Protected Species Survey Report for Austin Grounds Farm, Hook Norton Rd, Sibford Ferris, OX15 5QR

Cotswold Wildlife Surveys

9th December 2025

QUALITY CONTROL

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The information in this report has been prepared in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's (CIEEM) Code of Professional Conduct. The conclusions and recommendations expressed are reasoned judgements based on the evidence.

Every reasonable attempt has been made to comply with BS42020:2013 *Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development*, *CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing* (CIEEM, 2017) and Bat Conservation Trust's *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th edition, Collins, 2023). If there has been deviation from recognised practice, justification/explanation has been given.

CONTENTS

Page No.

SUMMARY **4**

1. INTRODUCTION **5**

2. METHODOLOGY **8**

2.1 Badgers 8
2.2 Bats 8
2.3 Birds 10
2.4 Reptiles & amphibians 10
2.5 Habitat Survey 11
2.6 Constraints 11

3. RESULTS **12**

3.1 Desk Study 12
3.2 Location 12
3.3 Site Description 12
3.4 Bats 13
3.5 Badgers 14
3.6 Birds 14
3.7 Reptiles and amphibians 14
3.8 Other species 14

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS **16**

4.1 Herptile Precautionary Method of Working 17

5. REFERENCES **19**

APPENDICES **19**

Appendix 1: Location plan 20
Appendix 2: Site layout 21

SUMMARY

At Austin Grounds Farm, planning permission is being sought for the conversion of the existing barn.

As this could impact on features typically used by bats as roosting places, a diurnal inspection was undertaken on 9th December 2025 to assess the building for signs of bat occupation.

All the internal and external structures, especially those associated with the roof and walls of the barn were examined.

No evidence of bat activity or occupation was found and the barn was considered to be of negligible suitability for roosting pipistrelles *Pipistrellus sp.* As such, no further surveys or mitigation measures are considered necessary.

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In terms of other species, no old or in use birds' nests were found, although the nearby trees and hedgerow were considered suitable for nesting purposes.

There were no ponds within 500 metres of the site shown on an Ordnance Survey map.

The presence of reptiles and amphibians was considered unlikely as the site was largely comprised of building and hardstanding, with no still water features and limited basking opportunities.

Irrespective of this, the proposed works will be carried out under a Precautionary Method of Working to ensure that any amphibians which are unexpectedly encountered are not harmed by the development.

No evidence of Badgers *Meles meles* was found, although there was Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* activity.

The only habitats present included a small amount of poor, semi-improved grassland which was partially mown, with some Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* scrub encroaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2025, Cotswold Wildlife Surveys was instructed by Stephen Hopkins, to undertake a protected species survey of a barn at Austin Grounds Farm in Sibford Ferris.

On 9th December 2025, a visit was made to the property to carry out a diurnal inspection of the barn to check for signs of bat occupation. A walkover of the wider site was also undertaken to check for evidence of other protected species.

The result of the survey is contained in this report.

In England, Scotland and Wales, all **bat** species are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) (as amended), through inclusion in Schedule 5. In England and Wales this Act has been amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC), which add an extra offence, makes species offences arrestable, increases the time limits for some prosecutions, and increases penalties.

All bats are also included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations (the Habitats Regulations), which defines 'European protected species of animals'. In England this is the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, in Scotland the Habitat Regulations 1994 (as amended), and in Northern Ireland the Conservation Regulations 1995.

All bats are also protected under the Bern Convention Appendix II, the Bonn Convention Appendix II, and the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.

The above legislation can be summarised thus (Mitchell-Jones and McLeish, 2004):

- *Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture (or take) bats;*
- *Deliberately disturb bats (whether in a roost or not);*
- *Recklessly disturb roosting bats or obstruct access to their roosts;*
- *Damage or destroy roosts;*
- *Possess or transport a bat or any part of a part of a bat, unless acquired legally;*
- *Sell (or offer for sale) or exchange bats, or parts of bats.*

The word 'roost' is not used in the legislation, but is used here for simplicity. The actual wording is 'any structure or place which any wild animal…uses for shelter or protection' (WCA), or 'breeding site or resting place' (Habitats Regulations).

As bats generally have both a winter and a summer roost, the legislation is clear that all roosts are protected whether bats are in residence at the time or not.

Badgers are protected in Britain by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The purpose of this Act is to protect the animals from deliberate cruelty and from the incidental effects of lawful activities which could cause them harm.

Under this legislation it is an offence to:

- Wilfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a Badger, or attempt to do so;
- Interfere with a sett by damaging or destroying it;
- Obstruct access to, or any entrance of, a Badger sett;
- Disturb a Badger when it is occupying a sett.

Note that if any of the above resulted from a person being *reckless*, even if they had no intention of committing the offence, their action would still be considered an offence.

A person is not guilty of an offence if it can be shown that the act was *'the incidental result of a lawful operation and could not have been reasonably avoided'*; only a court can decide what is 'reasonable' in any set of circumstances.

Penalties for offences under this legislation can be up to six months in prison and a fine of up to £5,000 for each offence.

A Badger sett is defined in the Act as *'any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a Badger*'. This can include culverts, pipes and holes under sheds, piles of boulders, old mines and quarries, etc.

'Current use' does not simply mean 'current occupation' and for licensing purposes it is defined as *'any sett within an occupied Badger territory regardless of when it may have last been used'*. A sett therefore, in an occupied territory, is classified as in current use even if it is only used seasonally or occasionally by Badgers, and is afforded the same protection in law.

In Britain, all wild **birds**, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981(as amended), with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 extending this protection. There are penalties for:

- *Killing, injuring or capturing them, or attempting any of these;*
- *Taking or damaging the nest whilst in use;*
- *Taking or destroying the eggs.*

Schedule 1 species carry special penalties and it is an offence to even disturb these near the nest.

All common **reptiles** (Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* and Adder *Vipera berus*) are afforded legal protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) largely as a consequence of a national decline in numbers associated with persecution and habitat loss. Under the terms of the Act it is illegal to intentionally kill or injure a reptile.

There is no special protection afforded to the four commoner species of **amphibian** (Common Frog *Rana temporaria*, Common Toad *Bufo bufo*, Smooth Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*, Palmate Newt *L. helvetica*).

However they are subject to a very limited degree of protection under Section 9(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

This means that the sale, transportation or advertising for sale for these species is prohibited. Consequently catching them or keeping them as pets, or even killing them is not prohibited (subject to the controls relating to animals welfare).

Great Crested Newts *Triturus cristatus* are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) as amended, and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994 (Regulation 38).

As a result of their rarity across Europe, they are also protected under Annexes IIa and IVa of the Habitats and Species Directive, and under the Berne Convention (the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats).

The above legislation can be summarised thus (Langton *et al*, 2001):

- *Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill, or intentionally injure Great Crested Newts;*
- *Deliberately disturb Great Crested Newts or intentionally or recklessly disturb them in a place used for shelter or protection;*
- *Damage or destroy a breeding or resting place;*
- *Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection;*
- *Possess a Great Crested Newt, or any part of it, unless acquired lawfully;*
- *Sell, barter, exchange or offer for sale Great Crested Newts or parts of them.*

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Badgers

Badgers are generally nocturnal and evidence of their presence in an area often comes from field signs rather than sightings of the animals. Useful field signs include:

- Setts (main, outlying, annex or subsidiary);
- Tufts of hair caught on barbed wire fences;
- Conspicuous Badger paths;
- Footprints;
- Latrines – small excavated pits in which droppings are deposited;
- 'Snuffle holes' – small scrapes where Badgers have searched for insects and plant tubers;
- Day nests – bundles of grass and other vegetation where Badgers may sleep above ground;
- Scratch marks on trees (usually near the sett).

Daytime surveys looking for field signs can be carried out at any time of the year, and should be non-intrusive, but nocturnal surveys of setts (if required), are only likely to be effective from April to November, when Badgers are most active, and any cubs present will have emerged

2.2 Bats

In order to fully assess bat occupation of a particular site, the Bat Conservation Trust (2023) recommends that information gathered from a desk study of known bat records, and a daytime site walkover, is used to inform the type and extent of future bat survey work, potentially including nocturnal emergence surveys.

The preliminary roost assessment (PRA) is usually in the form of a diurnal walkover and can be carried out at any time of the year. It provides an opportunity to check for signs of bat occupancy and/or the suitability for bat roosting.

Evidence of bat activity includes droppings, scratch marks, feeding remains, carcasses, or even roosting animals, whilst suitability is determined by the type and number of potential roost features (PRFs) typically used by bats.

Roosting places vary depending on the species. Pipistrelles usually inhabit narrow cracks or cavities around the outside of buildings, but they will roost in similar niches inside larger barns. Typical sites include soffit spaces, gaps behind fascia boards and end rafters, crevices around the ends of projecting purlins, under warped or lifted roof and ridge tiles, or in gaps in stone and brickwork where mortar has dropped out.

Larger species such as Brown Long-eared Bats *Plecotus auritus*, Myotis bats (Natterer's *Myotis nattereri* and Whiskered/Brandt's *M. mystacinus/M. brandtii*), and Lesser Horseshoes *Rhinolophus hipposideros*, like to roost in the roof voids of buildings, and can often be found hanging singly or in small groups from ridge boards or roof timbers, especially where these butt up against gable walls or chimney breasts.

They especially favour older structures with timber frames. Here they squeeze into tight crevices making them difficult to observe.

Where bats are found, or there is evidence of bat occupation or activity, i.e. that bat use is confirmed, a roost characterisation survey is undertaken. The results are used to inform the impact assessment and design of mitigation measures. Roost characterisation includes nocturnal emergence surveys, unless sufficient information has already been collected using robust survey methods with no significant constraints.

Nocturnal emergence surveys allow numbers and species of bats to be confirmed, and should only be undertaken when bats are out of hibernation and in their summer roosts.

The bat active period is generally considered to be between April and October, although particularly cold weather will affect the level and extent of bat activity. Indeed, the air temperature at the start of each survey should be at least 10°C or above, with no strong wind or heavy rain. The survey starts 15 minutes before sunset and continues for one and a half to two hours after sunset.

Visits will be a minimum of three weeks apart, and the number of surveys and timing is dependent on the evidence found or the suitability of the site to bats. This will be determined by the ecologist. In general, at least two emergence nocturnal surveys will be carried out, but a third visit may be necessary if the results are inconclusive or further information is required.

Nocturnal emergence surveys are also used to determine the presence or absence of bats, where signs of bat activity are indeterminate or absent but the suitability for bat roosting is considered to be low, moderate or high.

For a site with no evidence but low suitability, just one nocturnal emergence survey is required, this to be in the period May to August.

For moderate suitability a minimum of two visits are needed between May and September, of which one must be in the period May to August.

With high suitability, three visits will be necessary between May and September, of which two must be in the period May to August.

Where there is no evidence of bat presence, and no suitability for roosting, no nocturnal surveys will be needed.

The number of surveyors and/or the use of night vision aids (NVAs) is determined by the ecologist, and is dependent on the complexity of the structure. For simple structures just one surveyor using an appropriate number of NVAs will be sufficient, but for larger sites and/or more complex or irregularly shaped structures, e.g. those with multiple elevations and/or roof slopes, more surveyors will be required.

On 9th December 2025, a thorough inspection of the barn was made by Mollie Paxford (Natural England bat licence No. 2025-86518-CL18-BAT), including the exterior and interior walls, roof covering, roof space, eaves, gables, fascias, roof and ceiling timbers, window casements and door frames.

10x42 Nikon binoculars and a Fenix TK75 torch were used for the inaccessible/unreachable areas. On this occasion an endoscope was not used, as there were no crevices and cavities that could not be inspected with a torch or by use of binoculars.

2.3 Birds

Most resident and migrant birds breed in the spring and summer, although Woodpigeons *Columba palumbus* and Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* nest throughout the year, and as a result could be on eggs in almost any month.

In season, signs of breeding include singing males, display and copulation, birds gathering nesting materials, adults carrying food, calling chicks, etc.

In winter none of these activities may be occurring, so a survey for old nests and/or nest holes is the most reliable method of determining the presence or absence of breeding birds. Such a survey was carried out at the site on 9th December 2025.

2.4 Reptiles & amphibians

Commoner reptiles which may be encountered in rural areas include Grass Snake, Slow-worm, and Common Lizard.

During the winter months, from mid-October to late February or early March, they are in hibernation, usually deep in underground hibernacula, such as holes and cracks in the ground, among rocks or the roots of large trees, down animal burrows, or in piles of rubble or stone.

In the spring and summer they live above ground in well-vegetated places, with Grass Snakes often near or in water. Being cold-blooded all reptiles like to bask, and can often be found in open places.

There are very few signs of reptile presence, but these include:

- Shedded skin (snakes);
- Eggs (but not Common Lizard which gives birth to live young).

A survey for Great Crested Newts may be indicated when background information on distribution suggests that they may be present. More detailed indicators are:

- *Any historical records of Great Crested Newts on the site or in the general area;*
- *A pond on or near the site (within around 500 m), even if it holds water only seasonally;*
- *Sites with refuges (such as piles of logs or rubble), grassland, scrub, woodland or hedgerows within 500 m of a pond*.

There are several field survey methods which can be employed depending on the time of year:

- *Bottle or funnel trapping – adults ideally February to May, with June and July sub-optimal, and August to September for detection of larvae (i.e. young);*

- *Egg search – April to June ideally, with March and July sub-optimal;*
- *Torch survey – March to May for adults, with February and June to July sub-optimal, and August to September for larvae;*
- *Netting – March to May for adults, with February and June to July sub-optimal, and August to September for larvae;*
- *Pitfall trapping – March to May and September for adults, with February, June to August and October sub-optimal;*
- *Refuge search – April to September ideally, with March and October sub-optimal.*

The latter two methods involve terrestrial habitats, the others aquatic habitats, for which a minimum of 4 visits per year are recommended, with at least 2 visits between mid-April and mid-May to record peak numbers (English Nature, 2001).

None of these techniques were used, as there was nothing to suggest that newts would be present.

There were no ponds within 500 metres of the site shown on an Ordnance Survey map.

2.5 Habitat Survey

A general appraisal of the habitats present was carried out. This was conducted using standard JNCC (2003) techniques and methodologies, and included a walkover of the whole site.

2.6 Constraints

Although the survey was undertaken outside the optimum period for Phase 1 Habitat Surveys, given the nature and use of the site, the timing was not considered to be a constraint to the identification of features and habitats.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Desk Study

In view of the small scale of the proposed works, the likely low impact on bats and other wildlife, and in line with current guidance on accessing and using biodiversity data (CIEEM, 2016), a background data search was not carried out in this case.

3.2 Location

Sibford Ferris is a village located approximately 8.0 km southwest of Banbury, in Oxfordshire. Hook Norton Road runs south out of the village, with Austin Grounds Farm situated on the east side of the road. The Ordnance Survey Grid Reference is SP 35684 36698 (Appendix 1).

3.3 Site Description

The site comprised a corrugated metal barn (Figs. 1 and 2).

Figs. 1 & 2 Barn

The site was accessed via a track of hardstanding which was partially overgrown with mown, poor, semi-improved grassland (Fig. 3). The site also included a small area around the barn which was also hardstanding, partially overgrown with poor, semi-improved grassland and some encroaching Bramble (Fig. 4).

Figs. 3 & 4 Survey site

The layout of the site is shown in the aerial photograph in Appendix 2.

3.4 Bats

The daytime inspection was carried out on 9th December 2025, commencing at 14:00. The weather conditions during the time of the survey were recorded and are presented in Table 1 below.

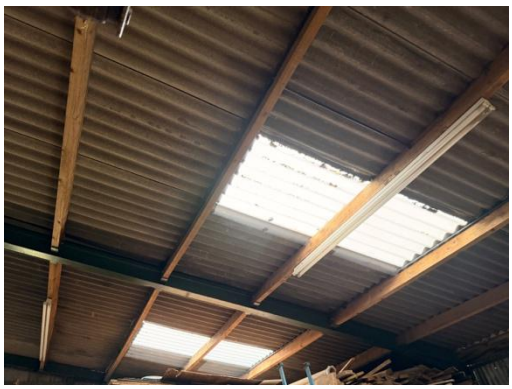
Parameter	Value
Temperature (ºC)	7.0
Cloud cover (%)	100
Precipitation	None
Wind speed (Beaufort scale)	2 W

Table 1 Weather conditions during the diurnal survey

The barn was steel framed with corrugated metal walls, and a corrugated fibre cement panel roof (Figs. 5 and 6). There were some gaps which led to the interior of the barn, none of which were suitable for roosting bats.

Figs. 5 & 6 Barn

Internally the barn was open to the underside of the roof which was unlined, with clear Perspex panels allowing light to brightly illuminate the building (Figs. 7 and 8).



Figs. 7 & 8 Interior of barn

No signs of bat activity or occupation were found in or around the barn, and it was considered to be of negligible suitability for roosting bats.

3.5 Badgers

No evidence of Badgers was found in or around the site.

3.6 Birds

No old or in use birds' nests were noted on the site, although the nearby trees and hedgerows were considered to have potential for nesting.

3.7 Reptiles and amphibians

There were no ponds within 500 metres of the site shown on an Ordnance Survey map, and the habitats were of little interest to herptiles, as they were mostly building and hardstanding, with no still water features and limited basking opportunities. There were various objects around the site, including a rubble pile. The latter will be dismantled by hand to ensure that no reptiles or amphibians are present.

3.8 Other species

No other species of interest were recorded. The site was largely hardstanding which had become overgrown by mown poor, semi-improved grassland and some perennial species (Figs. 9-14). Some Bramble was encroaching, but there were no hedgerows or trees within the site boundary.

Figs. 9 & 10 Survey area

Figs. 11 & 12 Survey area

Figs. 13 & 14 Survey area

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bats tend to be seasonal visitors to properties, and are not usually in occupation all year round. The females normally form maternity colonies during May or June and then leave for adjacent trees and/or woodland during July or August once the young bats are able to fly and become independent. Here they will spend the winter months in hibernation before returning to the house or barn the following spring.

Male bats generally live alone and have a number of favoured roosts. During the summer they visit each of these for a few days at a time, before moving to their chosen hibernation site in mid-late October.

Different species have different habits, but this seasonal movement is common to all.

Bats choose their roosts carefully. During the summer they look for sites which are warmed by the sun, and as a result are most often found on the south and western side of buildings.

Pipistrelles, our smallest and commonest bats, prefer to roost in very confined spaces around the outside of buildings, typical places being behind hanging tiles, weather boarding, soffit, barge and eave boarding, between roof felt and roof tiles or in cavity walls.

As such they can be difficult to find, so the suitability for roosting was also assessed. There was negligible suitability within the building for roosting pipistrelles.

Another bat frequently encountered in buildings is the Brown Long-eared. This is also a common species, but unlike pipistrelles, they prefer the dry, warm space of the loft or roof void, and can often be found hanging from roof timbers, especially rafters and the ridge board next to chimney breasts.

No evidence of Brown Long-eared Bats or any other void loving species was found.

As such, the site was not considered to be a bat roost and no further surveys or mitigation measures are required.

*

In terms of other species, no old or in use birds' nests were found, although the nearby trees and hedgerow were considered suitable for nesting purposes.

Nevertheless, since all in-use bird's nests and their contents are protected from damage or destruction, any tree and shrub removal or works to structures which affect birds, should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to 31st August inclusive. If this time frame cannot be avoided, a close inspection of the trees and shrubs to be removed or building works undertaken, will be carried out prior to clearance.

Work will not take place within a minimum of 5.0 metres of any in-use nest, although this distance could be more depending on the sensitivity of the species. Any in-use nest will be allowed to fledge before it is disturbed.

The presence of reptiles and amphibians was considered unlikely, as the site was largely building and hardstanding, with no still water features and limited basking opportunities and no ponds within 500 metres of the site. However, there was a rubble pile and various objects around the site.

As such, the proposed works will be carried out under a Precautionary Method of Working to ensure that any amphibians which are unexpectedly encountered are not harmed by the development.

No evidence of Badgers was found, although there was Rabbit activity.

Finally, it should be noted that open trenches could potentially trap wildlife, especially if these fill up with water. Escape routes should therefore be provided if trenches cannot be infilled immediately. These can be in the form of branches or boards placed on the bottom of the trench, with their upper ends above ground level and touching the sides, or sloping ends left in trenches.

4.1 Herptile Precautionary Method of Working

In order to minimise the chances of encountering reptiles and/or amphibians during the development, the following Reasonable Avoidance Measures will be implemented:

- Prior to any works commencing, contractors will be briefed by an ecologist on the possibility that amphibians and/or reptiles might be present, and what to do if one is unexpectedly discovered during construction;

- Ground clearance and excavations for footings should then ideally be undertaken during the main amphibian and reptile active period (April to October), to ensure that hibernating animals are not present, as these should not be disturbed. It should be noted that temperatures in April and October should be above 7ºC;

- Vegetation to be removed will initially be cut down to a height of approximately 100 mm, so that the ground beneath can be inspected by an ecologist. If no amphibians or reptiles are present, the remaining vegetation can be stripped, followed by removal of the turf and topsoil;

- If a reptile or common amphibian is found, it will be carefully caught and relocated to a safe, undisturbed area well away from the construction zone. If a Great Crested Newt is found, advice will be sought from Natural England on whether works can proceed without committing an offence;

- As soon as the footprint for the development has been declared free of animals by the ecologist, the excavations for the foundations can be undertaken;

- Any trenches excavated will be covered at the end of the working day to avoid animals falling into the trench. If this is not possible escape routes will be provided. These can be in the form of branches or boards placed on the bottom of the trench, with their upper ends above ground level and touching the sides, or sloping ends left in trenches;

- Material arising during construction will be stored on hardstanding or off the ground to prevent reptiles, newts or other amphibians using them as refuges. This will be subsequently removed from site by hand;

- All new building and other materials will be stored on pallets, preferably on hardstanding, to prevent animals using these as refuges. This will be particularly important during the winter months (November to March) when reptiles and amphibians seek hibernation sites;

- Since the risk of committing an offence is minimal, to reduce that risk further, working practices will be restricted to the daylight hours when amphibians are least active in the terrestrial environment;

- At the end of the construction process, all items will again be removed carefully from site, checking for amphibians and reptiles;

- A copy of this method statement will be kept on site, as it also includes the contact details of the licenced ecologist.

It should be noted that given the small scale of the works, there will be no requirement for a licence from Natural England.

Furthermore, the construction site does not need to be fenced off with a temporary amphibian exclusion barrier provided the above measures are adhered to.

5. REFERENCES

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Location plan

Appendix 2: Site layout

Appendix 1: Location plan

Barn at Austin Grounds Farm, Sibford Ferris

Appendix 2: Site layout

Barn at Austin Grounds Farm

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