ethos
Environmental Planning

Ecological Impact Assessment

Angel Farm, Sherston

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Ecology | Green Space | Community | GIS
Unit 1, Brassmill Lane Enterprise Centre | Bath | BA1 3JN
01225444114 | info@ethosep.co.uk
www.ethosep.co.uk

Report Produced for	**Rachel Stinchcombe**
Written by:	**Stephanie Green, Principal Ecologist**
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CONTENTS

		Page(s)
SUMMARY		3
1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	POLICY AND LEGISLATION	6
3	METHODOLOGY	8
4	BASELINE ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS	11
5	DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	15
6	ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES	17
7	ENHANCEMENTS	18

SUMMARY

Purpose of the Report	This Report has been produced by Ethos Environmental Planning on behalf of Rachel Stinchcombe. It provides an assessment of the likely ecological effects associated with the proposed conversion of the building at Angel Farm, Sherston.
Description of the scheme	The development proposals for the site include plans for the conversion of the building B1 for residential use.
Methodology	A desk study and structure inspection for bats was undertaken in August 2023.
Baseline Ecological Conditions	The site contains buildings with areas of hard standing and grassland surrounds, grazed by sheep and goats.
Key impacts and mitigation	There are no predicted impacts on important ecological features as a result of the development. Due to the suitability of surrounding habitat for bats, an ecological enhancement for bats is recommended as part of the development.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) report has been prepared by Ethos Environmental Planning (Ethos) on behalf of Rachel Stinchcombe. The details and experience of the authors and field survey team are provided in Section 3.7.

1.2 The report provides the results of an EcIA in relation to the proposed development of Land at Angel Farm, Sherston, Wiltshire.

1.3 The site contains buildings with areas of hard standing and grassland surrounds, grazed by sheep and goats.



Figure 1 Site location

1.4 Development proposals comprise the conversion of the existing building (B1) on site for residential use.

1.5 This assessment is based on surveys undertaken in 2023 comprising a structure inspection for bats and desk study.

1.6 The aims of this EcIA report are to:

- provide an assessment of the likely effects of the proposed development on ecological features on site;

- identify the measures required to mitigate impacts on site biodiversity;
- identify opportunities to deliver ecological enhancements and measurable gains for biodiversity as part of the development proposals; and
- to enable the Local Planning Authority to assess whether the proposals comply with relevant planning policy or legislation.

1.7 This report has been produced following the approach set out in CIEEM's 'Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing' (CIEEM, 2017).

2 POLICY AND LEGISLATION

2.1 National Policy

2.1.1 The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** sets out national planning policy, including policies of relevance to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Policies of relevance to the proposed development (parts of paragraphs 180 and 185) have been summarised below:

Para 180: When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;

d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Para 185: c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.

2.2 Local Policy

Wiltshire Core Strategy

2.2.1 The Wiltshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document ('the plan') was formally adopted on 20 January 2015. The plan provides a positive and flexible overarching planning policy framework for Wiltshire for the period up to 2026.

Core Policy 50: Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Protection
Development proposals must demonstrate how they protect features of nature conservation and geological value as part of the design rationale. There is an expectation that such features shall be retained, buffered, and managed favourably in order to maintain their ecological value, connectivity and functionality in the long-term. Where it has been demonstrated that such features cannot be retained, removal or damage shall only be acceptable in circumstances where the anticipated ecological impacts have been mitigated as far as possible and appropriate compensatory measures can be secured to ensure no net loss of the local biodiversity resource, and secure the integrity of local ecological networks and provision of ecosystem services.

All development proposals shall incorporate appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance of sensitive wildlife species and habitats throughout the lifetime of the development.

Biodiversity enhancement
All development should seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity. Major development in particular must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to restore, enhance and create valuable habitats, ecological networks and ecosystem services. Such enhancement measures will contribute to the objectives and targets of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) or River Basin/ Catchment Management Plan, particularly through landscape scale projects, and be relevant to the local landscape character.

2.3 Relevant Legislation

2.3.1 The following pieces of legislation in Table 1 have been considered within this assessment with an explanation of their relevance provided.

Table 1 Relevant legislation

Legislation	Relevance
The Habitats Directive (together with the Birds Directive) forms the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy. It is built around two pillars: the Natura 2000 network of protected sites and the strict system of species protection. All in all, the Directive protects over 1,000 animals and plant species and over 200 "habitat types" (e.g. special types of forests, meadows, wetlands, etc.), which are of European importance. The Habitats Directive and parts of the Birds Directive are transposed into legislation by **The Conservation of Species and Habitat Regulations 2017 (as amended).**	Presence of a structure on site which may support roosting bats.
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended, including by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), which provides legislative protection for certain species. The Act also prohibits the spread of invasive plant species, as well as providing the mechanism for the designation and protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;	Presence of a structure on site which may support roosting bats or nesting birds.
The **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006** (the NERC act) places a duty on all public authorities, including local planning authorities, to consider biodiversity in their work. Local planning authorities are to ensure that there is no net loss of biodiversity on a site, no net loss in habitat connectivity and aims to enhance biodiversity.	Enhancements for biodiversity

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of Assessment

3.1.1 This assessment has been undertaken following the approach set out in the '*Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland*' (CIEEM, 2018). The assessment has considered 'Important Ecological Features' that are present within the 'Zone of Influence' of the project. Important Ecological Features for this project comprise[1]:

- Designated nature conservation sites;
- Habitats and Species of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biodiversity in England;
- Legally protected species; and
- Red Listed or rare species (based on Red Data Book lists, Birds of Conservation Concern and species considered to be nationally rare / scare).

3.1.2 The Zone of Influence (ZoI) is the area over which the project could have an influence on ecological features. The ZoI is likely to vary for different features. However, in general terms the ZoI for this development proposal is considered to comprise the land within the red line boundary as well as immediate adjacent habitat features. It also includes designated nature conservation sites in the surrounding area.

3.1.3 The scope of the assessment was informed by an 'ecological walkover' undertaken in August 2023. The purpose of this was to identify the habitats on site, their potential for protected species and to establish the scope of surveys that would be required to inform a future planning application at the site.

3.1.4 The overall assessment has been informed by guidelines provided in CIEEM (2017) Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing.

3.2 Background Data Search

3.2.1 A search for statutory designated sites within 1km of the development site and granted European Protected Species (EPS) licences relating to bats within 1km of the site boundary was undertaken using publicly available information (DEFRA Magic map).

3.3 Bats

3.3.1 The methodology for the bat survey has been informed by the Bat Conservation Trust *Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines* (Collins, 2016).

[1] Box 14 in CIEEM's ECiA Guidelines (2018)

Habitats assessment

3.3.2 The habitats on site were assessed for their suitability to support foraging and commuting bats. This assessment was also contextualized through examination of suitable habitat and features in the wider landscape and possible flight-lines across the proposed site following natural linear features such as hedgerows.

Preliminary roost inspection

3.3.3 Physical external and internal inspection of the buildings were undertaken by the surveyor using the equipment described below to assist the inspection.

3.3.4 The physical search includes a search for live animals and a search for other signs that give an indication of past or present occupancy as outlined below. In the case of bats, typical indicators include droppings (which are characteristic and can often be speciated or at least be indicative of species type), signs of staining, urine splashing, characteristic odours, and accumulations of discarded prey remains.

3.4 Birds

3.4.1 The bird survey included an assessment of the habitats on site for their potential to support protected and notable species of bird as well as their potential to support breeding birds.

3.5 Limitations

3.5.1 The structures were fully accessible for the survey and overall, there are considered to be no significant limitations to the assessment.

3.6 Evaluation of Ecological Features

3.6.1 In line with CIEEMs guidelines on EcIA, this assessment has focused on relevant Important Ecological Features. The scale of importance of these features has been determined based on available contextual information, which for this project are considered to include:

- **International** – of internationally and protected through international legislation;
- **National** – of importance in England and protected through national legislation;
- **County** – of importance to the county (Wiltshire) but not sufficiently important to warrant 'National' scale of importance; and
- **Local** – of importance to the local area (Sherston), but not sufficiently important to warrant County scale of importance.

3.6.2 Potential impacts on Important Ecological Features are identified and assessed; likely significant effects are those likely to result in a change to the conservation status of a habitat or species population or undermine/support nature conservation policy. Mitigation measures have been devised following the mitigation hierarchy; appropriate mechanisms for securing mitigation measures have been identified.

3.7 Personnel

3.7.1 The surveyors on site have been detailed below in Table 2.

Table 2 Site surveyors

Ecologist	Position	Qualifications/ Licences	Experience
Steph Green	Principal Ecologist	MSc BSc (Hons), MCIEEM Class 1 GCN Licence Class 1 Hazel Dormouse Licence	Steph has over ten years' experience in ecological field survey and consultancy. Steph is responsible for leading and undertaking comprehensive habitat assessments, protected species surveys and is a licenced GCN and dormouse worker, as well as a Full Member of CIEEM.
Matt Attrill	Senior Ecologist	Tree Climbing and Rescue, City and Guilds NPTC Level 2 Award (206 and 306) BSc (Hons) Class 2 Bat Licence Class 1 GCN Licence	Matt is a highly experienced field surveyor with over nine years ecological experience. Matt is competent in surveying for a wide variety of wildlife gained experience from both the commercial and voluntary sectors.

4 BASELINE ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

4.1 Designated Sites

4.1.1 No statutory designated sites were identified within 1km of the proposed development site.

4.2 Bats

Desk study

4.2.1 The desk-based assessment did not identify any EPS licences relating to bats within 1km of the site.

Habitats

4.2.2 The site comprises structures with areas of hard standing and grassland, currently grazed by sheep and goats. There are areas of woodland in the local area and Hancock's Well Spring is located along the southern boundary of the site. These features are assessed to be valuable foraging and commuting habitat for bats.

4.2.3 In the local area, there are areas of arable and agricultural land to the north, west and south, with the village of Sherston to the east. Overall, the local environmental is assessed to be of moderate value to bats.

Structure inspection

4.2.4 There is one structure on site (B1) which is to be impacted by the development proposals, as shown in Figure 2 and described below.



Figure 2 Structure on site

B1

4.2.5 A recently constructed building (constructed in 2012) comprising timber with breezeblock trim and a metal corrugated roof, all of which are in very good condition with no holes, gaps or potential crevices. There are metal barge boards on the east and west elevation, which are tight to the walls and in very good condition. Windows are present on the southern elevation which are also in good condition.

4.2.6 Internally, the eastern section of the building is utilised for storage and is single void floor to ceiling, with no loft void present and wooden beams at roof level. The area is light due to to the presence of windows. The western section of the building has been converted for residential use.



Photo 1 Eastern entrance of B1



Photo 2 Metal barge boards on eastern elevation



Photo 3 Internals of eastern section B1



Photo 4 Internals of western section B1

4.2.7 No evidence of bats was identified during the structure inspection and there were no potential access points or roost features present. Therefore, due to a lack of potential roost habitat, the buildings are assessed to contain **negligible potential** to support roosting bats.

4.2.8 As building due to be impacted by the development proposals (B1) does not contain any suitable roosting habitat for bat, there will be no impacts on roosting bats as a result of the development. Additionally, the development will not involve any new lighting or changes to the existing windows. Therefore, there will not be any adverse impacts on foraging or commuting bats as a result of artificial lighting.

4.2.9 As there will be no impacts on bats as a result of the development, bats are not considered further in this assessment.

4.3 Birds

4.3.1 No evidence of nesting birds was identified during the structure inspection. Building 1 has recently been renovated and does not contain a loft void. There are no gaps in the windows or other access points into the building which birds could utilise. Therefore, birds are assessed to be likely absent from nesting on site within Building 1.

4.4 Summary

4.4.1 There are no important ecological features on site which will be impacted by the development.

5 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The development proposals comprise the conversion of the existing building for residential use, as shown in Figures 3 and 4.

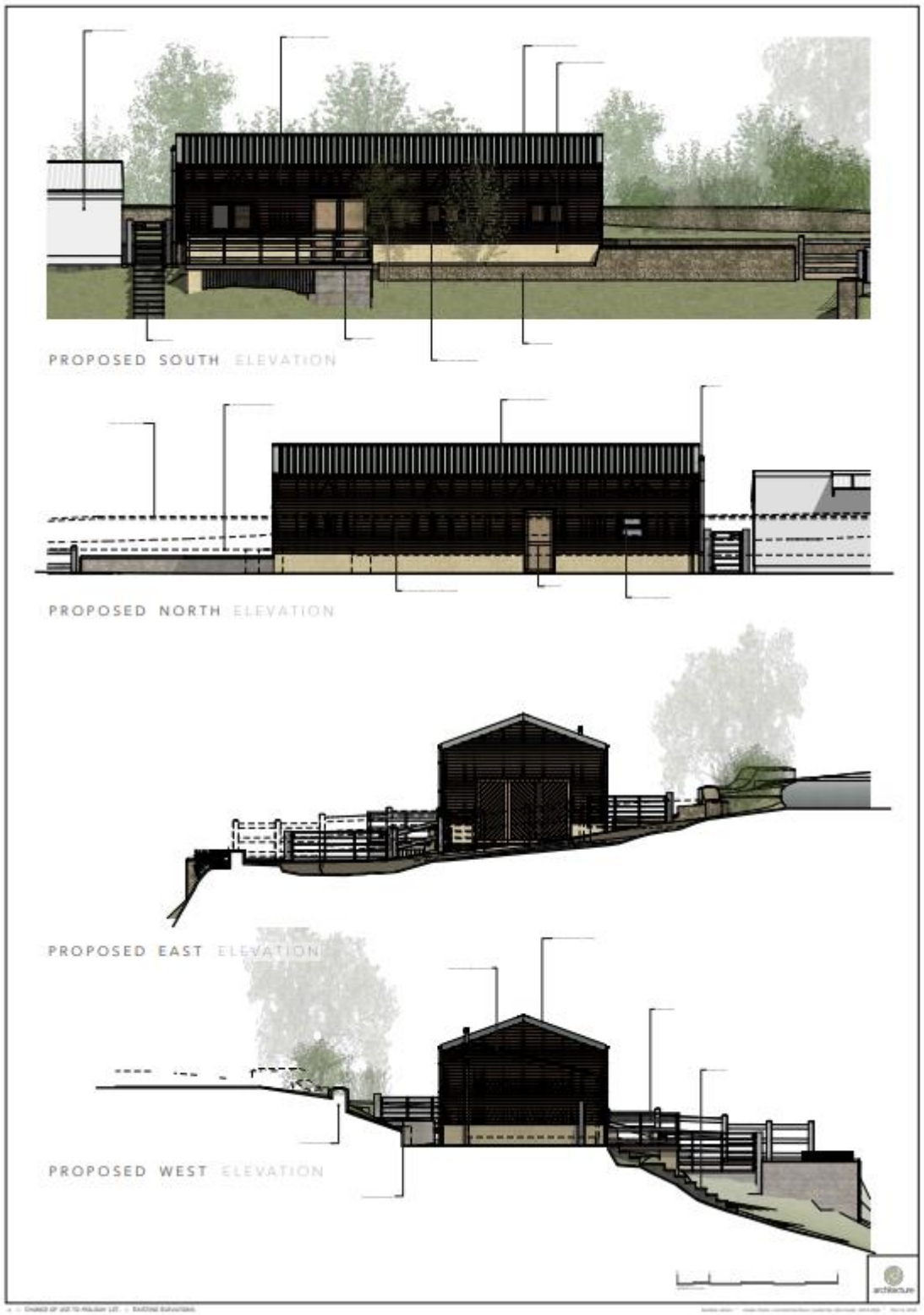

Figure 3 Proposed elevations

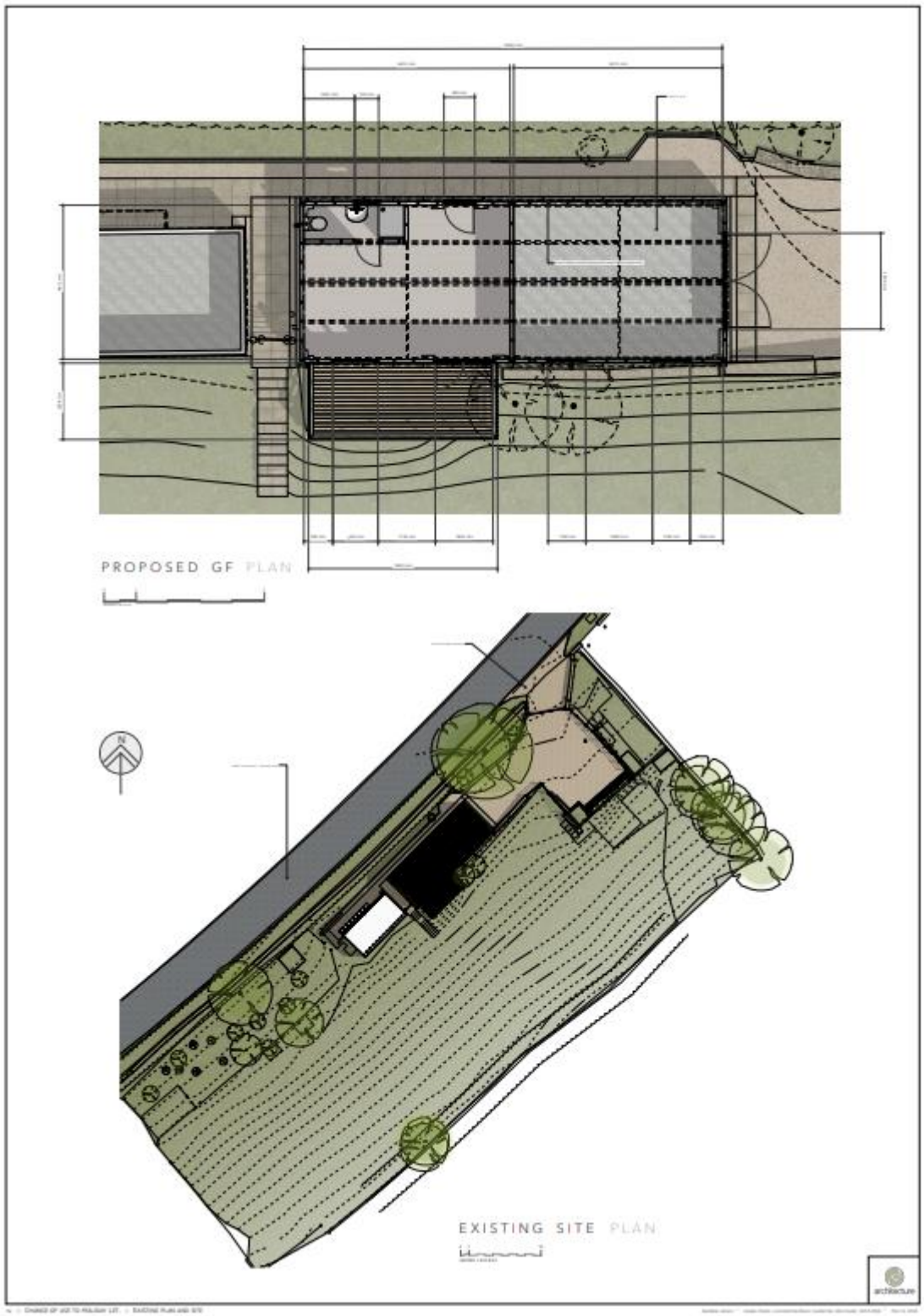

Figure 4 Proposed site plan

6 ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

6.1 Summary

6.1.1 There are no potential impacts on important ecological features and therefore, no mitigation or compensation is required as part of the development.

7 ENHANCEMENTS

7.1 Bats

7.1.1 The wider ownership site is assessed to be suitable for foraging and commuting bats. Therefore, as an enhancement measure for bats, it is recommended that a bat box is installed on site. A suitable location for the bat box would be along the wooded stream corridor at the south of the site. A suitable provision is shown below in Table 3.

Table 3 Ecological enhancement provisions

Provision	No.	Description	Installation
 2F Schwegler Bat Box	1	Specifications: • 33 (h) x 16 (d) cm • Weight 4kg Woodcrete, blend of concrete and clay which will not rot, leak, crack or warp. 20-25 years lifespan. Removable front panel.	Installed between 3-6m in a sunny and sheltered position. Situated on tree or building near vegetation.

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