Oxfordshire Badger Group and Oxfordshire Ornithological Society.
- 3.2.2. Information has been received from TVERC and is included at Appendix 2. This information is referenced within this report, where appropriate. Information regarding designated sites is also shown where appropriate on Plan ECO1.
- 3.2.3. Information was also received from the Badger Group and is referenced within this report, where relevant; however due to the sensitive nature of this information it has not been appended. The Bat Group responded to confirm that they did not hold any records from the application site or local area. No response was received from the Ornithological Society.
- 3.2.4. Further information on designated sites from a wider search area was also obtained from the online Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)² database. This information is reproduced at Appendix 3 and where appropriate on Plan ECO1.
- 3.2.5. The National Biodiversity Network (NBN)³ database was also consulted for any relevant biological records of nature conservation interest within the local area of the application site.

3.3. Habitat Survey Methodology

- 3.3.1. A habitat survey was carried out in April 2016 to ascertain the general ecological value of the land contained within the boundaries of the application site and to identify the main habitats and associated plant species, with notes on fauna utilising the application site.
- 3.3.2. The application site was surveyed based around extended Phase 1 survey methodology⁴, as recommended by Natural England, whereby the habitat types present are identified and mapped, together with an assessment of the species composition of each habitat. This technique provides an inventory of the basic habitat

² <http://magic.defra.gov.uk>

³ <http://data.nbn.org.uk/>

⁴ Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey – a Technique for Environmental Audit*. England Field Unit, Nature Conservancy Council, reprinted JNCC, Peterborough.

types present and allows identification of areas of greater potential which require further survey. Any such areas identified can then be examined in more detail.

- 3.3.3. Using the above method, the application site was classified into areas of similar botanical community types, with a representative species list compiled for each habitat identified.
- 3.3.4. All of the species that occur in each habitat would not necessarily be detected during survey work carried out at any given time of the year, since different species are apparent at different seasons. However the survey was undertaken during the optimal time of year, and given the habitats present, it is considered that an accurate and robust assessment has been made.

3.4. Faunal Survey

- 3.4.1. General faunal activity observed during the course of the survey was recorded, whether visually or by call. Specific attention was paid to the potential presence of any protected, rare, notable or Priority Species. In addition, specific surveys were undertaken for bats and badgers *Meles meles*.
- 3.4.2. **Bats.** Bat surveys were undertaken in April 2016 to assess the potential for roosting bats within trees on and adjacent to the application site. The work was undertaken by an experienced bat worker and aimed to establish the likelihood of presence / absence of bats.
- 3.4.3. Field surveys were undertaken with regard to best practice guidelines issued by Natural England (2004⁵), the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2004⁶) and the Bat Conservation Trust (2016⁷).
- 3.4.4. All trees at the application site were assessed for their potential to support roosting bats. For a tree to be classed as having some potential for roosting bats it must usually have one or more of the following characteristics:
- obvious holes, e.g. rot holes and old woodpecker holes;
 - dark staining on the tree below a hole;
 - tiny scratch marks around a hole from bats' claws;
 - cavities, splits and/or loose bark from broken or fallen branches, lightning strikes etc.;
 - very dense covering of mature Ivy *Hedera helix* over trunk.
- 3.4.5. In addition, a bat activity survey was undertaken in September 2016 to ascertain the level of use of the application site by foraging

⁵ Mitchell-Jones, A. J. (2004). *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature, Peterborough.

⁶ Mitchell-Jones, A.J. & McLeish, A.P. (Eds.) (2004). *Bat Workers' Manual*. 3rd edition. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

⁷ Collins, J. (Eds.) (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edition)*. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

and commuting bats, and to identify any features of potential value for this group. Surveyors walked transects through the application site incorporating all features of potential value, with all bat data observed or heard noted. The survey was commenced at sunset and continued until 2 ½ hours after sunset, and was undertaken in suitable weather conditions (mild, dry with light breeze). The detector was subsequently deployed overnight following the activity survey to record additional data through the night.

- 3.4.6. An EchoMeter 3 (EM3) bat detector was utilised during the activity to record bat calls, with all data subsequently analysed using bat sound analysis software.
- 3.4.7. **Badgers.** Surveys were undertaken to search for evidence of badgers in April 2016, and comprised two main elements. The first of these was a thorough search for evidence of badger setts. For any setts encountered each sett entrance would be recorded and plotted, even if the entrance appeared disused. The following information was recorded if appropriate:
- i) The number and location of well used or very active entrances; these are clear of any debris or vegetation and are obviously in regular use and may, or may not, have been excavated recently.
 - ii) The number and location of inactive entrances; these are not in regular use and have debris such as leaves and twigs in the entrance or have plants growing in or around the edge of the entrance.
 - iii) The number of disused entrances; these have not been in use for some time, are partly or completely blocked and cannot be used without considerable clearance. If the entrance has been disused for some time all that may be visible is a depression in the ground where the hole used to be and the remains of the spoil heap.
- 3.4.8. Secondly, evidence of badger activity, such as well-worn paths and run-throughs, snagged hair, footprints, latrines and foraging signs, was also searched for in order to build up a picture of the use of the application site by badgers.

4. ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

4.1. The application site was subject to an ecological survey in April 2016. The vegetation present enabled the habitat types to be satisfactorily identified and an accurate assessment of the ecological interest of the habitats to be undertaken.

4.2. The following main habitat / vegetation types were identified:

- Semi-Improved Grassland;
- Hedgerows / Treelines;
- Dense and Scattered Scrub; and
- Ditches

4.3. The location of these habitats is shown on Plan ECO2.

4.4. Each habitat present is described below with an account of their representative plant species.

4.5. Semi-Improved Grassland

4.5.1. The application site primarily comprises two fields which are separated by a road. Both of these fields support a semi-improved grassland sward with a comparable species composition.

4.5.2. Species present include Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, Timothy *Phleum pratense*, False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, Meadow-grasses *Poa* spp., Broadleaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg., Hedge Woundwort *Stachys sylvatica*, Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*, Cleavers *Galium aparine*, Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*, Wood Avens *Geum urbanum*, Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* and Herb-Robert *Geranium robertianum*. Rushes *Juncus* spp. are also present in wetter areas, with occasional Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* and Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* also recorded in some locations.

4.5.3. The margins of the fields support areas of more ruderal vegetation which are dominated by Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Willowherbs *Epilobium* spp. and Cleavers.

4.6. Hedgerows / Treelines

4.6.1. The application site supports a number of hedgerows / treelines along field boundaries. These are labelled on Plan ECO2 and described below.

4.6.2. T1 is a sparse, unmanaged treeline along the eastern boundary of the northern field (adjacent to Wendlebury Road). This feature is associated with a ditch that was mostly dry at the time of survey, and is very gappy. The treeline primarily comprises Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* trees and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub, with

other species present including Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Dog-rose *Rosa canina*.

- 4.6.3. T2 is a sparse line of trees and scrub situated along the western boundary of the northern field (adjacent to the A41 dual carriageway). This feature is associated with a ditch which only held water at its southern end (see below). As with T1, the treeline is primarily dominated by Ash trees and Hawthorn scrub, with Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* also present, and is gappy in structure.
- 4.6.4. T3 comprises a sparse treeline situated along the eastern boundary of the southern field. This feature is associated with a dry ditch and is dominated by Willows *Salix* spp., with Ash, Hawthorn and Blackthorn also present.
- 4.6.5. T4 is a sparse line of trees and scrub along the western boundary of the southern field, and has a comparable species composition and structure to T2.
- 4.6.6. Species present in the ground layer include Lords-and-Ladies *Arum maculatum*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Ivy.

4.7. Dense and Scattered Scrub

- 4.7.1. The application site also supports areas of dense scrub, notably to the north and south of the two fields, as well as scattered scrub adjacent to the road that bisects the two parcels.
- 4.7.2. The dense scrub to the north primarily comprises Blackthorn, whilst scrub to the south comprises Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum* trees, Dogwood, Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Willow saplings. Scattered Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* scrub is also present within and adjacent to the application site.

4.8. Ditches

- 4.8.1. The application site supports a number of ditches associated with field boundaries. Most of these were dry at the time of survey, with those containing water supported very limited marginal vegetation indeed (due to overshadowing from adjacent trees and scrub) and supporting flowing water.
- 4.8.2. The ditch associated with T2 supported some marginal vegetation at its southern end, including Bulrush *Typha latifolia*, Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga* and Fool's Watercress *Apium nodiflorum*. It is considered that this is linked to the A41, and that water levels / flows will change significantly depending on weather events.

4.9. Background Information

- 4.9.1. The desk study undertaken with TVERC did not return any recent records of protected or notable plant species from the application site or local area.

5. WILDLIFE USE OF THE APPLICATION SITE

- 5.1. During the surveys that have been undertaken within the application site, general observations have been made of any faunal use, with specific attention paid to the potential presence of protected or notable species.

5.2. Bats

- 5.2.1. There are no trees present either within or immediately adjacent to the application site that support any features of potential value for roosting bats, such as woodpecker holes, cracks, splits or flaking bark.
- 5.2.2. The application site offers some potential foraging and commuting opportunities in the form of hedgerows and treelines along field boundaries. However, given the presence of the A41 dual carriageway to the west (with associated street lighting, particularly in close proximity to the large roundabout which lies immediately to the west of the application site), it is considered unlikely that the application site would be of any particular significance for bats.
- 5.2.3. In order to inform this assessment, a bat activity survey was undertaken at the application site on 23 September 2016, in line with the methodology in Section 3 above. Table 1 below outlines the weather conditions during the survey.

Date	Weather Conditions
23.09.2016	17C, 80% cloud cover, dry, light breeze

Table 1: Weather Conditions during bat survey

- 5.2.4. The only species recorded during the bat activity survey was Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, with very little activity recorded (19 registrations in total). The survey did not identify any features or treelines within the application site to be of relatively greater importance, with the limited degree of activity distributed evenly through the site.
- 5.2.5. Following the activity survey, two bat detectors were deployed overnight, with one situated adjacent to T2 (in the north-west of the site) and one situated adjacent to T3 (in the south-east of the site). The detector deployed at T2 recorded very limited bat activity, with a total of 37 registrations of Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and two registrations of Soprano Pipistrelle recorded throughout the night. The detector deployed at T3 recorded only two registrations of Soprano Pipistrelle throughout the night.
- 5.2.6. **Background information.** The desk study undertaken with TVERC returned a small number of bat records from the surrounding area. The closest record was of Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* from a location approximately 1km to the north-east of the application site from 2009, although the type of record was not specified.

5.3. Badgers

- 5.3.1. No evidence of badger activity, including any setts, foraging signs, latrines or push-throughs, was recorded within the application site boundary.
- 5.3.2. Given the absence of any evidence to indicate badger activity, it is considered that the application site is not utilised by badgers, and as such this species is not considered further within this Ecological Assessment.
- 5.3.3. **Background information.** The desk study undertaken with TVERC and Oxfordshire Badger Group returned a small number of badger records from the surrounding area. The closest was a record of a dead badger, returned from a location approximately 0.1km north-east of the application site at its closest point from 2004.

5.4. Amphibians

- 5.4.1. The application site does not support any waterbodies which provide potential breeding opportunities for Great Crested Newts. Ditches present along the boundaries of the fields supported were largely dry at the time of survey in April 2016, and most did not support any marginal or aquatic vegetation, due to overshadowing from adjacent trees and scrub.
- 5.4.2. Whilst a wet ditch was present adjacent to T2, this feature appears to be associated with runoff from the adjacent A41 dual carriageway (with water levels expected to rise and fall rapidly as a result of rainfall), and supports flowing water. As such it is considered that this waterbody does not provide potential opportunities for breeding Great Crested Newts.
- 5.4.3. The large pond situated to the east of the application site boundary (at Wendlebury Farm) is stocked with fish, and it is therefore considered unsuitable for breeding newts.
- 5.4.4. Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* surveys were also undertaken by Ecology Solutions in 2013 of a number of waterbodies situated within and in close proximity to Promised Land Farm, which lies to the east of the application site. A total of six waterbodies were surveyed, including a number of wet ditches and ponds. No evidence of breeding Great Crested Newts was recorded within any of these waterbodies.
- 5.4.5. The A41 dual carriageway is considered to represent a barrier to the movement of Great Crested Newts from the west of the application site, whilst a stream situated approximately 300 metres to the east of the application site similarly provides a barrier to the dispersal of this species in the local area.

- 5.4.6. Checks of suitable refugia within the application site did not reveal the presence of any amphibians.
- 5.4.7. It is therefore considered that the application site does not support Great Crested Newts, either in their terrestrial or aquatic phase, and no further consideration is given to this species within this Ecological Assessment.
- 5.4.8. **Background information.** The desk study undertaken with TVERC returned a small number of amphibian records from the surrounding area. The closest records were of Common Frog *Rana temporaria*, Common Toad *Bufo bufo* and Smooth Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*, returned from a location approximately 1.4km west of the application site at their closest point from 2002/2003.
- 5.4.9. The desk study did not return any records of Great Crested Newt from the application site or surrounding area.

5.5. Reptiles

- 5.5.1. The habitats present within the application site are considered to offer sub-optimal opportunities for reptile species, on account of the short sward that the semi-improved grassland fields support. Moreover, it is noted that the application site is isolated from more suitable reptile habitats in the local area, notably by the A41 dual carriageway located immediately to the west.
- 5.5.2. Furthermore, searches of suitable refugia undertaken during the Phase 1 survey did not identify the presence of any reptile species.
- 5.5.3. It is therefore considered that the application site is unlikely to support this group, and no further consideration is given to reptiles in this Ecological Assessment.
- 5.5.4. **Background information.** The desk study undertaken with TVERC returned a small number of reptile records from the surrounding area. The closest records were of Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* and Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* returned from a location approximately 1.3km west of the application site at their closest point from 2003.

5.6. Birds

- 5.6.1. The application site offers some opportunities for nesting birds in terms of the hedgerows, treelines and dense scrub, although similar opportunities are available within the wider area, and there is nothing to indicate that the application site is likely to be particularly important for nesting or foraging birds.
- 5.6.2. Bird species recorded at the application site during surveys include Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Dunnock *Prunella modularis* and Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*.

- 5.6.3. **Background information.** The desk study undertaken with TVERC revealed a number of notable bird records from the local area. Records returned from the 1km grid square which includes the application site included the following Priority species / species listed on the Red List of Conservation Concern: Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* and Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*.

5.7. Invertebrates

- 5.7.1. The application site is expected to support a limited range of common invertebrate species, but there is no evidence to suggest that any protected or notable species are likely due to the habitats present.
- 5.7.2. **Background Information.** The desk study undertaken with TVERC returned few records of invertebrates in the local area. All records returned pre-date 1999 and as such are considered historical. The closest record was of Scarce Four-dot Pin-palp *Bembidion (Bembidion) quadripustulatum* returned from a location approximately 0.6km east of the application site at its closest point from 2000.

6. ECOLOGICAL EVALUATION

6.1. The Principles of Site Evaluation

- 6.1.1. The latest guidelines for ecological evaluation produced by CIEEM propose an approach that involves professional judgement, but makes use of available guidance and information, such as the distribution and status of the species or features within the locality of the project.
- 6.1.2. The methods and standards for site evaluation within the British Isles have remained those defined by Ratcliffe⁸. These are broadly used across the United Kingdom to rank sites, so priorities for nature conservation can be attained. For example, current Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designation maintains a system of data analysis that is roughly tested against Ratcliffe's criteria.
- 6.1.3. In general terms, these criteria are size, diversity, naturalness, rarity and fragility, while additional secondary criteria of typicalness, potential value, intrinsic appeal, recorded history and the position within the ecological / geographical units are also incorporated into the ranking procedure.
- 6.1.4. Any assessment should not judge sites in isolation from others, since several habitats may combine to make it worthy of importance to nature conservation.
- 6.1.5. Further, relying on the national criteria would undoubtedly distort the local variation in assessment and therefore additional factors need to be taken into account, e.g. a woodland type with comparatively poor species diversity, common in the south of England may be of importance at its northern limits, say in the border country.
- 6.1.6. In addition, habitats of local importance are often highlighted within a local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The Oxfordshire BAP highlights a number of habitats and species. This is referred to below where relevant.
- 6.1.7. Levels of importance can be determined within a defined geographical context from the immediate site or locality through to the International level.
- 6.1.8. The legislative and planning policy context are also important considerations and have been given due regard throughout this assessment.

⁸ Ratcliffe, D A (1977). *A Nature Conservation Review: the Selection of sites of Biological National Importance to Nature Conservation in Britain*. Two Volumes. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

6.2. Habitat Evaluation

Designated sites

- 6.2.1. **Statutory sites.** There are no statutory designated sites located within or immediately adjacent to the application site, or within close proximity to the site. The nearest statutory site designated for its nature conservation interest is Wendlebury Meadows and Mansmoor Closes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which is situated approximately 3.2km to the south of the application site boundary at its closest point (see Plan ECO1).
- 6.2.2. There are no European or internationally designated sites within 10km of the application site boundary.
- 6.2.3. Due to the distance in separation between the application site and the nearest statutory designated site, and that they are separated by intensively managed arable land, it is considered that the development proposals would not have an adverse effect on any statutory designated sites.
- 6.2.4. **Non-statutory sites.** There are no non-statutory designated sites situated within or immediately adjacent to the application site. The nearest non-statutory designated site is Bicester Wetland Reserve Local Wildlife Site (LWS), which is situated approximately 0.4km to the east of the application site boundary at its closest point (see Plan ECO1).
- 6.2.5. The application site is currently separated from this non-statutory designated site by an area of agricultural land. It is understood that there are no potential hydrological links between the application site and the LWS. As such it is considered that there would not be any potential adverse impacts on this designated site, either during the construction or operation period as a result of the development proposals.
- 6.2.6. Furthermore, given the nature of the development proposals for Phase 1 (for new hotel and business space), it is considered that the development proposals would not result in any potential increase in recreational pressure at the non-statutory designated site (although it is understood that public access into Bicester Wetland Reserve LWS is not currently possible).
- 6.2.7. In any event, standard engineering protocols and best practice shall be implemented at all times during the construction period, such as the use of temporary protective fencing, storage of materials away from retained habitats, dust suppression techniques and the use of interceptor fencing, where necessary.
- 6.2.8. It is therefore considered that the development proposals for Phase 1 of Bicester Gateway would not be likely to result in any adverse impacts on non-designated sites, and no mitigation measures would be necessary.

- 6.2.9. It is noted that further consideration will be afforded to the potential for effects to arise on Bicester Wetland Reserve LWS as a result of Phase 2 of the Bicester Gateway site (under a separate planning application), and the requirement for any specific mitigation measures.

Habitats within the application site

- 6.2.10. The majority of the habitats within the application site hold limited ecological value, comprising semi-improved grassland fields in addition to treelines / hedgerows, dense scrub.
- 6.2.11. The grassland habitats present within the application site primarily comprise a limited range of common and widespread species, although they do support some species indicative of neutral conditions such as Agrimony and Common Knapweed.
- 6.2.12. It is considered that there is scope to provide areas of species-rich wildflower grassland within areas of marginal open space included within the design proposals for the new development, this would provide a species-rich habitat post-development, providing opportunities for invertebrates, foraging birds and bats.
- 6.2.13. The features that hold relatively higher value within the context of the application site are the trees, hedgerows and scrub along field boundaries. Although the proposals will require the loss of the sparse line of trees and scrub along the western boundary (T2 and T4), the vast majority of the eastern treelines are to be retained. The provision of significant areas of new native tree and scrub planting, notably in the southern part of the application site and along the site boundaries, together with bolster planting of gaps in retained treelines, will offset any losses which are required, and will ensure that opportunities for faunal species such as nesting birds and foraging bats are maintained post-development.
- 6.2.14. It is considered that the provision of an appropriate landscape planting scheme for the application site, based around the use of native species of local provenance where possible, will mitigate for any losses to other habitats within the application site and will represent an enhancement in biodiversity value compared to the existing situation.

6.3. Faunal Evaluation

Bats

- 6.3.1. **Legislation.** All bats are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and included on Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 ("the Habitats Regulations"), as amended. These include provisions making it an offence:

- Deliberately to kill, injure or take (capture) bats;
- Deliberately to disturb bats in such a way as to:-

- (i) be likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young, or to hibernate or migrate; or
 - (ii) affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
 - To damage or destroy any breeding or resting place used by bats;
 - Intentionally or recklessly to obstruct access to any place used by bats for shelter or protection.
- 6.3.2. While the legislation is deemed to apply even when bats are not in residence, Natural England guidance suggests that certain activities such as re-roofing can be completed outside sensitive periods when bats are not in residence provided these do not damage or destroy the roost.
- 6.3.3. The words deliberately and intentionally include actions where a court can infer that the defendant knew that the action taken would almost inevitably result in an offence, even if that was not the primary purpose of the act.
- 6.3.4. The offence of damaging or destroying a breeding site or resting place (which can be interpreted as making it worse for the bat) is an absolute offence. Such actions do not have to be deliberate for an offence to be committed.
- 6.3.5. European Protected Species licences are available from Natural England in certain circumstances, and permit activities that would otherwise be considered an offence.
- 6.3.6. Licences can usually only be granted if the development is in receipt of full planning permission and it is considered that:
- (i) The activity to be licensed must be for imperative reasons of overriding public interest or for public health and safety;
 - (ii) There is no satisfactory alternative; and
 - (ii) The action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.
- 6.3.7. **Application Site Evaluation.** As outlined above, the application site does not provide any potential opportunities for roosting bats. Whilst the treelines and hedgerows provide some suitable foraging and commuting opportunities, given the context of the site (with the A41 dual carriageway with street lighting situated to the west) it is considered it would not be of any particular significance for bats.
- 6.3.8. Survey work undertaken in respect of foraging and commuting bats in September 2016 confirmed that the application site is not of any particular significance for this group, with very limited activity recorded and only two species present (Soprano Pipistrelle and Common Pipistrelle).

- 6.3.9. **Mitigation and Enhancements.** As outlined above, the majority of the treelines present along the eastern boundary of the application site are to be retained and enhanced, with new native tree, scrub and wildflower meadow grassland margins proposed as part of the planting scheme. This will ensure that existing opportunities for foraging and commuting bats within the application site are retained.
- 6.3.10. Notwithstanding that the application site is not considered to be of any significance for bats, it is recommended that a sensitive lighting strategy should be adopted as part of the development proposals, using measures such as hoods and cowls to minimise lightspill and ensure that dark corridors are provided post-development. This will ensure that any existing (albeit sub-optimal) opportunities available for foraging and commuting bats are maintained.
- 6.3.11. There is also scope to provide enhancements for roosting bats in the local area by installing a number of bat boxes on suitable retained trees or buildings within the application site.

Birds

- 6.3.12. **Legislation.** Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act is concerned with the protection of wild birds, whilst Schedule 1 lists species which are protected by special penalties
- 6.3.13. **Application Site Evaluation, Mitigation and Enhancements.** There are some opportunities for nesting birds in the trees, hedgerows and scrub within the application site. As all species of birds receive general protection whilst nesting, to avoid a possible offence it is recommended that any clearance of trees, hedgerows or scrub is undertaken outside the breeding season (between March and the end of July), or that checks be made for nesting birds by an ecologist immediately prior to removal.
- 6.3.14. The emerging proposals will retain areas of existing trees, hedgerows and scrub, with areas of new planting proposed across the site. This will maintain and enhance opportunities for foraging and nesting birds post-development.
- 6.3.15. In addition nest boxes could be erected as part of the development proposals to increase nesting opportunities for birds within the application site. All nest boxes should be situated out of direct sunlight and out of the reach of predators, particularly cats.

7. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 7.1. The planning policy framework that relates to nature conservation in Bicester, Oxfordshire is issued at two main administrative levels: nationally through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); and at the local level through policies in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 in addition to saved policies in the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and policies in the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011. Any proposed development will be judged in relation to the policies contained within these documents.

7.2. National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

- 7.2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system and was adopted on 27th March 2012. It replaces previous national planning policy, including Planning Policy Statement 9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation) [PPS9] which was published in 2005.
- 7.2.2. The key element of the NPPF is that there should be '*a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking*' (paragraph 14). It is important to note that this presumption '*does not apply where development requiring Appropriate Assessment under the Birds or Habitats Directives is being considered, planned or determined*' (paragraph 119).
- 7.2.3. The NPPF also considers the strategic approach which Local Authorities should adopt with regard to the protection, enhancement and management of green infrastructure, priority habitats and ecological networks, and the recovery of priority species.
- 7.2.4. Paragraph 118 of the NPPF comprises a number of principles which Local Authorities should apply, including encouraging opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments; provision for refusal of planning applications if significant harm cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated for; applying the protection given to European sites to potential SPAs, possible SACs, listed or proposed Ramsar sites and sites identified (or required) as compensatory measures for adverse effects on European sites; and the provision for the refusal for developments resulting in the loss or deterioration of 'irreplaceable' habitats unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss.
- 7.2.5. National policy therefore implicitly recognises the importance of biodiversity and that with sensitive planning and design, development and conservation of the natural heritage can co-exist and benefits can, in certain circumstances, be obtained.

7.3. Local Policy

Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031

- 7.3.1. The principal document for planning control purposes in Cherwell District is the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031, Part 1 of which was adopted in July 2015. The Plan provides the strategic planning policy framework for the District, and outlines the basis for decisions on land use planning affecting the Cherwell District.
- 7.3.2. It is noted that the application site forms the westernmost part of a Strategic Development site – Policy Bicester 10 (Bicester Gateway). Policy Bicester 10 make specific reference to:
- “Adequate investigation of, protection of and management of priority and protected habitats and species on site given the ecological value of the site, with biodiversity preserved and enhanced. An ecological survey should be undertaken, investigating the cumulative impacts of development at this site and at other sites on the Local and District Wildlife Sites in the vicinity”*
- 7.3.3. A number of key site specific design principles are outlined in the Local Plan for this site, which include: the provision of opportunities for green infrastructure; adequate investigation of, protection of and management of priority and protected habitats and species on site; the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity; consideration of potential impacts on designated sites in the locality; and the retention and creation of wildlife corridors.
- 7.3.4. There are four policies relevant to ecology and nature conservation in the Local Plan.
- 7.3.5. Policy ESD9 relates specifically to the protection of Oxford Water Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Given the distance between this designated site and the application site, this policy is not considered to be of any relevance in this case.
- 7.3.6. Policy ESD10 is the primarily policy in the Local Plan which relates to ecology and nature conservation, and is concerned with the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the natural environment. The policy makes reference to the protection afforded to sites of international, national, regional or local importance and notes that proposals will be expected to incorporate features to encourage biodiversity, as well as maintain and enhance existing ecological networks and provide new green infrastructure.
- 7.3.7. Policy ESD11 refers to the approach to be adopted in Conservation Target Areas (CTA). The application site does not lie within or adjacent to a CTA, and as such this policy is not considered to be of any relevance in this case.
- 7.3.8. Policy ESD17 relates to green infrastructure, and highlights the importance of maintaining and improving the green infrastructure

network, with reference made to its contribution to biodiversity and nature conservation.

- 7.3.9. Part 2 of the Local Plan is being prepared and will contain detailed planning policies to assist with the implementation of strategic policies and the development management process. The policies contained within this document will replace saved policies of the Local Plan 1996, once adopted (see below).

Cherwell Local Plan 1996

- 7.3.10. The Cherwell Local Plan 1996 was adopted in November 1996 and contains a number of saved policies which remain a material consideration in determining planning applications.
- 7.3.11. There are three saved policies within the Local Plan 1996 that relate to nature conservation. Policy C1 relates to the protection of statutory and non-statutory designated sites, while policy C2 relates to protected species. Policy C4 refers to the creation of new habitats.

Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011

- 7.3.12. There are also a number of policies relevant to ecology and nature conservation in the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011. The original intention was that this plan would replace the policies in the Cherwell Local Plan 1996; however work was discontinued prior to adoption of this plan.
- 7.3.13. Whilst policies in the Non-Statutory Local Plan 2011 are not part of the statutory development plan, the document has been approved as interim planning policy for development control purposes. As such some weight may also be given to the policies contained in this document.
- 7.3.14. There are nine policies within the Non-Statutory Local Plan 2011 that relate to nature conservation.
- 7.3.15. Policy EN1 states that in determining planning applications the Council will take into account the likely impact of the proposal on the natural environment. Policy EN2 relates to environmental replacement through provision of compensatory habitat. Policy EN6 refers to the impact of light pollution, while policy EN13 relates to development adjacent to watercourses. Policy EN22 states that development proposals will be expected to incorporate features of nature conservation interest, and retain and enhance features of value where possible. Policy EN23 relates to ecological surveys, while policies EN24 and EN25 relate to the protection of designated sites and species respectively. Policy EN27 states that development proposals should also incorporate the creation of new habitats.

7.4. Discussion

- 7.4.1. Recommendations have been put forward in this report that would fully safeguard the existing ecological interest of the application site, and wherever possible, measures to enhance ecological and biodiversity value have been set out. Based on surveys undertaken and assessment, the presence and potential presence of protected species has been given due regard and measures to enhance the application site for such species have been put forward.
- 7.4.2. In conclusion, implementation of the measures set out in this report would enable the emerging development proposals for the application site to fully accord with planning policy for ecology and nature conservation at all administrative levels, and also with Policy Bicester 10 which relates to the application site.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

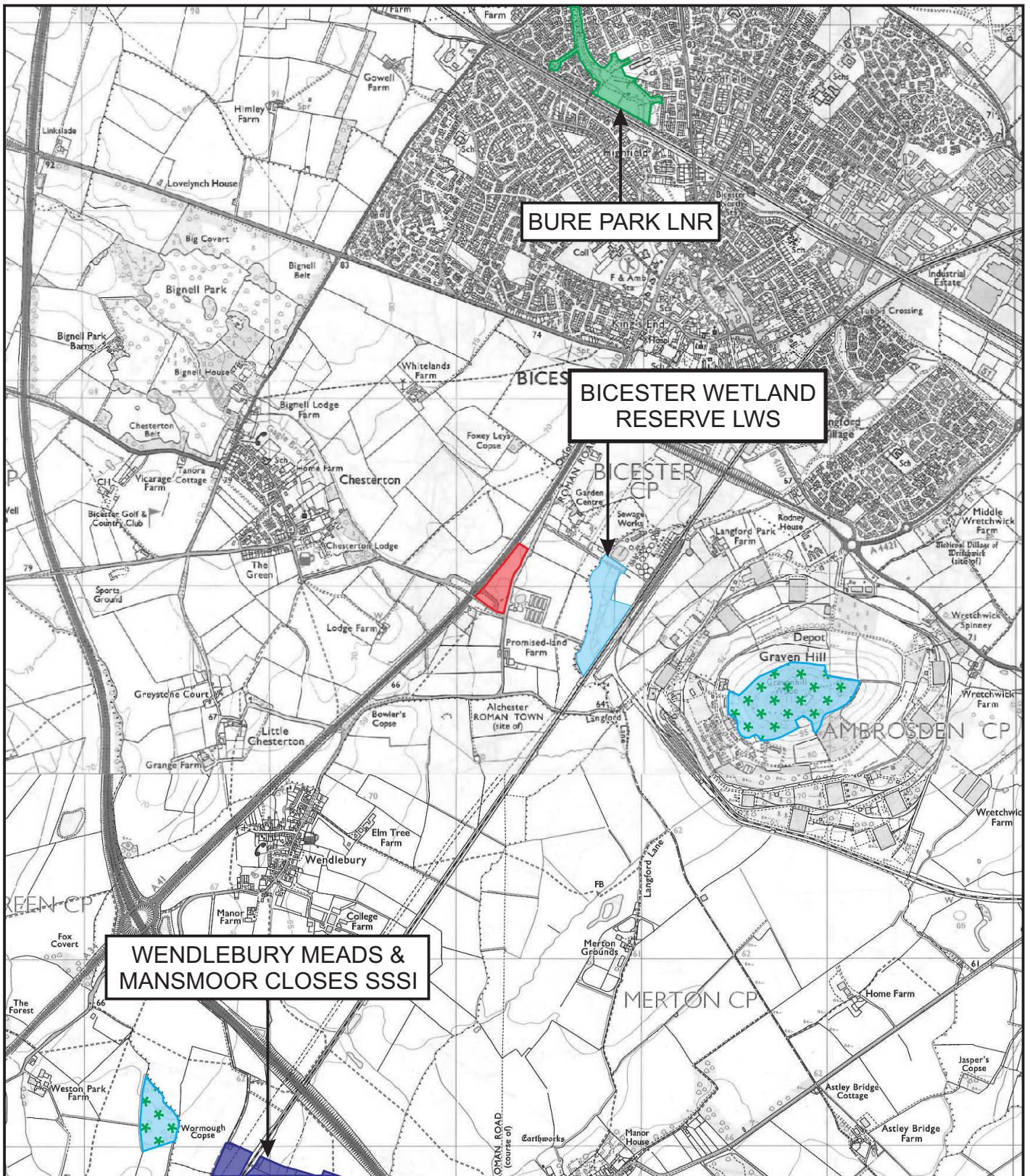
- 8.1. Ecology Solutions was commissioned by Bloombridge LLP in April 2016 to undertake an Ecological Assessment of Land at Bicester Gateway, Bicester, Oxfordshire.
- 8.2. The development proposals are for new business space and hotel development, including associated infrastructure, access and landscaping. This comprises Phase 1 of the Bicester Gateway site (Bicester 10).
- 8.3. There are no statutory or non-statutory sites designated sites of nature conservation interest situated within or immediately adjacent to the application site. The nearest designated site is Wendlebury Meadows and Mansmoor Closes SSSI which is situated approximately 3.2km to the south, whilst the nearest non-statutory designated site is Bicester Wetland Reserve LWS, situated approximately 0.4km to the east.
- 8.4. The application site is separated from these designated sites by open countryside, and with the implementation of standard engineering practice and best practice during construction it is considered that the development proposals would not have any adverse impacts on designated sites.
- 8.5. With the retention and enhancement of existing habitats of comparatively greater value, and the provision of an appropriately designed landscape planting scheme which incorporates new native tree, scrub and grassland at the margins of the site, it is considered that losses to habitats will be offset and an overall enhancement in terms of the biodiversity value of the site may be achieved post-development.
- 8.6. The habitats present within the application site provide some limited opportunities for faunal species, including bats and birds, although there is no evidence to suggest that the site is of any particular importance for these groups. Subject to the implementation of appropriate mitigation as outlined above, it is considered that any existing opportunities for these groups would be retained and moreover enhanced post-development.
- 8.7. In conclusion, on the evidence of the ecological surveys undertaken, the application site is not considered to be of particularly high intrinsic interest from an ecology and nature conservation perspective. The design of the proposed development and the implementation of mitigation measures as recommended in this report will ensure that there are no adverse effects on any designated sites or protected species as a result of development at the application site.

PLANS AND APPENDICES

PLANS

PLAN ECO1

Application Site Location and Ecological Designations



KEY:

- APPLICATION SITE LOCATION
- SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (SSSI)
- LOCAL NATURE RESERVE (LNR)
- LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE (LWS)
- *
*
*
*
 ANCIENT SEMI-NATURAL WOODLAND



ecology solutions ltd

7057: BICESTER GATEWAY

PLAN ECO1: APPLICATION SITE
LOCATION AND ECOLOGICAL
DESIGNATIONS

PLAN ECO2

Ecological Features



KEY:

-  APPLICATION SITE BOUNDARY
-  SEMI-IMPROVED GRASSLAND
-  HEDGEROWS/TREELINES
-  DENSE SCRUB
-  SCATTERED SCRUB



ecology solutions ltd

7057: BICESTER GATEWAY

PLAN ECO2:
ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

**Bicester Gateway, Bicester, Masterplan – Phase 1. Drawing Ref
16084_P102 (UMC Architects, December 2016)**

Dimensions are in millimetres, unless stated otherwise.
 Scaling of this drawing is not recommended.
 It is the recipient's responsibility to print this document to the correct scale.
 All relevant drawings and specifications should be read in conjunction with this drawing.



SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION

PHASE IA	- 2.56 Acres (1.043 Ha)
PHASE IA Land to be Retained for Future Phase II Road Widening	- 0.02 Acres (0.01 Ha)
Total Area PHASE IA	- 2.58 Acres (1.044 Ha)

PHASE IB	- 6.56 Acres (2.65 Ha)
PHASE IB Land to be Retained for Future Phase II Road Widening	- .25 Acres (0.10 Ha)
Total Area PHASE IB	- 6.81 Acres (2.75 Ha)

PHASE IA

Hotel	- 149 Bedrooms
Car Parking Spaces	- 149 (Including 8 Accessible Spaces)

PHASE IB

Unit 1	- 37,038 sq ft
Unit 2	- 37,038 sq ft
Unit 3	- 37,040 sq ft
Unit 4	- 49,050 sq ft
Car Parking Spaces	- 503 (Including 25 Accessible Spaces)

— BOUNDARY

rev amendments by old date

Bicester Gateway, Bicester
 Masterplan - Phase 1

Bloombridge
 Development Partners

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Drawing Status:	Planning
Drawn / Checked:	GW / GH
Date:	12.12.2016
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Drawing no:	Revision:
16084 P102	-

SCALE 1:1000