Preliminary Ecological Assessment

Land south of Lower Road,
Longridge,
PR3 2YY.

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Report prepared by:
Batworker Ecological Consultancy
Batworker.com
dave@batworker.com
07894 338290

Summary

In November 2022 Batworker Ecological Consultancy was commissioned to undertake a preliminary ecological assessment of land south of Lower Road, Longridge, PR3 2YY. to support an application for a proposed commercial development with associated parking, landscaping, and access.

A daytime walkover survey was carried out on 29th November 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 affected 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 loss of habitat at the site level.

The proposed development will result in the loss of an area of species poor improved grassland and a 20m section of hedgerow in poor condition.

The development offers considerable potential to create enhancements for biodiversity via a post development biodiversity enhancement and management scheme particularly planting of native hedge and tree species, and installation of bat boxes along the site boundary which is recommended within this report.

Introduction

In November 2022 Batworker Ecological Consultancy was commissioned to undertake a preliminary ecological assessment of land south of Lower Road, Longridge, PR3 2YY to support an application for a proposed commercial development with associated parking, landscaping, and access.

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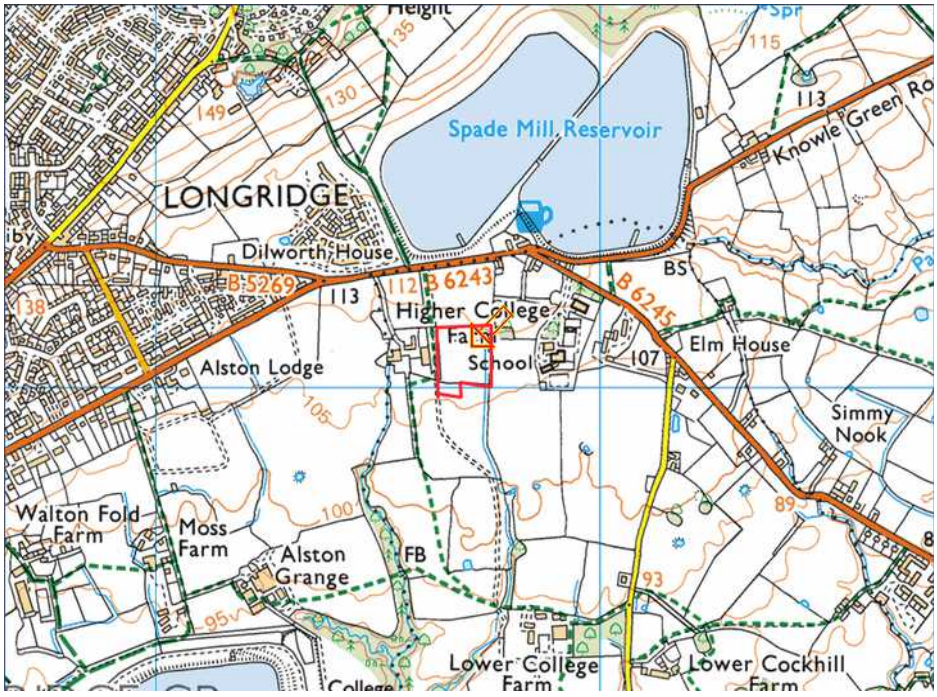
Survey and Site Assessment

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 SD6169137075

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 an Impact Risk Zone for tRed Scar and Tun Brook Woods SSSI, however the development does not fall within a relevant impact risk category.

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

Natural England Great Crested Newt Class Survey Licence Returns (England) 2017 – 2019 dataset no records within 500m of the site.

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.

A previous survey of the site (*Ecological Appraisal Land South of Lower Road, Longridge, Envirotech 3/10/19)* concluded:

"*1.1.4 The plant species assemblages recorded at the site are all common in the local area and are considered to be of low ecological value. Sympathetically landscaped open space is considered to offer habitat of equal or greater ecological value.*

1.1.5 The ponds in proximity to the site are considered to be of low quality and unlikely to support breeding populations of great crested newts

1.1.6 None of the hedgerows around the site perimeter were considered important under the Hedgerow Regulations (1997)."

Survey Summary

Survey	Date	Timings
Daytime Walkover	29.11.2022	2 hours.

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.

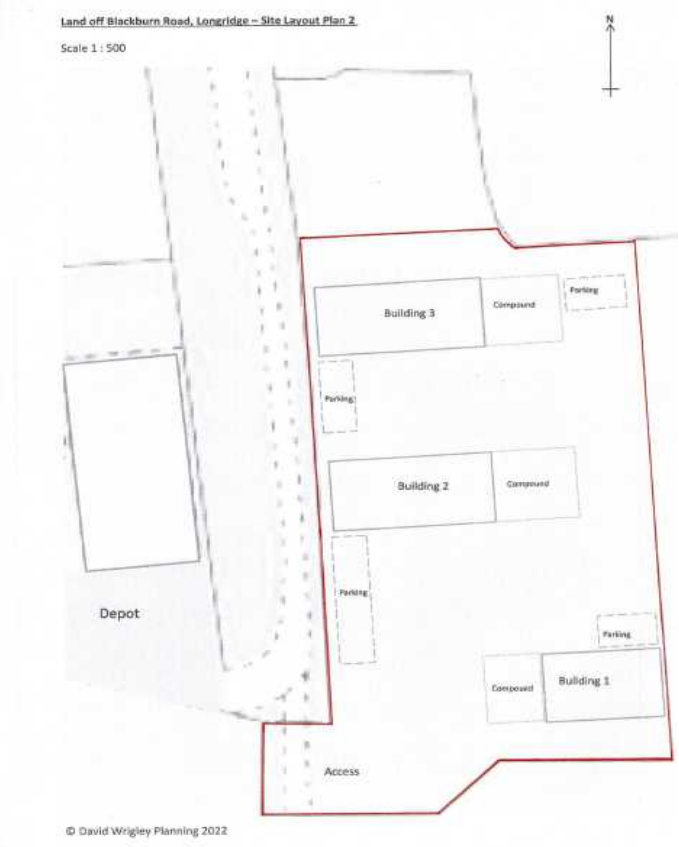
Survey constraints

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.

Proposed Development



The application consists of proposed commercial development for three units with associated parking, landscaping, and access.

Results

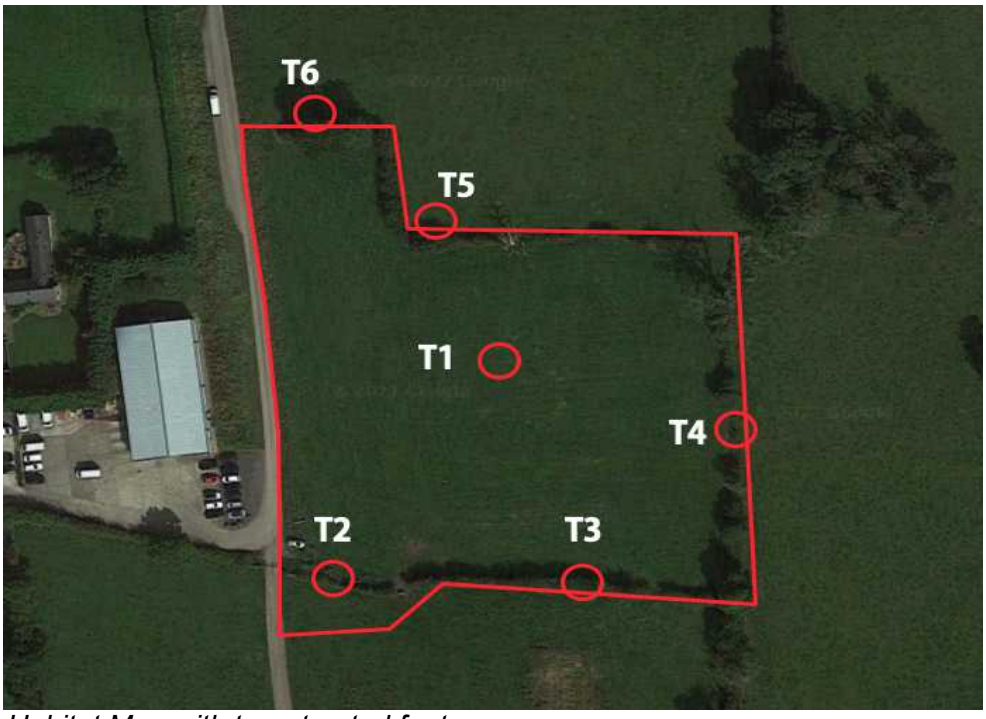
Survey site (red outline) context in relation to surrounding habitat.

The site is located in a rural position with surrounding habitat a mosaic of improved and semi improved grassland with some hedgerow and scattered deciduous tree cover along field boundaries, open water and semi natural woodland cover.

Habitat survey

View of the site from southeast

View of the site from south



Habitat Map with target noted features

Target Note 1 – The site is dominated by species poor improved grassland with a short grazed sward.


Target Note 2 – The south western boundary contains a short section of gappy hawthorn hedgerow in poor condition.


Target Note 3 – The southern boundary has a predominately hawthorn hedgerow present with ditching in the south eastern corner of the site It is recommended that this is supplemented with a native hedgerow and tree mix where gaps occur. The ditch would benefit from works to remove rank vegetation and planting with a species mix of native marginal plants.

Target Note 4 – Hedgerow along the eastern boundary is predominately hawthorn with mature and semi mature oak and ash trees.

Target Note 5– The northern boundary of the site is dominated by gappy hawthorn hedgerow. It is recommended that supplementary planting is carried out to offer a more complete and diverse hedgerow.

Target Note 6 – Semi mature hawthorn hedgerow with a species poor understorey makes up the northwestern boundary with a mature oak tree. A dew pond beyond the northern boundary was observed to be dry despite recent sustained rainfall and vegetation present suggested it had not held water recently.

Common name	Scientific name	DAFOR
Creeping Bent	*Agrostis stolonifera*	O
Meadow Foxtail	*Alopecurus pratensis*	O
Common Mouse-ear	*Cerastium fontanum*	F
Spear thistle	*Cirsium vulgare*	O
Field Bindweed	*Convolvulus arvensis*	F
Crested Dogs Tail	*Cynosurus cristatus*	O
Cocks Foot	*Dactylus glomerata*	O
Foxglove	*Digitalis purpurea*	O
Common Couch	*Elytrigia repens*	A
Cleavers	*Galium aparine*	O
Yorkshire Fog	*Holcus lanatus*	O
Soft Rush	*Juncus effusus*	F
Perennial Rye-grass	*Lolium perenne*	A
Timothy	*Phleum pratense*	A
Ribwort Plantain	*Plantago lanceolata*	O
Annual Meadow-grass	*Poa annua*	A
Rough Meadow Grass	*Poa trivialis*	A
Creeping Buttercup	*Ranunculus repens*	F
Bramble	*Rubus fruticosus spp*	O
Broad-leaved Dock	*Rumex obtusifolius*	F
White Clover	*Trifolium repens*	F
Nettle	*Urtica dioica*	O
Common field speedwell	*Veronica persica*	*O*

DAFOR scale: D = Dominant; A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional, R = Rare.

Breeding birds

No nesting birds were observed during the survey, however, suitable nesting and foraging resources for common woodland and urban fringe bird species are present on site. Nesting potential is available within trees and hedgerow on site.

Badgers

No evidence to suggest badgers were present on the site or using the site to forage were recorded.

Invasive non native plant species.

No evidence of invasive non native plants was recorded during the survey.

Amphibians

The site has no suitbable habitat and refugia features suitable for amphibians such as common toad and common frogs, reasonable avoidance measures are recommended as an appropriate mitigation measure.

Great Crested Newt

No waterbodies suitable for Great Crested Newt are present on site or within 250m of the site. Reasonable avoidance measures with regard to amphibians are recommended as an appropriate mitigation measure.

Other fauna.

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

Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment

It is understood that the development will not result in the loss of any mature trees on site. However mitigation advice with regard to post development lighting is included within this report.

Evaluation of the results

The site is assessed as low conservation value, no affected 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 level.

It is considered that development of the site will only result in loss of habitat at the site level.

The proposed development will result in the loss of an area of species poor improved grassland and a 20m section of hedgerow in poor condition.

The development offers considerable potential to create enhancements for biodiversity via a post development biodiversity enhancement and management scheme particularly pond creation and planting of native hedge and tree species within the proposed landscaping.

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.

Reasonable Avoidance Measures

Tree Root Protection

Temporary fencing should be placed to ensure a visible barrier to tree and hedgerow protection zones. Fencing (such as weldmesh "Heras" panels) should be spaced to the dripline of existing tree canopies and 1.5 metres from existing boundary hedgerow.

Fencing should be retained in place throughout the development process until completion of the project and be affixed with a 600mm x 300mm warning sign reading "TREE PROTECTION AREA KEEP OUT” every 5 metres.

No excavations, or installation of services, can be carried out in the tree and hedgerow protection zones.

Under no circumstances must any materials be stored under the canopy of existing trees, and no cement, diesel or oil stored near to them.

No fires should be lit within 5m of existing trees.

Any works to the existing trees are to be carried out by a fully qualified tree surgeon and in accordance with BS 3998 (1989) Recommendations for Tree Work.

> All workers on site should be made aware during site induction that:
> Tree protection fencing must not be moved or removed
> No person shall enter the tree protection zone
> No machine, plant or vehicles should enter the tree protection zone.
> No materials will be stored within the tree protection zone
> No spoil shall be deposited or stored within the tree protection zone.
> No excavations should be carried out
> No fires will be lit within 5m of the tree protection zone.
> Any incursion within the tree protection zone should only take place after written permission from the Local Authority.

Reasonable Avoidance Measures - Small mammals and amphibians.

Hand searches within dense vegetation and will take into account common amphibians, hedgehog and other small mammals.

Any hedgehogs or small mammals caught will be allowed to disperse, or if caught will be released into the adjacent habitat on the eastern boundary of the site, away from the development site.

Any toads or common amphibians that are caught during hand searching will be released into adjacent terrestrial habitat, away from the development site.

Once the hand searches have taken place for both amphibians and small mammals the areas of improved grassland will be strimmed to 100mm to remove amphibian foraging habitat from site and discourage amphibians, hedgehogs and other small mammals from using the site.

Nesting Bird Mitigation Strategy

Vegetation clearance works where necessary 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 ensuring no light spillage in order to maintain foraging and commuting potential for bats.

Bat Biodiversity Net Gain

Post development installation of three Greenwoods Ecohabitats three chamber bat boxes on trees within the site will provide new roosting opportunities for bats.

Location of bat boxes on mature boundary trees.

Tree species for landscaping.

Tree species for proposed landscaping should be a mix of native species which offer habitat for insects and autumn foraging for birds.

Alder	*Alnus glutinosa*
Silver Birch	*Betula pendula*
Hawthorn	*Craetagus montana*
Holly	*Ilex aquifolium*
Common Oak	*Quercus robur*
Bird Cherry	*Prunus padus*
Rowan	*Sorbus aucuparia*

Enhancement Hedgerow

Gappy boundary hedgerow and the newly created south western access offers opportunities for enhancement hedgerow in order to provide biodiversity net gain. A species mix can contribute to enhancing gaps in existing hedgerow and tree stands on the site boundary.

Species mix to provide foraging potential for insects and birds will follow the following recommendations.

Hawthorn	*Crataegus monogyna*	50%
Blackthorn	*Prunus spinosa*	20%
Holly	*Ilex aquifolium*	20%
Elder	*Sambucus nigra*	10%

Ditches along the southern and south eastern boundary offer opportunities for habitat enhancements. Planting recommendations for ditches are as follows.

Yellow Flag Iris	*Iris pseudacorus*
Marsh Marigold	*Caltha palustris*
Meadowsweet	*Filipendula ulmaria*
Purple Loosestrife	*Lythrum salicaria*