



Land off Old Charlton Road, Hitchin

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

28/03/2025



Client	McCarthy & Stone
Job name	Land off Old Charlton Road, Hitchin
Report title	Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
File reference	24_1782_Report_MF_IR

	Name	Position	Date
Author	Marcus Fry	Director	28/03/2025

Report Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Site Description	1
1.2	Proposed Works	1
1.3	Aims of Study	1
2	Methodology	2
2.1	Desk Study	2
2.2	PEA	2
3	Results	3
3.1	Desk Study	3
3.1.1	Designated Sites/Notable Habitats	3
3.1.2	Species Records	3
3.2	Habitat Description	4
3.3	Protected/Notable Species	5
3.3.1	Bats	5
3.3.2	Breeding Birds	7
4	Assessment	8
4.1	Constraints	8
4.2	Potential Impacts	8
4.2.1	Designated Sites/Notable Habitats	8
4.2.2	Habitats	8
4.2.3	Protected/Notable Species	8
4.3	BNG	9
4.4	Legislation and Policy	10
4.4.1	Bats	10
4.4.2	Breeding Birds	10
4.4.3	National Planning Policy Framework	10
4.4.4	Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006	11
4.4.5	Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	11
4.4.6	North Herts Council - Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	11
5	Recommendations	12
5.1	Mitigation Measures	12
5.1.1	Designated Sites/Notable Habitats	12
5.1.2	Habitats	12
5.1.3	Protected/Notable Species	12
5.2	Enhancement Measures	12
6	Conclusions	14
7	Disclaimer	15
8	Appendices	16

1 Introduction

1.1 Site Description

The site is located off Old Charlton Road, to the south of Hitchin, in the County of Hertfordshire at approximate postcode SG5 2AJ.

The site, which is estimated to be around 0.3 hectares in size, is centred on Ordnance Survey (OS) grid reference TL 18166 28831 and comprises 4 no. residential properties (Birchwood, Willow Close, Silverdale and Three Trees – north to south).

The land immediately surrounding the site is suburban in character, containing residential and commercial properties, along with roads, amenity grassland, scattered trees and woodland.

The site and surrounding area are illustrated in aerial images provided in Appendix 1 and photographs of the site are supplied in Appendix 2.

1.2 Proposed Works

It is understood that the proposed works are the subject of a planning application to North Herts Council, the Local Planning Authority (LPA), for the demolition of the existing buildings and subsequent construction of a 35-unit retirement living apartment block over three storeys, consisting of 17 x 1-bed and 18 x 2-bed apartments, and 23 parking spaces.

1.3 Aims of Study

To inform the planning application, GreenLink Ecology Ltd. has been commissioned to conduct a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) for the site, to include a detailed desk study and a survey to identify what habitats are present and look for any evidence of, or potential for, protected/notable species and their habitats. The key objectives of this PEA are to:

- Describe the habitat characteristics of the site;
- Identify likely ecological constraints associated with the proposals;
- Detail mitigation measures likely to be required;
- Recommend additional surveys that may be required to inform an Ecological Impact Assessment¹ (EclA);
- Identify potential opportunities offered by the proposals to deliver ecological enhancement; and
- Provide a summary of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment for the site and a baseline plan, to accompany the Statutory Metric (SM) calculation tool.

¹ CIEEM (2018) *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

2 Methodology

2.1 Desk Study

Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC) was contacted and records requested for statutory/non-statutory designated sites and for protected/notable species, from within a two-kilometre radius of the proposed development site, which is considered to be an appropriate Zone of Influence (Zoi) for the site.

2.2 PEA

A survey was undertaken by experienced consultant ecologist Marcus Fry MCIEEM² on 3rd May 2024 following published guidelines³. The native plant species and habitat types present were identified and any evidence of, or potential for, protected/notable species was recorded. On the day of the survey the weather conditions were overcast light rain and the temperature at midday was around 15°C.

² Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (Full)

³ CIEEM (2017) *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*, 2nd edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

3 Results

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 Designated Sites/Notable Habitats

According to the HERC data (Appendix 3), there are three statutory designated sites within the Zol, which include Oughtonhead Lane Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Oughtonhead Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Purwell meadows LNR, located circa 1.35 kilometres to the north-west, circa 1.6 kilometres to the north-west and circa 1.95 kilometres to the north-east, respectively.

There are also 10 non-statutory designated Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and one Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) present in the Zol, as follows:

- Oughton Head LWS ref: 11/01
 - Located circa 1.6 kilometres to the north-west
- River Purwell, Walsworth Common LWS ref: 11/027/01
 - Located circa 1.9 kilometres to the north-east
- The Willows (Hitchin) LWS ref: 20/016
 - Located circa 300 metres to the south-west
- Charlton Mill Pool LWS ref: 20/018
 - Located circa 880 metres to the south
- Priory Park Icehouse LWS ref: 20/034/01
 - Located circa 400 metres to the south
- Windmill Hill LWS ref: 20/043/01
 - Located circa 620 metres to the east
- Hitchin Railway Cutting LWS ref: 20/052/01
 - Located circa 1.56 kilometres to the north-east
- Purwell Meadows LWS ref: 20/053/01
 - Located circa 1.95 kilometres to the north-east
- Folly Alder Swamp LWS ref: 20/057
 - Located circa 1.5 kilometres to the south-east
- Maydencroft Manor Farm, Gosmore LWS ref: 20/074
 - Located circa 1.36 kilometres to the south
- Hitchin Railway Cutting RIGS ref: 20/052
 - Located circa 1.48 kilometres to the north-east

There are also areas of Priority Habitat Inventory (PHI) deciduous woodland present in the Zol, with the closest area being circa 70 metres to the south, within Priory Park.

3.1.2 Species Records

The HERC data includes records for a wide variety of protected/notable species, including amphibians, birds, mammals, fish, plants, invertebrates and mammals.

Many of these records are for species that are relatively common/widespread and protected in ways not relevant to the proposals (i.e. trade/sale), or have specialist habitats requirements that are not supported by the site.

Species that could not be present within the site are therefore not considered further in this report, although records relating to relevant species (bats and birds) are discussed in subsequent sections.

3.2 Habitat Description

In addition to the buildings, which are considered in a subsequent section, the site contains hard standing, modified grassland, introduced shrubs, ruderal vegetation/miscellaneous planting, short sections of hedgerow and scattered trees.

Hard standing (including gravelled areas) is present throughout the site, where there are short access driveways, car parking, footpaths and paved areas to the front, sides and rear. This represents an artificial habitat type that is of inherently low ecological value, with no potential for protected/notable species.

Modified/amenity grassland is present to the rear of the site, which is a species-poor habitat type, containing perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), daisy (*Bellis perennis*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and clover (*Trifolium* sp.). This represents a habitat type that is of low ecological value, with no significant potential for protected/notable species.

Introduced shrubs predominantly comprised of non-native ornamental species are present throughout the front part of the site, in beds/borders adjacent to hard standing (including gravelled areas). This represents a habitat type of low ecological value, although some of the larger shrubs have the potential for seasonal use by breeding birds, as described in a subsequent section.

There are small areas of ruderal vegetation/miscellaneous planting throughout the rear of the site, comprised of species such as herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), wood avens (*Geum urbanum*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*), dock (*Rumex* sp.), thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), ivy (*Hedera helix*), green alkanet (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*), common comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*), false oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), forget-me-not (*Myosotis arvensis*), white dead nettle (*Lamium alba*), cleavers (*Galium aparine*), cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), annual meadow-grass (*Poa annua*), cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*), and tree saplings, along with non-native garden plants. This represents a habitat type of low ecological value, with limited potential for seasonal use by breeding birds, as described in a subsequent section.

There are short sections of hedgerow to the front of the site and in between the individual residential plots, comprised predominantly of non-native Leyland cypress (*× Cupressocyparis leylandii*), along with occasional beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and yew (*Taxus baccata*). This represents a habitat type of relatively low ecological value at site level, with the potential for seasonal use by breeding birds and for use by foraging bats, as described in subsequent sections.

Urban trees are present throughout the site, in particular in association with the rear (western) boundary, with species recorded during the survey including Lawson cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), hawthorn, crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*), cherry (*Prunus avium*), apple (*Malus domestica*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), yew, blue atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica glauca*), Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*), along with non-native evergreen and broadleaved species. The trees are the subject of an independent report by Keen Consultants Ltd., which assesses their arboricultural value. The trees represent a habitat type of moderate ecological value at site level, which has the potential for use by bats and breeding birds, as described in a subsequent section.

None of the plants recorded within the site are protected or notable species and there are no habitats present that are of conservation concern.

3.3 Protected/Notable Species

3.3.1 Bats

The HERC data includes records for eight species of bat, including barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*), brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentonii*), Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*). These records are from a range of dates and locations, although based on an analysis of OS grid references (where provided) none of these records relate to the site or immediate surrounding area.

According to the Geographic Information System (GIS) <https://magic.defra.gov.uk> the closest granted European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licence application for bats is located circa 400 metres to the south-east (common pipistrelle, non-breeding site, dated 2012).

Since the demolition of the buildings could potentially impact on bats, these were assessed using a ladder, binoculars and a 3000 lumen LED torch by Natural England bat licence holder Marcus Fry MCIEEM (no. 2015-10955-CLS), in accordance with the 2023 Bat Conservation Trust's (BCT) guidance⁴. Features and evidence considered during the Potential Bat Roost Assessment (PBRA) included:

- Roof and wall construction;
- Features that have the potential to be actual bat roosts or provide access to roosting opportunities within the buildings;
- Scattered or accumulated bat droppings (identified by their dry, powdery texture when compressed) within the roof voids or around entrances to potential roosts;
- Oily staining, scratch marks and/or urine staining around access points to potential roosting locations;
- Places where cobwebs have been swept away; and
- The actual presence of live or dead bats.

Figure 1: Illustrating the buildings subject to a PBRA



⁴ Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines*, Bat Conservation Trust (4th Edition)

1. Rear of Silverdale. Glasshouse. No evidence of/potential for bats
2. Rear of Silverdale. Timber apex shed with timber cladding walls and a pitched roof (no void) clad in roofing felt. No evidence of/potential for bats
3. Rear of Willow Close. Single-storey summerhouse building, with painted timber cladding walls and a pitched roof (no void) clad in roofing felt. No evidence of/potential for bats
4. Rear of Birchwood. Single-storey summerhouse building, with painted timber cladding walls and a pitched roof (no void) clad in tiles. No evidence of/potential for bats
5. Rear of Birchwood. Timber apex shed with timber cladding walls and a pitched roof (no void) clad in roofing felt. No evidence of/potential for bats
6. Birchwood. Single-storey dwelling with brick walls and a pitched roof clad in tiles. Roof void converted to living space with skylights to the front and dormer windows to the rear, constructed from timber cladding walls and a flat, felted roof. Single-storey extension to rear, with brick walls and flat roof. No evidence of/potential for bats
7. Willow Close. Single-storey dwelling with brick walls and a pitched roof clad in tiles. Roof void converted to living space with skylights to the front and a dormer window to the rear, constructed from timber cladding walls and a flat, felted roof. Single-storey extension to rear, with brick walls and flat roof. No evidence of/potential for bats
8. Side of Willow Close. Single-storey outbuilding with brick walls and a pitched roof (inaccessible void) clad in tiles. No evidence of/potential for bats
9. Side of Silverdale. Single-storey outbuilding with timber cladding walls and a pitched roof (no roof void) clad in tiles. No evidence of/potential for bats
10. Silverdale. Single-storey dwelling with brick walls and a pitched roof clad in tiles. Roof void converted to living space with skylights throughout and a dormer windows to the front, constructed from metal cladding and roof tiles. Single-storey extension to rear, with brick walls and a pitched, tiled roof. No evidence of/potential for bats
11. Side of Three Trees. Single-storey outbuilding with brick walls and a pitched roof (inaccessible void) section clad in tiles, and a flat roof section with roofing felt. No evidence of/potential for bats
12. Three Trees. Single-storey dwelling with brick walls, a pitched roof (inaccessible void) clad in tiles and a side conservatory.

Since there will need to be trees removed to facilitate the proposals (as identified in the independent report by Keen Consultants Ltd.), these were assessed and categorised (to align with BS 8596:2015 'Surveying for Bats in Trees and Woodland') in accordance with the 2023 BCT guidance:

- Negligible potential – Unlikely to be used by roosting bats.
- Low potential – A tree of sufficient size and age to contain potential roost features but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only limited roosting potential
- Moderate potential – A tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation significance.
- High potential – A tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.

The trees were all assessed as having negligible potential for use by roosting bats, on the basis of their immaturity and/or absence of suitable features.

Overall, the habitats within the site are likely to be of limited value to the local bat population, although it is likely that *Pipistrellus* species of bat will occasionally use the site for foraging purposes.

3.3.2 Breeding Birds

The GIGL data includes numerous records for a variety of bird species, the majority of which have specialist habitat requirements that are not supported by the site. However, there are also records for relatively common/widespread species, some of which could seasonally use the site for breeding purposes.

There was no evidence for breeding birds recorded during the survey, which was undertaken within the breeding season (March-July/August), although the larger introduced shrubs, areas of established ruderal vegetation/miscellaneous planting, sections of hedgerow and trees represent potentially suitable habitats.

4 Assessment

4.1 Constraints

It was possible to directly access the entire site and the survey, which was informed by a detailed desk study, was undertaken by an experienced consultant ecologist, during an appropriate time of the year, using standard survey techniques and in accordance with the published guidelines. It is therefore considered that there were no significant constraints to the PEA.

4.2 Potential Impacts

4.2.1 Designated Sites/Notable Habitats

The statutory designated SSSI and LNR, along with the non-statutory designated LWS and RIGS, and the areas of PHI deciduous woodland are all sufficiently distant from the site and adequately buffered from it by substantial areas of suburban land, for there to be no significant risk of impacts as a result of the proposals.

4.2.2 Habitats

The site contains common/widespread habitats types (i.e. hard standing, modified grassland, introduced shrubs, small areas of ruderal vegetation/miscellaneous planting, short sections of hedgerow and scattered trees) that are not of conservation concern and impacts to these habitats are therefore considered to be insignificant, since they can be offset via replacement planting, as described in a subsequent section.

Potential impacts to retained trees are considered in the independent report and drawings by Keen Consultants Ltd.

4.2.3 Protected/Notable Species

4.2.3.1 Bats

Since it is considered that there is no significant risk of impacts to bats as a result of the proposed works, bats should not be affected by the proposals.

The proposed works could actually have a positive impact for the local bat population through the provision of wall-integrated bat boxes, as recommended in a subsequent section.

4.2.3.2 Breeding Birds

Although no evidence for actively breeding birds was recorded during the survey, there are potentially suitable habitats present, which could be seasonally used by breeding birds.

Therefore, breeding birds could be impacted on by the site clearance associated with the proposed works, if undertaken during the breeding season (March-July/August, as a guide). To avoid the seasonal risk of impacts to breeding birds, precautionary mitigation measures are recommended in a subsequent section.

The proposed works could actually have a positive impact for breeding birds through the provision of wall-integrated bird boxes, as recommended in a subsequent section.

4.3 BNG

The BNG SM calculation tool accompanies this document as an excel spreadsheet and what is provided in this section is a summary of the results.

The pre-existing site areas (data is included within sheets A-1 On-Site Habitat Baseline and B-1 On-Site Hedge Baseline, as illustrated in a baseline plan provided in Appendix 4) consist of:

- Urban – Developed land; sealed surface
 - i.e. buildings and hard standing – all removed
- Grassland – Modified grassland
 - i.e. modified/amenity grassland to the rear of the site – all removed
- Urban – Introduced shrub
 - i.e. small areas of soft landscaping, predominantly to the front of the site – all removed
- Urban – Vegetated garden
 - i.e. small areas of garden habitats, predominantly to the rear of the site, which includes 18 no. small sized trees (on-site and >75mm <300mm trunk diameter), as follows: T2, T6-7, T9-18, T20, T22, T26, T28 and T30, as identified in the independent report by Keen Consultants Ltd. – the majority removed
- Individual trees - Urban trees
 - i.e. trees identified in the independent report by Keen Consultants Ltd. as being >300mm trunk diameter (small trees are included in the 'vegetated garden' category), which include moderate sized trees: T19, T24-25 – all retained
- Hedgerows – non-native/ornamental hedgerows
 - i.e. short sections of hedgerows in between some of the residential plots and parts of the boundaries – all removed

This equates to an on-site baseline score of 0.82 habitat units and 0.09 hedgerow units, as identified in the Headline Results page in the spreadsheet.

The post-construction site area (data is included within the A-2 On-Site Habitat Creation, B-2 On-Site Hedge Creation pages in the spreadsheet) consists of:

- Urban – Developed land; sealed surface
 - i.e. new buildings and hard standing
- Urban – Introduced shrub
 - i.e. new areas of soft landscaping, throughout the site
- Grassland – Modified grassland
 - i.e. species-poor amenity cultivated turf
- Grassland – Other neutral grassland
 - i.e. new species-rich biodiverse lawn turf as supplied by <https://wildflowerturf.co.uk/products/establishanewhabitat/wildflower-turf/species-rich/>
- Individual trees – Urban trees
 - i.e. 9 no. small-sized native/cultivar species of tree
- Hedgerows – native and non-native/ornamental hedgerows
 - i.e. short sections of hedgerows throughout the site

This equates to an on-site post-intervention score of 0.69 habitat units and 0.16 hedgerow units, as identified in the Headline Results page in the spreadsheet.

Overall, according to the SM calculation tool, the proposals will result in an on-site net change of -0.13 for habitat units (-15.90%) and 0.07 hedgerow units (78.12%).

For hedgerow units, this exceeds the minimum 10% requirement and satisfies the trading rules, although for habitat units this does not deliver a net gain or satisfy the trading rules and therefore, BNG credits will therefore need to be purchased from a third-party supplier to address the 0.21 unit deficit, with the full details to be provided as part of a Biodiversity Gain Plan, which is likely to be made a condition of planning permission.

4.4 Legislation and Policy

4.4.1 Bats

All species of bat and their habitats are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000) and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

The legislation makes it illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to:

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a wild bat;
- Be in possession or control of any live or dead wild bat, or any part of, or anything derived from a wild bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a wild bat uses for shelter or protection; and
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection.

The legislation makes it illegal under the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 to:

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

4.4.2 Breeding Birds

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

4.4.3 National Planning Policy Framework

The Government revised the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024. The NPPF states that when determining planning applications, LPAs should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by encouraging opportunities to be taken for the incorporation of biodiversity in and around developments.

4.4.4 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

The NERC Act extends the biodiversity duty set out in the CRoW Act to public bodies and statutory undertakers to ensure due regard to the conservation of biodiversity.

This duty is set out in Section 40 of the NERC Act and states that: "*Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity*".

Section 41 of the NERC Act refers to a published list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, including deciduous woodland.

4.4.5 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

BNG is part of the Environment Act 2021, which requires development schemes in England to deliver a mandatory 10% BNG by creating or enhancing habitats in association with development, to ensure that proposals "...leave biodiversity in a better state than before", from February 2024.

4.4.6 North Herts Council - Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Section 5 - Promoting Biodiversity. The Plan seeks to protect wildlife and habitats and deliver BNG. In this context the following strategic objectives and policies are particularly relevant:

- ENV3 – Protect, maintain and enhance the District's historic and natural environment, its cultural assets and network of open spaces, urban and rural landscapes.
- ENV5 – Reduce water consumption, increase biodiversity and protect and enhance the quality of existing environmental assets by enhancing new green spaces and networks of green space for both recreation and wildlife.
- NE4 – Development to deliver measurable biodiversity net gain and to contribute to the restoration of ecological networks and degraded or fragmented habitats. Applicants are required to submit an ecological survey commensurate with the scale, location of development and its likely impacts on biodiversity demonstrating that adverse effects can be avoided and / or minimised according to the mitigation hierarchy. Net gains can be delivered through soft landscaping and tree planting to support wildlife habitats as identified in the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategy (when published).
- NE1 – seeks to protect the existing Green Infrastructure (GI) network and the creation of new strategic GI where appropriate. This is also the objective of SP12 which sets out a hierarchy of designations and features, seeking to protect and enhance designated and non-designated biodiversity sites in accordance with their position within the hierarchy.
- NE5 and NE6 - seek to protect existing open space and support new and improved provision as part of new development schemes.
- NE8 - seeks to use the most appropriate sustainable drainage solution, including enhancing biodiversity, water quality and provide amenity benefits, and also aims to mimic the natural drainage patterns and processes as far as possible.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Mitigation Measures

5.1.1 Designated Sites/Notable Habitats

Since it is considered that there is no significant risk of impacts to designated sites/notable habitats as a result of the proposed works, mitigation measures are not required.

5.1.2 Habitats

Mitigation measures are not considered necessary for the common/widespread habitat types that are within the site, since they are not of conservation concern and impacts to these habitats are insignificant.

Mitigation measures for retained trees are detailed in the independent report by Keen Consultants Ltd., to ensure that they are protected in accordance with BS 5837:2012 *"Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction - Recommendations"*.

5.1.3 Protected/Notable Species

5.1.3.1 Bats

Since it is considered that there is no significant risk of potential impacts to bats, mitigation measures are not required.

However, if at any time during the proposed works, it becomes apparent that bats are present and at risk of impacts, works will need to temporarily cease whilst a Natural England licence holder is consulted about how to proceed without the risk of an offence being committed.

5.1.3.2 Breeding Birds

The removal of potentially suitable habitat (i.e. larger introduced shrubs, areas of established ruderal vegetation/miscellaneous planting, sections of hedgerow and trees) should ideally be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season (avoiding March-July/August as a guide).

If it is necessary to conduct such work during the breeding season, this should be carried out under the supervision of an experienced ecologist, who will check for the presence/absence of any birds' nests.

If any active nests are found then works with the potential to impact on the nest must temporarily cease and an appropriate buffer zone should be established until the young have fledged and the nest is no longer in use.

5.2 Enhancement Measures

The NPPF states that *"the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by... minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible"*.

Therefore, the following measures are recommended, which will need to be implemented under a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP), which is likely to be made a condition of planning permission:

- The soft landscaping scheme should specify at least 70% native species of plant, or non-native species with a known benefit to wildlife. This should include a variety of herbaceous plants, shrubs, bulbs, climbers, species-rich biodiverse grassland, boundary hedgerows and small trees, to provide a diversity of habitat type/structure and benefit local biodiversity;
- To enhance the site for bats, the development should incorporate 8 no. 'wall-integrated' bat boxes, e.g. <https://www.birdbrickhouses.co.uk/products/bat-brick-houses/>, i.e. 2 on each orientation. These boxes will need to be installed above at least 4-5 metres from ground level and not illuminated by any new or proposed artificial lighting;
- To offset the loss of nesting opportunities and to enhance the site for birds, the development should incorporate 15 no. 'wall-integrated' bird boxes, e.g. <https://www.birdbrickhouses.co.uk/products/swift-brick-houses/>, i.e. 5 on each orientation other than south - suitable for swifts and other species of bird. These boxes will need to be installed above at least 3-6 metres from ground level and not facing south to avoid the risk of overheating during the summer months.
- To enhance the site for invertebrates, the development should incorporate a range of insect boxes/bug hotels throughout the site, e.g. <https://www.nhbs.com/> stocks a wide variety.
- Consideration should also be given to the following:
 - Using green/brown roofs/walls throughout the development (if suitable for the construction type), which will further benefit local biodiversity;
 - Utilising a Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) to create a small wetland area/rain garden; and
 - Providing bird tables/feeders and water features, to benefit the local bird population and provide stimulation for the future residents.

6 Conclusions

To inform a planning application, GreenLink Ecology Ltd. was commissioned to undertake a PEA and a BNG assessment, which have been completed without significant constraint.

The HERC desk study data indicates that within the ZOI, there are three statutory designated sites (SSSI and LNR), along with 10 non-statutory designated sites (LWS and RIGS) and areas of PHI deciduous woodland. It is considered that these are all sufficiently distant from the proposed development site and adequately buffered from it by substantial areas of suburban land, for there to be no significant risk of impacts and therefore, no need for mitigation measures.

The HERC desk study data also includes recorded for protected/notable species, which have been considered in this report, including bats and birds.

The PEA survey that was undertaken by an experienced consultant ecologist, determined that the site contains common/widespread habitat types that are not of conservation concern. Mitigation measures for habitats are only required in relation to retained trees, as detailed in the independent report by Keen Consultants Ltd.

Since there was no evidence for the presence of bats recorded and there was no significant potential identified for bats to be present and at risk of impacts, it is considered that there is no perceived risk of potential impacts to bats and therefore, no need for mitigation measures.

Mitigation measures have been recommended for breeding birds to avoid the seasonal risk of impacts in relation to the removal of potentially suitable habitats.

The BNG assessment has been completed, with the SM calculation tool accompanying this PEA report. The results of the BNG assessment indicates that although the proposals will result in an on-site net change of 78.12% for hedgerow units, the proposals will result in an on-site net change of -15.90% for habitat units, which does not deliver a net gain or satisfy the trading rules. BNG credits will therefore need to be purchased from a third-party supplier to address the 0.21 unit deficit

In accordance with the NPPF, recommendations have also been made for ecological enhancement measures to benefit local biodiversity, in particular habitats, bats, breeding birds and invertebrates.

Overall, there are no known overriding ecological constraints that would prevent the proposed works going ahead, subject to the recommendations made in this report being correctly implemented.

7 Disclaimer

This report is issued to the client for their sole use and for the intended purpose as stated in the agreement between the client and GreenLink Ecology Ltd. under which this work was completed, or else as set out within this report.

This report may not be relied upon by any other party without express written agreement. The use of this report by unauthorised third parties is at their own risk and GreenLink Ecology Ltd. accepts no duty of care to any such third party.

GreenLink Ecology Ltd. has exercised due care in preparing this report. It has not, unless specifically stated, independently verified information provided by others. No other warranty, express or implied, is made in relation to the content of this report and GreenLink Ecology Ltd. assumes no liability for any loss resulting from errors, omissions or misrepresentation made by others.

Any recommendation, opinion or finding stated in this report is based on circumstances and facts as they existed at the time that GreenLink Ecology Ltd. performed the work. The content of this report has been provided in accordance with the provisions of the CIEEM Code of Professional Conduct. GreenLink Ecology Ltd. works where appropriate to the scope of our brief, to the principles and requirements of British Standard BS42020.

Nothing in this report constitutes legal opinion. If legal opinion is required the advice of a qualified legal professional should be secured. Observations relating to the state of built structures or trees have been made from an ecological point of view and, unless stated otherwise, do not constitute structural or arboricultural advice.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Aerial images illustrating the approximate boundaries and surrounding area

Photograph 1: The approx. site boundaries and immediate surrounding area



Photograph 2: The site location and wider surrounding area



Appendix 2: Photographs of the site

Photograph 1: View of the site from Old Charlton Road, looking south-west towards Birchwood



Photograph 2: View of the site from Old Charlton Road, looking west at Birchwood/Willow Close



Photograph 3: View of the site from Old Charlton Road, looking west at Willow Close/Silverdale



Photograph 4: View of the site from Old Charlton Road, looking north towards Three Trees



Photograph 5: Eastern aspect (front) of the dwelling at Three Trees



Photograph 6: Eastern aspect (front) of the dwelling at Silverdale



Photograph 7: Eastern aspect (front) of the dwelling at Willow Close



Photograph 8: Eastern aspect (front) of the dwelling at Birchwood



Photograph 9: Western aspect (rear) of the dwelling/rear garden at Birchwood, looking east



Photograph 10: Rear garden at Birchwood, looking west



Photograph 11: Western aspect (rear) of the dwelling/rear garden at Willow Close, looking east



Photograph 12: Rear garden at Willow Close, looking west



Photograph 13: Western aspect (rear) of the dwelling/rear garden at Silverdale, looking east



Photograph 14: Rear garden at Willow Close, looking west



Photograph 15: Shed in the rear garden at Willow Close along with vegetated garden habitat



Photograph 16: Vegetated garden habitat in the rear garden at Willow Close



Photograph 17: Western aspect (rear) of the dwelling/rear garden at Three Trees, looking east



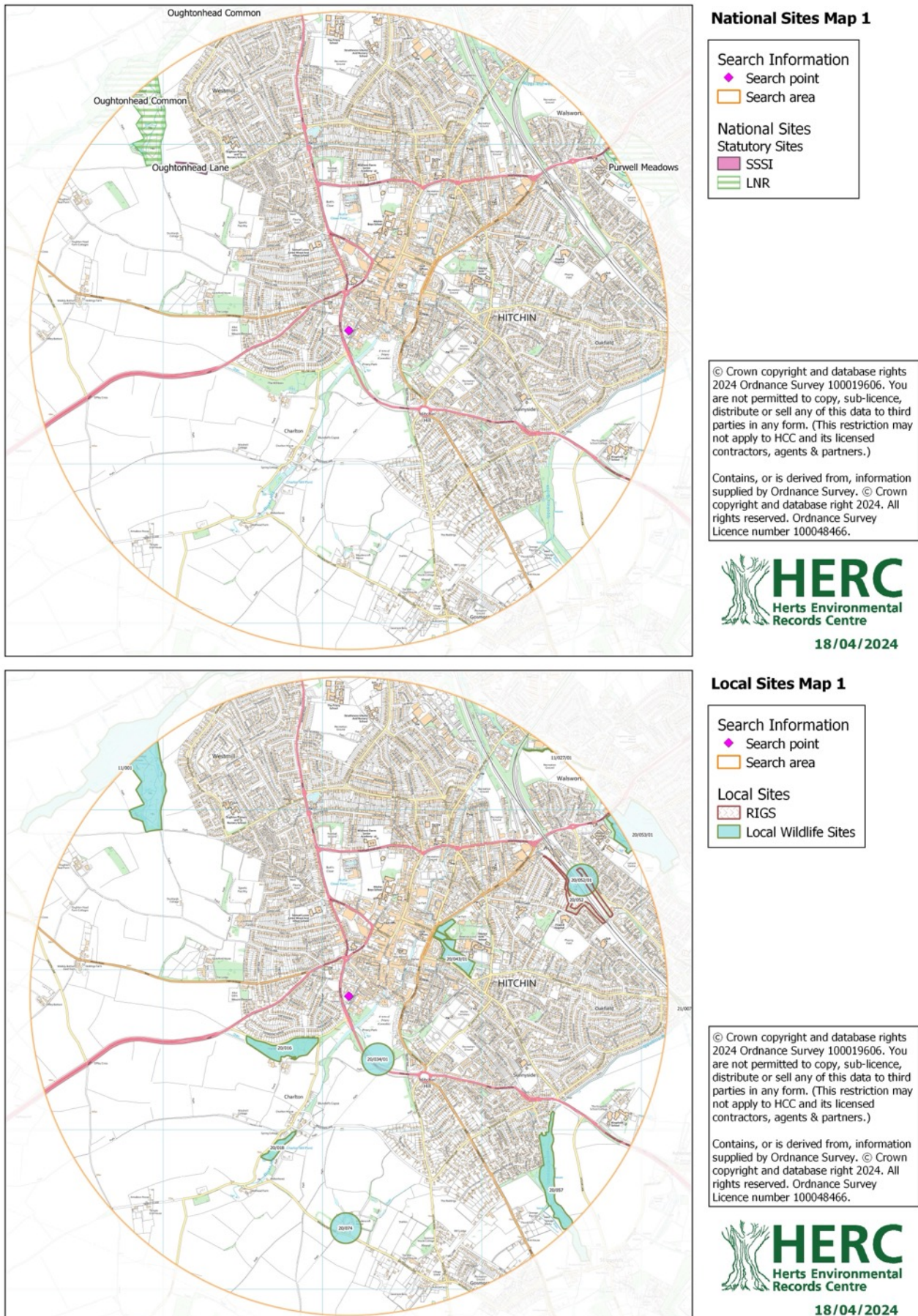
Photograph 18: Rear garden at Three Trees, looking west



Photograph 19: Front/side garden at Three Trees, looking north



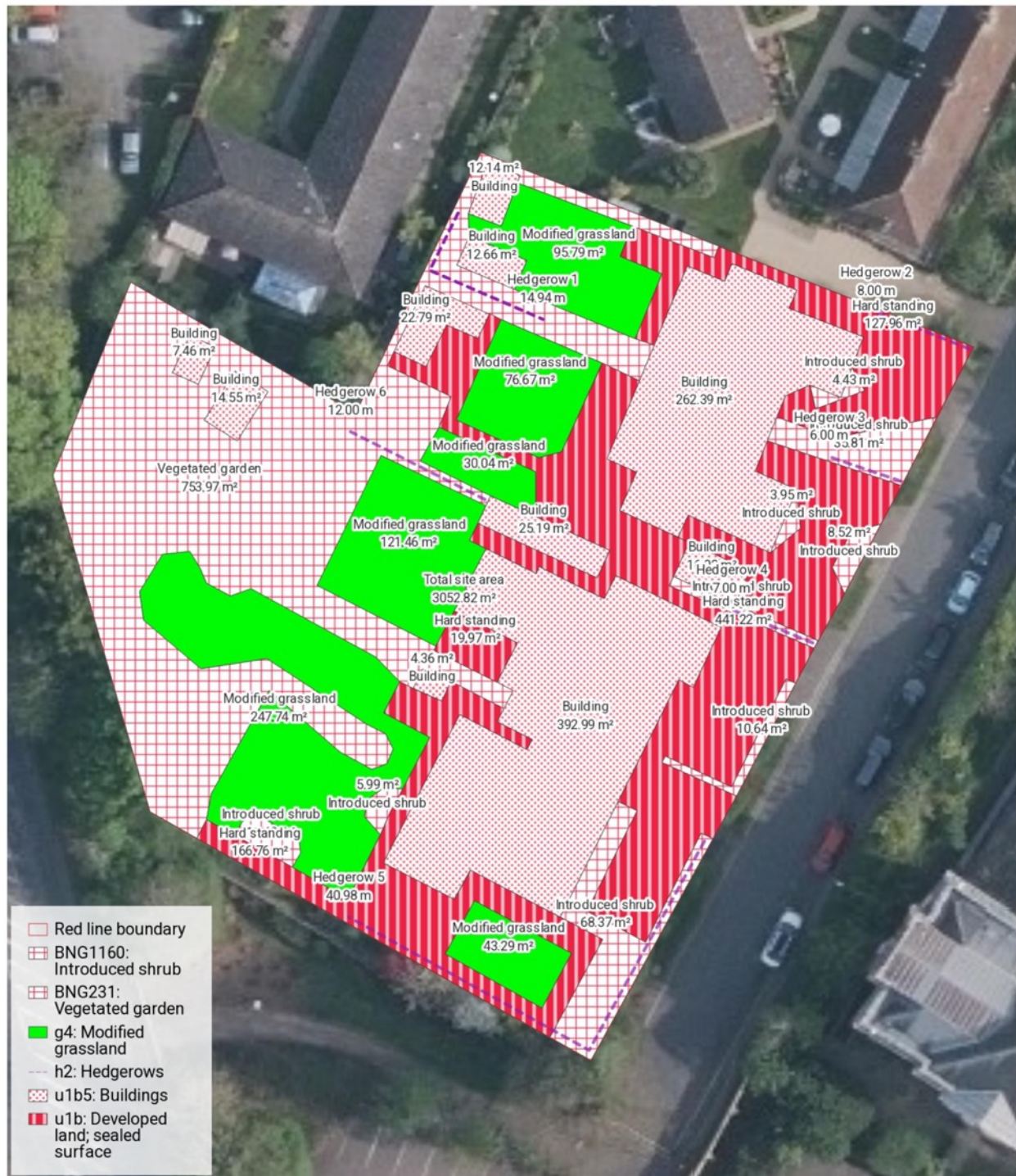
Appendix 3: Statutory and non-statutory designated sites in the Zol



Appendix 4: BNG baseline plan



Land off Old
Charlton Road,
Hitchin



Produced on Land App, Mar 28, 2025.
©Getmapping Ltd

BNG Baseline Plan

10 m
Scale 1:400 (at A4)



Headline Results Scroll down for final results ↴		Return to results menu		
On-site baseline	Habitat units	0.82		
	Hedgerow units	0.09		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
On-site post-intervention (Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	0.69		
	Hedgerow units	0.16		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
On-site net change (units & percentage)	Habitat units	-0.13	-15.90%	
	Hedgerow units	0.07	78.12%	
	Watercourse units	0.00	0.00%	
On-site net gain is less than target set ▲				
Off-site baseline	Habitat units	0.00		
	Hedgerow units	0.00		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
Off-site post-intervention (Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	0.00		
	Hedgerow units	0.00		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
Off-site net change (units & percentage)	Habitat units	0.00	0.00%	
	Hedgerow units	0.00	0.00%	
	Watercourse units	0.00	0.00%	
Off-site net gain is less than target set ▲				
Combined net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	-0.13		
	Hedgerow units	0.07		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
Spatial risk multiplier (SRM) deductions	Habitat units	0.00		
	Hedgerow units	0.00		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
FINAL RESULTS				
Total net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	-0.13		
	Hedgerow units	0.07		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	-15.90%	Total net gain achieved is less than target set ▲	
	Hedgerow units	78.12%		
	Watercourse units	0.00%		
Trading rules satisfied?	No - Check Trading Summaries ▲			
Unit Type	Target	Baseline Units	Units Required	Unit Deficit
Habitat units	10.00%	0.82	0.90	0.21
Hedgerow units	10.00%	0.09	0.10	0.00
Watercourse units	10.00%	0.00	0.00	0.00
No additional hedgerow units required to meet target ✓				
No additional watercourse units required to meet target ✓				
Input errors/rule breaks present in metric ▲				