



Ecological Appraisal

Land at King's Oak
Hitchin
Hertfordshire
SG4 7BF

July 2026

For and on behalf of:
Sworders
The Gatehouse
Hadham Hall
Little Hadham
Ware
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Declaration

This report has been produced endeavouring to follow the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct and ecological information has been provided in accordance with British Standards BS 42020 2013-Biodiversity-Code of practice for planning and development.

Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure this report accurately identifies potential ecological constraints to development or the likely presence or absence of species and the spatial and temporal use of the site by such species, it must only be viewed as a snapshot in time and reflects the ecological status of the site at the time of survey.

No liability can be assumed for ecological changes that may or may not occur on the site surveyed after the production of this report. The author of this report must be consulted as to the current applicability of the report if there are any seasonal delays in the use of this report.

This report can only be used for the purposes for which it was instructed and agreed at the time of commission.

Quality Assurance

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to detail the findings of an Ecological Appraisal (EA) of a very small site located near King's Oak, on the outskirts of Hitchin, in north Hertfordshire.

The application site, comprised of only four vegetative habitats, was not found to support any protected or Priority Habitats at this time. None of the habitats are considered to be of any higher than Site Level value only and all are considered to be widespread across the UK. As such, their predicted loss through redevelopment is not considered to adversely impact important habitats.

With regard to protected and/or Priority Species, only nesting birds and hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) were considered to potentially be found using the habitats within the application site. As such, whilst the potential loss of suitable habitats is not considered to have any significant adverse impact upon these species/species group, certain mitigation measures will be undertaken during any removal of these suitable habitats, to avoid the risk of injury to sheltering hedgehogs and the damage or destruction to bird nests (if conducted between March – August inclusive).

The application site measures 0.07ha in size and is therefore exempt from Biodiversity Net Gain under the latest exemption (July 2026), which excludes any site under 0.2ha from the scheme.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 A planning application is being prepared for the redevelopment of a site near King's Oak, in Hitchin. Detailed proposals are not currently available, though it is reported they will include a single residential in-fill between existing residential properties.
- 1.1.2 The purpose of this Ecological Appraisal (EA) is to detail the results of an initial ecological assessment of the application site, with the aim of identifying potential biodiversity constraints that may affect the redevelopment, inform mitigation and/or compensation measures and establish the potential need for further species surveys considered necessary under UK legislation and both national and local planning policies.
- 1.1.3 This ecological study has been commissioned by Sworders, of Little Hadham, on behalf of the applicant. The site with which this study is concerned is referred to throughout the report as the application site. The aerial photograph below indicates the extent of the application site and shows it in its geographical context.



Plate 1: Aerial photograph with indicative application site boundary

- 1.1.4 The report's author is Ecologist Ms Jasmine Stephenson, who holds an Honours Bachelor of Science Degree and a Master of Science Degree in Animal Science, Wildlife Biology

and Conservation. Her professional qualifications include her Associate Membership of The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). Jasmine Stephenson also holds a Natural England Level 1 Class licence for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) and a Natural England Level 2 Class licence for all UK bat species.

2.0 Planning Policy and Legislation

2.1 Relevant National and Local Planning Policies

National Planning Policy Framework

2.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) superseded Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) in March 2012. The NPPF 2024 states that 'planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by', in part;

- 'Minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs.'

It also states that 'when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles';

- 'If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused
- Development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- Development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.'

2.2 Local Plan Policies

2.2.1 The North Herts Local Plan 2011 - 2031 was adopted in November 2022 and is the current local level policy affecting the area in which the application site is located. The following policies may, in part, be of relevance to this study;

“Policy SP12: Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Biodiversity

We will accommodate significant growth during the plan period whilst ensuring the natural environment is protected and enhanced. We will:

a) Protect, identify, manage and where possible enhance a strategic multi-functional network of green infrastructure;

b) Consider and respect landscape character, scenic beauty and locally sensitive features, particularly in relation to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

c) Protect, enhance and manage designated sites in accordance with the following hierarchy of designations and features:

- Internationally designated sites*
- Nationally designated sites*
- Locally designated sites;*
- Non-designated sites that include important habitats and species*

d) Protect, enhance and manage biodiversity networks including wildlife corridors, ancient woodlands and hedgerows, wetland and riverine habitats, Local Geological Sites, protected species, priority species and habitats, and non-designated sites of ecological value and ensure measurable net gains for biodiversity; and

e) Protect other open spaces and support provision of new and improved open space.”

2.3 Legislation

The Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017

2.3.1 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 in the UK implement the EC Habitats Directive in the UK. These regulations mainly deal with the protection of sites

that are important for nature conservation in a European context (eg Special Areas of Protection [SACs] and Special Protection Areas [SPAs]). The legislation also gives protection to certain species of flora and fauna.

- 2.3.2 The Regulations makes it an offence to deliberately capture, kill or disturb wild animals and it is also an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal (even if the animal is not present at the time).

Wildlife & Countryside Act (WCA)

- 2.3.3 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, consolidates and amends existing national legislation to implement the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (Birds Directive).

Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act (NERC)

- 2.3.4 The NERC Act of 2006 places a duty on authorities to have due regard for biodiversity and nature conservation during the course of their operations. Section 41 of the Act identifies species and habitats considered Priority for conservation.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Field Survey

- 3.1.1 This report has been produced following the *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal* 2017 (Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management). Habitats have been described based on the methodology from the UK Habitat Classification (Ref. 4). In some circumstances habitat descriptions and mapping may have been adapted to suit non-standard site-specific conditions.

3.2 Scoping for Protected & Priority Species

- 3.2.1 The habitat survey has been extended to include a scope of the application site's habitats as to their likely importance or potential to support protected or Priority Species and Habitats, as identified under the following legislation; the Habitats Regulations 2017, the Wildlife & Countryside Act (as amended) 1981, the Protection of [REDACTED], the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) Red and Amber Lists and the Natural Environment & Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.
- 3.2.2 Some species and species groups have been scoped out of this EA because of the lack of available biological records, limitations in geographical distribution and the absence of species-specific suitable habitat and connectivity within or adjacent to the application site. Only those protected and Priority Species and species groups deemed likely to be present on site or affected by the proposals have been included in this EA.
- 3.2.3 The EA was carried out on the 13th May 2026, by Ms Jasmine Stephenson, Ecologist with ELMAW Consulting Ltd assisted by Ms Eloise Hedgecott MBIOL, Assistant Ecologist. Weather conditions on the day were suitable for surveying – warm, dry and with a light breeze. There were no restrictions to access.

3.3 Limitations

- 3.3.1 Plant species lists in this report are recorded to provide a snapshot of the application site and are not exhaustive. It is possible that certain plant species may have not been recorded during the survey due to seasonal constraints, such as flowering time, or other limitations. It is however considered that the species characteristic to the habitats on site were recorded, unless otherwise advised in this report. This report is not designed, or required to, present a complete inventory of flora/fauna.

- 3.3.2 As to the reliability of the assessment for protected and Priority Species, it must be further acknowledged that this EA is based on the presence of suitable habitat, local biological records, geographical distribution and habitat connectivity to support such protected and Priority Species and not on qualitative species-specific surveys. Where the potential for protected and Priority Species has been identified, further species-specific surveys are considered necessary to be confident of either a positive or negative conclusion as to the presence of protected species on site. Where a European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licence is required, species survey data of the current season and year of the application is required by Natural England.
- 3.3.3 The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) advises that where mobile species such as reptiles and bats are concerned, this report is likely to be out of date within 12 - 18 months and will need updating.
- 3.3.4 The study specifically addresses the issues of potential redevelopment constraints affecting protected and Priority Species and Habitats. This report provides generic, not project-specific recommendations in the absence of any detailed redevelopment plans for the site.
- 3.3.5 Recommendations for mitigation and compensation of impacts on ecology may need to be re-addressed and/or re-assessed once detailed site redevelopment plans are available.

3.4 Desk Study

- 3.4.1 Available biological records of protected and Priority Species and Habitats from a radius of 2km, hereafter known as the Zone of Influence (Zol), around the application site have been sourced from the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC), on the 11th of May 2026. The results of the data search request were received on the 11th of May 2026. In addition, all international sites of nature conservation importance, nationally important sites and local sites within a 2km Zol of the application site have been sourced.
- 3.4.2 Only species records from the last ten years have been included as it is considered that records older than this are not sufficiently recent to be relevant to this study.
- 3.4.3 Google earth aerial photographs and DEFRA's Magic Map Application images have been examined of the application site and surrounding landscape as have the relevant Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps at a 1:25,000 scale.

3.5 Determining Biodiversity Significance

- 3.5.1 The Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, in 2016, identified various ecological features and resources which are likely to be important in terms of biodiversity. These are likely to include habitats, species and species groups and ecological communities and are determined on the basis of a number of factors including size, rarity, conservation status and geographical distribution. Assigning a biodiversity value on a geographical scale is based on the above principles and geographical value is assigned to international, national/regional, county, district, parish/neighbourhood and site level only.

Geographical Range of Reference

Value Category	Site or Ecological Feature
International	All internationally important Sites or candidate/proposed Sites. Regularly occurring, nationally significant population of protected or internationally important species. A viable area of habitat type listed in Annex 1 of The Habitats Directive or smaller areas of such habitat which are essential to maintain the viability of a larger whole
National/ Regional	SSSIs and other nationally designated Sites. A viable area of a priority habitat identified in the UKBAP or an area of such habitat which are essential to maintain the viability of a larger area Regularly occurring, regionally or nationally significant population of European Protected Species or habitats Regularly occurring, locally significant population of a regionally or nationally important species.
County	County designated Sites (CWS). Other Sites with BAP priority habitats or species of appreciable value not included in the above. Regularly occurring, locally significant population of a County important species. Local Nature Reserves and other viable areas of key habitat identified in the County or LBAP.
District	Area of habitat identified in a District/Borough BAP and other natural or semi-natural Sites of significant biodiversity. Regularly occurring, locally significant population of a District/Borough important species during a critical stage of its life cycle.
Parish/Neighbourhood	Areas of habitat considered to appreciably enrich the local habitat resource within approximately 2km of the application site, parish or neighbourhood.
Site level only	Sites with limited biodiversity, providing some biodiversity enrichment at project site only.

- 3.5.2 The valuation, levels of geographical importance and significance have been determined following the guidance of the CIEEM in the *Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK 2018* (updated 2019) and the *Handbook of Biodiversity Methods. Survey, Evaluation and Monitoring 2005* and have been tabulated and appended to this report.
- 3.5.3 The baseline conditions of the application site have been determined for the year 2026.

4.0 Resulting Baseline Ecological Conditions & Preliminary Evaluation

4.1 Designated Sites of Nature Conservation Importance

4.1.1 The statutory sites of nature conservation importance within their respective ZOI of the application site are tabulated below:

Site designation	Site name	Approximate distance from application site	Within the Impact Risk Zone?
International designated sites of nature conservation importance within 2km			
None			
National designated sites of nature conservation importance within 2km			
None			
Local sites of nature conservation importance within 2km			
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	Purwell Meadows LNR	1.4km north of site	N/A
Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs)	- The Willows (Hitchin) - Priory Park Icehouse - Windmill Hill - Hitchin Railway Cutting - Purwell Meadows - Folly Alder Swamp - Sperberry Hill House Meadow - St Ibbs Bush - Maydencroft Manor Farm, Gosmore - Wymondley Transforming Station - Purwell Railway - Purwell Ninesprings	Between 0.5km and 2km from the site	

4.2 Habitats

General

4.2.1 The application site, situated on the outskirts of Hitchin, in north Hertfordshire, is located adjacent to Kingshott School, between two existing residential dwellings. There is a section of scrub and young woodland to the north of the application site, with a school cricket ground located immediately beyond the site's south-eastern boundary. The

site's habitats, including their classification under UKHab, protected status and geographical value are tabulated below.

UKHab Habitat Type	Brief Description & Representative Species	Protected/Priority Status	Geographical Value
h3d Bramble Scrub	A small parcel of bramble (<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> spp.)-dominated scrub is found in the southern corner of the application site. Scrub habitats dominated by bramble are very common habitats throughout the UK. Whilst scrub habitats of this type may not be of significant ecological value, they do provide a limited local feeding and sheltering resource to wildlife in general including nesting birds, herptiles, insects and small mammals such as hedgehogs.	Not a protected or Priority Habitat	Site level value only
Photos:  Plate 2: Bramble scrub growing against the ruderal vegetation			
81 Ruderal or Ephemeral	Covering the majority of the application site is ruderal vegetation interspersed with grass species, arising from ground disturbance of a neighbouring development. Dominant species include: • Garlic mustard (<i>Alliaria petiolate</i>) • Mugwort (<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>) • Barren brome (<i>Bromus sterilis</i>) • Dame's rocket (<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>) This type of habitat is very commonly found colonising cleared or heavily disturbed land and where the soil is highly nutrient-rich. It is generally dominated by common tall perennial plants that are adept at exploiting disturbed ground and are very common features throughout the UK.	Not a protected or Priority Habitat	Site level value only

Photos:



Plates 3 & 4: Areas of ruderal vegetation

828 Introduced Shrubs

There are a few relatively young shrubs growing, likely naturalized from the neighbouring gardens, throughout the application site. These are not considered to be of any significant ecological value due to their sizes. Species include blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and another *prunus* sp.

Not a protected or Priority Habitat

Site level value only

Photos:



Plates 5 & 6: Young shrubs growing up through the ruderal

200 Individual Tree

There is a single young *prunus* sp. tree growing within the application site. This tree offers very little value to wildlife and isn't considered to be of any ecological importance.

Not a protected or Priority Habitat

Site level value only

Photos:



Plate 7: Single young tree within the ruderal

4.3 Protected and Priority Species

Species and/or Species Group	Desk Study Results	Potential Site Status
Plants	No protected or Priority Species recorded within the 2km Zol within the last ten years.	The site, which is dominated by ruderal vegetation, resulting from previous ground disturbance as a result of an adjacent development, was not found to contain any protected or Priority Species of plant during the survey. It is considered unlikely to support such important plant species.
Invertebrates	There are 18 moths and three butterflies recorded within the 2km Zol within the last ten years.	The application site does provide some limited foraging habitat for invertebrate species through the ruderal species; however, the small extent of the site greatly limits its value to invertebrates. It is considered unlikely that the site is of high value to large assemblages of important invertebrates at this time.
Amphibians	Both great crested newt and common toad (<i>Bufo bufo</i>) have been recorded within the 2km Zol of the application site within the last ten years, though all records are located at least 1km away from the site.	There are no waterbodies within the application site, nor are there any waterbodies within 500m of the site. Whilst the application site would be considered to have suitable terrestrial habitat for amphibian species, the lack of nearby ponds strongly suggests it is unlikely to be of importance to important amphibian species.
Reptiles	There is a single record of a single species of reptile – slow worm (<i>Anguis fragilis</i>) – within the 2km Zol within the last ten years. This record is located beyond 1km from the	The application site is considered too small to support sustainable populations of reptiles although the occasional presence of dispersing or transient reptiles, such as grass snake (<i>Natrix natrix</i>) should not be discounted.

	application site with only a four-figure grid reference provided.	Nevertheless, at this time the site's current value to reptiles is deemed negligible.
Birds	There are 79 specially protected and/or Priority Species of bird recorded within the 2km Zol, within the last ten years.	The application site contains very little potential nesting habitat and is considered to only potentially support a very low number of common species, which may include Priority Species such as wren (<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>) and dunnoek (<i>Prunella modularis</i>). A single robin (<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>) nest was found during the initial survey within a pot on the ground of the site. Due to the limited nesting and foraging potential within the site, it is considered to be of very limited ecological value to birds at this time.
Bats	There are six species of bat recorded within the 2km Zol of the application site; common pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>), soprano pipistrelle (<i>P. pygmaeus</i>), Nathusius's pipistrelle (<i>P. nathusii</i>), brown long-eared (<i>Plecotus auritus</i>), Natterer's (<i>Myotis nattereri</i>) and noctule (<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>).	There is no bat roosting habitat within the application site and there is extremely limited feeding and foraging habitat (the ruderal vegetation with invertebrate availability). However, based on the surrounding habitat, there are ample alternative opportunities likely to be of significantly higher value to bats. The application site, at this time, is considered to be of negligible value to roosting, feeding or foraging bats.
Other	Other species that have been recorded within the 2km Zol include otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>), water vole (<i>Arvicola amphibius</i>), [REDACTED], brown hare (<i>Lepus europaeus</i>), polecat (<i>Mustela putorius</i>) and hedgehog. Of these, the application site would only be considered to potentially support hedgehog.	There is a small amount of suitable habitat for sheltering hedgehogs within the application site. The high number of records throughout Hitchin, which is in close proximity to the application site, suggest that the presence of this mammal within the application site cannot be discounted at this time. However, due to the small extent of suitable sheltering habitat, were hedgehogs to be found to be present on the application site, its value to this species would be no more than Site level value.

5.0 Ecological Evaluation, Redevelopment Constraints and Conclusions

- 5.1.1 The application site is not considered to be a site of nature conservation importance, nor is its redevelopment considered to impact upon any of these important sites at this time. Only the habitats and species tabulated below are considered to be potentially impacted by the proposed redevelopment.

Habitats and Species	Potential Impacts	Ecological Significance	Further Survey Work
All habitat types	Potential, partial or full loss of all habitats within the application site boundary	No significant adverse impacts predicted; none of the habitats are protected or Priority Habitats	None required
Nesting birds	Likely loss of small amounts of bird nesting habitat	No significant adverse impacts predicted	See recommend further surveys (heading 6.0)
Hedgehogs	Likely loss of small amount of hedgehog sheltering habitat	No significant adverse impacts predicted	Hand-search of suitable sheltering habitat prior to its removal (heading 6.0)

6.0 Recommended Further Surveys

Species	Methodology	Timing
Birds	In the UK, all wild birds, their nests, and eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, making it illegal to intentionally take, damage, or destroy a nest while it's in use or being built, or to harm or kill wild birds or their eggs. Additionally, in the case of specially protected bird species, it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bird listed under Schedule 1 while it is nest building, or at a nest containing eggs or young, or disturb the dependent young of such a bird. In order to protect nesting birds, their nests, eggs and young, redevelopment should only be carried out during the period September to February inclusive. If this is not practicable then a pre-redevelopment (ie no greater than 48 hours before clearance begins) search of the area should be made by a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist. If active nests are found, then work must be delayed until the birds have left the nest or professional ecological advice taken on how to proceed lawfully. If work is being carried out outside the bird nesting season, then these mitigation measures do not apply.	March - August inclusive
Hedgehog	The scrub within the application site is considered to potentially support a low number of hedgehogs, based on habitat suitability and local records. Therefore, their presence should be assumed within the application site and there should be some consideration during redevelopment for this mobile species. As such, suitable habitats should be carefully hand-searched for sheltering hedgehogs prior to any habitat removal. Additionally, post-development considerations for hedgehogs should be incorporated, to allow the free movement of hedgehogs within the local area, which may include ecological enhancements such as a hedgehog 'pop-holes' in fencing.	Any time of year

7.0 References

Ref. 1 Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. 2017 *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*

Ref. 2 Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.
2017 *Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing*

Ref. 3 Joint Nature Conservation Committee. 2010. *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey* Revised re-print

Ref. 4 UK Habitat Working Group (2018). *UK Habitat Classification*

Ref. 5 Bat Conservation Trust. 2023 *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines 4th Edition*, Bat Conservation Trust, London

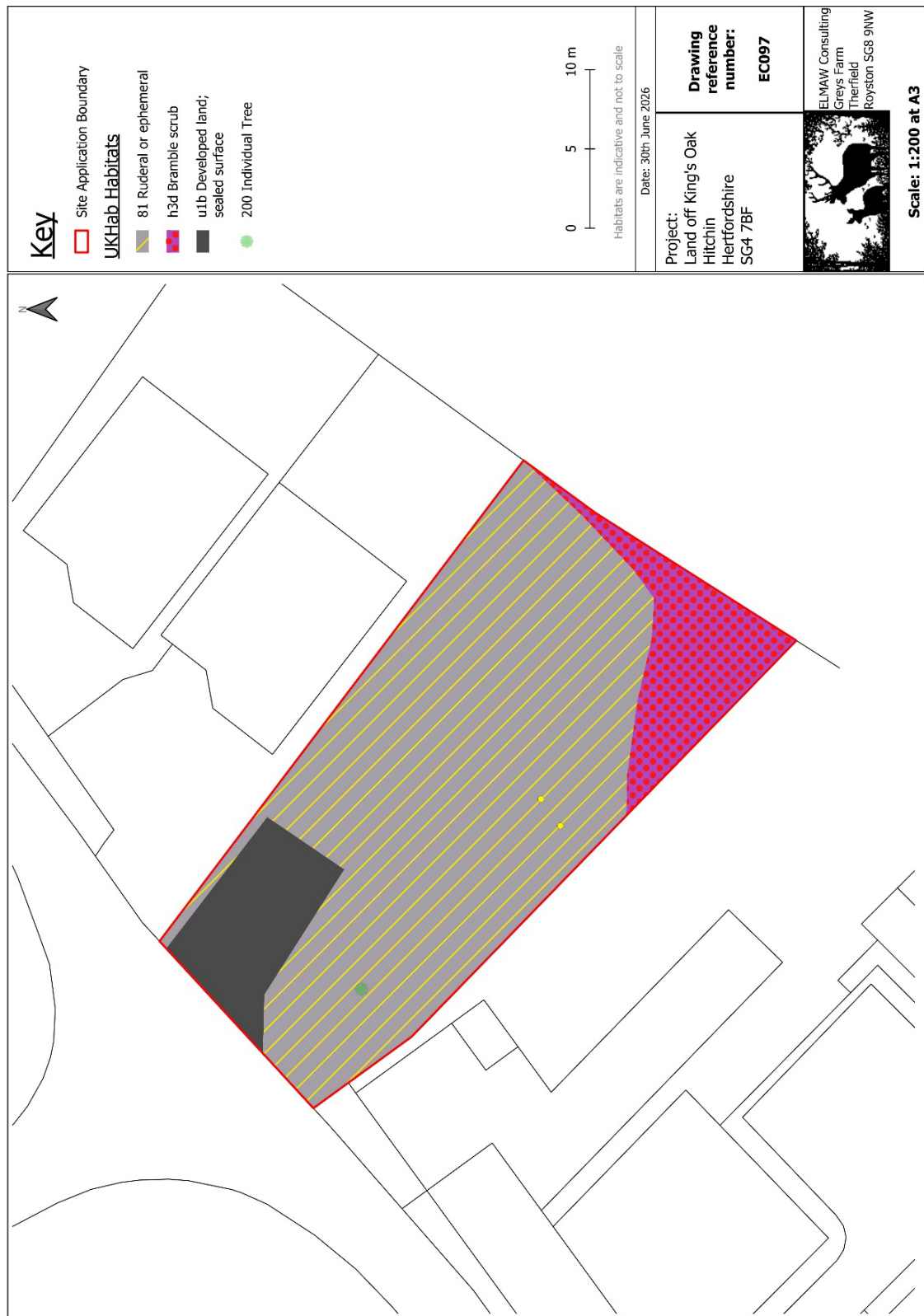
Ref. 6 Sewell D, Griffiths RA, Beebee TJC, Foster J and Wilkinson JW 2013 *Survey Protocols for the British Herpetofauna Version 1.0*

Ref. 7 Rose F 2006 *The Wildflower Key* Fredrick Warne & Co.

Ref. 8 Hubbard CE, 1992 *Grasses 3rd Edition* Penguin Books

Ref. 9 CIEEM (2021). *Biodiversity Net Gain Report and Audit Templates* Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester, UK.

8.0 Appendix 1 – Habitat Map



Scale accurate to raw file.

9.0 Appendix 2

9.1 Botanical Species Table

UKHab Habitat Type	Species Recorded
81 Ruderal or ephemeral	• Barren brome (<i>Bromus sterilis</i>) • Black medick (<i>Medicago lupulina</i>) • Bristly oxtongue (<i>Helminthotheca echioides</i>) • Dames rocket (<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>) • Forget-me-not (<i>Myosotis scorpioides</i>) • Garlic mustard (<i>Alliaria petiolate</i>) • Hemlock (<i>Conium maculatum</i>) • Mugwort (<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>) • White campion (<i>Silene latifolia</i>) • Yarrow (<i>Achillia millefolium</i>)
828 Introduced shrub	• Blackthorn (<i>Prunus spinosa</i>) • <i>Prunus</i> sp.