# Preliminary Ecological Assessment

**Outbuilding at Tilecroft,**
**Old Clay Lane,**
**Thornley,**
**Longridge,**
**PR3 2BF**

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**Summary**

In September 2021 Batworker Ecological Consultancy was commissioned to undertake a preliminary ecological assessment at Tilecroft, Old Clay Lane, Thornley, Longridge, PR3 2BF to support proposed plans for a residential conversion of an existing outbuilding.

A daytime walkover survey was carried out on 5th October 2021 and 21st January 2022 in order to assess the ecological, biodiversity and nature conservation status of the land. This report presents the results of a desktop study and extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey. The scope of the survey is appropriate to identify potential ecological constraints, mitigation required, and opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.

The site is assessed as low conservation value, no habitats within the site are Priority Habitat, and no protected species were observed. No significant ecological constraints as a result of development proposals have been detected at the site. It is considered that development of the site will only result in minimal loss of habitat at the site level.

Given the nature of the proposed development, and location of the building in relation to a nearby pond, it is considered that reasonable avoidance measures is an appropriate approach to mitigation with regard to Great Crested Newts.

Conversion construction work should take place outside the optimum period for bird nesting (March to August inclusive), unless a breeding bird survey by a suitably qualified ecologist is carried out in the 48 hours prior to commencement and no nesting birds are found.

The development offers potential to create enhancements for biodiversity via a post development biodiversity enhancement and management scheme particularly with regard to installation of bat and bird boxes.

## Introduction

In September 2021 Batworker Ecological Consultancy was commissioned to undertake a preliminary ecological assessment at Tilecroft, Old Clay Lane, Thornley, Longridge, PR3 2BF to support proposed plans for a residential conversion of an existing outbuilding.

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## Survey and Site Assessment

### Objectives of the survey

The purpose of the survey was to identify and map all habitats occurring within the survey area, and identify the presence of species present with particular reference to the need for further surveys and legal requirements, and provide an ecological assessment identifying potential impacts.

### Survey site location


A central grid reference for the site is SD5993238579

**Scope of Assessment**

The scope of ecological surveys undertaken comprised of :

- A desktop study for known ecological information at the site and the local area.
- An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and assessment.
- Assessment of the ecological value of the habitats within the site with the use of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC).
- Survey and assessment of all habitats for statutorily protected species and other wildlife including badger (*Meles meles*), great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*), bats, bird species, invertebrates and reptiles.
- The identification of any potential ecological constraints on the proposals and the potential for biodiversity enhancement required in accordance with planning policy guidance, wildlife legislation, and best practice.
- The identification of any further surveys or precautionary actions that may be required prior to the commencement of any development activities.

**Field Survey Methodology**

The ecological value of the survey area has been assessed based on the Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment (CIEEM, 2018). The biodiversity value of any habitat types and associated species assemblages has been assessed.

The plant species within the site boundary were recorded with estimates of the distribution, ground cover, abundance and constancy of individual species.

Stands of vegetation and habitats were described and evaluated using the National Vegetation Classification (NVC).

A survey of the site and surrounding habitat was carried out to assess potential for the presence of protected species (*Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, the Wildlife & Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended), including those protected under the NERC Act 2006 and Countryside & Rights of Way (CRoW*) Act 2000) in line with published guidelines. This included a search for field signs, and assessment of pond habitat where applicable.

The potential of the proposed development to impact upon any great crested newt population(s) breeding ponds within 250 metres has been considered.

Bird species observed and heard during the survey were recorded. Habitats throughout the site and in the immediate surrounding area were assessed for their value to nesting birds.

Invasive species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981 as amended 1996) were also searched for and recorded throughout the survey area.

**Pre Existing data on local species**

The desktop study involved conducting database searches for statutory and non-statutory designated sites and European Protected Species (EPS) licensing applications within a 2km radius of the site. The baseline conditions are based on a review of existing available information including:

- MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside) website (to identify statutory designated sites and EPS licences).
- Ordnance Survey mapping (to identify potentially notable habitats including ponds).
- Aerial photography (to identify potentially notable habitats).

A search of the MAGIC website revealed no EPS licence applications within a 1km radius.

The site lies within Impact Risk Zones for Red Scar and Tun Brook Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (approximately 4.5 kilometres south-west of the site), however the development does not fall within relevant impact risk categories.

Natural England Great Crested Newt (GCN) Pond Surveys 2017 – 2019 dataset has no pond records within 500m of the site.

Great Crested Newt Class Survey Licence Returns (England) 2017 – 2019 dataset has no records within 500m of the site. A pond at SD595379, located approximately 700m south west of the site, recorded GCN present in 24/05/2016.

Given the nature and limited habitats on site, and the localised effect of the proposed development it was not felt that a data search with the local records centre was appropriate.

**Survey Summary**

| Survey | Date | Timings |
|---|---|---|
| Daytime Walkover | 05.10.2021 | 2 hours. |
| Daytime Walkover | 21.01.2022 | 1 hour. |

**Personnel**

All surveys were conducted by Dave Anderson MSc, Natural England Science, Education and Conservation bat licence holder (2015-15784-CLS-CLS), a bat surveyor and ecologist with 20 years experience, having formerly managed the East Lancashire Biological Records Centre.

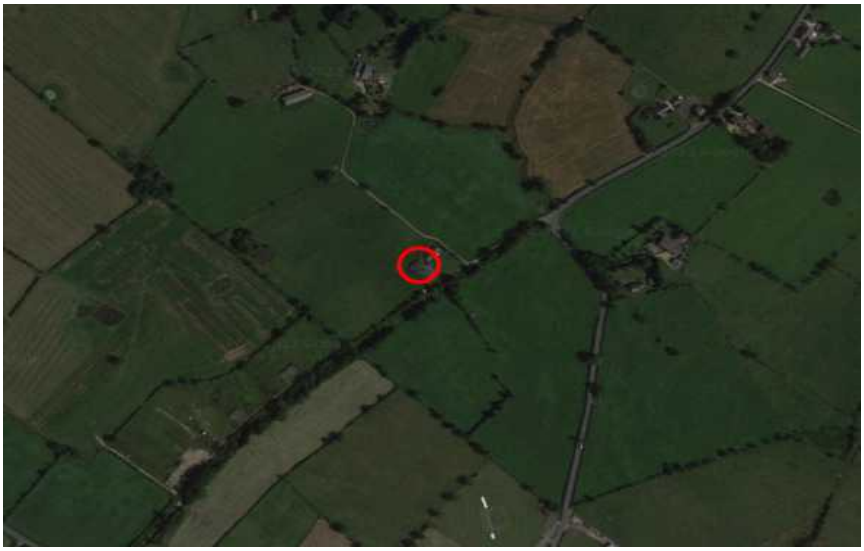
**Survey constraints**

Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the presence of plants and animals such as the time of year, migration patterns and behaviour. Therefore the survey of the study area should not be considered to have produced a complete list of plants and animals present.

Desk study data should not be treated as a definitive list of species present within a search area. Many species are under-recorded and low numbers of records can reflect a lack of survey effort in some areas, rather than confirm the absence of a species.

The entire site was accessible and habitats present on site are commonly occurring and of limited ecological value. Therefore the survey timing is not considered to be a major limiting factor on the assessment of the habitats present and their potential to support legally protected species.

## Results



*Survey site (red outline) context in relation to surrounding habitat*

The site is located in a rural position and consists of an L shaped outbuilding within an area of tarmacced hardstanding. Surrounding habitat is a mosaic of improved and semi improved grassland, hedgerow and linear semi natural deciduous tree cover.

### Site survey

*View of site from south east*

**Great Crested Newt**


*Habitat Map showing site in relation to habitat features.*

**P 1 –** A field pond located approximately 175m to the north west of the site. The pond was surveyed in 2014 with a negative result for the presence of Great Crested Newts (*Great Crested Newt – Presence & Absence Survey - Land off; Old Clay Lane, Longridge, ADK Environmental Management Ltd June 2014).* Precautionary mitigation is suggested as an appropriate approach to development.

**Breeding birds**

No nesting birds were observed during the survey, however two blackbird nests were recorded in the middle section of the building currently used as a wood store.

**Invasive non native plant species.**

No invasive non native species wee recorded within the site.

**Amphibians**

Presence of amphibians within the building were considered unlikely due to the dry nature of the building interior and surrounding hardstanding.

**Badgers**

No evidence to suggest badgers were present on the site.

**Other fauna.**

The wider site is likely to support small populations of other priority species such as hedgehog.

**Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment**

The building consists of an L shaped concrete block and brick built single storey outbuilding with a modern metal corrugated metal roof. External walls are generally well pointed with no gaps, cracks or crevices suitable for roosting bats.

The metal corrugated roof is single skin and unlined to the interior with roof lights allowing considerable light penetration.

A central stone built dividing wall had some crevices present. However no evidence of use by bats in the form of scattered droppings, urine splashing or grease marking was recorded.

Roost potential has been assessed as negligible to low. It is considered that a precautionary survey prior to work commencing would be an appropriate approach to development.

**Evaluation of the results**

The site is assessed as low conservation value, no habitats within the site are Priority Habitat, and no protected species were observed. No significant ecological constraints as a result of development proposals have been detected at the site. It is considered that development of the site will only result in minimal loss of habitat at the site level.

Bat roost potential has been assessed as negligible to low. Survey effort is considered appropriate to characterise the roost potential of building and that the presence of a significant bat roost is unlikely on site.

“The presence of a significant bat roost (invariably a maternity roost) can normally be determined on a single visit at any time of year, provided that the entire structure is accessible and that any signs of bats have not been removed by others”. - Mitchell-Jones, A (2004) Bat mitigation guidelines. English Nature.

It is considered that a precautionary approach to development with a prior emergence survey and provision of compensatory bat boxes would be an appropriate approach to roost compensation commensurate with that expected by Natural England for the purposes of licencing should it be necessary, The survey should be carried out May to August inclusive.

Given the nature of the proposed development, and location of the building in relation to a nearby pond, it is considered that reasonable avoidance measures is an appropriate approach to mitigation with regard to Great Crested Newts.

Conversion construction work should take place outside the optimum period for bird nesting (March to August inclusive), unless a breeding bird survey by a suitably qualified ecologist is carried out in the 48 hours prior to commencement and no nesting birds are found.

The development offers potential to create enhancements for biodiversity via a post development biodiversity enhancement and management scheme particularly with regard to installation of bat and bird boxes.

## Mitigation and Biodiversity Enhancement Measures.

These measures ensure that the development is implemented in accordance with the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), all relevant wildlife legislation, Natural England guidance, local planning policy and best practice.

The recommendations are reasonable and proportionate in order to address potential impacts identified during the survey. They offer an opportunity to ensure continued ecological connectivity, protect nearby habitats and species, and provide a level of biodiversity net gain.

### Nesting Bird Mitigation Strategy

Construction works will be carried out outside the bird nesting season (i.e. outwith March to August inclusive)

or

Following a nesting bird survey carried out by a suitably experienced ecologist no more than 48 hours in advance of works to ensure that no nesting birds will be harmed/disturbed during works.

If an active bird nest is detected at any point, works in that sector will immediately cease and an area of 5m radius around the nest will be cordoned off and clearly marked using hi-visibility tape and appropriate signage to prevent disturbance to nesting birds.

Any noisy machinery, or activity, will be moved at least 10m away from the location of the nest.

Works within the cordoned off area where active bird nests have been detected will only proceed once an experienced ecologist has confirmed the nests are no longer active.

**Lighting Mitigation with regard to foraging bats**

Any lighting to be used at the site during construction should be directional and screened where possible, lighting should be in accordance with guidance provided within *Guidance Note 8 Bats and artificial lighting, ILP/BCT 2018 and* included within a Construction Environment Management Plan.

Post development lighting should be directional and focussed to ensure dark corridors along the site boundaries and in particular along the southern boundary tree line ensuring no light spillage in order to maintain foraging and commuting potential for bats.

**Reasonable Avoidance Measures – Great Crested Newts**

The Overriding principles behind this method statement are:

“Avoiding damage to existing GCN habitat is always the preferred option. This involves taking steps to avoid killing, injury or disturbance to newts and damage to or loss of their habitat”

Precautionary Measures

The following steps will ensure that great crested newts and their habitats are not adversely affected by the proposed works:

All site personnel will receive a tool-box talk during their site induction to include details of the potential presence of great crested newts and what to do in the event they are found during works on site.

The site must be checked for the presence of great crested newts (and other amphibians) by the ecologist immediately prior to the work commencing. Any potential refugia will be checked and then removed/dismantled.

All excavations on site should be covered at night or a ramp should be provided to allow amphibians to exit excavations. All excavations should be checked for amphibians each morning prior to the re-commencement of any works.

All exposed new pipework and drains should be capped at night so as to avoid trapping amphibians.

All excavated materials/waste should be stored in skips or similar and not on the ground where it could be used as a refuge/resting area by amphibians. Alternatively all waste should be removed from site daily.

Scaffold footings will be place on sand to prevent newts taking temporary refuge underneath the footings.

Materials will be delivered and stored in an area of the site which is already hard standing.

Stored items will be raised off the ground (whether stored on amenity grass or hard standing) on pallets to remove any refuge potential for great crested newts.

Aggregates such as gravel and sand will be delivered in bulk bags and stored on pallets to remove any refuge potential for great crested newts.

**Bat Biodiversity Net Gain**

Post development installation of one Greenwoods Ecohabitats three chamber bat boxes on trees along the southern boundary tree line  will provide new roosting opportunities for bats.

**Bird Box**

Two open bird boxes suitable for nesting bird species such as Blackbird should be incorporated into the site design and installed post development works.