

Hertfordshire LEADS (Ecology)
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Application
25/01420/FP

Change of use and external alterations to former agricultural buildings comprising grade II listed threshing barn and non-listed courtyard buildings. Partial demolition of courtyard building between proposed Units 1 and 2 to facilitate access. Single-storey rear extension to facilitate Unit 10. Subdivision and two-storey rear extension to farmhouse to form Units 11 and 12. Erection of new building for two dwellings (Units 13 and 14). Partial demolition and modify building for cycle storage to Units 2 to 8 inclusive. Erection of building to accommodate 2 car port spaces for Unit 5 and refuse storage for Units 2-8 inclusive. Detached bin enclosure / cycle store buildings for Units 9 - 14 inclusive. Hard and soft landscaping in association with the provision of private and communal space. Boundary treatment, installation of 14no. EV charging points, installation of solar PV array on south facing roof slopes of Unit 14 and both the cycle and refuse storage buildings serving Units 2 -8 including provision of BNG area. Highover Farm Highover Way Hitchin Hertfordshire SG4 0RQ

Documents;

- **Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) & Baseline Habitat Map**, 29 July 2024, Cotswold Wildlife Surveys.
- **Nocturnal Bat Survey Report**, 15 August & 12 September 2024 (Issued 06/02/2025), Cotswold Wildlife Surveys.
- **Reptile & Amphibian Survey Report**, 15 August – 28 September 2024 (Issued 06/02/2025), Cotswold Wildlife Surveys.
- **Arboricultural Impact Assessment**, 12 June 2025, Andrew Belson Arboricultural Consultant.
- **Arboricultural Method Statement & Tree Protection Plans**, 29 August 2024 & 12 June 2025, Andrew Belson Arboricultural Consultant.
- **Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool**, Completion Date 24 June 2025, Cotswold Wildlife Surveys.

Summary of Advice:

Application can be determined with Conditions and Informatives listed

Pre-determination

- [Protected](#) species, No further surveys advised.
- [BNG Sufficient minimum information provided](#)

Determination

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	• Protected species, Sufficient to determine application. • BNG - Significant onsite Enhancement – secure by Condition • Conditions Enhancements, LEMP. • Informative • Bat licence, Breeding birds. Post- Determination • BNG –Advice for BGP stage
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Comments and recommended Conditions and Informatives:

Ecological Report

The application is accompanied by ecological reports which include an appropriate desk study, covering non-statutory designated sites and protected and notable species within 1 km of the site, together with statutory constraint information obtained via DEFRA MAGIC. I am not aware of any other existing ecological records for this site.

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) has been submitted which recommended further surveys for bats and for reptiles/amphibians Which have been supplied. The PEA confirmed that no further survey was required for badger or breeding birds, although standard nesting-bird precautions apply.

Protected species

Bats: Preliminary Roost Assessment, undertaken as part of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), identified the presence of a Brown Long-eared Bat roost. . Two nocturnal emergence/re-entry surveys were subsequently carried out on 15 August and 12 September 2024, which confirmed the additional presence of a day roost for one bat in the farmhouse, and two bats in the southernmost barn used by Common Pipistrelle. I have no reason to dispute these findings, and the application can be determined accordingly. As the proposed works will result in the loss of these confirmed roosts, the development will require a Bat Mitigation Class Licence from Natural England. Sufficient mitigation and compensation measures have been submitted to maintain the favourable conservation status of the bat species present. With this information in place, I consider the Local Planning Authority has adequate information to fully consider bats and to satisfy its obligations under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) prior to determination. I advise an [Informative](#) should be attached to any permission given:

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Reptiles: Given the presence of records of Common Lizard on nearby land a reptile survey was completed. Appropriate survey effort has been submitted following best-practice guidelines, confirming that reptiles are absent from the application site. No reptile-specific mitigation is required.

Great Crested Newts: The survey results assessed that given the poor habitat potential the likely presence of great crested newts within the area to be affected by the proposal to be **negligible**. I have no reason to doubt this conclusion.

Breeding birds: A **Barn Owl** was noted **roosting in a barn** during the nocturnal bat survey on **15 August 2024**, but was not present during the PEA site visit on 29 July 2024. In addition to the inclusion of a **Barn Owl box** see recommended conditions standard precautions should be taken. I advise the inclusion of an [Informative](#) to ensure the applicant is aware of their legal duties in this regard.

Ecological enhancements: The ecological reports include recommendations for species-specific enhancement measures, including the installation of bat roosting features and bird nesting boxes. In order to make these policy compliant with paragraph 187(d) of the NPPF and in line with the mapped measures within the LNRS The Integrated bird boxes should be universal swift boxes or the equivalent. I advise that securing these measures will ensure the application is policy-compliant and will deliver unmapped biodiversity enhancements aligned with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. These measures should be secured by an appropriate [Conditions](#)

BNG- Pre Determination

Minimum BNG information pre- determination:

A baseline map has been provided which is consistent with the habitat assessment. The submitted metric containing. The metric start page includes the completion date and the name of the person completing the metric. The Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Completion Date 24 June 2025) shows on-site baseline values of 4.68 habitat units. The baseline habitats are consistent with the base line habitat map. As a result, I have no reason to doubt these values.

Strategic Significance: The values for the baseline habitats have been set as low in line with government LNRS guidance. Consequently, I advise that the minimum information requirements have been met and the application can be determined accordingly.

BNG- Determination

Significant Onsite Enhancement: The proposed BNG includes areas of medium distinctiveness habitats. As a result, I advise that the On-Site enhancements should be considered Significant Enhancement. Given the scale and nature of these enhancements, in this case, it would be proportionate to secure these by [Conditions](#)

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requiring: A Landscape Ecological Management Plan demonstrating how the habitat will be created/ enhanced and maintained for 30 years.

BNG netgain predetermination: The metric demonstrates that all required trading rules are satisfied and that the overall project achieves a total net gain of 11.14%, comprising an on-site uplift of 0.52 habitat units.

Whilst the biodiversity gain condition is a post determination matter, the present information allows the LPA reasonable confidence that the general Biodiversity Condition will be discharged

BNG-Post Determination

Biodiversity Gain Plan: I advise this is completed using the government template. In order the Biodiversity Gain Plan to be discharged it should be submitted with the following minimum information either within the body of the plan or as supporting information.

- Completed metric tool calculation that demonstrates
 - a minimum 10% net gain achieved within the trading rules and consistent with the figures quoted within the Biodiversity Gain Plan.
 - A fully completed start page including project details and the date the final version of the metric was completed.
- pre-development and post-development plans (showing the location of on-site habitat, the direction of north and drawn to an identified scale, Post Development Plans should be sufficient to record the location of the post determination habitats within the final metric submitted to discharge the BGP.
- a description of how they will manage and monitor significant on-site gains (for example, With a habitat management and monitoring plan)

Conditions and Informatives

1. Condition – Installation of Bat and Bird Boxes

*Prior to the first occupation of the development, details of the number, design and exact locations of the ecological enhancement features recommended within the ecological reports—including a minimum of **two integrated bat boxes, one multi-chamber bat box, one Barn Owl box, and a minimum of two integrated universal swift boxes**—shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved measures shall be installed prior to occupation and retained thereafter for the lifetime of the development.*

2. Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP)

*No development shall take place (including demolition, ground works or vegetation clearance) until a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This should include the establishment of **wildflower grassland (other neutral grassland), new native tree planting**, as detailed in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Completion Date 24 June 2025).*

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3. Bat informative

A bat licence from Natural England is required to deliver this development. It will / may be a criminal offence if works proceed without a bat licence. It will / may also be a criminal offence if the terms of conditions of the bat licence, including in particular the mitigation and compensation requirements under the licence (which may require certain measures to be delivered before the development works start), are not adhered to.

4. Bird informative

*Vegetation removal or building works must avoid the bird nesting season (**1 March–30 September**) unless a pre-works check by a suitably qualified ecologist confirms absence of active nests. A 5 m buffer around any active nest will be applied.*

I trust these comments are of assistance and kind regards.

Simon Richards

Senior Ecologists, Hertfordshire LEADS