

Hinton House, Great Hinton

Natural Wildlife Pond with Ancillary Swimming

18 February 2026

Ecological Assessment



Overview

An Ecological Assessment has been conducted, involving desktop research, field surveys, and professional analysis to identify potential ecological constraints and opportunities for the site.

Brakes Ecology conducted an ecological assessment, including desktop research and a walkover survey to assess the site's ecological conditions.

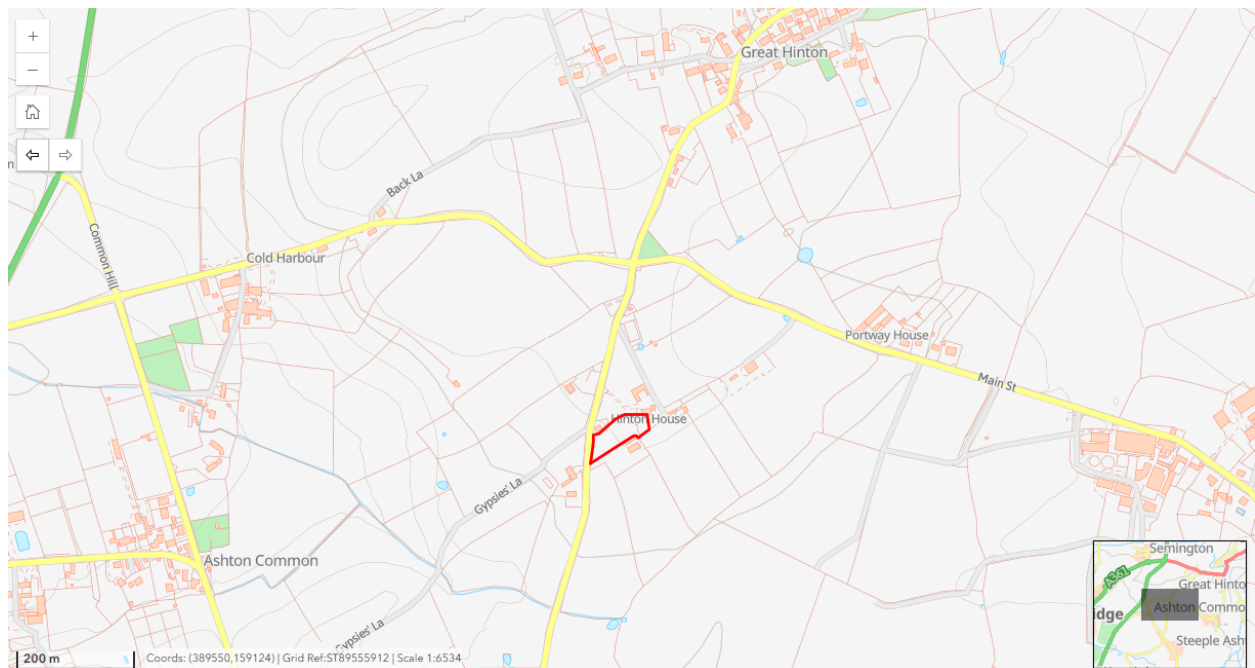
Introduction

In February 2026, Brakes Ecology conducted a desktop and walkover survey at the site, Hinton House, Great Hinton (hereafter referred to as ‘the site’). This report outlines the methodologies, results of the baseline surveys and broad recommendations in line with the Mitigation Hierarchy.

Site Location and General Description

The site is located to the South of the village of Great Hinton. It is primarily open pasture used for horse grazing, and partially extends into the lawned residential garden of Hinton House. The area is intersected by a formal box hedge, suffering from box blight. There are also a number of low quality apple trees which show evidence of disease.

The soil at the site is geographically categorised as ‘slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage’ (MAGIC Map, 2021).



Legislation and Policy

Introduction

Wildlife in the UK is protected through European Directives, which are transposed into national legislation, supported by a range of national and local policy and guidance. Recent changes in planning policy and legislation have gone beyond site and species-specific protection to set broader goals for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment and halting the continued loss of biodiversity in the UK.

Development can contribute to these goals through, for example, protecting the best features of a site and making them a valued part of the site's new use, and by incorporating enhancements to improve the site's value for wildlife.

The sections below provide a brief guide to the principal legislation and policy that sets the terms of reference for ecological appraisals in the UK. This is not intended to be a full description of all the obligations enacted by the various referenced documents, which should be referred to in their original form for the full details.

It is the responsibility of those involved with the development works to ensure that wildlife protection and nature conservation legislation is complied with at every stage of the project. Such legislation applies even in the absence of related planning conditions.

Relevant Legislation

The principal pieces of legislation relating to wildlife that are of relevance to this report are:

1. The Environment Act 2021
2. EU Habitats Directive (1992);
3. Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) Regulations 2017;
4. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
5. The Hedgerow Regulations 1997;
6. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006;
7. The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (which is extended under The Hunting Act 2004).

The main focus of much of this legislation is the protection of sites and species, the delineation of precisely how they are protected, and what actions would constitute an offence. This report provides guidance on whether any protected features are likely to be affected by the development proposal, and how offences under the legislation can be avoided.

Relevant Policy

National, regional and local planning authorities are obliged to follow key principles to ensure that the potential impacts of planning decisions on biodiversity conservation are fully considered. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's policies for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity through the town and country planning system. This encourages the contribution to, and enhancement of, natural and local environments through minimising the impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.

Planning authorities are required to follow key principles in their consideration of potential impacts of planning decisions on biodiversity conservation. Circular 06/05: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation provides guidance on the application of the law relating to planning and nature conservation and complements the National Planning Policy Framework.

The presence of species protected under UK and European legislation are a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat. Ecological appraisals and protected species surveys are therefore designed to provide local planning authorities with the baseline information they require in order to fully consider the potential ecological effects of a planning application.

Local Planning Policy

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

The relevant policies are: Core Policy 50 Biodiversity and geodiversity and Core Policy 52 Green Infrastructure.

The relevant sections are summarised below.

Core Policy 50 Biodiversity and geodiversity

Protection:

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

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

Biodiversity enhancement:

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

Local sites:

Sustainable development will avoid direct and indirect impacts upon local sites through sensitive site location and layout, and by maintaining sufficient buffers and ecological connectivity with the wider environment. Damage or disturbance to local sites will generally be unacceptable, other than in exceptional circumstances where it has been demonstrated that such impacts:

- i. cannot reasonably be avoided
- ii. are reduced as far as possible
- iii. are outweighed by other planning considerations in the public interest
- iv. where appropriate compensation measures can be secured through planning obligations or agreements.

Development proposals affecting local sites must make a reasonable contribution to their favourable management in the long-term...

Core Policy 52 Green infrastructure

...Development shall make provision for the retention and enhancement of Wiltshire's green infrastructure network, and shall ensure that suitable links to the network are provided and maintained. Where development is permitted developers will be required to:

- i. retain and enhance existing on site green infrastructure...

Biodiversity Action Plan

Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services, provides the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and country level biodiversity strategies for England, based on the list of habitats and species listed under The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Local biodiversity action plans give valuable information on local conservation priorities. The Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 is the local biodiversity action plan relevant to this site.

Surveys & Results

Desk Study

A desk study was conducted and comprised a review of online resources, including the UK government's online source of geological information about the natural environment (MAGIC) and the Wiltshire planning portal. MAGIC provides details of statutory designated wildlife sites and EPS licence applications, whilst the search of planning applications within close proximity of the site has provided additional information regarding protected species in the local area, further informing the evaluation of the site and its ecological value in a planning context.

The site is over 2km from the Steeple Ashton SSSI but lies within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone. The proposed development is not considered to have any impact on the SSSI.

Information gathered during the desk study has been inserted into the relevant sections for the species or habitats to which it relates.

Habitat Surveys

A walkover survey was conducted at the site in February 2026. The field survey methods were based on the Phase 1 habitat survey methodology (Joint Nature Conservancy Council, 2010) and involved

the identification of habitats that may support notable species and searching for evidence of such species.

The site consists primarily of open pasture used for horse grazing and partially extends into the lawned residential garden of Hinton House (see images Annex 1 A2, A5 and A6). A condition assessment of the grassland was undertaken in accordance with the UKHab methodology. The habitat is classified as modified grassland of low distinctiveness and was found to be in poor condition. The sward is species poor and regularly grazed, fertilised and managed, resulting in limited botanical diversity and structural variation. No invasive non-native plant species were recorded; however, the grassland does not meet the criteria to achieve moderate or good condition.

The site is intersected by a formal box hedge, which is currently affected by box blight, reducing its ecological value (see images Annex 1 A1). A small number of low-quality apple trees are also present, several of which show signs of disease (see images Annex 1 A3 and A4). Overall, the habitats within the site are of low ecological diversity with limited suitability for protected or notable species.

No evidence of badger activity was recorded during the walkover survey, and there are no nearby waterbodies within or immediately adjacent to the site that would provide suitable habitat for species such as Great Crested Newts.

Bat Surveys

According to MAGIC, there have been no European Protected Species (EPS) licence applications for bats within 2km of the site.

During the walkover survey, all trees within and immediately adjacent to the site were assessed from ground level for features with potential to support roosting bats, in accordance with standard Preliminary Roost Assessment guidance. No trees were recorded with features typically associated with bat roost potential. The small number of apple trees present are of low stature and condition, with limited structural complexity, and do not provide suitable roosting features.

No buildings or built structures are located within the proposed development footprint. Therefore, there is no potential for impacts on roosting bats associated with buildings as a result of the proposal.

In terms of foraging and commuting habitat, the site comprises short, heavily grazed pasture of low structural and floristic diversity. This habitat offers limited invertebrate abundance and minimal shelter, and is therefore considered to provide low-quality foraging habitat for bats. The formal box hedge intersecting the site is species-poor, heavily managed, and affected by box blight, reducing its structural value and connectivity. As such, it is unlikely to function as a significant commuting corridor. The site does not form part of a wider network of high-quality linear features such as species-rich hedgerows, woodland edges, or watercourses that would typically support regular bat movement.

Overall, the site is considered to have negligible potential to support roosting bats and low potential to provide significant foraging or commuting habitat.

Dormouse Surveys

The site was considered for its potential to support dormice. Although hedgerows and woodland edge habitats can provide suitable conditions for this species, the habitats within the site are of limited ecological value and lack the structural diversity and connectivity typically required to support a resident population. The boundary vegetation is heavily managed and does not form part of a wider, well-connected network of species-rich hedgerows or woodland.

Given the limited structural complexity, constrained extent of suitable habitat, and lack of strong connectivity to higher-value habitat in the wider landscape, the site is considered highly unlikely to support dormice. Accordingly, no further dormouse-specific survey effort, such as the deployment of nesting tubes, is considered necessary.

Birds

The site was assessed for its potential to support nesting and foraging birds during the February 2026 walkover survey. The assessment comprised a visual inspection of habitats present within and immediately adjacent to the site, with particular attention paid to features that may provide nesting opportunities such as trees, hedgerows, dense scrub, buildings, and areas of rough vegetation.

The site primarily comprises short, regularly grazed pasture of limited structural diversity. Such habitat offers negligible suitability for ground-nesting bird species due to its short sward height and frequent disturbance from grazing.

A formal box hedge intersects the site; however, it is heavily managed and affected by box blight, reducing foliage density and structural integrity. As such, it offers limited nesting potential for common hedge-nesting bird species. A small number of low-quality apple trees are present, several of which show signs of disease and limited canopy development. While these trees may provide occasional perching opportunities, their condition and structure offer only limited suitability for nesting.

No buildings or dense scrub habitats are present within the development footprint.

Overall, the habitats within the site are considered to provide low suitability for nesting birds and limited foraging opportunities due to the species-poor and intensively managed nature of the grassland.

Great Crested Newt Surveys

The site was assessed for its potential to support Great Crested Newts during the walkover survey. The assessment considered the presence of suitable breeding habitat (ponds or other waterbodies), terrestrial habitat suitability, and connectivity to the wider landscape. Desk study information from MAGIC was also reviewed.

No ponds, ditches, or other waterbodies are present within the development site or immediately adjacent to it that would provide suitable breeding habitat for Great Crested Newts. The site comprises short, intensively managed pasture and lawn, offering limited structural diversity. The terrestrial habitat lacks key features typically associated with suitability for Great Crested Newts, such as rough grassland, scrub, log piles, rubble piles, or other refugia that could provide shelter, foraging opportunities, or hibernation sites.

A review of MAGIC identified a historic EPS licence for Great Crested Newts approximately 1.5km to the west of the site (2018). However, no records were identified within a 250m buffer zone around the site.

Based on the absence of suitable breeding habitat and the low suitability of terrestrial habitats within the site, the potential for Great Crested Newts to be present is considered low.

Reptile Surveys

The site was assessed for its potential to support common reptile species during the walkover survey. The assessment considered habitat suitability, including the presence of rough grassland, scrub, hedgerows, refugia features (e.g. log piles, rubble, compost heaps), and connectivity to the wider landscape. Desk study information from MAGIC was also reviewed.

No EPS licences for reptiles were identified within the vicinity of the site.

The site comprises short, intensively grazed pasture and managed lawn with limited structural diversity. The sward is uniformly short and regularly disturbed by grazing, offering minimal opportunities for basking, foraging or shelter. The formal box hedge is heavily managed and affected by disease, providing limited structural variation and few refuge opportunities. No features such as log piles, brash piles, rubble, or south-facing banks were recorded within the development footprint.

Given the lack of suitable habitat features and limited structural diversity, the site is considered to have low suitability for common reptile species.

Evaluation

Designated Sites

The site is located over 2km from the Steeple Ashton Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Although it falls within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone, the nature and scale of the proposed development are not considered likely to result in any adverse effects on the SSSI. The site is not within or close to any other statutory designated sites and is not located within consultation zones for European sites designated for bats. It is also outside of the catchment zones for nitrates and phosphates associated with the River Avon SAC.

Overall, the proposed development is not considered likely to give rise to any direct or indirect impacts on designated sites.

Habitats & Vegetation

The site comprises a grazed paddock of negligible ecological value. The grassland is species-poor and heavily managed, offering limited habitat diversity. The existing formal box hedge intersecting the site is heavily diseased and of low ecological value.

The proposed development involves the creation of a wildlife pond, which will substantially enhance the ecological value of the site. The introduction of open water, together with marginal and aquatic planting, will create a range of new habitats capable of supporting amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, birds, and small mammals. The pond margins can be managed to develop areas of rough grassland and native planting, further increasing habitat diversity.

Overall, the proposal will replace habitats of negligible value with a mosaic of higher-value habitats, resulting in a clear biodiversity enhancement and measurable net gain.

Bats

The site currently comprises a grazed paddock of negligible ecological value, offering limited foraging opportunities for bats due to its species-poor sward and lack of habitat diversity. The diseased box hedge along the boundary provides negligible habitat value and is unlikely to support significant bat activity.

The proposed creation of a wildlife pond will enhance the site's suitability for bats by introducing open water and associated marginal planting. Ponds are known to attract a range of aquatic invertebrates, which in turn provide a valuable food resource for foraging bats. The development of more structurally diverse vegetation around the pond margins will further improve commuting and foraging opportunities.

Dormice

The site comprises a grazed paddock with a heavily managed and diseased box hedge, providing negligible suitable habitat for dormice. There is no connected network of species-rich hedgerows or woodland that would support their presence. Based on the habitat conditions present, the site is not considered suitable for dormice and is unlikely to be used by this species.

The proposed creation of a wildlife pond will not adversely affect dormice and will not result in the loss of suitable habitat.

Birds

The site comprises predominantly short, grazed pasture and a heavily managed, diseased hedge, both of which are of low ecological value. The grassland is unsuitable for ground-nesting species due to regular grazing and lack of structural diversity. The existing hedge and apple trees provide limited potential nesting habitat for common and widespread bird species; however, these features are of low quality and do not form part of a wider, species-rich hedgerow network.

The proposed creation of a wildlife pond, together with areas of marginal planting and tussocky grassland, will increase structural diversity and provide enhanced foraging, nesting, and shelter opportunities for birds. The introduction of native planting around the pond margins is likely to increase invertebrate abundance, thereby improving food availability. Over time, this will result in a net enhancement of habitat suitability for common garden and farmland bird species.

Given the low baseline habitat value, significant adverse impacts on birds are not anticipated. To ensure compliance with legislation, any vegetation clearance should be undertaken outside of the main bird nesting season (March to August inclusive).

Great Crested Newts

The site comprises short, intensively managed pasture and lawn of low suitability for GCN, with no ponds or suitable breeding waterbodies within or immediately adjacent to the development area. Terrestrial habitat is also of low value due to the absence of refugia such as rough grassland, scrub, log

piles, or stone features. Although a historic EPS licence for GCN is recorded approximately 1.5km to the west, the distance and intervening landscape reduce the likelihood of the species occurring on site.

Given the lack of suitable breeding habitat and the low baseline terrestrial suitability, the proposal is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts to Great Crested Newts, and no further survey work is considered necessary.

Reptiles

The site comprises a grazed paddock with a short, regularly managed sward that offers very limited suitability for reptiles. The diseased box hedge provides negligible structural diversity and limited refuge opportunities. Overall, the site is considered to have low potential to support common reptile species such as Slow Worm or Grass Snake.

The proposed creation of a wildlife pond, together with areas of marginal and rough grassland planting, will increase structural diversity and create more suitable habitat conditions. The introduction of features such as log piles, brash piles, and small areas of tussocky grassland around the pond margins would further enhance the site's value for reptiles by providing shelter, basking opportunities, and potential hibernation sites.

Given the current low suitability of the site, significant impacts on reptiles are not anticipated. The proposal presents an opportunity to enhance habitat provision for reptiles compared to the existing baseline conditions.

Further Works

The findings and conclusions set out above are based on desktop studies, site inspection, and professional appraisal of the habitats present. Given the negligible ecological value of the grazed paddock and diseased hedge, together with the nature of the proposal to create a wildlife pond for biodiversity enhancement, no further ecological surveys or assessment work are considered necessary. Works should proceed in accordance with relevant wildlife legislation.

Biodiversity Net Gain

The proposed development comprises the creation of a natural wildlife pond within the residential curtilage of Hinton House. The proposal is domestic in nature and does not constitute major development.

Under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by the Environment Act 2021), certain categories of development are exempt from the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement. These exemptions include householder development and development which does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than 25 square metres (or 5 metres in length) of on-site habitat of medium or higher distinctiveness.

The baseline habitats within the application site comprise modified grassland in poor condition, residential lawn, and a heavily managed box hedge affected by disease. These habitats are classified as being of low ecological distinctiveness and do not constitute priority habitat.

The proposal will not result in the loss of any habitat of medium or high distinctiveness, nor will it result in the loss of any priority habitat. The development is therefore considered to fall within the exemptions to mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

Notwithstanding the above, the proposal has been designed as biodiversity-led development and will deliver a clear ecological enhancement through the creation of open water habitat with native aquatic and marginal planting, together with areas of tussocky and rough grassland. The development will therefore provide a measurable uplift in habitat diversity compared to baseline conditions.

Conclusion

The proposal constitutes small-scale, biodiversity-led development and is anticipated to deliver measurable ecological enhancement. Given the low baseline habitat value of the site and the introduction of open water and structurally diverse marginal habitats, the development is expected to achieve a biodiversity net gain in accordance with the Environment Act 2021.

The site currently comprises residential lawn, intensively grazed paddock and a diseased box hedge, all of which are of low ecological value. The proposed creation of a wildlife pond will replace these habitats with a more diverse mosaic of open water, native aquatic and marginal planting, and areas of tussocky and rough grassland. This will significantly increase habitat diversity and provide enhanced opportunities for amphibians, invertebrates, birds, bats and other wildlife.

No evidence of protected species was recorded during the survey, and the site offers limited suitability to support such species. The development can therefore proceed without harm to protected species, subject to standard legislative compliance, and is not anticipated to give rise to adverse ecological effects.

Enhancement measures will include:

- Creation of a wildlife pond with native aquatic and marginal planting
- Establishment of tussocky and rough grassland around the pond margins

In view of the site's low baseline ecological value and the biodiversity enhancement objectives of the proposal, no further ecological surveys, mitigation measures or formal management plans are considered necessary. The development represents a clear ecological improvement over existing baseline conditions and aligns with national and local planning policy requirements for biodiversity conservation and enhancement.

Annex A - Photographs



A1 Box hedge with evidence of Box Blight



A2 Paddock looking towards Hinton House Lawn



A3 Apple trees with evidence of disease



A4 Apple trees with evidence of disease



A5 Lawned area of Hinton House



A6 Looking into the Paddock area