



BENGROVE LTD

Ecology-BNG-Wildlife

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

LAND NORTH OF WOOTTON RIVERS

Client: Blanchard Farms

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SUMMARY

Bengrove Ltd were asked to provide a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of a parcel of land just north of Wootton Rivers by Blanchard Farms, where they hope to erect a dwelling for farm workers.

The site is in an arable field with species-rich hedgerows with trees to the north and west, and an area of woodland known as the Pit Plantation to the northeast behind the proposed development area. A field drainage ditch runs along the bottom of the sloped field, to the south of the proposed dwelling. Three barns have recently been constructed on the Site, with a crushed hardcore track curving from the existing field gate, flanked by guarded and recently planted whips. The plan proposes to extend this track further up the field to the Site's footprint.

The surveyed area includes habitats that may occasionally be used by protected species found in more distinct, protected areas within the wider landscape. Notably, birds and bats from the ancient woodlands of Savernake Forest SSSI, Apshill Copse LWS, Brick Hill Copse LWS, and Ram Alley Copse LWS. However, the field is not uncommon within the wider landscape, and the development footprint small enough that any habitat loss would not be significant beyond the Site-level. Less mobile protected species such as amphibians and reptiles are also unlikely to be abundant within the field due to its poor-quality habitat.

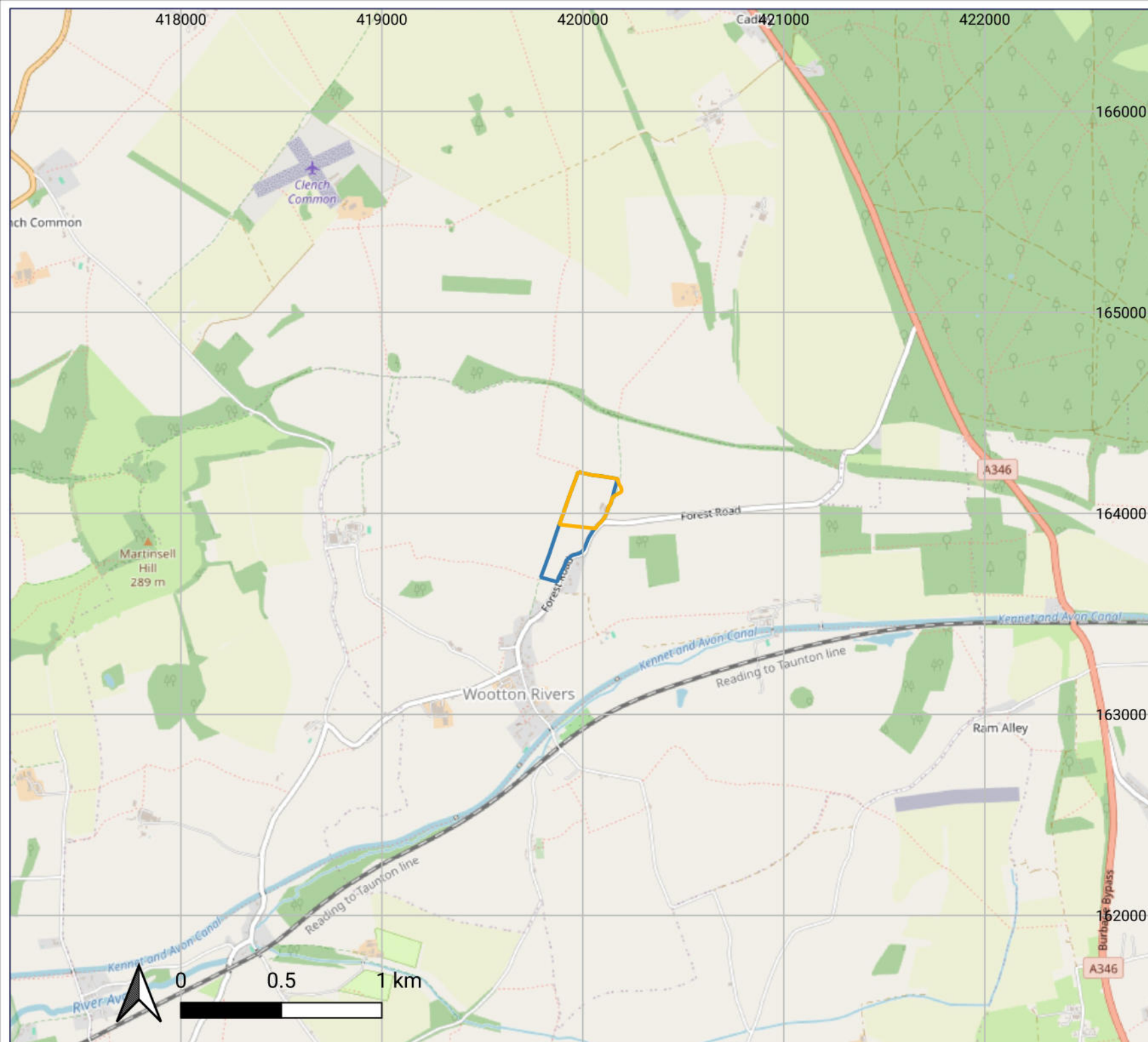
Key measures that should be incorporated into the design include:

- A detailed Construction Ecological Management Plan that outlines the following:
 - How lighting of trees and hedges where SSSI birds may be nesting, bats may be roosting, or protected moths with 'positive phototaxis' may be flying will be avoided;
 - Suitable Biodiversity Protection Zones around key areas: a 15m buffer around the Pit Plantation, and a 5m buffer around the ditch;
 - Careful vegetation clearance to avoid harm to any small animals present;
- Birds pre-commencement survey for Barn owl nest box and Hobby in woodland.
- Create an ecotone habitat that transitions away from the Pit Plantation.
- Two bird-nesting boxes (e.g. for Swifts) will be incorporated into the dwelling.
- Trees outside woodland planting, additional woodland creation, or hedgerow planting or enhancement, focussing on the woodland creation measures outlined in the Wiltshire & Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Tailor enhancements for declining invertebrates identified in the LNRS. This could include plug-planting of Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) and Cowslips (*Primula veris*) under newly planted trees for the Duke of Burgandy (*Hamearis lucina*) butterfly.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Scope and Purpose of the Report

- 1.1.1 Bengrove Ltd was commissioned by Blanchard Farms to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal for the land north of Forest Road, Wootton Rivers, Marlborough (hereafter referred to as the 'Site'), in connection with a potential new dwelling for farm workers. The Site location is shown in the **Site Location Plan**, the OS grid reference for the centre of the Site is SU20086409 and the nearest postcode is SN8 4NL.
- 1.1.2 The purpose of this report is to:
- provide an assessment of the ecological importance of the site's habitats;
 - set out whether any protected or notable species are likely to use the site;
 - determine whether any further ecological surveys should be completed to support the planning application;
 - confirm whether the application will be subject to the biodiversity net gain requirement;
 - explain how relevant planning policies apply to the site; and
 - verify which ecological matters should form material considerations for the planning application.
- 1.1.3 The report follows the methods set out in the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal produced by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, 2017).



Legend

Boundaries

 Survey Area

 Ownership Boundary

OpenStreetMap

Project	Land North of Forest Road
Client	Blanchard Farms
Title	Site Location Plan
Date	02/02/2026
Suitability	For issue
CRS	OSGB36 / British National Grid
Scale	1:25000
QGIS	3.44.2-Solothurn

2. LEGISLATION AND POLICY

Wildlife in the UK is protected through various pieces of legislation and planning policy. This forms a framework through which projects are assessed for their impacts on habitats and species and the background against which recommendations are made for the grant or refusal of planning permission.

2.1. Legislation

2.1.1 The main pieces of legislation protecting wildlife in the UK that are relevant to this project are:

- The *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017* (as amended); and the *Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019*. These regulations cover the protection of European designated sites (the Natura 2000 Network, made up of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas); and European Protected Species listed in Annex IV to the Habitats Directive, whose natural range includes any area in Great Britain.
- The *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended); the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*; and the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)*. Together these acts provide specific protections for a number of UK species (with some overlap with the species listed on Annex IV) and list invasive species for which there are legal provisions; nationally designated sites including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); and set out the species of principle importance for conservation (Priority Species).
- The *Environment Act 2021* which inserted *Schedule 7A* into the *Town and Country Planning Act 1990* making it mandatory for all developments (with some exceptions) to deliver at least 10% net biodiversity gain. The Acts and related regulations make it a requirement that planning applications are submitted with details of the biodiversity value of onsite habitats.

2.2. National Planning Policy Framework

2.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – last updated 7th February 2025 – sets out the government's planning policy for England. Chapter 15 sets out the policies relating to the natural environment, and the elements of particular relevance are:

2.2.2 **Paragraph 187:** Sets out that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) Protecting and enhancing [...] sites of biodiversity [...] value (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside;
- c) 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;

2.2.3 **Paragraph 193:** Sets out that, when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

- 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;
- b) Development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- c) Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- 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.

2.3. Biodiversity Net Gain

2.3.1 The planning application would not be within the scope of the requirement to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain, introduced by *Schedule 7A* of the *Town and Country Planning Act 1990* (inserted by the *Environment Act 2021*) as it is a self-build development.

2.4. Local Plan

2.4.1 The land falls within the administrative area covered by the Wiltshire Council Local Planning Authority. The current Development Plan comprises:

- Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted 20th January 2015), including policies saved from former local district plans. Biodiversity and Geodiversity policies:
 - Core Policy 50
 - Draft Local Plan Policy 88
- Chippenham Site Allocations Plan
- Wiltshire Housing Site Allocations Plan
- Minerals and Waste Plans
- 'Made' Neighbourhood Plans

2.4.2 The relevant neighbourhood plan is the Marlborough Area Neighbourhood Plan (2023). We also assess the extent to which the Supplementary Planning Document, Wiltshire Design Guide (2024), may influence the planning decision-making process.

2.4.3 Core Policy 50 is the current policy, but the Local Plan review is targeting a Biodiversity Net Gain of 20%, above and beyond the 10% required.

2.5. Local Nature Recovery Strategy

2.5.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) have been designed to reverse biodiversity decline and restore ecological connectivity across England.

2.5.2 Section 40(2A) of the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* (duty to conserve biodiversity) and Part 6(104-108) of the *Environment Act 2021* (Local nature recovery strategies for England) outline how local authorities must create and adhere to biodiversity priorities that aim to achieve the above, within their respective areas.

2.5.3 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Wiltshire and Swindon has now been adopted and published. When completing a statutory metric, the baseline habitats will therefore be set as low strategic significance. Post-development habitats can be set to high strategic significance if:

- The location of the habitat parcel has been mapped in the Local Habitat Map as an area where a potential measure has been proposed to help deliver the priorities of that LNRS; and
- The proposed intervention is consistent with the mapped potential measure in the LNRS for the habitat parcel.

3. METHODS

To understand the Site's ecological function in the wider landscape, a combination of desk-based research and field surveys were used. All areas within the proposed Red Line Boundary could be surveyed, and while the UKHabs survey was completed in January, the survey area was predominantly a winter cereal crop, and common species around the boundaries could be identified.

3.1. Desk Study

3.1.1 Desktop data were provided by Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC) on the 26th January 2026. The data search included records of protected and priority species, and notified (non-statutory) designated sites within a 2km radius of the proposed development site.

3.1.2 The Government's Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) map was used to search for the following protected habitat and species data over various Zones of Influence, that is, the area over which ecological features may be affected by biophysical changes as a result of the project:

15km Zone of Influence

3.1.3 The potential for the project to have adverse impacts on European designated sites – RAMSAR, SAC, and SPA – was assessed. There is no fixed distance at which this area of analysis must be set. It need not be so wide as to capture any and all Natura 2000 sites nor all the land where their qualifying features may be encountered: there is an inverse relationship between the distance from a site and the concentration of qualifying species – a very wide search area would be meaningless.

3.1.4 Given the scale of the project and its location and landscape context, a 15km area of analysis has been adopted as sufficiently broad to capture any Nature 2000 sites whose qualifying features might conceivably use the site on anything more than an occasional basis.

- Wetlands of International Importance (RAMSAR)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Areas (SPA)

5km Zone of Influence

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- National Nature Reserves (NNR)

- Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
- Records of Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) environmental DNA (eDNA) surveys (2017-2019) for District Level Licensing (updated annually); and
- Records of granted European Protected Species License (EPSL) applications.

2km Zone of Influence

- Priority Habitats Inventory (a spatial dataset of habitats identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and listed as being of principal importance for the purpose of conserving or enhancing biodiversity, under Section 41 of the *Nature Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006*).

- 3.1.5 Spatial data for all of the above (except for the EPSL records) are available under the Open Government Licence (OGL, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>) via Natural England's ArcGIS REST API services. This service was used in the maps and plans produced for this report, along with 'OS Open Data – Local' shapefiles provided by Ordnance Survey.
- 3.1.6 To determine the likelihood of Great Crested Newts being present on Site, the following steps were followed:
- 1) Results from the 5km EPSL licence searches obtained during the data search were checked for records of Great Crested Newts within the wider landscape.
 - 2) The centre of the Site's survey area was added to QGIS and a 500m buffer created around it.
 - 3) The following data sources were then added to the same project:
 - (a) Several shapefile layers taken from Natural England, reproduced under the OGL. Including:
 - (i) [Great Crested Newts eDNA Pond Surveys for District Level Licensing \(England\)](#)
 - (ii) [Surveyed priority ponds \(England\) – Overview](#)
 - (iii) [Priority Habitats Inventory \(England\)](#)
 - (b) A georeferenced snip of a 500m buffer around the Site, taken from MAGIC – used to help locate ponds via satellite imagery.
 - (c) Historical, Ordnance Survey, 25-Inch maps (1873-1914) of Wiltshire from the National Library of Scotland, available under the CC-BY licence.
 - (d) Shapefiles from Ordnance Survey's [OpenMap-Local](#) dataset (this provides shapefiles for ponds, rivers, buildings etc), available under the OGL.
 - 4) Using the above sources, the 500m area around the Site was manually searched for any possible waterbodies that could support a population of newts, and point markers created at their locations.
 - 5) Where ponds did fall within 500m of the Site, consideration was then given to any functional barriers to movement across the landscape (flowing water, large roads, urban areas etc). Based on this, the likelihood that newts would use the site was considered.

- 3.1.7 Whilst they give an indication of habitats and species in the area, the above are not a substitute for field surveys and assessment. For example, where the Priority Habitats Inventory or eDNA records suggest there may be protected habitats or ponds suitable for newts within or adjacent to the Site, they are likely to require field assessment to verify the record.

3.2. Habitat Survey

- 3.2.1 A full UKHabs survey was carried out on the 9th January 2026. The survey was carried out by Peter Stocking, who has a BSc in Conservation Biology and Ecology (First-Class Honours) and roughly a year's experience as an ecological consultant.
- 3.2.2 The purpose of the survey was to classify the habitats according to the UK Habitat Classification version 2.0¹.

3.3. Protected Species Scoping

- 3.3.1 The Site was also assessed for its potential to support legally protected and notable species, based upon the results of the desk study and with reference literature for the relevant species and groups:
- Amphibians (Gent and Gibson, 2003)
 - Badgers (Harris et al. 1991; and Roper, 2010);
 - Bats (Collins, 2023; Mitchell-Jones, 2004; and Reason, P.F. and Wray, S. 2023)
 - Birds (Gilbert et al. 1998; Bibby et al. 2000)
 - Dormice (Bright, Morris and Mitchell-Jones, 2006)
 - Terrestrial invertebrates (Drake et al. 2007; Kirby, 2001).

3.4. Limitations

- 3.4.1 The entire site was accessible during the survey, and the site could be thoroughly searched for evidence of protected species.
- 3.4.2 Botanical surveys are best conducted in the spring and summer months (April-August), making January a sub-optimal survey period. Where species could not be identified, photos were taken and species checked in the office.
- 3.4.3 Some protected species will be less active during January (amphibians and reptiles, for example), making spotting signs more difficult during this time.

¹ UKHab Ltd (2023). *UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0* (at <https://www.ukhab.org>)

4. RESULTS

4.1. Designated Sites

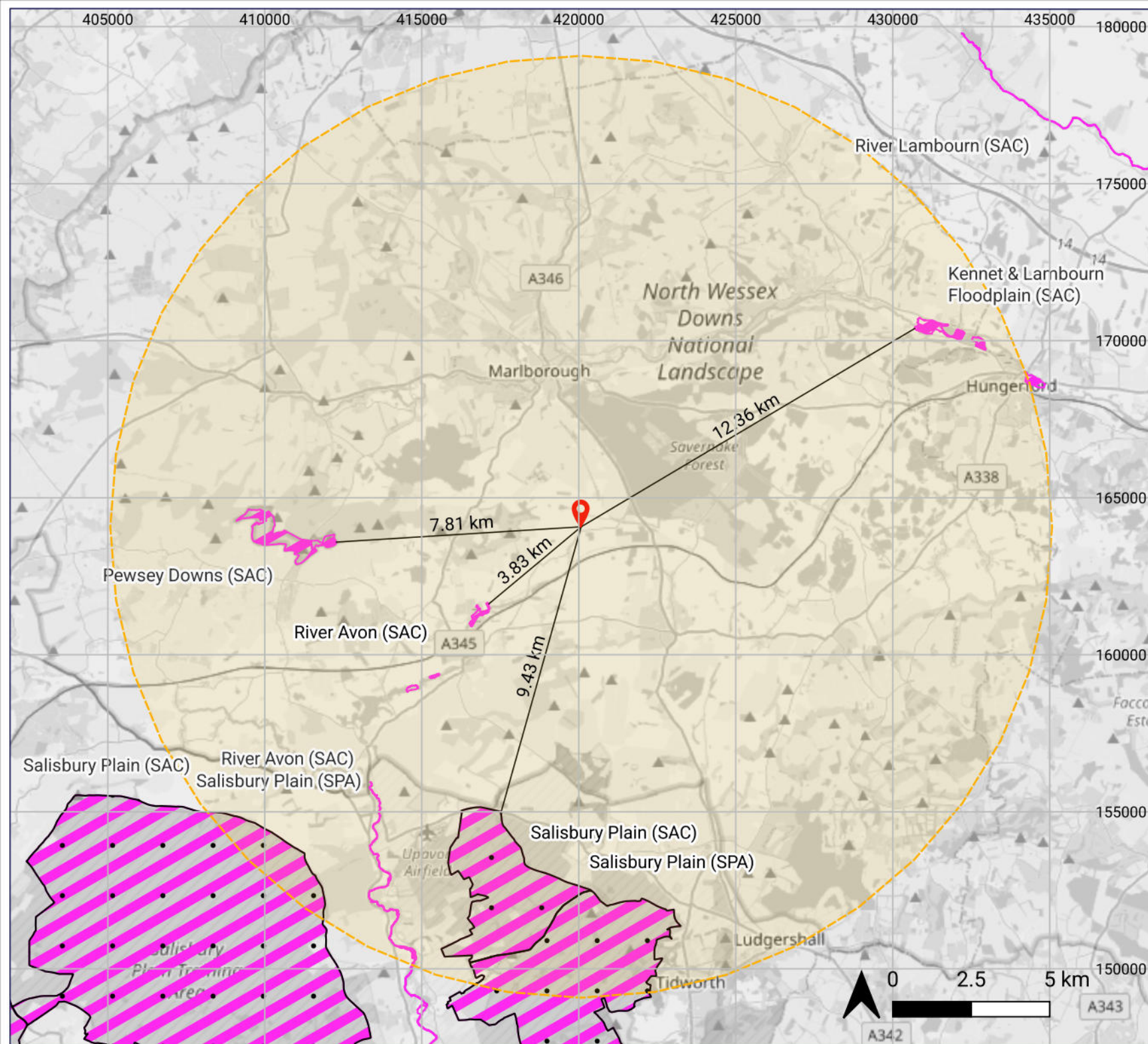
This section outlines the known ecological networks in the wider landscape before considering how (together with the on-site habitats) they form an ecosystem with any potential protected species in the area. This is then used to inform which additional surveys, if any, are required.

4.2. Designated Sites

- 4.2.1 Areas of higher value for nature conservation in England are protected at various levels: from sites supporting ecological features of European importance to locally important sites. Development projects can have adverse impacts on designated sites directly, or through indirect effects where an important species present at these sites might also rely on the proposed development area. Local designations provide an indication of the habitats and species that are uncommon and valuable in the local area, and offer a benchmark of the ecological value of local habitats.
- 4.2.2 There are five European designated sites within 15km of the Site (**Table 4-1**), and four further statutory designated sites within 5km of the Site (**Table 4-2**).

Table 4-1: European designated sites within 15km

Site Name	Designation	Reason(s) for Designation
River Avon	SAC	An Annex I habitat transitioning between chalk and clay sections, which supports five aquatic <i>Ranunculus</i> species, including <i>R. fluitans</i> . It also supports several Annex II species, notably Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>), Sea lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>), Brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>), Atlantic salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>), and Bullhead (<i>Cottus gobio</i>).
Sailsbury Plain	SAC	Two Annex I habitats occur here: One that is the best remaining example of lowland juniper scrub on chalk in the UK, and another that has the priority habitat type "orchid rich sites". It is believed to be the largest surviving semi-natural dry grassland within the EU. A cluster of large sub-populations of the Annex II Marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>) species breeds on dry calcareous grassland here.
Salisbury Plain	SPA	The site supports important numbers of non-breeding Hen Harrier (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>); breeding Eurasian Hobby (<i>Falco subbuteo</i>); breeding Common Quail (<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>); and breeding Stone Curlew (<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>).
Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain	SAC	A cluster of sites that supports one of the most extensive known populations of Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>) in the UK, and is one of two sites representing the species in the south-western part of its range in the important chalk stream habitat.
Pewsey Downs	SAC	This site also hosts the Annex I "orchid rich sites" priority habitat and holds a very significant population of hundreds of thousands of plants growing in high-quality chalk grassland, including the Early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>) – a rare plant that is only found in the UK.



Legend

 15km Buffer

 Site Location

 Special Protection Areas (England) © Natural England

 Special Areas of Conservation (England) © Natural England

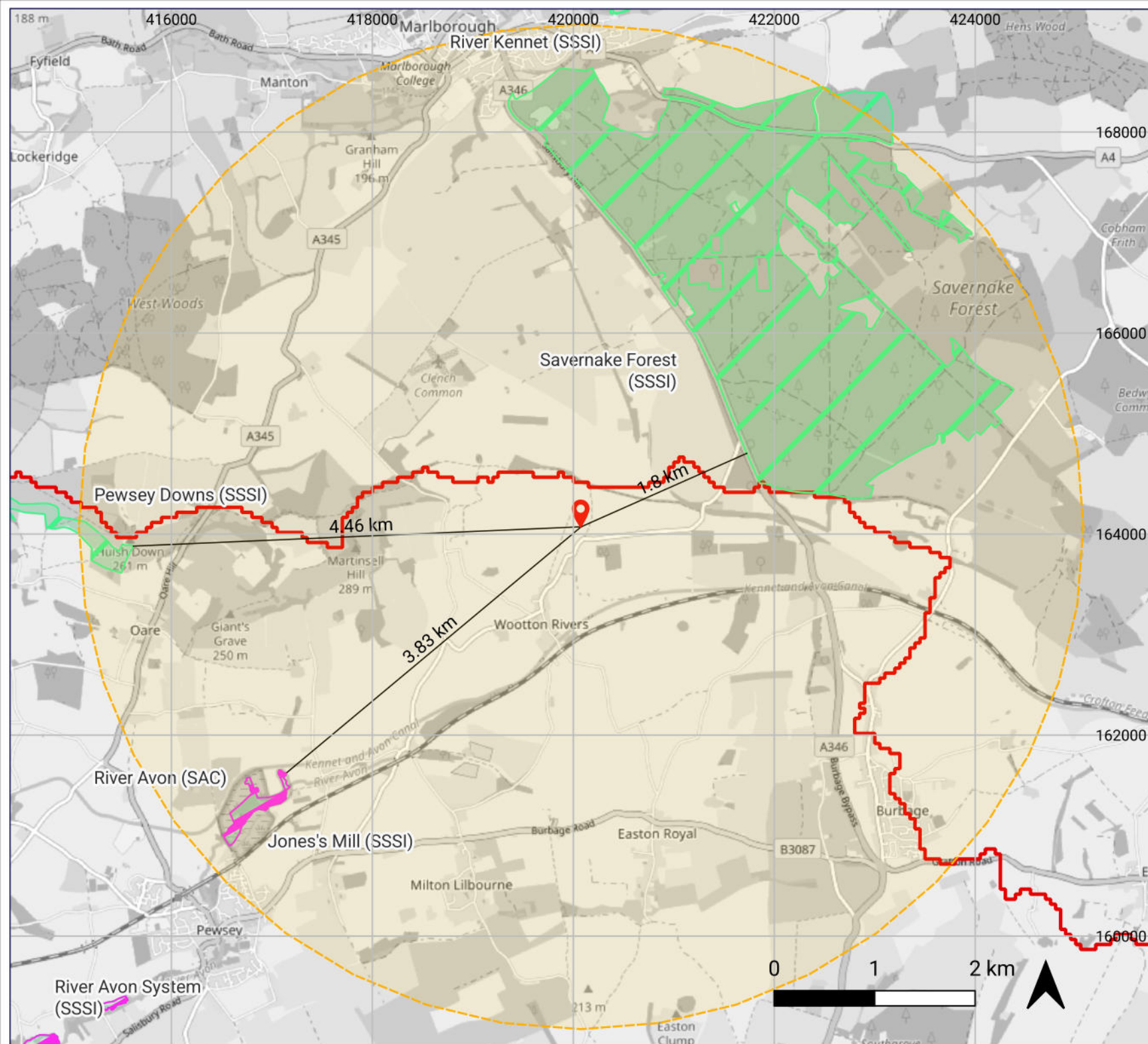
OpenStreetMap

Project	Land North of Wootton Rivers
Client	Blanchard Farms
Title	European Designated Sites
Date	02/02/2026
Suitability	For issue
CRS	OSGB36 / British National Grid
Scale	1:160000
QGIS	3.44.2-Solothurn



Table 4-2: Designated Sites within 5km of the Site

Site Name	Designation	Reason(s) for Designation
Jone's Mill	SSSI	An area of fen vegetation, scrub, and woodland. It represents the best-known example of a calcareous valley mire in Wiltshire.
Savernake Forest	SSSI	An extensive area of ancient woodland (previously 18 th -19 th beech and oak plantation that is now mainly 20 th century beech and oak plantation supplemented with naturally regenerated species), lying on a plateau of Upper Chalk covered by Clay-with-Flints. It is one of the largest woods in Wiltshire. It is incredibly biodiverse, supporting nationally restricted invertebrates, a diverse bird assemblage, dormice, bats, and great-crested newts. It has over 500 species of fungi (including uncommon <i>Lepiota</i> species), generally attributed to the continuity of beech woodland, unimproved grassland areas and abundance of decaying wood. More than 50 plant species associated with ancient woodland have been recorded in the Forest.
Pewsey Downs	SSSI	An extensive chalk downland scarp on the edge of the Marlborough Downs that supports an extremely rich chalk grassland flora and 28 species of resident, breeding butterflies. A small ancient wood with uncommon stands sits atop the escarpment, which is capped with clay-with-flints and acidic turf. Great-crested newt (<i>Triturus cristatus</i>) breeds in some of its remaining dew ponds.
North Wessex Downs (National Landscape / AONB)		



Legend

-  5km Buffer
-  Site Location
-  Special Areas of Conservation (England) © Natural England
-  Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England) © Natural England
-  Nutrient Neutrality Catchments (England) © Natural England

OpenStreetMap

Project	Land North of Wootton Rivers
Client	Blanchard Farms
Title	Statutory Sites Plan
Date	02/02/2026
Suitability	For issue
CRS	OSGB36 / British National Grid
Scale	1:50000
QGIS	3.44.2-Solothurn

- 4.2.3 There are 12 locally designated sites within 2km of the proposed development site (**Table 4-1**), comprised of 11 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), and one Local Geological Site (LGS). Hat Gate is also classified as a Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) site:

Table 4-3: Non-statutory sites within 2km

Site Name	Designation	Approximate distance from Site
Apshill Copse	LWS	250m
Brick Hill Copse	LWS	630m
Hat Gate WWT Reserve	LWS	990m
Kennet & Avon Canal	LWS	1km
Crook's Copse	LWS	1km
Martinsell Hill East	LWS	1.37km
Long Copse, Savernake	LWS	1.4km
Savernake Forest Ancient Woodland	LWS	1.45km
Leigh Hill Railway Cutting	LGS	1.5km
Square Copse	LWS	1.6km
Ram Alley Copse	LWS	1.71km
Leigh Hill Copse	LWS	1.8km

4.3. River Basin District

- 4.3.1 Rivers are a Priority Habitat under Section 41 of the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006*. As such, local authorities have a duty to conserve them.
- 4.3.2 The Site falls within the South West River Basin District (see **River Basin District Plan**). One ditch runs west to east along the bottom of the surveyed area, heading towards Forest Road. Beyond this, the closest waterbody to the Site is a potential chalk stream (yet to be determined) 693m to the south, which flows south to meet the Kennet and Avon Canal (moderate ecological status). Another waterbody just south of the canal runs east to west before joining the Hampshire Avon (East) and Deane Water waterbody 2.8km to the southwest and on to the River Avon and eventually exiting into the English Channel through Christchurch.

4.4. Priority Habitats & Ecological Networks

- 4.4.1 The Site falls within the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs National Character Area (NCA 116). The landscape primarily contains chalk wolds and downs, with the agricultural landscape a mix of chalk and limestone. Its headline description gives a good impression of the landscape in which the Site is situated:

Vast arable fields stretch across the sparsely settled, rolling Chalk hills of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs National Character Area (NCA). There are extensive views from the escarpment, punctuated by landmarks including chalk-cut horse figures, beech clumps and ancient monuments. Historic routeways, including the Ridgeway National Trail, provide public access across this landscape. [...] The natural beauty and special scenic qualities of the area lead to the majority of the area (97 percent) being included in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.²

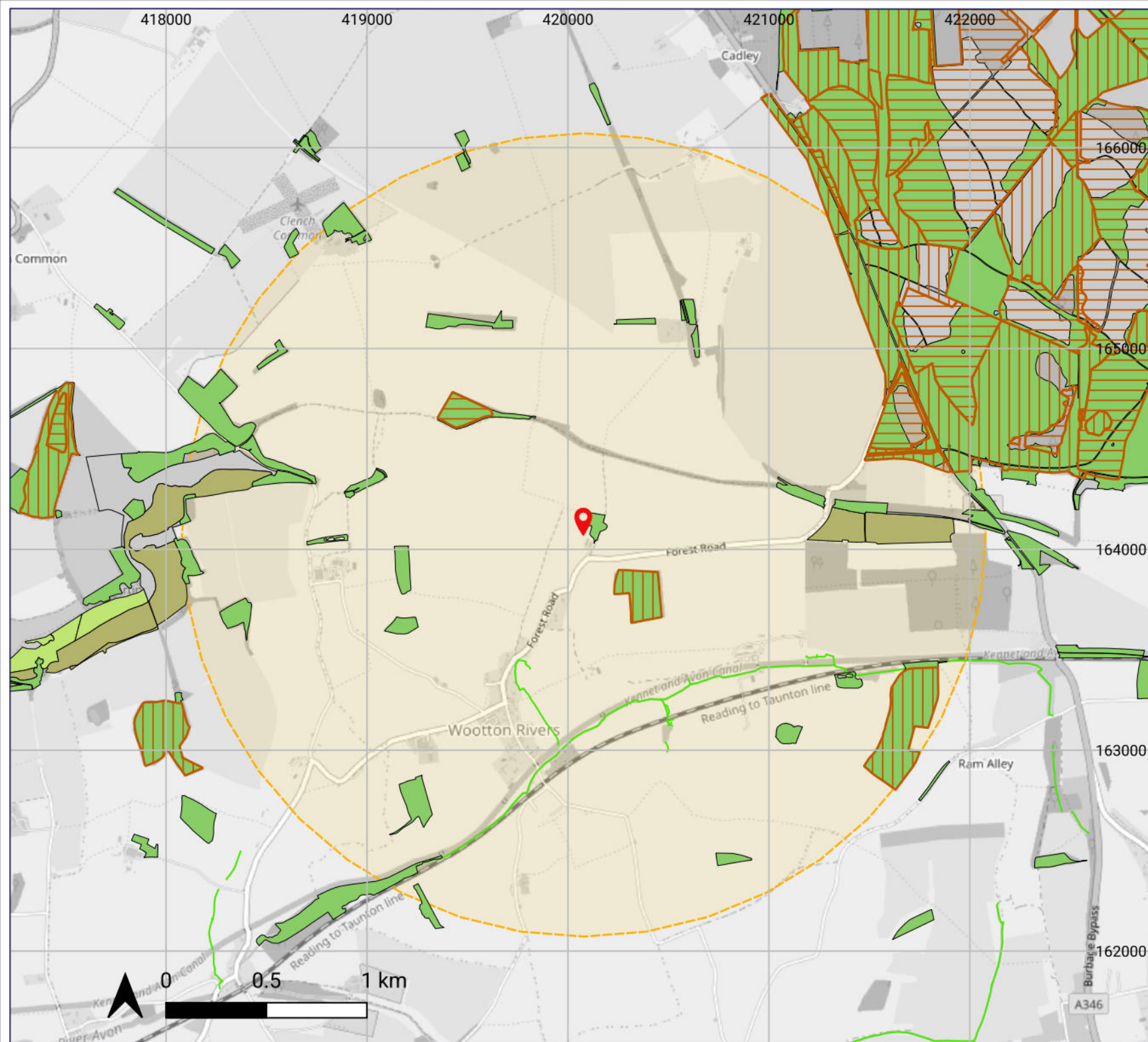
- 4.4.2 The Site is within the Wiltshire & Swindon LNRS, with three of its mapped measures overlapping with the surveyed area:

- **Savernake Plateau.** Conserve wooded downland.
- **W1: Maintain and Enhance Woodland and Associated Habitats (Woodland Areas).** The adjacent Pit Plantation is mapped as priority deciduous woodland within the Priority Habitat Inventory, and falls within this measure. Species noted in this measure include bats and the Duke of Burgandy butterfly.
- **W2: Create More Woodland and Associated Habitats.** The proposed location for the new dwelling overlaps with this measure. Bats and the Duke of Burgandy butterfly are also noted in this measure, along with arable plant assemblages.

- 4.4.3 Overall, the wider landscape around the Site is characterised by lowland meadows (although there is none within 2km of the Site), deciduous woodland (47 parcels within 2km), and calcareous grassland (2 parcels). Of the woodland within 2km, four are classified as ancient woodland (irreplaceable habitat):

- Apshill Copse LWS
- Brick Hill Copse LWS
- Ram Alley Copse LWS
- Hens Wood/Briary Wood (part of the Savernake Forest)

² Berkshire and Marlborough Downs - National Character Area Profiles [Internet]. National Character Area Profiles. 2024. Available from: <https://nationalcharacterareas.co.uk/berkshire-and-marlborough-downs/>



Legend

2km Buffer

Ancient Woodland © Natural England

Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland

Ancient Replanted Woodland

Priority Habitats Inventory (England)
© Natural England

Deciduous woodland

Lowland calcareous grassland

Lowland meadows

No main habitat but additional habitats present

Ponds

Chalk Rivers (England)
© Natural England

Low certainty

OpenStreetMap

Project	Land North of Wootton Rivers
Client	Blanchard Farms
Title	Habitats & Ecological Networks
Date	03/02/2026
Suitability	For issue
CRS	OSGB36 / British National Grid
Scale	1:25000
QGIS	3.44.2-Solothurn

4.5. Habitat Descriptions

Cropland

- 4.5.1 The surveyed area is actively farmed, and at the time of the survey was sown with a winter cereal crop (UKHabs: c1c7) over a heavy clay soil with flints.



Grassland

- 4.5.2 The crop is sown close to the hedgerows with very narrow margins, except for a few patches of fast-growing grasses and herbs in a few locations: beneath the recently planted and tree-guarded whips near the entrance, running along the bank to the west of the barns, and following the contour curving around the off-site Pit Plantation woodland.
- 4.5.3 While mainly close-cropped, common species included Cocks-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Cleavers (*Galium aparine*), Broad-leaved Dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), and Stinging Nettles (*Urtica dioica*). There was also the rare instance of Ground Ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) next to the woodland, and Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) and Spear Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) on the bank of rough grassland.





- 4.5.4 These areas would be classed as 'Modified grassland (g4)' in UKHabs. Based on the relatively rapid condition assessment carried out in winter, they are in 'poor-good' condition, falling short of good in the shorter areas with reduced species richness.

Hedgerows

- 4.5.5 The Site is bordered to the north, east, and west by species-rich hedgerows with trees connected to the Pit Plantation. The woody component included a mix of Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), and Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*).
- 4.5.6 The field's boundaries and the track running along its western edge (from Mud Lane to Wootton Rivers) are visible on historic OS maps from the 19th Century, when the chalk pits and lime kiln were still active. However, the hedgerows and trees are not marked, suggesting the hedgerows on-site were formed recently as part of the Enclosure Acts.

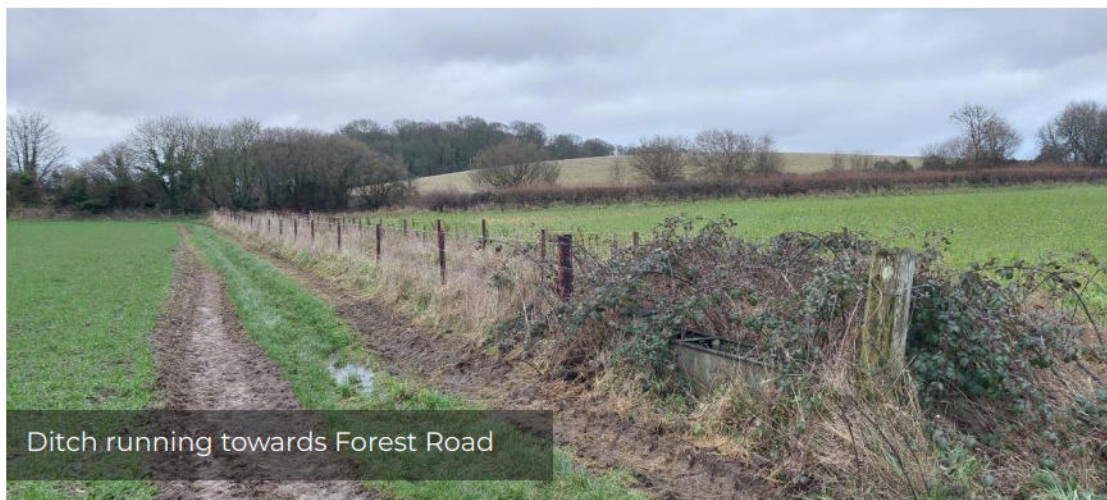




- 4.5.7 Hedges are a Priority Habitat, and these would be classed as 'Species-rich hedgerows with trees (h2a5 - 11)' in UKHabs. Based on the relatively rapid condition assessment carried out in winter, they are in 'moderate' condition, falling short of 'good' due to the lack of variation in tree class and health, as well as a walked lane on one side, with a close-cropped field on the other.

Ditch

- 4.5.8 Running along the bottom of the survey area is a fenced wet ditch with limited flow and poor riparian vegetation. Its straight course running along the bottom of a sloped field, and the fact that it is not visible on historical OS maps, suggests this is a drainage ditch and not a stream whose channel has been straightened in the past.



- 4.5.9 This would be classed as a 'Other rivers and streams (r2b)' in UKHabs. Based on the relatively rapid condition assessment carried out in winter, it is in 'poor' condition.

The Pit Plantation

- 4.5.10 While the development is unlikely to directly impact the woodland, it is described here for ecological context and so any indirect impacts that may arise are first avoided, in line with the mitigation hierarchy.
- 4.5.11 The Pit Plantation displays distinct characteristics across two main stands: The area of beech woodland atop the hill to the north, and the woodland within the old chalk pit itself. The former is heavily dominated by Common Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), with an open ground layer blanketed in leaves, little understory and a canopy of upright trees roughly the same age. It would be classed as 'Lowland beech and yew woodland (w1c)' in UKHabs. Based on the relatively rapid condition assessment carried out in winter, it is in 'poor' condition. The latter is denser, with scrub and tangled branches and a somewhat shaded ground layer. It would be classed as 'Other lowland mixed deciduous woodland (w1f7)' in UKHabs. Based on the relatively rapid condition assessment carried out in winter, it is in 'moderate' condition.
- 4.5.12 Based on the review of historical OS mapping and its origins as a quarry, this is not ancient woodland, but is at least 30 years old (judged from historical satellite imagery on Google Earth).





Legend

 Survey Area

HEDGEROWS

 Species-rich native hedgerow with trees

WATERCOURSES

 Ditches

HABITATS

 Cereal crops

 Developed land; sealed surface

 Lowland beech and yew woodland

 Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

 Modified grassland

BASE MAPS

Bing Maps

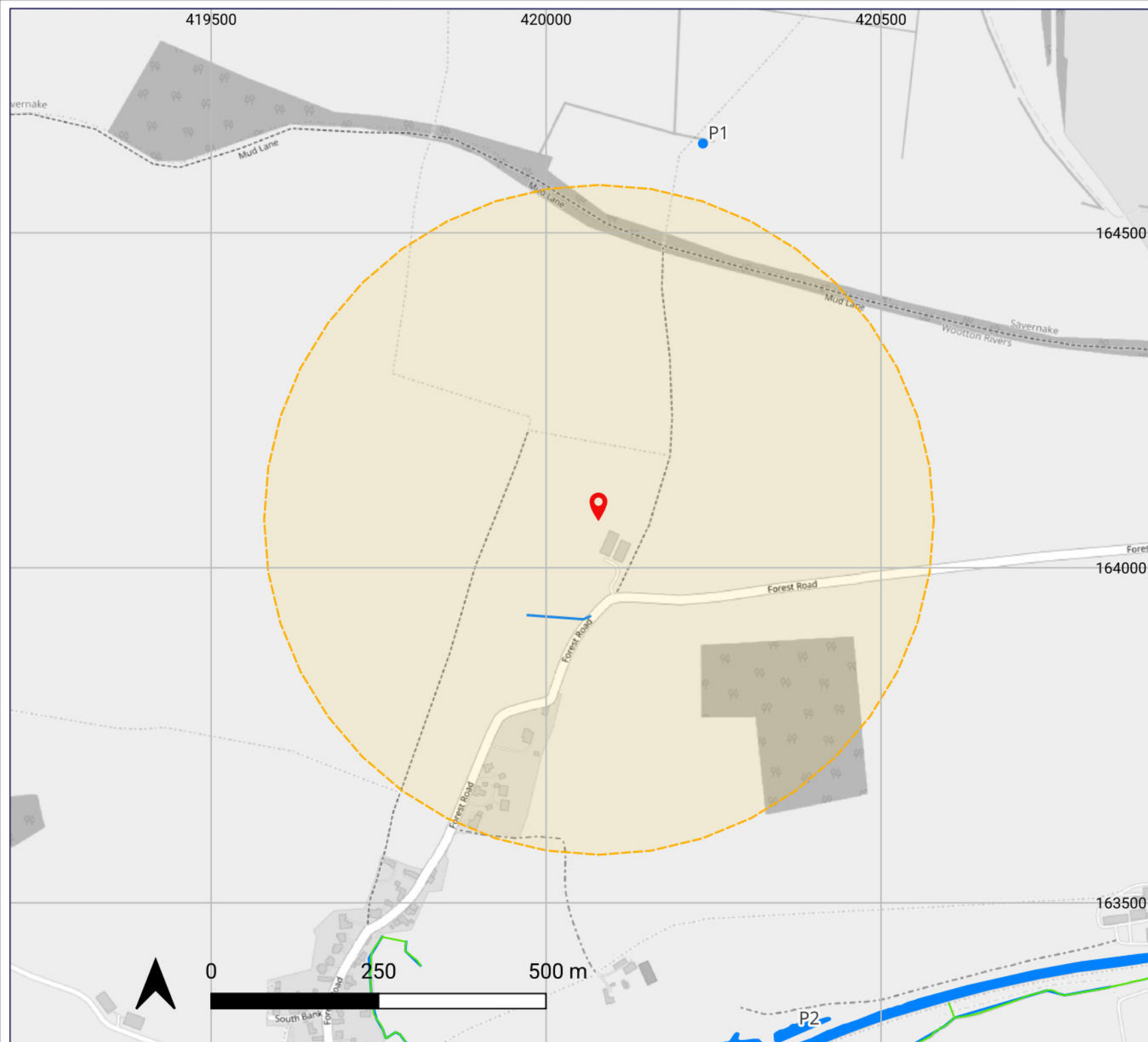
Project	Land North of Wootton Rivers
Client	Blanchard Farms
Title	Baseline Habitats Plan
Date	04/02/2026
Suitability	For issue
CRS	OSGB36 / British National Grid
Scale	1:2500
QGIS	3.44.2-Solothurn

4.6. Amphibians & Reptiles

- 4.6.1 There are no records of European Protected Species Licences granted for Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*) within 500m of the Site. There are six eDNA survey results, two of which are positive for GCN (in Savernake Forest and just northeast of Burbage), three are negative, and one is inconclusive.
- 4.6.2 There is also one record of Great Crested Newt (*T. cristatus*) within the 2km data search, located in Wootton Rivers, south of the canal and Reading to Taunton line (approximately 1.3km away). They are also known to breed in Pewsey Downs dew ponds. There are also four records of Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*) and eight records of Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*), both of which are primarily associated with Kennet and Avon Canal, as well as the Hat Gate WWT Reserve.
- 4.6.3 There are no waterbodies on site, nor within 500m of the proposed dwelling. The closest ponds lie 583m to the north, and 797m to the south.
- 4.6.4 There were three Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*) records within the 2km data search, including one by Wootton Rivers railway bank, three records of Grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*), and two records of Adders (*Vipera berus*).
- 4.6.5 The sloping, open fields within the survey area are unlikely to provide sufficient cover and are considered poor quality habitat for amphibians and reptiles. The lack of standing water also makes it unlikely that Great Crested Newts (*T. cristatus*) would be found here, even though they are present in the local area. The hedges around the Site boundaries provide good habitat for reptiles and amphibians in their terrestrial life stages, but the narrow field margins offer little shelter and basking opportunities.
- 4.6.6 Other amphibians such as Common Toads (*B. bufo*), Common Frogs (*R. temporaria*), Grass Snakes (*N. helvetica*) and the commoner newt species could be found in small numbers in the tussocky grassland and hedgerows.

4.8. Bats

- 4.8.1 The WSBRC data search returned 85 records of bats within 2km, across 8 confirmed species of the 18 resident species we have in the UK. There are granted EPSL licences for Brown Long-eared bats (*Plecotus auritus*), Common pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), Soprano pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), and Serotines (*Cnephaeus serotinus*) within 5km.



Legend



Site Location



500m Buffer



Ponds

Chalk Rivers (England)

© Natural England



Low certainty

OS OpenData - Local



SU_SurfaceWater_Line



SU_SurfaceWater_Area

OpenStreetMap

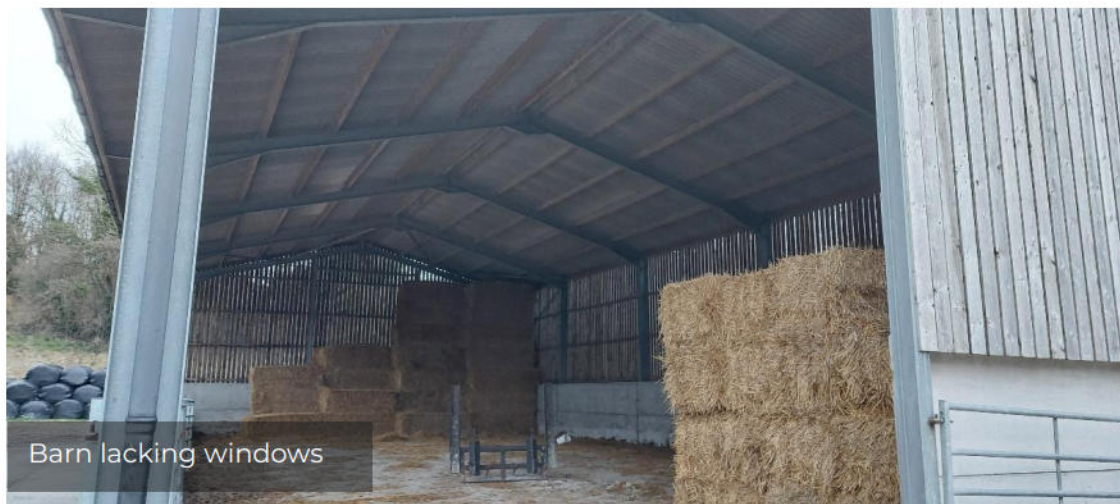
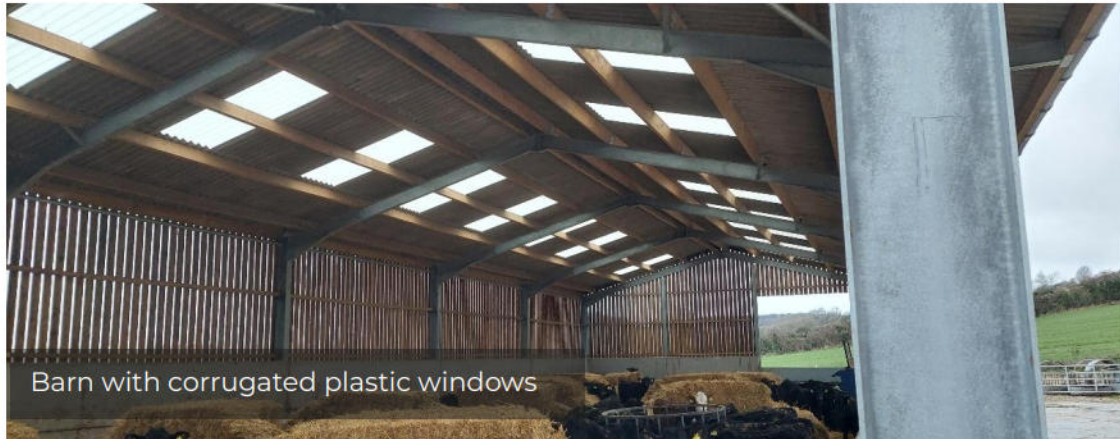
Project	Land North of Wootton Rivers
Client	Blanchard Farms
Title	Pond Plan
Date	03/02/2026
Suitability	For issue
CRS	OSGB36 / British National Grid
Scale	1:7500
QGIS	3.44.2-Solothurn

- 4.8.2 The Pit Plantation and nearby ancient woodland (such as Apshill Copse, Brick Hill Copse, and Savernake Forest) provide potential roosting opportunities for bats, although the Pit Plantation has generally younger trees with lower roosting potential.
- 4.8.3 Several records returned in the data search were for bats recorded at or in the vicinity of Wootton Rivers itself, including Common (*P.pipistrellus*) and Soprano Pipistrelles (*P.pygmaeus*), Brown Long-eared bats (*Plecotus auritus*), Serotine (*C. serotinus*), Myotis (*Myotis spp.*), Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*) near the canal. Barbastelles (*Barbastella barbastellus*) have also been recorded at Savernake Forest SSSI.
- 4.8.4 The arable field is poor quality foraging habitat for bats. When cultivated and sown with crops, it will support a low diversity and abundance of invertebrate prey species. With reference to Table 4.1 in the Bat Conservation Trust Good Practice Guidelines, the field would largely fall into the category of 'None' or 'Negligible' foraging habitat, while the rough grassland would be 'moderate'. The hedges are well-connected to woodland, and they are likely to be regularly used by foraging and commuting bats.

Table 4-4. WSBRC records alongside the number of SACs in the UK for which this species is designated.

Species	No. Records
Brown long-eared Bat (<i>Plecotus auritus</i>)	16
Soprano Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>)	14
Common Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>)	13
Serotine (<i>Cnephaeus serotinus</i>)	12
Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus spp.</i>)	9
Noctule (<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>)	8
Myotis Bat species (<i>Myotis spp.</i>)	6
Barbastelle (<i>Barbastella barbastellus</i>)	3
Daubenton's Bat (<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>)	2
Leisler's Bat (<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>)	1
Long-eared Bat species (<i>Plecotus spp.</i>)	1

- 4.8.5 The barns are open on at least one side, well-lit with slatted sides, and (on one out of the three) corrugated plastic windows in the roof. Compared to the adjacent woodland, they are of 'negligible' suitability for roosting bats.



- 4.8.6 There is an abandoned wooden-roofed building or tunnel entrance within the pit plantation that could provide roosting opportunities for bats. This area could not be accessed during the field survey.
- 4.8.7 The site is not within a consultation zone for any European sites designated for bats. The closest SAC for which bats are a qualifying species is Mottisfont Bats SAC, which is around 35.94km south of the site, closely followed by the Bath & Bradford on Avon Bats SAC, 36.03km to the west. These distances are greater than the typical foraging range of the species for which the sites are designated, and the site is not on a major landscape corridor (such as a river or railway) that would connect it to the sites.

4.9. Birds

- 4.9.1 There are 381 records for protected and notable birds within the 2km desktop data search area, distributed across 47 different species, including 13 of the 19 birds listed on the breeding farmland bird index (shown in red below).
- 4.9.2 The Site provides arable farmland habitat for foraging birds, as well as good nesting opportunities in the hedges and Pit Plantation woodland. Of the species below, Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) may forage and nest in the field (depending on how it's managed).

Protection & Status	No. Species	Species (from most records to least)
International		
Red	15	Yellowhammer (20), Skylark, Linnet, Mistle Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, House Martin, Marsh Tit, Yellow Wagtail, Fieldfare, Greenfinch, Lapwing, Grey Partridge, Tree Pipit, Starling, Herring Gull (1)
Amber	15	Dunnock (23), Song Thrush, Wren, Woodpigeon, Stock Dove, Moorhen, Mallard, Gadwall, Kestrel, Grey Wagtail, Rook, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Tawny Owl. Redwing, Sparrowhawk (2)
Green	10	Barn owl (29), Red Kite, Grey Heron, Collared Dove, Kingfisher, Coot, Redstart, Woodlark, Firecrest, Peregrine (1)
Biodiversity Lists		
Red	3	Cuckoo (12), House Sparrow (5), Swift (4)
Amber	3	Bullfinch (16), Willow Warbler (1), Sedge Warbler (1)
Green	1	Whitethroat (11)

- 4.9.3 The old trees at Savernake (1.8km from the Site) favour hole-nesting species such as Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*), Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*), Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*), and all three woodpeckers (*Picus viridis* & *Dendrocopos spp*). It also harbours Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*), Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), and Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*), with Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) and Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) breeding at the woodland edges. It is therefore unsurprising that the data search results returned records for Spotted Flycatcher (*M.striata*), Tree Pipit (*A. trivialis*), Tawny Owl (*S. aluco*), and Redstart (*P. phoenicurus*), and confirms they are found beyond the bounds of the SSSI itself, with some records either near or at Wootton Rivers itself.



- 4.9.4 There were hay-bales beneath the nest box at the time of the survey, so no droppings or evidence of nesting activity could be seen.

4.10. Dormice

- 4.10.1 There is one record of Hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) within the 2km data search, located at Hat Gate WWT Reserve, roughly 1km away.
- 4.10.2 Within the wider landscape, there are plenty of ancient woodland areas that could support a population of dormice, the nearest of which is Apshill Copse, 250m to the southeast. Dormice are also known to be present within Savernake Forest. These are well connected to the Site by hedgerows.
- 4.10.3 The boundary hedges are good habitat for dormice, and have been allowed to grow tall, which means many of the shrubs will flower and fruit (providing food for dormice). The field itself is not suitable for dormice.

4.11. Fluvial & Riparian Species

- 4.11.1 There are 55 records of Water Voles (*Arvicola amphibius*), 3 Otter (*Lutra lutra*) records, and 2 Water Shrew (*Neomys fodiens*) records within 2km of the Site. Apart from the shallow ditch at the bottom of the field, there are no areas of running water crossing the Site, and the closest stream lies 690m to the south.
- 4.11.2 There were no records of notable or protected fish species within 2km.

4.12. Section 41 Mammals

- 4.12.1 There are records of Brown Hare (*Lepus europaeus*), Hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*), Harvest Mouse (*Micromys minutus*) within the 2km data search. There were no signs of these species during the field survey, but the grassy field margins may provide good habitat for hedgehogs and harvest mice, and hares could use the open field.

4.13. Invertebrates

- 4.13.1 The data search results returned records for invertebrates principally recorded in Savernake Forest and Hat Gate WWT Reserve.
- 4.13.2 Five Section 41, BAP moth species were returned in the data search that are common within England and the south of the UK. They are generally night-flying moths attracted to light, that could be found within the rough field margins and neighbouring woodland:
- Pretty Chalk Carpet (*Melanthia procellata*)
 - Shoulder-striped Wainscot (*Leucania comma*)
 - Shaded Broad-bar (*Scotopteryx chenopodiata*)
 - Mottled Rustic (*Caradrina Morpheus*)
 - Dot Moth (*Melanchra persicariae*)
- 4.13.3 There are records of 13 butterfly species within 2km, including Purple Emperor (*Apatura iris*) and Duke of Burgandy (*Hamearis lucina*). The latter of which has 21 records and is targeted in the LNRS measures. The Duke of Burgandy (*H. lucina*) favours scrubby grasslands and woodland clearings, with the female laying her eggs under the leaves of Cowslip (*Primula veris*) and Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*). Purple Emperor (*A. iris*) are also known to be present at Savernake Forest.

5. EVALUATION

5.1. Designated Sites

- 5.1.1 Potential significant effects on Sailsbury Plain SAC, Pewsey Downs SAC, and Jone's Mill SSSI can be ruled out simply on the basis of distance and without detailed consideration: they are designated for habitats and not mobile species that might rely upon off-site land. Additionally, the Site lies south of Kennet & Lambourne Floodplain SAC, so any changes in nutrient output into nearby watercourses will occur downstream of this Site.
- 5.1.2 Potential significant effects on the River Avon SAC can similarly be ruled out. The Site does lie within the Avon Hampshire Operational Catchment, but is hydrologically and ecologically disconnected from nearby waterbodies. The potential increased nutrient load on the catchment will be considered separately as part of the Nutrient Neutrality assessment.
- 5.1.3 There are no records of the SPA species within the 2km data search, and the Site lies outside the recreational impact zone for the SPA. It is therefore unlikely that there will be any impacts on the SPA. Of the species for which it is designated, Hobby (*F. subbuteo*) could nest in abandoned corvid nests in the Pit Plantation woodland, although this is a small and isolated stand.
- 5.1.4 The chances of Hobby (*F. subbuteo*) nesting in this area are slim, but potential impacts on any such nests during construction will need to be addressed in a Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEMP).
- 5.1.5 Both Savernake Forest SSSI and Pewsey Downs SSSI are sufficiently distanced from the Site to rule-out impacts on populations of Great Crested Newt (*T. cristatus*) found within these areas. Additionally, the age of the woodlands in the wider landscape mean dormice (*M. avellanarius*) could be present in the Site's boundary hedges and Pit Plantation woodland, but these are more likely to be distinct populations from those at Savernake Forest.
- 5.1.6 Records suggest birds from Savernake Forest are found in and around Wootton Rivers. The proposed footprint of the development is sufficiently small to say any loss of foraging habitat in the field would not be significant. The same would be true for any bats resident in the Forest. Instead, impacts could stem from construction works and lighting of trees and hedges where birds may be nesting or bats may be roosting while away from the SSSI. These concerns would also be addressed in a detailed CEMP.

5.2. Habitats & Ecological Networks

- 5.2.1 The following Priority Habitats were recorded within the survey area:

- Deciduous woodland (the Pit Plantation)
- The hedgerows

- 5.2.2 Provided these are not damaged, and a 15m biodiversity protection zone (buffer) included around the Pit Plantation, the proposed development would not have adverse impacts on the local ecological networks, thereby avoiding harm in the first instance.
- 5.2.3 Enhancing the field margins would help mitigate for the loss of cropland, while improving the edge habitats available for species that favour these areas.
- 5.2.4 The ditch running along the bottom of the Site appears disconnected from waterbodies in the wider landscape, but if any works are to take place in its vicinity, a 5m buffer will be needed to protect the riparian zone.
- 5.2.5 The LNRS Measures identified include the creation of woodland. Therefore, we would recommend planting individual trees within the crop field to create 'trees outside woodland' – a stepping-stone habitat that would improve connections to and from the Pit Plantation. Additionally, enhancing the hedgerows and (if possible) creating new woodland areas in the north and north-east areas of the Site would facilitate this.

5.3. Amphibians and Reptiles

- 5.3.1 The absence of ponds within 500m of the Site means amphibians may move through the landscape during their terrestrial life stages, but rarely during the breeding season. The hedgerows, fallen leaves and damp, shaded habitat of the Pit Plantation may also offer shelter from predators and hot temperatures, but the arable landscape survey area offers poor quality habitat.
- 5.3.2 There was also little fallen deadwood within the beech woodland atop the hill, and mainly standing deadwood within the pit itself, providing scarce resting habitat for reptiles. While fallen leaves may offer some shelter, this, combined with the predominantly narrow field margins offers little suitable habitat for reptiles.
- 5.3.3 Consequently, while the loss of cropland would reduce the amount of available foraging habitat for these groups, the loss is not significant compared to what is available in the wider landscape.

5.5. Bats

- 5.5.1 Avoiding the removal of the hedgerows and grassy margins, as well as avoiding lighting of the Pit Plantation would mean that significant effects on bats would be unlikely. A lighting strategy should be prepared to show how light-spill will be avoided post-construction.
- 5.5.2 Habitat creation and enhancement could be tailored to specifically benefit Barbastelle (*B. barbastella*) bats. The available research indicates that woodland edge habitats are particularly important foraging areas: there is therefore a good opportunity to create an 'ecotone' zone in the recommended 15m buffer between the Pit Plantation and the crop field/proposed development footprint.
- 5.5.3 Allowing some monolith trees to remain for roosting opportunities, as well as taking action that adheres with the LNRS woodland creation and enhancement measures has the potential to significantly benefit bats in the area.

5.6. Birds

- 5.6.1 All the development footprint falls within 50m of the Pit Plantation, and most of the field also falls within 50m buffers of the hedgerow, meaning Skylarks (*A. arvensis*) are unlikely to nest here due to the increased predation risk (see **Skylark 50m Buffer Plan**).
- 5.6.2 Avoiding the removal of monolith trees would also benefit the hole-favouring birds found in Savernake Forest, while improving the field margins would benefit a range of species, including farmland birds.
- 5.6.3 The loss of cropland area may reduce foraging habitat for farmland birds, but this can be mitigated by the proposed enhancements.
- 5.6.4 In accordance with the draft Local Plan, two bird nesting boxes (e.g. swift bricks) should be integrated into the proposed dwelling.

5.7. Dormice

- 5.7.1 Provided the proposed plan can be completed without the removal of any hedgerow or woodland, there would be no impacts on dormice (*M. avellanarius*).
- 5.7.2 The proposed enhancements described above also have the potential to benefit dormice.

5.8. Fluvial & Riparian

- 5.8.1 As the indicative development footprint is at least 40m away from any nearby watercourses, there is no risk of impact on fluvial and riparian species.



Legend

-  Survey Area
-  50m Skylark Buffer
-  Buildings
- HEDGEROWS**
 -  Species-rich native hedgerow with trees

WATERCOURSES

-  Ditches

HABITATS

-  Cereal crops
-  Developed land; sealed surface
-  Lowland beech and yew woodland
-  Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
-  Modified grassland

BASE MAPS

Bing Maps

Project	Land North of Wootton Rivers
Client	Blanchard Farms
Title	Skylark 50m Buffer Plan
Date	04/02/2026
Suitability	For issue
CRS	OSGB36 / British National Grid
Scale	1:2500
QGIS	3.44.2-Solothurn

5.9. Section 41 Mammals

- 5.9.1 Hedgehog (*E. europaeus*) and harvest mice (*M. minutus*) could be present in the edge habitats within the development. Given the size and quality of the habitat, only small numbers of individuals are likely to be encountered and therefore significant effects are unlikely.
- 5.9.2 The CEMP should incorporate suitable measures (including careful vegetation clearance) to ensure any potential impacts on the site-level population are avoided.

5.10. Invertebrates

- 5.10.1 Small stands of recent woodland, adjacent to field margins and arable habitat are not uncommon in the local landscape, and the footprint of the development is small. Significant effects on invertebrates are therefore unlikely.
- 5.10.2 It is possible that some of the uncommon moth species from the data search would use the Site. Avoiding artificial light spill onto the adjacent woodland is therefore recommended.
- 5.10.3 Habitat enhancements can be specifically tailored to declining invertebrates that are known to be present in the local area, such as Duke of Burgandy (*H. lucina*). This could include plug-planting of Primrose (*P. vulgaris*) and Cowslips (*P. veris*) under newly planted trees.

5.11. Further Surveys

- 5.11.1 Subject to the application of the mitigation hierarchy and suitable precautions during construction, there will be no need for further ecological surveys prior to determination of the application. Further surveys will be required during the construction stage:

- 
- Birds pre-commencement survey for Barn owl nest box and Hobby in woodland



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