

ECOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

LAND AT TOP LANE, STOURTON

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Site Address	Land at Top Lane, Stourton, BA12 6QA		
Site central grid reference	ST 76729 33511		
Client Name	Stourhead Estate		
Survey Date/s	10.06.2026		
Report Date	02.07.2026		
Revision	Date	Author	Action
Final	02.07.2026	L. Gilbert	

Quality Assurance

The information that we have prepared and provided is true and has been prepared and provided in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct.

We confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional opinions. Every reasonable attempt has been made to comply with BS 42020 (Biodiversity: Code of practice for planning and development); the CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing (CIEEM, 2017), The Statutory Biodiversity Metric: User Guide (DEFRA, 2025) and the Bat Conservation Trust's Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good practice guidelines 4th edition (Collins, 2023).

If compliance has not been achieved, justification/explanation has been given.

Validity Of Report

The results and recommendations of this assessment are valid for up to two years from the date the most recent site visit was carried out (June 2028). The evaluation and recommendations within this report are based on the details of the proposed works provided by the client. If the proposals change, the report will need to be reviewed to ensure all recommendations remain appropriate.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brief Description of Project:	Planning permission is being sought for the construction of two new dwellings with associated gardens, driveways, parking and landscaping, with access off Top Lane.
Key Habitats	The site comprises the corner of a grassland field, which is sheep grazed. A vegetated bank, dominated by bracken, forms the southern site boundary and an offsite intact hedgerow dominated by laurel forms the eastern site boundary. A Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and area of ancient, replanted woodland (Top Wood) is situated c.58m to the north of the site and the adjacent field c.15m to the northeast of the site is mapped as wood pasture and parkland. Both areas are Priority Habitat.
Key Species	The vegetated bank is suitable to support nesting birds, and the grassland and vegetated bank are likely to be used by foraging birds. The grassland and vegetated bank, although sub-optimal, have some suitability to support reptiles and amphibians during their terrestrial phases. Foraging and commuting bats are likely to utilise the habitats on site. Badger and hedgehog could pass through the site, although no evidence was recorded.
Designated Sites	The site lies c.738m to the east of Heath Hill Farm SSSI and is situated within a SSSI IRZ; however, due to the type of development proposed (residential) and the scale of the proposals (two dwellings), impacts on designated sites are considered unlikely. Top Wood (LWS) lies c.58m to the north and Writh Coppice (LWS) lies c.107m to the south of the site.
Mitigation	Reasonable avoidance measures will be followed during the clearance of the grassland and section of vegetated bank. This will include: • Maintaining the habitats on-site so they don't become more suitable for protected species prior to commencement. • A walkover by an ecologist to check for evidence of badger within 3 months of commencement. • A nesting bird check by a suitably experienced ecologist. • Phased/ sensitive clearance of the grassland and vegetated bank outside of winter. • An Ecological Clerk of Works during the final cut to ground level, which will include fingertip searches where necessary. Measures to protect nearby LWS's and areas of Priority Habitat will be implemented throughout the construction phase and include pollution prevention measures, suitable buffers and reducing noise and vibration as much as possible. There will be no lighting during the construction phase, and if required during operation, a sensitive lighting strategy will be developed.

Compensation	The retained bank along the southern site boundary will be enhanced with new native hedgerow planting and species rich native hedgerow planting is also proposed along the access driveway. Two areas of native mixed scrub will be planted in the east and west of the site.
Enhancements	A separate Biodiversity Net Gain – Assessment Report (Vikki Gallaher, November 2025) has been produced for the site. The site will be further enhanced through the provision of integrated bat and bird boxes and native planting of benefit to pollinators.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. LG Ecology was commissioned to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) to support a planning application submission for land at Top Lane, Stourton (hereafter referred to as the site).
- 2.2. The site has a central grid reference of ST 76729 33511 and the location of the site is shown in Image 1 below.
- 2.3. The proposals are for two new dwellings with associated gardens, parking areas and landscaping, with access off Top Lane.



Image 1: Site location plan showing red line boundary.

Personnel

- 2.4. The PEA, which included an extended UK Hab survey was carried out by Lily Gilbert. Lily has over 13 years of experience in ecological consultancy. She holds licenses for bats (level 2) hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*, barn owl *Tyto alba* and great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* and has significant experience of EcIA. She is accredited to undertake MoRPH River condition assessment surveys and is experienced in the use of the Biodiversity Metric to demonstrate Biodiversity Net Gain. Lily is a Full Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (MCIEEM) and is the author of this report.

Context

2.5. The site is located within the southeast corner of a permanent grassland field situated within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (formally AONB). The site is within a semi-rural setting with approximately seven residential properties located along Top Lane, within c.200m of the site. The site forms part of a wider mosaic of semi-natural habitats, including permanent grassland, hedgerows, patches of deciduous woodland, lakes and ponds.

Objective

2.6. The objective of this Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) is:

- To identify potentially significant ecological effects associated with the proposed development;
- To set out the mitigation measures required to ensure compliance with nature conservation legislation and relevant planning policy, and to address any potentially significant ecological effects;
- To identify how mitigation measures will be secured;
- To identify any significant residual ecological effects and set out any compensation measures proposed to address these; and
- To identify appropriate enhancement measures.

3. PLANNING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Legislation

3.1. The following pieces of legislation are of specific relevance to this assessment:

- The Environment Act 2021. This piece of legislation is of relevance because all planning permissions granted in England are mandated to deliver at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain from 2nd April 2024 (unless exemptions apply).
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019¹. All bat species and hazel dormouse are listed as protected species in Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended by The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which gives them full protection under Regulation 43. Where it is necessary to carry out an action that could result in an offence relating to a species protected under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), it is possible to apply for a licence from Natural England. Licences are only issued where Natural England is satisfied that the relevant legal tests have been met including that works are unavoidable and that reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that adverse effects on protected species are minimised.
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981² (as amended, including by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). All species of British bat (*Vespertilionidae* and *Rhinolophidae*) are listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and receive some limited protection under Section 9. This piece of legislation is relevant because the site has the potential to support nesting birds.
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006³. Section 41 includes lists of habitats and species recognised as of 'principal importance' for the conservation of biodiversity. Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 requires all public bodies to have regard for biodiversity conservation when carrying out their function. This is commonly referred to as the 'biodiversity duty'. Seven species of British bat and hazel dormouse are listed as species of principal importance for the purpose of conserving

¹ Great Britain. *The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019* No.579 [online]. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/9780111179512/contents>

² Great Britain. *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* [online]. Available from: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/contents>

³ Great Britain. *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* [online]. Available from: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents>

biodiversity in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

3.2. The following pieces of legislation have been considered, but are not considered to be of specific relevance in this case:

- Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (no badger setts are present within the site or sufficiently close to be affected).
- Hedgerows Regulations 1997 were introduced to protect hedgerows of importance from destruction. For the Regulations to be applicable, the hedgerow must be at least 20m in length or, if less than 20m, it must meet another hedgerow at each end. A hedgerow is deemed to be important if it is more than thirty years old and meets at least one of the criteria listed in Part II of Schedule 1 of the Regulations.

National Planning Policy Framework 2023⁴

3.3. Paragraph 180-184 of the NPPF relates to 'Conserving and enhancing the natural environment' and Paragraphs 185-188 relates to 'Habitats and Biodiversity'.

3.4. Paragraph 180 of the NPPF states the following:

"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

⁴ HM Government. *National Planning Policy Framework December 2023*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65a11af7e8f5ec000f1f8c46/NPPF_December_2023.pdf

woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons⁶⁷ 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.”

Local Planning Policy

Wiltshire Core Strategy⁵

3.5. The Wiltshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document was formally adopted on 20th January 2015 and provides the overarching planning policy framework for Wiltshire for the period up to 2026. Relevant policies have been included below.

“Core Policy 50: Biodiversity and geodiversity.

Protection Development proposals must demonstrate how they protect features of nature conservation and geological value as part of the design rationale. There is an expectation that such features shall be retained, buffered, and managed favourably in order to maintain their ecological value, connectivity and functionality in the long-term.

Where it has been demonstrated that such features cannot be retained, removal or damage shall only be acceptable in circumstances where the anticipated ecological impacts have been mitigated as far as possible and appropriate compensatory measures can be secured to ensure no net loss of the local biodiversity resource, and secure the integrity of local ecological networks and provision of ecosystem services. All development proposals shall incorporate appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance of sensitive wildlife species and habitats throughout the lifetime of the development.

Any development potentially affecting a Natura 2000 site must provide avoidance measures in accordance with the strategic plans or guidance ... otherwise bespoke measures must be provided to demonstrate that the proposals would have no adverse effect upon the Natura 2000 network. Any

⁵ [untitled \(wiltshire.gov.uk\)](#)

development that would have an adverse effect on the integrity of a European nature conservation site will not be in accordance with the Core Strategy.

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

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

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

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

Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan⁶

3.6. Wiltshire BAP provides Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans, which contain objectives, targets and actions and set out the priorities for the County. All bat species found in Wiltshire are covered under the Bat Species Action Plan.

Wiltshire and Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy⁷

⁶ [Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan \(BAP\) 2008 \(wiltshirewildlife.org\)](https://wiltshirewildlife.org/)

⁷ wiltshire.gov.uk/media/18289/Local-Nature-Recovery-Strategy-for-Wiltshire-and-Swindon/pdf/Revised_Copy_of_Local_Nature_Recovery_Strategy_for_Wiltshire_and_Swindon_landscape-compressed_1.pdf?m=1762355778637

3.7. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been formally adopted and published. The LNRS is a roadmap designed to guide nature recovery initiatives throughout Wiltshire. The LNRS has informed the BNG assessment and the assignment of strategic significance within the Biodiversity Metric.

4. METHODS

Data search

- 4.1. MAGIC⁸ was used in June 2026 to carry out a background data search for the site. This included a search for Statutory Designated Sites whose Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) covers the site boundary, Priority Habitats within 500m of the site and European Protected Species (EPS) licence records within 1km of the site.
- 4.2. A data search from Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre was received on 17th June 2026. The data search provided records of legally protected and notable species, and non-statutory and statutory designated sites within 2km of the site boundary.

Extended UK Hab

- 4.3. An extended UK Hab survey was carried out on 10th June 2026. Habitats within the site were mapped using the UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0⁹. Habitats were mapped to the fine-scale minimum mappable unit of 25m² area or 5m length and were classified to at least level 3, with level 4 and 5 classifications assigned where possible.
- 4.4. In addition to classifying the habitats present, the suitability of the habitats to support protected and notable species was assessed.

Badger

- 4.5. Checks were undertaken to identify areas within the site and surrounding area that may be used by badgers for foraging and building setts. These signs include setts, snuffle holes, pathways, and latrines.

Birds

- 4.6. The site was assessed for potential nesting habitat, and any signs of nesting activity was recorded. Bird species use a variety of habitats, including buildings, trees, shrubs, undergrowth, or open fields, for nesting. Therefore, all these features were taken into consideration.

Barn Owl

- 4.7. The site was surveyed to assess the foraging potential for barn owls and any potential roosting and/or nesting sites they may use. Barn owls require rough grassland with a thick enough thatch layer to

⁸ [Magic Map Application \(defra.gov.uk\)](https://magic.defra.gov.uk/)

⁹ UKHab Ktd (2023). UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0 (at <http://www.ukhab.org>)

provide suitable shelter for their primary prey (field voles) and suitable roosting and nesting locations within a 3-6 km radius.

Great crested newts

- 4.8. The suitability of any aquatic and terrestrial habitat on or near the site was assessed for use by great crested newts. Great crested newts can travel up to 500m between breeding ponds using suitable terrestrial habitats. Therefore, ponds within a 500m radius of the site were identified using OS maps and aerial imagery, and connectivity to the site was also considered. Suitable terrestrial habitat offers cover and foraging opportunities and includes grassland with tall sward height, scrub, woodland, or mature gardens. Hedgerows, ditches, stone walls, rubble piles and small mammal holes can provide good terrestrial habitat.

Reptiles

- 4.9. Any features that reptiles may use for basking (e.g., south-facing slopes), hibernation (e.g., rubble piles, mammal holes), and foraging (e.g., tussocky grassland/scrub) were recorded.

Hazel dormouse

- 4.10. Habitats within and surrounding the site were assessed for their general suitability to support hazel dormouse. Hazel dormouse generally use areas of dense woody vegetation with a diversity of woody species and three-dimensional habitat complexity, with good connectivity to other areas of suitable habitat.

Limitations

- 4.11. It must be noted that even in situations where the survey evidence suggests the likely absence of species, it is still possible for species to be encountered on-site due to undetected or unpredicted changes in species movements.
- 4.12. Due to access restrictions, it was not possible to survey all waterbodies within 500m of the site. Waterbodies 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 were not able to be surveyed. As the waterbodies closest to the site were able to be surveyed, this is not considered to be a significant limitation.

5. RESULTS

Designated Sites

5.1. There is one statutory designated site within 2km of the site; Heath Hill Farm SSSI, which lies c.738m to the west. Heath Hill Farm is part of the Stourhead Estate and comprises hay meadows and permanent pasture, which support unimproved neutral to calcareous grassland and rush pasture with areas of semi-improved and improved grassland.

5.2. The site does fall within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zone (IRZ); and the following development types have been identified as requiring further consideration due to likely impacts:

- **Infrastructure:** Pipelines and underground cables, pylons and overhead cables (excluding upgrades and refurbishment of existing network). Any transport proposal including new or extended footways, cycleways, roads/car parks, railways and waterways (excluding routine maintenance). Airports, helipads and other aviation proposals.
- **Minerals, Oil and Gas:** Planning applications for quarries, including: new proposals, Review of Minerals Permissions (ROMP), extensions, variations to conditions etc. Oil & gas exploration/extraction.
- **Residential:** Residential development of 100 units or more.
- **Rural Residential:** Any residential development of 50 or more units outside existing settlements/urban areas.
- **Air Pollution:** Any industrial/agricultural development that could cause AIR POLLUTION (including: industrial processes, livestock & poultry units with a floorspace > 500m², slurry lagoons > 200m² & manure stores > 250 tonnes).
- **Combustion:** General combustion processes >20MW energy input. Incl: energy from waste incineration, other incineration, landfill gas generation plant, pyrolysis/gasification, anaerobic digestion, sewage treatment works, other incineration/combustion.
- **Waste:** Landfill. Including: inert landfill, non-hazardous landfill, hazardous landfill.
- **Compost:** Any composting proposal with more than 500 tonnes maximum annual operational throughput. Incl: open windrow composting, in-vessel composting, anaerobic digestion, other waste management.
- **Water Supply:** Any development needing its own water supply eg remote rural housing that is not connected to a mains water supply, OR large infrastructure such as warehousing/industry where the total net additional gross internal floorspace following development is > 1,000m².

Table 1: Non-statutory designated sites within 2km of the site.

Local Wildlife Site	Site Description	Distance and Direction from Site
Top Wood	Small ancient woodland site on a roughly circular hilltop, supporting beech plantation with ornamental planting.	58m north
Writh Coppice	Small ancient woodland site supporting coniferous and broadleaved plantation, together with areas of wet and dry semi-natural woodland.	107m south
Western Estate Fields	Series of damp meadows supporting fen, marsh and swamp habitats within the Stourhead Western Estate.	294m south-west
Lynch Wood	Small ancient woodland site on the Stourhead Western Estate, recently replanted with broadleaved species.	316m north-west
Bonham Hanging	Broadleaved and coniferous plantation woodland on an ancient woodland site, located on a steep west-facing slope within the Stourhead Estate.	340m east
Garden Lake, Stourhead	Large ornamental lake set within landscaped parkland.	357m north-east
Stourhead Woods	Predominantly coniferous woodland managed under a continuous-cover system, with areas of interest mainly associated with streams and flushes where wet alder woodland forms habitat corridors.	525m north
Mill Covert	Wet alder, ash and willow woodland, with drier oak woodland, situated within a shallow valley on the Stourhead Western Estate.	630m south
Sunny Hanging Wood	Steep, south-west-facing hanging woodland forming part of an ancient woodland site within the Stourhead Estate.	1km north-east
Stour Valley Fields	Series of west-facing pastures with abundant springs and flushes adjacent to the headwaters of the River Stour.	1.8km south
Bayley's Coppice	Small beech plantation on a flat ancient woodland site within the Stourhead Estate.	1.9km north

5.3. The non-statutory sites listed above are predominantly woodland, parkland, wetland and grassland habitats associated with the wider Stourhead landscape. The closest site is Top Wood, located approximately 58m north of the site.

5.4. It is worth noting that the Ancient Woodland Inventory is currently being updated, and some areas within the Stourhead Estate currently classified as ancient woodland are thought to have been misclassified.

Priority Habitats

5.5. The nearest areas of Priority Habitat are an area of ancient, replanted woodland (Top Wood) c.58m to the north of the site and the adjacent field c. 15m to the northeast of the site, which is mapped as wood pasture and parkland.

Habitats

Modified grassland with rushes (g4)

5.6. The majority of the site comprises modified grassland, which is sheep grazed. The sward is dominated by grasses, and species include Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, upright brome *Bromopsis erecta*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*. Creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*, and marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* were also present.

5.7. Scattered tussocks of soft rush *Juncus effusus* with fox gloves *Digitalis purpurea* and common nettle *Urtica dioica* are present throughout the grassland.

5.8. Aside from the tussocks of rushes, the sward varies in height from closely grazed to 40cm, is not tussocky and lacks a thatch layer.

5.9. The sward did not consistently support six to eight vascular plant species per 1 m², and in most areas, fewer than two forb species were observed within a typical sampling area.

5.10. The sward is dominated by common grasses and has low structural diversity. Although some of the species are indicative of calcareous/ chalk grassland, these species were not dominant. The presence of Yorkshire fog, perennial ryegrass, creeping buttercup, white clover, mouse-ear, and marsh thistle is a sign of an improved sward, likely as a result of ongoing sheep grazing.

Vegetated bank – bracken (g1c)

- 5.11. The southern boundary, which separates the site from Top Lane, comprises an earth bank, which is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* with common nettle and bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis*. There are occasional woody species, including hazel *Corylus avellana*, elder *Sambucus nigra*, field rose *Rosa arvensis* and a single holly *Ilex aquifolium* tree. However, the woody vegetation is widely spaced and does not form a continuous linear structure and therefore does not meet the definition of a hedgerow.

Non-native hedgerow

- 5.12. A non-native hedgerow dominated by cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*, with some sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, holly, and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, runs offsite along the eastern site boundary. A cluster of oak *Quercus robur* and beech *Fagus sylvatica* trees are at the northern extent of this hedgerow, and whilst they are offsite, the canopies overhang the north eastern corner of the site.

Species

Bats

- 5.13. The data search returned records of the following species within 2km of the site; barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*, serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*, Bechstein's *Myotis bechsteinii*, Brandt's *Myotis brandtii*, Daubenton's *Myotis daubentonii*, 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*.
- 5.14. The data search records include a serotine maternity roost, c.600m to the north east, a Daubenton's roost c.628m to the north east, a Natterer's hibernation roost c.556m to the north east and lesser horseshoe and greater horseshoe roosts within 1km of the site. The majority of the roost records are from buildings that form part of the Stourhead Estate.
- 5.15. MAGIC returned records of the following granted bat licences within 2km of the site:

- EPSM2012-3938 – destroying a resting place for lesser horseshoe, greater horseshoe, brown long eared, whiskered, Brandt's, Daubenton's Natterer's and Alcahoes bats in 2013, c. 1.1km to the north east of the site.
- 2016-21127-EPS-AD2 – damaging a resting and breeding place for brown long eared and lesser horseshoe bats in 2016, c. 1.08km north east of the site.

5.16. There are no trees or buildings on-site and therefore no opportunities for roosting bats.

5.17. The trees adjacent to the north east corner of the site were subject to a ground-level tree inspection and no potential roosting features were identified. A number of potential roosting features were recorded on the adjacent property to the east of the site, including gaps under shiplap boarding. However, these are considered far enough from the site to avoid any impacts.

5.18. The on-site habitats are likely to support a variety of bat species and form part of a wider landscape of high-quality bat foraging and commuting habitat. The sheep-grazed grassland is likely to support a range of invertebrate species; however, it is unlikely to represent an important foraging resource for bats relative to the woodland, lakes, hedgerows, and more species-rich grassland present in the surrounding area. In particular, the site is unlikely to be an important foraging resource for greater horseshoe bat, as it is not cattle-grazed.

5.19. Top Lane provides a dark linear habitat corridor, which is sheltered by overhanging trees, and provides good connectivity. However, the section of bank along the southern site boundary is lacking in structural and species diversity and could be enhanced with native species planting to strengthen this linear habitat corridor.

5.20. Top Wood, which lies c. 58m uphill from the site provides high quality foraging habitat.

5.21. The grassland and vegetated bank are considered likely to be of low importance for foraging and commuting bats, given the limited size of the site and the relatively poor quality of these habitats compared with higher-value habitats elsewhere in the local area. Nevertheless, the site is situated between areas of high-quality bat habitat and is therefore likely to provide important connectivity for bats across the landscape.

Birds

- 5.22. The data search returned records of the following species within 2km of the site; sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, red kite *Milvus milvus*, teal *Anas crecca*, mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, gadwall *Mareca strepera*, swift *Apus apus*, common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, grey heron *Ardea cinerea*, little egret *Egretta garzetta*, stock dove *Columba oenas*, collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, merlin *Falco columbarius*, peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, hobby *Falco subbuteo*, kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, skylark *Alauda arvensis*, meadow pipit *Anthus pratensis*, hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, whitethroat *Curruca communis*, house martin *Delichon urbicum*, yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*, brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, linnet *Linaria cannabina*, house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, tree sparrow *Passer montanus*, dunnock *Prunella modularis*, willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, marsh tit *Poecile palustris*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, redwing *Turdus iliacus*, song thrush *Turdus philomelos*, fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*, mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus*, and tawny owl *Strix aluco*.
- 5.23. The small areas of woody vegetation along the southern boundary provide opportunities for nesting and foraging birds, although none were recorded at the time of the survey. The grassland offers some opportunities for foraging birds; however, it is considered unsuitable for ground nesting birds due to proximity of the boundary vegetation.
- 5.24. The grassland has low suitability for foraging barn owl due to the lack of a thatch layer.
- 5.25. Therefore, the bird interest is considered to be of low importance.

Great crested newts

- 5.26. No records of great crested newts were returned within the 2km data search. There are records of common toad *Bufo bufo* and common frog *Rana temporaria* within 2km of the site. MAGIC returned positive class licence records of great crested newts from 2017, c. 2.2km to the south west of the site.
- 5.27. The site is within an 'amber' risk zone for great crested newts. Amber zones contain main population centres for great crested newts and comprise important connecting habitat that aids natural dispersal.
- 5.28. There are no waterbodies within 250m of the site on OS Maps, but eight within 500m of the site. The locations of the waterbodies are shown in Appendix 2.

5.29. The closest waterbody lies c. 255m to the south east of the site, and forms part of a network of ponds and sluices, which connect with Turners Paddock Lake. New Lake lies c.309m to the south of the site on the opposite side of Writh Coppice. Two ponds, which are known as the Lynch Ponds, lie c.346m to the north west of the site.

5.30. Ponds 1 and 2 were subject to Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessments and both were found to have 'good' suitability for great crested newts. The results of the HSI assessments are included below.

Table 2: HSI Results

	Pond Name	Pond 1	Pond 2
SI No	SI Description	SI Value	SI Value
1	Geographic location	1	1
2	Pond area	0.9	0.8
3	Pond permanence	0.9	0.9
4	Water quality	0.67	0.67
5	Shade	1	1
6	Water fowl effect	0.67	0.67
7	Fish presence	0.67	0.67
8	Pond Density	1	1
9	Terrestrial habitat	1	1
10	Macrophyte cover	0.4	0.4
HSI Score		0.79	0.78
Pond suitability (see below)		Good	Good

5.31. The applicant has informed us that the Lynch Ponds are not stocked with fish but have wild brown trout.

5.32. The habitats surrounding the waterbodies within 500m comprise woodland, tussocky grassland and scrub, all of which are more suitable for terrestrial great crested newt than the on-site habitats.

5.33. There is no suitable breeding habitat for great crested newt on-site, and the majority of the site comprises sheep-grazed grassland, which is of low suitability for terrestrial great crested newt as a result. The base of the vegetated bank and the tussocks of rushes areas offer some suitability for terrestrial great crested newt, and the base of the bank in particular provides suitable shelter for overwintering amphibians.

5.34. If great crested newts are present within the waterbodies within 500m of the site, it is considered unlikely that terrestrial great crested newts would be present onsite due to the higher quality of the terrestrial habitats surrounding the waterbodies relative to the site itself. However, as the site lies between waterbodies, there is a small chance that amphibians could move between waterbodies and pass through

- 5.35. The data search returned records of slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, grass snake *Natrix helvetica*, adder *Vipera berus* and common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* within 2km of the site.
- 5.36. An incidental recording of a common lizard was made whilst walking between the site and the Lynch Ponds during survey in June 2026. The lizard was recorded c.269m to the north west of the site within an area of tussocky grassland, which sloped down to the ponds.
- 5.37. The grassland on-site is sub-optimal for reptiles because it lacks a tussocky structure and thatch layer. However, it still has low suitability, and the tussocks of rushes and base of the vegetated bank provide cover and opportunities for shelter. It is considered possible that small numbers of reptiles may move through the site between areas of more suitable habitat within the local area.
- 5.38. As a precaution, habitat clearance will be carried out following precautionary methods of working, which are outlined in section 6 of this report.

5.39. A single record of otter *Lutra lutra* was returned within 2km of the site. The recording was made in 2009 at Gasper Lake, c. 600m to the south of the site. No records of water vole *Arvicola amphibius* were returned within the data search.

5.40. There are no watercourses on or in proximity to the site and the habitats on-site are considered unsuitable for otter and water vole. Therefore, water vole and otter are considered to be likely absent from the site and have been scoped out of this assessment.

5.42. No evidence of badger *Meles meles* was found within the site or within 30m of the site, where access was possible. [REDACTED]

5.43. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] These are outlined in
Section 6.

Hazel Dormouse

- 5.44. The data search returned numerous records of hazel dormouse within 2km of the site.
- 5.45. The habitats on-site are considered to be largely unsuitable for hazel dormouse. The vegetated bank lacks the structural and species diversity that hazel dormouse require, and the arboreal connectivity is poor due to the lack of woody vegetation.
- 5.46. The likelihood of hazel dormouse being present on-site is considered to be low, and precautionary methods of working are considered appropriate in this instance, given the small scale of the works.

Invertebrates

- 5.47. The data search returned records of small heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*, dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*, white-letter hairstreak *Satyrus w-album*, common darter *Sympetrum striolatum*, mottled rustic *Caradrina morpheus*, small phoenix *Ecliptopera silaceata* and white ermine *Spilosoma lubricipeda*, within 2km of the site.
- 5.48. Invertebrate species are likely to use the site, but notable species are unlikely to be present, given the more species-rich and varied habitats within the surrounding area.

Other Species

- 5.49. The data search returned a single record of pine marten *Martes martes* within 2km of the site. The sighting was made in 2025, 1.8km to the north west of the site. As pine marten rely on the cover of woodland and trees, the site is considered unsuitable to support this species.
- 5.50. There is a low risk of hedgehog, a Species of Principal Importance listed on Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006, sheltering within the vegetated bank on-site and foraging within the grassland.

6. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Impacts, Mitigation and Compensation Measures

Habitats

- 6.1. The proposals for the site comprise the erection of two single storey dwellings with associated parking areas, gardens, an access driveway and landscaping. The proposals require the removal of c. 7m of vegetated bank habitat to facilitate the access, with some minor works required either side of the access to create a suitable visibility splay.
- 6.2. The offsite hedgerow and trees along the eastern boundary will be retained and protected from the development with suitable Root Protection Areas and protective Heras fencing.
- 6.3. Approximately 0.15ha of grassland will be lost to the footprint of the development.
- 6.4. Areas of grassland will be re-established within the gardens, and large areas of mixed native scrub are proposed in the east and west of the site to enhance the site for biodiversity, provide screening and contribute to the site's Biodiversity Net Gain.
- 6.5. The retained areas of vegetated bank will be enhanced with native hedgerow planting to increase the structural and species diversity of this linear habitat feature and a new species rich hedgerow will be planted alongside the driveway.

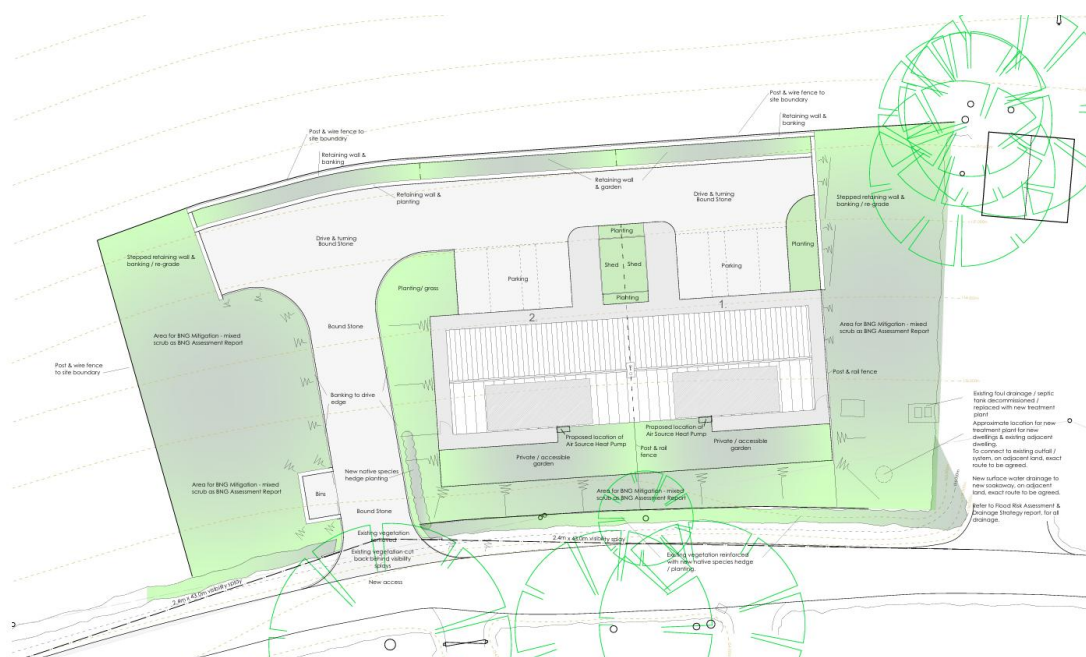


Image 2: Proposed Site Plan (Brimble Lea, Dec 2025)

Designated Sites

- 6.6. The site falls within a SSSI Impact Risk Zone for Heath Hill Farm SSSI, which lies c.738m to the west. The type and scale of development proposed does not meet the criteria set out by Natural England for which a significant effect on the SSSI is considered likely. As such, impacts on statutory designated sites are considered unlikely.
- 6.7. Without suitable mitigation measures, there is potential for the proposed development to impact the nearest Local Wildlife Sites: Top Wood and Writh Coppice. Potential impacts could arise from noise and vibration during construction, pollution during construction and lighting impacts during construction and operation. The following mitigation measures will be implemented during the construction phase to avoid impacts on the Local Wildlife Sites.
- A 50m buffer will be maintained between the site and Top Wood, with no machinery or construction activities permitted in this area.
 - No lighting will be permitted during the construction phase of the development, and all works will take place during daylight hours.
 - Lower vibration techniques will be used where feasible (e.g. bored rather than driven piling, hydraulic rather than percussive breakers) to minimise vibration impacts.
 - Well-maintained, modern plant with effective silencing will be used and all equipment will be turned off when not in active use rather than idling to minimise noise disturbance.
 - Appropriate pollution control measures will be employed, with reference to available guidance, including the Environment Agencies Guidance for Pollution Prevention documents (GPP), to ensure that detrimental impacts to the Local Wildlife Sites are avoided. This will ensure impacts to the wider landscape as a result of surface run-off, spillage and pollution arising throughout the construction phase are also avoided.
- 6.8. These mitigation measures will also help to protect the nearby areas of Priority Habitat.

Bats

- 6.9. There are no potential roosting features on-site or sufficiently close to the site as to warrant further investigation.
- 6.10. The proposals are relatively small in scale and include only a small amount of habitat removal. Post-development, the site will include areas of mixed scrub, re-instated grassland and an enhanced vegetated bank with native hedgerow planting.
- 6.11. The removal of a section of the bank to facilitate the access and visibility splays is unlikely to have a detrimental impact on bats, as the vegetation along Top Lane already has an inconsistent structure, with numerous gaps for driveways and gateways. Furthermore, the adjacent trees overhang the section to be removed to some extent, meaning canopy connectivity will be retained for bats. Once established, the new hedgerow planting along the bank will enhance this linear corridor for commuting and foraging bats.
- 6.12. There will be no lighting during the construction phase of the project, and therefore there will be no lighting impacts on bats.
- 6.13. Any necessary lighting during the operational phase will need to consider position, duration, type of light source, spectra and level of lighting in accordance with Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night Guidance Note 08/23 (BCT).
- 6.14. The use of artificial lighting is to be limited to the essential minimum throughout the site, and any lighting to be used should avoid upward pointing lights, with the spread of light being kept near to or below the horizontal, i.e., directed to where the light is required with no vertical or horizontal spill onto nearby habitats.
- 6.15. Lighting must not be directed at or towards boundary habitats and Top Lane must be kept as a dark corridor to allow all species to utilise it for commuting and foraging.
- 6.16. The following lighting is recommended: LED luminaires should be used / lighting with a warm white light source (2700Kelvin or lower) / lighting with peak wavelengths higher than 550nm. This will avoid the components of light most disturbing to bats.
- 6.17. If all other options have been explored, accessories such as hoods, covers, louvers and shields can be used to avoid excessive light spill.
- 6.18. Specialist glazing options could be utilised to reduce light transmission, along with recessed internal lighting.

- 6.19. With the proposed mitigation and compensation, the residual impact on foraging and commuting bats is considered to be neutral.

Birds

- 6.20. In the absence of mitigation, the clearance of the section of vegetated bank has the potential to disturb or destroy nesting birds.
- 6.21. To protect any reptiles, amphibians and small mammals that might be sheltering within the bank, the removal of the section of bank will be carried out within the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive) and will therefore be preceded by a check for active birds' nests undertaken by an ecologist. If no birds' nests are found, works can proceed within 48 hours following the precautionary methods outlined below. However, if an active birds nest is found, then works must stop and an appropriate buffer installed around the nest (usually 5m). The buffer must remain in place until the ecologist confirms the young have fledged.
- 6.22. With the inclusion of the mitigation measures above the overall residual effect will be neutral.

Reptiles and Amphibians

- 6.23. Clearance of the grassland and the section of bank could harm or disturb any reptiles, amphibians or small mammals that are present.
- 6.24. A precautionary approach to the clearance of the section of bank and grassland will be followed to protect reptiles and any other wildlife that might be present such as amphibians and small mammals. All clearance will take place outside of winter when reptiles, amphibians and small mammals are more active and can move out of the way more freely. Vegetation should initially be cut to 30cm in height followed by a second cut to ground level 24 hours later. The cut to ground level will be overseen by an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW), who will carry out a fingertip search if and when required. This will ensure any wildlife present is able to move out of harm's way into the adjacent areas of retained habitat. All habitat clearance will be carried out using hand tools.
- 6.25. If a great crested newt or an unexpected number of reptiles or common amphibians are found when the ECoW is not present, work should stop and an ecologist contacted for advice.

6.26. Building materials which could be used by reptiles or amphibians for shelter should be stored above ground level (e.g. on pallets), so they are less accessible to reptiles and amphibians.

6.27. With the inclusion of the mitigation measures above, the overall residual effect is considered to be neutral.

General Wildlife Protection Measures

6.28. Although it is not anticipated that there will be any direct impacts on hedgehog or badger during the construction phase, given they are highly mobile, the following good practice measures will be adhered to:

- A walkover of the site and surrounding area will be carried out by an ecologist within 3 months of the commencement of works to look for any new evidence of badger.
- Trenches will be covered at the end of each working day and any temporarily exposed pipes will be capped to prevent hedgehogs and badgers gaining access during the night; and
- Any trenches/pits will be inspected each morning to ensure no animals have become trapped overnight.

7. ECOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENTS

- 7.1. The applicant has committed to providing the following ecological enhancements, which will provide additional bat roosting and bird nesting opportunities on-site:
- 2 x Habibat 003 bird nest boxes (or similar) will be installed on north facing elevations in the fabric of the new dwellings. These boxes should be positioned as high as possible with access unimpeded by trees.
 - 2 x Habibat 001 (or similar) integrated bat boxes will be installed in south-facing elevations of the proposed dwellings. The boxes should be installed at least 2.5 – 4m above ground level.
- 7.2. Fences around and within the site (including garden fences) shall incorporate 130mm holes at ground level to allow the free movement of hedgehogs and other wildlife.
- 7.3. It is recommended that new planting uses native species of trees and shrubs, including species producing flowers and fruit. These will provide foraging and nesting opportunities for birds, and will provide habitat for a wide range of invertebrate species.
- 7.4. All biodiversity enhancements shall be maintained in perpetuity.

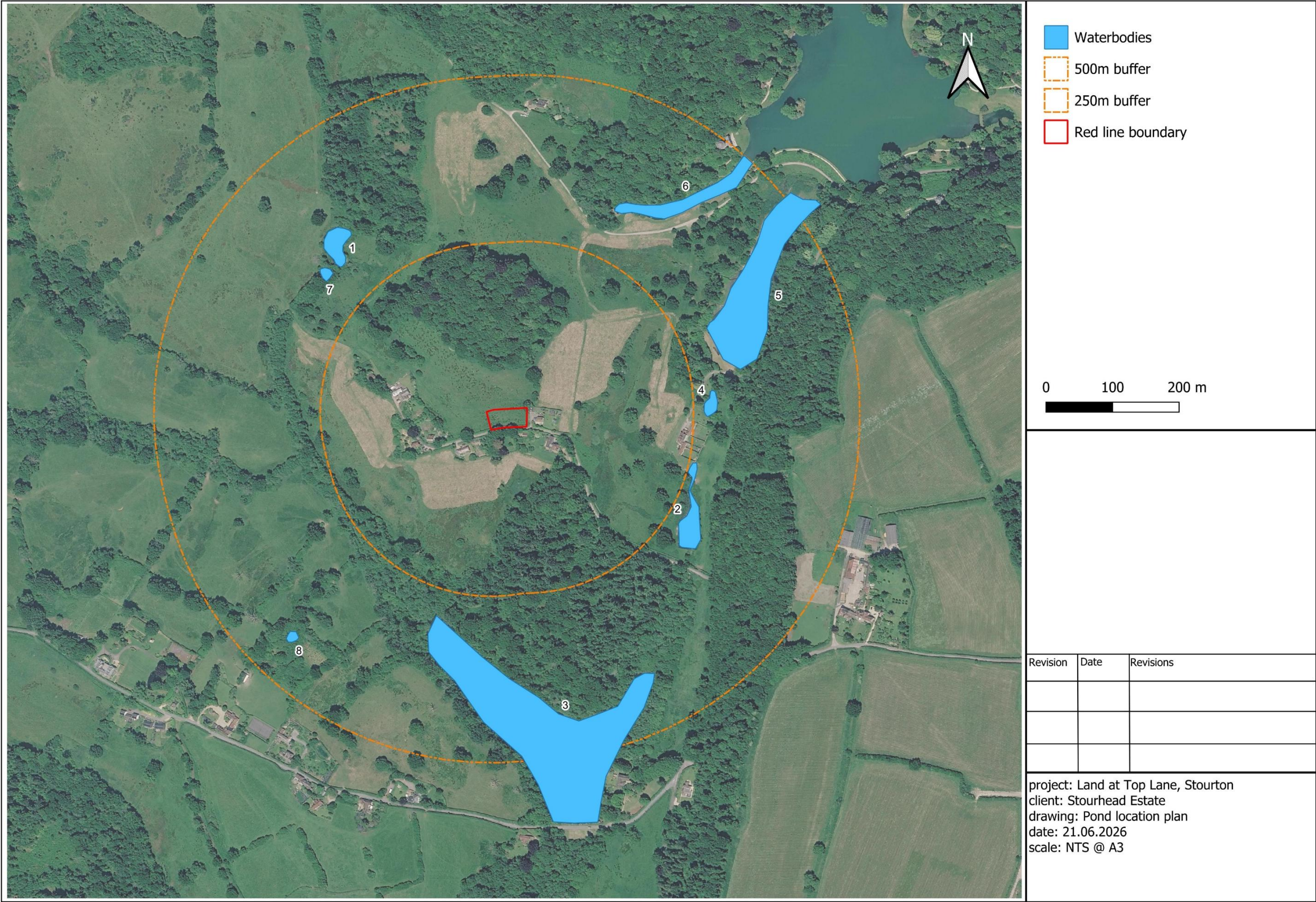
8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1. The site forms part of a wider landscape of higher-value habitats, including ancient woodland, parkland, lakes and species-rich grassland associated with the Stourhead Estate.
- 8.2. The habitats on-site provide some suitability for foraging and commuting bats, foraging and nesting birds, and the terrestrial phases of reptiles and amphibians, although in each case this is considered to be of low to moderate value relative to the surrounding landscape. No evidence of badger, otter or water vole was recorded on-site, and the habitats are considered unsuitable to support hazel dormouse.
- 8.3. With the implementation of precautionary working methods and mitigation measures, which include phased vegetation clearance outside the nesting bird season, a pre-commencement badger walkover, reasonable avoidance measures for reptiles and amphibians, and a sensitive lighting strategy, impacts on protected and notable species are considered likely to be minimal, with an overall residual effect of neutral.
- 8.4. The proposals include the enhancement of the retained vegetated bank with native hedgerow planting, a new species-rich hedgerow along the access driveway, and areas of native mixed scrub planting, together with integrated bat and bird boxes.
- 8.5. Assuming implementation of the mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures set out in this report, the proposed development is considered to conform to relevant local planning policy and national legislation relating to biodiversity and protected species.

APPENDIX 1: BASELINE HABITAT PLAN



APPENDIX 2: POND LOCATION PLAN



APPENDIX 3: SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



Offsite hedgerow and trees along eastern boundary



Grassland field taken from north west corner of site looking south east



Vegetated bank along southern site boundary and Top Lane



Vegetated bank along southern site boundary – site side



Pond 1



Pond 2