Minety BESS Grid Connection Cable Route

on behalf of Axis PED

Ecological Assessment Report



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Report Verification and Declaration of Compliance

This report has been prepared with reference to best practice guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland, as defined by CIEEM (2022) and is provided in accordance with the provisions of British Standard 42020:2013 Biodiversity: Code of practice for planning and development and BS 8683:2021 Process for Designing and Implementing Biodiversity Net Gain - Specification.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Scope

1.1.1 Avian Ecology Ltd. (AEL) was commissioned by Axis PED to undertake an Ecological Assessment in relation to a proposed grid connection cable route at Minety National Grid Substation ('the Proposed Development'). The cable route would serve as a connection between the substation and the Battery Energy Storage System consented under planning reference 20/07390/FUL.

1.1.2 The study area comprised the planning application site boundary ('the Site') shown in **Figure 1**, unless otherwise stated.

1.1.3 This report provides baseline information and an assessment of potential ecological effects of the Proposed Development.

1.1.4 The objectives of the assessment are to:

- Provide baseline information on the current habitats and ecological features both within the Site and in the immediately surrounding area;
- Identify the proximity of any designated sites for nature conservation interest and provide an assessment of any potential effects the Proposed Development may have on these;
- Identify the presence or potential presence of any protected species or habitats and provide an assessment of any potential effects the Proposed Development may have on these; and,
- Provide recommendations for further pre-construction checks and / or mitigation measures, if required as well as providing an outline of proposed habitat enhancements.

1.1.5 The assessment has been informed by desk-based review of relevant ecological information and an extended habitat survey; and refers to relevant legislation, planning policy and guidance as appropriate.

1.1.6 Consideration has been given to the potential presence of rare, protected, or notable habitats and species, and the location of nearby features including designated sites for nature conservation.

1.1.7 Throughout this report, common names for species are favoured over scientific names unless there is potential for confusion and in which case scientific names are also presented.

1.2 Site Overview

1.2.1 The Site is located immediately south of the existing Minety National Grid Substation, approximately 2.8km west of the village of Minety, Wiltshire. The Site consists of an area of scrub and woodland edge habitat and is bounded to the north by the Minety National Grid Substation and associated infrastructure (e.g., tracks) and by woodland to other aspects, some of which is classified as ancient woodland.

1.2.2 In the wider context, the Site is situated in a rural landscape dominated by arable and pastoral farmland with fragmented patches of deciduous woodland.

1.2.3 Extensive development is being undertaken in the area surrounding the Site, including the following developments:

- 20/07390/FUL Installation of a Battery Storage facility (consented);
- 20/03528/FUL Installation of a renewable energy park (consented);

- PL/2022/09258 Extension of existing substation (under consultation); and,
- PL/2022/05504 Installation of a Battery Energy Storage System (under consultation).

1.2.4 Therefore, given the above developments, the baseline may differ between the surveys undertaken and construction of the Proposed Development. Where this is anticipated, reference has been made in the text.

1.2.5 The Site location is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

1.3 Proposed Development

1.3.1 The Proposed Development will include the digging of a new cable route required to connect a consented battery storage development (planning application reference: 20/07390/FUL) to the National Grid Substation. Works will briefly involve the excavation of a trench, laying of cabling and trench backfilling/ reinstatement. Clearance of woodland edge vegetation will be required to facilitate works.

1.4 Legislative and Planning Framework

Legislation

1.4.1 Reference has been made to the following key pieces of legislation listed in **Table 1:1**.

Table 1:1: Key legislation

International
• Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat 1971 (hereafter referred to as the 'the Ramsar Convention); • Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats 1979 (hereafter referred to as the 'the Bern Convention'; and, • UNESCO convention on the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972).
National
• Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; • Hedgerow Regulations 1997; • Infrastructure Act 2015; • Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006); • Protection of Badgers Act 1992; • The 'Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended); • The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019; • The Environment Act 2021; • The Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019; • The Town and Country Planning Act 1990; and, • The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

1.4.2 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) remains in place following the United Kingdom's (UK's) withdrawal from the European Union (EU) with only relatively minor changes coming into force on 31st December 2020, with the 2017 regulations being transposed into national (England and Wales) legislation via the Conservation of Habitats and Species Amendment (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. They are hereafter referred to as the 'Habitats Regulations'.

Policy

1.4.3 Reference has been made to the following key pieces of policy listed in **Table 1.2**.

Table 1:2: Key Policy

National
• Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions (Natural England. 2022); • Biodiversity Net Gain. Good practice principles for development; • BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity – Code of Practice for Planning and Development; • BS 8683:2021 Process for Designing and Implementing Biodiversity Net Gain – Specification; • European protected species policies for mitigation licences (Natural England. 2022); • National Planning Policy Framework 2 (NPPF, 2021); and, • The United Kingdom Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). •
Local
• Wiltshire Core Strategy (2015)[1] • Biodiversity and Development Guidance[2] • Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan (2008)[3]

1.4.4 The 'UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework' succeeds the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) and 'Conserving Biodiversity – the UK Approach'. The lists of priority species and habitats agreed under UK BAP still form the basis of much biodiversity work and are therefore considered within this report in the context of the objectives of the Biodiversity Framework. BAPs identify habitats and species of nature conservation priority on a UK (UK BAP) and Local (LBAP) scale. UK BAPs formed the basis for statutory lists of priority species and habitats in England under Section 41 (England) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, and so are also relevant in the context of this legislation.

[1] https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planning-policy-core-strategy
[2] https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/1102/Biodiversity-and-development
[3] https://www.wiltshirewildlife.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/wiltshirebap2008%281%29.pdf

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

2.1.1 A desk study was undertaken to identify existing information on the presence of designated sites for nature conservation, protected and notable species and habitats within proximity to the Site as follows:

- Statutory and Non-statutory designated sites for nature conservation within 2km of the Site; and,
- Existing records of priority habitats, protected and notable faunal species, within 2km of the Site.

2.1.2 The following key sources were consulted:

- Natural England and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) websites[4];
- The Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website[5];
- District Level Licencing Data[6];
- Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Record Centre (WSBRC); and,
- Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Inventory[7] (ATI)

2.1.3 Reference was also made to Ordnance Survey maps and online aerial images (www.google.co.uk/maps) in order to determine any features of nature conservation interest in the wider area, including potential ponds and watercourses.

Desk Study Limitations

2.1.4 Many of the records returned through the desk study were recorded imprecisely with only four or six figure grid references, corresponding to a 100m or 1km grid square, respectively. Therefore, these records are useful only to indicate the broad distribution of species, and cannot be relied upon to determine if the species has been recorded within the Site.

2.1.5 Unless otherwise stated, this report refers to the number of records identified through the desk study, however it is acknowledged that some records are of multiple individuals. The purpose of the desk study is primarily to broadly identify the presence, distribution and regularity of use of the target species, and not to determine exact numbers present, therefore this is not considered a limitation to the assessment. Precise numbers are given where considered pertinent to the assessment.

[4] http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/
[5] https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx
[6] https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/great-crested-newts-edna-pond-surveys-for-district-level-licensing-england?geometry=-1.451%2C51.749%2C-1.002%2C51.823
[7] https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/

2.2 Field Surveys

Extended Habitat Survey

2.2.1 An extended habitat survey was undertaken on the 11th May 2023 by K. Love *BSc Hons* with additional information gathered on 25th May 2023 by L. Quarton *MSc* and A. Hulme *BSc Hons*, all of whom are suitably experienced and qualified ecologists with experience of habitat surveys. The survey followed UK industry standard UKHab Methodology[8] with reference to the CIEEM, guidance (2017)[9].

2.2.2 The survey covered the Site as presented in **Figure 1**.

2.2.3 Habitats were mapped and described, using a series of 'target notes' (TNs). The survey was extended to include the additional recording of specific features indicating the presence, or likely presence, of protected species, invasive species and other species of conservation significance.

Limitations to Field Surveys

2.2.4 Limitations to field surveys are discussed below.

Extended Habitat Survey

2.2.5 An Extended habitat survey does not constitute a detailed botanical survey or faunal species list or provide a full protected species survey but, enables competent ecologists to ascertain an understanding of the ecology of the site in order to:

- Broadly identify the nature conservation value of a site and assess the significance of any potential impacts on habitat/species recorded; and/or,
- Confirm the need and extent of any additional specific ecological surveys that are required to identify the true nature conservation value of a site (if any).

2.2.6 The survey visit was undertaken in May and therefore within the optimal period for botanical surveys (approximately April to September).

[8] http://www.ukhab.org

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

3 BASELINE

3.1 Future Baseline

3.1.1 Due to extensive development on land surrounding the Minety National Grid Substation, the baseline is likely to differ from that recorded during habitat surveys. In particular, the Proposed Development will interact with the proposed Substation Extension (planning ref: PL/2022/09258). No landscape design has been submitted alongside this application; however, the Arboricultural Impact Assessment[10] (AIA) indicates the extent of habitat loss.

3.1.2 The Proposed Development would connect to proposed infrastructure to be installed as part of the proposed substation expansion application, it is expected that this proposed vegetation clearance associated with the substation extension application would be undertaken in advance of the Proposed Development and this cleared state is taken as the future baseline for this assessment.

3.2 Designated Sites for Nature Conservation

Statutory Designated Sites

3.2.1 The Site is located within 2km of three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the closest being located approximately 240m north of the Site. No other statutory designated sites for nature conservation are located within 2km of the Proposed development. A summary of statutory designated sites within 2km of the Site is presented in **Table 3:1** and locations are presented in **Figure 2**.

3.2.2 The review of MAGIC identified that the Site is located within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) of the Cloatley Farm SSSI and Emmett Hill Meadows SSSI. The IRZ system sets the criteria for development whereby a Local Authority (Council) would be required to consult with Natural England regarding potential risks to the SSSIs posed by the Proposed Development on Site.

3.2.3 It is considered that the Proposed Development meets the criteria for Infrastructure, defined as "*Pipelines and underground cables, pylons and overhead cables. Any transport proposal including road, rail and by water (excluding routine maintenance). Airports, helipads and other aviation proposals*".

Table 3:1. Statutory Designated Sites
(SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest)

Site Name	Distance and Direction from Site	Reason for designation
Cloatley Farm SSSI	240m north	Cloatley Farm SSSI is a nationally important site for breeding populations of the nationally scarce marsh fritillary and brown hairstreak butterflies, and for species-rich neutral grassland. The relevant National Vegetation Classification (NVC) type is MG5 crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* – common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* grassland of the heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* subcommunity (NVC MG5c).

[10] Aecom (2022) *Proposed Extension to Minety 400 kV Substation Arboricultural Impact Assessment Report*

Site Name	Distance and Direction from Site	Reason for designation
Emmet Hill Meadows SSSI	530m east	This is a botanically diverse area of gently sloping neutral to acidic grassland in the Oxford Clay Vale of North Wiltshire. The site, which comprises two floristically rich meadows cut for hay in late summer, provides an excellent example of a habitat which has been greatly reduced by intensive farming methods.
Ravensroost Woods SSSI	1.89km north-west	Ravensroost Wood is a structurally varied and botanically rich wet ash-wych elm and wet ash-maple woodland, with a complex system of rides, ditches and small ponds. This combination supports a diverse flora including uncommon and locally rare species.

Non-Statutory Designated Sites

3.2.4 Information provided by WSBRC confirms that the Site is not located within any non-statutory designated site for nature conservation. The search identified 11 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within a 2km radius of the Site boundary, as described in **Table 3:2** and presented in **Figure 3.**

Table 3:2 Non-statutory Designated Sites
(LWS: Local wildlife Site)

Site Name	Distance and Direction from Site	Description
Stonehill Wood LWS	10m south of the Site	Semi natural ancient woodland disturbed by felling and replanting.
Park Copse – Charlton LWS	55m west	Hazel coppice woodland.
Flisteridge Wood, Oaksey Nursery & Maskelyne Copse LWS	1.15km north	Ancient semi-natural woodland of oak with birch, over hazel and bluebell.
Pond Lodge Estate Meadow LWS	1.24km south	The site consists of a small meadow adjacent to the wood at Pond Lodge Estate, plus a small triangle of marshy grassland nearby.
Braydon Wood LWS	1.34km south	A large ancient woodland site extensively replanted with broadleaves and conifers.
Braydon Pond LWS	1.46km south	A large lake within broadleaved woodland, with fluctuating water levels and a large draw-down zone.
Swatnage Wood LWS	1.51km south-west	Small and fairly isolated ancient woodland site with some conifers.
Cloatley Meadows Wildlife Site LWS	1.58km north-west	Part of a larger WWT reserve, these two areas of land include neutral meadows and pastures and an area of broadleaved woodland.
Nineteen Acre Wood LWS	1.63km south-east	A small stand of ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland.
Great Withy Wood LWS	1.73km south-east	Ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland, possibly replanted with broadleaves.
Hill House Meadow LWS	1.93km north-west	Species-rich neutral grassland now partly planted with trees.

3.3 Priority habitats

3.3.1 Information on priority habitats within the Site and within 2km of the Site is presented in **Table 3:3** below. Where numerous records of a particular habitat were recorded, only the closest record to the Site has been provided.

Table 3:3: Priority Habitats
(NERC S.41: Listed on Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act; UKBAP: UK Biodiversity Action Plan; LBAP: Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan)

Priority habitat name	Designation	Distance from site
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	NERC S.41, UKBAP, LBAP	Within the Site
Lowland meadows	NERC S.41, UKBAP, LBAP	245m north
Priority ponds	NERC S.41, UKBAP, LBAP	355m east
Traditional orchards	NERC S.41, UKBAP, LBAP	1.46km north-east

3.4 Ancient and Irreplaceable Habitats

3.4.1 Ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland soils are widely present within the local landscape, with the closest area of ancient woodland (Stonehill Wood) located approximately 10m south of the Site.

3.4.2 A review of the ATI identified no ancient or veteran trees within 2km of the Site.

3.4.3 No trees displaying ancient or veteran features were noted during the extended habitat survey, nor are any individual ancient, veteran or notable trees identified in The Arboricultural Method Statement[11].

3.5 Habitats and Vegetation

3.5.1 This section should be read in conjunction with the UKHab Habitat Plan presented as **Figure 4**, and photographs presented in **Appendix 1**.

3.5.2 Habitats are described from east to west along the proposed cable route.

3.5.3 At the eastern extent of the Site is an area of bramble dominated scrub comprising dog rose, young ash, goat willow, oak and hawthorn, with a ground flora of willowherb, nettle, creeping thistle, bugle, creeping buttercup and thyme-leaved speedwell **(Photo 1)**. This patch of scrub is identified for removal as part of proposed substation expansion plans, and so not considered part of the Proposed Development baseline.

3.5.4 To the west of this lies a patch of disturbed, herb rich grassland with frequent bare ground. Species present were indicative of disturbed ground and included spring sedge, creeping thistle, creeping

[11] Longleaf Tree and Woodland Consultancy Ltd (2023) *Minety Substation Cable Installation Arboricultural Method Statement. Ref: AMS-MSCR-0623*

buttercup, thyme leaved speedwell, docks, black medick, common daisy, soft rush, teasel, ribwort plantain, oxeye daisy, dandelion, forget-me-not, bugle and sorrel **(Photo 2)**.

3.5.5 Continuing west lies a small copse of trees including goat willow, oak and field maple with a scrub understory of hazel, blackthorn, dog rose and bramble. Ground flora included common bluebell, nettle and creeping thistle **(Photo 3)**. This vegetation is identified for removal as part of proposed substation expansion plans, and so not considered part of the Proposed Development baseline.

3.5.6 The route then crosses a hardstanding access road **(Photo 4)** before continuing along woodland edge habitat adjacent the south of the track. The woodland itself was plantation woodland dominated by ash with field maple understory and a ground flora including common bluebell, lesser celandine and greater stitchwort **(Photo 5)**, however edge habitats comprised more shrub like species interspersed with bramble, willowherb and nettle.

3.5.7 The cable routes western extent and terminus is within an area of grassland with scattered scrub **(Photo 6)**. Grasses included rough-stalked meadow grass, cocksfoot and false oat grass with glaucous sedge also present. Forbs present included common vetch, yarrow, dandelion, comfrey, St Johns wort, willowherb, ground elder, fleabane and an unidentified orchid species. Scrub species present included elder, birch and maple. While it was not clearly wet at the time of survey, species present indicate this grassland is likely wet at least periodically.

3.6 Protected and Notable Species

3.6.1 Species relevant to the Proposed Development are referenced in the sections below.

Birds

3.6.2 A total of 110 recent records of birds from 20 different species were returned by WSBRC, including 18 records of schedule 1 species (many of which were recorded outside of the breeding period), 28 records of NERC S.41/ UKBAP species and 94 records of Red Data List bird species. There is some overlap between designations, and some records include multiple individuals.

3.6.3 Schedule 1 species recorded include species that may nest within woodland habitats nearby to the Site (subject to suitable habitat features) include red kite, barn owl and hobby.

3.6.4 Woodland edge and scrub habitats within the site have the potential to support a range of breeding bird species typical of such habitats.

Bats

3.6.5 A total of 109 recent records of bats were returned by WSBRC. Records included 11 species, and three species groups. Records provided as six figure grid references, accurate only to a 100m grid square. Species returned included: Bechstein's bat, brown Long-eared bat, Western barbastelle, noctule, soprano pipistrelle, brown Long-eared, serotine, common pipistrelle, Natterer's, Daubenton's bat, whiskered Bat, Myotis species, *Nyctalus* species, pipistrelle species.

3.6.6 No EPS licencing records relating to bats were noted within 2km of the Site.

3.6.7 No trees affected by the Proposed Development or on land immediately surrounding the Site were noted as having bat roosting potential, however trees possessing potential bat roosting features are present within the wider woodland area.

3.6.8 Woodland edge habitats impacted by the Proposed Development are considered to meet the definition of high suitability foraging and commuting habitats (as defined by BCT guidance[12]), providing high-quality habitat well connected to the wider landscape. It is likely that the Site and surrounding woodland habitats form part of a network of woodland sites utilised by bats, connected in the wider landscape by hedgerows and field boundary features.

Badger

3.6.9 Data provided by WSBRC included three recent records of badger, none of which were in proximity to the Site.

3.6.10 No badger setts were noted within the Site or immediate surrounds, however woodland habitats provide suitable habitat for foraging badger and sett creation with evidence of mammal paths and foraging observed within the wider woodland area.

Otter and Water Vole

3.6.11 One record of otter and no records of water vole were returned by WSBRC. The otter record was not located in proximity to the Site.

3.6.12 No EPS licencing records relating to otter were noted within 2km of the Site.

3.6.13 No suitable aquatic habitat for either species is located within the immediate vicinity of the Site, and therefore otter and water vole are not considered further in this assessment.

Hazel Dormouse

3.6.14 Data provided by WSBRC included two recent records of hazel dormouse, however records were accurate only to the nearest 10km gird square.

3.6.15 The applicant has been provided with a hazel dormouse survey report relating to the Minety Substation Expansion[13] (planning application reference: PL/2022/09258). Surveys undertaken by The Environment Partnership in 2022 found a dormouse nest within a nest box located approximately 155m north-west of the Site and a potential dormouse nest within another nest box located 250m north-east of the Site. The survey encompassed areas immediately surround the Site, however no evidence of dormouse was found in these areas.

3.6.16 The extended habitat survey found that the Site provided less suitable habitat than the areas of woodland to the north and west of the existing substation, a view confirmed by the Minety Substation Expansion Dormouse Survey Report. However, while the habitat within the Site is less suitable than

[12] Colins, J. (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (3rd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London

[13] The Environment Partnership (2022) *Minety Substation Extension Dormouse Survey Report. Document ref: 9236.004*

surrounding habitats with no dormouse found, suitable habitat does exist in the form of scrub and woodland edge and dormouse may be present within the Site.

Amphibians

3.6.17 Data provided by WSBRC included six records of great crested newt (GCN) and two records of common frog, all located around Minety Substation or the surrounding area.

3.6.18 No EPS licencing records relating to GCN were noted within 2km of the Site, however GCN survey licence returns indicate two ponds with GCN presence located approximately 205m north of the Site and 300m east of the Site. A single GCN eDNA pond survey record also confirms GCN presence at a pond located approximately 355m east of the Site.

3.6.19 No suitable breeding habitat exists for GCN or other amphibians exists within the Site or immediate surrounds, however woodland edge and scrub habitat present within the Site provide suitable habitat for foraging and refuge for amphibian species, including GCN.

Reptiles

3.6.20 No recent records of reptiles were returned by WSBRC.

3.6.21 Habitats present including scrub and woodland edge provide suitable habitat for a variety of common and widespread species of reptile.

Other Protected and Notable Species

3.6.22 Data provided by WSBRC included records of brown hare, hedgehog and harvest mouse, as well as invertebrates including common darter dragonfly, brown hairstreak butterfly, and dusky thorn, blood vein and centre-veined sallow moths.

3.6.23 No evidence was gathered during the extended habitat survey to suggest the likely presence of other notable mammal species; however, it is considered that habitats located within the Site may potentially support hedgehog. The Site is likely to support a range of invertebrate species typical of woodland edge habitats, which may include Sect 41 priority species such as brown hairstreak.

3.7 Invasive Non-native Species

3.7.1 Data provided by WSBRC did not include any records of invasive non-native plant species, nor were any noted during the extended habitat survey.

4 ASSESSMENT

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 This section seeks to identify the potential for effects to occur on habitats and protected and notable species which could be considered as reasonably likely to occur as a result of the Proposed Development. The Site's proximity to statutory and non-statutory designated sites and potential effects on their qualifying interests is discussed. Measures are proposed for the protection of sensitive habitats and species, and recommendations are made for further pre-construction surveys and mitigation, if required.

4.1.2 The development has been designed to minimise the potential for effects on sensitive ecological features; thereby ensuring existing wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity are maintained and enhanced. Biodiversity enhancements have also been adopted.

4.2 Statutory Designated Sites for Nature Conservation

4.2.1 The Site is not located within or immediately adject to any statutory designated sites for nature conservation.

4.2.2 All works will be confined to the Site boundaries with no potential for encroachment beyond this. Indirect impacts to off-site habitats will be avoided through the implementation of best practice pollution prevention measures to include dust suppression and runoff control. Therefore, through the physical separation and implementation of best practice measures, no impacts to statutory designated sites for nature conservation are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Development.

4.3 Non-Statutory Designated Sites for Nature Conservation

4.3.1 The Site is not located within any non-statutory designated site for nature conservation, with the closest (Stonehill Woods) being located approximately 10m south of the Site, separated by existing access tracks.

4.3.2 The excavation footprint extends into the root protection zone for Stonehill Woods LWS, designated for the presence of ancient woodland. This incursion cannot be avoided through relocation of the Site due to surrounding infrastructure associated with the Minety Substation. The Arboricultural Method Statement states that the impact is considered to be low, with no loss or deterioration to the ancient woodland considered likely.

4.3.3 No trees within Stonehill Woods LWS are due to be felled to facilitate works, with tree protection fencing erected around the perimeter of the woods as indicated on the Tree Protection Plan. As previously described, best practice pollution control measures will be implemented to minimise the potential for impacts to off-Site habitats.

4.3.4 Therefore, due to the tree protection measures enforced around Stonehill Woods LWS and no predicted deterioration to ancient woodland, no impacts to Stonehill Woods is anticipated.

4.3.5 Due to the physical separation and implementation of best practice pollution control measures, no impacts to other non-statutory designated sites for nature conservation are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Development.

4.4 Habitats

4.4.1 The Site is primarily comprised of scrub and woodland edge habitats, parts of which are identified for removal as part of the Minety substation Expansion application, to which the Proposed Development would connect.

4.4.2 Direct impacts to Ancient Woodland have been avoided, however the site does lie party within the 15m buffer zone of the ancient woodland. Considering the current land use and the small scale and temporary nature of the works, no deterioration of ancient woodland is predicted from this incursion.

4.4.3 Tree removal totalling approximately 200 linear metres and likely to comprise approximately one row of trees (approx. 6m back from existing woodland edge) would be undertaken to facilitate the Proposed Development. Adjacent woodland habitats would be protected through the placement of tree protection fencing in line with BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction. Additionally, best practice pollution control measures would be implemented to avoid indirect impacts to off-site habitats.

4.4.4 The proposed works would be of a small scale and temporary, consisting the excavation of a trench, laying of cables and subsequent backfilling. Works would follow as closely as reasonably practicable the edge of the existing trackway to minimise damage to woodland. All excavated soils are to be reinstated following construction of the Proposed Development, with woodland edge habitats allowed to naturally re-establish along the route.

4.4.5 Overall, due to the small scale and temporary nature of the works, avoidance of most valuable habitats and the proposed reinstatement of woodland edge habitats, negligible impacts to on-site and adjacent habitats are predicted as a result of the Proposed Development.

4.5 Protected and Notable Species

Birds

4.5.1 All wild birds, their nests and eggs are, with few exceptions, protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Over eighty species or groups of species are listed under Schedule 1 of the Act, which confers special protection with increased penalties for offences committed.

4.5.2 Additionally, a further forty-nine bird species are listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 with 62 species are listed within the Wiltshire BAP, and are therefore, a material consideration within the planning process.

Breeding Birds

4.5.3 Dependent on the timings of construction, the removal of scrub and woodland habitat could impact upon nesting birds directly through habitat loss and damage to nests, and indirectly due to noise and visual disturbance.

4.5.4 While vegetation clearance has been avoided where possible, with plentiful suitable alternative nesting habitat available in the immediate vicinity and measures proposed to safeguard adjacent habitats (e.g., tree protection fencing), some vegetation clearance will be required to facilitate works, primarily consisting section felling. Following completion of works, woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route.

4.5.5 In order to comply with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and to minimise the potential for impacts to nesting birds, all vegetation clearance will be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season, typically taken to be March to August inclusive. Where this is not reasonably practicable, vegetation clearance works would only be undertaken following an inspection for nesting birds by a suitable qualified ecologist. In the event a nesting bird is found within or immediately adjacent to the works area, a suitable exclusion zone would be put in place, to remain until chicks have fledged or the nest is otherwise no longer active. The size of any exclusion zone would be determined by the on-Site ecologist using professional judgement based on the species present and surrounding habitats.

4.5.6 Works will be relatively small scale and temporary in nature, and therefore disturbance is not considered likely to have a significant effect on local breeding bird populations, particularly taking into account the high levels of consented developments to be constructed in advance of the Proposed Development, that would likely result in birds either becoming habituated to moderate levels of baseline disturbance or not nesting in proximity to the Site.

4.5.7 As a precaution however, the pre-construction survey would also encompass a search for nesting Schedule 1 species, afforded protection from disturbance, which may potentially be disturbed by works, such as red kite.

4.5.8 In order to compensate for the loss for suitable woodland edge and scrub nesting habitat a total of ten bird boxes would be erected on suitable trees along woodland edges outside of the Site.

Bats

4.5.9 All species of British bat are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Bats are further protected under the Habitats Regulations.

4.5.10 Seven bat species in the UK are also listed as species of Principal Importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 and all bat species found in Wiltshire are listed as priority species within the Wiltshire BAP.

4.5.11 No trees supporting roosting bats are located within the Site or immediate surrounds. As discussed above, all works will be confined to the Site with suitable protection measures (e.g., tree protection fencing) to be installed to prevent encroachment to surrounding habitats. Therefore, no direct impacts (e.g., loss of roosting habitat) or indirect impacts (e.g., disturbance from noise or lighting) to roosting bats are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Development.

4.5.12 As a precaution it is proposed to undertake a pre-construction walkover to ensure that no new potential roost features have developed in the intervening period between the extended habitat survey and start of proposed works. Should any potential roost features be identified, appropriate avoidance, mitigation or as a last resort compensation measures would be implemented, informed by surveys and undertaken under licence, where appropriate.

4.5.13 While no trees with potential roost features are proposed to be lost as a result of the Proposed development, it is proposed to install a minimum of ten bat boxes on suitable trees in proximity to the Proposed Development.

4.5.14 The proposed development would result in the removal of high suitability foraging and commuting habitat, in the form of woodland edge. The land take of the Proposed Development is relatively minimal and woodland edge habitats allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction. Adjacent trees would also be allowed to overhang, returning the Site to woodland edge habitat.

4.5.15 No permanent lighting is considered necessary for the Proposed Development, and lighting required during construction would be minimal, if used at all. All construction would be undertaken during daylight hours, and where lighting is required for construction of the Proposed Development this would be task specific and kept to the minimum required to safely accomplish the task.

4.5.16 The proposed Minety Substation Expansion development (planning ref: PL/2022/09258), to which the Proposed Development would connect to, includes the upgrade of an access road immediately to the north of the Proposed development and therefore alongside other developments in the surrounding area it is anticipated that bats would be habituated to moderate levels of baseline disturbance and unlikely to be impacted by small scale and short term cabling works.

4.5.17 Therefore, given the natural regeneration of woodland edge habitats, moderate levels of baseline disturbance from consented developments and the small scale and short term nature of the Proposed Development, it is not anticipated that there would be impacts to foraging or commuting bats.

Badger

4.5.18 Badgers are afforded legislative protection under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

4.5.19 Sett interference includes damaging or destroying a sett, obstructing access to a sett, and disturbing a badger whilst it is occupying a sett. It is not illegal, and therefore a licence is not required, to carry out disturbing activities in the vicinity of a sett if no badger is disturbed and the sett is not damaged or destroyed. Where an activity is likely to result in an offence under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 a licence from Natural England is required.

4.5.20 No badger setts were identified within the Site or immediate surrounds; however, badgers are likely to be present within woodlands surrounding the Site with evidence of mammal foraging present.

4.5.21 The Proposed Development would not result in any direct impacts to badger setts. The works footprint is minimal with works to be short term and small scale in nature. All works would be undertaken in daylight hours with no use of permanent lighting and minimal use of lighting during construction. Therefore, it is considered unlikely that the Proposed Development would result in disturbance to badgers potentially utilising the Site or surrounding areas.

4.5.22 Badger activity can show seasonal patterns of use and badgers can quickly establish new setts, or re-use setts previously thought to be inactive. Considering the highly mobile nature of badgers and the seasonality of their activity, a pre-construction survey should be undertaken prior to works commencing on Site by a suitably qualified ecologist. The survey will check for any newly constructed setts in and surrounding the Site.

Hazel Dormouse

4.5.23 Hazel dormice are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Habitats Regulations. Additionally, the hazel dormouse is listed as priority species under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 and Wiltshire BAP Plan, with specific actions under the Wiltshire BAP Woodland Habitat Action Plan

4.5.24 Surveys undertaken in support of the Minety Substation expansion development (planning ref: PL/2022/09258), to which this development connects to, found hazel dormouse to be present within woodland to the north and north-west of the Site, approximately 155m distant from the Site. These surveys did not find evidence or dormice within or adjacent to Site and the extended habitat survey identified that the Site and surrounding habitats provided less favourable habitats to those north and west of the existing substation where dormouse were found during survey. While less favourable than surrounding habitats where dormouse were found during surveys, the Site does provide suitable dormouse habitat within scrub and woodland edge habitats.

4.5.25 Natural England standing advice[14] states that "*If hazel dormice are found on part of the site, you can assume they're present in suitable habitats on the whole site."* The Dormouse Mitigation Handbook[15] also states that "*If dormice are known to be present in all, or part, of a contiguous habitat, they are also likely to be present in neighbouring areas of connected woodland, scrub etc. (even where these appear to be suboptimal habitat)*".

4.5.26 The Proposed Development would result in the loss of approximately 200 linear metres of suitable woodland edge and scrub habitat. The Arboricultural report states that approximately one row of trees at the woodland edge would be removed, to a total width of approximately 6m.

4.5.27 While it as acknowledged that dormice are likely to occasionally use all areas of woodland, taking into account the lack of survey records in this part of the woodland and relatively limited extent of removal, it is proposed to remove woodland edge vegetation following Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs). Outline measures are provided as **Appendix 2**.

4.5.28 Following construction of the Proposed Development, woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route with overhanging branches from adjacent woodland, and therefore the loss of suitable habitat would be small scale and temporary in nature.

4.5.29 To provide further enhancement for dormouse, trees felled during works would be piled into log piles to provide a suitable nesting habitat for dormouse.

Amphibians

4.5.30 GCN and natterjack toads are protected by Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Habitats Regulations.

4.5.31 GCN, natterjack toad and common toad are also listed as priority species in England under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. GCN is also listed as a priority species within the Wiltshire BAP.

[14] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hazel-dormice-advice-for-making-planning-decisions
[15] https://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Dormouse-Conservation-Handbook.pdf

4.5.32 GCN are known to be present within ponds in proximity to the Site, the nearest of which is located approximately 200m from the Site. The site offers suitable terrestrial habitat for amphibian species including GCN and common toad in the form of scrub and woodland edge. Natterjack toad have a restricted distribution and are not found at this location.

4.5.33 Works would be small scale and temporary in nature with woodland edge habitats allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction of the Proposed Development resulting in no permanent loss of suitable GCN habitats. To safeguard individual GCN which may be present within the Site, all works would be undertaken following a RAMs Method Statement. Outline measures are provided as **Appendix 2**.

4.5.34 The proposed habitat loss of 0.13ha of land between 100-250m from a breeding pond has been input to the Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool[16] provided as **Table 4:1**, which indicated an offence is highly unlikely and therefore no licence would be required to permit these works.

Table 4:1: Natural England Great Crested Newt Rapid Risk Assessment Tool

Component	**Likely effect** (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.1 - 0.5 ha lost or damaged	0.1
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.1
Rapid risk assessment result:	**GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY**	

4.5.35 Taking into account the above, no impacts are anticipated to GCN or other notable amphibians as a result of the Proposed Development.

Reptiles

4.5.36 Widespread reptile species namely the common lizard, slow worm, grass snake and adder are protected against killing, injuring and sale under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). These species are also listed as priority species under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. Slow worm, grass snake and adder are also listed under the Wiltshire BAP.

4.5.37 Woodland edge habitats provide suitable habit for common and widespread species of reptile. It is considered that RAMs implemented to safeguard amphibians would also serve to protect reptiles potentially present within the Site, and that the Proposed Development would not result in impacts to reptiles.

[16] Natural England (2020) Template for Method Statement to support application for licence under Regulation 55(2)(e) of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) in respect of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus*. Form WML-A14-2

Other Species

4.5.38 The Site may support hedgehog, as well as providing foraging and egg laying habitat for a range of invertebrate species.

4.5.39 RAMs implemented to safeguard GCN, to include a two stage cut and the covering of open excavations would also serve to safeguard hedgehog and other small mammals.

4.5.40 Works are of a small scale and temporary in nature with woodland edge habitats allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following completion of works, resulting in no permanent habitat loss. Plentiful similar habitat is present within the immediate surrounds and therefore temporary habitat loss is not considered likely to impact upon small mammal or invertebrate populations.

4.6 Invasive Non-native species

4.6.1 Section 23 of the Infrastructure Act 2015 amended the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) by inserting a new Schedule 9A to introduce a statutory regime of species control agreements and orders. This schedule ensures that, landowners act on Schedule 9 invasive species, or permit others to enter the land and carry out those operations, to prevent their establishment and spread.

4.6.2 No invasive non-native species were noted within the Site, however as part of the pre-construction walkovers, a search for invasive species will be undertaken. Should any invasive non-native plant species be noted within the Site or immediate surrounds, appropriate measures will be undertaken to ensure no spread or to treat and remove such species.

4.6.3 Should further areas of spread / other invasive species be encountered on Site prior to or during construction, the advice of a suitably qualified ecologist or invasive species treatment specialist should be sought, and appropriate measures taken to achieve legislative compliance.

5 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT SUMMARY

5.1.1 **Table 5:1** summarises the mitigation and enhancement recommended in for the Proposed Development.

Table 5:1: Mitigation and Enhancement Summary

Feature	Summary of Mitigation and Enhancement
Designated Site for Nature Conservation s	• All works to be confined to the Site with tree protection fencing to be installed to protect adjacent habitats including Stonehill Woods LWS. • Best practice pollution prevention measures to be employed to prevent indirect impacts to designated sites.
Habitats	• All works to be confined to the Site with tree protection fencing to be installed to protect adjacent habitats. • All retained trees within the vicinity of construction areas will be protected during construction works in-line with BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction. • Pollution prevention measures will be implemented to prevent pollution and run-off occurring during the construction and specific control measures will be implemented to protect the watercourses/ditches within and off Site. • Woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction of the Proposed Development.
Birds	• Removal of nesting bird habitats should be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season (01 March to 31 August inclusive). If vegetation works are necessary during the breeding season, suitable nesting habitat should be hand-searched by a suitably experienced ecologist prior to works commencing. Only when the ecologist is satisfied that no offence will occur under the legislation will works be permitted to proceed. • Woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction of the Proposed Development. • Ten bird nest boxes to be installed on suitable trees in proximity to the site.
Bats	• No trees to be affected by the Proposed Development were identified as offering bat roosting potential. • A pre-construction check will be undertaken to identify any new roosting features that may have established. • Should suitable roost features be identified, surveys will be undertaken in line with best practice guidelines, to inform the need for further avoidance and/ or mitigation measures, or a licence application as required. • Woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction of the Proposed Development to maintain woodland edge foraging and commuting habitat. • No works are considered likely to affect conservation status or risk disturbance to bats. • Ten bat roost boxes to be installed on suitable trees in proximity to the site.
Badgers	• No badger setts have been identified in proximity to the Site. • A pre-construction check will be undertaken to ensure no setts have been excavated in the intervening period.
Hazel Dormouse	• Works affecting trees and woodland edge habitats to be undertaken following Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs).

Feature	Summary of Mitigation and Enhancement
	• Woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction of the Proposed Development.
Reptiles	• Precautionary - Works affecting suitable habitat to be undertaken under RAMs. • Woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction of the Proposed Development.
Amphibians	• Works affecting suitable habitat within the Site will be undertaken under RAMs. • Woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction of the Proposed Development.
Other Species	• Works affecting suitable habitat for small mammals to be undertaken following RAMs. • Woodland edge habitats would be allowed to naturally re-establish along the route following construction of the Proposed Development.
Invasive Species	• Pre-construction checks for new colonisation by invasive species should be undertaken. If required, measures will be employed to eradicate/control species such as Himalayan balsam to prevent the accidental introduction or spread.

Figure 1:Site Location Plan



Legend

Site

Rev	Date	Description	De	App
00	24/07/2023		HD	HD

This map contains data from the following sources:
Ordnance Survey (2023)

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Licence number 010031673.

Co-ordinate System : British National Grid
Projection: Traverse Mercator
Datum: OSGB 1936
Units: Metres

MINETY CABLE ROUTE

SITE LOCATION PLAN

avian ecology

Avian Ecology, Suite 3c Walnut Tree Farm, Northwich Road, Lower Stretton
WA4 4PQ
Tel: 0843 506 5116
www.avianecology.co.uk

0 50
meters

N W E S

Figure 2: Statutory Designated Sites Plan

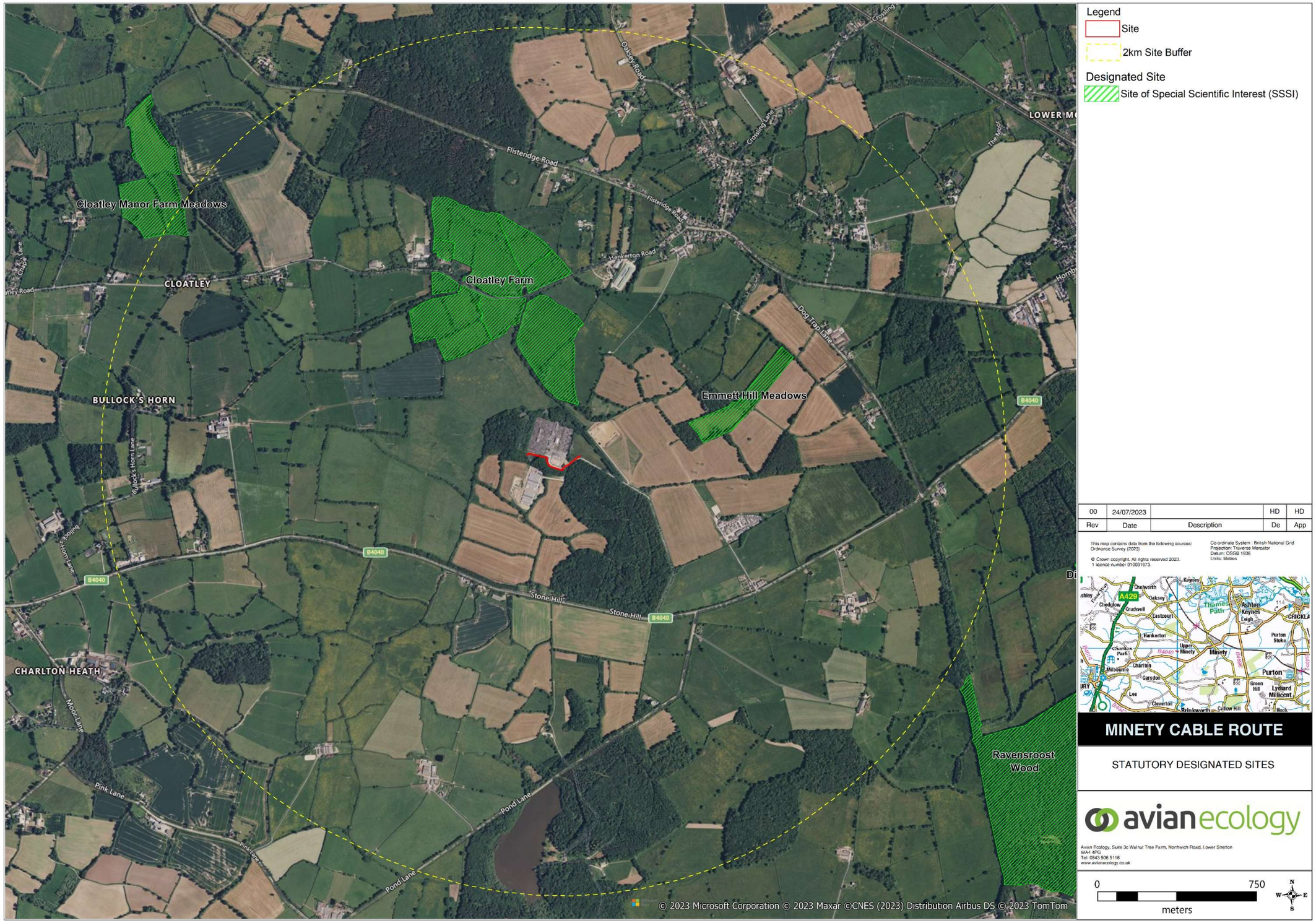


Figure 3: Non-statutory Designated Sites



Figure 4: Extended Habitat Survey (pre-clearance)

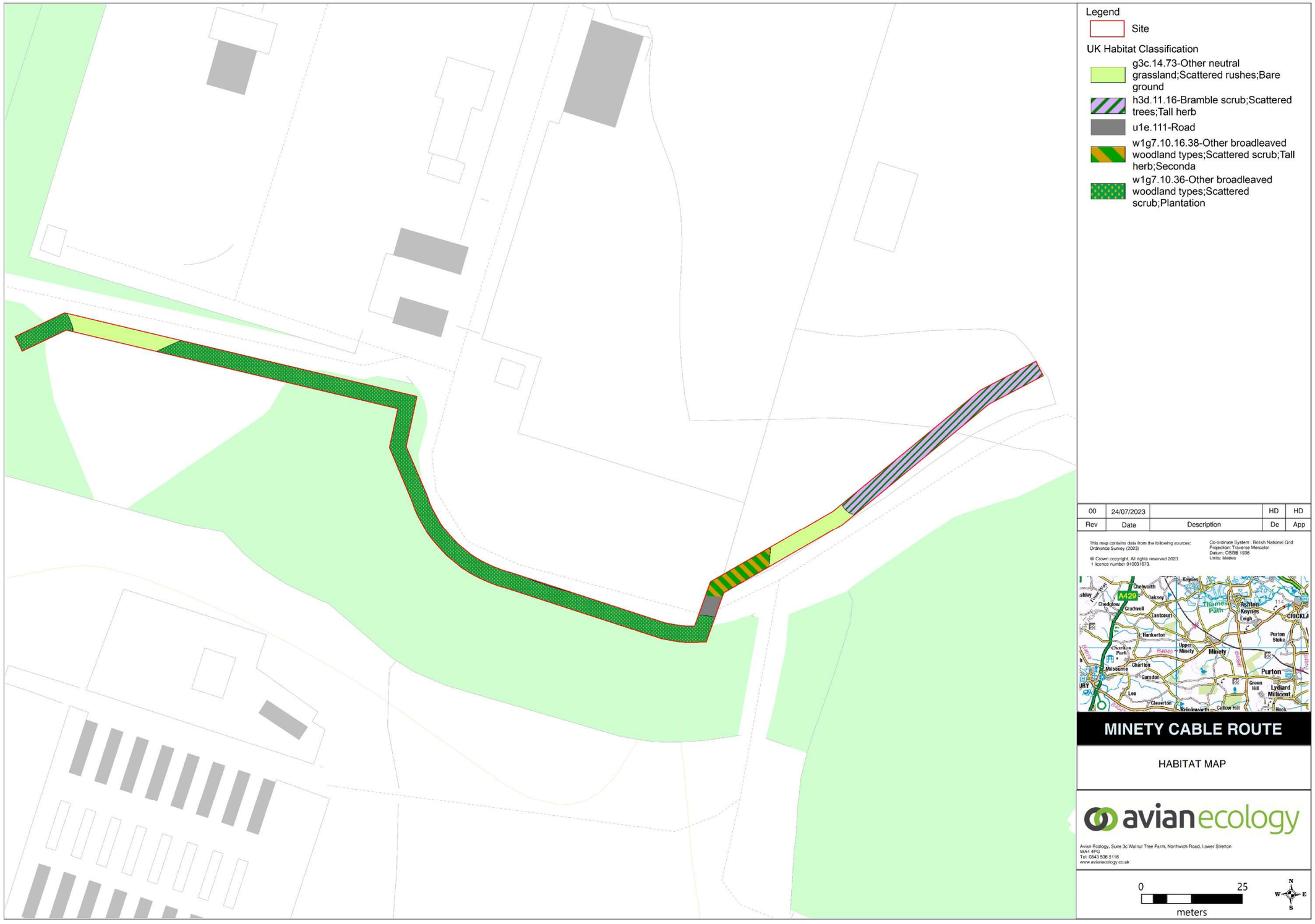
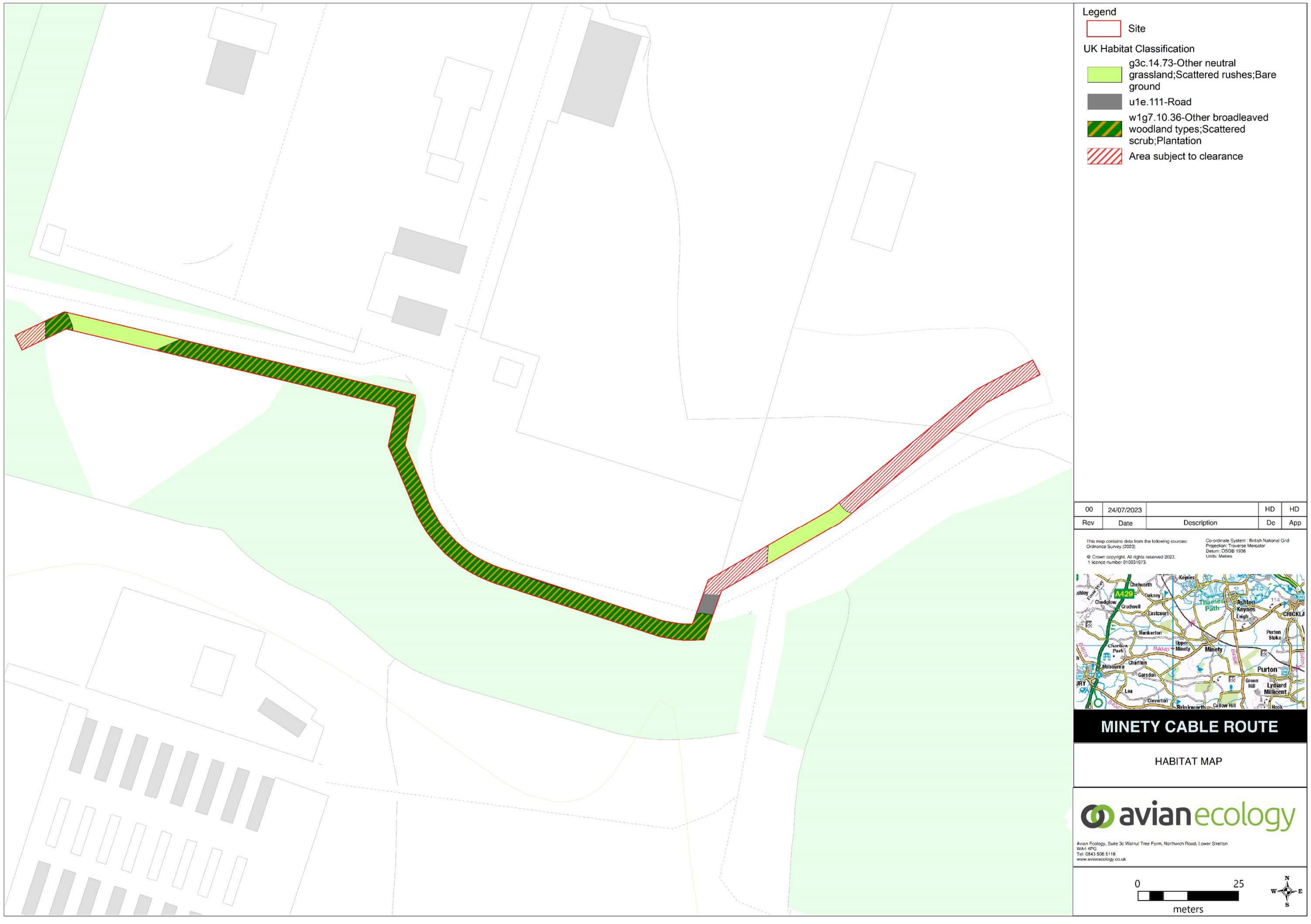


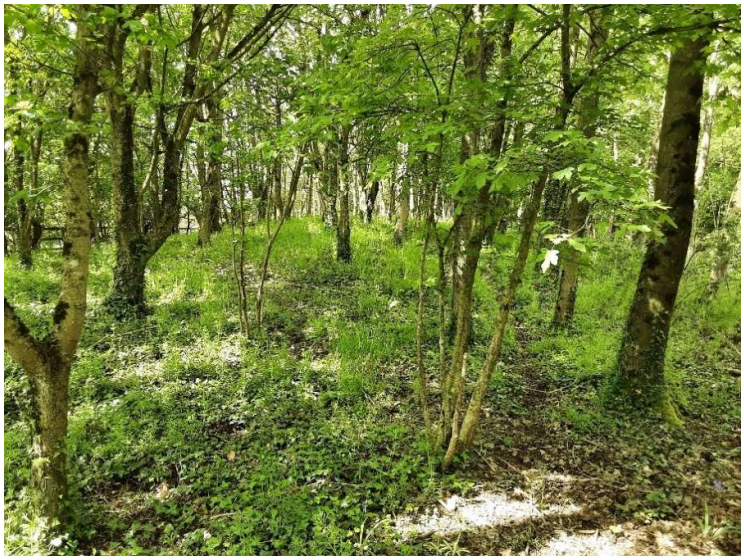
Figure 5: Extended Habitat Survey (post-clearance)



Appendix 1

Photographs

Photographs	Description
	P1: Area of bramble dominated scrub with establishing trees.
	P2: Patch of sparse disturbed grassland.

Photographs	Description
	P3: Patch of scrub crossed by cable route.
	P4: Road to be crossed by cable route.
	P5: Plantation woodland dominated by ash.

Photographs	Description
	P6: Area of seasonally wet grassland with scattered scrub along cable route.
	P7: Existing access track adjacent to cable route with woodland edge habitats to left of image.

Appendix 2

Outline Reasonable Avoidance Measures Method Statement

Hazel Dormouse

Summary of Method Statement

It is currently understood that a small area of vegetation removal is required within the Proposed Development footprint comprising a length of approximately 200m of woodland edge habitat. Tee felling of approximately one row (6m) is proposed. Hazel dormouse are known to be present within linked areas of woodland, and therefore as a precautionary measure these RAMs will be used to guide works.

Any clearance of habitats potentially suitable for hazel dormouse will be carried out by hand using the 'persuasion' approach (Bright *et. al.*, 2006[15]) and under the direct supervision of a suitably licensed ecologist and/or accredited agent.

Search and Habitat Clearance

Prior to habitat clearance commencing in suitable hazel dormouse habitats (young trees in planted woodland area, hedgerows and associated habitats), a detailed inspection of all such vegetation to be removed/impacted will be undertaken by an ECoW in order to ensure no hazel dormice are present.

Potential impacts of killing and injury during site clearance will be mitigated using the 'persuasion' approach (Bright *et al*, 2006[17]). This approach is normally adopted where:

- Less than 100m of hedgerow will be removed – as long as the remaining habitat is linked to a larger potential dormouse habitat.
- Less than a 50m wide strip of woodland will be removed – as long as the remaining habitat is linked to a larger dormouse habitat.

If works are proposed during the dormouse hibernation period between November – March, vegetation will be 'soft' felled in order to avoid impacts on potential dormouse hibernation habitat such as tree/hedge 'stools' and exposed roots (no ground clearance should take place in these habitats during this period). Felled tree sections may be logged into approximately 2m lengths and piled away from proposed works areas to provide wildlife habitat (including summer and winter nest/hibernation sites for dormice). As a precautionary measure, remaining stumps that may provide places of shelter should be removed the following April/May.

All clearance will be undertaken by an appointed contractor under the supervision of a suitably qualified/licenced ECoW, using hand tools or light machinery, and will be sensitive to the likelihood of disturbing dormice. Vegetation will be gradually reduced to stump level, with all cut brash stacked in habitat piles or chipped into piles at suitable locations around the site (outside of the proposed development works

[17] Bright, P.W, Morris, P.A. & Mitchell-Jones, A. (2006) *Dormouse Conservation Handbook: Second Edition*. English Nature, Peterborough.

areas in retained woodland habitats), as directed by the ECoW to provide habitat for invertebrates, small mammals (including dormice), amphibians and reptiles.

Site operatives will be informed by a 'tool box', which will detail the potential for protected species to occur on-site, what to look out for and what to do in the event that animal is found.

If a hazel dormouse is found during site clearance or construction periods, works must stop immediately and contact should be made with a suitably qualified/licenced ECoW.

Amphibians and Reptiles

Method Statement Objectives

Any development related activities on the Application Site, such as vegetation clearance or excavations in areas of suitable amphibian or reptile habitat may potentially affect amphibian and reptile species. As a result, safeguards must be implemented to protect these species and the Method Statement below details measures to be implemented to ensure these objectives are achieved.

Method Statement

This Method Statement should be followed for all minor works (e.g., vegetation removal, excavation and cable laying etc,) within the Application site, which may affect the surrounding terrestrial habitat to ensure legal compliance and to ensure the objectives are achieved.

The following measures will be adopted throughout the construction period of the proposed development:

- Site operatives will be informed by 'tool box' talk of the potential for protected species to occur on-site, what to look out for and what to do in the event that animal is found.
- Clearance works within the Application Site should only commence after a careful visual inspection undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist has determined that no animals are present. Vegetation should be reduced to a height of c.150mm prior to ground works commencing to aid visual searches and encourage individuals to temporarily move away from the working areas.
- Habitat reduction works are to be undertaken between April – October which will avoid disturbing amphibian/reptiles during the hibernation season; when these species will be more susceptible to disturbance, this will also encourage these species (if present) to avoid utilising habitats within the Site for hibernation purposes.
- Should any trenches and excavations be required, an escape route for animals that might enter the trench must be provided, especially if left open overnight. Ramps should be no greater than 45 degrees in angle. Ideally, any holes should be covered.
- All excavations left open overnight or longer should be checked for animals prior to the continuation of works or infilling.
- Any excavated material stored overnight should be searched prior to being used as infill.

If an amphibian or reptile is found, work must stop immediately and contact should be made with a licensed, qualified ecologist.