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Upper Heyford- Land at Chilgrove Drive

Phase I- Ecological Survey Report

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Job	Phase I Survey and Report		
Report title	Upper Heyford- Phase I Ecological Survey Report		
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction	This report prepared by Ecology and Habitat Management Ltd provides a high level scoping assessment on the potential ecological constraints for Land to the west of Chilgrove drive, Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire, where manufacturing, warehouse, training and office facilities, for a single occupier are proposed. The recommendations of this report will highlight key ecological areas, potential constraints and recommended further action in the form of more detailed species specific surveys or ecological enhancements where necessary.
Results	The site is broadly rectangular shaped area of farmland located on the outskirts of the village of Upper Heyford. The farmland is arable and at the time of the survey had been harvested to stubble. The sites boundary is marked by mature hedges.
Conclusion	The hedgerows surrounding the periphery of the site represent the habitat with the greatest potential wildlife value. The hedgerows have the potential to support commuting and foraging bats, nesting birds and badgers within a hole within one of hedgerows. There is one local wildlife site north of the site on the edge of a former airfield. It is likely that bats are commuting and foraging across the site. The site comprises a large area of farm land surrounded by hedgerows. Therefore to provide evidence on the importance of the hedgerows and uncultivated field perimeters for nesting birds a breeding bird survey is recommended to ascertain the level of use by notable bird species. [redacted] Overall the survey shows there are no insurmountable issues relating to wildlife.
Recommendations	Conditions attached to any permission for further surveys for birds and badgers, and mitigation measures if necessary.

Enhancements and Opportunities	Key enhancement recommendations: • Any new proposed landscaping should use native broadleaved trees and plants which should be sourced locally. Hedgerows around the site should be retained where possible with a buffer strip of 3-5 meters. • Where required further species surveys recommended are likely to recommend species specific enhancements.

INTRODUCTION

This report is prepared by Ecology and Habitat Management Ltd for HED Ltd provides a high level scoping assessment on the potential ecological constraints for Land to the west of Chilgrove drive, Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire, where manufacturing, warehouse, training and office facilities, for a single occupier are proposed. The recommendations of this report will highlight key ecological areas, potential constraints and recommend further action in the form of more detailed species specific surveys or ecological enhancements where necessary.

SURVEY LOCATION

The site is located at OS Grid reference SP52157 25867.

The site and habitats present are shown on map 1.

SURVEY OBJECTIVES

The key objectives are as follows:

- Identify all relevant statutory and non-statutory designated sites and features of ecological significance within the site and its surroundings.
- Using JNCC 2007 Phase 1 methodology the recognised standard for mapping ecological habitats, identify key habitats on and adjacent to site.
- Assess the potential for the presence of protected species and species of principal conservation importance within the site and its surroundings. Using the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Guidelines undertaken by an experienced and qualified ecologist
- Provide recommendations for further surveys where assessed as necessary and suggest potential enhancements.
- Provide an early indication of potential ecological mitigation and compensation requirements.

Further information on wildlife legislation and planning policy has been included in Appendix A.

SURVEY LIMITATIONS

This survey records the flora and fauna evident on the day of the site visit. It does not record any flora or fauna that may appear at other times of the year, and as such, were not evident at the time of visit.

METHODS

DESK STUDY

Biological records from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre for a 1km radius were obtained. The records obtained contain all relevant records and information held by the local wildlife trust on the area. An extensive search of web based information for the area was also undertaken identifying records of protected and other notable species of flora, fauna together with statutory/non-statutory wildlife sites.

Web-based resources were consulted to identify designated nature conservation sites within or immediately adjacent to the site surveyed include the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside

PHASE I HABITAT MAPPING

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) is the statutory adviser to Government on UK and international nature conservation. Its work contributes to maintaining and enriching biological diversity, conserving geological features and sustaining natural systems. The JNCC Phase 1 Habitat Classification and associated field survey technique provide a standardised system to record semi-natural vegetation and other wildlife habitats. The approach is designed to cover large areas of countryside relatively rapidly. It presents the user with a basic assessment of habitat type and potential importance for nature conservation. Each habitat type/feature is identified by way of a brief description of its defining features. It is then allocated a specific name, an alpha-numeric code.

The use of this method relies on the ecologist being experienced in native botanical identification of common native plants, trees and grasses.

Daniel Hone has undertaken botanical surveys throughout the UK and as such is qualified to use this methodology accurately.

SCOPING SURVEY

The site and its immediate surroundings were considered in terms of habitats, protected species present and the potential for presence of species of principal conservation importance during a walkover survey undertaken on 27th October 2014. The survey was undertaken by Daniel Hone MCIEEM.

Habitats were searched for:

- field signs of protected species in the form of latrines, feeding remains, active shelter/breeding sites.
- animal activity/behaviour if observed.
- botanically diverse habitats.
- invasive introduced plants and animals.
- habitats with the potential to support protected species.
- habitat connectivity to surrounding habitats.

RESULTS

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site is a broadly rectangular shaped area of farmland located on the outskirts of the village of Upper Heyford. The farmland is arable and at the time of the survey had been harvested to stubble. The sites boundary is marked by mature hedges. Pictures below show various views of the site.

Photos: Views of the Upper Heyford Site

DESIGNATED NATURE CONSERVATION SITE

See map 1 for a plan showing the designation search area.

There are no statutory designations within 1km of the site such as SSSI, SAC or SPA.

Upper Heyford Airfield local wildlife site is located north of the site. It does support good habitat connectivity to site although the habitats within the local wildlife site such as the calcareous grassland is not found on site therefore the proposed plan is unlikely to affect the integrity of the wildlife site. There are no non-statutory wildlife sites within 1km of the site.

HABITATS ASSESSMENT

The site principally consists of a wheat stubble filled arable field that dominates the site which appears to be ploughed regularly. Due to the evident intensive farm uses of the field it offers little ecological potential and is likely of low ecological value.

The field margins offer some diversity of habitat where there are, predominantly species poor (as defined by the Defra Hedgerow Survey Guidelines), hedgerows. These hedgerows though species poor, combined with the tree lines, are likely to provide habitat connectivity for species across the site and to the wider landscape.

Phase 1 habitats identified on site are listed below using the JNCC terminology JNCC (2007). See map 1 for the location of habitats on site:

HEDGEROWS (J2.1)

Hedgerows border the entire site and several mark old field boundaries. Species comprise native species and vary in species richness although are generally species poor. Dominant species comprised hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna), privet (*Ligustrum sp*.), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*). The understoreys of the hedges were generally poor with bare soil dominating.

TALL RUDERALS (C3.1)

A small area of tall ruderals existed around the entire field margin where ploughing has not occurred in several years. The ruderal vegetation is dominated by common nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and lesser burdock *(Arctium minus*), mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), yellow oat grass (*Trisetum flavescens*), Brome grass (*Bromus Sp*) all common wayside field margin plants.

PROTECTED SPECIES POTENTIAL ASSESSMENT

PROTECTED FLORA

It is considered that the site has a low potential to support protected or notable flora due to the land being ploughed regularly and subject to herbicides and nutrient inputs. Records of protected flora were found within 1km although species identified are unlikely to occur within the habitats present on site.

GREAT CRESTED NEWT

Several records of great crested newt (GCN) have been identified over 500 meters from site. The wider landscape does support good habitat connectivity in the form of hedgerows. However the site lacks water bodies and the open bare soil of the arable field, which comprises the majority of the site, should be considered to be sub optimal foraging habitat for GCN as it lacks cover from predation and structural diversity they require.

Therefore site should be considered to have a **low potential to support GCN.**

Common amphibian species are afforded limited legal protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). GCN's are afforded legal protection under Schedule 5 of The Conservation of Habitats Species Regulations (2010) (as amended) and Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats Species Regulations (2010) (as amended) (See Appendix A). GCN's are a European Protected Species (EPS).

REPTILES

There are no records of reptiles within 1km from the site. The open habitats across the majority of the site lack rank grassland with scattered scrub together with open patches of bare ground which reptiles require for feeding, basking and commuting.

Therefore it should be considered to have a **low potential to support common reptile species**, namely viviparous lizard (*Zootaca (Lacerta) vivipara*), slowworm (*Anguis fragilis*) adder (*Vipera berus*) and grass snake (*Natrix natrix*).

Common reptiles are afforded legal protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (See Appendix A).

BIRDS

Several bird records were identified within 1km of the site. The hedgerows around the periphery of the site have potential to support nesting birds. Therefore the site should be regarded as having a **high potential to support breeding birds**.

The arable fields and tall ruderals are also likely to have some, though minor, value to birds for feeding and possibly may be used by ground nesting birds. Birds that use the site could potentially be Species of Conservation Concern (SoCC).

All species of bird whilst actively nesting are afforded legal protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and special penalties are available for offences related to birds listed on Schedule 1 (See Appendix A).

BADGER

[redacted]

BATS

A number of records for bats were identified within 1km of the site although none of the records originated from site.

None of the trees within the hedgerows supported features such as splits, knot holes, cracks, peeling bark which have the potential to support bats due to their species, age or form.

Therefore the site should be considered to have a **low potential** to support roosting bats.

It should be noted however that due to the good habitat connectivity that the hedgerows provide across the site bats are likely to be foraging and commuting across the site. Therefore the site should be considered to have **a high potential** to support commuting bats.

All species of bat are afforded legal protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats Species Regulations (2010) (as amended) (See Appendix A). All species of bat are European Protected Species (EPS).

HAZEL DORMOUSE

No records of dormice have been identified within 1km of the site. The open arable field which dominates is generally considered to be suboptimal for dormice and should not be considered to be suitable for hibernating or feeding and foraging dormice. The hedgerows which border the site would have potential for dormice if they had good connectivity to woodlands which support sustainable populations. However the hedgerows which surround the site lack connectivity to sustainable populations.

Only two small sections of hedge are likely to be affected along the western hedge which is defunct at each end. This section of hedge is therefore less likely to support dormice as dormice are arboreal and prefer good aerial connectivity which prevent going to ground to commute. Therefore the hedgerows should be considered to have a **low potential** to support hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*).

Dormice are afforded legal protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats Species Regulations (2010) (as amended) (See Appendix A). Dormice are European Protected Species (EPS).

INVERTEBRATES

Records of notable invertebrates have been identified within 1km of site. However the species identified are unlikely to occur within the habitats present due to the farm management and likely historical use of pesticides. Therefore it should be consided that the site has a **low potential** to affect notable invertebrates.

OTHER PROTECTED SPECIES

No other protected species such as otter, water vole or native crayfish have potential to be supported on or adjacent to site.

CONCLUSIONS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Map 3 shows that the proposed development will require the loss of the arable field. As discussed this has a low overall potential to support protected or notable species. However there is some scope for the arable field and tall ruderals to support notable breeding bird assemblages. Therefore to provide evidence on the importance, or not, of the site for ground nesting birds a breeding bird survey is recommended to ascertain the level of the sites use by notable bird species.

The hedgerows surrounding the periphery of the site represent the habitat with the greatest potential wildlife value. [redacted]

It is likely that bats are commuting and foraging across the site utilising the hedgerows. If the hedgerows are likely to be directly affected it is recommended that a bat activity survey be carried out to understand the impacts the development may have to bat populations in the area.

Even if the hedgerows will not be directly impacted it will be important to consider indirect impacts from the development, particularly lighting and disturbance during construction.

[redacted]

If the hedgerows require removal it will be important to carry out this work outside of the breeding bird season.

There is one local wildlife site north of the site on the edge of a former airfield which this development is unlikely to impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the principles of established survey techniques and comply with relevant best practice guidelines set out by the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

SPECIES RECOMMENDATIONS

BIRDS

As the habitats on site have the potential to support notable breeding and foraging birds a breeding bird survey is recommended to provide evidence on the importance of the site to notable farmland birds in-particular. The survey would be carried out by an experienced bird surveyor taking due regard of the BTO's Common Bird Census method; this is a mapping method that aims to record all birds seen and heard, and their location within the survey area.

The survey involves three thorough site visits between April and the end of June. The visits would be undertaken in the early morning one hour after dawn to take advantage of the peak in singing activity. The results are used to produce a large-scale map of birds recorded on site. The advantage of this method is that the maps produced show the approximate location of every bird detected, allowing us to relate individual birds to small-scale habitat regions. As with any bird survey, males are more easily detected than females, and any records of males singing may represent a pair (male and female).

BATS

As the hedgerows on site have the potential to support commuting and foraging bats and light spill onto hedgerows can disturb key commuting routes used by bats. It is recommended that lighting is kept to a minimum and avoids light spill onto the hedgerows around the site. Lighting should take due regard of the bats and lighting advice which can be found at: http://www.bats.org.uk/data/files/bats_and_lighting_in_the_uk__final_version_version_3_may_09.pdf.

If the hedgerows will be directly affected it is recommended a more detailed bat activity survey is conducted.

BADGERS

A badger survey is recommended to identify how badgers use the site this will then assist the development of an appropriate mitigation plan. It is proposed that the survey and development of a mitigation plan be attached as a condition of the relevant planning permission.

The survey would include enough information to show any possible impacts to badgers and their status on the site. This survey can be done at any time of year. The best time is in spring, early autumn or winter when badgers are active but there's less vegetation to hide field signs.

If the proposed plan will cause unavoidable harm to badgers or damage to their setts, a compensation plan would be required to show how this loss will be compensated. Mitigation plans will also identify phases of work that could be completed without impacting the badger sett or foraging areas. This may allow some works to progress without significant impact to badgers.

ENHANCEMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Ecological enhancements should where possible be incorporated into the proposed development to contribute towards the objectives of planning legislation identified within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

In accordance with the above plans: “Plan policies and planning decisions should aim to maintain, and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests” and together with the Natural England & Rural Communities Act 2005, places a statutory duty to promote biodiversity and minimise impacts of a development upon ecology.

Furthermore, in accordance with the principles of NPPF, developments should contribute towards the degree of connectivity between natural habitats and avoid the effects of habitat fragmentation and isolation. These networks of habitats provide valuable routes or stepping-stones for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of species within the wider environment. Existing networks, where possible, should be strengthened by, or integrated within, new developments.

Key enhancement recommendations:

- Any new proposed landscaping should use native broadleaved trees and plants which should be sourced locally. Hedgerows around the site should be retained where possible with a buffer strip of 3-5 meters.
- Where required further species surveys recommended are likely to recommend species specific enhancements.

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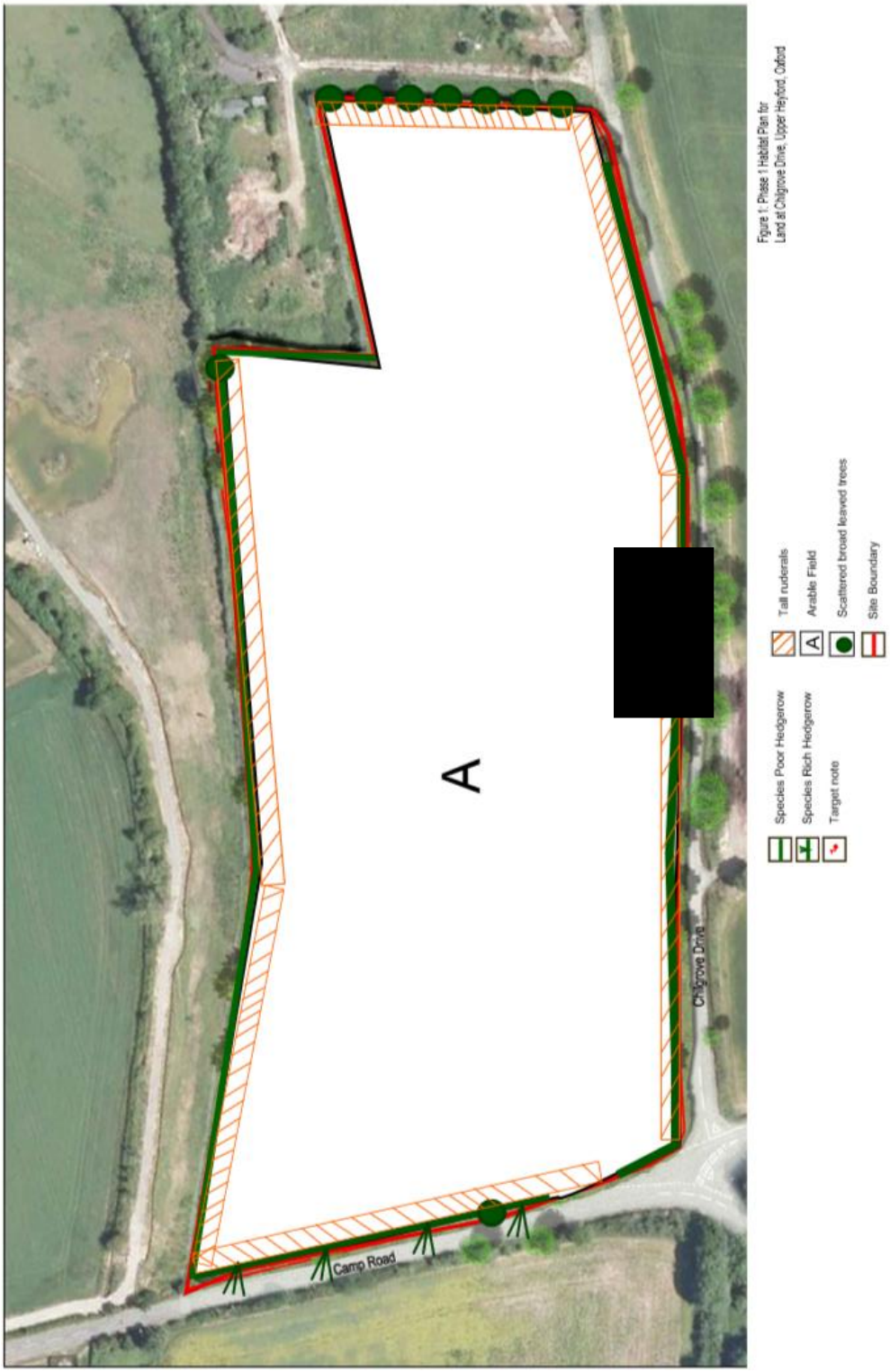
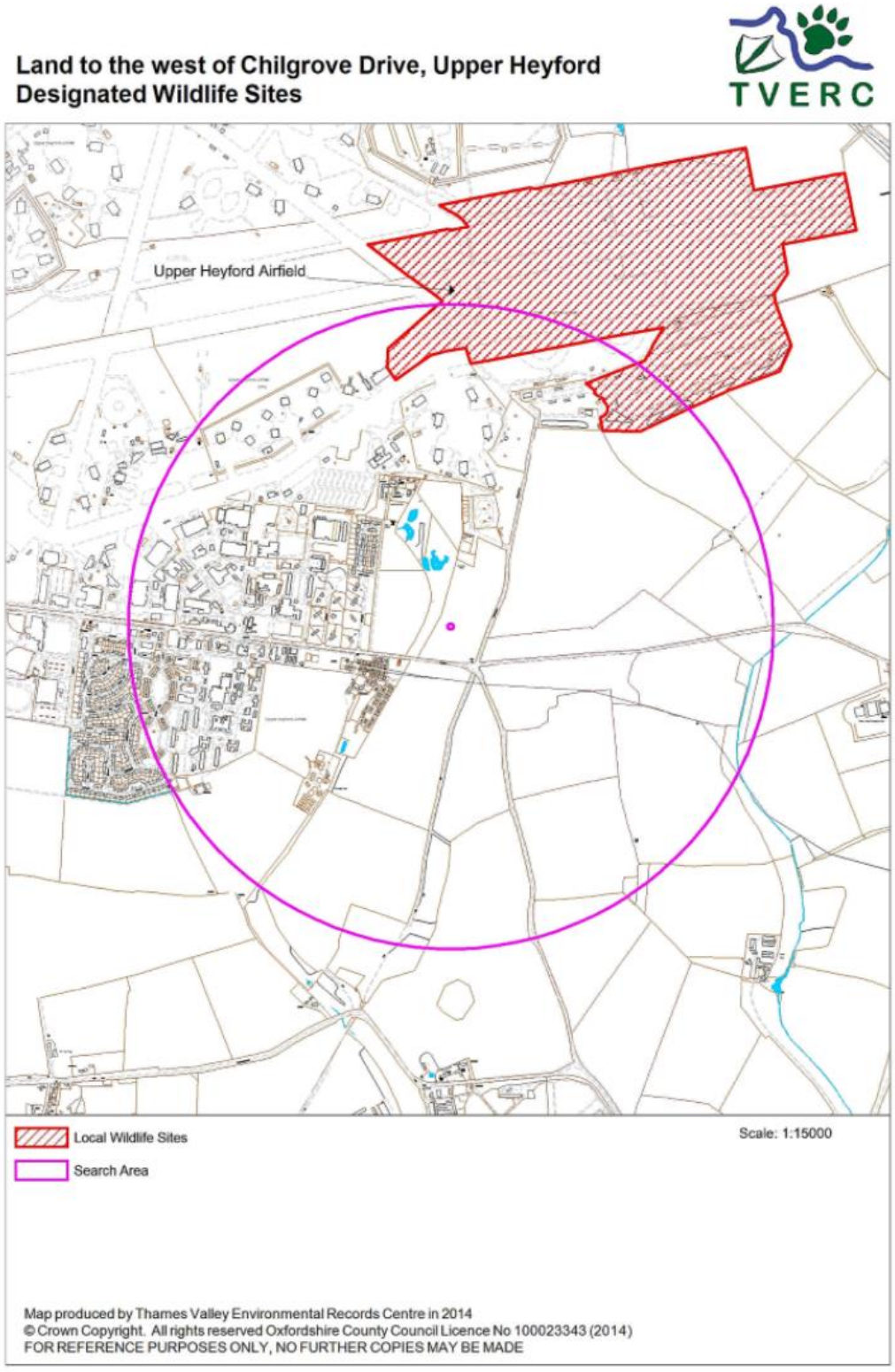
MAPS

Map 1: Habitat Map



Map 2: Designated Wildlife Sites within 1 KM



Map 3: Proposed Development layout

APPENDIX A- LEGISLATION

The following is a summary of wildlife legislation and planning policy relevant to protected plant and animal species in the UK.

The sections on legislation have been extracted from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's website and the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 consolidate all the various amendments made to the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 in respect of England and Wales. The 1994 Regulations transposed Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EC Habitats Directive) into national law. The Regulations came into force on 30 October 1994. In Scotland the Habitats Directive is transposed through a combination of the Habitats Regulations 2010 (in relation to reserved matters) and the 1994 Regulations. The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) transpose the Habitats Directive in relation to Northern Ireland.

The amendments relate to the protection status of European protected species covered by the Habitats regulations. Taken together it is an offence to undertake the following acts with regard to European Protected Species:

(a) deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of a European Protected Species;

(b) deliberately disturb animals of any such species in such a way as to be likely to significantly affect:

(i) the ability of any significant group of animals of that species to survive, breed, or rear or nurture their young, or

(ii) the local distribution or abundance of that species;

(c) deliberately take or destroy the eggs of such an animal; or

(d) damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal.

An offence will only be committed if the deliberate disturbance is likely to significantly affect a significant group of animals of that species' ability to survive, breed, or rear or nurture its young or significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of that species.

Any biological definition of what constitutes a significant group of animals should take into account the local abundance of the species, its behaviour and the circumstances in which the disturbance takes place. Species that tend to be solitary, such as dormice, probably never form significant groups of adults, but a family group with dependent young could constitute such a group, particularly if the species is rare in the area. The Regulations make it an offence (subject to exceptions) to deliberately capture, kill, disturb or trade in the animals listed in Schedule 2 or damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal; or pick, collect, cut, uproot, destroy, or trade in the plants listed in Schedule 4. However, these actions can be made lawful through the granting of licences (European Protected Species Licence) by the appropriate authorities (Natural England in England and Countryside Council for Wales). Licences may be granted for a number of purposes (such as science and education, conservation, preserving public health and safety), but only after the appropriate authority is satisfied that:

- Regulation 44 (2)(e) the development is 'in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment'.
- Regulation 44 (3)(a) there is 'no satisfactory alternative'.
- Regulation 44 (3)(b) the action 'will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species at favourable conservation status in their natural range'.

To apply for a licence, the following information is required:

- The species concerned.
- The size of the population at the site (note this may require a survey to be carried out at a particular time of the year).
- The impact(s) (if any) that the development is likely to have upon the populations.
- That measures can be conducted to mitigate for the impact(s).

Amendments to the Habitats Regulations for England and Wales and the new Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 2007 came into force on the 21st August 2007. Both Regulations revised the definition of deliberate disturbance of European Protected Species.

Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) 1981

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) is the principal piece of UK legislation relating to the protection of wildlife. It consolidates and amends existing national legislation to implement the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

(Bern Convention) and Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (Birds Directive) in Great Britain.

The Act makes it an offence (with exception to species listed in Schedule 2) to intentionally kill, injure, or take any wild bird or their eggs or nests. Special penalties are available for offences related to birds listed on Schedule 1, for which there are additional offences of disturbing these birds at their nests, or their dependent young. The Secretary of State may also designate Areas of Special Protection (subject to exceptions) to provide further protection to birds. The Act also prohibits certain methods of killing, injuring, or taking birds, restricts the sale and possession of captive bred birds, and sets standards for keeping birds in captivity. The Act makes it an offence (subject to exceptions) to intentionally kill, injure, or take, possess, or trade in any wild animal listed in Schedule 5, and prohibits interference with places used for shelter or protection, or intentionally disturbing animals occupying such places. The Act also prohibits certain methods of killing, injuring, or taking wild animals listed in Schedule 6.

The Act makes it an offence (subject to exceptions) to pick, uproot, trade in, or possess (for the purposes of trade) any wild plant listed in Schedule 8, and prohibits the unauthorised intentional uprooting of such plants.

The Act contains measures for preventing the establishment of non-native species which may be detrimental to native wildlife, prohibiting the release of animals and planting of plants listed in Schedule 9. It also provides a mechanism making any of the above offences legal through the granting of licences by the appropriate authorities.

The Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) was passed to provide additional levels of protection for wildlife whilst also strengthening the protection afforded to Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The CRoW act now makes it an offence to ‘recklessly’ harm the majority of species listed on the Schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

The Act places a duty on Government Departments and the National Assembly for Wales to have regard for the conservation of biodiversity and maintain lists of species and habitats for which conservation steps should be taken or promoted, in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity (Section 74). Schedule 12 of the Act amends the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, strengthening the legal protection for threatened species. The provisions make certain offences 'arrestable', create a new offence of reckless disturbance, confer greater powers to police and wildlife inspectors for entering premises and obtaining wildlife tissue samples for DNA analysis, and enable heavier penalties on conviction of wildlife offences.

Natural England & Rural Communities Act 2006

The Natural England & Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) is designed to help achieve a rich and diverse natural environment and thriving rural communities through modernised and simplified arrangements for delivering Government policy.

It was created to make provision in connection with wildlife, sites of special scientific interest, National Parks and the Broads; to amend the law relating to rights of way; to make provision as to the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council; to provide for flexible administrative arrangements in connection with functions relating to the environment and rural affairs and certain other functions; and for connected purposes.

NERC carries an extension of the CRoW Act biodiversity duty to public bodies and statutory undertakers to ensure due regard to the conservation of biodiversity.

The Badger Act 1992

In the UK, badgers are primarily afforded protection under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. This makes it illegal to wilfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a badger, or to attempt to do so and to intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett. Sett interference includes disturbing badgers whilst they are occupying a sett, as well as damaging or destroying a sett or obstructing access to it.

Badgers also receive limited protection under Schedule 6 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This outlaws certain methods of taking or killing animals.

Under Section 10 (1)(d) of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, a licence may be granted by Natural England to interfere with a badger sett for the purpose of development, as defined by Section 55(1) of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.

Section 3 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 defines interference as:

a) Damaging a badger sett; b) Destroying a badger sett; c) Obstructing access to, or any entrance of, a badger sett; d) Causing a dog to enter a sett; or e) Disturbing a badger when it is occupying a badger sett.

The Wild Mammals Act 1996

The Wild Mammals (Protection) Act (1996) makes it an offence for any person to mutilate, kick, beat, nail or otherwise impale, stab, burn, stone, crush, drown, drag or asphyxiate any wild mammal with intent to inflict unnecessary suffering.

The Abandonment of Animals Act 1960

The Abandonment of Animals Act comes into force when an animal is abandoned, whether permanently or not, in circumstances likely to cause unnecessary suffering. With regards to development, this has implications when translocations of animals are proposed. As such, care must be taken to ensure that any receptor sites are suitable for the species in terms of habitat and carrying capacity in order that minimal stress and suffering is imposed upon the animal(s) concerned.

The Hedgerows Regulations

The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 were introduced to protect hedgerows of importance from destruction. The Regulations define a hedgerow as, 'a row of bushes forming a hedge with the trees growing in it'. The law however does not clarify the difference between a line of trees and a hedgerow.

However the legislation does not apply to any hedgerow (even if it is within the list above) which is 'within or marking the boundary of the curtilage of a dwelling house'.

For the Regulations to be applicable, the hedgerow must be at least 20 metres in length and less than 5 metres wide. A hedgerow is deemed to be important if it is more than thirty years old and meets at least one of the criteria listed in Part II of Schedule 1 of the Regulations.

If a hedgerow that qualifies under the Regulations is to be removed, the landowner must contact the Local Planning Authority (LPA) in writing by submitting a hedgerow removal notice. The LPA then has a period of 42 days to decide whether or not the hedgerow meets the importance criteria of the regulations.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the view of central Government on how planners should balance nature conservation with development and helps ensure that Government meets its biodiversity commitments with regard to the operation of the planning system. It is a key objective of NPPF to:

"promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the recovery of priority species, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. NPPF states that development plan policies and planning decisions should be based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas, including biodiversity. It also states that the aim of planning decisions should be to prevent harm to biodiversity conservation interests and to "promote opportunities for the incorporation of beneficial biodiversity and geological features within the design of development.

Where granting planning permission would result in significant harm to those interests, local planning authorities will need to be satisfied that the development cannot be reasonably be located on any alternative sites that would result in less or no harm. In the absence of any such alternatives, local planning authorities should ensure that, before planning permission is granted, adequate mitigation measures are put in place. Where a planning decision would result in significant harm to biodiversity interests, which cannot be prevented or adequately mitigated against, appropriate compensation measures should be sought. If that significant harm cannot be prevented, adequately mitigated against, or compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.

Biodiversity Action Plans

Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPS) set out actions for the conservation and enhancement of biological diversity at various spatial scales. They consist of both Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) and Species Action Plans (SAPs).

The UK BAP was the UK's response to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity in Rio de Janeiro. Following a review in 2007 a list of 1149 priority species and 65 priority habitats has been adopted, which are given a statutory basis for planning consideration under Section 74 of the CRoW Act 2000.