



Ecological Impact Assessment

Land at Bird in Eye Farm Uckfield

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LIABILITIES:

Whilst every effort has been made to guarantee the accuracy of this report, it should be noted that living creatures are capable of migration and whilst protected species may not have been located during the survey duration, their presence may be found on a site at a later date.

The views and opinions contained within this document are based on a reasonable timeframe between the completion of the survey and the commencement of any works. If there is any delay between the commencement of works that may conflict with timeframes laid out within this document, or have the potential to allow the ingress of protected species, a suitably qualified ecologist should be consulted.

It is the duty of care of the landowner/developer to act responsibly and comply with current environmental legislation if protected species are suspected or found prior to or during works.

1.0 Introduction

Purpose of the Report

1.1 This Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) evaluates the effects of the development on land at Bird in Eye, Uckfield. The findings of The Ecology Partnership's surveys are assessed against the proposals in order to:

- Evaluate the baseline interest;
- Identify and rank significant impacts;
- Set out mitigation and compensation measures and the means to secure these;
- Assess the significance of residual impacts;
- Identify enhancement measures; and
- Set out requirements for post-construction monitoring.

Site Context and Proposals

- 1.2 The site is c20.08 ha with the central grid reference TQ48402075. The site is located to the east of Uckfield town centre, south of the B2102. The site is largely managed grassland habitats with the associated Bird in Eye Farm buildings at the centre of the site. Ancient woodland is located to the south and west of the site. Further west is Uckfield, with new development around Uckfield Hospital. To the north, east and south, arable landscape is present in the form of fields, woodlands and hedgerows. The approximately red line boundary is shown in Figure 1 below.
- 1.3 The proposals are for an outline application for up to 190 dwellings with associated works, parking, landscaping, publicly accessible open space and SANG provision, with access from the B2102.



Figure 1: Approximate location of the red line boundary



Figure 2: Red Line Boundary

Legislation

- 1.4 The following legislation has been considered in determining the scope of this EcIA.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

- 1.5 The surveys identified the potential presence within the project's red line of several species or species groups listed on Schedule 5 of the Act, for which the provisions of Section 9 apply, necessitating surveys and assessments to determine presence/absence, location of activity and in some cases estimates of abundance, from which mitigation measures could, if necessary, be devised to comply with the Act. These species and species groups were bats, reptiles, great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*).
- 1.6 The PEA also noted habitat suitable for a number of breeding bird species, hence the need to assess the likely distribution of active nests, to provide constraints on site clearance in compliance with the protection provided to wild birds, their nests and eggs through Section 1 of the Act.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

- 1.7 Section 41 (Biodiversity lists and action (England)) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to “publish a list of living organisms and types of habitat which in the Secretary of State's opinion are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity (in England)” and to “take such step as... reasonably practical to further the conservation... or promote the taking by others of such steps” for these (Section 41 List) species and habitats.
- 1.8 The PEA identified the presence of the Section 41 hedgerows as well as the potential presence of a number of Section 41 species, including the aforementioned bats, breeding birds, reptiles, great crested newts and hazel dormice. Surveys and assessments for the species provided information to inform mitigation that could be requested by the local planning authority in relation to Section 41, in addition to meeting legislative requirements.

Hedgerow Regulations 1997

- 1.9 The PEA assessed the hedgerows present on site according to criteria set out in the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. These regulations make provision for the protection of important hedgerows in England which meet set criteria.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992

- 1.10 The Act provides protection to the species and its setts, controlling certain actions by licence. Information on the location of active setts was required to inform the project layout and, if necessary, the need for licenced activity.

Conservation of Habitats and Species Amendment (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

- 1.11 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Amendment protects biodiversity through the conservation of natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora. It outlines the rules for the protection, management and exploitation of such habitats and species.
- 1.12 European Protected Species (EPS) are protected under this legislation includes all UK bat species, hazel dormice and great crested newt. If the development is likely to cause an offence against an EPS which significantly impacts their favourable conservation status; an EPS mitigation licence would be required to permit certain activities that would otherwise be illegal.
- 1.13 Special Area of Conservation (SAC) are designated for protecting one or more special habitats and/ or species. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are selected to protect one or more rare, threatened or vulnerable bird species listed within this legislation. Development proposals which are likely to have a significant (adverse) effect on the National Site Network in the UK (including Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)) is required to undertaken an Appropriate Assessment.

The Environment Act 2021

- 1.14 The Environment Bill received Royal Assent on 9th November 2021 and is now enacted as the Environment Act 2021. Part 6 (Nature and Biodiversity) and Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021 insert a new section 90A and Schedule 7A into the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA), which contain the provisions requiring mandatory biodiversity net gain for development granted planning permission pursuant to the

TCPA. These provisions require developments to provide a biodiversity value post-development that exceeds the predevelopment biodiversity value of the onsite habitats by at least 10%. This was adopted in February 2024 although there are a number of exemptions which may mean that biodiversity net gain is not required. These are listed under government and are as follows:

- Development below a de minimis threshold;
- Householder applications;
- Small scale self-build and custom housebuilding;
- HS2; and
- Biodiversity net gain sites.

Planning Policy

- 1.15 The following national and local planning policies have been considered in determining the scope of this EcIA.

National Planning Policy

- 1.16 National policy guidance is provided by the **National Planning Policy Framework** (NPPF 2023), which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. Section 15 of the document is entitled 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment'. This outlines the need for planning policies and decisions to contribute and enhance the natural environment, to minimise impacts from development and to provide net gains in biodiversity.

Local Planning Policy

- 1.17 The site falls under the planning control of the Adopted Wealden Local Plan (1998) and Wealden District Council Core Strategy Local Plan (1998). These policies included the following which are considered relevant to ecology, biodiversity and nature conservation;

Adopted Wealden Local Plan (1998):

- ***Policy EN15***
- ***Policy EN16***

Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan (2013):

- ***WCS12 Biodiversity***

2.0 Methodology

Baseline Surveys

2.1 The pre-development ecological baseline was established through review of existing survey data obtained from the following documents: The following surveys have been conducted across the site:

- Extended Phase 1 habitat survey 2019 (CSA Environmental);
- Great crested newt surveys 2019 (CSA Environmental);
- Reptile surveys 2019 (CSA Environmental);
- Bat Activity surveys 2019 (CSA Environmental);
- Dormouse Survey 2020 (CSA Environmental);
- Habitat condition assessment 2020 (CSA Environmental);
- Update PEA and condition assessment 2024 (The Ecology Partnership);
- eDNA Pond Surveys 2024 (The Ecology Partnership);
- Update dormouse surveys ongoing 2024 (The Ecology Partnership);
- Update bat transect surveys ongoing 2024 (The Ecology Partnership);
- Update reptile surveys ongoing 2024 (The Ecology Partnership).

Scope of the Assessment

2.2 The zone of influence of the development is defined as:

- The project red line, for effects on designations, habitats and species;
- Adjacent habitat, considered by species, for mobile species with territories or foraging ranges that may overlap the site;
- Designated sites which can be impacted through development activities; and
- Undesignated priority (Section 41) habitats that may be sensitive receptors to increased recreational pressure or other impacts such as surface water pollution.

2.3 The types of features considered in the assessment of effects, to meet legislative and policy requirements, are:

- Designated sites (European, national and local);
- Protected species;
- Habitats and species of principal importance (Section 41 list);
- Hedgerows and woodland, where not of principal importance;

- Invasive species (Schedule 9 of Wildlife and Countryside Act); and
- Habitats, where not of principal importance, that may function as wildlife corridors or stepping stones.

Desktop Study

- 2.4 A desktop study was completed using an internet-based mapping service (www.magic.gov.uk) for statutory designated sites and an internet-based aerial mapping service (maps.google.co.uk) to understand the habitats present in and around the survey area as well as habitat linkages and features within the wider landscape.

Field Surveys

Extended Phase 1 Survey

- 2.5 The site was initially surveyed by the Ecology Partnership. The preliminary ecological appraisal was undertaken on 24th June 2024 by Alexia Tamblyn MA (Oxon) MSc CEcol CEnv MCIEEM FRGS and Matt Pendry BSc (Hons) MCIEEM FISC level 4.
- 2.6 The surveyors identified the habitats present, following the standard 'Phase 1 habitat survey' auditing method developed by the Joint Nature Conservancy Council (JNCC). The Ecology Partnership surveyed the site on foot and the existing habitats, land uses and dominant plant species in each habitat were recorded on an appropriately scaled map (JNCC 2010).
- 2.7 The site was inspected for indications of the presence of protected species as follows:
- Evidence of badger, including setts, runs, snuffle holes and hairs;
 - The presence of features within trees such as fissures, holes, loose bark and/or ivy which had the potential for roosting bats;
 - Scrub/grassland mosaic and potential hibernation sites for common reptiles;
 - Relevant habitat for dormice, such as dense deciduous woodland and coppice;
 - The presence of suitable breeding places (waterbodies) and hibernation features for GCNs; and
 - Suitable nesting habitat for birds.

Protected Species Surveys

- 2.8 The desktop study and initial Phase 1 survey identified the potential to support roosting, foraging & commuting bats, reptiles, great crested newts (GCN) and dormice on site. Further surveys were recommended and undertaken within the red line boundary which is summarised in Table 1 below. Detailed survey methodologies are provided in the appended reports.

Table 1: Species surveys undertaken between 2019 -2024

Faunal Group	Survey Methodology	Date of Surveys	Guidance
Badgers	During the PEA surveys, all habitats potentially suitable for badgers were systematically examined for evidence of badger activity. Particular attention was paid to areas where the vegetation and/or the topography offered suitable sett sites such as the boundary features.	2019 2022 2024	The evaluation of badger activity was based on methodology developed for the National Survey of Badgers (Creswell <i>et al.</i> 1990)
Bats – tree inspection	As part of the PEA, any trees supporting particular features likely to be of value to bats, such as splits, cracks, rot holes, coverings of ivy, peeling bark or similar, were recorded. The potential for the trees to support roosting bats were assessed in accordance with the criteria set out in the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines (BCT, 2012; BCT, 2016, BCT 2023)	2019 2024	Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines 2 nd Edition (Hundt 2012) Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines 3 rd edition (Collins 2016) Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines 4 th edition (Collins 2023)
Bats – activity surveys	Dusk surveys were carried out across the site using transect methods to record activity, along with two remote recording devices (Anabat surveys) as per Bat Conservation Trust guidelines (BCT, 2012; BCT 2016, BCT 2023).	Transect surveys: 11 th June 2019 23 rd July 2019 29 th August 2019 Anabat Express devices were deployed on site and recorded data on: 8 th – 12 th July 2019 23 rd – 27 th August 2019 24 th -28 th September 2019. Transects 11 th June 2024 August 2024 September 2024	Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines 3 rd edition (Collins 2016) Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines 4 th edition (Collins 2023)

		Anabat Express devices were deployed on site and recorded data on: 11 th June – 16 th June 2024 August 2024 September 2024	
Dormice	A total of 194 dormouse tubes were established along the boundary features and within Frith Wood Checks were undertaken once a month in April, May, June, July, August, September and October A survey score of 69 was achieved.	Tubes set up on 24th April 2019 Checks April – November 2019 Surveys conducted in 2024. Tubes deployed in May 2024. Surveys on going	Dormouse Conservation Handbook – English Nature
Great Crested Newts	An eDNA survey was carried out on the off-site Ponds P1 Bottle trapping An eDNA survey undertaken in 2024. All water samples were analysed by SureScreen Scientifics.	24th April 2019 24th April 2019 and 8th May 2019 29th May 2024	eDNA surveys and analysis follow the protocol outlined by Biggs <i>et al.</i> (2014)
Reptiles	The refugia were placed around the edges of the site within the habitat edges and next to hedgerows prior to the commencement of the reptile survey. A total of seven survey visits were made to the site to check the refugia for the presence of reptiles. Visits were only carried out if the weather conditions were suitable for locating reptiles. On each visit to the site, a minimum of one circuit to check all refugia was carried out.	Refugia set up 5th June 2019 Checks 26th June 2019, 2nd July 2019, 12th July 2019, 7th August 2019, 19th August 2019, 12th September 2019, 19th September 2019 Refugia set up August and will be checked August – September 2024	The timing and number of surveys completed were based on guidelines produced by Froglife (1999) and Gent and Gibson (1998)
Water vole and otter surveys	All watercourse and water bodies within the site and site boundaries were surveyed for water vole and otter.	19th June 2020 26th August 2020	Strachan <i>et al.</i> 2011

Nesting birds	As part of the PEA, the site was assessed for its potential to support nesting birds. The hedgerows, treelines, woodland edge and scattered scrub all retained suitability for nesting birds.	2019 2024	BTO (Balmer et al 2013)
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Ecological Assessment Methodology

- 2.9 This assessment has been carried out with reference to ‘Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland’ (CIEEM 2018).

Baseline condition

- 2.10 The baseline condition of the site is the situation documented in this report (section 3) from data (field surveys and desk study) gathered between 2019 and 2024, plus any relevant modifications within or outside the red line within the zones of influence subsequent to the completion of the 2024 assessment.

Important ecological features

- 2.11 Important ecological features are those for which the decision maker (LPA or other regulator) needs the EcIA to help to assess the effects (negative, neutral or positive) and to guide the determination of the planning application. Important features are therefore generally defined by whether legislation or policy requires their consideration. For example, a European site within the zone of influence of the development is important and needs an assessment of effects. Similarly, at different levels, any legally protected species and any features such as wildlife corridors and section 41 species, with national or local policy support, are important features. Features that cannot be referenced to legislation and policy are generally not important and the next step of the EcIA (impact assessment) is not necessary. There may occasionally be situations where professional judgement and local expertise is relevant in defining local rarity as important, regardless of a lack of current legislative and planning support.
- 2.12 The CIEEM guidelines (2018) avoid rigid guidance on the levels of importance, which is often required within EIA, along with the level of magnitude of an effect, as one axis of an impact matrix. Sometimes a label of European, national or local importance may be

obvious, for European sites, SSSIs and Local Wildlife Sites respectively. It is often less clear whether a small population of a Section 41 priority species or small extent of a Section 41 habitat should be of local or greater or less importance, as this may depend on data that does not exist on the distribution and abundance of the feature. Legally protected species can be important solely because of the need to meet legislation, or because they are also a feature of a County Wildlife Site or target of a local Biodiversity Action Plan. In these cases, the same species could warrant different levels of importance, possibly with different implications for what is reasonable mitigation or compensation, beyond legislative compliance.

- 2.13 This report follows CIEEM guidelines (2018) in not forcing features into a level of importance, but using ranked importance where possible. Sites are given three levels, corresponding to their legislative and planning support: European, National and Local. Habitats and species, where not a qualifying feature of the hierarchy of sites, are simply referenced to the planning policy or legislation that supports their importance and where possible assessed from the extent, range or population size within zone of influence in relation to the extent, range or population size in the relevant administrative unit, for example LPA boundary or BAP boundary.

Impact assessment

- 2.14 According to CIEEM guidelines (2018), the only essential purpose of impact assessment in EcIA is: *“to assess and report significant residual effects that remain after mitigation measures have been taken into account. However, it is good practice for the EcIA to make clear both the potential significant effects without mitigation and the residual significant effects following mitigation”*.
- 2.15 Impact assessment is required for each feature determined as important and not for other features. CIEEM guidelines (2018) advise that each impact assessment should consider, if possible, the different stages of a development (construction, operation and decommissioning) and that it should be characterised by the following:
- Positive or negative - whether the impact leads to an adverse, beneficial or neutral effect;
 - Extent – the spatial area over which the impact occurs;

- Magnitude – change in, for example, the amount of habitat or the size of population;
- Duration – both in relation to the life cycle of the ecological feature and of the life of the project;
- Frequency and timing – for example, the number of disturbance incidents to birds and their timing in relation to the breeding cycle; and
- Reversibility – if and at what timescale recovery is possible.

2.16 As with the assessment of importance, CIEEM guidelines (2018) do not encourage a classification of the magnitude of impacts on a scale of severity. Rather, the significance of each impact should be assessed as the quantity of a feature of importance impacted; for example, residual loss of 5% of the extent of woodland within a Local Wildlife Site or gain of 10% in the extent of a section 41 habitat (hedgerows) on the site.

Avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement

2.17 CIEEM guidance (2018) recommends a mitigation hierarchy. Once important features and significant impacts are identified, the project design should be modified where possible to avoid significant impacts. If avoidance is not possible, mitigation then compensation should be sequentially considered (Figure 3). A residual impact is an impact that remains after mitigation but is documented here both before and after compensation, as mitigation, particularly if embedded in the design, is assumed to be delivered without input from the LPA or other regulator, whilst compensation may require planning conditions and have some uncertainty on which the regulator should deliberate. Enhancement is an activity that results in a net gain in biodiversity, generally for an important feature, “over and above” anything required for mitigation or compensation. The terms mitigation and compensation are not always clearly defined and there is difference of opinion on their definitions. This report follows the Information Paper on the subject developed in consultation with Natural England for HS2 (2017), from which this quote and illustration are taken:

“A clear distinction is made between the use of the terms ‘mitigation’ and ‘compensation’ reflecting the habitual use in ecological impact assessment of ‘mitigation’ to mean ‘measures taken to avoid or reduce negative impacts’, as separate from ‘compensation’ meaning ‘measures taken to make up

for the loss of, or permanent damage to, biological resources through the provision of replacement areas”

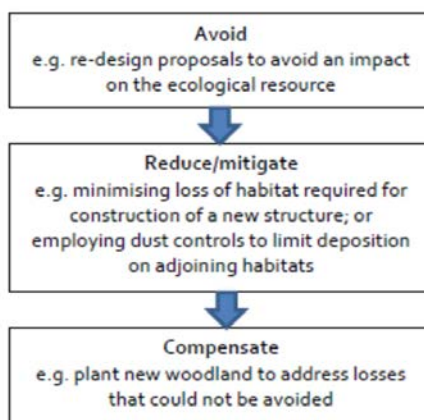


Figure 3: The mitigation hierarchy (from HS2 2017)

Limitations of the Assessment

- 2.18 It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive description of the site, no single investigation could ensure the complete characterisation and prediction of the natural environment. The site was visited over the period of several site visits, as such seasonal variations cannot be fully observed and potentially only a selection of all species that potentially occur within the site have been recorded. Therefore, the survey provides a general assessment of potential nature conservation value of the site and does not include a definitive plant species list. However, the survey area was visited on a number of occasions over the optimal period, ensuring that detailed habitat information could be gathered. It is therefore considered that the survey work has allowed a robust assessment of habitats and botanical interest across the site.
- 2.19 The specific protected species surveys were undertaken at the appropriate time of year and during suitable weather conditions to an appropriate level of survey effort. Any specific limitations are noted in the relevant sections above or discussed in the results section.

3.0 Baseline Ecological Conditions

Biological Records

- 3.1 A 2km radius data search was requested from Sussex Biological Records Centre 2019. Notable protected species from this search are outlined below (Table 2). Only records from within the last ten years and those closest to site have been included.
- 3.2 A total of 175 bat records were identified within the search area, dating from 1982 to 2018. These include the following species: common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus*, long eared bat *Plecotus sp.*, serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*, natterer's bat *Myotis nattereri*, Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentonii*, whiskered bat *Myotis mystacinus*. The closest records are of brown long-eared bat, (c. 100m from Site) and serotine, *Myotis sp.*, common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and noctule (c. 180m from Site). These records were mostly of foraging bats within and around woodlands close to the Site. A number of records returned also relate to maternity roosts within 700m of the development area and hibernation roosts c. 1km from the Site. Habitat connectivity between these records and the Site exists via tree lines and woodland blocks.
- 3.3 A total of seven records of dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* were identified within the search area, dating from 1990 to 2018. SxBRC returned records of dormouse from the woodland along the western boundary of the Site from 2013 and 2005. A Natural England Dormouse licence EPSM2012-5024 09/11/2012-31/10/2015 was granted for the adjacent site. Other dormice licences are present 1.7km west (2019-39789-EPS-MIT, 2019-39789-EPS-MIT – 1, 2019-39789-EPS-MIT -2) and 1.5km south west (2017-31265-EPS-MIT-1)
- 3.4 A total of five records of water vole *Arvicola amphibius* were identified within the search area, dating from 1990 to 2012. The closest record is c. 465m southwest of the Site from 2003. SxBRC do not provide records of otter *Lutra lutra* due to the sensitive nature of these records, however consultation with the Sussex Wildlife Trust (email correspondence dated 06 July 2020 CSA Environmental) has confirmed recent observations of otter within the locality.

- 3.5 A total of 25 records of hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* were identified within the search area, dating from 2003 to 2018. The closest record is c. 600m from the Site.
- 3.6 A total of 12,272 records of 132 bird species were identified within the search area, dating from 1981 to 2019. Those of potential relevance to the Site include honey buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, red kite *Milvus milvus*, hobby *Falco subbuteo*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, barn owl *Tyto alba*, tawny owl *Strix aluco*, lesser spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* and wood warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*.
- 3.7 A total of 61 records of four reptile species were identified within the search area including slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, grass snake *Natrix natrix*, common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and adder *Vipera berus*.
- 3.8 A total of 277 records of four amphibian species were identified within the search area, including palmate newt *Lissotriton helveticus*, smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*, common frog *Rana temporaria* and common toad *Bufo bufo*, in addition to 98 records of great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*. The closest record for great crested newt is from c. 675m southwest of the Site, with further records c. 1km to the west and southwest. However Framfield Stream, present just west of the Site, acts as a barrier to the GCN populations recorded in these areas.

Designated Sites

- 3.9 There is one internationally designated site, Ashdown Forest SPA and SAC which is located 5.29km north of the red line boundary. It is therefore noted that the site falls within the 400m-7km zone of influence of the Ashdown Forest. Lewes Downs SAC is located over 10km to the south west of the site (Table 2 below).
- 3.10 The site does not fall within or adjacent to any national statutory designations, with the nearest SSSI, Buxted Park SSSI is located 1.3km to the north of the site. Plashett Park Wood SSSI is located 4.7km south west of the site, Park Corner Heath SSSI located south 5.8km south, Waldon Cutting SSSI , 6.5km south east. The site lies within multiple SSSI impact zones (Table 2 below).

- 3.11 There are three internationally designated sites within 10km of the sites red line boundary, these are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Internationally designated sites within 10km of the site

Name of site and designation	Description (Taken from site citation where applicable)	Approximate Distance from Site (At nearest point)
Ashdown Forest SAC SPA	Supports northern Atlantic wet heaths, European dry heaths. Birds of European importance European nightjar, Dartford warbler, Eurasian hobby woodlark, hen harrier. GCNs are also notable.	5.29km north
Lewes Downs SAC	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco- Brometalia</i>) (important orchid sites). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone, including important orchid sites	Over 10km south
Buxted Park SSSI	Buxted Park is an old deer park consisting of a variety of unimproved grassland communities with parkland trees and areas of woodland which as a whole support a large invertebrate population.	1.3km north
Plashett Park Wood SSSI	This area of ancient woodland on Weald clays contains a rich community of breeding birds. In addition it includes a number of plants and invertebrates which have a nationally restricted distribution.	4.7km south west
Park Corner Heath SSSI	Park Corner Heath is a small area of grassy heath, woodland and scrub lying on sand over the Weald Clay about 6 miles north west of Hailsham. It supports an outstanding assemblage of moths and a varied butterfly fauna including several nationally scarce species.	5.8km south
Waldron Cutting SSSI	This laneside cutting shows upper Ashdown Sand Formation (lower Hastings Beds Group) with siltstones and fine sandstones with sedimentary structures and 1 m-long <i>Lycopodites</i> plants in life position. It is one of only two occurrences of the latter known in Ashdown Sand (Waldron Soil Bed).	6.5km south east

- 3.12 The site lies within the SSSI impact zone for Buxted Park SSSI. However, the listed developments which are considered likely to impact upon the integrity of the SSSI do not include residential development. As such impacts on Buxted Park SSSI and other wider SSSIs as a result of the development are scoped out of the assessment.
- 3.13 Lewes Downs SAC is considered to be of sufficient distance from the development site as to be scoped out of the assessment.

- 3.14 In terms of non-statutory designated sites, there are two Local Nature Reserves and 3 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within 2km of the site. These are as follows:
- Hempstead Meadows LNR (c. 460m north-west of the Site)
 - West Park LNR (c. 1.8km west of the Site).
 - Harlands Farm Pond and Stream LWS (within 1km);
 - Hempstead Wood LWS (within 1km);;
 - Ridgewood Clay Pit LWS (within 1km).
- 3.15 The closest LNR is Hempstead Meadows, located north of the railway line and the River Uck. This area is managed by Uckfield Town Council and supports pathways managed for recreation purposes. As the proposals for the development includes on site recreational areas (SANGS and POS) and a walking route to Uckfield Town Centre, it is considered that the on site provision will minimise any recreational impacts resulting from the development on all LNR and LWS listed. Due to the walking distances from the site to these LNR and LWS and the on site provision of recreation opportunities, and the well connected nature of the site to Uckfield Town Centre and recreational provisions in Uckfield, it is considered that impacts resulting from the development would be negligible. As such, impacts on LNRs and LWS are scoped out of the EcIA.

Habitats

Context and surrounding priority (Section 41 list) habitats

- 3.16 Priority habitats within 2km of the survey site boundary as shown in Figure 4 below. **Deciduous woodland** and **ancient semi-natural woodland** (Bird in Eye) lie immediately adjacent to the southern site boundary and is of **regional** importance.
- 3.17 Less extensive priority habitats, not mapped in Figure 4, are **hedgerows** on site and within the surrounding landscape.

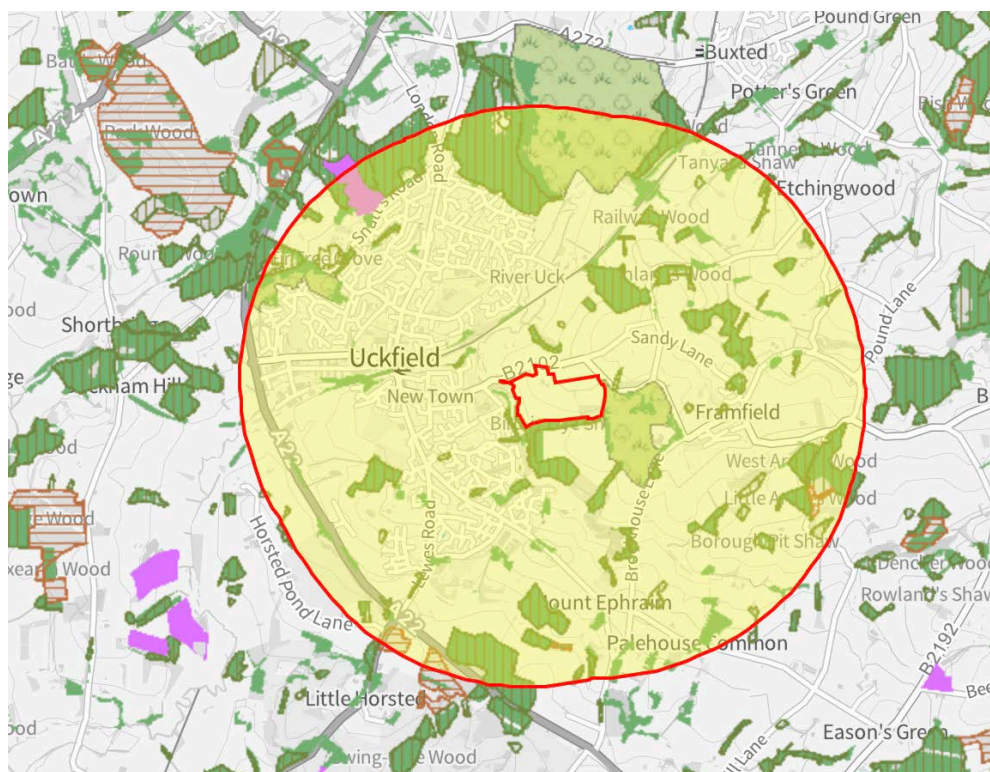


Figure 4: Location of the red line boundary in relation to priority habitats– ancient woodland hatched green, lowland deciduous woodland dark green, woodpasture green trees and good quality grassland pink

Baseline habitats on the site

- 3.18 There have been negligible changes to the habitats present on site in 2024 since the 2019 survey. The fields were grazed by horses in 2019 and were considered to be of 'poor' condition. In 2024, several of the fields were being managed for silage, with others grazed by cows. The fields were considered to be modified grassland, the majority of which were in 'poor' condition, with one field being 'moderate' condition. These fields are considered to be common and widespread, and of **site level importance** only.
- 3.19 Two small pockets of scrub were located in Field 1. The scrub supports hawthorn, blackthorn and dense bramble. Other species present included common nettles. These scrub areas are considered to be common and widespread, and of **site level importance** only.
- 3.20 A total of two tree lines and two hedgerows were recorded on site. The hedgerows in the gardens of the adjacent properties were not considered within the report. The locations are shown in Figure 4 below.

- 3.21 The hedgerow (H1) was dominated by hawthorn, with additional species including elder, bramble, hops, holly, dog rose and ivy. Bracken and common nettles are associated with the base of the hedgerow. The hedgerow (H2) was considered species rich and supported elm., hazel, holly, honeysuckle, dog-rose, Oak, bramble and hawthorn.



Figure 4: Location of hedgerows and tree lines

- 3.22 Tree line 1, TL1, supports some mature oak, with Scots pine, and silver birch. With T2 being Leylandii species.
- 3.23 An area of planted woodland lies to the south east corner of the site, adjacent to the ancient woodland. Species present included silver birch, oak, alder buckthorn, hazel, wild service tree and holly. The understorey was sparse due to the dense nature of the tree stands. Where there was an understorey species present included wood meadow grass and broad leaved dock with occasional bracken and common nettle.
- 3.24 A section of the site support bare ground which was clear of vegetation in areas, with some areas supporting pockets of perennial rye and annual meadow grass. This area was to the east of tree line 1 (TL1). Here pockets of ruderals were also present around the stored silage and farm machinery.

3.25 The habitat map is shown in Figure 5 below.

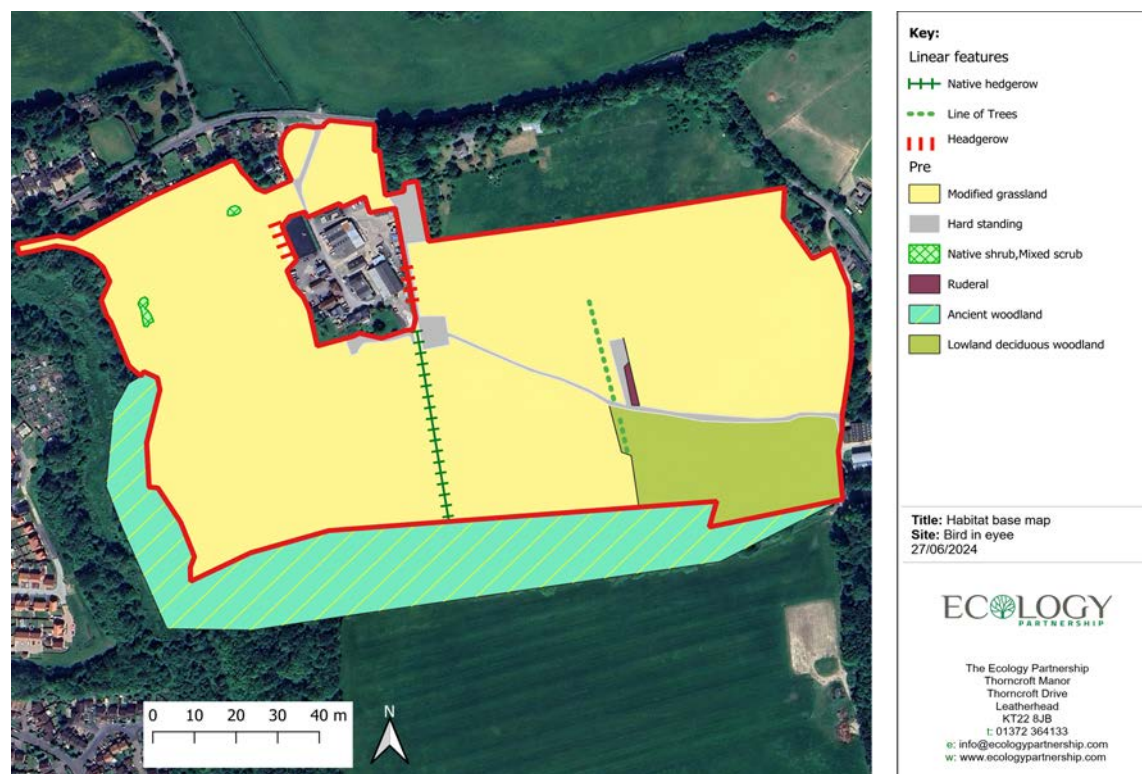


Figure 5: Habitat map (2024 survey)

Table 3: Summary table of habitats present on the site and levels of importance

Habitats	Description	Level of Importance
Modified grassland	Dominant habitat on site	Site
Mature treelines	One treeline with direct connectivity from the off-site adjacent ancient woodland Linear features / green corridors	Local
Hedgerows	Their composition varied in terms of height, structure and species composition Linear features / green corridors	Local
Off-site ancient woodland edge	Bird in Eye, ancient woodland block with connectivity to off site habitats through hedgerows and tree lines	Regional
Scattered scrub	Small and scattered habitat. Limited in nature and extent	Site
Lowland deciduous woodland	Planted woodland, linked to ancient woodland and provides additional habitat	Local

Species and species groups

- 3.26 Species data is derived primarily from biological records within 2km of the site and the protected species surveys conducted throughout 2019 to 2024, commissioned to support this EcIA.

Bats

- 3.27 Numerous trees along the sites boundaries and within the ancient woodland however may support roosting bats. None of these are being removed as part of the scheme, The tree line, TL1, is also to be retained in full. As such, no trees are scheduled for removal and all therefore retain their potential for bats.
- 3.28 The majority of site as a managed grassland field was considered to be sub-optimal habitat for bats, but the boundary features do offer optimal habitat suitability for foraging and commuting bats, owing to the presence of ancient woodland edge, mature hedgerows and treelines along the field edges (CSa Environmental 2019).
- 3.29 Activity and static detector surveys were undertaken in 2019 and are currently being updated in 2024. These surveys revealed use of the site by a minimum of seven bat species.
- 3.30 **Common pipistrelle** (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and **soprano pipistrelle** (*P. pygmaeus*) and were the most frequently recorded species during the walked transect and static detector surveys. Both species are common and widespread bat species within the UK (Mathews *et al.* 2018). According to the Sussex Bat Group (2019), common pipistrelles are widespread and abundant in the county whilst soprano pipistrelles are widespread and fairly common.
- 3.31 **Myotis species** (*Myotis spp.*) were recorded in low levels across both walked transects (two calls) and static detector surveys (only two calls) Note that myotis calls could not be confidently identified to species and have been grouped in the general 'myotis species' category. Myotis species are widespread and relatively scarce in Sussex. As only limited calls were recorded, the site is not considered to be an important habitat for these species.

- 3.32 **Serotines** (*Eptesicus serotinus*) were recorded in low numbers, with only one call recorded during the walked transects and only three recorded on the statics. As only limited calls were recorded, the site is not considered to be an important habitat for these species.
- 3.33 **Noctules** (*Nyctalus noctula*) and *Nyctalus sp* formed only a low proportion of the total calls on site, at 16 calls on the static and none recorded on the walked transects. It is considered likely that low numbers of these individuals were using the site occasionally and it does not form part of their core foraging and commuting habitat.
- 3.34 **Brown long eared bats** (*Plecotus auritus*) were recorded once on the walked transect and 4 times across the static monitoring period. As only limited calls were recorded, the site is not considered to be an important habitat for these species.
- 3.35 Given the assemblage of bat species and their levels of activity on site, the populations of bats using the site are considered to be of up to **local importance**.

Badgers

- 3.36 Badgers (*Meles meles*) are present on site and adjacent to the site. CSa Environmental confirmed changes of use across the years in all of the setts. However, initially the main sett was considered to be within the woodland, Bird in Eye, and therefore retained in full. This sett is to be retained in situ and an ecological buffer is to be created along this edge to protect the badgers from development and disturbance. Additional setts appear to be created and then abandoned within the site boundary. No setts were identified during the update PEA in 2024, however, the northern woodland adjacent to the road was not accessed.
- 3.37 As sett status changes, and the animals and mobile and dynamic, update monitoring prior to development would be required.
- 3.38 This species is protected for animal welfare reasons rather than their conservation status. As such, they are included to demonstrate legal compliance.

Hazel Dormice

- 3.39 Dormouse monitoring surveys were undertaken across the site boundaries between in April and November 2019. The September check, an adult female dormouse was found

in a tube within the north-western corner of the Site along with four eyes-closed juveniles. An empty dormouse nest was also found during the November check within the south-western corner of the Site on the edge of woodland. Further surveys were also undertaken across woodlands W2 and W3 within the proposed SANG area with checks undertaken in November 2019 and between April and September 2020. No evidence of dormice was recorded during these surveys.

3.40 The presence of dormice within the woodlands around the site is considered to be of **local importance**.

3.41 Update surveys are currently being conducted across the hedgerows, tree lines and woodland (Bird in Eye) throughout 2024.

Great Crested Newts (GCN)

3.42 There is a single pond on site within the woodland. Water samples were collected from this pond, P1 on 24 April 2019. Presence/absence pond surveys of Pond 1 were also undertaken alongside eDNA sampling. Two surveys were undertaken on 24 April 2019 and 08 May 2019. No GCNs were recorded in Pond 1 (P1). Ponds P2, P3 and P4 were not granted access.

3.43 Update eDNA survey was conducted on the pond, P1, set within the woodland on 23rd May 2024. No GCN DNA was identified.

3.44 The site lies within the green zone and therefore there is limited potential for GCNs to be present in the local landscape. As such, no further surveys for GCNs are recommended. GCNs are scoped out of the assessment.

Reptiles

3.45 Two species of reptile, grass snake and common lizard, were recorded on-Site during the surveys. A peak count of two adult grass snakes were recorded on 12 July 2019 and one common lizard on 12 September 2019. Reptiles were mostly found close to the northern boundary of the site and along a single hedgerow. The Site was concluded to support low populations of both grass snake and common lizard. The populations of reptiles using the site are considered to be of up to **local importance**.

- 3.46 Update reptile surveys are being conducted in 2024.
- 3.47 The majority of the reptile habitat is to be retained within the scheme., with areas of the site being set aside for SANGS and for open space, alongside ancient woodland buffer zones. It is considered that the development proposals support plenty of space to support the reptiles identified within the boundary.

Breeding birds

- 3.48 The boundary habitats of hedgerows and tree lines, scattered scrub have potential to support nesting birds, whilst the managed fields was considered to have limited potential due to their management and grazing regime. Bird in Eye, the ancient woodland, was also considered to be of value for breeding birds. Due to the ancient woodland edge, the tree lines and hedgerows, the site is considered to be of value of up to **local importance**.

Other Species

- 3.49 Otter and water vole surveys were conducted in the off site stream to the west of the site, in Framfield Stream and the watercourse which runs through the woodland Bird in Eye Shaw. No evidence of otters or water voles was recorded. These are scoped out of the assessment.
- 3.50 Hedgehogs have the potential to be present around the site boundaries.
- 3.51 A barn owl box is located within the tree line TL1. This will be fully retained within the site boundary, and located adjacent to the SANG area.

Future Baseline

- 3.52 Future baseline conditions are conditions which would be likely to arise if present conditions continue and a change of land use through the planning system does not occur. These conditions are assumed to be the continued functioning of the field for farming, including arable and grassland ley.

Table 4: Summary table of faunal groups surveyed and present on the site and levels of importance

Faunal Group/Species	Description	Level of Importance
Bats (roosting)	Numerous trees along the site boundaries have been assessed as having bat roost potential, ranging from 'low' to high'. All of these are to be retained in situ	Local
Bats (foraging and commuting)	The boundary features on site support potential for foraging and commuting bats. The field is sub optimal for foraging and commuting bats, whilst the adjacent off-site ancient woodland is optimal. At least seven bat species were identified during the activity and static record surveys in low numbers.	Up to Local
Badgers	A main sett was present in the southern woodland, off site. With additional setts in the northern woodland (off site) with outliers within the site boundaries. Activity levels have altered since 2019 and an update in 2022, and with a further review in 2024.	Site (legislative implications)
Dormice	Present in the ancient woodland around the site boundaries and at the northern aspect of the site	Local
GCN	Considered likely absent	N/A
Reptiles	A 'low' population of grass snake and common lizard recorded within the site boundary.	Local
Breeding birds	Woodland considered to support a range of species. This is off site. On site habitats considered to support common and widespread species. Barn owl box and use of this box notable.	Local
Otters and water voles	Considered likely absent	N/A
Hedgehogs	Likely to be present around the edges of the site.	Site

4.0 Description of the Proposed Development

4.1 The site landscape masterplan shows the extent of the development area and green infrastructure area within the development area. A range of embedded mitigation and proposed compensation measures will be implemented within both the development and ownership boundaries.

4.2 Specified features of the landscape masterplan that can be considered as **embedded mitigation** are:

- Ancient woodland 15m buffer zone with planted ancient woodland edge with no development / construction;
- Ancient woodland 50m buffer where there is no residential development;

-
- Retention and buffer of bat potential trees;
 - Retention and buffer of the badger setts located off site (in Bird in Eye) and in the off site woodland located along the B2102;
 - Retention of plantation woodland to the south east of the site;
 - Retention of the majority of hedgerows and tree lines within and around the site;
 - Construction on modified grassland habitats, of site value only.
- 4.3 Specified features of the landscape masterplan that are proposed as **compensation**, for the loss of the site's baseline habitats, are:
- Sowing POS and SUDS areas with relevant wildflower meadow mixtures;
 - Planting of new mixed native thorny scrub along the ancient woodland boundaries to create a more extensive green edge;
 - New street tree planting within the site boundaries.
- 4.4 Full habitat details can be found within the Biodiversity Net Gain report (The Ecology Partnership 2024).
- 5.0 Assessment of Effects and Mitigation Measures**
- 5.1 The impact assessment is for the development as described above (Section 4), including the submitted site layout plan, landscape and ecology strategy and their embedded mitigation. This assessment does not separate construction and operation impacts, rather it is focussed on assessing effects on important features that would result from the final layout. Residual impacts are those that remain after mitigation and before compensation, which is considered in section 7.
- 5.2 Features within or overlapping the red line that require an impact assessment are those determined as important in section 3, namely:
- Off-site ancient woodland;
 - Mature treelines;
 - Hedgerows;
 - Lowland deciduous woodland;
 - Bats;
 - Badgers;

-
- Reptiles;
 - Dormice and
 - Nesting birds.

5.3 Important features offsite, but within the zone of influence of the development and have the potential to be impacted by increased recreational pressure, are:

- Ashdown Forest SPA and SAC.

Off-site ancient woodland

5.4 The off-site ancient woodland, adjacent to the southern site boundary is considered to be of regional value, hold the highest ecological value and provide landscape connectivity. The ancient woodland is to be retained as per site development plans but encroachment and other indirect impacts have the potential to result in a **minor negative impact of regional importance**.

5.5 Mitigation for the ancient woodland includes a buffer at least the minimum requirement of 15m and, within the masterplan this extends to 50m, which avoids any direct loss of habitat and also ensure that roost systems are protected and understory around the very edges of the ancient woodland will also be retained. Thorny scrub planting is also planned along the woodland edge, which also serves to prevent recreational impacts such as pedestrian encroachment and fly tipping. The woodland is outside the red line and is not open to the public. The open space provision created as part of the proposals, will ensure there are local recreational opportunities for residents, which avoids the ancient woodland.

5.6 Consideration of pollution prevention and water levels must be made, to ensure that the woodland habitat does not suffer as a result of water run-off, pollution or changing to the water table, which should be reviewed by a hydrologist. Impacts such as light pollution and garden encroachment will be minimal as public open space is already designed to be in this area, with housing located away from the woodland. The nearest footpaths to the woodland would be unlit.

Mature treelines

- 5.7 The on site mature treelines are considered to be of local value and provide landscape connectivity in the landscape and some foraging and commuting habitat. These features will be retained and buffered from the development as per site plans.
- 5.8 The site layout also ensures that no back gardens back on to these habitats or that these tree lines are incorporated into private ownership. The retainment and buffer of these habitat features will result in a **neutral impact**.

Hedgerows

- 5.9 The on site hedgerows are considered to be of local value, have high ecological value and vitally, provide landscape connectivity. The hedgerow H2 is located on the site boundary are to be entirely retained and buffered from the development as per site plans. The hedgerow located within the grassland (H1) will also be largely retained whereas a small section of the hedgerow is proposed to be removed for access, although the amount of hedgerow removed has been kept to a minimum through the appropriate locating of the road.
- 5.10 Mitigation for potential hedgerow damage or degradation on includes a buffer to be maintained between the hedgerows and development, which will serve to consider root protection areas and maintain dark corridors. Heras fencing will be erected at least 2m from the retained site boundaries, to act as a visual and physical buffer during construction to prevent their degradation in addition to protecting reptiles present along the site edges.
- 5.11 The site layout also ensures that no back gardens back on to these habitats or that these hedgerows are incorporated into private ownership. The small sections of removal of this habitat feature will result in a **minor negative impact at a local level**.

Lowland Deciduous Woodland

- 5.12 The on site lowland deciduous woodland is considered to be of local value is located adjacent to the ancient woodland, Bird in Eye Shaw. The woodland will be retained and buffered from the development as per site plans.

- 5.13 The site layout also ensures that no back gardens back on to this and that the woodland is located within the open space / SANGS area. This habitat is also to be managed for wildlife and improved in terms of condition. The retainment and buffer of these habitat features will result in a **neutral to positive impact**.

Bats - roosting

- 5.14 Whilst numerous trees were assessed as having bat roost potential across the site boundaries, all of the trees are to be retained and buffered from the development.
- 5.15 Mitigation involves the sensitive felling of any trees which have some potential leaving the sections on site at least overnight before they are further broken down and removed from site. It is however, recommended that all mature trees are retained as much as possible. Additionally, the installation of bat boxes on retained trees or integrated into new buildings will also take place.

Bats - foraging and commuting

- 5.16 The majority of the development footprint will occur centrally on the large area of sub-optimal habitats, with optimal bat habitats restricted towards the site margins, including hedgerows and treelines and the ancient woodland edges.
- 5.17 Whilst there are several breaks within the hedgerows required for access, but this habitat loss is not considered significant and these flightlines feature will not be significantly fragmented. Embedded mitigation includes large buffers around the site edges as per the site development plans, in addition to mitigational and enhancement planting in these areas, which will buffer and strengthen existing foraging areas and flightlines.
- 5.18 Mitigation also includes restricting the treeline loss and consequent canopy cover reduction to as small an area as possible, plus the implementation of a sensitive lighting scheme across the site, which can be conditioned. A sensitive lighting scheme will reduce any impacts from new artificial lighting on foraging and commuting bats as recommended within the Bat Activity report (CSa Environmental). It is considered that the loss of small sections of suitable and a large area of sub optimal habitat on site however, will still result in a **negative effect of local importance**.

Badgers

- 5.19 The legislative protection for badgers applies to the animals and their setts for welfare purposes. As such, this assessment does not consider the loss of foraging habitat since the development will not isolate the main setts in the wider area or restrict the movement of badgers to feeding areas, foraging habitat or water. An update walkover should be carried out prior to the commencement of works and this can be secured through planning conditions.
- 5.20 The main sett, located in Bird in Eye Shaw, will be retained in situ and buffered from any development.
- 5.21 If any setts are found to be within the development footprint following an update walkover, then a Natural England mitigation licence will need to be applied for.
- 5.22 As badgers are present within the edges of the site, the following best practice methods will be adopted for mitigation:
- Any trenches or excavations on site should be either covered over at night or a plank of wood placed in so as to allow any mammals to escape if the badgers were to accidentally fall in.
 - Any open pipes or conduits laid should be blocked off each night to prevent badgers from entering them.
 - Construction work should only take place between dawn and dusk with no late evening work. This will reduce possible disturbance to badgers as they emerge to forage and also reduce the risk of traffic casualties from late working site traffic.
- 5.23 With the above mitigation in place, the development will produce a **neutral effect** on foraging and commuting badgers as a result of the proposed development.

Reptiles

- 5.24 The majority of the development footprint is sub-optimal for reptiles due to managed nature of the field networks. The optimal reptile habitats support low reptile populations of grass snake and common lizard, albeit these are limited to the field boundaries. As the site supports only two reptile species, it does not meet the criteria for a 'key reptile site'.

- 5.25 Construction activities have the potential for a reduction of small areas of suitable reptile habitat including small sections of the northern edge of site for access purposes. The remainder of the habitats that support reptiles are to be retained and buffered from the development.
- 5.26 Mitigation measures for reptiles include:
- Retention of the majority of boundary habitats;
 - Heras fencing installed around the retained boundary habitats, at least 2m from hedgerow features to protect reptile populations present;
 - Small sections of suitable habitat to be removed must be done using a two-phase cut, under RAMS and ecological supervision;
 - If larger areas, then a translocation is likely to be required;
 - Translocation of any individual animals found to areas being retained;
 - Continued current management of the grassland field to ensure there is no further of any vegetation development and the ground remains unsuitable for reptiles.
- 5.27 These measures are considered sufficient to ensure harm to reptiles is avoided. Further mitigation details can be seen within the reptile report. The habitat loss on site will result in a **minor residual impact of local level importance**.

Dormice

- 5.28 The majority of the development footprint will occur centrally on the large area of sub-optimal habitats for dormice, with the development largely on grassland, with optimal dormouse habitats restricted towards the site margins, including hedgerows and treelines and the ancient woodland.
- 5.29 Whilst there are several breaks within the hedgerow within the site, and a small area of scrub along the northern edge of the site, required for access, but this habitat loss is not considered significant and the green infrastructure will not be significantly fragmented. Embedded mitigation includes large buffers around the site edges as per the site development plans, in addition to mitigational and enhancement planting in these areas, which will buffer and strengthen existing habitat networks.

- 5.30 A sensitive lighting scheme will reduce any impacts from new artificial lighting on habitats suitable for dormice. Other indirect impacts, such as impacts from local residence and potential impacts from cat predation, must also be considered. It is considered that the loss of small sections of habitat on site however, and potential impacts from operation will still result in a **negative effect of local importance**.

Breeding birds

- 5.31 All hedgerows, treelines and scrub on site have potential to support breeding birds. It is not considered likely that the amount of suitable habitat to be removed would support large numbers of breeding birds or species of high conservation significance.
- 5.32 The UK breeding season for most bird species takes place between March and September. The legislative protection afforded active nests, birds and their eggs and young will be met through the mitigation clearance of vegetation outside of the breeding season or after a nesting bird check by a suitably qualified ecologist, no more than 48 hours prior to clearance. Should active nests be identified, works must cease in the vicinity of the nest until the birds have fledged the nest.
- 5.33 It is considered likely that there will be an increase in disturbance from new residents to nesting birds as part of the operational phase and there is also the potential for predation by domestic pets such as cats. The small areas of suitable habitat removal will result in a **minor negative residual effect of local importance**.

Internationally Protected Sites and SSSI

- 5.34 Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), located approximately 5.29km north of site. The Site lies within the 7km radii whereby proposed residential development is identified in Policy WCS12 of the Adopted Wealden Core Strategy (2013) as having the potential for likely significant effects on qualifying features.
- 5.35 Development of the Site is not predicted to have any impact on the designation as a result of direct loss of habitat or habitat fragmentation or habitat isolation due to the distances between the development site and the Ashdown Forest. Furthermore, as the development

site is located away from the Ashdown Forest there would be no impacts resulting from cat predation or noise, light or other impacts, resulting from development.

- 5.36 Potential effects of nitrogen deposition on the qualifying habitat features of the designation as a result of increased traffic have been considered in line with Policy WCS12 of the Adopted Wealden Core Strategy (2013). It has been concluded that increased nitrogen deposition as a result of traffic generated from the proposed development will not affect the integrity of the SAC.
- 5.37 The Site lies within 7km of the SPA and is therefore within the zone of influence set out within Policy WCS12 of the Adopted Wealden Core Strategy (2013). Residential development within a 7km radii of Ashdown Forest SPA has been identified as having the potential for likely significant effects on qualifying features (ground nesting birds; Dartford warbler and night jar) as a result of increased visitor pressure to the SPA (e.g. especially from increases in dog walking activities). Whilst the proposed development alone may not be anticipated to result in a likely significant effect, in-combination with other plans or projects this may occur.
- 5.38 The site will support SANGS, totalling 8.69ha. At 190 units, 2.4 people per unit a total increase in population of 456, where SANGS requirement is 8ha per 1000 increase in population, the SANG land at a minimum would be 3.65ha. It can be seen that the SANG land provided is over double what would be required. The required SANGS route would be a minimum of 2.5km circular walk. The SANGS land is shown in the landscape masterplan.
- 5.39 Additional mitigation for the potential effects on these designations will be provided through funding of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) in line with Policy WCS12 of the Wealden District Adopted Core Strategy Local Plan (2013). SAMM contributions will be made in relation to this development in line with the tariff set by the Local Planning Authority. Subject to the implementation of this strategic mitigation approach, no significant adverse residual effects are anticipated.
- 5.40 With regards to impacts on other designated sites, notably Buxted Park SSSI located 1.3km to the north of the site, the proposals lie outside the listed developments which are

considered likely to impact upon the integrity of the SSSI units. Considering this, and the provision of new recreation opportunities designed into scheme, impacts on Buxted Park and other designated sites are considered to be unlikely.

Ancient Woodland

- 5.41 **Bird in Eye Shaw / Ancient Woodland** lies adjacent to the south of the site and to the south west of the site. The proposals will not directly impact this habitat through fragmentation or loss but it may be subject to additional recreational pressure, albeit no access into the woodland is provided. Any increase in recreational pressure will be minimised by providing on-site public open space and SANG. It is considered that all the SANG and POS provided on site is likely to be used by future residents on a day-to-day basis. Other measures to reduce impacts, will include creation of more accessible footpaths, habitat linkages across the site, new walking routes and significant buffer zones (50m along the northern aspect). Construction impacts will be removed through implementation of a CEMP. Lighting will be conditioned. Overall, this will result in a **negligible residual impact**.

6.0 Cumulative effects

- 6.1 The largest scheme is the Ridgewood Farm, Uckfield Application reference: WD/2019/1773/MRM WD/2015/0209/MEA Outline application for residential-led mixed use development for up to up to 1000 dwellings, a primary school, retail, community, health, leisure and employment uses. Reserved matters was approved in January 2019. Eastbourne Road, Uckfield Application reference: WD/2020/0410/MAO –Outline planning application for up to 90 residential dwellings, structural planting and landscaping, informal public open space and children's play area has been approved.
- 6.2 The consented developments are all required, as a result of the planning process, to minimise effects on ecology through mitigation measures. The granting of planning permission for these sites have been a result of assessing potential impacts on the surrounding habitats, including designated sites, as required by law and policy. This includes assessing the impacts alone and in combination with other projects and plans within the local landscape.

6.3 Other developments include smaller developments such as; extensions, building change of use plus demolition and replacement of single or low numbers of buildings. These types of developments are considered to have negligible impact upon surrounding habitats and protected sites as they do not result in a significant net increase of people living in the area.

6.5 Assuming that the nearby developments have mitigation in place to negate any potential negative effects such as increased visitor pressure on surrounding habitats and that protected species surveys have been conducted, a cumulative impact from the developments would be insignificant.

7.0 Compensation

Hedgerows

7.1 Several small sections of the hedgerow will be removed to allow access through the field networks. Compensation measures includes the planting of a new native mixed species hedgerow with trees along the SANGS boundary.

7.2 The new hedgerows will improve connectivity and enhance green infrastructure across the site boundaries as a whole. New and existing hedgerows will be managed in the long term for a range of wildlife including bats, dormice and reptiles present on site. It is therefore considered there will be an overall **minor positive effect of site importance**:

Bats

7.3 The bat activity report (CSa Environmental 2019) outlines the recommended mitigation and compensation measures for bats overall across the site. The following compensation measures are considered to be sufficient to remove any residual effects on these species:

- Planting of new urban trees, across the site and near the proposed site entrance to create 'hop-over' points which would maintain aerial linkages and contribute to the green infrastructure within the site;
- Trees will also be planted within the POS creating a more diverse open space provision and
- Planting POS and SUD areas wildflower meadow mixes to increase invertebrate activity and in turn, prey for bats.

- 7.4 A sensitive lighting scheme will be condition as part of the permission. This will ensure that light levels along the boundaries are low to ensure bats can utilise the edge habitats as per current levels. It is recommended that the southern boundary supports light levels of approximately 0.45 lux.
- 7.5 The habitats to be created as part of the development, including scrub and wildflower planting around the site's edges are considered to be of higher quality habitat for bats than what is currently present on site. Whilst modified grassland is to be lost the site will support a range of new and enhanced habitats, resulting in a **neutral impact of site importance** for foraging and commuting bats.

Dormice

- 7.6 Small areas of hedgerow will be removed, and potentially some scrub on the northern aspect of the site is likely to be removed to allow for access and the cycle route. All areas of removal of habitat would be required to be removed under a Natural England dormouse licence (dependent on extent of clearance).
- 7.7 The habitat removal required is minimal, with the extensive areas of habitat being retained and buffered. Significant areas of new planting, notably around the ancient woodland, will be planted with native scrub species (oak, spindle, hawthorn, honeysuckle, hazel, crab apple) will provide high value habitat for dormice.
- 7.8 All habitats created, including new and existing hedgerows, new scrub habitat, will be managed in the long term for dormice. It is therefore considered there will be an overall **neutral impact of site importance**.

Reptiles

- 7.8 The reptile survey report outlined the recommended mitigation and compensation measures for reptiles. These measures will be implemented to compensate for the losses of suitable grassland habitats. The below compensation measures would result in a **minor positive effect of site importance**:
- Planting of native mixed scrub site boundaries, increasing suitable habitat and improving connectivity across site;
 - Creation of SUDS designed to support species rich grassland planted for wildlife;

- Creation of new grassland areas around the new SUDS and POS with a wildflower meadow mix; and
- Management of retained and new habitats to provide a range of niches, specifically grassland areas maintained at a longer sward for wildlife.

Breeding birds

7.9 Mature tree lines, hedgerows and the woodland are largely being retained. New planting will compensate for any small habitat loss. The recommended compensation measures are through the provision of the scrub edge planting which would provide nesting and foraging habitat for native species. It is considered there will be an overall **neutral impact at site level**.

8.0 Enhancement

8.1 The development proposals include significant enhancements for the site. These have been designed to ensure there is minimal impact on ecology.

8.2 A new community orchard is to be created in the north western aspect of the site. This will support a range of native fruiting species which provide value for species such as bats. The grassland will be managed with a light touch (under a LEMP) to provide a species rich grassland habitat. The use of log piles within the orchard area will provide some habitat for reptiles and invertebrates.

8.3 The use of integral bat boxes within the new development and the use of bat boxes on existing mature trees will also provide enhanced roosting opportunities within the redline boundary and result in a **minor positive impact of site importance** for roosting bats.

8.4 The installation of bird boxes on mature trees or on the new homes will also provide enhanced nesting opportunities within the redline boundary for common birds. This would result in a **minor positive impact of site importance**.

8.5 The use of dormouse boxes within the woodland will uplift the potential of the woodland for dormouse nest building. These dormouse boxes would result in a **minor positive impact of site importance**.

8.6 The above measures will provide new opportunities for a range of wildlife including breeding birds, reptiles, dormice and foraging bats. The long-term management of these habitats should be detailed in a LEMP, which will ensure it is managed to maximise wildlife in the long term- for example maintaining longer grassland around the SUDS and POS areas, mowing a footpath through it for pedestrian access.

8.7 The following enhancements are included within the scheme and summarised below;

- Sowing amenity grassland areas with a flowering lawn mixture;
- Sowing POS areas with wildflower meadow mixtures to increase biodiversity;
- Planting native urban trees (mixture to be agreed with arboriculturalist) through the site and along the road networks;
- Provision of integral bird and bat boxes;
- Installation of log piles and hibernacula creation;
- The provision of hedgehog highways and hedgehog homes;
- Provisions of dormouse boxes within the off site but adjacent ancient woodland (Bird in Eye Shaw);
- Long-term management of retained and newly planted habitats such as scrub and grassland to benefit wildlife.

9.0 Monitoring

9.1 A site walk over will be required within three months of the construction start date, to ensure baseline habitats are at the same condition and all mitigation/compensation measures are relevant.

9.2 Ecological clerk of works tasks will be required during construction, to ensure there is no change in the baseline that may alter the implementation of the development.

9.3 All reptile and badger mitigation work must be undertaken under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist and all vegetation clearance on the site boundaries must be undertaken with hand tools only to ensure that the species are protected during works. Nesting bird checks will also be undertaken prior to habitat removal.

9.4 All scrub clearance works must be conducted under a Natural England dormouse licence, if required.

- 9.5 Habitat management will be required post-development to ensure the LEMP supports the habitat creation objectives. .

10.0 Summary and conclusions

- 10.1 The development at Bird in Eye Farm results in a change of land use into residential development with up to 190 residential dwellings to be created with associated open space and infrastructure. Table 6 (below) summarises the effects on important features and how mitigation and compensation have been applied.

Baseline ecology and effects

- 10.2 The baseline features evaluated as important (through site designation, legislative protection or priority status on NERC Act 2006 Section 41 lists), so needing an assessment of effects, are as follows.
- 10.3 Important features offsite, but within the zone of influence of the development and have the potential to be impacted by increased recreational pressure, are:
- Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA
- 10.4 Features within or overlapping the red line that require an impact assessment are those determined as important in section 3, namely:
- Off-site but adjacent ancient woodland (Bird in Eye Shaw);
 - Mature treelines;
 - Hedgerow;
 - Lowland deciduous woodland;
 - Bats;
 - Badgers;
 - Dormice;
 - Reptiles.

Mitigation, compensation and enhancement

- 10.5 Embedded mitigation comprises the development footprint largely taking place on modified grassland habitat which is of limited ecological value and the retention of the majority of boundary habitats.

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- 10.6 Residual impacts can be removed through species specific mitigation and compensation measures, which should be written into the planning conditions for the full planning application. The following methods are recommended:
- Removal of the treelines limited to as small an area as possible;
 - A sensitive lighting scheme across the site, particularly for the site boundaries which must remain unlit;
 - Buffer around retained boundary features, with protective Heras fencing;
 - Buffer around the retained badger setts, with protective Heras fencing;
 - Reptile mitigation, including sensitive clearance and translocation if required;
 - New mixed scrub planting along the northern aspect of the woodland site edges;
 - New native mixed species hedgerow planting within the scheme;
 - Creation of SUDS planted for wildlife in south east corner of site;
 - Sowing POS and SUDS areas with wildflower meadow mixtures to increase biodiversity and increase reptile suitable habitat post development.
- 10.7 Enhancements should be secured by condition including:
- Provision of bird boxes on trees and buildings;
 - Provision of bat boxes on trees and bat tubes in buildings;
 - Provision of dormouse boxes within the off site but adjacent ancient woodland (Bird in Eye Shaw);
 - Creation of log piles and hibernacula around the sites edges;
 - The inclusion of hedgehog highways and hedgehog homes;
 - Long-term management of the new and existing habitats to benefit wildlife and biodiversity.
- 10.8 Site monitoring is required to ensure that on site conditions have not changed between the 2024 walkover and construction starting. If further reptile suitable habitat has established, mitigation will be reviewed and a full translocation may be required. Monitoring is also required during construction, to ensure that the boundary features are adequately fenced off and protected from site works/ degradation.
- 10.9 Monitoring is required prior to the construction phase for badgers. Whilst the setts are largely off site, or suitably buffer and retained, new setts could be created on site between

now and construction and ensuring sensitive clearance of the site's habitats. Monitoring will also include an ecological clerk of works at construction phase to ensure sensitive clearance of required habitat areas. Monitoring will ensure implementation of the conditions in addition to ensuring there is no change in the baseline that may alter the implementation of the development.

Summary

- 10.10 The proposed development is to be built on habitats common and widespread and of site value only. Habitats of value, including the ancient woodland edge, mature treelines and hedgerow boundary habitats are largely being retained and maintained within the scheme.
- 10.11 Whilst there is some loss of hedgerow sections for new site access, these will be compensated for by the buffering of retained boundary features and the provision of new mixed species hedgerow with trees features along the boundaries.
- 10.12 To compensate for the loss of low value habitat, higher value habitats will be created, including SUDS planted for wildlife and wildflower meadow planting in new POS areas.
- 10.13 Enhancements include the planting of urban trees across site, creation of log piles and the use of a variety of wildlife boxes within the scheme.
- 10.14 It is considered that the new habitats created are of higher value than the ones which are lost. Overall, no significant impacts are predicted on protected species resulting from this development.

Table 5: Features of the site where significant effects are predicted from the development

Feature	Effect type and magnitude	Mitigation	Residual effect	Compensation to remove residual effects	Residual effect after compensation	Enhancement/biodiversity gain
Designated sites						
Ashdown Forest SPA SAC	Minor negative impacts of local level from increasing recreational pressure	Creation of high quality open space provision on site. SANG creation Creation of footpath linkages and recreational space on site	Minor Negative	SAMMS provisions	Neutral	N/A
Buxted Park SSSI	Neutral	Creation of high quality open space provision on site. Creation of footpath linkages and recreational space on site	Neutral	-	N/A	-
Priority habitats						
Ancient woodland (Off-site)	Minor negative of local level, recreational impacts from encroachment and degradation	Minimum requirement of a 15m buffer along the woodland edge, extended to 50m Thorny planting within 15m buffer to prevent encroachment	Neutral	-	N/A	-
Treelines	Neutral No loss anticipated	Heras fencing 2m from retained treeline to protect from degradation	Neutral	Creation of new mixed species native hedgerow with trees along the southern site boundary-increased	Neutral	Additional hedgerow planting and tree planting Long term management for wildlife

				connectivity across the western half of site		
Hedgerows	Negative of local level, Loss of small areas of hedgerow habitat for access	Restrict treeline loss to as small an area as possible Heras fencing 2m from hedgerows to protect retained features on site. Embedded mitigation (BS5837) to avoid damage to retained hedgerows.	Negative of local level	Creation of new mixed species native hedgerow along the southern and western site boundary- increased connectivity across the western half of site	Neutral	Creation of new mixed species native hedgerow increased connectivity across the south western corner of site Long term management for wildlife
Lowland deciduous woodland	Neutral No loss anticipated	Heras fencing 2m from retained treeline to protect from degradation	Neutral	Woodland management to provide glades and opportunity to develop understorey	Minor positive	Long term management for wildlife
Priority and protected species						
Bats (foraging and commuting)	Negative of local level, Loss of sections of hedgerows Light pollution causing indirect loss of commuting habitats and severance of flightline	Restrict hedgerow loss to as small an area as possible, retention of the majority boundary features Implementation of sensitive lighting scheme and 2m buffer from treeline, woodland or hedgerow features to maintain dark corridors	Minor negative of site importance	Mixed species hedgerow planting along the western and southern site boundaries- increased connectivity across the site	Neutral	Mixed scrub planted around the sites boundaries to create more robust green infrastructure across the site Creation of SUDS planted for wildlife and wildflower meadow in the south east corner of site Urban tree planting across site

		Creation of hop-over points for bats commuting along the northern treeline feature				
Bats (roosting)	Neutral No tree removal anticipated	Heras fencing to be installed around the retained boundary habitats Implementation of sensitive lighting scheme Sensitive removal of trees in sections and leaving on site overnight before removal	Neutral	-	Neutral	New bat boxes/ tubes to be installed on site to create new roosting opportunities.
Badgers	Neutral Badger setts protected and buffered from any development	Precautionary working practices to be implemented during construction.	Neutral	-	N/A	Habitat creation and enhancement Creation of log piles
Common reptiles	Minor negative of local level, Loss of sections of suitable habitat. Potential disturbance from new residents and predation from new domestic cats	Majority of suitable habitat to be retained and protected from site works via Heras fencing Sections of habitat removal to be conducted under RAMS and ecological supervision Translocation of any reptiles found to areas retained	Minor negative of local importance	Wildflower meadow grassland habitat feature to be created around POS in south east of site Creation of SUDS Planting of hedgerow habitat in western half of site, increased suitable habitat and improved	Minor Positive	Creation of log piles and hibernacula Long-term management of new habitats for reptiles including longer grassland around the SUDS in the south east corner

				connectivity across site		
Dormice	Minor negative of local level, Loss of sections of suitable habitat. Potential disturbance from new residents and predation from new domestic cats	Majority of suitable habitat to be retained and protected from site works via Heras fencing Sections of habitat removal to be conducted under RAMS and ecological supervision or under Natural England licence if required New habitat created	Minor negative of local importance	Planting of hedgerow habitat planting of 15m woodland buffer with species rich native scrub, increased suitable habitat and improved connectivity across site	Neutral	Use of dormouse boxes to uplift the carrying capacity within the woodland
Breeding birds (active nests)	Minor negative of site level, loss of treelines and scattered scrub patches Potential predation from domestic cats from new residents	Construction works timing outside of breeding bird season or under ecological supervision	Minor negative at site importance	Planting of new hedgerows and tree lines, scrub habitats	Neutral	Additional nesting habitats planted including mixed scrub and urban trees Installation of bird boxes

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Date: 29/07/2024