

COYNE ENVIRONMENTAL LTD

**35 Gray's Lane
Hitchin
SG5 2HH**



PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

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INTRODUCTION

Coyne Environmental Ltd has been instructed to undertake an ecological survey for 35 Gray's Lane, Hitchin, SG5 2HH. This is to establish the potential presence or absence of protected ecological features. It is proposed to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is not required as this is a self-build application. The PEA will contribute to the submission of a planning application to the North Herts District Council (NHDC)

The completed PEA will allow the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to consider the impacts that the proposal will have on wildlife. The Authority can then set out its legal obligations under the 'Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations' (2018) and 'Outline Mitigation and Compensation Strategy' if required. The PEA was conducted on the 10th of December 2025, by Ecologist Sara Bates, in the daytime in good weather (11°C), no wind and no rain.

SITE

The grid reference to the surveyed site is TL 17778 29096, close to Tilehouse Street Baptist Church. The site proposal is for a replacement dwelling with a covered pergola and open swimming pool, in the rear garden at 35 Gray's Lane, SG5 2HH. The site is within Hitchin, which is one of the oldest continuously occupied urban centres in Hertfordshire.



Figure 1 Google satellite image of the area surrounding the proposal site.

The site is surrounded by further residential properties, in good upkeep, in comparison to the unmanaged 35 Gray's Lane. The site is at the Western edge of Hitchin, where many houses have extensions into their large gardens.

AREA DESIGNATIONS

Biodiversity management and protection within the UK planning system is described through European and UK legislation. The main protection for wildlife is the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), including for bats (European Protected Species). Legislation for specific species is also present such as, Protection of Badgers Act 1992, EU Habitats and Birds Directive and more general guidance,

Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994, which defines "European Protected Species" (EPS) and EU Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2020.

The North Hertfordshire District Council, Local Plan 2011-2031 states the aim to protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment by requiring development proposals to consider the landscape character and features of the surrounding area. Hitchin has no designated sites, and none are present within 500 meters of the site, and this site is not within the Green Belt (GB). There is a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) at 0.54 miles to the North-West of the site, at Oughtonhead Lane. No ponds are present within the 500-meter buffer zone study area.

ECOLOGICAL EVALUATION

A full Phase 1 Habitat Survey was not deemed necessary, due to the nature of the site. An Ecological Walkover Survey was therefore undertaken aligned with the UKHab Handbook (v2.1). However, if the survey 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).

The application site is an unmanaged residential property, where the rear garden shows the extent of the property needing attention. The front garden to the North of the site consists mainly of concrete for the driveway (**UKHab Code: u1b**). Additionally, the front garden contains ornamental planting (**UKHab Code: u1 – 846**) on either side of the drive, the North-East of the front garden contains four



Figure 2 Hard standing at the application site.

trees, with one tree at the North-West side. The front garden contains a small circle of bare ground (**UKHab Code: u1 – 810**) within the concrete area, with evidence of previous planting present which has now been cut to ground level.

The main dwelling is a bungalow in moderate condition with a concrete tiled roof in reasonable condition. The windows on the bungalow (**UKHab Code: u1b5**) are PVC and are in good condition, with the rear of the building having a sliding patio door. A single garage is attached to the dwelling with the main door top opening. The rear of the garage has a window missing and a wooden door to access the back garden.

The rear of the site is mainly large bramble scrub (**UKHab Code: h3d**) which has recently been cut back to form a pathway to the back of the garden. Scattered across the recently managed bramble is species such as cleavers (*Galium aparine*) and rumpled cloverleaf (*Geum sylvaticum*). A poor condition wooden barn (**UKHab Code: u1b5**) is at the South-East with a felt roof and plastic windows. Eight trees are present within the rear garden, which have had little human intervention; with a large amount covered in ivy (*Hedera helix*) and neglected. A section of the rear garden consists of concrete (**UKHab Code: u1b**) which joins to the front garden and is separated from the bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) scrub by a brick wall and steps. The low brick wall separation is close to an overgrown mixed hedge (**UKHab Code: h2**) consisting of laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) which have been covered in ivy.



Figure 3 Photographs of the rear garden with recent management from the large bramble scrub covering most of the garden.

ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The whole site will be surveyed and assessed for ecology, as well as the surrounding area. There is residential housing surrounding the application site. As well as examining the habitats on site, particular attention will be given to bats and Great Crested Newts (GCN), both European Protected Species (EPS).

Bats

The external areas of the building were fully investigated for bat droppings and insect's meals, no droppings were found; however, an insect wing was found on the windowsill at the front of the property to the North-West. The roof tiles were in good condition, but signs of wear were present in places. Small areas were found on the roof where bats would be able to access, provided evidence in photographs. No holes were found to the rear of the property, but the East of the roof was unable to be investigated due to the orientation of the roof. Additionally, the rear of the attached garage is missing a window, creating a large opening into the garage.



Figure 4 Potential bat roost locations on site.

The trees on the site were all investigated for potential openings, including for urine stains or scratching. No holes were present on the trees, where investigation could occur. However, due to a large amount of ivy present on most of the trees it is not possible to rule out the opportunity of a bat roost. Therefore, the site has been determined to have a moderate potential as a bat roost. Therefore, with the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines **two bat presence/absence surveys** will be required.

Birds

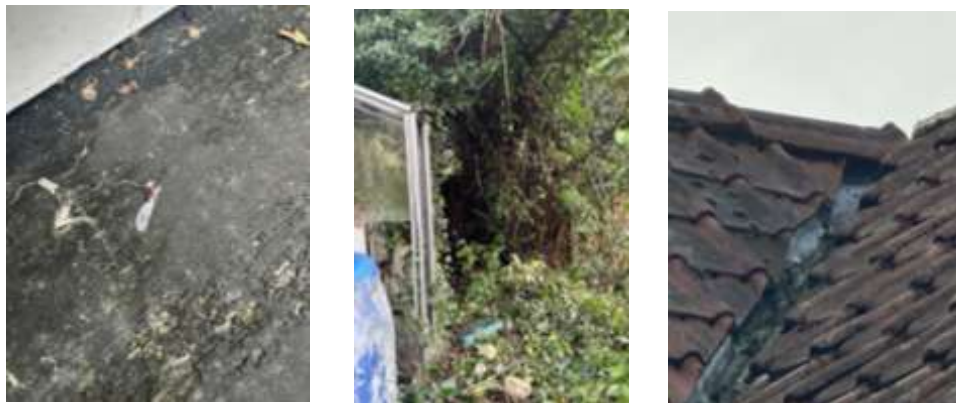


Figure 2 Additional photographs of potential roosts, as well as the insect wing located on the front windowsill.

The trees and scrub on the property and surrounding areas offer potential habitats, food sources and nesting sites to birds. The survey showed no active nests or signs of nest building. There is a bird bath present on the sealed surface in the rear garden, which appears to not have been maintained. Bird species noted on the survey included robins (*Erithacus rubecula*), blue tits (*Cyanistes caeruleus*), and jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*).

Any work that is required to be undertaken near to the trees, must not be carried out in the normal breeding season March-August. If emergency work is required, the trees are to be inspected. If bird nests are found, a protection zone of at least 3 metres diameter must be retained until the fledglings have left the nest. This will be included in the Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS).

Mammals

The general vegetation on site includes sealed surfaces and a large amount of bramble scrub in the rear garden where clearance has recently undertaken. The garden is fenced on the perimeter, with the South corner having a small hole where some mammals could enter. No evidence of holes/burrows or tracks were noted of voles, shrews or other small mammals were found.

The walkover found no mammals on site, including badger setts or hedgehogs. No trails, passages (footprints) through shrubs or taller vegetation, latrine areas (droppings), discarded meals etc were found. Potential refugia for hedgehogs (long vegetation, sheltered corners etc) were searched but no animals were found. As part of the **PWMS this will include for the potential presence of mammals**, so no specific badger survey is considered necessary.

Reptiles/Amphibians

The area is unlikely to provide opportunity for reptiles as the site was largely bramble scrub, enclosed within a fence line. Additionally, the surrounding areas of the site consist of further residential gardens. Inspection under possible refugia (stones, wood, equipment etc) was carried out but no evidence of reptiles including faeces or slough was detected. Due to the surrounding environment and limited evidence of reptiles, Coyne Environmental Ltd concludes that the site has a low probability for reptiles. The proposal is unlikely to affect any reptiles such as slow worms or grass snakes; therefore, no further reptile surveys are needed.

Great Crested Newts (GCN)

Great Crested Newts (GCN) are European Protected Species (EPS) under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and by UK law in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. There are no ponds present within the site boundary, and the closest pond is outside of the 500-metre buffer set for designations around the site. Due to the lack of ponds within the area the site has been determined as not a potential GCN habitat. Provisions within **the PWMS will include measures for GCN protection**.

Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS)

The following works are recommended to be undertaken to ensure any existing ecology and wildlife of the site is managed to conserve as much as practical:

1. If in the unlikely event bats are encountered during development, work must be stopped immediately and the ecologist informed. Depending on what is found an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) may be required to undertake a watching brief. This would be continued until it is decided by the ECoW that no further evidence of bats has occurred and the supervision can be discontinued.

2. As the trees and scrub may be used by birds as possible nesting sites, no work to the existing vegetation should be undertaken in the bird breeding season (Mar-Aug) which is particularly important for House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) which are in steep decline (Red Listed). If necessary, the trees should be inspected to see if nest sites are present and active. If this is the case the ecologist should be contacted for advice.
3. When carrying out removal of any necessary vegetation clearance, care must be taken to ensure any unexpected wildlife and particularly GCN, are not encountered (under refugia -stones / timber). If any EPS are encountered, they should be allowed to escape at their own free will. If necessary, reptile protective fencing should be installed to prevent any further encounters with wildlife.
4. Care should also be taken to ensure small mammals, like hedgehogs are not present in the undergrowth. It is also important to ensure that if clearance does involve wood fires these are inspected to ensure animals like hedgehogs have not temporarily taken refuge here.
5. Works to prepare the land should be timed to minimise the potential impact on possible wildlife.
6. Any scrub or similar vegetation clearance necessary, should ideally be removed in winter (Dec-Feb) to within 20cm of ground level to ensure that any possible foraging/migrating between areas are not affected.
7. Any ground level vegetation clearance can be undertaken during the spring/summer (mid Mar-mid Jun) when activity is more dispersed.
8. Soil stripping should ideally be undertaken during the active season, between March to October and in suitable weather conditions.
9. Given that wildlife is unlikely to visit the site, simple precautions will be sufficient to ensure that they do not exploit more attractive or useful habitats created during the works by keeping the site tidy and storing materials off the ground. Any soils stacking should be smoothed to prevent potential cavities and covered in tarpaulin.
10. If in the unlikely event that animals are found on site, they should be left to disperse of their own accord and works should be undertaken from the centre of the site outwards to allow for dispersal. Any animal that needs further assistance to escape should be gently placed in a clean bucket or other container with a lid and moved on to a safe location away from the development.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

The Environment Act 2021 has a mandatory requirement for a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) uplift on developments. However, this application is exempt from BNG requirements, due to being a self-build project. However, enhancements can still be performed and incorporated into a landscape design proposal.

Ecological enhancements may be needed which can be in the form of bird and bat boxes, a landscape design proposal with planting of native trees and wildflower areas with insect hotels for bees and butterflies. Passages through fences can allow the connection of habitats of hedgehogs and the placement of hedgehog houses in discreet locations will help the species.

CONCLUSION

Coyne Environmental Ltd has been instructed to carry out this ecological study of 35 Gray's Lane, Hitchin, SG5 2HH. This report details findings from the survey. From the above assessment, due to the moderate potential for bat roosts **two bat emergence surveys are recommended**. Should bats be recorded emerging, further survey and/or a Natural England mitigation licence will be required, and appropriate avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures would be designed accordingly. No other ecology of significance was identified during the walkover therefore no other surveys are required, following the bat survey.

The proposal may disturb some wildlife while the work is being undertaken, however this will only be temporary. A Biodiversity Net Gain Metric is not required as the proposal will be a self-build. Therefore in my professional opinion, I assess that the proposed development would have minimal impact on the ecology of the area. I recommend no other surveys would be required at the site. On this basis, the proposal can be considered by North Hertfordshire District Council, when the application is submitted.

REFERENCES

Baseline Habitat Map

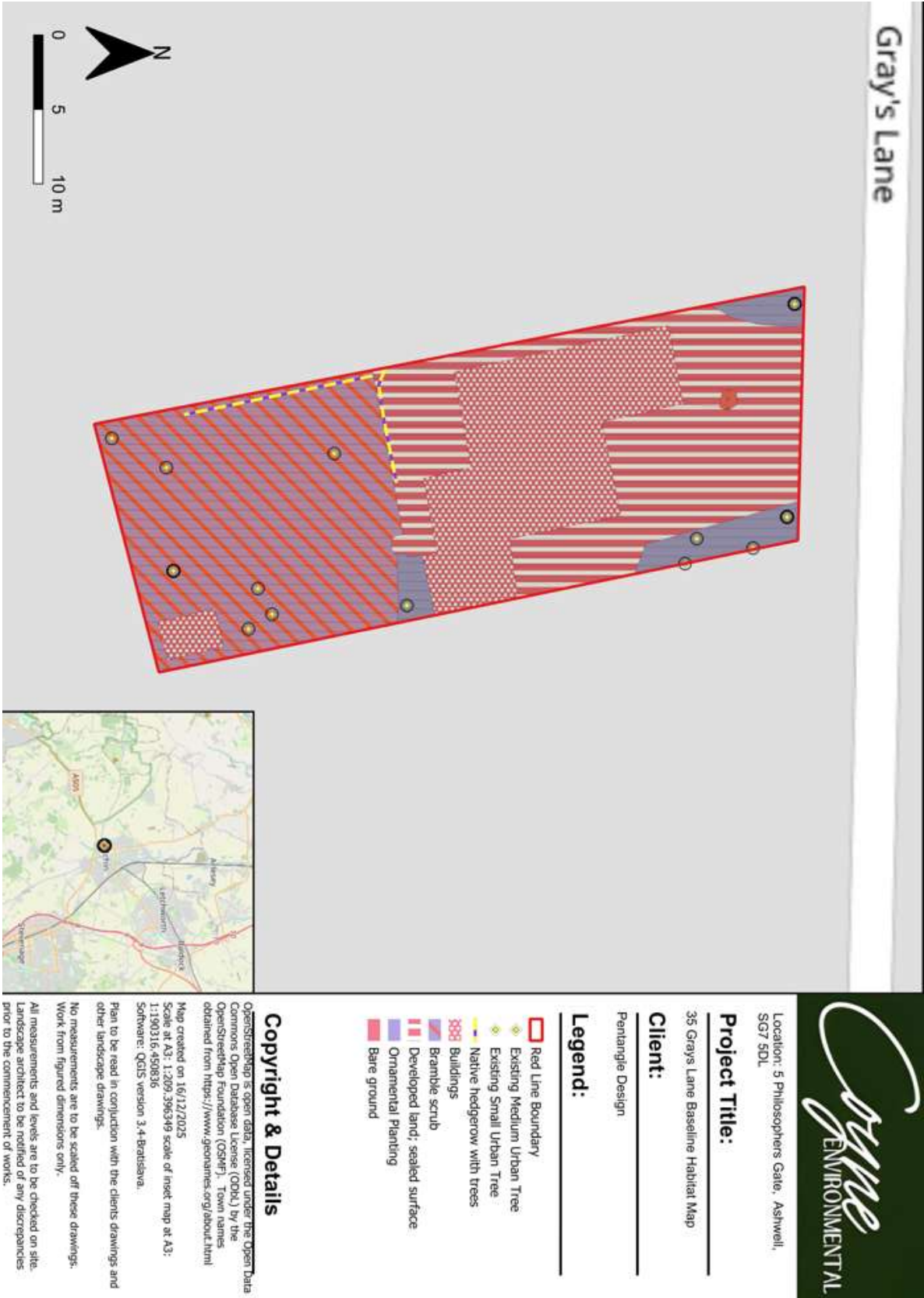
Proposed Habitat Map

Additional Photographs

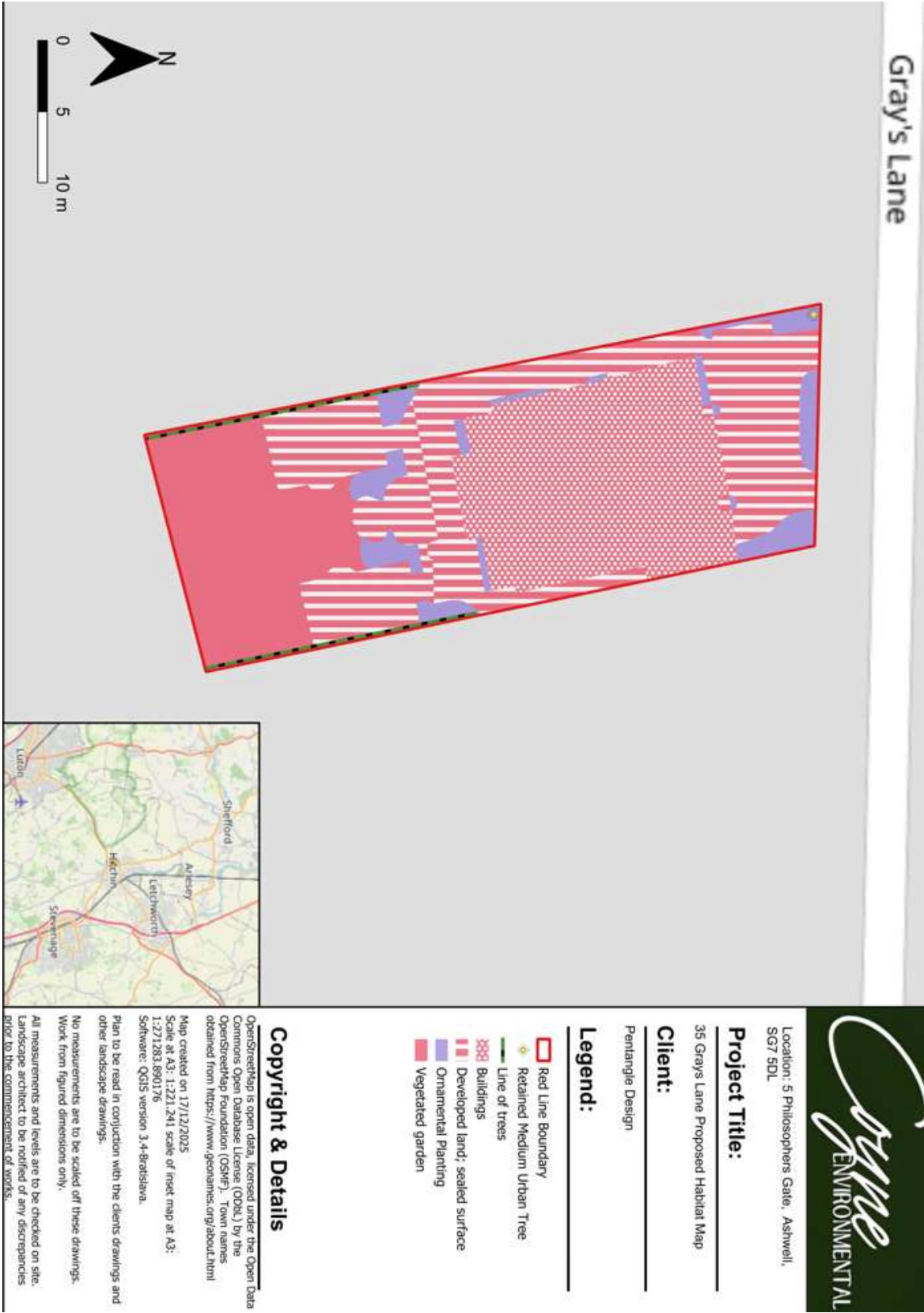
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031

Appendix 1: Baseline Habitat Map



Appendix 2: Proposed Habitat Map



Appendix 3: Additional Photographs

	
The wooden shed in the South-East corner in poor condition	Concrete passage to the West of the house leading to the rear garden.
	
Section of the overgrown mixed hedge in the rear garden, leading to steps down to the bramble scrub	Front of the property with a bare ground section in the centre of the drive.
	
Steps in the rear garden leading from concrete to the bramble scrub area.	View into the bramble scrub from the steps in the rear garden.

