

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

**Land Rear of 234 Conquest Close,
Hitchin SG4 9DP**

For TEG Properties Ltd

January 2025



Report: SE2578.1

CONTENTS

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2	INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES	
2.1	Introduction	5
2.2	Site Location, Description, and Development Proposals	5
2.3	Scope and Objectives	5
2.4	Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	5
3	METHODOLOGIES	
3.1	Surveyor	6
3.2	Desk Study	6
3.3	Habitat Survey	6
3.4	Protected & Biodiversity Species Assessment	6
3.5	Limitations and Assumptions	7
4	RESULTS	
4.1	Desk Survey - Designated Sites and Habitats	8
4.2	Desk Survey - Protected and Biodiversity Species	8
4.3	Site Survey - Habitats	8
4.4	Protected and Notable Species Scoping Survey	10
5	DISCUSSION	
5.1	Designated Conservation Sites	10
5.2	Potential Impacts on Biodiversity	11
5.3	Further Ecological Surveys	11
5.4	Opportunities for Biodiversity Enhancement	11
6	RECOMMENDATIONS	
6.1	Precautionary Working Methods Statement (PWMS)	11
6.2	Mitigation – New Lighting	13
6.3	Biodiversity Enhancement Proposals	13
7	REFERENCES	13
	APPENDICES	14

Related Documents List

- SE2578.1 PEA Conquest Close Hitchin Jan 2026 f (Preliminary Ecological Appraisal)
- SE2578.2 BNG Report Conquest Close Hitchin Jan 2026 f (this Biodiversity Net Gain report)
- SE2578.3 BNG Metric Conquest Close Hitchin Jan 2026 f (Metric spreadsheet)
- SE2578.4 BNG HCA Conquest Close Hitchin Jan 2026 f (Habitat Condition Assessment)

LIMITATIONS AND EXCEPTIONS

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This report is prepared and written in the context of the proposals outlined in the introduction and should not be used in a different context. If any change in circumstances occurs or if 18 months have passed since the date of the report, the report should be referred to the author for reassessment and, if necessary, reappraisal.

The Summary and Recommendations sections of the report provide an overview and guidance only and should not be relied upon explicitly until considered in the context of the whole report. Interpretations and recommendations in the report represent my professional opinion, developed in accordance with accepted industry practices and current legislation at the time of writing. No responsibility is accepted for any inaccuracies in the supplied data.

Scientific survey data will be shared with the local biological records centre in accordance with professional codes of conduct.

Limitations of Surveys

This report documents the wildlife observed during the survey, along with anecdotal evidence of certain species. It does not record any animals or plants that may appear at other times of the year and were, therefore, not evident during the survey visits. The behaviour of animals can be unpredictable and may not conform to standard patterns recorded in scientific literature. Therefore, this report cannot predict with absolute certainty that animal species will occur in apparently suitable locations or that they will not occur in locations or habitats that appear to be unsuitable. Habitats outside the site boundary were visited only when considered appropriate and when access was available.

This survey is valid for 18 months. If development does not occur within this period, it is recommended that the survey be repeated as part of a comprehensive ecological reappraisal.

Andrew Palmer BSc (Hons), DipLA, MCIEEM
Sound Ecology – January 2026

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sound Ecology has compiled this report on behalf of TEG Properties Ltd. It pertains to the redevelopment of land to the rear of 234 Conquest Close, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9DP.

The report presents the findings and recommendations of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). A separate Biodiversity Net Gain assessment has been provided.

Site Description and Development Proposals

The 0.146 ha site comprised a long-abandoned, overgrown plot that had previously been used, but not recently, as a small allotment. Two semi-derelict timber sheds were present. Several self-sown trees were present.

The proposal involves site clearance and the construction of two detached bungalows with parking and gardens. The existing vehicle access to the adjacent garages remains the main entrance.

Survey Results

No priority or irreplaceable habitats will be impacted. No evidence of Protected and priority (NERC s41) species was recorded. The site has no bat roost suitability nor suitability for supporting any other protected species. It can reasonably be assumed that nesting birds are present, including 41 species.

Evaluation, Mitigation and Enhancement

As no further surveys are required, this PEA should be considered equivalent to an Ecological Impact Assessment.

No detrimental impacts on species or habitats are anticipated, and no further surveys are merited.

A Precautionary Working Methods Statement (PWMS) for site clearance and construction work will help avoid potential low-level risks to wildlife.

The proposals will incorporate new habitat opportunities for wildlife likely to occur within the local area.

2 INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

2.1 Introduction

Sound Ecology has compiled this report on behalf of TEG Properties Ltd. It pertains to the redevelopment of land to the rear of 234 Conquest Close, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9DP (hereinafter referred to as ‘the site’).

The report presents the findings and recommendations of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). The assessment informs a planning application and evaluates development constraints arising from ecological issues, ensuring compliance with wildlife legislation (Appendix A1). It also allows any work that may otherwise be detrimental to protected and biodiversity species to be appropriately scheduled.

Sarah Downing BSc (Hons), MCIEEM undertook the survey, and Andrew Palmer BSc (Hons), DipLA, MCIEEM produced this report (See 3.1)

2.2 Site Location, Description, and Development Proposals

The 0.145 ha (1,461 m²) site comprised a long-abandoned, overgrown plot that had previously been used, though not recently, as a small allotment. Two semi-derelict timber sheds were present. Several self-sown trees were present.

The proposal involves site clearance and the construction of two detached bungalows with parking and gardens. The existing vehicle access to the adjacent garages remains the main entrance.

The site lies in a residential area in the south of Hitchin, surrounded by houses, gardens and urban infrastructure. The site lies within a triangle formed by the A602 (Stevenage Road), The London Road, and Blackhorse Lane. Effectively, it is isolated from significant open spaces even within the urban fabric. There were no ponds, wetlands or significant open spaces within a 250 m radius.

No priority or irreplaceable habitats will be impacted. The only statutorily protected site within 2 km is Purwell Meadows Local Nature Reserve (1.8 km away).

2.3 Scope and Objectives

The objectives of the survey are:

- To undertake a scoping exercise to assess potential impacts on protected habitats and species.
- To recommend follow-up species surveys as needed.
- To make recommendations to mitigate potential negative impacts arising from development proposals.
- To recommend enhancing on-site habitats and wildlife opportunities, resulting in an overall net gain in biodiversity.

2.4 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

A separate BNG assessment has been provided.

3 METHODOLOGIES

3.1 Surveyor

The survey was conducted by Sarah Downing (SD), an experienced ecologist who meets the requirements of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) as outlined in BS 42020:2013. SD is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. SD holds level-1 bat, Hazel Dormouse and a Great Crested Newt survey licences (Class Licences: 2025-84203-CL17-BAT, 2026-87033-CL10a-DOR and 2025-81276-SCI-CL08, respectively).

The report's author was Andrew Palmer (AP). AP is also an experienced ecologist who meets the requirements of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) as specified in BS 42020:2013. AP has held a Level 2 Bat Survey Licence since 2011 (Class Licence Registration Number: 2025-84600-CL18-BAT) and Great Crested Newt and Barn Owl Survey Licences (Class Licences 2025-82676-SCI-CL08 and 2026-87016-CL29-OWL).

3.2 Desk Study

A desk study was undertaken to provide an ecological context and inform an assessment of the potential ecological constraints to development. MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside) was searched in January 2026. Current Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photographs were used to identify features within a 500-metre radius of the site that may be used by protected or notable species. Given the modest, localised and discrete nature of the proposal, it is not considered necessary to undertake a biological records data search.

3.3 Habitat Survey

The survey involved a site visit on November 25, 2025, to record and map habitat types and ecological features. Although November is not an ideal month for habitat surveys, given the nature of the habitats present, this is not considered a significant limitation.

3.4 Protected and Biodiversity Species Assessment

The site was inspected for evidence of protected and NERC s41 notable species and assessed for its potential to support them. This included species listed under all relevant English legislation (as Appendix A1). The following protected and notable species were considered within the assessment.

3.4.1 Bats

The two sheds and trees were thoroughly examined in accordance with the Bat Survey Guidelines (BSG) outlined in the BCT Good Practice Guidelines (Collins, 2023). The survey searched for evidence of bat utilisation and roost suitability, with the findings categorised as per Table 1a (structures) and Table 1b (trees). The survey methodology comprised a Ground Level Tree Assessment (GLTA) using binoculars and lighting to inspect the depth of any visible feature.

Table 1a: Bat Roosting Potential in Buildings (adapted from Collins, 2023).

Suitability	Assessment of features present that potentially support roosting bats
None	An absence of suitable roost features
Negligible	Negligible habitat features - unlikely to be used by roosting bats.
Low	The few potential roosting sites are likely to be used by a <i>low number of transient</i> bats.
Moderate	Potential roosting sites, but with features <i>unlikely</i> to support maternity or hibernation.
High	Roosting sites of potential higher conservation value.

Table 1b: Assessment of Bat Roosting Potential in Trees (adapted from Collins, 2023).

Suitability	Assessment of features present that potentially support roosting bats
None	Either there is no PRF, or it is highly unlikely to be any.
FAR	Further assessment is required to establish if PRFs are present.
PRF	A tree with at least one potential roost feature (PRF) is present.

3.4.2 Bat Foraging and Commuting:

Using the BCT Guidelines (summarised in Table 2), the suitability of habitats for supporting bat foraging and commuting activities was assessed. [*High Suitability is not relevant.*]

Table 2: Assessment of Bat Activity Suitability (Commuting and Foraging)

Suitability	Commuting and foraging habitats
None	No habitat features for commuting or foraging bats were present.
Negligible	No obvious habitat features for commuting or foraging bats are present; however, a small element of uncertainty remains.
Low	Isolated or poorly connected habitat that could potentially support small numbers of foraging and commuting bats.
Moderate	Continuous habitats connected to the wider countryside.

3.4.3 Amphibians

Great Crested Newt (GCN) surveys are only relevant where suitable breeding ponds are present within 250 m (this may be extended to 500 m where the habitat between the site and ponds is *highly suitable*). There were no ponds within a 250 m radius and no suitable commuting routes to more distant ponds. Consequently, no further assessment for GCN was necessary.

3.4.4 Other Species

The site was not considered suitable for widespread reptiles. However, it was assessed for suitability for supporting Badgers, Hedgehogs and nesting birds. Additionally, the site was searched for invasive non-native species (INNS), including Japanese Knotweed.

3.5 **Limitations and Assumptions**

No significant limitations were identified, and the surveys adhered to established good practice guidelines. Adjacent land was only examined closely where public access was possible. This PEA provides an overview of the likelihood of protected and notable species occurring on the site. The absence of a species cannot be presumed where no evidence was found. Further surveys are recommended where there is a reasonable likelihood that a protected species may be present and potentially impacted by the development proposal.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Desk Survey - Designated Sites and Habitats

Statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations do not cover the site. The only statutorily protected site within 2 km is Purwell Meadows Local Nature Reserve (1.8 km away). However, no impacts on protected sites or significant habitats are anticipated, and no further action is required.

4.2 Desk Survey - Protected and Biodiversity Species

4.2.1 Protected Species

No European Protected Species (EPS) applications were granted for Great Crested Newts within 2 km. There have been three EPS for bats within 2 km, although none are directly relevant to the site.

4.3 Habitat Survey

The 0.145 ha (1,461 m²) site comprised a long-abandoned, overgrown plot that had previously been used, though not recently, as a small allotment. Two semi-derelict timber sheds were present. Several self-sown trees were present. A full schedule of trees is provided in the accompanying BNG Report (SE2578.2). Figure 1 shows the distribution of measurable habitats. These are also illustrated in the photographs below.

No irreplaceable or priority habitats were recorded.

Figure 1: Baseline Habitats



Photographs: 1 – Access track to site behind the adjacent garages. 2 – The overgrown interior dominated by Nettles and Brambles. 3 – Nettles and self-sown trees. 4 – Bramble scrub. 5 – Trees alongside one of the sheds. 6 – Self-sown trees. 7 – Interior of Shed 2. 8 – Interior of Shed 1.



The entrance to the site comprised a concrete paved track off Conquest Close. It included an area of species-poor modified grassland and a timber fence covered with Ivy forming a supported hedgerow. The interior of the site was dominated by tall forbs, almost solely comprising Common Nettle. In the central area, Bramble scrub was dominant. While 22 species were recorded, aside from Bramble, Nettle and Ivy, all were present as occasional or rare in the DAFOR scale. Species included garden escapes such as Bamboo, *Mahonia aquifolium* and *Vinca major*. Native forbs included small amounts of Dove's-foot Cranesbill, Ground Ivy, Cleavers, Dandelion, Foxglove, Spear Thistle, Creeping Buttercup and Alexanders.

Self-sown trees were primarily limited to the boundary and included a mixture of non-native Leyland Cypress, Cherry Plum, Sycamore and Cedar. Native trees included Ash, Hazel, Hawthorn and Holly. Most trees were saplings and had a diameter (at breast height) below the 7.5 cm threshold. However, 19 trees were recordable as scheduled within the BNG Report (SE2578.2). The largest trees were two Sycamores with a dbh of 61 and 70 cm. While these Sycamores held minor habitat features, none were significant or raised the trees' value beyond the 'good' category for BNG.

Adjacent Habitats: The site backed onto small rear gardens and, in the southeast, onto boundary vegetation to the carpark of the Orange Tree pub.

4.4 Protected and Notable Species Scoping Survey

4.4.1 Bats

No evidence of bat utilisation was recorded in the sheds, and both were considered unsuitable for roosting bats. Additionally, none of the trees were suitable to support roosting bats.

The site had moderate suitability for bat foraging and commuting, primarily due to the contribution of boundary trees. Those near the southern and northern ends will be retained.

4.4.2 Other species

Small numbers of nesting birds and Hedgehogs may be present. There was no evidence of other protected or notable (s41) species, and no significant suitability to support these species. Protected or priority amphibians and reptiles are not anticipated, and there was no evidence of Badgers.

While there was no evidence of Schedule 9 non-native invasive species, Bamboo and Periwinkle were spreading and are potentially degrading the habitat.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Designated Conservation Sites

The proposed redevelopment is not sufficiently close or on a scale to pose risks to local sites or more distant, internationally recognised sites of conservation value. No further consideration of statutory or non-statutory sites is necessary.

5.2 Potential Impacts on Biodiversity

No evidence of protected or priority species was identified during the survey. Suitability for such species is broadly negligible, although nesting birds are likely present during the breeding season.

A minor loss of foraging resources will result from removing some trees, but the site's value can be retained through new planting and adequate mitigation of potential light impacts.

Precautionary Working Methods (PWMS), including timing restrictions, will be applied to eliminate low-level risks.

5.3 Further Ecological Surveys

The potential impacts on habitats and species of conservation concern have been fully evaluated, and consequently, no further ecological surveys are required.

5.4 Opportunities for Biodiversity Enhancement

The proposals will incorporate proportionate opportunities for enhancing biodiversity.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Precautionary Working Methods Statement (PWMS)

PWMS applies immediately before and during construction. Therefore, a copy of this report should be retained on-site during clearance and construction work. All site operatives should be made aware of its contents where they are relevant to the tasks they are undertaking. Additionally, the contact details of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) should be made available in case advice is required during operations.

6.1.1 Protected Species

Construction personnel will conduct a brief site walkover and check excavations each day before work commences to ensure no protected species have entered the site overnight.

At any time, if protected species are found during site clearance, demolition, or construction, work will stop, and the SQE will be contacted immediately for advice. Protected species should not be handled unless they are an immediate and unavoidable danger*. If this arises, the SQE should be contacted immediately. The animal should then be secured in an escape-proof, ventilated container and stored in a shady location before being released by the ecologist. [*Bats should be handled with gloves to prevent injury to the animal and to avoid being bitten.]

6.1.2 Birds

Pre-work inspections should be conducted to ensure that nesting birds are not present. If nesting birds are found during clearance or construction, work will stop, and the SQE will be contacted immediately for advice. All bird species are offered protection under

the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) when nesting or preparing nests (typically, but not exclusively, between March and August inclusive).

As such, clearance should be carried out outside the breeding bird season to avoid disturbing or destroying active nests. Should this time frame be unfeasible, it is recommended that a nesting bird check be conducted before commencing work. If active nests are observed, structures must be left alone until the SQE is satisfied that the young have successfully fledged.

6.2.4 Site Clearance

Structures - Checks for protected species and nesting birds will be conducted before any alterations to buildings. Where structures have crevices or holes, they should be checked before demolition using a torch to ensure there is no wildlife present. Additionally, when stripping roof sheets or timber cladding, constant surveillance must be applied. This work should initially be undertaken with hand tools until the operative is satisfied that it is safe to proceed with machinery. Contact the SQE for advice if in doubt.

Ground Works and Miscellaneous - Short-mown vegetation should be maintained on-site throughout the pre-demolition period to prevent it from becoming a favourable habitat for species that may be harmed during the works. In all cases, the area should be checked before cutting commences. Once cut short, these areas should be maintained as short swards.

During debris clearance and timber and rubble pile removal, care should be taken to check these areas before moving to ensure that wildlife is not seeking refuge. Loose material piles should be dismantled manually rather than mechanically. It is advisable to bring and store only building products intended for use on the day of the site. If building products need to be stored on-site (e.g., overnight or for a few days), they should be stored on pallets or in bags on pallets to prevent the creation of refuges that attract wildlife. Where possible, building products should be placed on hard standings.

All excavations created during construction (e.g., for foundations or services) should be filled in and finished on the same day to avoid leaving any traps into which animals might fall. If this is unavoidable, then an escape route is provided overnight from the hole, which can be in the form of a wooden plank cut into the bank to provide a ramp, or the hole is entirely covered by a heavy sheet or slab flush to the surrounding ground and without holes at the sides, to exclude amphibians from crawling beneath. If in doubt, pile soil along the slab's edges to seal the edges.

Security and work floodlighting should only be used where necessary to avoid any potential detrimental impacts on commuting bats during construction. These lights should not continuously illuminate boundary vegetation at night. The principles outlined below, as set out in the Institute of Lighting Professionals' Guidance Note, should also be applied to lighting during the construction phase.

6.2 **Mitigation – New Lighting**

There should be no additional light spillage onto the surrounding boundary habitats to avoid detrimental lighting impacts on bats and nocturnal wildlife using the Site. Lighting should be restricted to the minimum level of illumination necessary for safety and security, and only where necessary. The following measures should be implemented within the lighting scheme:

- New column-mounted luminaires, lighting bollards, and wall-mounted luminaires should be selected, sited, and angled to prevent unnecessary spillage of light onto areas without illumination.
- Consider installing internal light fittings in a recess near windows facing the boundary vegetation to reduce glare and light spill.
- Ensure new LED luminaires have dimming capability, a warm white spectrum (ideally less than 2700 K, but below 3500 K) with peak wavelengths higher than 550 nm, and no UV output.
- Security lamps should use a trigger (e.g., passive infrared detector) and switch off after a short period (ideally 1-2 minutes) rather than remaining on all night.

Further guidance is available in 'Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK' (ILP 2023).

6.3 Biodiversity Enhancement Proposals

The proposed dwellings are bungalows with limited scope for integrating bat and bird boxes. Nevertheless, one bat box and one bird box should be provided. Details of these and other features, including Hedgehog access, insect boxes, and landscape enhancements, should be included in a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan conditioned upon approval.

7 REFERENCES

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

Institution of Lighting Professionals (2023). *Bats and artificial lighting in the UK*. Guidance Note 08/23.

A1 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

A1.1 Protected and Notable Species and Habitats

A1.1.1 European Protected Species (bats, great crested newts, otters, dormice, and others)

This information is intended solely as guidance, and the relevant Acts should be consulted for the correct legal wording.

European Protected Species (EPS) are protected under the EC Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora, also known as the Habitats and Species Directive. This legislation is enacted under the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (the 2017 Regulations). Therefore, works that impact EPS will likely require a licence from Natural England.

Broadly, it is an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly/deliberately injure, take, or kill a bat (or other EPS).
- To possess a bat (unless obtained legally), alive or dead.
- Intentionally or recklessly/deliberately damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that bats (or other EPS) use for shelter or protection, whether bats are present or not.
- Intentionally or recklessly/deliberately disturbs a bat (or other EPS) while occupying a structure or place it uses for shelter or protection.
- Deliberately disturb bats (or other EPS) in such a way as to be likely to affect significantly:
 - i. The ability of any significant group to survive, breed, rear or nurture their young
 - ii. The local distribution or abundance of that species.

Prosecution could result in imprisonment, fines of £5,000 per affected animal, and the confiscation of vehicles and equipment used.

A European Protected Species Licence is required before any development that may impact bats and their roosts, or other European Protected Species (EPS). An EPS licence could be required for (relevant examples):

- Demolition of a building known to be used by bats prior to the development of a site.
- When removing trees or pruning out features in which bats roost.
- When undertaking significant alterations to roof voids used by bats.

Exemptions can be granted from the protection afforded to bats under the Habitat Regulations by means of an EPS (European Protected Species) Habitats Regulations licence obtained from Natural England (NE).

Three tests must be satisfied before a licence can permit otherwise prohibited acts. In this case, only Regulation 53(2)(e) is relevant for preserving public health or safety, or for other overriding public-interest reasons. This includes social or economic ones, with beneficial consequences of primary importance to the environment.

This is subject to Natural England's satisfaction that the application additionally meets:

- Regulation 53(9)(a) that there is no satisfactory alternative.
- Regulation 53(3)(b) that the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

A1.1.2 UK Protected Species (including EPS species, badgers, water voles, barn owls, reptiles, etc.)

In England, Scotland and Wales, all bat species are also protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended) through inclusion in Schedule 5. The offences under

this Act, which cover the obstruction of places used for shelter or protection, disturbance, and sale, still apply to European Protected Species.

In England and Wales, the WCA is amended by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW), which adds an additional offence ('or recklessly') to S9(4)(a) and (b)), makes species offences arrestable, increases the time limits for some prosecutions and increases penalties.

Other species receive protection at a national level, typically against injury and killing, but this may also include the destruction of their resting places, as well as collection and sale (the latter may also apply to selected named plants). The more common reptile species have partial protection and are also Species of Principal Importance (SPI).

Certain species are protected under other national legislation, for example, the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, which provides special protection against harm to badgers or their setts.

A1.1.3 Biodiversity Species and Habitats

Some species and habitats that do not merit national protection are nevertheless threatened or endangered at a local scale, usually at the county level, or have been found to have undergone rapid decline. These are listed on the UK Species/Habitats of Principal Importance (S41) list or in county Local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and are part of the NPPF lower tier.

A1.2 **Planning**

A1.2.1 General

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2024) outlines the Government's planning policies for England and explains how these policies are expected to be applied. The NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to sustainable development and minimise impacts on, while providing net gains for, biodiversity. This includes establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures, as well as incorporating features that support priority or threatened species, such as swifts, bats, and hedgehogs.

In addition, it aims to promote the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of priority habitats and ecological networks, the protection and recovery of priority species, and the identification and pursuit of opportunities to achieve measurable net gains for biodiversity.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (OPSI 2006) (section 40(1)) 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."*

A1.2.2 Species/Habitats of Principal Importance and Biodiversity

A list of species and habitats of principal importance (SPI & HPI) has been produced to aid in assessing and evaluating biodiversity impacts. Natural England has produced standing advice (*Purpose and use of the England Biodiversity List*) regarding SPI as follows:

The England Biodiversity List has been developed to meet the requirements of Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). This legislation requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of species of flora and fauna, as well as habitats considered to be of principal importance, for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The S41 list will be used to *guide* decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 *"to have regard"* to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions (author's italics).

