

Land at Foxfields Country Hotel, Billington
PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

April 2026



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Knight Sky Ecology was commissioned to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal of land located at Foxfields Country Hotel. A summary of the main findings along with the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the appraisal are listed below.

Ecological Feature	Results	Conclusions and Recommendations
International / national sites	No statutory designated sites with nature conservation interest are located within a 2 km radius. The proposals will not trigger the need for assessment of impacts on any Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the wider area.	No further consultation or mitigation is required in respect of internationally or nationally designated sites.
Locally designated sites	No Biological Heritage Sites (BHS) are located within 250 m. Two BHS are located within 1 km.	Stand-off distances and intervening land are sufficient to avoid any potential impacts on locally designated sites.
Priority habitats	No priority habitats are present within the site. A deciduous woodland bounds the site to the north-east.	No impacts to the adjacent woodland are anticipated. An Arboricultural Impact Assessment has been submitted in support of the proposal.
Site habitats	Site habitats comprise species-poor grassland and hardstanding only. A section of grassland is proposed for use in delivering Biodiversity Net Gain.	The development will result in the loss of habitats of low ecological value. No trees will be affected. The site will be subject to the Biodiversity Net Gain condition.
Amphibians	One isolated woodland pond is located within 250 m. The site provides suboptimal terrestrial habitat for amphibians, including great crested newt.	Precautionary working methods are advised.
Birds	Scattered trees and adjacent woodland provide potential nesting opportunities for breeding birds.	Standard measures to avoid impacts on nesting birds are required. Installation of bird boxes is recommended within the development layout.
Bats	No structures or trees with bat roost potential were identified. Adjacent trees and woodland will support foraging bats.	The development is not anticipated to adversely affect the distribution or abundance of bats. Additional tree planting recommended to enhance foraging habitat. Good-practice lighting measures should be implemented. Installation of bat boxes is recommended.
Other protected / notable species	No other protected or notable species are likely to be present or affected by the proposed development.	No further action required.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Instruction & Background

Knight Sky Ecology Ltd was commissioned to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) of land located at Foxfields Country Hotel, Whalley Rd, Billington, Clitheroe BB7 9H (“the site”). The PEA included a basic desk-based study and a site survey completed on 23rd March 2026.

The PEA was undertaken to provide supporting information for the proposed construction of 3no. ancillary leisure and recreational buildings at the site.

1.2 Site Description

The development boundary lies within the existing grounds of the hotel and will utilise the existing access and car park. The proposed units would be positioned within the managed gardens immediately north-east of the hotel building and directly south-east of the car park. An area of woodland is located to the north-east, while the tree-lined Clitheroe (Ribble Valley) rail line forms the south-eastern boundary.

The wider landscape is predominantly agricultural, with Billington situated approximately 350 m to the north-east and Langho around 1.2 km to the south-west. The site location is illustrated in Figures 1.1 and 1.2.

Figure 1.1. Location Plan

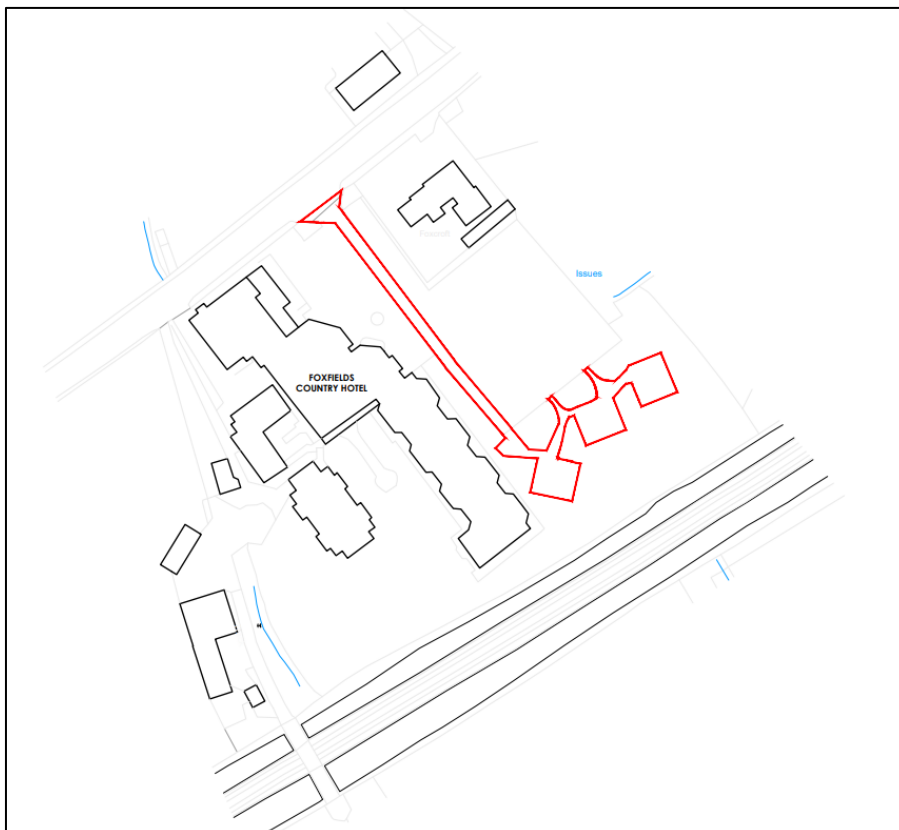


Figure 1.2. Aerial view of site and approximate development boundary



1.3 Legislation and Policy

Many UK wildlife species and habitats are protected by law and these important ecological features form a key consideration for defining the scope of assessment within a PEA. The key legislation of potential relevance to the site includes:

- Environment Act 2021
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992

A summary of the legislation pertinent to the findings within this report is also provided in Appendix A.

1.4 Report Aims

The framework of this report and its main objectives are to:

- Establish a baseline of ecological information for the site;
- Identify the likely ecological constraints associated with the proposed development;
- Identify any mitigation measures likely to be required, in line with the 'Mitigation Hierarchy';
- Identify any additional surveys that may be required to inform an Ecological Impact Assessment (if necessary); and,
- Highlight opportunities for ecological enhancement.

2 METHODS

2.1 Scope of this Report

The methodology for this PEA, and the information presented within this report, follows standard guidance as set out by CIEEM (2017). The level of detail provided is considered proportionate to the scale of the project, the location and history of the site, and the complexity of any potential impacts associated with the proposed development.

The development boundary lies within the managed grounds of the existing hotel curtilage, utilising established access and infrastructure. Given the nature and context of the site, desk-based data searches for protected and notable species were not deemed necessary from the local records centre. Any additional information requirements are identified where relevant within the report.

2.2 Desk Study

2.2.1 Online Resources

The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) mapping tool (Available from: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>) was used to search for ecological information contained within the following datasets:

- Statutory designated sites for nature conservation (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)) including SSSI Impact Risk Zones - to assess for likely impacts on SSSI.
- Priority habitats (as listed within Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) within a 500m radius.

Geospatial datasets for Biological Heritage Sites and the Lancashire Ecological Network were accessed from [here](#).

Basic contextual information on the site and its surroundings was also obtained from Google Earth and Ordnance Survey mapping, providing additional background to support and interpret the site survey findings.

2.3 Field Survey

A site walkover was undertaken on 23rd March 2026 by Ryan Knight MCIEEM. Ryan has extensive experience in survey and site assessment for habitats and protected species and holds a Level 2 Natural England Class Licence for bats (ref. 2015-12611-CLS-CLS) and a Level 1 licence for great crested newts (ref. 2015-16727-CLS-CLS). The aim of the site visit was to gather sufficient baseline information of the habitats within the site and to identify any habitats or features of potential ecological significance.

All habitats within the site were described and mapped using UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) definitions (UKHab Ltd, 2023) unless otherwise stated. Dominant and notable plant species were recorded, and relative abundance was expressed using the DAFOR scale: dominant, abundant, frequent, occasional and rare. Botanical taxonomic nomenclature follows the New Flora of the British Isles, Fourth Edition (Stace, 2019).

In addition, the site visit included a search for incidental evidence of protected and notable species and an assessment of the site's potential to support protected and notable species.

2.4 Survey and Report Comments

The site visit was undertaken outside the standard habitat survey season (April/May to September). However, the site habitats were relatively basic and the seasonal restriction did not present a significant constraint to the assessment.

This report will remain valid for a period of 24 months from the date of issue. An ecologist should be contacted for advice on the revalidation requirements of the report if planning permission is not obtained or works do not commence within this time period.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 Internationally / Nationally Designated Sites

There are no internationally / nationally designated sites for nature conservation within a 2.5km radius. In addition, the proposed development type does not trigger the need for an assessment of potential impacts with regards to any SSSI located in the wider area.

3.1.2 Locally Designated Sites

Biological Heritage Sites (BHS)

Table 3.1 provided the details of two BHS located within a 1km radius.

Table 3.1. Locally designated site information

BHS name	Site reference	Reason for designation ¹	Distance and direction from the site
Smalley's Farm	73SW12	Fungi (Fu1)	265m south
Cronshaw Chair	73SW03	Butterflies and Moths (Le4)	775m south

Lancashire Ecological Network

The site is not located within the ecological network. The woodland to the immediate north-east is listed as a 'stepping stone habitat'.

3.1.3 Priority Habitats (including Irreplaceable Habitats)

The woodland to the immediate north-east of the site is listed as deciduous woodland priority habitat on the relevant MAGIC mapping layer. There is another priority listed deciduous woodland 250m west.

3.2 Field Survey

Site photos are provided in Appendix B to provide a general overview and supporting information for the PEA. Figure 1 (Appendix C) provides a habitat map of the site.

3.2.1 Habitats

u1b6 Other developed land

The proposed development would utilise the existing access and car park within the site.

¹ Habitat codes and designation criteria can be found at Lancashire County Heritage Sites Scheme Biological Heritage Sites Guidelines for Site Selection (last updated 2023). Lancashire County Planning Department. 1998. Available from <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/943412/bhs-guidelines-for-site-selection-april-2023.pdf>

g4 Modified grassland

The development footprint lies within an area of species-poor, modified grassland. The grassland is maintained as a lawn and supports a typical mix of perennial rye-grass, finer-leaved grasses and annual meadow-grass. Forb diversity was very low, with only meadow buttercup, dandelion and white clover recorded during the survey. Much of the lawn contained abundant springy turf moss due to the heavy shading of the adjacent trees.

To meet the mandatory requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain, an additional lawn area within the rear grounds has been set aside for enhancement. This lawn supports a species composition very similar to that of the proposed development area.

Adjacent land

To the immediate north-east of the site lies an area of deciduous woodland. The section of woodland adjacent to the site comprises semi-mature willow and alder, with occasional birch and cherry. Based on aerial imagery, this woodland is estimated to be approximately 25–30 years old. Further north, the woodland transitions into a willow plantation that forms part of the hotel grounds.

To the immediate south of the site is a group of trees including birch, alder, Scots pine and cherry, with several additional individual trees and small stands of conifers scattered around the wider site boundary. Further to the south-east, the rail line is bordered by a linear belt of broadleaved trees.

Non-native Invasive Species

No invasive non-native species were identified within the site or immediately adjacent.

3.2.2 Protected & Notable Species of Fauna

Table 3. 2 provides an overview of the most relevant protected and notable species considerations for the site.

Table 3.2. Protected / notable species records and field survey findings

Ecological Feature	Overview and Evaluation of Presence / Absence
Amphibians	A single waterbody was identified on MAGIC within 250 m, located in woodland approximately 75 m north-east of the site; it was not viewed during the survey. Knight Sky Ecology does have access to local great crested newt records within the local area. The nearest record is approximately 1.5 km north. No EPS licences or licence returns occur within 1 km. The managed grassland within the development footprint lacks structural diversity and refuge features, resulting in very low suitability for amphibians. No further survey required. Precautionary mitigation is recommended in Section 5.
Reptiles	Site habitats are of very low suitability for reptiles, and there are no known local records or distributions in the immediate area. Reptiles are considered absent. No further survey required.
Birds	The survey was undertaken in the early nesting season. Species recorded included blue tit, rook, woodpigeon, jackdaw, treecreeper, blackbird and chiffchaff. Surrounding trees and woodland provide nesting opportunities, but no trees occur within the development footprint. No further survey required. Precautionary measures recommended in Section 5.
Badger	No evidence of badger activity was recorded within the site, which is unsuitable for sett creation. A walkover of adjacent woodland also found no signs of badger presence. No further survey required.
Bats	No potential roost features were identified in trees adjacent to the site. Woodland edges and scattered trees provide suitable foraging habitat, and moderate levels of bat activity are expected locally. No further survey required. Lighting mitigation is recommended in Section 5.
Other notable fauna	Hedgehog may occur in the wider area, but the managed grassland provides no suitable refuge habitat. No other ecological constraints are anticipated, as species are likely absent or the works will not significantly affect their distribution or abundance. No further action required.

4 EVALUATION & CONSTRAINTS ASSESSMENT

4.1 Designated Sites

There are no statutory designated sites capable of being adversely affected by the proposed development. Owing to the intervening distances and the absence of any functional hydrological or terrestrial connectivity, there is no conceivable pathway through which the development could significantly affect the qualifying features of any Biological Heritage Site (BHS) during either construction or operation.

4.2 Priority Habitats (Deciduous Woodland)

There are no priority habitats within the site. The adjacent woodland is a **priority habitat** as listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment² submitted to the support the application has confirmed that there would be no impacts to trees within this woodland.

4.3 Habitats

The development design has been subject to inputs from both an arboricultural and ecological perspective. The mitigation hierarchy was followed during this process. Only habitats of low / no ecological value would be impacted by the proposal. All surrounding trees can be retained.

The site habitats are considered to be of a very low ecological significance (of no greater than site value) and the loss of such habitats is not considered to represent a constraint to the development. At the time of writing (April 2026), the site will NOT be exempt from the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) condition. Recommendations regarding BNG are provided in Section 5.

4.4 Amphibians

The site does not contain any refuge or suitable hibernation habitats for amphibians and all boundary features are to be retained. No records of great crested newt were identified within 1km. There is only one pond within 250m. This is a pond located within woodland 75m north-east. No significant impacts to amphibians including great crested newts are anticipated. However, the adoption of precautionary mitigation measures is advised and as detailed in Section 5.

4.5 Nesting Birds

Suitable habitats for nesting birds were confined to the trees located immediately adjacent to the site boundary. Several trees may need minor works (i.e., branch removal / crown lifting). The proposal is therefore minded to consider the following:

- Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is illegal to intentionally take, damage or destroy a wild bird's nest while it is being used or built and it is illegal to intentionally take or destroy eggs.

With regards to this, further mitigation measures are recommended in Section 5.

² Arboricultural Impact Assessment. Foxfields Country Hotel (Lakeland Tree Consultancy, April 2026).

4.6 Bats

No trees or structures with potential roost features were present in the site. Adverse construction impacts (e.g., noise, vibration etc) are not anticipated to significantly affect bat activity patterns. The adjacent habitats present good foraging conditions for bats.

There are no current night-time lighting columns within the site. Several species of bats (e.g., brown long-eared bats and Myotis species such as whiskered bats) are sensitive to the impacts of lighting and the activity levels of such species is much reduced in urbanised landscapes. It is expected that the development will not require lighting columns and significant impacts to bats are not anticipated. Nonetheless, good practice guidelines with regards to bats are lighting are recommended in Section 5.

4.7 Other

No other potential constraints to the proposals with regards to protected and notable species were identified.

4.8 Ecological Impact Assessment – Statement

A preliminary ecological appraisal is not usually sufficient to support a planning application as a standalone document and the majority of planning applications should be supported by an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) following standard guidance (CIEEM, 2018). However, potential impacts to designated sites have been sufficiently screened out and it is confirmed that no further detailed surveys are recommended to inform the development plans. Standard, good practice mitigation measures to avoid impacts to ecological features are detailed within this report. Therefore, an EclA is not considered to be required for the project.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Landscaping – General

It is recommended that the development incorporates a suitable planting scheme which utilises UK native species or species of proven benefit to local wildlife (e.g., pollinators).

5.2 Biodiversity Net Gain

In England, biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This legislation was inserted into the 1990 Act by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021, and was amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, subject to some exceptions, every planning permission is subject to a condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met (“the biodiversity gain condition”). This objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the on-site habitat. This increase can be achieved through on-site biodiversity gains, registered off-site biodiversity gains or through statutory biodiversity credits.

The development site will be subject to the biodiversity net gain condition. A statutory biodiversity metric tool along with pre- and post-habitat plans of the site are to be submitted separately.

5.3 Nesting Birds

It is advised to complete any tree work outside of the nesting bird season of March to August (inclusive). If it is necessary to undertake tree work within the nesting bird season, any such works should be preceded by a nesting bird check conducted by a suitably qualified ecologist. Where active nests are encountered, the nest must be left in-situ and all works in the immediate area must cease until the chicks have fledged.

5.4 Bats and Lighting

Lighting for the proposed development should follow current best practice guidelines (Bats and artificial lighting in the UK, (BCT / ILP, 2023) and Guidance Note 01/21 – The Reduction of Obtrusive Light (ILP, 2021)). The following mitigation measures are advised in respect of the use of external lighting within the site:



- Avoid light spill on the adjacent woodland or treelines.
- Keep site lighting to minimum requirements (i.e., only use lighting where absolutely necessary)
- Use PIR lights set on short timers - avoid excessively strong security lighting.
- Avoid up lights (upward light ratio of 0%) and use cowls shields for all downward facing lights.
- LED luminaires should be used where possible due to their sharp cut-off, lower intensity, good colour rendition and dimming capability.
- A warm white spectrum (ideally <2700Kelvin) should be adopted to reduce blue light component.
- Luminaires should feature peak wavelengths higher than 550nm to avoid the component of light most disturbing to bats.



5.5 Enhancements

The development presents a good opportunity to increase roosting provision for bats and nesting opportunities for birds via the installation of boxes on the property. Table 5.1 provides the recommended box models.

Table 5.1. Bat & bird box models

No.	Design	Example	Positioning	Description
Bat Box x 2	Greenwoods – two crevice bat box. FOR TREES.	<p>BAT BOXES TWO CREVICE BAT BOX</p> 	<p>Suitable for attaching to trees and should be sited as high up on the main stem of a tree, at a height of at least 3m from the ground. The box should be positioned in an uncluttered location of a tree with a clear flight path to the entrance.</p> <p>Any aspect is fine.</p>	<p>Designed for small groups of crevice dwelling bat species, such as common and soprano pipistrelles.</p> <p>Available from https://www.greenwoodsecohabitats.co.uk/shop</p>
Bird Box x 2	Vivara Pro WoodStone® House Sparrow Nest Box (double chamber)		<p>The best place to put a bird box is 2–4 metres high on a wall facing between north and east to avoid direct sunlight and the wettest winds. Ensure it is tilted slightly forward to keep rain out, has a clear flight path, and is out of reach of cats.</p>	<p>This house sparrow nest box is manufactured from woodstone® - a mix of concrete and FSC wood fibres. This material is strong and highly insulating, which helps to provide a thermally stable environment within the box. It also protects against damage from predators such as cats, woodpeckers and squirrels. It is available with one or two breeding chambers, which can be particularly suitable for house sparrows as they prefer to nest in colonies.</p> <p>Available from https://www.nhbs.com</p>

6 REFERENCES

CIEEM (2017). *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

CIEEM (2018) *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine version 1.2*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

Stace, C.S. (2019). *New Flora of the British Isles, 4th edition*. University Press, Cambridge.

Stanbury, A., Eaton, M., Aebischer, N., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D., and Win I. 2021. The status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain. *British Birds* 114: 723-747. Available online at <https://britishbirds.co.uk/content/status-our-bird-populations>.

UKHab Ltd (2023). *UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0* (at <https://ukhab.org>)

APPENDIX A. LEGISLATION

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitats which in the Secretary of State's opinion are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving or enhancing biodiversity. Without prejudice to section 40 of the Act, the Secretary of State must take such steps as appear to the Secretary of State to be reasonably practicable to further the conservation of the living organisms and types of habitats included in any list published under this section, or promote the taking by others of such steps.

Under Section 40, public authority has a duty to further the general biodiversity objective often referred to a biodiversity duty. This biodiversity duty includes:

- a) conserving, restoring or otherwise enhancing a population of a particular species, and
- b) conserving, restoring or otherwise enhancing a particular type of habitat.

In England, there are 56 habitats and 943 species of principal importance, often referred to as priority habitats and priority species respectively.

Legislation relating to European Protected Species (e.g. bats, otter, great crested newt)

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly damage or destroy any structure or place which any wild animal specified in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; or
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any structure or place which any such animal uses for shelter or protection.

In addition, under this legislation there are offences relating to sale, possession and control of wild animals listed in Schedule 5.

Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) it is an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal listed as a European Protected Species;
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of any such species in such a way as to be likely:
 - to impair their ability:
 - i) to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young, or;
 - ii) in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate, or;
 - to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.
- Deliberately take or destroy the eggs of such an animal; or,
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal.

In addition, under this legislation there are offences relating to possession, control sale and exchange of an EPS. Great crested newt, otter and several species of bat are listed as a priority species under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

Legislation for amphibians (other than great crested newt)

Common toad is listed as a priority species under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) the four widespread amphibian species, smooth newt, palmate newt, common toad and common frog receive limited protection through section 9(5) only which makes selling, offering for sale, possessing or transporting for the purpose of sale (live or dead animal, part or derivative) an offence.

Legislation relating to breeding birds

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended) is the principal mechanism for the legislative protection of wildlife in Great Britain. All bird species are protected under elements of Section 1 of the Act and it is an offence, with certain exceptions, to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird;
- Intentionally takes, damages or destroys the nest of any wild bird included in Schedule ZA1 (for specific birds that reuse their nests)
- Intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built;
- Intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides further protection for selected species (e.g. peregrine falcon, barn owl, little ringed plover, kingfisher and red kite during the breeding season). If any person intentionally or recklessly disturbs any wild bird included in Schedule 1 while it is building a nest or is in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; or disturb dependent young of such a bird, that person shall be guilty of an offence.

A number of birds are listed as priority species under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

APPENDIX B. SITE PHOTOS

Photos 1a-1b

View towards site from car park.



Photo 2.

View north-east from land
behind development site.



Photos 3a – 3b

Views across the site.





Photo 4.
Woodland to north-east.



Photo 5.

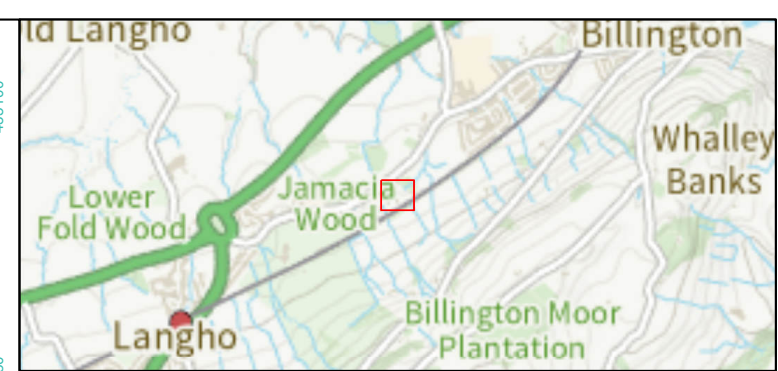
View of area to be used for tree planting only.

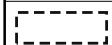




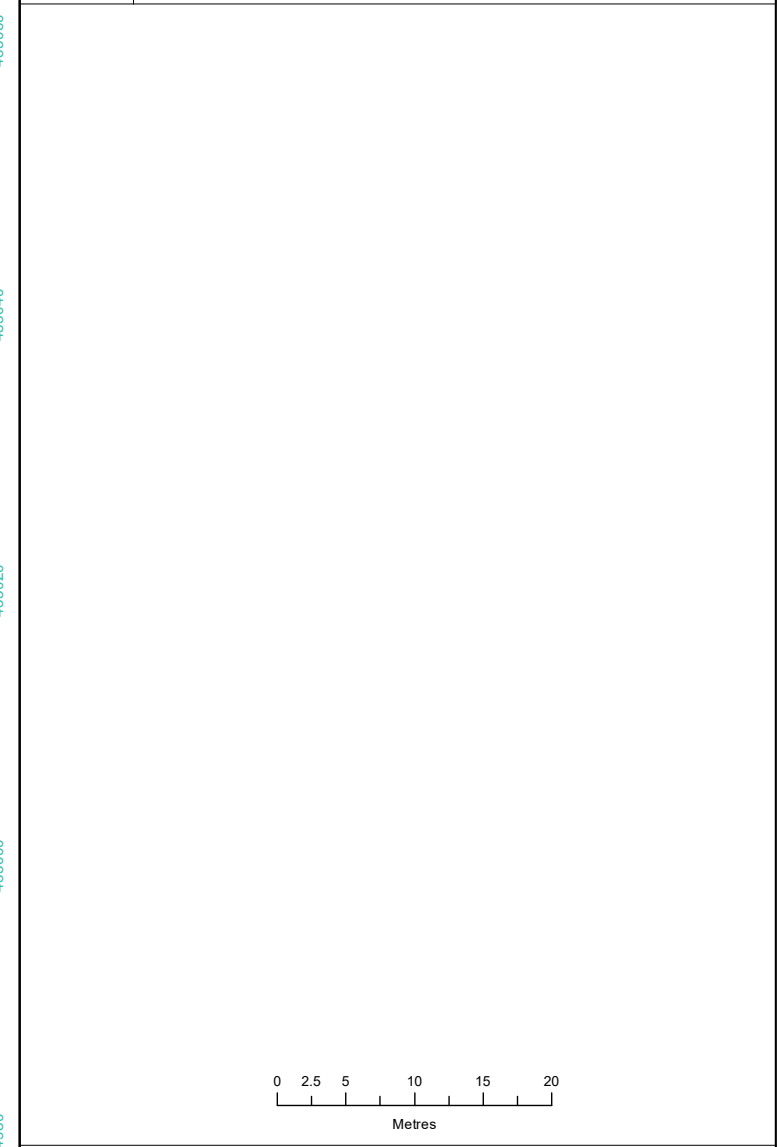


APPENDIX C. HABITAT MAP

Figure 1 UK Habitat Classification Map (Baseline) – Next page



Survey Information	
	Site boundary (1,380.7m ²)
UKHab Habitat Survey	
	g4 - Modified grassland (1,032.5m ²)
	u1b6 - Other developed land (348.2m ²)



PROJECT TITLE
FOXFIELDS COUNTRY HOTEL, BILLINGTON

DRAWING TITLE
Figure 1: UK Habitat Classification Map (Baseline)

VER	DATE	REMARKS	Drawn	Checked
1.0	23/04/26	UKHab	MP	RK

DRAWING NUMBER:
 KSEcology/Foxfields/UKHab

SCALE	1:550	PLOT SIZE	A3	DATUM	OSGB	PROJECTION	BNG
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