Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Plan

Mr and Mrs Elderfield

Saddlepack Farm
Stert
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SN10 3HZ

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This report has been prepared to set out ecological compensation and enhancement measures at Saddlepack Farm, Stert, Wiltshire, with a view of safeguarding protected species and habitats. Cotswold Environmental Ltd accept no responsibility or liability for any use that is made of this document other than by the client for the purposes for which it was originally commissioned and prepared.

Methods used to prepare this report, including those carried out in the field followed The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This document has been prepared to set out ecological compensation and enhancement measures at Saddlepack, Stert, Wiltshire.

1.2 Cotswold Environmental Ltd were commissioned in December 2023 to produce a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan for a proposed development at Saddlepack Farm, Stert, Wiltshire. This document should be read in conjunction with the following document:

- Cotswold Environmental Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated September 2023 (Report No. CE001099).

1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (July 2021) sets out the government planning policies for England and how they should be applied. Chapter 15: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment, is of particular relevance to this report as it relates to ecology and biodiversity[1]. The Government Circular 06/2005, which is referred to by the NPPF, provides further guidance in respect of statutory obligations for biodiversity and geological conservation and their impact within the planning system.

1.4 All survey and assessment work were completed in accordance with official assessment guidelines[2] and largely followed that recommended by the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) [3] and follows the British Standard Code of Practice[4].

Relevant Legislation

The Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (the Habitat Regulations) (as amended)

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) consolidate the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 with subsequent amendments. The Regulations transpose Council Directive 92/43/EEC, on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EC Habitats Directive), into national law. They also transpose elements of the EU Wild Birds Directive in England and Wales. The Regulations came into force on 30th November 2017 and extend to England and Wales (including the adjacent territorial sea) and to a limited extent in Scotland (reserved matters) and Northern Ireland (excepted matters). In Scotland, the Habitats Directive is

[1]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779764/NPPF_Feb_2019_web.pdf

[3] CIEEM (2017) Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing. CIEEM, Winchester.
[4] British Standards Institution (2013) BS 42020:2013. Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development. British Standards Institution, London.

transposed through a combination of the Habitats Regulations 2010 (in relation to reserved matters) and the and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994. The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) transpose the Habitats Directive in relation to Northern Ireland.

2 Site Assessment Overview

2.1 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was undertaken during July 2023 by Cotswold Environmental Ltd, providing baseline data used to inform this document. A summary of onsite habitats is provided below:

2.2 The site – an existing agricultural yard - is comprised of an area of hardstanding with a mobile home, nearby agricultural building and manege immediately surrounded by mature trees and shrubs. Rows of semi-mature trees and mature shrubs exists to the immediate south and west of the mobile home, comprising common hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and field maple *Acer campestre*. Hardstanding comprised of compacted hardcore dominated the survey boundary and is connected to the concrete driveway which provides access to the site from the south-east.

Responsibilities

2.3 The developer is legally responsible for ensuring that planning conditions set by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) are fulfilled. All ecology works described in this Plan will be carried out under the guidance of the appointed Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) as required.

2.4 Any breaches of the requirements of this plan will be reported to the appointed ECoW by the Site Manager or site workers as soon as practicable. Where necessary, the ECoW and/or Developer will report any breaches to Wiltshire Council and/or Natural England (NE).

2.5 The Developer will ensure that any remedial measures proposed are approved by the relevant LPA and where appropriate NE, prior to them being carried out on site.

3 Biodiversity Enhancement Measures

TREE AND HEDGEROW PLANTING

Native Trees

2.6 Native tree species will be planted at two separate locations within the site boundary (see Figure 1), both to compensate for the loss of habitats resulting from works undertaken within the yard area, as well as to further enhance the ecological value of the site. A minimum of 10 trees will be planted within the yard area of sites northern extent, and a minimum of 20 trees plants within the area at the sites' southern extent. Trees will be planted at an interval of one tree per 2 m^2 and will be of locally common native species and of British provenance (preferably local) and should comply to British Standard 3936. A diverse mixture of species will be planted, to include hazel *Corylus avellana,* hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, black thorn *Prunus spinosa*, field maple *Acer campestre*, and wild cherry *Prunus avium,* and *oak Quercus robur*. Shrub species – hawthorn and blackthorn, will make up no more than 20% of the planted mix. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* must not be planted due to the risk of ash dieback spread, and trees must not be planted within third party land.

Tree Planting Methodology

2.7 Trees will be planted between September and April, providing soil is not waterlogged and no ground frost is present.

2.8 Prior to planting, the ground should be broken up and cleared of any existing vegetation which may compete with new plants. Notably for tree planting within the yard area, hardcore must first be cleared to expose soil, and where required additional top soil added. Bare roots must be carefully handled and protected prior to planting to prevent them from drying out. Ideally, they should be kept in bags in a cool, damp location.

2.9 Trees saplings will be planted in a substrate of organic mulch such as well-rotted woodchip, bark, coconut fibre, grass cuttings, horse manure or farmyard manure, which can be laid around the base of the tree to a 100mm depth. This will be applied early summer, no later than May, and will require topping-up in subsequent years.

Future Management/Maintenance of Planted Trees

2.10 If the weather becomes adversely dry in the growing season following planting, consideration may have to be given to watering the plantings, and in dry conditions they should be regularly monitored to check for levels of mortality. For the first year any trees which die should be replaced by new plantings and once mature tree guards should be removed and disposed of.

2.11 Planting areas will be kept free from weeds for the first 3 growing season, following which understorey can be allowed to return.

Native Species-Rich Hedgerow

2.12 A native species-rich hedgerow measuring 175 m total length will be planted as part of the site enhancement scheme. Hedge plants should be approximately 0.5m transplants of locally common native species and of British provenance (preferably local) and should comply to British Standard 3936. They will be planted in a double staggered row at a distance 30 cm apart to produce a dense hedgerow once mature. A diverse mixture of species is recommended to enhance the wildlife value of the hedgerow and provide a good feeding resource for both pollinating insects and birds. Recommended species composition is 10% Hazel *(Corylus avellana),* 50% Hawthorn *(Crataegus monogyna)*, 10% Field Maple *(Acer campestre),* 5% Holly *(Ilex aquifolium)*, 10% Blackthorn *(Prunus spinosa),* 5% Dog Rose *(Rosa canina)*,.5% Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus)* and 5% wayfairing tree (*Viburnum lantana*).

Future Management/Maintenance of Hedgerows

2.13 If the weather becomes adversely dry in the growing season following planting, consideration may have to be given to watering the plantings, and in dry conditions they should be regularly monitored to check for levels of mortality. For the first year any trees which die should be replaced by new plantings and once mature tree guards should be removed and disposed of.

2.14 Supports/ties and other associated equipment used to aid with growth will be regularly checked and adjusted accordingly and once trees are well established, supports will be removed.

2.15 Annual cutting of the hedge is not recommended because it weakens the shrubs and reduces winter food for wildlife. Work on a rotation of cutting once every 2-3 years, which in turn will be cost-effective and help to produce a more natural-looking hedge. Trim the hedgerow outside of the bird nesting season which generally runs from late February until late August.

2.16 Trimming the hedge into an A-shape up to 2m high and 1.5m wide rather than the traditional box cross-section encourages bush growth from the base of the hedge and prolongs life.

Planting Protection

2.17 New planting will be vulnerable to damage by grazing stock, rabbits, hares or deer and as such require measures to protect these until mature.

2.18 Methods to ensure planted trees are not impacted by rabbits, deer and other pests, is by using clear spiral guards which can be used with most species and will expand with growth of the plant. Other

options are the use of plastic mesh guards which are useful for branching species. Guards must be removed once plants have become established, typically after 3-5 years.

2.19 Planting located within the southern grazing field will need to be suitably protected from livestock. As such, a timber fence will be installed to prevent livestock accessing tree and hedgerow plants at a minimum distance of 1.5 m. Locations for fencing are provided in Figure 1.

Monitoring

2.20 Monitoring of planting will be undertaken for a period of 5 years to ensure compliance and appropriate development of the compensation scheme and remedial action is taken with regard to plant replacements and habitat creation, thus ensuring long-term success.

2.21 Monitoring will comprise two visits per annum for a 5-year period to assess for levels of mortality. During this period, any planting which has died will be replaced with like-for-like species. Additionally, fencing and guards will be checked during these visits and will be repaired or replaced by the site owner as necessary.

2.22 Methodology provided within this plan will be updated where relevant to respond to updated best practices in landscape and ecological management.

Additional Enhancement Features

2.23 The following biodiversity enhance features will be installed to further enhance the site for local populations of bats and birds. Locations for these is provided in Figure 1.

Bats

2.24 Two bat boxes will be installed upon mature trees located within the site grounds, using Schwegler 1FF Bat Box (or similar), which is suitable for a variety of bat species including those of the genera *Pipistrellus*, *Myotis* and *Plecotus* species. Furthermore, these woodcrete-built bat boxes have been proven to be more successful as bat mitigation than traditional timber-built bat boxes[5].

2.25 The following considerations will be given when selecting the positioning of bat boxes on site:

[5] 1. Aughney, T. (2008). An investigation of the impact of development projects on bat populations: Comparing pre-and post-development bat faunas. Irish Bat Monitoring Programme. Bat Conservation Ireland, www.batconservationireland.org

- The chosen placement for bat box installation are of a robust nature, reducing possibility of the bat box falling to the ground which could cause damage to the box, loss of a roost, or disturbance, injury or death to bats.
- Climbing plants must not be allowed to grow up towards the bat box as this may eventually block entry.
- The surroundings must remain free from obstruction, allowing for a more direct flight path into the bat box.
- The location must safely accessible, should the bat box need to be repaired, replaced or monitored by bat-licensed personnel.
- Following Bat Conservation Trust guidelines, the bat boxes shall be installed a minimum of 4 m above ground and positioned to ensure that it will receive direct sunlight for at least part of day, in a south, east or south-east facing direction. They must not face north or north-east.

Note: Once a bat box is occupied, it is an offence to disturb any bat when it is roosting, or to kill, injure or handle a bat without the appropriate licence granted by Natural England. If a sick or injured bat is found, the local Wildlife Trust or bat group should be contacted for further advice. If maintenance of the bat boxes is required, a suitably licensed bat worker or local bat group must be consulted.

Birds

2.26 Two external bird nest boxes (Schwegler 1B type or similar) will be installed upon mature onsite trees. For maximum success, the bird boxes will be installed as follows:

- Following British Ornithology Trust guidelines for mounting bird boxes, they will be positioned no lower than 3 m above ground to offer protection from both ground level disturbance as well as from potential threats.
- The proposed placement of the bird boxes will allow for a clear flight path, without obstruction to the nest box entrance. They shall be installed facing a north or north-eastly direction to offer protection from prevailing winds and rain.
- Further information regarding nest boxes can be found at https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds/putting-nest-boxes-birds/make-nest-box

2.27 **Note:** When the nest box is occupied, all common wild birds are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and as amended). Under this legislation it is an offence to:

- 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 or destroy the egg of any wild bird

Compliance Reporting

2.28 Following the completion of the above works, a letter of compliance can be provided to Wiltshire Council at their request.

APPENDIX B: MAPS



Figure 1: Biodiversity Enhancement Map