

Coyne Environmental Ltd

**Wellbury House
Little Offley
SG5 3BP**



Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

July 2025

**KENNETH COYNE
Dip LA, DA, Dip TP, Cert Ecol. & Cons (Dist.) CMLI
Coyne Environmental
5 Philosophers Gate
Ashwell
Herts
SG7 5DL
01462 743723**

Company No. 15416453

INTRODUCTION

Coyne Environmental Ltd has been instructed by Peter George Town Planning to carry out an ecological assessment of Wellbury House, Little Offley, SG5 3BP for a planning application of a new multipurpose building on the derelict swimming pool. This is for the Hitchin Yeshiva (Rabbinical Jewish School). It is proposed to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the ecology of the area.

From the analysis of this study, it will be possible to review the ecological assessments, to ascertain what measures are needed to achieve a satisfactory environmental result for the site. This should enable North Herts. District Council (NHDC), to consider the impact of the proposal on the environment. It can then discharge its legal obligations under the "Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2018) and any" Outline Mitigation and Compensation Strategy" if required



I am a qualified Ecologist, with over 40 years' experience in the environmental field. This includes being a license bat worker (Bat License 2015-15943-CLS-CLS). The PRA Survey was carried out on the 10th March 2025. This was conducted in the daytime, (16C) variable conditions, light winds, dry and partly sunny.

LOCATION

Offley (pop.1646 - 2021) is a civil parish in north Hertfordshire , with both Great and Little Offley. This stands on a chalk escarpment (159m), between Hitchin and Luton . The northern part of the parish lies within the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB). Offa, King of Mercia, in the 8thC, is said to have built a palace here and gave his name to the village. Offley Place, originally Tudor with a 17th C wing was rebuilt in 1810. St Mary Magdalene's Church is 13th C. In the 1970s the A505 by-pass, has removed through traffic.

WELLBURY HOUSE

Wellbury House is a Victorian mansion, originally within a 300-acre landscaped parkland, situated in a rural area near to Little Offley. In April 1918, the Wellbury Estate, was put up for auction. It had been the home of Francis Gosling a director of Barclay's Bank. The estate

comprised a mansion, park and a farm. The estate was sold to Sir William Austin Bart. but the house and park were occupied by Stanislas Eyre, a prominent London Solicitor. Part of Wellbury Farm (21 acres) was sold to Ralph Delme-Radcliffe - Lord of the Manor of Hitchin. The remainder was sold to Alfred Bullard. (233 acres)

Bullard sold his herd of pedigree Friesians in 1923 and started growing a species of American hunban clover, which reached a height of eight feet. This was used as fodder. In 1926, he sold the farm to Mary Jane Muddle. In the 1970`s the House was bought by Bernard Kenworthy -Browne, who founded a Catholic preparatory school for boys, which closed in 2013, to be temporarily used as a care home for boys. It was then abandoned and become derelict. The house and gardens (6 acres) are now owned by the Jewish Yeshiva School.

SITE

Yeshivas Toras Chessed is a Jewish Yeshiva school (founded 1989) which follows the Ashkenazi Orthodox ritual, with a curriculum focuses on studies of the Talmud and Jewish law. The school has around 200 students. It is based in the grounds of Wellbury House off the B655 (part of the Icknield Way), with a new extension attached to one of the ends of the Mansion. Neither the gardens or the house and outbuilding have been renovated or restored. This included the abandoned and derelict swimming pool. However, some of the original structure appeared to be used in part, with a new four-storey block in a modern style. The whole site appears to be in a temporary transitional state.



The old swimming pool is location at the back of the mansion, in part of the gardens, which are very overgrown but with some of the original trees and conifers, now very mature specimens. The pool was an open-air facility, surrounded by brick walls and is completely derelict, but still half filled with rainwater. Around this are former gardens with planting now overgrown and very weedy. This extends to the rest of the grounds.

AREA DESIGNATION

Management and protection of biodiversity within the UK planning system is set out through European and UK legislation. The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) is the main protection for wildlife, including bats (European Protected Species). There is also legislation for specific species, Bats, WCA (1981), Protection of Badgers Act 1992, EU Habitats and Birds Directive and more general guidance, EU Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2020. This study and report have also considered BS 42020 (2013) Biodiversity -Code of practice for planning and development.

The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Partnership has developed the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for the county as A 50-year Vision for wildlife and natural habitats of Hertfordshire along with

the Hertfordshire Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan 2010. At the local level North Herts District Council there are several environmental initiatives, such as promoting more trees planting and wildlife verges. To the north of the site is the edge of the Chilterns with Pegsden Hill & Hoo Bit nature reserve along with Deacon Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Telegraph hill nature reserve, running along the escarpment. Part of the Devils Ditch, an ancient defensive ditch is along in the area. There are no National Nature Reserves (NNR), or RAMSA sites within the study area. These all are aimed at ensuring the environment of Hertfordshire and its wildlife is adequately protected.

ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

As the site is totally unkempt, with no apparent management (lots of fallen wood around the grounds), it initially appears to be one of no significant ecology. A full Phase 1 Habitat Survey was therefore not deemed necessary for this study, and a Walkover Ecological Survey has been undertaken. However, if this identifies any wildlife of significance, measures will be taken as set out in the JNCC guidance Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Surveys (2010) and CIEEM Guidelines (2017).



It is proposed to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the site to find what ecology is on the site and surrounding areas. Bats, European Protected Species (EPS) would be the first study of a PEA. However, as the site will not affect the main house or other buildings, an internal inspection was not necessary. The proposed development area is former lawn and shrub beds which were inspected for any evidence of potential bat holes in trees, using binoculars but nothing was found. In accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) guidelines, the proposal is assessed to be **negative** as a bat roosting site.

The areas were next inspected for any bird's nests, in the trees and scattered shrub beds, using binoculars but no active nests or nest building was observed. No avifauna was observed using the site on the survey inspection. If any work is undertaken in the bird breeding season, March -August, the vegetation must be inspected and if any active nests are found, a 10m exclusion zone must be established and left until the fledglings have flown. Using the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) guidance, the site is assessed to be a medium site for avifauna.

Large parts of the grounds are former lawns, now rough grassland (*Poa spp*, *Festuca spp*) with a few sparse weeds (*Plantago lanceolata*, *Taraxacum agg*, *Bellis perenes*) in among the grass. There are few emergent native species for insects such as bees and butterflies to find nectar and shelter.

Within the site there are opportunities for small mammals like hedgehogs but with no signs of mole activity on site. There were no runs through the grass or other vegetation, footprints or any droppings observed. No holes or small animal burrows were found and no signs of badger activity (setts). Mammals, like red fox probably do pass through the area but there are greater opportunities in the wider countryside beyond the site for wildlife generally.



The site is not one of ecological importance but the neglected nature of the overall site where apart from a few insects seeking flowers for pollen and possible small birds foraging for seed bearing grasses and other herbs. The site is therefore classed as of **low** ecological significance.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN (BNG)

The Environment Act 2021 has a mandatory require for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on developments of a minimum of 10%. Within this scheme it is proposed that the BNG should be undertaken as part of the planning permission with suitable mitigation or enhancement required to meet the Statutory Net Gain, to be incorporated into any required ecological enhancements and landscape design proposals, as part of the Reserved Matters, in the Approval.

This can include enhancements in the form of bird and bat boxes, hedgehog homes, refugia, native tree planting and wildflower areas. These can be set out in an ecological plan, as part of the detailed design.

CONCLUSION

Coyne Environmental Ltd has been instructed to carry out an ecological study of Wellbury House, Little Offley, SG5 3BP, for a proposal to develop a multi-purpose building on the site. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) has been undertaken, and no ecological habitats of importance have been found. The site survey and subsequent desk top study indicates that this is not in an area of high risk for any specific species or sensitive habitats. The assessment has concluded that the site has a **no potential** for bats and a **low potential** for wildlife in general.

Therefore, in my professional opinion. I assess that the proposal to develop part the site will have minimal impact on the overall ecology of the area and bats (EPS) in particular. I conclude that, Following the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) metric assessment in accordance with the environment Act 2021 and any required mitigation,

no further environmental studies are required and that the proposal can be determined by North Herts District Council, on this basis.

REFERENCES

Ownership Land Registry Map

Proposals Map

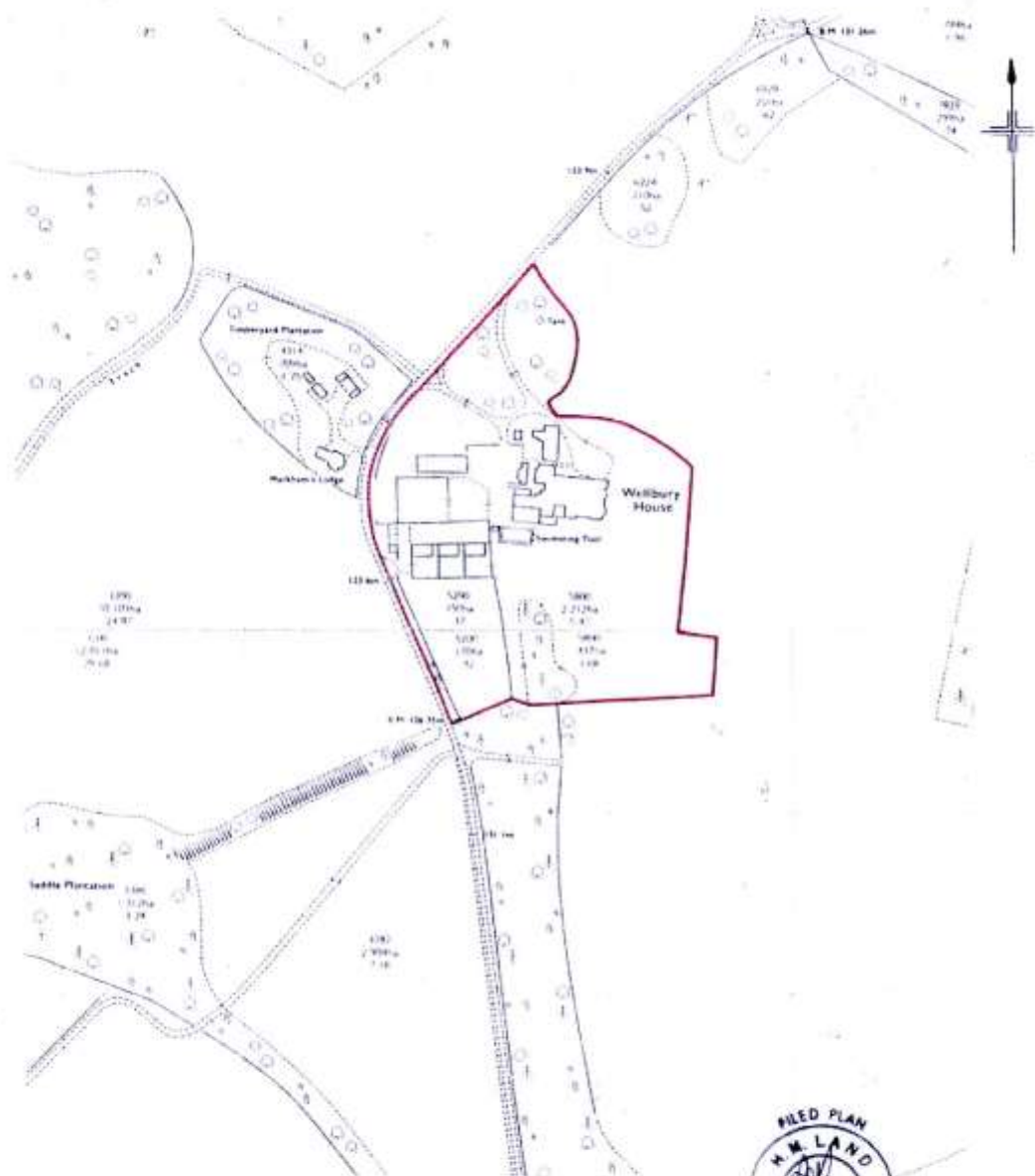
Location Plan

Original Estate Plan

Environment Act 2021

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981

H.M. LAND REGISTRY		TITLE NUMBER HD275805
ORDNANCE SURVEY PLAN REFERENCE	TL1328 TL1329 TL1330	Scale 1:2500
COUNTY	HERTFORDSHIRE	DISTRICT NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE
		Crown copyright



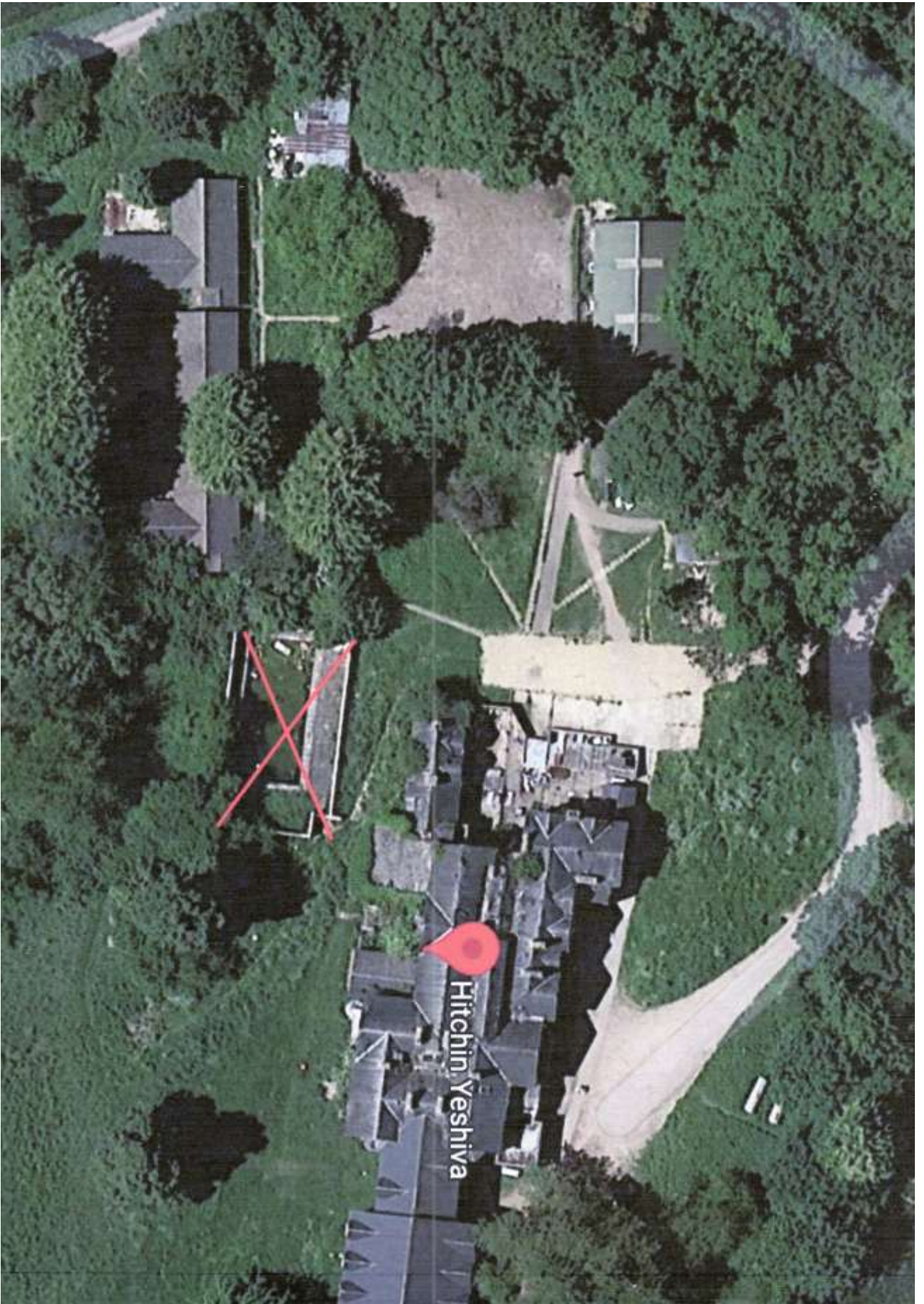
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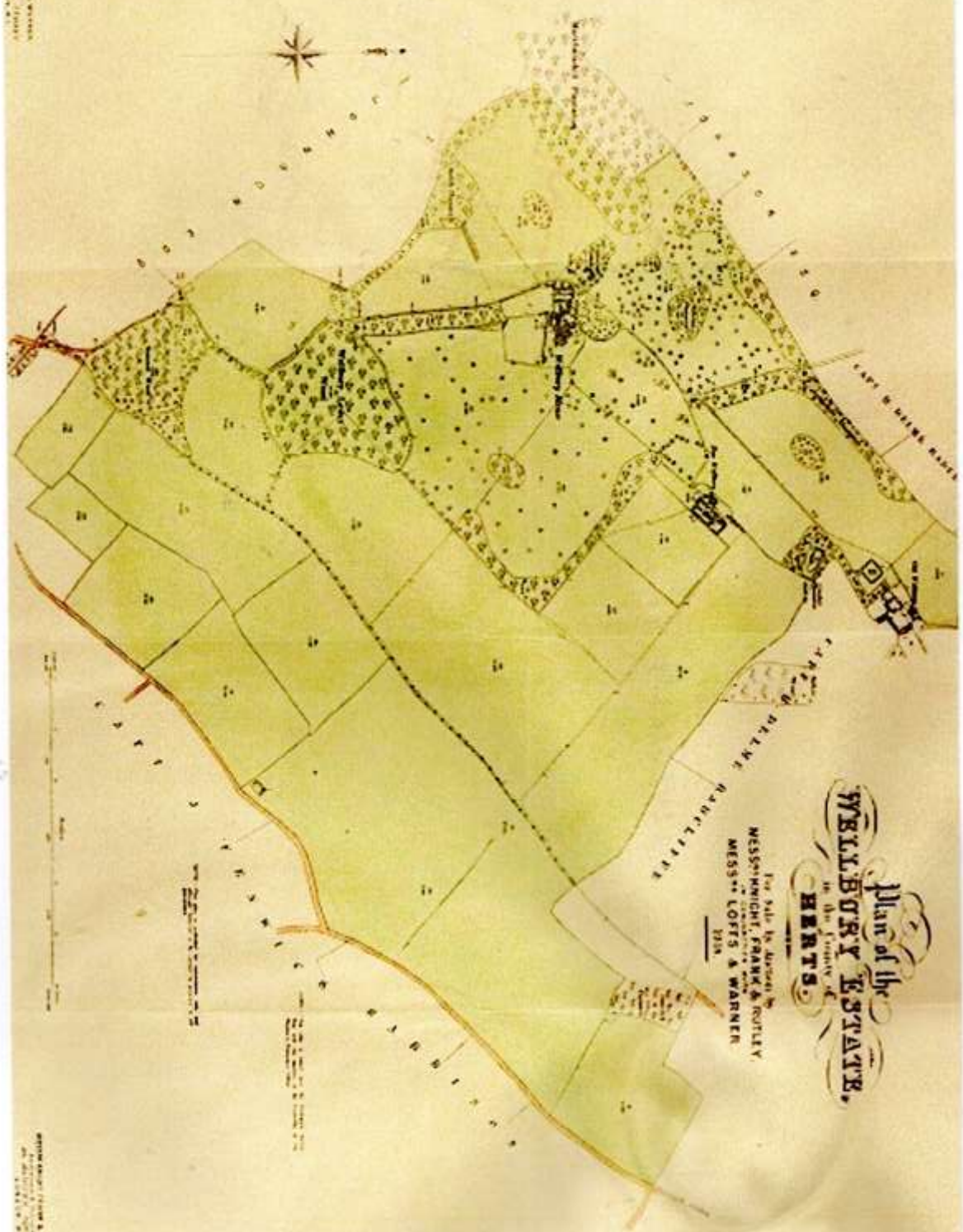
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WELLBURY ESTATE
HERTS.



Plan of the
WELLBURY ESTATE,
HERTS.

For Sale by Auction by
MESSRS. FRANK & CO. LIMITED,
15, ABchurch Lane, LONDON, E.C. 4.
MESSRS. LLOYD & WATKINS,
15, ABchurch Lane, LONDON, E.C. 4.
1911.

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