

Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

ECOLOGY

Officer name:	Abi Gazzard
Date:	21/01/2026
Application number:	PL/2025/06976
Proposal:	Polytunnel and Outbuilding
Site address:	Land to rear of 1 Pye Corner, Box, SN13 8ED
Case officer:	Isobella Wise

Recommendations:

☐	No Comment
☐	Support
☐	No objection
☒	Condition (no objection subject to conditions)
☐	Objection - further information required
☐	Objection in principle
☐	HRA completed

Thank you for consulting Ecology. I have reviewed the application and supporting documents against OS Maps, aerial photography of the site and surrounding area, together with GIS layers of statutory and non-statutory designated sites and existing records of protected species.

Information considered:

- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, BNG Ecology, December 2025
- Proposed Site Plan, Planning Services Ltd, October 2025
- Design and Access Statement, Ian Rea, October 2025
- Biodiversity Net Gain, BNG Ecology, December 2025
- Statutory Biodiversity Metric, James Mansfield, December 2025
- Condition assessment sheets

The site comprises a plot of grassland (potentially former woodland) where it is proposed to erect a wooden shed and poly tunnel for horticultural use (non-commercial). A previous proposal for a single dwelling (PL/2021/06688) was refused and then subsequently dismissed at appeal, with one of the reasons for planning refusal relating to ecology and adverse impacts on Priority Habitat and protected sites. The Inspector commented that they did not consider the site to comprise Priority Habitat, though acknowledged its location within the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bat SAC (see below) and requirement for Appropriate Assessment.

COMMENTS:

Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats Special Area for Conservation (SAC)

The site is located within multiple parcel and core roost buffers (consultation zones) for Bechstein's, Greater Horseshoe and Lesser Horseshoe bats associated with the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon SAC. The current proposal therefore has potential to result in significant adverse impact on the special features of the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon SAC.

A test of likely significance has been carried out by the relevant Competent Authority (Wiltshire Council) as required by Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations

2017 (as amended). This concluded that given the scale and nature of the currently proposed development which:

- (i) involves no loss of a roost of a qualifying species;
- (ii) does not propose removal of any trees or hedgerow, or significant level of permanent habitat loss;
- (iii) does not propose any additional external lighting, and
- (iv) will not result in a notable increase in levels of human disturbance,

there is no mechanism for adverse impact on the Conservation Objectives of the SAC, and the proposal can be screened out of Appropriate Assessment.

Priority Habitats

Whilst the site is mapped as Priority Habitat (namely, deciduous woodland and traditional orchard), the site has comprised a clearing of grassland and scrub since at least 2002, with some scattered fruit trees present in the southwest. The site may have in the past qualified as deciduous woodland, with the Ecology Officer noting for PL/2021/06688 that the site contained numerous tree stumps and ancient woodland indicator species. However, with regard to the definitions of said habitats outlined by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the current ecology report states that *“historic habitats outlined by All Ecology [do not meet] the above definitions provided”*. Further, with respect to PL/2021/06688, the Inspector was satisfied that the site did not currently constitute Priority Habitat. On the balance of evidence, it is accepted that the site does not presently comprise Priority Habitat, but it may have historically.

The proposed development is therefore considered in the context that the site could have been a Priority Habitat in the past, but has since been managed/degraded. The proposal will result in the loss of a small area of grassland and scrub (<0.01 ha), to accommodate a 19.8m² shed and a 71.4m² polytunnel, which are temporary structures. No tree removal is proposed, and no root protection areas will be impacted. The works are overall considered to be relatively low-impact compared to the previous scheme of a dwelling, which would have also introduced a change in land use and increased disturbance levels. The site will be enhanced with at least 17 fruit trees and native hedgerow. The proposed fruit trees are all of the Rosaceae family and, if managed at a low intensity, could eventually form traditional orchard Priority Habitat. Similarly, the new hedgerow would comprise Priority Habitat. There will be an improvement for wildlife via this tree- and hedge-planting, also improving connectivity with the adjacent woodland. As such, whilst there will be an overall loss of 91.2m² of habitat that may have once comprised deciduous woodland Priority Habitat, it is considered that suitable compensation is proposed, alongside minimal further disturbance or degradation.

The adjacent woodland comprises lowland mixed deciduous woodland Priority Habitat, and is also within the applicant's ownership. Given the nature of the development, it is unlikely that there will be any large risk of pollution or disturbance to the woodland during construction and operation. **The ecology report's proposed buffer zone is welcomed (Section 6.2), and works should be carried out in compliance with the report's recommendations, to be secured via a condition.**

Protected Species

Bat activity surveys were undertaken in 2021 in association with the previous application/appeal. The site was confirmed to have been used by some of the SAC's qualifying species, Greater Horseshoe and Lesser Horseshoe bats, with low levels of foraging recorded, and limited commuting activity. Additional autumn surveys showed no increase in activity. As such,

considering the proposed habitat improvements as well as lack of any new lighting and the small scale of the current proposal, the works are not considered likely to result in any significant loss of foraging habitat for bats.

The scrub could provide some suitable habitat for nesting birds. The adults, young, eggs and nests of all species of birds are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) while they are breeding. Please be advised that works should not take place that will harm nesting birds (such as vegetation clearance) from March to August inclusive. The applicant is advised to check any structure or vegetation capable of supporting breeding birds and delay removing or altering such features until after young birds have fledged.

The scrub on-site and the adjacent woodland are suitable for use by dormice. However, given that that no trees or woodland will be lost, and there will be no increase in disturbance of the woodland, surveys and mitigation are not considered necessary for this scheme. Instead, precautionary measures must be implemented, including sensitive vegetation clearance and timing considerations, as per Section 6.2 of the ecology report.

The clearing on-site provides some potential reptile habitat, but reptile surveys undertaken in 2021 did not record any presence. The closest pond is >250m away, and it is unlikely that great crested newts are present. As above, the general mitigation outlined in Section 6.2 will ensure the risk posed to these species is reduced nonetheless.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) this application is required to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The Biodiversity Gain Plan condition will automatically apply if approval is forthcoming.

A completed statutory metric calculation, map (Biodiversity Net Gain, BNG Ecology, December 2025; Statutory Biodiversity Metric, James Mansfield, December 2025) and condition assessment sheets confirming the baseline biodiversity units of the site have been submitted. It is acknowledged that some fruit trees have already been planted in advance for BNG; the justification provided in the BNG report is acceptable.

Information in the completed on-site baseline habitat tabs is accepted as accurate based on the information submitted. The pre-development (baseline) situation is summarised below.

On-site pre-development (baseline) biodiversity value	0.91 Habitat units
	0.00 Hedgerow units
	0.00 Watercourse units
Are there any irreplaceable habitats on-site?	No
Has any habitat degradation of occurred?	Yes. An alternative date has been set (April 2022) as some grassland had been removed to provide an access track, and some re-sown with a meadow mix. Additionally, an area of scrub has been cleared. The habitats pre-April 2022 are included in the BNG baseline.

Confirmation of how the development will achieve BNG is a post-determination matter however consideration should be given to how any proposed BNG will be secured.

CONDITIONS:**1. Compliance with submitted documents**

The development will be carried out in strict accordance with the following documents:

- Section 6.2 of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, BNG Ecology, December 2025
- Biodiversity Net Gain, BNG Ecology, December 2025

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and for the protection, mitigation and enhancement of biodiversity.

Informative – Artificial Lighting

The habitat within the proposed development site and the surrounding area is suitable for foraging and commuting bats. An increase in artificial lux levels can deter bats which could result in roost abandonment and/or the severance of key foraging areas. This will likely result in a significant negative impact upon the health of bat populations across the region. Artificial light at night can have a substantial adverse effect on biodiversity. Any new lighting should be for the purposes for safe access and security and be in accordance with the appropriate Environmental Zone standards set out by the Institute of Lighting Engineers in their publication GN01:2021, 'Guidance for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light' (ILP, 2021), and Guidance note GN08-18 "Bats and artificial lighting in the UK", issued by the Bat Conservation Trust and Institution of Lighting Professionals.

Sign off by WC Ecologist will only be given once ALL outstanding information has been submitted and agreed sufficient.

Ecologist Abi Gazzard	Date 21/01/2026
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