Beacon Hill Farm, Amesbury

Ecological Appraisal

Prepared by:
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On behalf of:
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October 2023

Report Reference
edp7847_r001a

Document Control

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Client	Stuart Crook
Report Title	Ecological Appraisal
Document Reference	edp7847_r001a

VERSION INFORMATION

	Author	**Formatted**	**Peer Review**	**Proofed by/Date**
001_DRAFT	LNe	MWl	PNe	-
001a	LNe	-	-	NHa 181023

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(edp7847_d001a 19 October 2023 JSn/LNe)

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(edp7847_d002a 19 October 2023 DJo/LNe)

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Executive Summary

S1 This Ecological Appraisal has been prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) on behalf of Stuart Crook. This Appraisal considers the ecological implications of proposals at Beacon Hill Farm, Amesbury. The proposal comprises a change of land use to a clay pigeon shooting school, stationing of portable office and toilet blocks and use of the farmyard as car parking.

S2 To inform the Ecological Appraisal, survey work has been undertaken, including a desk study, Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey, and specific surveys for bats, badger and birds.

S3 The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations; however, the Salisbury Plain Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) is located approximately 0.3km north of the Site, and the Site is located within the River Avon SAC catchment. As such, a shadow Habitats Regulations Assessment has been completed, which concluded there would be no likely significant effects as a result of the proposals.

S4 The Site is dominated by woodland which is a Priority Habitat and will be retained under the proposals, with shooting stands utilising existing clearings. Any minor vegetation clearance required would not significantly impact the woodland habitat. The existing hedgerow will be enhanced through new planting, thereby lengthening the feature. Other habitats on-site are of negligible ecological value and will be retained.

S5 There is the potential for breeding birds to be impacted by the proposals, largely due to disturbance from shooting noise. However, the majority of bird species recorded on-site are relatively noise tolerant and these birds are likely to be habituated to current shooting that occurs within the woodland. Nest boxes will be installed off-site (within the landownership but away from the shooting) as mitigation for any loss of nesting sites.

S6 There is potential for badger, reptiles and other mammals to utilise the site, although no badger setts are present, and a very low risk of dormouse and great crested newt being present. Precautionary safeguards will be implemented during any minor vegetation clearance. However, as the shooting locations will utilise existing clearings, impacts on protected species are not anticipated.

S7 Enhancements will be provided in the form of seeding of bunds with a shade tolerant wildflower mix, hedgerow planting, and retention of any deadwood in habitat piles within the woodland. Subject to the implementation of mitigation measures, the proposals are capable of compliance with relevant planning policy and legislation and can deliver net benefits for wildlife and biodiversity.

Section 1
Introduction

1.1 This Ecological Appraisal has been prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) on behalf of Stuart Crook (hereafter referred to as "the Applicant"). This Appraisal considers the ecological implications of proposed development at Beacon Hill Farm, Amesbury (hereafter referred to as "the Site").

1.2 This report has been prepared with reference to the following key guidance:

- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*[1];
- CIEEM *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment*[2];
- British Standard: *Biodiversity - Code of Practice for Planning and Development*[3]; and
- British Standard: *Process for Designing and Implementing Biodiversity* Net Gain[4].

1.3 EDP is an independent environmental planning consultancy with offices in Cirencester, Cardiff and Cheltenham. The practice provides advice to private and public sector clients throughout the UK in the fields of landscape, ecology, archaeology, cultural heritage, arboriculture, rights of way and masterplanning. Details of the practice can be obtained at our website (www.edp-uk.co.uk).

SITE CONTEXT

1.4 The Site is centred approximately at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference (OSGR) SU 1927 4195. The local planning authority (LPA) is Wiltshire Council. The location and extents of the Site are illustrated on **Plan EDP 1** and described in the material supporting the planning application.

1.5 The Site measures 8.9 hectares (ha) and is located approximately 1.5km to the east of Amesbury, within a rural context surrounded by agricultural land. The Site comprises a woodland, with a small strip of arable land at the north and farm buildings and yard within the eastern part.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

1.6 The proposal comprises a change of land use to a clay pigeon shooting school, stationing of portable office and toilets and use of the farmyard as car parking. The proposals would allow

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

[2] CIEEM (2018). G*uidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine version 1.2*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester

[3] BSI (2013) *Biodiversity - Code of Practice for Planning and Development*. BS 42020:2013. British Standards Institute

[4] BSI (2021) *Process for Designing and Implementing Biodiversity Net Gain. Specification*. BS 8683:2021. British Standards Institute

shooting up to seven days a week between 9am to 6pm, albeit in reality, shooting would not generally be this frequent.

1.7 The proposals are subject of a detailed planning application and the proposed gun locations are provided as **Appendix EDP 1** to this report. A previous planning application was refused in April 2022 (20/07444/FUL) on the bases of aircraft safety, noise and the absence of an Ecological Impact Assessment. This Ecological Appraisal, therefore, considers the ecological implications of the proposals to inform a new planning application.

SCOPE OF THE ASSESSMENT

1.8 This Ecological Appraisal describes the current ecological interest within and around the Site, which has been identified through standard desk- and field-based investigations. It then considers the potential ecological impacts and opportunities for ecological enhancement based on the final masterplan (incorporating inherent mitigation), in the context of relevant legislation and planning policy. Finally, this Appraisal identifies the necessary additional measures to avoid, mitigate or provide compensation for potential impacts, and the mechanisms for securing such measures.

1.9 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** summarises the methodology employed in determining the baseline ecological conditions within and around the Site (with further details provided within Appendices and on Plans where appropriate);
- **Section 3** summarises the baseline ecological conditions (with further details also provided within Appendices and on Plans where appropriate) and identifies and evaluates any pertinent ecological features/receptors;
- **Section 4** describes how the development design has responded to the ecological constraints and any embedded/inherent mitigation, and then considers the potential impacts of the proposals on pertinent ecological features; and
- **Section 5** proposes mitigation and enhancement measures for the current and possible future planning stages, in the context of relevant legislation and planning policy, and mechanisms to secure their delivery.

Section 2
Baseline Methodology

2.1 This section of the Ecological Appraisal summarises the methodologies employed in determining the baseline ecological conditions within and around the Site. This has been undertaken by appropriately qualified ecologists using relevant best practice methodologies wherever possible. Reasons for any departure from best practice methodology are given and normally relate to the timing of EDP's commission and/or the availability of access to parts of the Site.

DESK STUDY

2.2 The desk study is an important element of undertaking an initial Ecological Appraisal of a site proposed for development, which entails the initial collation and review of contextual information, such as designated sites, together with known records of important habitats or species.

2.3 The desk study involved collating biodiversity information from the following sources:

- Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC); and
- Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website[5].

2.4 The desk study was undertaken during November 2022 and involved obtaining the following information:

- International statutory designations (10km radius around site);
- National statutory designations and non-statutory local sites (2km radius);
- Protected, priority and notable species records (2km radius); and
- All other notable habitat records (500m radius).

2.5 These search areas are considered sufficient to cover the potential zones of influence[6] of the proposed development in relation to designated sites, habitats and species.

2.6 The adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy and saved policies from the Salisbury District Local Plan were also reviewed as part of the desk study, to understand local priorities with regard to protection of ecological features/biodiversity.

[5] www.magic.gov.uk

[6] Zone of Influence (ZoI) - the areas and resources that may be affected by the proposed development.

CONSULTATION

2.7 The previous planning application for the Site received an objection from the Wiltshire Council Ecologist due to a requirement for further information. No Ecological Appraisal was submitted within this previous application and therefore the consultation response set out further information required in terms of protected habitats and species, demonstrating no net biodiversity loss, and the River Avon SAC.

EXTENDED PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY

2.8 The main habitats within the Site, together with their dominant/characteristic plant species, were identified by undertaking an Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey. The survey technique adopted for the Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey was at a level intermediate between a standard Phase 1 survey technique, involving habitat mapping and description, and a Phase 2 survey, based on detailed habitat and species surveys. The survey involved identifying and mapping the main habitat types (including Priority Habitats) and scoping any potential protected or Priority Species populations. This level of survey is not intended to compile a complete floral and faunal inventory for the Site.

2.9 The Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey was undertaken by a suitably experienced surveyor on 08 November 2022, during which the weather was dry.

Limitations

2.10 The Phase 1 Habitat survey was completed outside of the optimal period for botanical survey. However, considering the habitat types present, the survey allowed for a robust assessment of habitat type and the potential impacts of the proposals, such that this is not considered a limitation to the appraisal.

DETAILED (PHASE 2) SURVEYS

2.11 The scope of Phase 2 surveys undertaken within the Site was defined following the initial studies described above.

2.12 The surveys 'scoped in' based upon the findings of the Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey are summarised in turn below, with reference to sources of further detailed information where applicable.

Breeding Birds

2.13 The Site contains woodland suitable for nesting birds; however, considering the small size of the Site and diversity of habitats present the likelihood of a significant breeding bird assemblage being present was judged to be low. Nevertheless, the Site is located in close proximity to the Salisbury Plains Special Protection Area (SPA) and the LPA Ecologist highlighted that Site survey should be undertaken by a competent avian ecologist. A breeding bird survey was therefore undertaken with reference to standard methodology, entailing a modified

Common Bird Census (CBC)[7] 'territory mapping' approach. This involved a single visit to the Site, undertaken in May 2023 to coincide with the height of the breeding bird season for lowland Britain. Evidence of birds within the off-site surrounding farmland was also recorded. Based on the results of this survey it was not deemed necessary to undertake further breeding bird survey visits.

2.14 The survey took place on 04 May 2023. The visit started within half an hour from dawn and was timed to ensure it was completed prior to 11am to cover the peak activity period. No precipitation was recorded during the survey, cloud cover was 70% and high winds were recorded. During the visit, the Site was walked at a slow pace to enable all birds detected to be identified and located. Frequent stops were made to scan suitable habitats and to listen for singing and calling birds. All areas of suitable breeding habitat within the Site boundary and immediately adjacent areas were approached to within 50m.

2.15 During the survey, the location and activity of each bird detected (including those seen or heard) was recorded and mapped using standard two-letter British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) species codes. The breeding status of each bird species identified at the Site was determined according to the nature of the behavioural elements recorded, as set out in **Table EDP 2.1**.

Table EDP 2.1: Field Evidence used to Determine Bird Breeding Status

Breeding Status	Examples of Behaviour Exhibited
Confirmed	• Distraction display; • Nest building; • Nest with eggs; • Nest with young; • Used nest; • Recently fledged young; or • Adult carrying faecal sac/food.
Probable	• Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season; • Courtship and display; • Visiting a probable nest site; • Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults; • Brood patch on adult examined in the hand; or • Nest building or excavating nest-hole.
Possible	• Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat; • Male in song; or • Adult giving alarm call.
Non-breeder	• Feeding birds only; • Birds flying over only; or • Lack of suitable breeding habitat.

2.16 To inform the assessment in this report, the numbers of potential territories identified, the abundance of species at the County and National level, the quality of the habitat present and

[7] Marchant, J. (1983). *Common Bird Census Method.* BTO

the geographical range of the birds concerned have been considered, based on national and regional accounts.

2.17 The conservation status of each species of bird was also taken into account and the following lists were considered:

- Schedule 1 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act* 1981 (as amended) – affords greater protection to certain breeding species that are considered appropriately at risk nationally and are listed for additional legal protection accordingly;
- Priority Species;
- Salisbury Plain SPA qualifying species; and
- Birds of Conservation Concern[8] - under this approach UK bird populations are assessed, using quantitative criteria, to determine the population status of each species and then placed on one of three lists; Red, Amber or Green.

Limitations

2.18 As with all breeding bird surveys following this technique, the process is open to some subjectivity in interpretation except where active nests are located. Therefore, recorded locations indicate the 'centre' of a territory and not necessarily the breeding location.

2.19 Following best practice, the survey visits were timed to start around first light, to coincide with the period of peak activity for birds, most particularly passerine songbird species. There were relatively strong winds recorded during the survey (Beaufort Scale 4); however, the strength of the wind was much lower within the woodland where the majority of the survey took place and therefore was not considered to have a significant impact on the survey results. The results are therefore not significantly limited by seasonal or climatic factors. There were no access constraints to the survey.

Badger Survey

2.20 Evidence of badger (*Meles meles*) activity within the Site, was searched for on 08 November 2022. During the survey, any signs of badger activity such as holes, latrines, trails, snuffle holes and hairs on fencing or vegetation were recorded.

Ecological Surveys Scoped Out

2.21 **Table EDP 2.2** below summarises other survey types which, whilst occasionally required to inform a planning submission for development sites, are not deemed to be necessary/-appropriate in this case.

[8] Stanbury, A., Eaton, M., Aebischer, N., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D., and Win I. 2021. *The status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain*. British Birds 114: 723-747.

Table EDP 2.2: Ecology Surveys Scoped Out

Survey Type	Reasons for Scoping Out
Bat Activity	Nature of proposals are unlikely to impact foraging or commuting bats as there would be no habitat loss or lighting impacts, therefore no detailed survey required. Noise impacts are discussed further in the report.
Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)	WBRC returned no records of dormice within 2km of the Site and the woodland on-site is sub-optimal due to a lack of understorey structure. Any vegetation clearance required would be minimal and therefore no detailed survey work is required. This is discussed further in the results section below.
Otter (*Lutra lutra*) and water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*)	No suitable aquatic habitat for these species is present on-site or adjacent and therefore these species are not discussed further within this report.
Great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*)	The only waterbody within 500m of the Site appears to only be ephemerally wet and of poor quality for amphibians. In the unlikely event this species is present on-site, the proposals are highly unlikely to impact the local population and precautionary safeguards can be implemented during minor work, as discussed further in the results section.
Reptiles	The Site is not likely to support more than small numbers of common reptile species and the proposals are highly unlikely to impact the local population, such that no detailed survey is required, as discussed in the results section.
Invertebrates	The Site is likely to support a range of invertebrates within the woodland, however the proposals will not result in significant loss of habitat and additional deadwood resources will be created.
Detailed Botanical Surveys	The woodland is not ancient and is unlikely to support significant numbers or assemblages of rare plant species. In addition, the proposals will result in only minor impacts on the woodland habitat. The Phase 1 survey is therefore sufficient to evaluate habitat impacts.

Section 3
Baseline Results

3.1 This section of the Ecological Appraisal summarises the baseline ecological conditions determined through the course of desk- and field-based investigations described in **Section 2**. In particular, this section identifies and evaluates those ecological features/receptors that lie within the Site's potential zone of influence (ZoI) and which are pertinent in the context of the proposed development. Further technical details are, where appropriate, provided within Appendices and on Plans to the rear of this report.

3.2 Where a particular ecological feature/receptor has been confirmed to be present, or presence is inferred based on habitat suitability, its ecological importance is assessed. The level of ecological importance assigned to each ecological feature is based upon established geographical value systems and the uses the following scale: International and European (highest) > National > Regional > County > District > Local > Negligible (lowest).

DESIGNATED SITES

3.3 Information regarding designated sites was obtained during the desk study. Statutory designations (those receiving legal and planning policy protection) and non-statutory designations (those receiving planning policy protection only) are discussed in turn below.

Statutory Designations

3.4 Statutory designations represent the most significant ecological receptors. Internationally important statutory designations include Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Ramsar sites (including potential SPAs, possible SACs and proposed Ramsars). These designations are protected under the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations* 2017 (as amended) (the *Habitats Regulations*). These designations are referred to as 'habitats sites' in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF, 2023) and development which would adversely affect a habitats site (alone or in combination) cannot benefit from the NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development.

3.5 Nationally important statutory designations include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs). NNRs are also SSSIs, both of which are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside* Act 1981 (as amended). The NPPF states that development which would adversely affect as SSSI should not normally be permitted.

3.6 Local level statutory designations include Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and are generally considered to be of importance at the County level or lower. LNRs are designated under the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside* Act 1949, however protection of LNRs is given via local planning policies and/or by-laws.

3.7 Statutory designations are also recognised as key natural assets within the Wiltshire core Strategy and specific planning guidance is available for nutrient pollution and the River Avon SAC.

3.8 No part of the Site is covered by any statutory designations. However, there are four Internationally important designations within 15km of the Site and one Nationally important designation within 2km of the Site. There are no County level designations within 2km of the Site. These sites are summarised in **Table EDP 3.1** and illustrated on **Plan EDP 2**.

Table EDP 3.1: Statutory Designations Within the Site's Potential Zone of Influence

Designation	Approximate Distance from Site	Interest Feature(s)
Internationally Important Statutory Designated Sites (within 10km of the Site)		
Salisbury Plain SAC	0.3km north	Selected for the presence of the Annex I habitats (*Juniperus communis*) formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands and semi-natural dry grassland on calcareous substrates, and also hosts the priority habitat type 'orchid rich sites.' Also selected for the presence of the Annex II species marsh fritillary butterfly.
Salisbury Plain SPA	0.3km north	Selected for supporting nationally important populations of breeding Eurasian hobby (*Falco Subbuteo*), common quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) and stone curlew (*Burhinus oedicnemus*), and wintering hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*).
River Avon SAC	3.3km west	Selected for supporting the Annex I habitat watercourses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation and Annex II species Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*), sea lamprey (*Petromyzon merinus*), brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) and bullhead (*Cottus gobio*).
Porton Down SPA	5km south-east	Selected for supporting breeding stone curlew.
Nationally Important Statutory Designated Sites (within 2km of the Site)		
Salisbury Plain SSSI	0.3km north	Represents 41% of Britain's remaining area of unimproved chalk grassland, supporting 13 species of nationally rare and scarce plants, 67 species of rare and scarce invertebrates and forms a site of International importance for birds. Also supports scrub and woodland habitats, temporary and permanent pools and the Nine Mile River winterbourne.

Non-statutory Designations

3.9 Non-statutory designations are also commonly referred to in planning policies as 'Local sites', although such designations are typically considered to be of importance at a County level. In Wiltshire, such designations are termed Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs). Additional sites such as non-designated nature reserves (e.g. Wildlife Trust nature reserves) and Ancient Semi-natural Woodland (ASNW) are considered here when not covered by other designations.

The importance of LWSs is recognised in the NPPF and in the Wiltshire Core Strategy, Core Policy 50.

3.10 No part of the Site is covered by any non-statutory designations. There is one LWS located within 2km of the Site, as summarised in **Table EDP 3.2** and shown on **Plan EDP 2**.

Table EDP 3.2: Non-Statutory Designations Within 2km of the Site

Designation	Approximate Distance from Site	Interest Feature(s)
Boscombe Down Railway Line LWS	1km south	Two small areas of calcareous grassland on steep, disused railway embankments.

HABITATS

3.11 There are several mechanisms by which habitats that lie outside of statutory and non-statutory designations are protected, or by which their importance is recognised at a National level. This includes the following:

- 'Important' hedgerows are protected from removal (outwith the planning process) by the *Hedgerows Regulations* 1997;
- Certain habitats are listed as Priority Habitats, the conservation of which public authorities in England must have due regard to as part of policy or decision-making under Section 40 of the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities* (NERC) *Act* 2006;
- Paragraph 180 of the NPPF includes a presumption against development which results in significant harm to biodiversity (including habitats), or results in the loss of irreplaceable habitat[9]. This paragraph also encourages development to secure measurable net gains for biodiversity; and
- The importance of protecting habitats, and networks of habitats, is reflected in Core Policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

3.12 The distribution of different habitat types within the Site is illustrated on **Plan EDP 1**. The principal habitats within the Site, together with their dominant/characteristic plant species identified during the survey, are discussed in turn below. The type, distribution and species composition of the habitats present is discussed below.

Semi-natural Broadleaved Woodland

3.13 The majority of the Site comprises woodland, dominated by sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) with occasional ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and silver birch (*Betula pendula*) (see **Image EDP 3.1** below). The centre of the woodland is dominated by relatively

[9] Irreplaceable habitats are technically very difficult (or take a very significant time) to restore, recreate or replace once destroyed. They include ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, blanket bog, limestone pavement, sand dunes, salt marsh and lowland fen

young trees, with more mature trees at the peripheries. The understorey is limited and includes hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg). The ground flora is sparse and common nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is frequent. The woodland is managed with piles of deadwood left as habitat features.

3.14 The woodland is managed for shooting, with open areas dominated by seeded Perennial Rye-grass. Earth bunds have been created within the woodland to minimise noise impacts. These are unmanaged and therefore naturally colonised by tall ruderal species typical of disturbed habitat, including nettle, teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), dock (*Rumex* sp.) and cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*).

3.15 The woodland is a Priority Habitat, albeit not a high-quality example of this habitat due to the limited structural and species diversity. Numerous other woodlands are present in the local area. Overall, the woodland is therefore of no more than Local level importance.



Image EDP 3.1: On-site woodland.

Arable

3.16 Part of an arable field is located within the north of the Site, which extends off-site (**Image EDP 3.2**). At the time of survey this was reported to be seeded with a game bird cover mix at the margin, with the exception of a small area of grassland margin in the north-west. Depending on the species sown, the game bird cover may provide foraging opportunities for wild birds through the provision of a seed resource. The arable crop itself is of negligible ecological importance, while the margin is of no more than Site level importance.

Hedgerow

3.17 A short section of native hedgerow is located at the east of the Site, forming a boundary to the farmyard and managed to a relatively wide box shape. Native hedgerows are a Priority Habitat. However, this is only a very short section which, although connected to the woodland to the south, is not connected to any other hedgerows or woodland to the north, where a wooden fence forms the eastern Site boundary. As such, the hedgerow is of only Site level importance.

Bare Ground and Building/Structures

3.18 A farm track comprising tarmac and bare ground forms the access to the Site and a bare ground yard is located within the east of the Site (**Image EDP 3.3**). An open fronted farm building with a metal framework and corrugated roof and cladding is also present at the east of the Site, along with various containers, materials and stored items. Grassland and tall ruderal species have colonised around the edges of the bare ground. This habitat is of negligible ecological importance.



Image EDP 3.2: Northern edge of woodland with farm track and arable field.



Image EDP 3.3: Farmyard at east of Site.

Summary

3.19 The majority of the Site comprises woodland of Local level ecological importance. Other habitats on-site are of no more than Site level ecological importance. A number of the habitats also require consideration in relation to their importance in maintaining populations of protected, priority or other notable species. This is discussed further below.

PROTECTED, PRIORITY OR OTHER NOTABLE SPECIES

3.20 Certain species receive legal protection in the UK and are commonly known as 'protected species.' In reality, the level of protection for different species varies considerably, from protection solely against 'killing and injury' to full protection of the species and their places of refuge. Where pertinent, details of legal protection afforded to species/species-groups are provided below.

3.21 In addition to protected species there are other species/species groups that do not receive legal protection, but which are notable owing to their conservation status. This includes Priority Species, the conservation of which public authorities in England must have due regard to under the NERC Act (2006). The NPPF recognises species as an important component of biodiversity, as does Core Policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

3.22 The likelihood of presence, or confirmed presence, of protected, priority or other notable[10] wildlife species within the Site is summarised below with reference to desk study records, habitat suitability and detailed surveys where relevant. Further details are made available within the plans where referenced.

Breeding Birds

3.23 All wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act* 1981 (as amended) (WCA). This makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird;
- Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built;
- Take, damage or destroy the egg of any wild bird; or
- To have in one's possession or control any wild bird (dead or alive) or egg, or any part of a wild bird or egg.

3.24 In addition, further protection is afforded to those wild bird species listed on Schedule 1 of the WCA, prohibiting any intentional or reckless disturbance to these species while they are nest building, or at a nest containing eggs or young, or to recklessly disturb the dependent young of such a bird. A number of species are also included as Priority Species.

3.25 A large number of records of bird species were retrieved during the desk study, including six records of WCA Schedule 1 species, 11 records of Priority Species, and numerous records of species included on the latest Red and Amber lists of Birds of Conservation Concern[11]. None of these records are located within or immediately adjacent to the Site. The vast majority of records received relate to species that would not normally breed in habitats found within the Site. Records of the species with possible suitable breeding habitats within the on-site woodland include spotted flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata)*, hobby (*Falco Subbuteo)*, cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus)* and red kite (*Milvus milvus)*.

3.26 A total of 27 bird species were recorded during the breeding bird survey, six of which were recorded as probably breeding and 21 were recorded as possibly breeding. Full details of each species recorded, including their breeding status on-site/adjacent and their conservation status, are provided below in **Table EDP 3.3**.

[10] Notable species are those which are not legally protected but are formally identified as being of conservation concern

[11] Stanbury, A., Eaton, M., Aebischer, N., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D., and Win I. 2021. *The status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain*. British Birds 114: 723-747

3.27 Of the six bird species that were recorded as likely breeding on-site or adjacent to the Site, three are species of nature conservation importance, namely being a Priority Species and/or being species included on the latest Red and Amber lists of Birds of Conservation Concern. These species on-site were whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) and woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), with Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) probably breeding within adjacent arable fields. The distribution of these species recorded within the Site is shown on **Plan EDP 3**. In addition, corn bunting (*Emberiza calandra*), dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), house martin (*Delichon urbicum*), linnet (*Linaria cannabina*), stock dove (*Columba oenas*), tawny owl (*Strix aluco*) and wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) were possibly breeding on-Site or adjacent to the Site. No species listed on Schedule 1 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act* were recorded on, or in close proximity to, the Site.

3.28 It was deemed that the results from the single survey visit were sufficient to understand the breeding bird assemblage present on the Site. Further surveys are not necessary, due to the size of the Site, and low suitably of the habitat for other notable or protected bird species, including stone curlew, hen harrier, quail and hobby that are notified for nearby designated sites. The surrounding habitat is also sub-optimal and subject to noise disturbance, as a result of the existing shooting on-site and the A303, 335m to the north.

3.29 The abundance and diversity of bird species recorded on-site was consistent with the limited extent and diversity of nesting habitats present. The majority of species recorded were associated with the woodland with a small number recorded around the arable habitat and buildings adjacent to the Site. No evidence of qualifying species for the Salisbury Plain SPA were recorded. The breeding bird assemblage is therefore judged to be of no greater than Local level ecological importance.

Table EDP 3.3: Results of the Breeding Bird Survey 2023

Common Name	Scientific Name	UK Status	On-site Status	No. Recorded	Survey Observations
Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	6	Six birds observed singing across the woodland.
Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapilla*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	4	Four birds observed singing within the woodland.
Blue Tit	*Cyanistes caeruleus*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	5	Five birds observed singing within the woodland.
Buzzard	*Buteo buteo*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	1	A single bird observed within the woodland.
Carrion Crow	*Corvus corone*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	1	A single bird observed within the arable field off-site to the west of the woodland.
Chaffinch	*Fringilla coelebs*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	3	Three birds observed singing within the woodland.
Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	2	Two birds observed singing within the woodland.
Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decacto*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	1	One bird observed on top of an off-site farm building.
Corn Bunting	*Emberiza calandra*	**Red List S.41**	Possible breeding off-site	27	A total of 27 individuals recorded, mostly within a flock observed around the off-site farm buildings. May breed within off-site field margins.
Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*	**Amber List S.41**	Possible breeding on-site	2	Two singing birds observed within the woodland.
Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	Green List	Probable breeding on-site	4	Two individuals and a pair observed singing within the woodland and adjacent arable field hedgerow.
Great Tit	*Parus major*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	3	Three birds observed singing within the woodland.

Common Name	Scientific Name	UK Status	On-site Status	No. Recorded	Survey Observations
House Martin	*Delichon urbicum*	**Red List**	Possible breeding on-site	1	A single bird observed flying over the on-site farm buildings.
Linnet	*Linaria cannabina*	**Red List S.41**	Possible breeding off-site	1	A single bird observed singing within an arable field adjacent to the woodland.
Magpie	*Pica pica*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	2	Two birds observed within the woodland.
Pheasant	*Phasianus colchicus*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	1	A single individual observed on the woodland edge.
Pied Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	1	A single individual observed next to the farm buildings.
Red-legged Partridge	*Alectoris rufa*	Green List	Probable breeding off-site	2	A pair was observed within the arable field off-site to the south.
Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*	Green List	Possible breeding on-site	8	Eight birds observed singing within the woodland.
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*	**Red List S.41**	Probable breeding off-site	4	A flock of four birds were observed within the arable field off-site to the south-east.
Stock Dove	*Columba oenas*	**Amber List**	Possible breeding on-site	1	A single bird observed within the arable field off-site to the south-west.
Stonechat	*Saxicola rubicola*	Green List	Possible breeding off-site	1	A single bird observed within the arable field off-site to the west.
Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	Green List	Probable breeding off-site	3	Three birds recorded flying around the farm buildings.
Tawny Owl	*Strix aluco*	**Amber List**	Possible breeding on-site	1	A single bird was observed within the woodland.

Common Name	Scientific Name	UK Status	On-site Status	No. Recorded	Survey Observations
Whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*	**Amber List**	Probable breeding on-site	5	Three birds were recorded within a hedgerow off-site to the north-west of the Site. Two other individuals were recorded, one within the woodland and one within a hedgerow to the south-east of the Site.
Woodpigeon	*Columba palumbus*	**Amber List**	Probable breeding on-site	7	Two pairs and three individuals were observed within the woodland.
Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*	**Amber List**	Possible breeding on-site	8	Eight birds were recorded singing within the woodland.

Bats

3.30 All species of British bat are listed as European Protected Species (EPS) on Schedule 2 of the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations* 2017 (as amended) (referred to as the '*Habitats Regulations*'). This affords strict protection to bats and their roosts, and makes it an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a wild animal of an EPS;
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of an EPS wherever they are occurring, in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong, or in the case of hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a wild animal of an EPS.

3.31 Additional protection for bats is also afforded under the WCA, making it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb bats whilst they are occupying a structure or place which is used for shelter or protection, or to obstruct access to this structure or place. In addition, soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*), greater horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*), barbastelle bat (*Barbastella barbastellus*), Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteinii*), noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), and lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) are also listed as Priority Species.

3.32 The desk study returned 57 records for bats within the 2km search radius around the Site, relating to at least nine different species. Most records are only provided to a 1km grid square accuracy, however no roosts (or other bat records) are located within the same 1km grid squares as the Site.

3.33 A single record for the Annex II species Western Barbastelle was returned within 2km of the Site, for a non-roosting bat located approximately 1.7km west of the Site in 2014. Two records relating to European Protected Species Mitigation Licences (EPSML) issued for bats were returned from the data search on MAGIC within 2km of the Site, all at least 1.5km from the Site.

Bat Roosting

Trees

3.34 With respect to trees, several of the more mature trees within the woodland have features suitable for bat roosting, however many of the trees are relatively young and do not provide potential roosting opportunities. As no mature trees are to be directly impacted by the proposals, further detailed surveys to determine roost presence/absence were not completed.

Buildings/Built Structures

3.35 The building on-site is open to the elements and comprises a single skin of metal corrugated cladding on a metal framework (**Image EDP 3.4**). As such, the building has negligible suitability to support roosting bats and no further survey work is necessary.



Image EDP 3.4: On-site farm building.

Bat Foraging/Commuting Activity

3.36 The woodland on-site is of moderate suitability for foraging bats and is connected to other off-site habitats via a hedgerow north of the Site. However, due to the nature of the proposals, no impacts on foraging or commuting bats are expected (see **Section 4** below), and therefore detailed bat activity surveys are not considered necessary.

Dormouse

3.37 Hazel dormouse is an EPS receiving strict protection under the *Habitats Regulations* as summarised above in respect of bats. Additional protection is also afforded to this species under the WCA as summarised above in respect of bats. This species is also listed as a Priority Species.

3.38 No records for dormouse were returned within 2km of the Site's boundaries during the desk study and no nearby records relating to EPSMLs issued for dormouse were returned from the data search on MAGIC.

3.39 The woodland on-site is of some suitability for dormice but is small in size and has a limited shrub layer and species diversity. Should dormice be present within the local area, the hedgerow north of the Site provides connectivity between the on-site woodland and off-site hedgerow and woodland habitats. However, considering the absence of local records for this species and the small area of woodland with limited understorey structure, it is unlikely that dormice will be present on-site. In any case, in the unlikely event that this species is present

the proposals will utilise existing open areas within the woodlands and therefore not significantly impact dormouse habitat, such that no detailed survey work is required.

Badger

3.40 Badgers and their setts are protected under the *Protection of Badgers Act* 1992, which makes it an offence (*inter-alia*) to:

- Wilfully kill, injure, take, or cruelly ill-treat a badger; and
- Damage or interfere with a sett, by doing one of the following things:
    - Damage a badger sett or any part of it;
    - Destroy a badger sett;
    - Obstruct access to, or any entrance of, a badger sett;
    - Cause a dog to enter a badger sett; or
    - Disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett.

3.41 The 1992 Act defines a badger sett as "*any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a badger*".

3.42 The protection afforded to badgers is primarily due to animal welfare issues and history of persecution rather than concerns over their unfavourable nature conservation status.

3.43 Nineteen records of badger were returned within 2km of the Site, including a record for a sett within the same 1km grid square as the Site, dated 2006. The woodland within the Site offers good opportunities for badger foraging and sett building. However, no setts or any other evidence of this species within the Site was recorded during the survey.

Other Mammal Species

3.44 The Site does not contain suitable habitat for otter (*Lutra lutra*) or water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*). Records of the following Priority mammal species were returned within 2km of the Site:

- Polecat (*Mustela putorius*) – two records approximately 1.8km east of the Site;
- European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)[12] – 82 records largely associated with residential areas of Amesbury and Bulford Camp; and
- Brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*) – 26 records in local landscape.

[12] Hedgehogs are also protected from capture or killing by specific methods under Schedule 6 of the WCA

3.45 The woodland on-site provides suitable foraging, refuge and/or breeding habitat for polecat, hedgehog and brown hare, however it is not a large area and it is unlikely to support populations above Site level importance.

Great Crested Newt

3.46 Great crested newt is an EPS receiving strict protection under the *Habitats Regulations* as summarised above in respect of bats. Additional protection is also afforded to this species under the WCA as summarised above in respect of bats. This species is also listed as a Priority Species.

3.47 Four low resolution records of great crested newt were returned within 2km of the Site; however, these are all from 1985 or prior and not within the 1km grid squares containing the Site. No records relating to EPSMLs issued for great crested newt were returned from within 2km of the Site on MAGIC.

3.48 A single pond is recorded on OS mapping within 500m of the Site, approximately 45m from the east of the Site. This is a soakaway feature associated with the farm and although wet at the time of survey in November 2022, is reported to be dry the majority of the year and therefore unsuitable during the breeding season in most years. The feature contained no aquatic vegetation and was grassland beneath shallow water. The pond has very limited suitability to support great crested newt and negligible suitability during most breeding seasons, and it is unlikely that great crested newt utilise the pond given the absence of other nearby waterbodies or records of this species, and regular desiccation. In the unlikely event that great crested newt are present within the off-site pond, then the on-site woodland provides potential foraging and refuge habitat for this species. Any population utilising the Site would be of no more than Local level importance.

Other Amphibian Species

3.49 Other legally protected amphibians are rare and have a very restricted distribution[13], however, common toad (*Bufo bufo*) is a widespread species which is listed as a Priority Species.

3.50 Four records for common toad were returned from the data search, although the only recent record (after 1980) is located approximately 1.6km east of the Site. Although the woodland provides suitable foraging and refuge habitat for this species, given the lack of waterbodies in the surrounding landscape it is unlikely to be of value above the Site level.

Reptiles

3.51 All species of common reptile, namely common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), slow worm, grass snake (*Natrix helvetica helvetica*) and adder (*Vipera berus*), receive at least limited protection from harm under the WCA, making it an offence to cause intentional killing and injuring of these species. In addition, these species are also listed as Priority Species.

3.52 Numerous reptile records were returned from the desk study within 2km of the Site, relating to slow worm and common lizard, as well as a single record for grass snake. No records originate

[13] Natterjack toad (*Epidalea calamita*) and Northern pool frog (*Pelophylax lessonae*) are EPS, protected under WCA and Priority Species

from within the Site or within 500m of the Site. The on-site woodland provides refuge opportunities for reptiles with the clearings providing open areas for basking and foraging; however, suitable reptile habitat is limited and it is unlikely the Site would support populations above Site level value.

Invertebrates

3.53 A large number of invertebrate records were returned from the data search, including several notable butterflies within 1km grid squares encompassing the Site. However, many of these are associated with Salisbury Plain SAC/SPA north of the Site.

3.54 The on-site woodland is likely to support range of invertebrate species and includes deadwood piles of value to saproxylic species; however, no ancient trees are present and the open areas do not support a diverse botanical assemblage of value to invertebrates. The Site is therefore unlikely to support invertebrate populations above Site level value.

SUMMARY OF KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

3.55 The key ecological features/receptors pertinent to the development proposals, based on the survey findings described above, are set out in **Table EDP 3.4**.

Table EDP 3.4: Summary of Ecological Features within the Zone of Influence

Feature	Key Attributes	Ecological Importance
Statutory Designated Sites		
Salisbury Plain SAC	Designated for juniper on calcareous grassland and marsh fritillary (off-site).	International Off-site
Salisbury Plain SPA	Designated for wintering hen harrier and breeding Eurasian hobby, common quail and stone curlew (off-site).	International Off-site
Salisbury Plain SSSI	Unimproved chalk grassland (off-site).	National Off-site
River Avon SAC	Designated for river supporting *Ranunculus* communities, Desmoulin's whorl snail, sea lamprey, brook lamprey, Atlantic salmon and bullhead (off-site).	International Off-site
Porton Down SPA	Designated for breeding stone curlew (off-site).	International Off-site
Non-statutory Designated Sites		
Boscombe Down Railway Line LWS	Calcareous grassland on disused railway embankments (off-site).	Local Off-site
Habitats		
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	Priority habitat woodland comprising the majority of Site.	Local
Hedgerow	Short section of Priority Habitat hedgerow.	Site

Feature	Key Attributes	Ecological Importance
Species		
Breeding birds	Low numbers of common breeding birds possible/probable, predominantly associated with woodland.	Local
Bat roosting	Trees with suitability to support roosting bats present on-site.	Site
Bat foraging	Range of bat species expected to utilise Site for foraging and commuting.	Likely Local
Dormouse	Suitable habitat present but species unlikely to be present.	Negligible
Badger	No evidence, although may use Site for foraging and future sett creation; cannot be ruled out.	Negligible
Other mammals	Potential for polecat, brown hare and hedgehog.	Site
Great crested newt	Unlikely to utilise Site, although suitable terrestrial habitat present.	Negligible
Reptiles	Potential for small populations of common reptile species.	Potentially Site
Invertebrates	Woodland likely to support a range of invertebrate species, including saproxylic invertebrates.	Site

Section 4
Impact Assessment

4.1 This section of the Ecological Appraisal considers the likely impacts of the development proposals on the pertinent ecological features identified in **Section 3** in the absence of mitigation.

IMPACTS ON DESIGNATED SITES

Statutory Designations

4.2 As described in **Section 3**, there are several statutory designations within the potential ZoI of the Site. The potential impacts on these designations, in the absence of additional mitigation, are discussed below.

International Designations

4.3 There are four European Sites of relevance to the Site, which are Salisbury Plain SAC and SPA, River Avon SAC and Porton Down SAC. A Shadow Habitat Regulations Assessment (sHRA) (edp7848_r002) has been undertaken to consider all potential impact pathways on these internationally designated sites. The sHRA provides the necessary details; however these are summarised below.

4.4 None of the bird species for which the Salisbury Plain SPA is designated were recorded on-site and the woodland is of very low suitability for these species. Due to the distance between the Site and the nearby designated sites, direct Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) were screened out. Indirect impacts that were considered in more detail were: wastewater discharge and the potential for effects on the River Avon SAC; and the potential effect of increased noise on the qualifying bird species of the Salisbury Plain SPA. Although the shooting will result in higher noise levels within the closest part of the Salisbury Plain SPA, considering the current disturbance due to the presence of footpaths, the proximity of the A303 to this part of the SPA and the shooting that already occurs within the farmland, likely significant effects were screened out. A septic tank will be installed to serve the toilets which will receive a very low daily discharge and not discharge to a watercourse. Due to the distance from the SAC (3.3km), likely significant effects were screened out.

4.5 In summary, the proposals are unlikely to have a significant effect on Salisbury Plain SAC/SPA, River Avon SAC or Porton Down SAC.

National Designations

4.6 The Salisbury Plain SSSI (the only nationally designated site within the ZoI) corresponds to the area designated as Salisbury Plain SAC and SPA. As summarised above, adverse impacts from the proposals on the qualifying habitats and species are not expected. Impacts on other species supported by the SSSI, such as the plant and invertebrate assemblage, are not expected due to the separation distance and lack of impact pathways from the proposed use as a clay pigeon shooting school.

4.7 It is therefore concluded that no significant direct or indirect impacts on the Salisbury Plain SSSI, or other National designations, would occur as a result of the proposals.

Non-statutory Designations

4.8 As described in **Section 3**, there is only one non-statutory designation within 2km of the Site. The Boscombe Down Railway Line LWS is designated for habitats (calcareous grassland) which would not be impacted by the proposed clay pigeon shooting school as it is 1km removed from the Site. It is therefore concluded that no significant impacts on the Boscombe Down Railway Line LWS would occur as a result of the proposals.

IMPACTS ON HABITATS

4.9 The habitats on-site will be effectively retained in their entirety under the proposals. The car park will utilise the existing farmyard and the portable office and toilets will be located on an area that is currently bare ground. The shooting locations will utilise existing clearings within the woodland. It is possible that a very small amount of vegetation clearance may take place within the woodland to facilitate the erection of the new shooting stands, however this will be limited to small young trees and scrub only where necessary. No mature trees will be felled and no hardstanding base is required for the stands, which are self-supporting on the surface. As such, there will be no loss of woodland habitat and only minor impacts to the vegetation present, unlikely to significantly impact the condition of the woodland. The current woodland management, which includes leaving any deadwood from felling/pruning in piles and any fallen deadwood *in situ* will be continued. No pollution from concrete or other materials will occur as the shooting stands will not require footings.

4.10 The existing hedgerow at the east of the Site will be retained and enhanced through the planting of additional native hedgerow connected to the north. The arable field and associated margins within the north of the Site and the existing access track will be retained as existing.

4.11 During operation there will be some increase in the numbers of visitors accessing the woodland, such that there may be an increase in trampling of woodland vegetation. However, this would be confined to specific access points already utilised within the woodland, such that it is not expected to have a significant impact on woodland condition. The use of the woodland as a clay pigeon shooting school is not expected to create any new pollution impacts on the woodland.

4.12 Overall, there will be no net loss in habitat area or condition on-site. New hedgerow creation at the east of the Site will provide a net gain in linear hedgerow habitat on-site.

IMPACTS ON PROTECTED, PRIORITY OR OTHER NOTABLE SPECIES

Breeding Birds

4.13 Installation of the shooting stands will utilise existing clearings, albeit there is the potential for a minor loss of scrub or young trees. Therefore, in the absence of mitigation there is potential for the killing and injury of individual birds and damage or destruction of their nests during vegetation clearance. This could lead to a breach of wildlife legislation. If barn owl, red kite or any other Schedule 1 species begin to nest within the Site then any disturbance to them while

they're nesting, building a nest, in or near a nest that contains their young, or disturbance to their dependent young could also lead to a breach in wildlife legislation.

4.14 The proposed shooting school will result in an increase in noise disturbance within the Site and also within the surrounding fields. This has the potential to reduce the suitability of habitat within the woodland and adjacent habitats for nesting. However, it is understood that clay pigeon shooting already takes place at the Site and therefore those birds present are habituated at least to some extent to the sound.

4.15 The majority of birds recorded on-site are relatively tolerant to high noise levels. Tawny owl (which were recorded within the woodland on the Site) are, however, more sensitive to noise impacts. However, there are many other woodlands within the local landscape and the potential loss of suitable habitat for a single pair of tawny owl would be highly unlikely to have a significant impact on the local population of this Amber listed species.

4.16 In considering tawny owl, as well as other bird species, it should be noted that the Site is already used for shooting up to five or six days per week and therefore, any nesting birds would be habituated to the sound of gun fire. As such, it is unlikely the proposed increase in shooting would alter the nesting habits of these owl species, or the overall wider assemblage of breeding birds within and adjacent to the Site.

Bats

4.17 No mature trees with features suitable for roosting bats will be felled to facilitate the proposals and there will be no change to artificial lighting on-site. As such, any existing roosts within the woodland would not be directly impacted by the proposals. There is the potential for noise due to gun fire to disturb individual roosting bats if present within adjacent trees, however, as the woodland is already used for shooting any bats currently roosting within the area should be habituated to the sound, such that a change in frequency would be unlikely to have a significant effect.

4.18 The proposals will not significantly alter the habitats available on-site and there will be no shooting within the woodland after dusk, therefore foraging and commuting bats will not be impacted by the proposals.

Dormouse

4.19 It is unlikely that dormouse are present within the Site. Shooting locations will be located within existing clearings. Any vegetation clearance required to facilitate the erection of the shooting stands will be minimal, such that in the unlikely event this species is present, the proposals would not have an adverse impact on the conservation significance of the local population. Nevertheless, precautionary safeguards will be put in place during vegetation clearance (see **Section 5** below).

Badger

4.20 No evidence of badger has been identified within or adjacent to the Site, although there are sett records within the local area. It is possible that this species utilises the Site for foraging and there is the potential for setts to be created in the future. The proposals will not significantly

alter the foraging opportunities available, and no lighting or night-time activity is proposed. As such, no significant impact on the local population is expected.

Other Mammals

4.21 There is the potential for hedgehog, brown hare and polecat (all of which are Priority Species) to utilise the Site. However, any minor vegetation clearance proposed would not have a significant impact on their local populations, should they be present.

Great Crested Newt

4.22 Based on the ephemeral nature of the off-site waterbody and the lack of other waterbodies in the surrounding area, great crested newt are unlikely to utilise the Site. In the unlikely event this species, or other amphibians are present, any vegetation clearance poses a minor risk of killing or injury of individuals. Therefore, precautionary methods will be implemented during vegetation clearance and stand installation. As great crested newt are considered unlikely to be present, no licensing for great crested newt is considered necessary.

Reptiles

4.23 The woodland within the Site provides some limited opportunities for common reptile species. The vast majority of habitat will be retained; however, there is a small risk of killing or injury of individual animals during any additional vegetation clearance. As such, precautionary methods will be implemented as discussed in **Section 5** below.

Section 5
Mitigation and Enhancement Strategy

5.1 This section of the Ecological Appraisal considers the impacts set out in **Section 4** and puts forward additional measures to firstly avoid any ecological impact, and if this is not possible, then to minimise the likely impacts of the proposed development to insignificant levels, to comply with relevant planning policy and avoid any infringement of relevant legislation.

5.2 This section also sets out proposed ecological enhancements for the Site, in line with the wording within the NPPF and Core Policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, requiring developments to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.

DESIGNATED SITES

5.3 No impacts to any statutory or non-statutory designated sites are considered likely through the development and therefore no mitigation is required.

HABITATS

5.4 During the installation of new shooting stands, vegetation clearance will be restricted to only the small areas necessary and limited to scrub and young trees. Clearance will take place using hand tools to prevent accidental damage to retained vegetation. The shooting stands will be located over the natural surface with no concrete or other solid footings created.

5.5 Any cut material from the limited vegetation clearance will be kept within the woodland as habitat piles. These will benefit invertebrates and also provide places of shelter for small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. A new native, species-rich hedgerow will be planted at the east of the Site, providing a net gain in hedgerow habitat within the Site. The bunds will be seeded with a wildflower mix suitable for shaded habitat to enhance botanical diversity within the woodland.

5.6 Subject to the implementation of the measures summarised above, impacts on retained habitats will be avoided and net gains in biodiversity will be achieved in accordance with relevant planning policy.

PROTECTED, PRIORITY OR OTHER NOTABLE SPECIES

Breeding Birds

5.7 The small areas of vegetation clearance required to erect shooting stands will be subject to precautions to avoid impacts on nesting birds. Any removal of scrub or young trees should be undertaken between September and February (inclusive) to avoid the peak bird breeding season. If clearance during the breeding season cannot be avoided, then a suitably experienced ecologist should first check vegetation for nesting birds immediately prior to clearance. If nesting birds are found at any time of year, the nest (and a suitable buffer around the nest) would need to be retained until any young have fledged or the nest is otherwise naturally

disused. The exact dimensions of the buffer should be advised by an ecologist. An updated check for Schedule 1 bird species nesting on-site or within adjacent land subject to increased noise levels should also be completed.

5.8 The effect of increased shooting noise on nesting birds is expected to be minor, given the species recorded are largely noise tolerant species. However, to mitigate for the potential loss of some nesting sites within the woodland and adjacent barns, new bird boxes will be erected in suitable locations off-site but within the same land ownership.

Dormouse

5.9 Clearance of woody vegetation will be limited to the minimum required for stand installation, such that this is highly unlikely to impact dormice in the unlikely event they are present within the woodland. As a precaution, vegetation clearance will be preceded by a check for dormouse nests by a suitably experienced ecologist. Should any evidence of dormouse be found then works must cease and the need for a Natural England mitigation licence considered.

Badger

5.10 A pre-commencement badger survey will be completed to ensure that no newly created badger setts are present within the Site. If badger setts are identified, then potential impacts will need to be considered, however as no ground clearance is required this should be minimal.

Other Mammals

5.11 Should any brash be present within the areas to be cleared for erection of shooting stands, then the supervising ecologist will check these for hedgehog. Any individuals will be relocated to retained habitat piles within the woodland.

Great Crested Newt (and ther Amphibians)

5.12 Prior to any vegetation clearance a suitably experienced ecologist will carry out a fingertip search for amphibians, including great crested, prior to cutting vegetation to ground level. This should occur outside of the hibernation period (i.e. March – October), ideally in September or October outside of the bird nesting season. However, should this not be possible, given the small scale of habitat loss and low likelihood of encountering great crested newt, clearance can take place over winter months subject to an ecologist first checking for any hibernation features, and these being retained *in situ* should they be encountered. Stand locations can be altered by a small degree if necessary, so as to minimise impacts on habitat features.

5.13 Should great crested newt be encountered then works must cease and the need for Natural England licensing considered.

Reptiles

5.14 The above precautionary safeguards for great crested newt will also serve to safeguard any reptiles present. Should any reptiles be encountered then they would be safely relocated to retained habitat by the supervising ecologist.

Conclusions

5.15 The impacts of the proposals on important ecological features are predicted to be negligible, with the potential exception of breeding birds where a minor impact on noise sensitive species may occur. Impacts are not expected to significantly impact local populations and can be mitigated through off-site nest box installation.

5.16 EDP concludes that, subject to the full implementation of the additional measures summarised above, the proposals are capable of compliance with relevant planning policy and legislation and can deliver net benefits for wildlife and biodiversity.

Appendix EDP 1
Approximate Gun Positions



PLAN	**KCC2885/09**		
TITLE	**Approximate Gun Positions**		
SITE	**Beacon Hill Farm**		
CLIENT	S H Crook		
NUMBER	KCC2885/09 06/23cb		
DATE	June 2023	**SCALE**	1:2500 at A3

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Promap V2 LANDMARK INFORMATION

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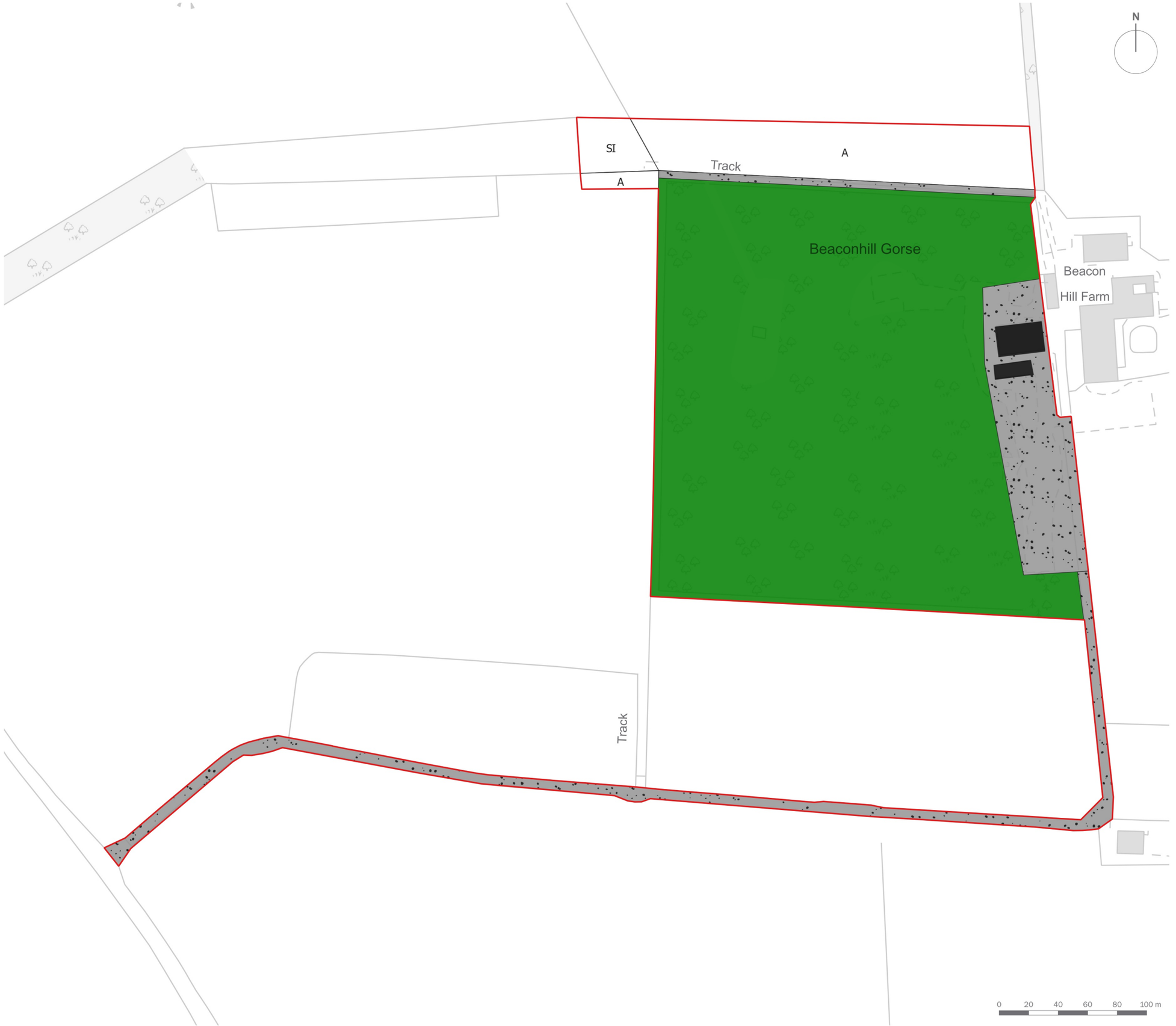
Plotted Scale - **1:2500**. Paper Size - **A3**

Plans

Plan EDP 1: Extended Phase 1 Habitat Plan
(edp7847_d001a 19 October 2023 JSn/LNe)

Plan EDP 2: Designated Sites
(edp7847_d002a 19 October 2023 DJo/LNe)

Plan EDP 3: Bird Survey Results
(edp7847_d003a 19 October 2023 DJo/LNe)



Site Boundary

Broadleaved Semi-natural Woodland

A — Arable

SI — Poor Semi-improved Grassland

Building

Hardstanding/Bare Ground

client

Stuart Crook

project title

Beacon Hill Farm, Amesbury

drawing title

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Plan

date	**19 OCTOBER 2023**	drawn by	**JSn**
drawing number	**edp7847_d001a**	checked	**LNe**
scale	**1:2,500 @ A3**	QA	**RBa**

the environmental dimension partnership

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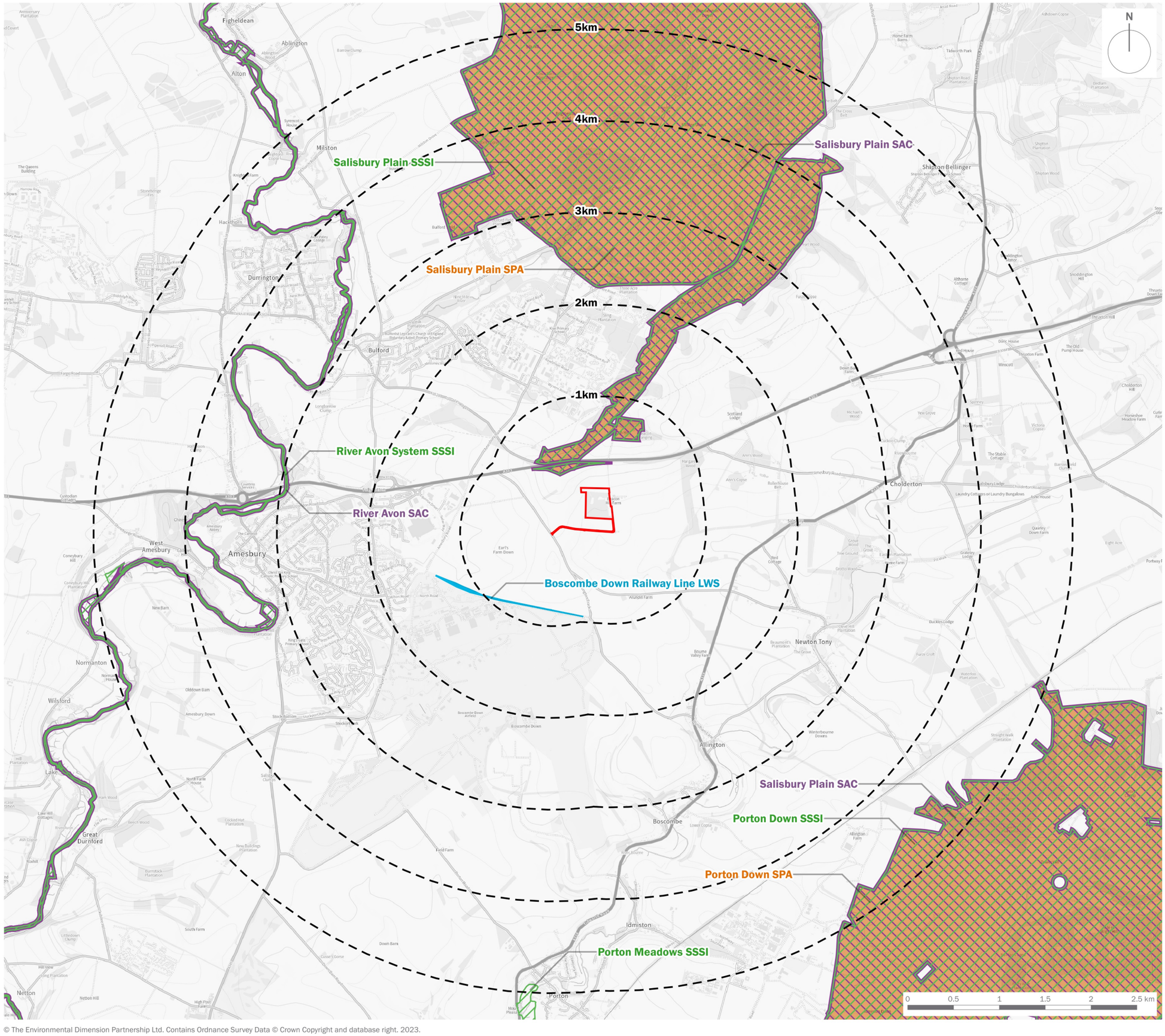

Site Boundary

Range Rings (at 1km intervals)

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Special Area Conservation (SAC)

Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Local Wildlife Site

client

Stuart Crook

project title

Beacon Hill Farm, Amesbury

drawing title

Designated Sites

date	**19 OCTOBER 2023**	drawn by	**DJo**
drawing number	**edp7847_d002a**	checked	**LNe**
scale	**1:40,000 @ A3**	QA	**RBa**

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Site Boundary

Conservation Status

Species of Principal Importance

Not Listed as SPI

Birds of Conservation Concern

Red List

Amber List

Code	Species
CB	Corn Bunting
D.	Dunnock
HM	House Martin
LI	Common Linnet
S.	Sky Lark
SD	Stock Dove
TO	Tawny Owl
WH	Common Whitethroat
WP	Woodpigeon
WR	Wren

client

Stuart Crook

project title

Beacon Hill Farm, Amesbury

drawing title

Bird Survey Results

date	**19 OCTOBER 2023**	drawn by	**DJo**
drawing number	**edp7847_d003a**	checked	**LNe**
scale	**1:3,000 @ A3**	QA	**RBa**

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