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# Former Punchbowl Inn Hurst Green, Clitheroe

## Ecological Assessment Report

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Authored by Richard Roe BSc MSc MCIEEM CEnv

### CONTACT DETAILS

KINGDOM ECOLOGY LTD

7 Speke Road

Woolton

Liverpool

L25 8QA

Email: [enquiries@kingdomecology.com](mailto:enquiries@kingdomecology.com)

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Kingdom Ecology have carried out an update Ecological Assessment of an approximately 0.8ha area of land located at the former Punchbowl Inn, Longridge Road, Hurst Green, Clitheroe, BB7 9QP (National Grid Reference SD 6739 3786). The location of the study area is shown on Figure 1 in the Appendix.

Survey has been carried out to identify potential ecological constraints to any future development of the site. Surveys were previously undertaken in 2015 and 2017 comprising of otter, water vole, extended Phase 1 Habitat and bat surveys. However, since these surveys the pub building has been demolished.

The update Ecological Scoping Survey was undertaken on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021. Surveys were carried out by Richard Roe (BSc, MSc, MIEEM, CEnv). Richard has extensive experience of undertaking protected species, habitat and botanical surveys as a professional ecological consultant with over twenty years' experience.

The chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management has provided guidance on the appropriate lifespan of ecology surveys and reports (see <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Advice-Note.pdf>). This guidance suggests that surveys which have been completed within the previous 12-18 months are likely to still be valid in most cases.

Recent photographs of the site have been provided by the applicant (these are date stamped 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023) and provide confirmation that the site has not significantly changed since the original November 2021 surveys. Recent changes to the site include minor works to scrape back and mound topsoil.

Given the low biodiversity value of habitats previously recorded at the site, the findings of the previous surveys are still considered to be valid and the previous surveys are more likely to provide an accurate representation of habitats before topsoil removal.

## 1.2 Purpose of Report

This report provides and outlines the findings of the initial field surveys and desktop study undertaken in November 2021.

Surveys aimed to identify habitats and species which are either of importance in terms of their conservation value or are afforded statutory legal protection. The presence of such habitats or species would form a material consideration during the planning process and could pose a constraint to the redevelopment of the site.

The field surveys comprised of an ecological walkover survey with a search for habitats that could support any protected species.

Following a description of the survey findings and an evaluation of habitats present, the report goes on to make broad recommendations for further works, mitigation and ecological enhancement measures where relevant.

## **1.3 Relevant Legislation**

### **1.3.1 Birds**

All wild birds in England and Wales are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird, or take, damage or destroy the nest (whilst being built or in use) or its eggs.

### **1.3.2 Badgers**

Badgers are afforded protection under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992; this act was introduced on welfare grounds. The Act is based primarily on the need to protect badgers from baiting and deliberate harm or injury. Badgers are not considered to be a species of any conservation concern. However, the Act contains restrictions that apply more widely and can have implications were badgers and development come into conflict. All the following are considered criminal offences:

- to wilfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a badger;
- to attempt to do so; or
- to intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett.

Sett interference includes damaging or destroying a sett, obstructing access to a sett, and disturbing a badger whilst it is occupying a sett. It is not illegal, and therefore a licence is not required, to carry out disturbing activities in the vicinity of a sett if no badger is disturbed and the sett is not damaged or obstructed.

The legislation recognises the need for a range of legitimate activities to be carried out and allows licences to be granted for certain purposes permitting work that would otherwise be illegal, including development.

### **1.3.3 Otter**

Otter are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

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Taken together, this legislation makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture otter.
- Deliberately disturb otter, whether within a resting place or not.
- Damage, destroy or obstruct access to an otter resting site, or a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection.
- Possess or transport otters, unless acquired legally.
- Sell, barter or exchange otters.

Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, disturbance is defined as that which is likely:

1. to impair their ability -
  - to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young, or
  - in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or
2. to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.

The otter is considered a European Protected Species (EPS). The Conservation of Habitat and Species Regulations (2017) provide derogation against certain offences which could potentially affect an EPS through the EPS Licensing system.

#### **1.3.4 Non-native plant species**

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides the primary control on the release of non-native species into the wild in Great Britain. It is an offence under section 14(2) of the Act to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' any plant listed in Schedule 9, Part II. Schedule 9 of the act includes Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

## 2 Field Survey Methods

### 2.1 Survey Aims and Objectives

The survey aim was to assess the site as to its ecological importance by assessing the value of habitats and their suitability to support any protected or notable species. The purpose of this was to highlight any ecological constraints associated with future development proposals.

Field survey comprised of an ecological walkover survey, this included an assessment of habitats at the site in terms of their suitability to support any protected species including bats, badger, water vole, otter and breeding birds.

Species that are considered unlikely to be significantly affected by the proposed development, even if known to be present in the general vicinity, were 'scoped out' of the assessment.

### 2.2 Methods

#### 2.2.1 Walkover Survey

An Ecological walkover of the site was undertaken on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021.

The aims of the walkover survey were to:

- identify areas or habitats that are of particular ecological interest for nature conservation and which require more detailed investigation;
- provide additional information regarding incidental observations of protected species or non-native, invasive species;
- to assess the site as to its ecological importance by assessing the value of habitats and their suitability to support any protected or notable species (including badgers, bats and breeding birds).

The walkover survey sought to highlight any ecological constraints associated with future works proposals and to inform further ecological survey of the site, where relevant.

A map of the habitats recorded within the study area is shown in Figure 2 in the Appendix. Typical habitats recorded at the site are also shown in photographs in the Appendix.

## 3 Field Survey Results

### 3.1 Site Description and Habitats

The study site comprises of the former Punchbowl Inn plus surrounding grounds. The site covers an area of approximately 0.8ha. The site is located on the B6243 Longridge Road approximately 1km to the west of the village of Hurst Green.

Surrounding habitats are agricultural in character comprising of sheep grazed improved pasture and rush pasture. Bailey Brook runs to the north and south of the site. It is tree lined along its length and also links with small blocks of broadleaved woodland. The study site location is shown on Figure 1 in the Appendix.

The former Inn building has been recently demolished and so the site itself comprises of areas of rubble, spoil heaps, bare ground, regenerating vegetation plus some remnant patches of marshy grassland and ruderal herb habitat.

There is watercourse (Bailey Brook) running along the western boundary of the site, a band of cypress trees is on the eastern boundary and scattered broadleaved trees including beech, oak, ash and sycamore are located around the site perimeter and along the brook. There are remnant sections of species-poor hedgerow along the site's boundary with Longridge Road (comprising of hawthorn, beech and garden privet) with the remaining site boundaries marked with stock fencing and Heras fencing.

There are Himalayan balsam seedlings scattered across the site. Himalayan balsam is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act as non-native invasive species (see Section 1.3).

None of the habitats within the site itself are considered to be of any significant value in their own right. However, Bailey Brook is considered to be a feature of biodiversity importance. The scattered broadleaved trees are also considered to be of minor biodiversity importance.

Habitats at the study area are Target Noted and shown on Figure 2 in the Appendix. Target Note descriptions are provided in Table 1 below. Photographs of the habitats taken in 2021 and 2023 are provided in the Appendix.

*Table 1- Habitat Target Notes*

| <b>Target Note</b> | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                  | Much of the site comprises of patches of bare ground plus perennial vegetation. It appears that the topsoil may have been either compacted or scaped back in the recent past and during the recent demolition works. This has been colonised by a typical pioneer vegetation comprising of patches of field horsetail, scentless mayweed, common ragwort, creeping thistle, creeping buttercup, prickly sowthistle, greater plantain, ribwort plantain, annual meadow-grass, cock's foot and Yorkshire fog. There are also Himalayan balsam seedlings throughout these areas. There are rubble piles and spoil heaps located in these areas as well as patches of taller ruderal vegetation (see Target Notes 3 and 4). |
| 2                  | There are remnant patches of unmanaged marshy grassland located at the eastern edges of the site. These areas comprise of frequent soft rush and common bent with occasional tufted hair-grass, hard rush, rough meadow-grass, Yorkshire fog, cock's foot, ragwort, spear thistle, creeping thistle and creeping buttercup.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 3                  | There are areas of ruderal herb which have colonised the spoil heaps scattered around the site. These principally comprise of nettle and creeping thistle, with greater burdock, hogweed, broadleaved dock and ragwort.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 4                  | There are large patches of tall herb habitats adjacent to the brook comprising principally of creeping thistle.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 5                  | Bailey brook runs along the western boundary of the site. The brook is approximately 2m wide with a rocky substrate. The brook is culverted to the north of the site where it passes beneath Longridge Road. The brook ranges in depth between 100-200mm and has a moderate flow. The brook does not have any in-channel vegetation. The east bank of the brook comprises of bare ground with stands of nettle, bramble, Himalayan balsam and butterbur. There are scattered trees along the eastern bank of the brook comprising of oak and sycamore with trees also on the western bank including sycamore, oak, ash, hazel and beech.                                                                                |
| 6                  | There is a large rubble pile located alongside Longridge Road where the inn building formerly stood. There is also a central area of sealed surface, hardstanding at the site which would have acted at the former pub carpark. A section of stone wall runs along the western edge of the former carpark.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 7                  | There is an L-shaped band of tall cypress trees along the eastern boundary of the site.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 8                  | Ash trees with dense ivy coverage which offers some 'low' suitability bat roosting habitat.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 9                  | Sycamore trees with light ivy coverage offering some 'low' suitability bat roosting habitat.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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## **3.2 Protected Species**

### **3.2.1 Breeding birds**

The trees, bramble scrub and hedgerows at the site could support nesting birds during the breeding season.

### **3.2.2 Badger**

No field signs indicative of badger activity was found within the study site.

### **3.2.3 Bats**

None of the trees present were identified as supporting any obvious high value features for roosting bats such as large rot holes, splits or significant areas of lifting bark.

Trees at Target Note 8 and 9 offer some 'low' suitability potential bat roosting habitat within areas of ivy growth (see Table 1).

However, no further broadleaved trees would be removed as part of development proposals. Therefore, works are unlikely to affect any roosting bats.

### **3.2.4 Water vole and Otter**

The brook is considered to be unsuitable for water vole, largely on account of its moderate flow rate, shallow water, rocky substrate, lack of suitable vegetation and heavy shading from adjacent trees.

No suitable otter resting sites were identified along the brook and no field signs indicative of otter presence were found.

However, otter are known to be present throughout the River Ribble catchment and so may occasionally pass along Bailey Brook. The River Ribble itself is located approximately 1.5km to the southeast of the site.

No evidence of otter or water vole was found on the brook during the site surveys carried out in 2015 or 2017.

### **3.2.5 Other Protected Species**

It is considered to be unlikely that any other protected species would be present within the study site.

## 4 Evaluation and Recommendations

### 4.1 Summary

#### 4.1.1 Habitats

Field survey has assessed the ecological value of an approximate 0.8ha area of land located at the former Punchbowl Inn, Longridge Road, Hurst Green.

The inn building has been recently demolished and so the site itself comprises of areas of rubble, spoil heaps, bare ground, regenerating vegetation plus some remnant patches of marshy grassland and ruderal herb habitat.

There is watercourse (Bailey Brook) running along the western boundary of the site, a band of cypress trees is on the eastern boundary and scattered broadleaved trees including beech, oak, ash and sycamore located around the site perimeter and along the brook.

There are remnant sections of species-poor hedgerow along the site's boundary with Longridge Road (comprising of hawthorn, beech and garden privet) with the remaining site boundaries marked with stock fencing. There are Himalayan balsam seedlings scattered across the site.

None of the habitats within the site itself are considered to be of any significant value in their own right. However, Bailey Brook is considered to be a feature of biodiversity importance. As well as offering valuable aquatic and riparian habitats in its own right, the brook will also act as a potential wildlife corridor at the landscape scale.

The trees along the site boundaries are also considered to be features of biodiversity value. Mature trees, as well as being culturally and ecologically valuable, are also of importance to invertebrates, birds, mammals and other associated ecological groups through the provision of foraging resources and a variety of ecological niches.

#### 4.1.2 Protected Species

The areas of hedgerow and trees could support nesting birds during the breeding bird season.

Trees at Target Note 8 and 9 offer some 'low' suitability potential bat roosting habitat within areas of ivy growth. However, these would not be affected by development proposals.

Bailey Brook runs along the western boundary of the site. The brook is considered to be unsuitable for water vole.

No suitable otter resting sites were identified along the brook and no field signs indicative of otter presence were found.

However, otter are present throughout the River Ribble catchment and so may occasionally pass along Bailey Brook.

It is considered unlikely that any other protected species would be directly impacted by development proposals.

## **4.2 Recommendations**

### **4.2.1 Habitats**

It is recommended that a buffer area is maintained between the edges of Bailey Brook and any development. This buffer area should be at least 5m in width from the top of the brook bank. The banks of the brook could be planted with appropriate riparian trees including alder and willow and the buffer area can be left to naturally develop into a scrub and tall herb habitat.

An appropriate pollution prevention plan will need to be put in place during construction to ensure that no sediment, run-off or chemical pollutants impact upon the adjacent Wybunbury Brook.

Where any new trees and areas of planting are planned as part of landscaping proposals, it is recommended that new planting includes species which can provide nectar sources for insects and berries/fruits for invertebrates and birds.

The following small/medium sized tree species are recommended as they offer suitable foraging opportunities to various native wildlife (including birds and invertebrates): rowan, wild cherry, crab apple, silver birch, holly, and willow. These trees should be included in the planting mix.

Any areas of ornamental shrubbery should include suitable nectar sources for insects. The Royal Horticultural Society provides a list of suitable plants for invertebrates (see [rhs.org.uk/plantsforpollinators](http://rhs.org.uk/plantsforpollinators)). It is recommended that this list is consulted when producing detailed landscaping designs for the site.

New boundaries features should include native hedgerows instead of fencing or ornamental hedging. Hedgerows should comprise of mix of hawthorn, blackthorn, holly and hazel.

### **4.2.2 Himalayan Balsam**

Himalayan balsam is present within the perennial habitats across the site (Target Note 1) and alongside the Brook (Target Note 5). This plant is listed as a non-native, invasive species and is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause this species to grow in the wild. The plant is likely to be ubiquitous along the Bailey Brook corridor.

It is recommended that a method statement for the removal and control of Himalayan balsam is produced by an appropriately qualified ecologist or invasive species specialist.

In order to prevent Himalayan balsam spreading into any new sites, it is recommended that any stands of the plants within or immediately adjacent to the construction area are identified during pre-construction surveys.

Control measures for Himalayan balsam should aim to prevent seeding (generally August-October). It is recommended that plants are removed by hand pulling or cutting. This should be carried out May-July to be the most effective. Cutting should be carried out at ground level and below the first node to achieve the best results. Cut Himalayan balsam should be removed from site to licensed landfill as controlled waste, or dealt with on-site in appropriate waste management areas.

#### **4.2.3 Breeding Birds**

All wild birds in England and Wales are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird, or take, damage or destroy the nest (whilst being built or in use) or its eggs.

It is therefore recommended that future development of the site including any tree or hedge management avoid taking place during the breeding bird season (March-September inclusive).

Where this is not possible, a check for breeding birds should be carried out immediately prior to the start of works by an appropriately qualified ecologist.

If during works any nesting birds are found, works should immediately stop and further advice should be sought from an appropriately qualified ecologist. The ecologist would mark out a buffer zone around the nest, the size of the buffer zone would be determined depending upon the species encountered and the nest site location. No works would be allowed to take place within the buffer area until all young birds had fledged. Fledging of young birds would need to be confirmed by the appropriately qualified ecologist.

#### **4.2.4 Otter**

As previously recommended, a minimum 5m buffer should be retained between the development and the top of the bank of Bailey Brook.

This buffer area should be left to naturally develop tall herb and scrub habitats.

There is a risk that otters could access the site during construction and could be harmed if works are carried out in an insensitive manner. It is therefore recommended that during construction:-

- Where any trenches or other excavations are to be left open overnight, these should be fitted with mammal ramps or should have the sides battered to form a slope to allow any trapped wildlife to escape.
- A tidy works area should be maintained during construction and any hazardous substances should be fenced off to remove any mammal hazards from the site.

Following the implementation of these measures, it is considered to be unlikely that the proposed development will have a significant negative impact upon the local otter population.

#### **4.2.5 Further Site Enhancements**

Opportunities to further enhance the biodiversity value of the site should be designed into future development proposals.

Ecological opportunities should include the provision of bat and bird box scheme which should be designed by an appropriately qualified ecologist.

Bat boxes should be built into the proposed new building. Suitable models of bat box include the Habibat 003 or 005 which can be built into the brickwork of the new structures.

Bird boxes should provide suitable nesting habitat for house sparrows. As with the bat boxes, integral bird boxes should be used which would be built into the structure of the new housing.

Further bird boxes for common garden bird species can be installed on retained mature trees along the site boundaries.

Lighting proposals will need to ensure that bat box locations and habitats on Bailey Brook are not illuminated of an evening.



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## 5 Appendix

**Photographs (2021)**

*Photograph 1 - Rubble pile along roadside*



*Photograph 2 - Ruderal herb and spoil heaps at northwest corner of site*



*Photograph 3 - Hardstanding at centre of site*



*Photograph 4 - Line of conifer trees at Target Note 7*



*Photograph 5 - Marshy grassland habitats at northeast corner of site*



*Photograph 6- Short perennial habitats at Target Note 1 (southwest corner of site)*



*Photograph 7 - Bailey Brook on western boundary*



*Photograph 8- Ash tree at Target Note 8*



**Photographs (2023)**

*Photograph 9 - Rubble pile at site*



*Photograph 10 - Line of conifer trees at Target Note 7*



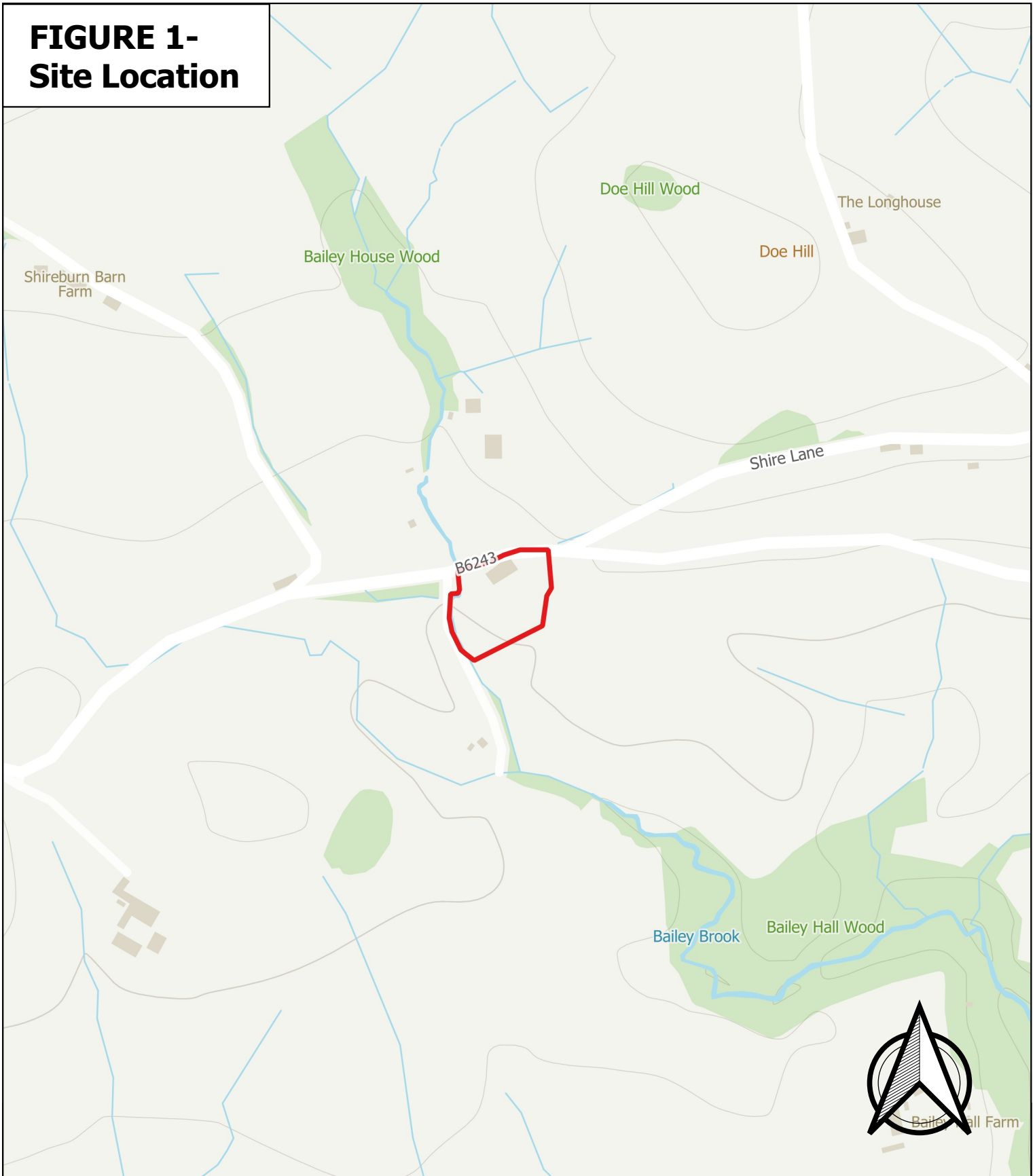
*Photograph 11 - Hardstanding at centre of site*



*Photograph 12 - Spoil hap to rear of conifers at Target Note 7*



# FIGURE 1- Site Location



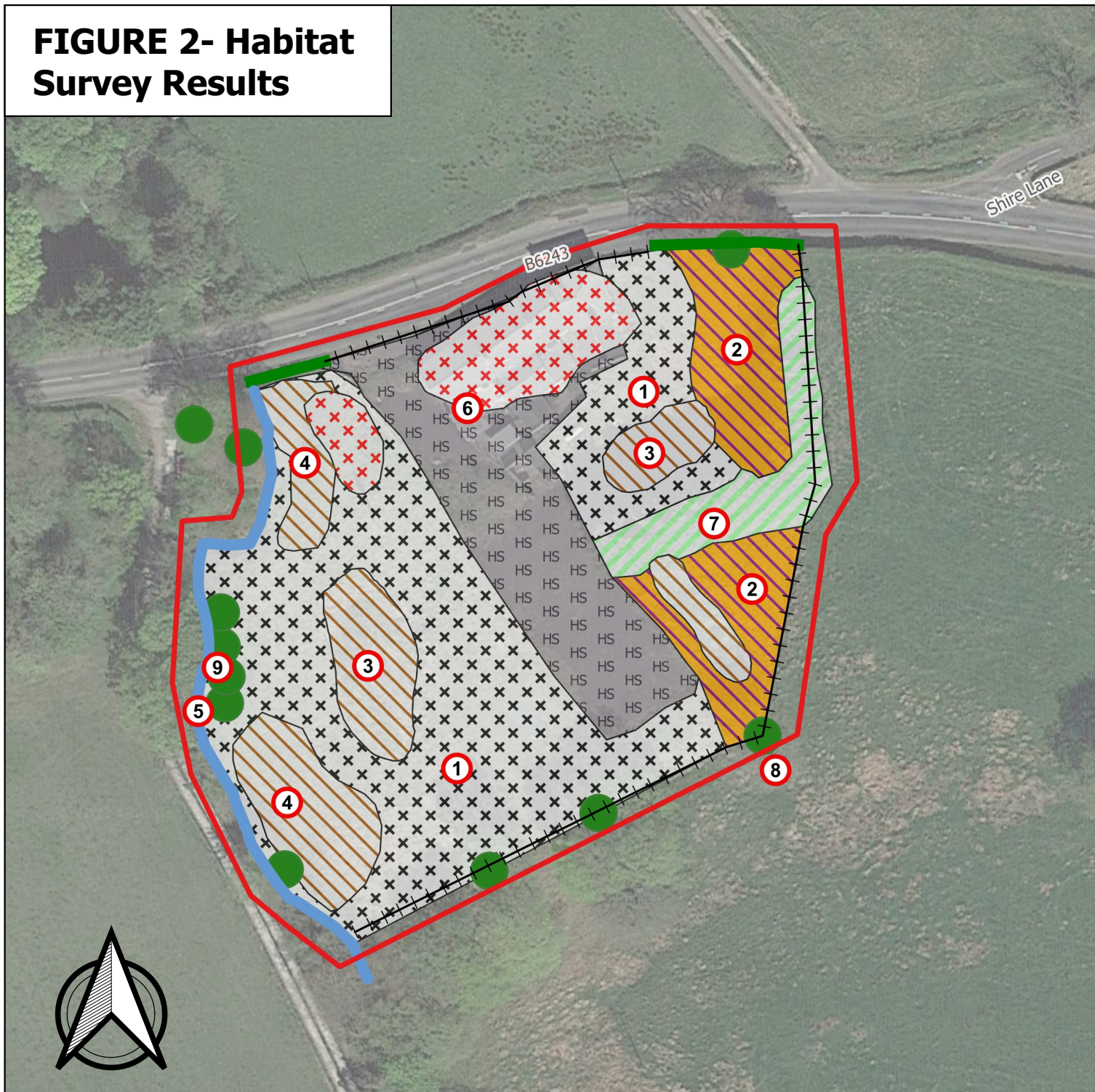
## KEY

 Study Site

0 50 100 150 200 250 m



**FIGURE 2- Habitat Survey Results**



**KEY**

-  Study Site
-  Target Note
-  Tree
-  Fence
-  Hedgerow
-  watercourse
-  Coniferous plantation
-  Marshy grassland
-  Ruderal herb
-  Rubble
-  Ephemeral/short perennial
-  Hardstanding

0 10 20 30 40 m

