

Ecological Appraisal

Project: Wykham Park Farm, Banbury, Parcels 1 & 3

Client: Persimmon Homes Ltd

Date: 19th October 2022

- masterplanning
- environmental assessment
- landscape design
- urban design
- ecology
- architecture
- arboriculture
- graphic design

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The following report has been prepared by FPCR Environment & Design Ltd. on behalf of Persimmon Homes Ltd. A site visit was undertaken on Friday 8th April 2022 to update the ecological baseline information in response to Condition 9 of the outline planning consent for development at Wykham Park Farm, Banbury (Parcels 1 and 3), Banbury (Cherwell District Council Application Reference 14/01932/OUT). Proposals for parcels 1 and 3 involves the construction of a residential development of between 235 and 260 dwellings and areas of greenspace. Condition 9 of the outline planning permission states:

“No development shall take place on any phase including works of site clearance/preparation until the phase of the site has been thoroughly checked by a suitably qualified ecologist to ensure that no statutorily protected species which could be harmed by the development have moved on to the site since the date the previous surveys supporting the application were carried out. Should any protected species be found during this check, full details of mitigation measures to prevent their harm shall be submitted and approved by the LPA. Thereafter the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved mitigation scheme unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.”

Survey methods followed the extended Phase 1 Survey technique which involved a systematic walk over of the site by an experienced ecologist to classify the broad habitat types and to particularly identify any habitats of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity as listed within Section 41 (S41) of NERC Act (2006).

During the survey, observations, signs of, or suitable habitat for, any species protected under Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 were noted. Throughout the survey, consideration was also given to the existence and use of the site by other notable fauna such as Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) or Red Data Book (RDB) species.

The wider site has previously been subject to Extended Phase I Habitat Surveys in August 2012, April 2014, July 2014 and August 2014 whilst great crested newt surveys were undertaken in 2013 and bat activity surveys were carried out in 2012 in association with the wider site area.

Designated Sites

No internationally designated sites of nature conservation value occur within 5km of the site and no nationally designated sites occur within 2km of the site. There were no locally designated sites on-site, however Salt Way potential Local Wildlife Site (pLWS) was located approximately 20m north of the site which may be designated in the future on account of its value as a 'green lane'. Additionally, The Bretch Local Wildlife Site (LWS) was located approximately 1.2km north-west of the site which

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is designated for its mosaic of grassland, scrub and stream habitats including areas of lowland calcareous grassland and lowland meadow grassland. The ES Chapter (Gallagher Estates, 2014¹) which accompanied the outline application assessed the potential impacts that the wider development could have on these sites and concluded that the development will unlikely have a significant impact on either site. Due to proposed extensive green infrastructure within the wider site and the relative distance from the Site, it is not anticipated that The Bretch LWS will experience a significant increase in recreational pressure. Whilst in closer proximity to the Site, due to Salt Way pLWS being managed and functioning as a National Cycle Network (NCN), it was considered to be already subject to at least moderate levels of recreational pressure on a daily basis, and as such it is not expected that any additional increases in recreational pressure as a result of the development are likely to affect the integrity of the site.

Protected Species

No records of protected species were returned from within the site boundary whilst records of common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, unidentified pipistrelle *Pipistrellus sp.*, grass snake *Natrix helvetica* and brown hare *Lepus europaeus*, hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* and common toad *Bufo bufo* were returned from within 2km of the site boundary.

Assessment & Recommendations

Habitats (Figure 1)

Parcels 1 and 3 largely formed part of a field compartment which was previously recorded as arable land between 2012 and 2014, however during the walkover survey undertaken in 2022 this was now formed of sheep-grazed improved grassland which was of a generally uniform structure approximately 10cm in height. Species recorded here largely comprised cock's foot *Dactylus glomerata* and perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne* whilst forbs were extremely limited in both diversity and abundance with common nettle *Urtica dioica*, spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* and broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius* recorded. A gravel track was present along the western boundary of this field compartment.

A small, triangle shaped area of mature mixed semi-natural woodland largely formed of English oak *Quercus robur*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and larch *Larix decidua* was located in the north-western corner of the site. The woodland was largely formed of mature specimens though saplings of the same species were present across the woodland block whilst the ground flora was largely formed of cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* and ivy *Hedera helix*.

A small section of another field compartment was within the western boundary of the site which was formerly recorded as arable land on previous survey occasions. However, due to the commencement of construction in this field compartment this area was now largely formed of bare ground supporting limited ephemeral/short perennial vegetation including dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, greater plantain *Plantago major*, spear thistle and perennial rye-grass.

Four hedgerows (H13-H16 (hedgerow numbering consistent with ES Chapter)) were present on-site which formed the field boundaries, details of canopy compositions in addition to the physical characteristics of the hedgerows (profile, length, % gaps etc.) are presented in Table 1 below. Hedgerow H12 used to be present along the north-western boundary of the site adjoining the south-western extent of the woodland, however this section of the hedgerow has been removed since the previous survey,

1 Gallagher Estates, 2014. Land at Wykham Park Farm, Banbury. Environmental Statement

Table 1: Hedgerow Composition and Descriptions

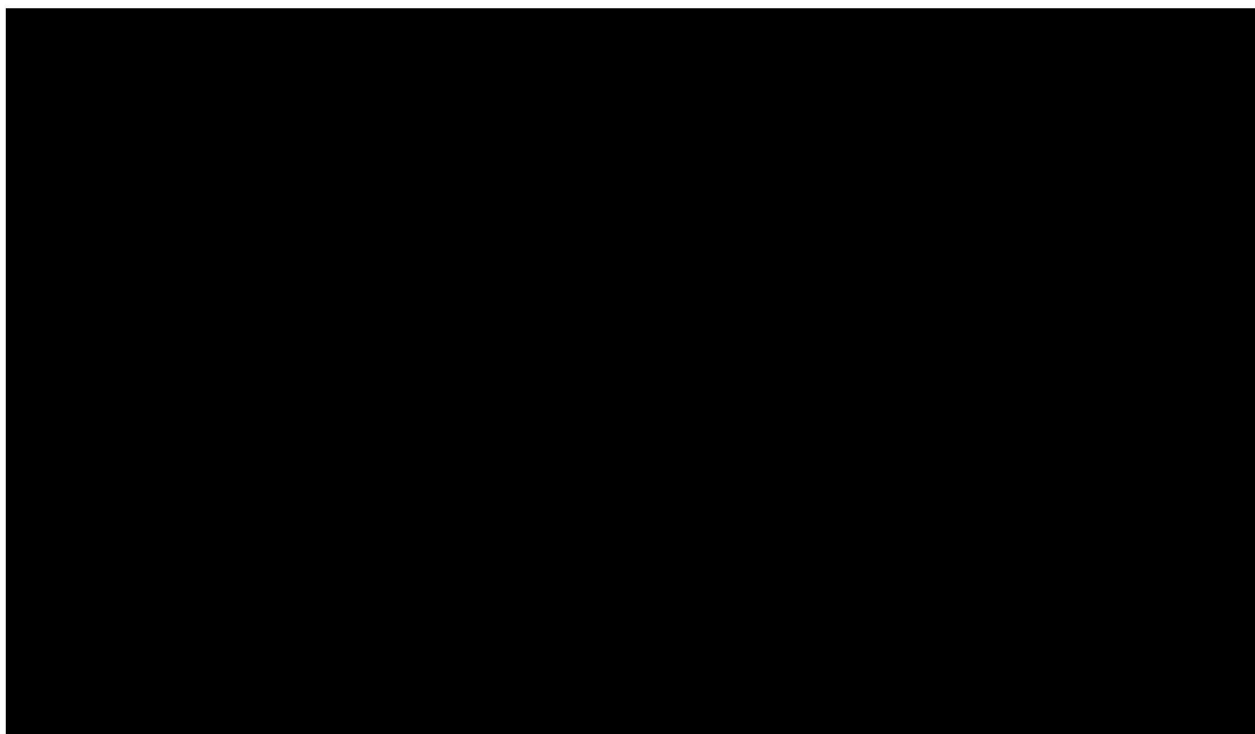
Ref	Canopy Species	Length	Notes	Important under REGS?
H13	<i>Cm, Fe, Ps, Rf, Sn</i>	100m	Western edge of gravel track, 0 mature trees, No gaps, 4 connections	No
H14	<i>Ac, Fe, Ps, Ra, Rf, Sn, Up</i>	310m,	Northern boundary hedgerow: 0-10% gaps, 1 mature tree, 3 connections.	No
H15	<i>Ac, Ps, Rc, Sn, Rc, Rf, Up</i>	150m	Eastern boundary hedgerow: 0 mature trees, no gaps, 3 connections.	Yes
H16	<i>Ac, Cm, Rc, Ps, Qr, Sn, Ug</i>	390m	Southern boundary hedgerow, 6 mature trees, 10-30% gaps, 2 connections	Yes

Key to hedgerow species: *Ac* *Acer campestre* Field Maple, *Cm* *Crataegus monogyna* Hawthorn, *Fe* *Fraxinus excelsior* Ash, *Ps* *Prunus spinosa* Blackthorn, *Qr* *Quercus robur* English Oak, *Ra* *Rosa arvensis* Field Rose, *Rc* *Rosa canina* Dog-rose, *Rf* *Rubus fruticosus* agg. Bramble, *Sn* *Sambucus nigra* Elder, *Ug* *Ulmus glabra* Wych Elm, *Up* *Ulmus procera* English Elm

All hedgerows contain over 80% native woody species and are therefore identified as Habitats of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act. Hedgerows H15 and H16 likely qualify as important under the wildlife and landscape criteria of the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

A vegetative species-list is provided in Appendix A.

Fauna



Bats

The site was considered to be of limited value to bats with the improved grassland and bare ground of low value to bats, whilst the hardstanding areas of negligible value. The field boundary hedgerows and woodland were considered to be of higher value providing suitable commuting and foraging habitat. There were no trees identified with bat roosting potential located on-site. Bat surveys undertaken in August and September 2012 by Wardell Armstrong identified relatively low numbers of common and widespread species comprising common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, an unidentified *Myotis sp* bat and noctule *Nyctalus noctula* within the wider area of the site. Since the on-site habitats remain of similar value to when these surveys were completed in 2012 it is reasonable to assume that the assemblage of bats currently using the site will also remain similar and therefore no update surveys are required.

Although under the consented outline scheme the proposals involve the removal of hedgerow H16 and the partial removal of hedgerow H13, it is considered that the enhancement of existing hedgerows and the creation of new hedgerows, scrub planting and green corridors within the site boundary and the wider site area will compensate for these losses, therefore maintaining commuting and foraging networks across the site. The roosting resources within the site could be enhanced through the provision of bat boxes installed on the existing mature trees and / or incorporated into the built fabric of the residential properties. It is recommended that a sensitive lighting scheme is implemented to include the avoidance of direct lighting of the boundary hedgerows and woodland whereby lighting should be directional with light spillage avoided whilst lighting levels should be as low as guidelines permit and used only where required for public safety.

Birds

Habitats within the site comprising the woodland, hedgerows and mature trees, are considered to be of potential value to farmland and woodland birds which may provide a source of shelter, foraging and nesting opportunities. The grassland is of some suitability for ground-nesting birds including skylark *Alauda arvensis*. The majority of habitats of value to breeding birds including the boundary trees, woodland and part of the hedgerow network are to be largely retained and enhanced within the proposals. Although the loss of hedgerow H16 and the partial loss of hedgerow H13 will reduce the availability of nesting resources, the enhancement of the retained hedgerows and the provision of new scrub, hedgerow and tree planting within the site boundary and the wider site area are considered to compensate for these losses. Habitat loss within the site is mainly confined to areas of improved grassland and bare ground but due to the limited area of these losses there are not likely to lead to any significant impact on the local bird populations.

All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird or take, damage or destroy its nest whilst in use or being built, or take or destroy its eggs. In addition to this, for some rarer species (listed on Schedule 1 of the Act), it is an offence to disturb them while they are nest building or at or near a nest with eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

Any removal of woody vegetation or ground clearance should occur outside the bird breeding season (March to August inclusive) to minimise the risk of disturbance to breeding birds. If this is not possible, vegetation and the ground should be checked prior to removal/clearance by a suitably experienced ecologist. If active nests are found, vegetation/the ground should be left untouched and suitably buffered from works until all birds have fledged.

The nesting resources within the site could be further enhanced through the provision of bird boxes installed on the existing mature trees and / or incorporated into the built fabric of the residential properties.

Herpetofauna

The grassland and the ephemeral/short perennial vegetation were considered to offer limited suitable habitat for amphibians and reptiles lacking the structure they typically require whilst the areas of hardstanding were of negligible value for these species. Due to the poor-quality habitats present on-site reptile surveys have not previously been undertaken, however during the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey undertaken by Wardell Armstrong in 2012 a grass snake *Natrix helvetica* was recorded in the wider site area along Salt Way. Therefore, although this grass snake was recorded off-site, it is recommended that a precautionary approach to works is undertaken in areas of suitable habitat to ensure no reptiles are harmed during the process with works undertaken under a Method Statement to minimise any risk of harm to grass snake.

During GCN surveys undertaken in 2013 in association with the wider site, a medium population of GCN were recorded within two ponds (P1 and P5) but were found to be absent in all other ponds surveyed. Pond P1 was located approximately 250m north-west of the site boundary whilst pond P5 is located approximately 740m south of the site boundary. In the ES it was determined that the likelihood of GCN from pond P1 commuting onto site was very low due to the intervening distance, the quality of the habitats in the vicinity of the pond and the presence of a main road, Bloxham Road (A361), separating the site from the pond. However, due to Natural England's Rapid Risk Assessment Tool stating that there was a 'likely' risk of an offence being committed for works within 500m of the site then clearance works within this radius were recommended to be undertaken under a Method Statement to minimise this risk. However, in the intervening period a new residential development has been built to the west of Bloxham Road, separating pond P1 from the site which is now considered to represent a major barrier to dispersal for GCN. Consequently, it is considered extremely unlikely that GCN from pond P1 would commute onto site and therefore conducting site clearance works within 500m of this pond under a Method Statement is unnecessary. Due to the intervening distance between pond P5 and the site it is considered extremely unlikely that GCN from this pond would commute onto site. Therefore, it is considered that GCN do not pose a constraint to development and no further surveys are required.

It is considered that through habitat retention and the proposed creation of additional habitats including SUDS features, species-rich grassland and scrub planting that additional commuting, foraging and hibernation opportunities will increase the suitability of the site for reptiles.

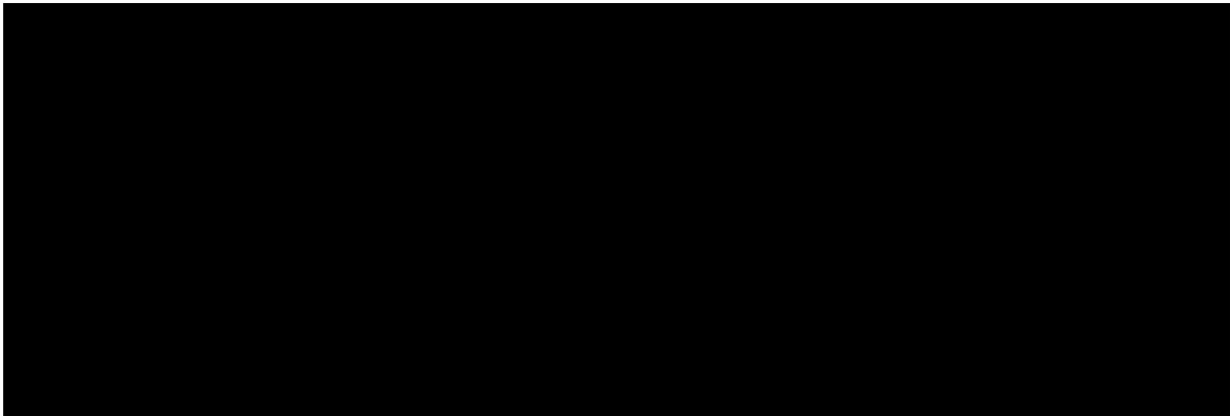
Summary

Updated survey work demonstrates that the site remains of limited ecological value largely comprising areas of improved grassland, bare ground with ephemeral/short perennial vegetation and hardstanding also present. Habitats of higher value, including part of the hedgerow network and mature trees, are largely to be retained as part of the proposals (Soft Landscaping Proposals, drawing ref: P21-2662_100 – 107, Pegasus Group). Although some of the hedgerow network is to be lost to facilitate the development, the proposed tree, hedgerow and scrub planting within the application boundary and the wider site area are considered to compensate for these losses. Consequently, the proposed development is expected to have a limited ecological impact with no ecological constraints identified.

As a consequence of the on-site habitats remaining of similar value to when previous surveys were completed in between 2012 and 2014 with the majority of higher value habitats to be retained under the proposals with the proposed tree and scrub planting considered to compensate for the hedgerow losses it is considered that updated bat activity surveys (transect and static detector) are not required.

Although GCN were recorded within two ponds during the 2013 survey season, due to the intervening distance and barriers to dispersal it is considered extremely unlikely that GCN from either pond would commute onto site. Therefore, no further surveys are considered necessary and this species does

not represent a constraint to development. Due to the presence of grass snake within the wider site area, it is recommended that all site clearance works are completed under a method statement to minimise the risk of injury or death to grass snake.



Under the NPPF, development should seek to contribute a net gain in biodiversity with an emphasis on improving ecological networks and linkages where possible. Detailed landscaping plans show that tree and shrub planting is included within the greenspace which will provide additional foraging and nesting opportunities for wildlife. Preference has been given to native species within the more semi-natural areas, with an emphasis on species bearing nectar, berries, fruit and nuts, as these enhance the foraging opportunities for local wild fauna including birds and invertebrates whilst ornamental species are present in the more formal areas. Native shrub species included within the soft landscaping design include alder *Alnus glutinosa*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, goat willow *Salix caprea* and grey willow *Salix cinerea*. Within the more semi-natural areas grassland is to be sown with a species-rich seed mix and appropriately managed to increase their ecological value.

The current availability of roosting resources for bats and nesting resources for birds could be enhanced through the provision of additional bat and bird boxes on existing mature trees and/or integrated into the built fabric of residential properties.








It should be noted that the accuracy of the ecological data contained within the reports should not be relied upon beyond one year after completion of the survey. In the event that the on-site works have not commenced within one year of the survey, then further work may be required to ensure the provision of accurate baseline ecological data.

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Key

-  Bare ground
-  Built Environment: Buildings/hardstanding
-  Improved grassland
-  Mixed woodland - semi-natural
-  Broadleaved trees
-  Native Hedgerow
-  Broadleaved tree



client
Persimmon Homes Ltd

project
Wykham Park Farm Parcels 1 & 3,
Banbury

drawing title
Phase 1 Habitat Plan

scale @ A3
1:1,800

drawn
BJC

issue
09/09/2022

Figure 1

APPENDIX A – BOTANICAL SPECIES LIST

Semi-Natural Mixed Woodland

SPECIES	COMMON NAME
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy
<i>Larix decidua</i>	Larch
<i>Quercus robur</i>	English oak
<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>	Bramble
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broadleaved Dock
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle

Improved Grassland

SPECIES	COMMON NAME
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False-oat Grass
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping Thistle
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle
<i>Dactylus glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot
<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	Red Dead-nettle
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial Rye-grass
<i>Poa annua</i>	Annual Meadow-grass
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock
<i>Senecio jacobeeae</i>	Ragwort
<i>Taraxacum officinale agg.</i>	Dandelion
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle

Bare Ground

SPECIES	COMMON NAME
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False Oat-grass
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle

SPECIES	COMMON NAME
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cocks-foot
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	False-oat Grass
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock
<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	Groundsel
<i>Taraxacum officinale agg.</i>	Dandelion
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Nettle