

Ecological Impact Assessment

The Weighbridge, Chippenham

December 2025

Ecology | Green Space | Community | GIS

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Report Produced for

Rapleys

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Issue:

V1

Date:

December 2025

Project:

ETH25-338

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SUMMARY

Purpose of the report	This report has been produced by Ethos Environmental Planning on behalf of Rapleys. It provides an assessment of the likely ecological effects associated with the proposed re-development of The Weighbridge, Old Road, Chippenham.
Description of the scheme	The proposals for the site include redevelopment of a derelict building to undertake structural repairs, weatherproof the property and refurbish the internals and services.
Methodology	An external structure inspection for bats including endoscope inspection of features as well as a dusk emergence survey were undertaken in August 2025. An internal structure inspection was undertaken on 9 th September 2025.
Baseline ecological conditions	The site is dominated by urban habitats and is located within a largely urban landscape, adjacent to Chippenham railway station. The habitats on site are of ‘negligible’ suitability for foraging and commuting bats. The building on site was initially assessed to be of moderate potential for roosting bats. This was subsequently downgraded to low potential due to the presence of significant artificial lighting on all elevations. No evidence of bats was identified during the structure inspection, and no bats were recorded emerging during the dusk emergence survey. Therefore, the building does not currently support roosting bats. No bats were recorded commuting or foraging on or near the site during the emergence survey. The building offers nesting opportunities for common species of birds associated with urban areas.
Key impacts and mitigation	Timing of demolition or a pre-works check of the building will be required to avoid impacts on nesting birds.
Conclusion	Assuming the implementation of effective mitigation measures, as set out in this report, no significant adverse ecological effects are predicted. Enhancements for invertebrates are recommended. The proposed development is therefore in accordance with relevant national and local planning policies in relation to nature conservation and relevant wildlife legislation.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) report has been prepared by Ethos Environmental Planning (Ethos) on behalf of Rapleys. The EclA has been written by Stephanie Green MSc BSc (Hons) MCIEEM, Head of Ecology at Ethos. The details and experience of the authors and field survey team are provided in Appendix 2.
- 1.2 The report provides an EclA in relation to the proposed development of The Weighbridge, Old Road, Chippenham (Central Grid Reference ST 91995 73733), hereafter referred to as 'the site' and shown in Figure 1.
- 1.3 The site is located in the centre of Chippenham and contains a derelict commercial building. There are no vegetated habitats present on or adjacent to the site.



Figure 1 Site location

- 1.4 The proposals for the site include redevelopment of a derelict building to undertake structural repairs, weatherproof the property and refurbish the internals and services.
- 1.5 As the site consists entirely of developed land; sealed surface, the scheme is exempt from Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements in line with the de minimis exemption (DEFRA, 2024).
- 1.6 The aims of this EclA report are to:

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

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

2 POLICY AND LEGISLATION

2.1 National Policy

- 2.1.1 The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** (published Dec 2024) sets out national planning policy, including policies of relevance to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Policies of relevance to the proposed development (parts of paragraphs 187, 192, 193 and 198) are provided in Appendix 1.

2.2 Local Policy

- 2.2.1 Relevant policies from the Wiltshire Core Strategy (2015) are listed below and provided in detail within Appendix 1:

- Core Policy 50: Biodiversity and Geodiversity Protection.
- Core Policy 50: Biodiversity Enhancement.

2.3 Relevant Legislation

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

Table 1 Relevant legislation

Legislation	Relevance
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended, including by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), which provides legislative protection for certain species. The Act also prohibits the spread of invasive plant species, as well as providing the mechanism for the designation and protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;	Potential presence of nesting birds on site.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of Assessment

3.1.1 This assessment has been undertaken following the approach set out in the 'Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland, 1.3' (CIEEM, 2018). The assessment has considered 'Important Ecological Features' that are present within the 'Zone of Influence' of the project. Important Ecological Features for this project comprise¹:

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

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

3.1.3 The scope of the report is informed by the scale of the development proposals and assessment of any likely ecological impacts. Therefore, for this project the scope includes potential impacts on bats and birds. Other impacts are scoped out.

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

3.2 Background Data Search

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

3.3 Bats

3.3.1 The methodology for the bat surveys was informed by the 'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines 4th Edition' (Collins, 2023).

3.3.2 Targeted surveys for bats were undertaken as set out in Table 2, with further details of survey methodology provided in Appendix 2.

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

Table 2 Surveys undertaken for bats

Survey	Description	Date undertaken
Assessment of habitat suitability	Habitats on site were assessed for their suitability to support foraging and commuting bats.	5 th August 2025
Preliminary roost assessment	Physical external and internal inspection of the building on site.	5 th August 2025 9 th September 2025
Dusk emergence survey	1 survey undertaken in line with guidance for low potential building.	5 th August 2025

3.4 Birds

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

3.4.2 A search for birds' nests or evidence of nesting birds within the structure on site was undertaken on 9th September 2025.

3.5 Other Protected and Notable Species

3.5.1 The site was assessed for its suitability to support other protected species such as NERC S41 mammals, badger, hazel dormouse, amphibians including great crested newt, riparian mammals, reptiles and invertebrates, all of which were scoped out due to a lack of suitable habitat on or within proximity to the site.

3.6 Limitations

3.6.1 The initial structure inspection was limited to the external inspection only due to the presence of security fencing. A subsequent internal inspection was therefore undertaken in September 2025 once access could be gained. This initial lack of access is therefore not considered to be a significant limitation to the assessment.

3.6.2 A data search was not requested from the Local Records Centre as part of this assessment. Due to the small size of the site, small scale of works and lack of suitable habitat on site to support protected or notable species, this is not considered a significant limitation to the assessment.

3.7 Evaluation of Ecological Features

3.7.1 In line with CIEEM's guidelines on EcIA, this assessment has focused on relevant Important Ecological Features. The scale of importance of these features has been determined based on available contextual information and can include:

- **International** – of international importance and protected through international legislation;
- **National** – of importance in England and protected through national legislation;

- **County** – of importance to the county (Wiltshire) but not sufficiently important to warrant 'National' scale of importance; and
- **Local** – of importance to the local area (Chippenham), but not sufficiently important to warrant County scale of importance.

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

3.8 Personnel

3.8.1 The surveyors on site and report author have been detailed in Appendix 2.

4 BASELINE ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

4.1 Designated Sites

Statutory designated sites

- 4.1.1 No statutory designated sites were identified within 1km of the proposed development site. Therefore, impacts on statutory designated sites are scoped out of the assessment.

4.2 Habitats

General site description

- 4.2.1 The site comprises a derelict building surrounded by security fencing. There are commercial buildings to the north, residential areas to the west and Chippenham railway station car park to the east and south east. The site is set within an urban environment within the centre of Chippenham. The River Avon is located 220m south of the site at its closest point.

4.3 Bats

Habitats

- 4.3.1 The site comprises entirely of developed land; sealed surface, which provides negligible suitability for commuting and foraging bats. Some vegetation is present along the railway line 30-metres south of the site, although this is fragmented and does not form a significant ecological corridor for bats. The most valuable habitat for bats in the local area is the River Avon, located 220m south of the site.

Data search

- 4.3.2 No granted EPS licences for bats were identified within 1km of the site.

Preliminary roost assessment

- 4.3.3 The building is constructed of stone with wooden panelling on the east, west and southern elevations. There are several gaps in the stonework, some of which lead to cavities behind. These were inspected, with no evidence of bats identified. The wooden panelling is in poor condition, with slipped and missing panels. The windows are boarded up. The slate roof is in fairly good condition, however the ridge tiles on the eastern side of the roof are warped and contain gaps. External photos are shown in Photo 1-4.



Photo 1 Southern elevation with security fence



Photo 2 Western elevation



Photo 3 Gaps under wooden panelling



Photo 4 Lifted ridge tiles on eastern end of building

- 4.3.4 The internal inspection identified that the weighroom on the ground floor contains a concrete slab floor. The windows are boarded up however, under the weighbridge there are potential access points into the building, as well as some gaps above the doors and gaps in the stonework.
- 4.3.5 The loft void was accessed and several holes in the roof were identified, although the void was still fairly dark and not subject to excessive light ingress. The roof felt present is in poor condition with multiple rips. All windows except for the northeast elevation are sealed tight. Evidence of mice and rats were identified throughout, with no evidence of bat presence.



Photo 5 Gap above doorway



Photo 6 Internals ground floor



Photo 7 Hole in ceiling



Photo 8 Hole in loft void felt

- 4.3.6 **No evidence of bats** was identified during the internal and external inspections. There are several potential crevice features for bats externally on the building as well as several potential entry points into the internals of the building. Following the structure inspection, the building was assessed to contain Moderate potential for bats (see below subsequent downgrading following emergence survey).

Dusk emergence survey

- 4.3.7 The dusk emergence survey undertaken on 5th August 2025 did not identify any bats emerging from the building. No bats were recorded throughout the survey. Environmental variables recorded during the survey are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3 Environmental variables

Environmental Variable	Start	End
Sunset	20:49	
Survey timings	20:35	22:20
Temperature (°C)	16	15
Cloud cover (X/8)	1	0
Wind speed - Average	Light air	Gentle breeze
Wind speed - Max	Gentle breeze	Light breeze
Humidity	52	65
Rain	None	None

- 4.3.8 During the bat survey, high levels of artificial lighting were identified on site. All elevations of the building were lit, either from adjacent street lighting or from security lighting within the railway station car park. As a result of this, alongside the lack of bats recorded during the survey and the lack of suitable vegetation on or near the site, the building was downgraded to **low potential for bats**. Therefore, no further emergence surveys were undertaken, in line with best practice guidance (BCT, 2023).



Photo 9 Security lighting



Photo 10 Security lighting

- 4.3.9 The emergence survey identified the building does not currently support a bat roost. Bats are therefore not considered further in this assessment.

4.4 Birds

- 4.4.1 No evidence of nesting birds was identified externally or internally within the building. There are several holes within the brickwork and also access points into the building internals and loft void. Therefore, there is potential for common species of bird to utilise the building during the breeding season. Birds are considered further on a precautionary basis during construction.

4.5 Other Protected Species

- 4.5.1 The site does not contain any suitable habitat to support NERC S41 mammals, hazel dormouse, badgers, riparian mammals, amphibians, reptiles or notable invertebrates. Given the urbanised nature of the site and lack of suitable nearby habitats with potential to support these species, species, they are likely to be absent from the site and are not considered further in this assessment.

4.6 Summary

- 4.6.1 A summary of the important ecological features on site and their scale of importance for nature conservation is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Important ecological features on site

Important Ecological Features	Scale of Importance
Birds	N/a - Precautionary only

5 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The building is currently in a state of significant disrepair, and the development proposals comprise a complete structural repairs and prevention of further water ingress. The works required are summarised below:

- Repairs to the primary structural roof members;
- Repairs to the timber roof members including removal and replacement of tiled coverings;
- Replacement of gutters, flashings and weathering details;
- Repairs to the timber framed walls and timber cladding; and
- Repointing of the limestone walling.

6 ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

6.1 Birds

- 6.1.1 To avoid impacts on breeding birds, works to the building should either be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season (March to August inclusive), or be subject to a pre-works check by a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE). In the event that any nests are found during the pre-works check, the SQE will set up a buffer zone around the nest (minimum of 5m but will vary depending on the species present), in which no works will take place until the young have fledged. Any nests present will be monitored by a SQE who will be able to advise when works can recommence. This requirement can be secured by a planning condition.

6.2 Ecological Enhancement

- 6.2.1 Given the urban nature of the site, levels of artificial lighting and the poor connectivity with habitats of value in the wider area, ecological enhancements for bats are not considered suitable. Furthermore as the building is listed, this limits options for installing features for enhancement, such as nest boxes on the building. As there are existing swift bricks on the stone wall adjacent to the building, two bug hotels are proposed as suitable enhancement measures, which can be secured by condition, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 5 Ecological enhancement provision

Provision	Species	Description	Installation	Photograph
Bug hotels x2	Invertebrates – solitary bees, ladybirds, butterflies.	Wooden shelters to provide refuge for invertebrates.	On the stone wall, ideally with some native species planters / or wildflower seeding of the grassland to provide nearby pollen, nectar sources.	 

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Wiltshire Council (2015) Core Strategy

APPENDIX 1 POLICY

National Policy - NPPF

The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** (published Dec 2024) sets out national planning policy, including policies of relevance to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Policies of relevance to the proposed development (parts of paragraphs 187, 192, 193 and 198) have been summarised below:

Para 187: Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)*
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs;*

Para 192: To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

- a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and*
- b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.*

Para 193: When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles, notably:

- a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;*
- d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate*

Para 198: c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.

Local Policy

The Wiltshire Core Strategy sets out the strategic vision for sustainable growth in Wiltshire and provides a framework for planning. Policy relating to biodiversity is provided 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 long-term. Where it has been demonstrated that such features cannot be retained, removal or damage shall only be acceptable in circumstances where the anticipated ecological impacts have been mitigated as far as possible and appropriate compensatory measures can be secured to ensure no net loss of the local biodiversity resource and secure the integrity of local ecological networks and provision of ecosystem services.

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

Any development potentially affecting a Natura 2000 site must provide avoidance measures in accordance with the strategic plans or guidance where possible, otherwise bespoke measures must be provided to demonstrate that the proposals would have no adverse effect upon the Natura 2000 network. Any development that would have an adverse effect on the integrity of a European nature conservation site will not be in accordance with the Core Strategy.

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.

APPENDIX 2 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Bats

Habitats

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

Preliminary roost assessment

A physical external inspection of the building on site was undertaken on 5th August 2025 using the equipment described below to assist the inspection. Approximately four hours of search effort were expended. An internal inspection was then undertaken on 9th September 2025 once internal access into the building was gained.

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

Where required, the search included an endoscope search of features with potential for bats. Equipment included a Rigid micro-CA-350 Inspection Camera with micro 6mm extension, camera, laser measure, and binoculars.

Dusk emergence survey

One dusk emergence survey was undertaken on 5th August 2025.

The emergence survey commenced 15 minutes before sunset and finished 1.5 hours after sunset.

Two surveyors were positioned to view all aspects of the structure where potential roost features have been observed, as shown in Figure 2.

Echo Meter Touch (EMT) bat detectors were used for the survey. All calls recorded were analysed using the Echo Meter Touch app software. All calls recorded were cross referenced to a call reference collection library of known bat species to confirm species presence.

Thermal imaging cameras were used as a survey aid on all surveys, as demonstrated in Photos 9 and 10. The surveyors were trained Jim Philips and Matt Attrill, who are both licensed bat surveyors who have attended two training courses on the use of thermal imaging cameras for bat surveys (Wildlifetek, 2020, 2022) and are considered to be 'suitably qualified' in the use of

the cameras as both a survey aid and method. For these surveys, thermal imaging was used as a 'survey aid' in accordance with the Thermal Imaging Bat Survey Guidelines (Fawcett Williams, 2021).

Flir T540 thermal imaging cameras with were used and videos were recorded as non-radiometric files. This camera has a thermal resolution of 464×348 with a 42° lens which allows for the detection of bats up to a distance of 51m. The video files were transferred into standard video analysis software for later analysis.



Photo 11 North west elevation

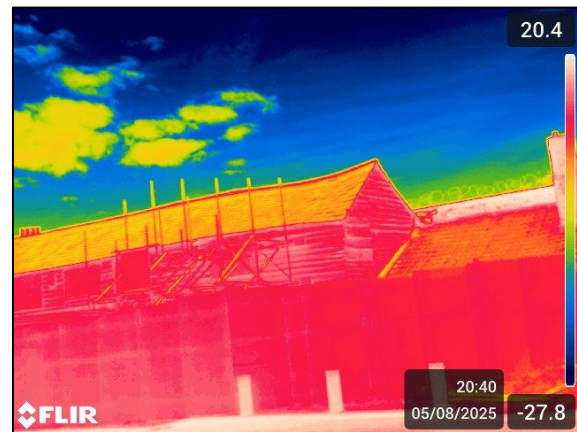


Photo 12 South east elevation



Figure 2 Surveyor positions

Surveyors on Site

Table 6 Site surveyors and report authors

Ecologist	Position	Qualifications/ Licences	Experience	Role
Steph Green	Head of Ecology	MSc BSc (Hons), MCIEEM Class 1 GCN Licence Class 1 Hazel Dormouse Licence	Steph has over eleven years' experience in ecological field survey and consultancy. Steph is responsible for leading and undertaking comprehensive ecological impact assessments, protected species surveys and is a licensed GCN and dormouse worker, as well as a Full Member of CIEEM.	Bat surveyor, structure inspection and report author
Sarah Forsyth	Principal Ecologist	MSc DIC BSc (Hons), ACIEEM Class 2 Bat Licence (NE) Class 1 GCN Licence (NE) Tree Climbing and Rescue, City and Guilds NPTC Level 2 Award (206 and 306)	Sarah has a broad range of experience in ecological management and assessment, both in consultancy and the public sector. Sarah is responsible for leading on ecological assessments and overseeing projects through various stages of planning and implementation.	Bat surveyor, structure inspection and project manager
Becky Morris	Senior Ecologist	PhD, DIC, MSc, BSc, MCIEEM Class 1 GCN Licence	Becky has sixteen years' experience working as an Ecological Consultant, specialising in botanical surveys. She holds a great crested newt survey licence.	Internal structure inspection
Sophie Thompson	Assistant Ecologist	MSc, BSc (Hons)	Sophie has over two years' experience in delivering habitat surveys, protected species surveys and ecological reports. Sophie has also worked with her local community to enhance wildlife by contributing to nature reserve management plans and by attending habitat management days.	Internal structure inspection