

Ecological Survey Assessment and Report

Tisbury Footpath Link

Produced by

HELEN PENGELLY MCIEEM

INDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT

D & H Pengelly, Canopy Land Use,

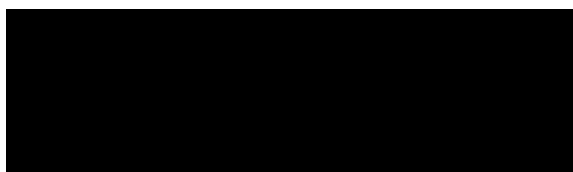
5 Brickfield Offices

Maperton

Wincanton

Somerset

BA9 8EG



JULY 2024

CONTENTS

[illegible]

This report is provided to inform the applicant and Wiltshire Council about how the proposed Footpath Link could impact ecology and biodiversity.

SUMMARY

Date of Survey – 02.07.2024

Site location – central grid reference ST9511 2975

- This report focuses on the potential ecological impacts of the proposed footpath link in relation to the Local Wildlife Site (LWS) known as Place Farm Meadows (South), the upper reaches of the River Nadder Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and the Chilmark Bat SAC consultation zone.
- Other statutory designated sites and notable species within 2km of the footpath link are noted however the small scale and low intervention nature of the proposal concludes that there is unlikely to be any significant impact to habitats and species beyond the immediate vicinity.
- The field survey recorded UKBAP habitat adjacent to the site and data provided by the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC) indicate a number of UKBAP and EPS species present in the Tisbury area. However, it is considered that the proposal will not have a significant impact on BAP habitats or the locality's ability to support species of conservation concern.
- No statutory designated sites are likely to be affected by the proposal.
- All works on trees within the site boundary are covered by a previous decision notice. There will be no additional significant loss of bat roosting and foraging habitat within the current proposal, therefore no mitigation is proposed in relation to the Chilmark Bat SAC consultation zone.
- The River Nadder LWS is not likely to be affected provided mitigation is implemented to prevent potential pollutants reaching the watercourse (e.g. fuel, silt, soil).
- The ecology of Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS is not likely to be affected provided that mitigation is implemented to restrict the construction works including vegetation clearance and disturbance to within 8m of the northern field boundary.

1. INTRODUCTION

Aims and Objectives

This report provides an ecological assessment and information on how the proposed Tisbury Footpath Link might impact any designated wildlife areas, habitats or protected species using the locality.

Anticipated ecological impacts are summarised in the conclusion and recommendations are provided to reduce these along with mitigation proposals.

Suggested enhancement works have also been put forward for consideration.

Statutory designations and constraints within the locality

The site itself is not covered by any statutory nature conservation designations.

Statutory conservation sites and designations within 2km of the site are listed below (ref WSBRC).

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

	Site_Type	Grid_Ref	Site_Name	Area_Ha	Designation_Status
0	SSSI	ST960306	Lady Down Quarry	0.299918	Notified
1	SSSI	ST961295	Upper Chicks Grove Quarry	5.815337	Notified
2	SSSI	SZ141985	River Avon System	475.942750	Notified

Special Areas of Conservation

	Site_Type	Grid_Ref	Site_Name	Area_Ha	Designation_Status
0	SAC	SZ141985	River Avon	467.581569	Designated

Site location

The site is located along and adjacent to Court Street within the village of Tisbury, south of Place Farm and the east of Tisbury Row.

Maps supplied by the applicant indicate that the Footpath Link route (hereafter also referred to as 'the site') is around 60m long in full, however only those parts that fall within the Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS field (approximately 22m of the route, the gateway entrance and the visibility splay) are of significance in terms of potential ecological impact. The 22m section of the route within the LWS field boundary runs close to the northern boundary of this field parallel to Court Street.

The remainder of the route is situated on existing surfaced roads, footpaths or a tightly mown road verge all of which are of negligible ecological value.

MAP1 - General Site Location



Site description

The proposed footpath link is approximately 60m long in total and mainly uses existing hard surfaced public roads, surfaced road edges or surfaced footpaths. An existing, well used pedestrian foot bridge crosses over the main course of the Fonthill Brook, locally known as 'Troutbeck' on the western boundary of the site. Another disused (but in-tact and stable) wooden foot bridge crosses an open wet drainage ditch (culverted under Court Street) at the point where the Footpath Link proposal enters Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS from the west.

No change, other than minor pruning back of vegetation to the above described parts of the route are proposed, therefore they are not considered in any detail in this report.

The parts of the route that will require more intervention and disturbance to existing habitat are summarised below with their estimated areas and lengths: (see also Map 3)

- A. Permissive footpath running along the northern boundary of Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS – estimated 22m long x 1.2m wide. Current use; overgrown, unmanaged (uncut / ungrazed) field edge dominated by bramble.
- B. Off road / field access area using existing access point within the boundary of Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS, south of Court Street – estimated 30m². Current use; relict gateway and overgrown/unmanaged dominated by coarse grasses and ruderal vegetation.
- C. Visibility splay within the boundary of Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS, south of Court Street – estimated 50m². Current use; bramble thicket and nettles.

- D. Existing footbridge providing permissive access to Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS over open drainage channel – (No works required other than minor pruning back of overgrown vegetation).
- E. Footpath located on a grass verge to the north of Court Street where it joins an existing surfaced path just outside the Place Farm/ Tithe Barn Gatehouse – estimated 33m long x 1.2m wide.

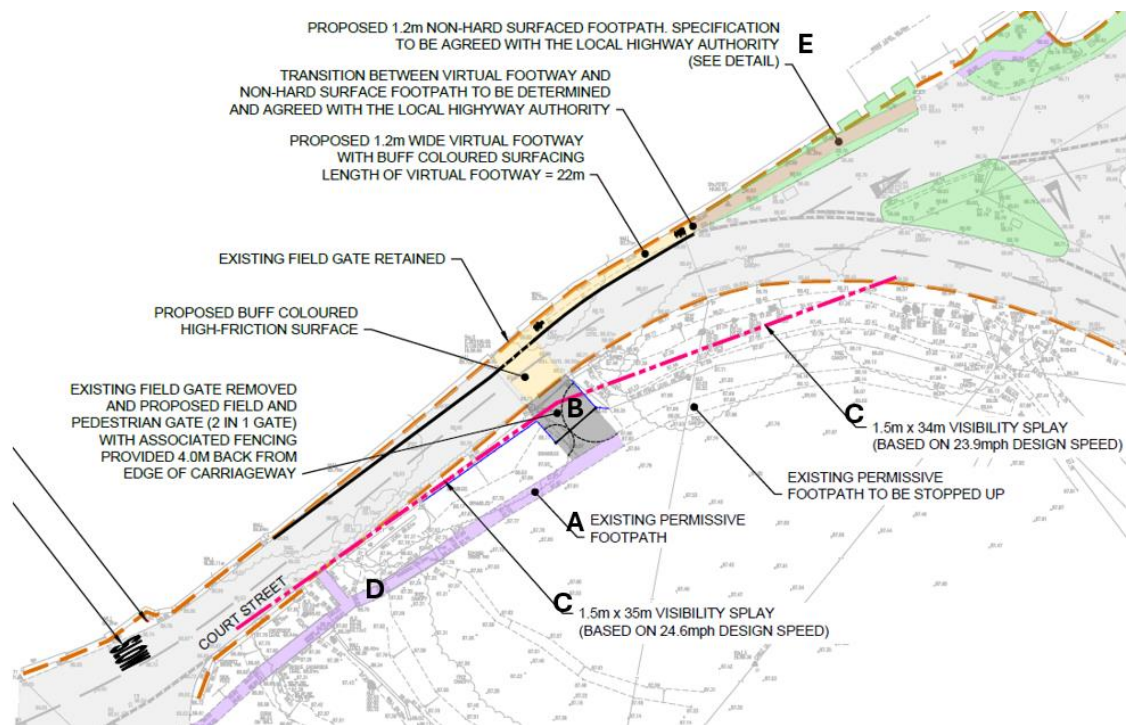
MAP2 – Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS

This field is bounded by 'Troutbeck' to the west and the River Nadder to the south. The field has had drainage channels cut in the past but now only one main channel appears to remain running west to east across the northern half of the field.

The field appeared un-managed at the time of the survey and is dominated by tall, rank grass, nettle, reed and sedge.



MAP3 - Location of main areas of survey



Description of proposed works

The planning application is to improve pedestrian access to the Tithe Barn events venue by providing a weatherproof permissive footpath link between existing public roads / rights of way.

As stated in the site description, the works relevant to this ecological impact assessment involve clearance of vegetation and construction of a non-hard surfaced footpath (min 1.2m wide) on the route of an existing unsurfaced permissive footpath, construction of a further non-hard surfaced footpath across a grass road verge, re-siting of a field access gateway onto the public road with associated clearance of vegetation and the clearance of roadside vegetation to create a visibility splay.

2. METHODOLOGY

Desk study

In compliance with the planning guidelines a data search request was sent to the WSBRC on 26.06.24 to include a standard search for notable / protected species and statutory / non-statutory designated wildlife sites within 2km of the site.

The full data set was received on 08.07.24. This has provided a full list of species records for the site and within a 2km radius.

Obtaining existing records is an important part of the evaluation process, it has provided additional information including past records that were not apparent during the field survey which can only provide a snapshot of the ecology of the site. This consultation exercise also provides valuable contextual information about local nature conservation designations.

In addition, the Government's Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside website (MAGIC) was accessed for further contextual information.

Field survey

A field survey was carried out on 02.07.24, weather conditions were warm and dry. The whole footpath link site was walked or viewed at close quarters and through binoculars. Some areas were difficult to access directly on foot due to overgrown and dense vegetation.

During the field survey habitats were identified using JNCC Phase 1 habitat survey methodology. Notable or indicative plant species were also recorded for each of the habitats identified. The survey also included looking for signs or evidence of any protected species using the area.

3. LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

All parts of the site were properly viewed and assessed on foot and using binoculars from close proximity with clear views in from adjacent roads, gateways and footpaths.

Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS field was not surveyed comprehensively. The main open parts of the field were impassable due to the tall, dense unmanaged vegetation and presence of open ditches.

4. RESULTS

Habitats present on or directly adjacent to the site (JNCC Phase 1 habitat survey name)

Unimproved neutral grassland – UKBAP (Photo 1)



The 22m section of the footpath link runs parallel to the northern boundary of the field (A on Map 3). Directly adjacent and to the south of this section the LWS field contains remnants of overgrown, unimproved neutral grassland habitat. Away from the wet ditches the grassland within the field is dominated by tall coarse grasses with patches of nettle and thistle. Other species include fleabane, soft and hard rush, around the wetter areas, meadowsweet, marsh valerian, selfheal, meadow vetchling, ribwort plantain, creeping buttercup, yarrow, germander speedwell and hemlock water-dropwort.

This habitat is widespread within the LWS field however the actual route of the footpath link does not include any of the indicator species for this habitat. The only non-woody species recorded on the actual route of the footpath link were nettle, bramble, dock, thistle, bindweed, hogweed and hemlock water dropwort.

Tall herb and fen – UKBAP (Photo 2)



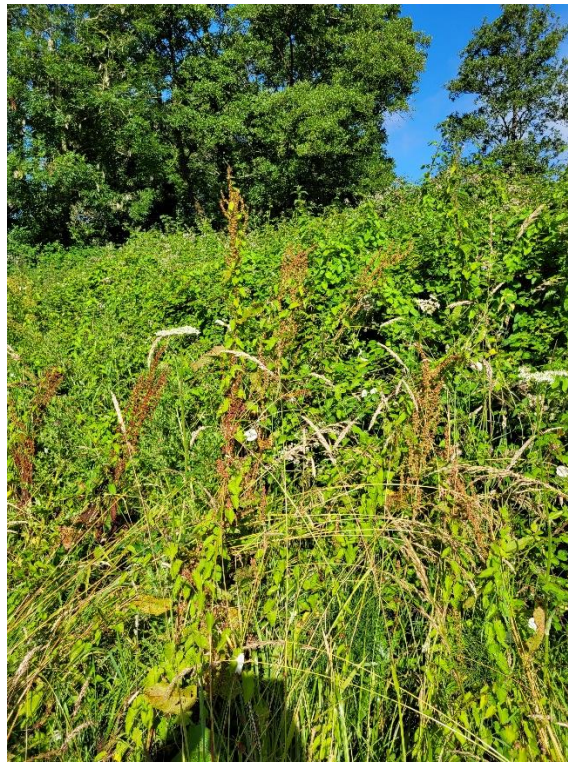
This wetland habitat is confined to the waterlogged patches and ditches that run through the LWS field. Plant indicators recorded during the field survey include common reed, sedges, meadowsweet, hemlock water dropwort, hairy willowherb, yellow flag iris, marsh valerian, water-mint and purple loosestrife.

This habitat is conspicuous within the LWS field, however it is located well away from any disturbance or clearance required by the footpath link construction.

Dense scrub (Photo 3)

The 22m section of the footpath link (A on Map 3) plus the new field access / gateway (B on Map 3) and the visibility splay (C on Map 3) includes some dense, bramble dominated scrub. This habitat has naturally regenerated from the fenced field boundary.

This is not a rare or restricted habitat and its clearance is not considered to be a significant loss to the ecology of the locality, as long as the mitigation measures recommended are followed.



Cultivated/disturbed land – amenity grassland (Photo 4)

The 33m section of the footpath link north of the road (E on Map 3) is located across a tightly mown grass dominated road verge with plant species indicative of low value amenity grassland such as daisy, dandelion, white clover, yarrow and spotted medick.

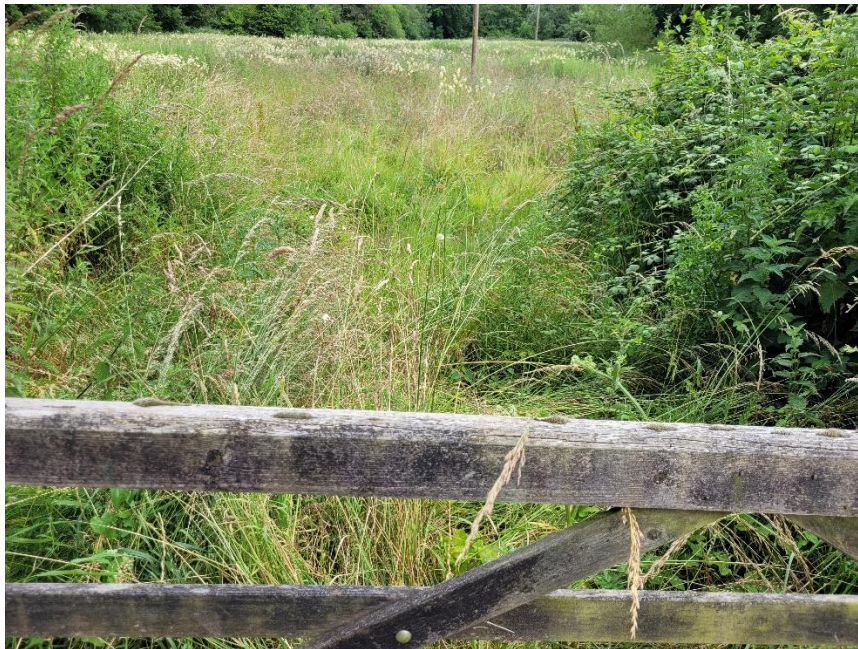


This area has a very low existing ecological value and the construction of a surfaced path here is not considered to be ecologically detrimental.

Other tall herb and fern – ruderal (Photo 5)

The new field access / gateway (B on Map 3) location includes sparse vegetation typical of compacted and disturbed ground conditions. It is dominated by coarse grasses and ruderal plant species including bindweed, common dock, horsetail, creeping thistle, ragwort, creeping buttercup and teasel.

This area has a very low existing ecological value and the construction of a surfaced gateway and access point here is not considered to be ecologically detrimental.



Additional site photos

Photo 6 – existing in-tact bridge over the drainage channel at the western end of the site (Map 3 - D)



Photos 7 & 8 – Vegetation to be cleared on the northern boundary of the field (Map 3 – A)



Species

No evidence of EPS or other protected species using the site was found during the survey undertaken on 02.07.24.

Desk research and historic records provided by WSBRC indicate potential for European Protected Species (EPS) and other protected species that may be present on or directly adjacent to the site.

Species listed in the table below have been drawn from the data search results supplied by WSBRC.

Species	Status	Habitats present to support named species
<i>Bufo bufo</i> - Common Toad	Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland, Tall herb and fen, Dense scrub
<i>Triturus cristatus</i> - Great Crested Newt	EPS Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland, Tall herb and fen, Dense scrub
<i>Meloe proscarabaeus</i> - Black Oil-beetle	Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland, Tall herb and fen
<i>Anguis fragilis</i> - Slow-worm	Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland, Tall herb and fen
<i>Natrix Helvetica</i> - Grass Snake	Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland, Tall herb and fen

<i>Zootoca vivipara</i> - Common Lizard	Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland, Other tall herb and fen - ruderal
<i>Lutra lutra</i> - Eurasian Otter	EPS Sect.41, UKBAP	Running water, Tall herb and fen
<i>Arvicola amphibius</i> - European Water Vole	Sect.41, UKBAP	Running water, Tall herb and fen
<i>Micromys minutus</i> - Harvest Mouse	Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland
<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i> -Hazel Dormouse	EPS Sect.41, UKBAP	Dense scrub
Bat species (see full list below) *	EPS Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland, Tall herb and fen, Dense scrub, Running water
Bird species (see full list below)**	Sect.41, UKBAP	Dense scrub, Hedge, Tall herb and fen
Moth species (see full list below)***	Sect.41, UKBAP	Unimproved neutral grassland, Tall herb and fen, Dense scrub, Other tall herb and fern - ruderal

*EPS Bat species recorded within 2km; Barbastelle, Sertotine, Myotis sp, Daubentons, Whiskered, Natterers, Leislars, Noctule, Common pipistrelle, Soprano pipistrelle, Long-eared, Brown long-eared, Greater horseshoe, Lesser horseshoe.

** UKBAP Bird species recorded within 2km; Cuckoo, Reed bunting, Spotted flycatcher, House sparrow, Yellowhammer, Lesser redpoll, Tree pipit, Hawfinch.

***UKBAP Moth species recorded within 2km; Knot grass, Beaded Chestnut, Green-brindled crescent, Mouse moth, Brown-spot pinion, Dusky brocade, Garden tiger, Centre barred sawfly, Mottled rustic, Dark crimson underwing, Small square spot, Small phoenix, September thorn, Dusky thorn, August thorn, Autumnal rustic, Small emerald, Ghost moth, Rustic, Rosy rustic, Shoulder-striped Wainscot, Rosy minor, Brindled beauty, Lackey, Dot moth, Powdered quaker, Shaded broad-bar, White ermine, Buff ermine, Feathered gothic, Blood vein, Cinnabar, Oak hook-tip, Dark-barred twin-spot carpet.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Assessment of habitat loss

- Unimproved neutral grassland – UKBAP;

No direct loss of this habitat is expected as long as the vegetation clearance and footpath construction is confined to within 8m of the northern boundary of the field.

- Tall herb and fen – UKBAP

No direct loss of this habitat is expected as long as the vegetation clearance and footpath construction is confined to within 8m of the northern boundary of the field.

- Dense scrub

The estimated area of habitat lost including the footpath construction, gateway access point and visibility splay is estimated as < 0.005ha (50m²).

The loss of this amount of low value habitat in this location is unlikely to have any negative impact on the ecology of the site, over and above the short term disturbance which can be mitigated.

- Cultivated/disturbed land – amenity grassland

The loss of this habitat in this location is unlikely to have any negative ecological impact.

- Other tall herb and fern – ruderal

The loss of this habitat in this location is unlikely to have any negative ecological impact.

Assessment of how the proposal may affect notable species

Common Toad

WSBRC hold records of common toad *Bufo bufo* within 2km search radius. Whilst potentially suitable terrestrial habitat for refuge and hibernation exist on site, in the form of scrub and rank damp grassland, it is considered unlikely that the species is breeding at the site since no suitable ponds are present.

Great crested newts

WSBRC hold records of great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* within 2km search radius. Whilst potentially suitable terrestrial habitat for refuge and hibernation exist on site, in the form of scrub and rank damp grassland, it is considered unlikely that the species is breeding at the site since no suitable ponds are present.

Reptiles

WSBRC hold several records of reptile species from within the 2km search radius, including: slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, grass snake *Natrix natrix* and common lizard *Zootoca vivipara*. It is likely that the site supports these species given the nature and extent of suitable habitats present. However, mitigation can be put in place to prevent or minimize losses.

Otters

WSBRC hold numerous records for otter *Lutra lutra* from within the 2km search radius. The watercourse that forms the western boundary of the LWS field (Troutbeck) along with the River Nadder to the south will support otters however the drainage ditch running into and across the site is unlikely to be of any importance to the species owing to its small size and shallow/open nature.

Troutbeck and the River Nadder will be unaffected by the proposal as there are no clearance or construction works proposed for these watercourses. Therefore, it is considered unlikely that the proposal will have any impact on this species.

Water voles

WSBRC holds numerous records of water vole from within the 2km search radius. Given the shallow nature and densely vegetated banks of the drainage ditch within the LWS field it is likely

to be of importance for water vole, although no signs of water vole activity were seen during the field survey.

No disturbance to any of the watercourses, including bankside vegetation is required within the proposal therefore it is considered unlikely that the works will have any impact on this species.

Harvest mouse

WSBRC holds records of harvest mouse within 2km radius of the site. It is likely that the LWS field site supports this species given the nature and extent of suitable habitats present (long tussocky grass, reed etc).

No disturbance is required to the existing grassland field therefore it is considered unlikely that the works will have any impact on this species.

Hazel dormouse

WSBRC holds records of hazel dormouse within 2km of the site. It is considered unlikely that the site supports this species due to the low level of scrub and hedgerow habitat present.

Bats

WSBRC holds records of bats from within the 2km search radius including: Barbastelle, Serotine, Myotis sp, Daubentons, Whiskered, Natterers, Leislars, Noctule, Common pipistrelle, Soprano pipistrelle, Long-eared, Brown long-eared, Greater horseshoe, Lesser horseshoe.

No potential bat roosts were identified during the site survey apart from a number of mature trees on the boundary of Place Farm Meadows which have been covered by a previous planning decision notice (Reference Number: PL/2023/09002, Decision Date: 28 November 2023).

The LWS grassland field and associated vegetation and watercourses provides good potential foraging habitat for bats. The connectivity of habitat providing 'bat corridors' will be unaffected by the small scale vegetation clearance associated with this proposal as this will be limited to a very small band along the northern boundary of the field.

Birds

WSBRC hold several records for notable bird species within 2km of the site including: kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, barn owl *Tyto alba*, other BAP bird species are listed below the summary species table in the Results (section 4). The loss of habitat caused by the construction of the footpath link is not considered to be significant and is mitigated by the presence of significant areas of suitable good habitat within proximity.

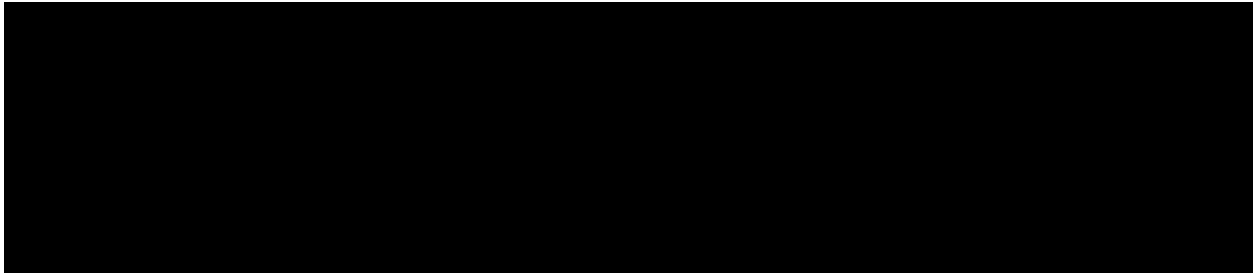
Casual observations during the field survey identified the following: wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*, robin *Erithacus rubecula* and wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*. These birds are likely to be using the bramble scrub and tall grassy margins for foraging and potentially nesting. None of these species is considered of particular note and carrying out the construction works outside bird nesting season will ensure no damage to nests.

Invertebrates

WSBRC holds numerous records of BAP moth species within 2km of the site. These are listed below the summary species table in the Results (section 4). The loss of habitat for moths

caused by the construction of the footpath link is not considered to be significant and is mitigated by the presence of significant areas of suitable good habitat within proximity.

WSBRC holds records Black Oil-beetle *Meloe proscarabaeus* within 2km of the site. This species requires open flower rich habitat and could therefore be expected to be present within the open grassland LWS field. No disturbance is required to the existing grassland field therefore it is considered unlikely that the works will have any impact on this species.



6. RECOMMENDATIONS & MITIGATIONS

The proposal falls outside the River Avon SAC, however it does fall within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone therefore NE should be consulted regarding the impact of the proposal in relation to the R Avon SSSI / SAC / SPA Impact Risk Zone.

As outlined in the results and conclusions it is considered that this proposal will not cause any significant long term adverse effects on the named habitats and species present on site or within the locality.

There will be short term disturbance created by the construction of the footpath link. The following recommendations will address and minimise the impact during construction:

- Timing – undertake the works at the end of the summer / early autumn to avoid damage to soils and bird nesting season. If work must take place over the winter period avoid trafficking the site when ground conditions are waterlogged.
- Strictly minimise vegetation clearance and ground disturbance to within 8m of the northern boundary of the CWS field. This will include clearance of grass dominated vegetation and bramble thicket. The width of the path plus a buffer of vegetation clearance either side should be maintained at no more than 3m wide.
- Strictly minimise vegetation clearance for the new field access / gateway to not exceed 8m into the field to ensure no infringement into the species rich areas of the main field.
- Engage an ecologist to carry out a walkover survey or deploy refuge tins immediately prior to the start of works to check the site within the field for reptiles, amphibians (and nesting birds if work is carried out March – September).
- Follow advice from the ecologist should a significant number of reptiles / amphibians be found. This may include advice on suitable re-location and/or the use of reptile fences to create a barrier between the unaffected grassland / tall herb areas in the main field.
- Should pre-construction surveys reveal the presence of great crested newt works should stop immediately and a licenced ecologist should be employed to advise before proceeding.
- Take all measures to protect all watercourses within and adjacent to the site from pollution such as fuel spillage and soil / sediment run-off.

- Construct the surfaced permissive footpath within the LWS field to ensure that it does not channel surface water run-off into adjacent ditches or streams. Use a permeable surface or provide cross drains if necessary to ensure that any surface run-off is retained or absorbed within the adjacent grassland.
- Use the brash / woody material resulting from the vegetation clearance to create habitat piles under existing trees or on the field boundaries. These will provide shelter and hibernation sites for reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. Do not burn any arisings on the site or within the adjacent LWS field.

7. ENHANCEMENT

The main potential for enhancement is presented by the opportunity to bring the Place Farm Meadows (S) LWS back into active management. This proposed enhancement will benefit UKBAP habitat (Unimproved neutral grassland and Tall herb and Fen) as well as the UKBAP and EPS species listed in the table provided in section 4 of this report.

The CWS field is 0.78ha in area and is currently un-managed. The re-introduction of a low intensity grazing and / or annual cutting regime will prevent the valuable neutral grassland / tall herb and fen vegetation from being shaded out by succession to woody scrub and trees.

This field has a drainage channel and is bounded by 'Trout Beck' and the River Nadder. Information provided by the Wildlife Trust and the field survey carried out for this report indicates that the drainage channel which crosses the site west to east supports the main plants of interest and most variety including brooklime, water mint, water forget-me-not, creeping jenny, floating sweet-grass and sedges, whilst grasses with patches of nettle, thistle and some dock dominate the remainder of the field. Other species include fleabane, soft and hard rush, around the wetter areas, meadowsweet, selfheal, meadow vetchling, ribwort plantain, creeping buttercup, yarrow and germander speedwell with hemlock water-dropwort and some yellow iris and valerian along the stream banks. These wildflower species will only persist in open conditions produced through an annual light grazing and / or cutting management regime. Without management the open grass/sedge/herb dominated habitat will succeed to woody scrub and eventually closed canopy woodland with a subsequent loss of BAP habitat and species diversity.

As this field is part of a Local Wildlife Site, the full extent and design of this habitat enhancement should be drawn up in full consultation with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

A further habitat enhancement recommendation is to fence the new permissive route out of the main LWS field area and to plant a new native hedge on the field side of the fence. This hedge and fence would be approximately 30m in length and should consist of a mix of locally native shrubs such as; hawthorn, field maple, hazel, guelder rose, dogwood, spindle, alder buckthorn.

8. BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN (BNG)

Further clarification is required from the local planning authority to determine if a full BNG assessment is warranted for this site.

It is unclear whether the small scale of work, habitat type present, relatively low 'value' of the habitat directly affected, along with the mitigation and enhancement suggestions would merit a full BNG assessment.

The site is less than 0.1ha and, if assessed, the BNG calculation would be carried out using the small site's metric (SSM).

According to the .gov.uk website a site can forgo a full assessment if it falls under the '*development subject to the de minimis exemption*':

A development that does not impact a priority habitat and affects less than:

- 25 square meters (5m by 5m) of on-site habitat.
- 5 meters of on-site linear habitats (e.g., hedgerows).

The definition of developments that "impact a habitat" is if it decreases its biodiversity value.

It is considered that the removal of the bramble dominated patch and other low value vegetation would not have a large or lasting impact on the biodiversity value of this site.

Furthermore, if enhancement takes place to improve the management of the LWS and/or plant a new 30m native hedgerow (as suggested in section 7) this would increase the biodiversity value of the site, rather than decrease it.