



# PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Oysters Farm, Gutch Common, Wiltshire SP7 9BE

Prepared for: S. Priest, Oysters Farm, Semley, Wiltshire SP7 9BE

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## Summary

The buildings have been assessed as having negligible potential to support roosting bats and are not being used by barn owls or nesting birds. No further surveys are required as long as work on the building begins within two years of this report.

Enhancements are proposed in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024) and the Environment Act 2021. Mitigation measures to protect a hedge during works are required.

This is a self-build development, and is therefore exempt from Biodiversity Net Gain (Defra, 2024 and 2023).

## 1.0. Introduction

1.1. Survey – The preliminary bat roost appraisal aimed to assess the building for the presence of bats and to confirm the presence/absence of bats and/or potential bat roosting features. The barn owl survey assessed the building for the presence of barn owls. Other bird species' use of the building to nest was also considered.

Local Planning Authorities must consider species protected under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) when making planning decisions. Local Planning Authorities also aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity (National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) 2024) and have regard to conserving biodiversity, including restoring and enhancing populations or habitats, under the Natural Environment & Communities Act 2006 (NERC 2006).

1.2. Report – The report aims to summarise the survey results, highlight any effects of the proposed development on bats, barn owls, and other bird species and provide appropriate mitigation and/or enhancement.

1.3. Site Location – Oysters Farm, Gutch Common, Wiltshire SP7 9BE (Figs. 1 - 3), grid reference ST 89750 26021.

1.4. Description of Site – The site includes two barns, both in bad states of repair, on the edge of a hardstanding farmyard, to the NE of Oysters Farmhouse. The farm building range at Oysters Farm is not listed but, as a traditional range of agricultural buildings, may be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). The owners of the property are seeking planning permission to restore and convert the range and immediate setting to residential use.

1.5. Description of Proposals – This application involves a self-build conversion of an agricultural barn (non-designated heritage asset) into C3 residential, the demolition of a modern dilapidated timber barn, minor alterations to retained barns, as well as hard and soft landscaping, nutrient neutrality measures, a Pre-Packaged Treatment Works (PPTW), and associated landscaping. The type and scope of the survey are appropriate to the nature and extent of the development and its scale of impact.

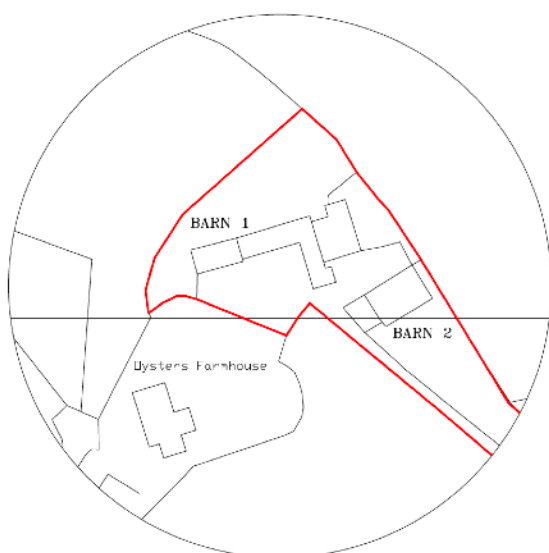
Figure 1. Location Plan



Figure 2. Aerial View of Site



Figure 3. Site Boundary



## 2.0. Method

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) is an assessment of the ecological features present, or potentially present, within a site and its surrounding area (the zone(s) of influence) regarding a proposed development.

The key objectives of a PEA are to:

- Identify the likely ecological constraints associated with a project.
- Identify any mitigation measures likely to be required.
- Identify any additional surveys that may be required to inform an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) and
- Identify the opportunities a project offers to deliver ecological enhancement.

2.1. Desk Study – The Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) was used to search for data on protected sites and bat mitigation licences for bats within 1km of the site. A 1km data search from Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC) was also requested.

2.2. Field Survey – The ecology survey carried out on 13th May 2025 assessed the site for species and/or habitats protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Surveys were conducted in accordance with all relevant guidelines (see the Reference section). The weather was fine, still, and clear.

2.2.1. Bats & Buildings – A survey assessment was carried out of the buildings (external walls, roof coverings, soffits, fascias, internal spaces, beams, ledges, windowsills, floors, holes and cavities, etc.) for signs of regular use by bats (i.e. staining, droppings and worn surfaces) and for any potential bat roost features, such as gaps in tiles, lifted lead flashing, gaps or holes in soffits or fascias, and missing mortar around the roof.

2.2.2. Bats & Trees – The trees on site were assessed for their potential to support roosting bats based on suitable bat roosting features, such as cracks, splits, woodpecker holes, deadwood, scratch marks and ivy. An assessment was also made of the suitability of the site and the surrounding landscape to support foraging and/or commuting bat species. The trees were assessed as having high, medium or low bat potential.

2.2.3. Other Protected Species – The survey assessed the site for signs of use by protected species that could be affected by the proposed development, e.g., for nesting birds – nests, nesting material, etc., for badgers – badger holes, latrines, hair on wire fencing, snuffle holes, etc., for reptiles/amphibians – suitable habitat, presence in/under various materials, e.g., in wood piles, etc., for dormice - nests, hedge type, and connectivity, signs of feeding, etc., for water voles - droppings, burrows, feeding stations, signs of feeding and otter - holt, spraint, footprints, etc.

2.3. Field Equipment – The equipment used to carry out the survey includes a torch, ladder, endoscope, binoculars, compass, notebook, and pen.

2.4. Details of Surveyor – Katie Pollard BSc, MSc, PhD, MCIEEM. Director and Principal Ecologist at KP Ecology. Ecologist for over 20 years. Natural England Licences held relevant to this survey: Bat Class Licence 2025-86276-CL18-BAT.

### **3.0. Constraints to Survey**

The site visit provides a 'snapshot' of the ecological features and habitats during the survey. It doesn't account for seasonal variation in flora or fauna, so habitats and species may have been overlooked due to seasonal constraints. However, the ecologist is confident that the survey's findings and conclusions are correct.

## 4.0. Results

### Ecological Assessment

The results of the Ecological Assessment carried out on 13th May 2025 are presented below;

- Barn 1 – A single-storey, L-shaped brick and stone building situated within the hardstanding farmyard. There are three open doorways and numerous open windows along the south-east elevation, and two closed doorways and a window on the south-west elevation (Figs. 4 - 5).

Figure 4. South-east elevation of Barn 1



Figure 5. SE & SW elevation of Barn 1



The south-western end of Barn 1 is built from both stone and brick, with a noticeable crack in the stone on the north-western elevation. On the south-west and north-west elevations, which also feature doors and windows, the barn faces onto improved grassland. This land will form part of the garden for Barn 1 and was previously used for grazing (Figs. 6 & 7).

Figure 6. Close-up of SE & SW end elevations



Figure 7. SW and NW elevations of Barn 1



At the NE end of Barn 1 is an open steel-framed structure, which runs along most of its length. There are also two ash *Fraxinus excelsior* trees immediately adjacent to the NE end of Barn 1, again with open windows and a wooden doorway (Figs. 8 & 9).

Figure 8. NW & NE elevations of Barn 1 & Lean-to



Figure 9. View of Barn 2 - SW & SE



- Roof – The roof of Barn 1 is mainly covered with clay tiles, with a few roof lights on the NW and NE elevations. Additionally, there are two sections of corrugated asbestos sheeting over part of the stone section of the building at the SW end and on the SE gable end (Figs. 4 - 9). There are some large holes in Barn 1's roof, allowing significant water ingress. The tiles are not lined (Figs. 10 - 15).
- Interior – The inside of Barn 1 is damp due to water ingress, with rotting timbers and water on the floor. The barn is now used for only a small amount of storage due to water ingress (Fig. 15). It is light inside through windows, doors, and holes in the roof, and is very draughty (Figs. 10 - 15).

Figure 10. Hole in roof of Barn 1



Figure 11. Another large hole in Barn 1 roof



Figure 12. Gaps along ridge & side of roof



Figure 13. Gaps in roof tiles



Figure 14. Big hole in roof



Figure 15. View along section of Barn 1



No bats, or evidence of bats, e.g. bat droppings, urine stains, or feeding remains (butterfly/moth wings/beetle elytra) were observed in the barn. It is not being used by bats to roost.

There were also no signs that the barn had been used by barn owls or other nesting birds, such as old nests, owl pellets, or white staining.

- Lean-to at NE end of Barn 1 – This timber-framed building is open on three sides, with a corrugated metal roof. It has been used for livestock in the past (Figs. 16 -17).
- Barn 2 – A timber-framed barn, open on one side, located to the SE of Barn 1. It is roofed and clad (on two sides) with corrugated metal sheets. It is draughty and light (Figs. 18 - 20).

Figure 16. View through Lean-to, to Barn 2



Figure 17. View of wall with adjoining Barn 1



Figure 18. SW and NW elevations of Barn 2



Figure 19. View of roof of Barn 2



Figure 20. View of doorways on SE elevation



No bats, or evidence of bats, e.g. bat droppings, urine stains, or feeding remains (butterfly/moth wings/beetle elytra) were observed in the barn. It is not being used by bats to roost.

There were also no signs that the barn had been used by barn owls or other nesting birds, such as old nests, owl pellets, or white staining.

No further surveys of these buildings are required.

- Area around barns – The area surrounding Barn 1 features a hard-standing farmyard to the south (Fig. 22) and south-east, while Barn 2's yard lies to the north-west and south-west. A hard-standing track leads up to the barns, with a hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* hedge on the south-east boundary of the track (outside the development boundary). This hedge was planted by the current owners and will not be impacted by the proposed work.

The area to the north and west of Barn 1 is improved grassland, with species including: perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, with common nettles *Urtica dioica* along the north-west side of Barn 1 and some Buddleia *Buddleja* sp. and other common shrubs around the west/south-west corner of Barn 1. This area of grassland has previously been grazed, but is not within the curtilage of Barn 1, where it will remain. There are no plans to remove this area of grassland.

There are boundary trees along the NE of the site, but these are outside the development boundary (Fig. 21).

Figure 21. Aerial View of Site



## 4.2. Protected Species

There are no protected or notable species, nor any protected habitats or habitats supporting protected species, within the boundaries of the development site. There are mature trees on the boundary, but these are outside the development boundary.

4.2.1. Bats – No bats or evidence of bats were observed during the survey. Bats are not using the buildings to roost. It has negligible bat roost potential. There is a soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* bat roost in one of the buildings on Oysters Farm (owner, pers. comm.), but this will not be impacted by the proposed development. The buildings will be checked before any work commences on site.

4.2.2. Badgers – There was no evidence of badgers or suitable habitats on site. Therefore, the proposed development will not adversely impact badgers. No further action is required.

4.2.3. Nesting Birds – There are suitable habitats for nesting birds on the site; however, none were noted at the time of the survey. The buildings will be checked before any work commences on site.

4.2.4. Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians – The area impacted by the works does not offer suitable habitats for great crested newts or other amphibians. There will be no adverse impacts on amphibians. No further action is required.

4.2.5. Reptiles – The area impacted by the works does not offer suitable habitats for reptiles. There will be no adverse impacts on reptiles. No further action is required.

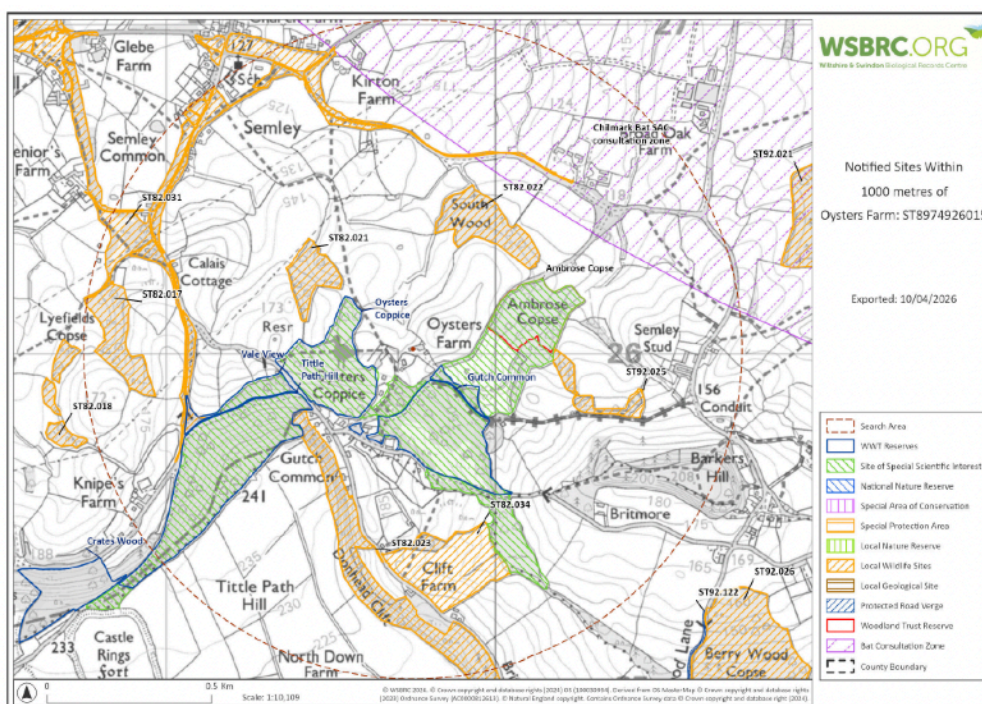
### 4.3. Results from MAGIC

Within 400m of the site is Gutch Common Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Gutch Common Local Wildlife Site. Its main habitats are neutral lowland grassland and lowland broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.

### 4.4. Result from Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre (1km data search)

4.4.1. Protected Sites – There are seven Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within 1km of the site, four Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) Reserves and Gutch Common SSSI (Fig. 22). The site sits outside the Chilmark Quarry Bat Consultation Zone.

Figure 22. Notified Sites Map (WSBRC)



4.4.2. Protected Species – There are many records of protected species within 1km of the site, mainly due to the high level of recording on the LWS's, the WWT Reserves and the SSSI. Species include: Badger *Meles meles*, brown hare *Lepus europaeus*, water vole *Arvicola amphibius*, hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*, and 10 confirmed bat species.

Bat species records are for: Barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*, serotine *Cnephaeus serotinus*, whiskered *Myotis mystacinus*, natterer's *Myotis nattereri*, noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus*, greater horseshoe *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* and lesser horseshoe *Rhinolophus hipposideros*. Only eight of these records are for bat roosts; all of the others are field records.

## 5.0. Conclusion

No protected species (including bats and barn owls) or their habitats are present on the site. Beyond the north boundary of this application, boundary trees provide suitable nesting opportunities for birds and a flight line for bats. The proposed work to convert the two barns for residential use will not impact any of these boundary trees or any other vegetation on or adjacent to the site. The one hedge outside of the boundary, along the track, will be protected during works.

Enhancements are required under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024), Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted 2015) and the Environment Act 2021.

No further survey work is required, provided the work commences within two years of this report. However, checks of the barns will be required prior to commencement of work to ensure that no nesting birds or other protected species have taken up residence since the last survey.

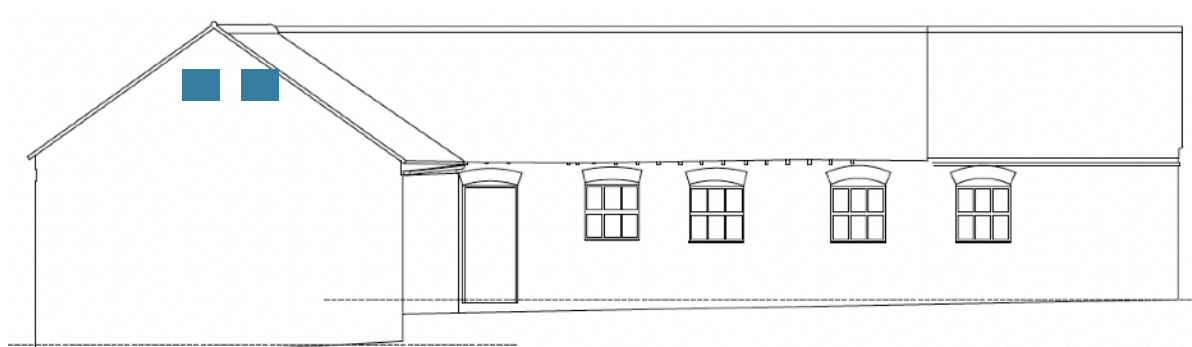
## 6.0. Mitigation

The hedge along the track will be protected during work by Heras fencing.

## 7.0. Biodiversity Enhancements

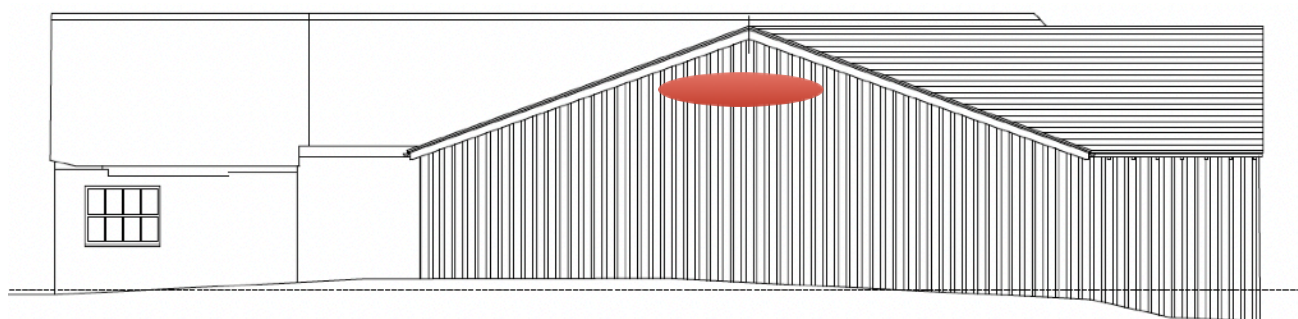
- Bats – Two external woodcrete bat boxes will be put up on the south-west elevation of Barn 1 (Fig 23). The exact make, model and position of the bat boxes will be discussed and agreed upon with the ecologist.

Figure 23. South-west elevation of Barn 1 - position of external bat boxes ■



- Birds – A row of sparrow boxes will be put up on the north-east elevation of Barn 1. The exact make, model and position of the bat boxes will be discussed and agreed upon with the ecologist.

Figure 24. North-east elevation of Barn 1 - position of sparrow terrace ●



- Landscaping – The Landscape Service has provided a landscape design which includes: c. 100 m of native hedge planting, a wildflower meadow, and various native trees and flowers that are good for pollinators. Following the ecologist's advice, two woodcrete bat boxes and two woodcrete bird boxes will be installed in trees in the adjacent woodland. All of which will provide suitable habitats for wildlife. Full details are available in a separate document (The Landscape Service, 2026).

## 8.0. References

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### Ecologist Signature



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