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& environmental services

Middledean,

Swallowcliffe,

Salisbury, SP3 5NY

Ecology Assessment

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Contents

		Page
1.0	Summary	4
2.0	Introduction	5
3.0	Methodology	6
4.0	Results and Analysis	8
5.0	Requirements and Recommendations	13

Appendices

Appendix A: Site location

Appendix B: Existing aerial

Appendix C: Proposals

Appendix D: Protected sites, habitats and species data from MAGiC database within 2km

Appendix E: Mitigation and enhancements

Appendix F: Protected species legislation

1.0 Summary

The owner is applying for a change of use from farmland to residential for a small area of land (0.08 Hectares) that they own in order to bring the ha-ha feature within their curtilage and extend their garden. Both areas of grassland have similar floral diversity and would be considered to be Modified Grassland although one area is managed by grazing and the other is managed by mowing and removing the arisings.

The proposals will have a negligible impact on Biodiversity and protected species as most of the sheep grazed land in the wider field will be retained and managed in the same way. There is no separation between the two areas of grassland currently, other than by the ha-ha. A pond is located adjacent to the land, this will be unimpacted by the proposals.

It is unlikely that the proposal will decrease the biodiversity value of the area of land and therefore it would be considered exempt from the mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements.

To ensure there is a Biodiversity Net Gain a Swift Nest Box will be attached to the exterior of the existing house. The haha feature will be retained as this acts as a short wildlife corridor for amphibians and reptiles. Ten new native or fruit bearing trees will be planted within the grounds of the dwelling.

2.0 Introduction

Background

2.1 Peach Ecology was commissioned in July 2025 to carry out an ecological assessment of the change of use application at Middledean, Swallowcliffe, Salisbury, SP3 5NY (central Grid Reference: ST 96890 26786) (Appendix A) laid out as shown in Appendix B. This report will be submitted to Wiltshire Council for permission for the change of use from farmland to residential usage as shown in Appendix C.

Description of site and surrounding area

2.2 The site consists of an area of Modified Grassland used for grazing sheep that is immediately adjacent to the garden of a property, the garden is all lawn in the area adjacent to where the garden extension is proposed. The grassland has a ha-ha at the boundary between the garden and grazing land and a pond is located immediately to the north, the pond was practically dry at the time of survey. The surrounding land is a mix of arable and grazing land with strips of woodland, hedgerows and residential land within 1km. To the east is grazing land; to the north is Bottom Road with a strip of woodland and arable land beyond; to the south is grazing land that is separated by a hedgerow from some arable land and to the west beyond the house and garden is more grazing land.

Brief

2.3 The main objectives of the PEA are:

- To assess the potential for protected and notable species and determine if the change of use will cause an ecological impact on them
- To assess the habitat types on site and determine if the change of use will cause decrease the biodiversity value
- To provide recommendations for mitigation and enhancement measures

3.0 Methodology

Desk Study

3.1 This involved gathering ecological data relating to statutory nature conservation sites from within 2km as shown in Appendix D. Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) a DEFRA run website was used along with Ordnance Survey maps and aerial images, including historic aerials, to check for relevant data on notable habitats and species nearby, including European Protected Species license data and wildlife corridors where the site connects into the surrounding area.

Site Assessment

3.2 The initial site survey was undertaken on the 8th July 2025. The survey employed techniques based on standard Phase I Habitat Survey methodology (CIEEM, 2016). Habitat types on and adjacent to the site were identified according to standard habitat definitions (UKHabs). The collection of botanical information focused on the dominant and key indicator species for each habitat type. The site survey included an assessment of the habitats immediately adjacent to the site, where possible, to look at its value within the local landscape. Indicative methodologies for the most likely protected and notable species that could occur on site or adjacent to the site and be impacted by the proposals are set out below.

Bats

3.3 No trees or buildings are impacted by the proposals. The bat foraging and commuting value of the site was assessed to determine if the change of use would impact bats.

Badgers & Hedgehogs

3.4 During the field survey, the site and a surrounding buffer (typically 100m) was systematically walked to identify badger & hedgehog signs, including setts (main, annex, subsidiary, and outlier), latrines, foraging evidence (snuffle holes, digging), well-trodden paths, scratching posts, and footprints as well as droppings and deep piles of leaves. Findings are evaluated to determine the impact of the change of use on these species.

Birds

3.5 Any habitat features, for example, scrub, trees, hedgerows and buildings which could potentially be used by nesting birds, were surveyed and any nesting activity was noted. Any bird records were also noted down during the survey in relation to the habitats. The value of the site to ground nesting birds was assessed.

Dormice

3.6 The site was assessed to ascertain habitat suitability and identify any signs of dormouse presence. Key features such as species-rich hedgerows, woodland edges, scrub, and areas with a diverse shrub layer (including hazel, honeysuckle, and bramble) are noted as potential nesting or foraging sites. The survey includes a search for indirect evidence such as gnawed hazelnuts, which have a characteristic smooth,

bevelled edge. Findings are mapped, and the presence of suitable habitat may indicate the need for further presence/absence surveys using nest tubes or nest boxes.

Reptiles

3.7 The habitats on site were assessed for their suitability for reptile species. Key features such as rough grassland, hedgerows, woodland edges, scrub, and open ground with refugia (e.g., log piles, stone heaps, and compost heaps) are noted as potential basking, foraging, or hibernation sites. Observers record any direct sightings of reptiles or indirect evidence such as shed skins. Findings are mapped to determine whether further presence/absence surveys are required.

Great Crested Newts

3.8 Any ponds on site and within the vicinity of the site were checked for features such as aquatic vegetation, shading, and water quality etc in line with a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) for Great Crested Newts. These were used to assess their potential as breeding sites. Terrestrial habitats, including grassland, scrub, hedgerows, and woodland, are evaluated for their suitability for foraging, sheltering, and hibernation. The survey also involved searching for indirect evidence, such as egg-laying vegetation or aquatic invertebrates indicative of newt presence. Findings are mapped, and the presence of suitable habitats may trigger further targeted surveys, such as eDNA testing or presence/absence surveys.

4.0 Results and Analysis

Desk study

4.1 The following statutory designated sites were identified within 2 km of the proposed development site:

- **Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs** Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The site is located within the Cranborne Chase AONB. This is a National Landscape, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and covers 380 square miles of countryside, overlapping the boundaries of Wiltshire, Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset. It is a diverse natural landscape with a rich archaeological and historical significance. Cranborne Chase offers areas of rare chalk grasslands, scientifically important ancient woodlands, and chalk escarpments. The downland hillsides and chalk river valleys have a distinct and recognisable character. The primary purpose of the National Landscape designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area – now and for future generations..
- **Prescombe Down** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located approximately 2km to the south-east. Prescombe Down is a botanically rich downland site with a flora characteristic of the south and south-west chalk grassland. Much of the vegetation is dominated by a nationally restricted sedge species and the fine sward comprises a wide diversity of herbs and grasses. In addition the downland supports a rich butterfly community, including some scarce species. Such extensive areas of unimproved calcareous grassland have become increasingly rare with the intensification of agriculture and are vulnerable to further development. The site is designated as an SAC for its Annex I habitat (Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) - important orchid sites) and Annex II species (Early gentian *Gentianella anglica*).

4.2 The desk study considered potential impacts of the proposed development on these ecological receptors. Given the small scale of the proposals, the extension of an existing garden, the likelihood of significant effects on these designated sites is negligible as no construction work is proposed. The underlying substrate of the area for the proposed garden extension is a freely draining slightly acid loamy soil and not chalk. The development site is separated from more chalky areas by fields, a road and hedges and the limited footprint of the works means potential impacts on statutory sites, protected species and habitats are likely to be low.

Site Assessment

4.3 The following habitats were recorded on-site during the field survey. Each habitat is described in terms of its structure, ecological value, and potential ecological constraints.

- Modified Grassland
- Vegetated Garden
- Pond

Modified Grassland

4.4 The area where the existing lawn is proposed to extend into is an area of sheep grazed grassland (Photo 1 and 2) that would be classified as Modified Grassland. The grassland does not meet the UKHabs criteria for Other Neutral Grassland. The sward consists of over 90% Grass including Bent Grass, Sweet Vernal Grass, False Oat Grass, Cocksfoot with some Yarrow, Soft Rush, Nettles, Springy Turf Moss and Fox and Cubs. There are less than 9 species per m^2. There is a ha-ha with a wall to the western side and a dip where there are clumps of Soft Rush and Yellow Flag Iris which indicates it is a bit more damp. The grassland is grazed by sheep although it had also been mown at the time of survey. There appears to have a been a fence between the lawn (Vegetated Garden) to the west and the grassland but this has been removed and there are signs that both areas have been grazed by sheep due to the present of droppings found throughout both habitats.

Photo 1: Looking south with the Modified Grassland to the left of the photo and the lawn to the right

Photo 2: Looking north with the garden to the left and Modified Grassland to the east

Vegetated Garden

4.5 The lawn (Photo 3 and 4) is distinct from the Modified Grassland although both have been grazed by sheep, the lawn appears to be mown more regularly as it is part of the residential curtilage. There are no fences between the two habitats. The species are similar in both areas although the garden is slightly more modified with species including Dandelion and White Clover present, there is also more Fox and Cubs. The lawn would be classified as Vegetated Garden.

Photo 3: Looking north with the lawn to the left

Photo 4: Looking west at the ha-ha – this will be retained

Pond

4.6 A pond (Photo 5) is located just to the north of the area where the change of use is proposed. The pond was practically dry at the time of survey due to the hot and dry summer.

4.7 The pond will be retained and will be unimpacted by the change of use.

Photo 5: The pond to the north of the garden

Protected Species Assessment

Birds

4.8 There were no birds present on site at the time of survey and bird nesting habitat will be unimpacted by the proposal. A new swift box will be added to the existing house to increase Biodiversity on site.

Bats

4.9 Three European Protected Species licences for bats were granted within 2km:

- 2014-4572-EPS-MIT to the west for Brown Long-ear
- 2019-42773-EPS-MIT to the west for Brown Long-ear and Lesser horseshoe
- 2020-48434-EPS-MIT to the west for Barbastelle, Brandts, Common and Soprano Pipistrelle

4.10 The proposals are localised to the site so it is unlikely that there will be an impact on bat populations further afield or their commuting or foraging habitat.

4.11 There were no suitable features on site for roosting or commuting bats.

4.12 No new lighting is proposed.

Reptiles & Amphibians

4.13 The vegetation on site is unsuitable for reptiles, the grass is grazed and the local area has large areas of arable and grazing land that are not suitable for reptiles. Reptiles will not be impacted by the proposals.

4.14 The pond was dry at the time of survey so no further analysis for Great Crested Newts was possible. A HSI assessment of the pond was undertaken and this found that the pond had a score of 0.7 indicating that is was ‘Good’ for Newts.

4.15 The proposals will not result in a loss of the pond or terrestrial habitat suitable for amphibians – the lower dipped part of the ha-ha could make a contribution to amphibians as a wildlife corridor, this will be retained.

4.16 The site is located within a Green Zone for Great Crested Newts. Green Risk Zones for great crested newts are areas where the newts are sparsely distributed and have low to moderate suitability for habitat, meaning they may be present but are not in key population centers.

Habitat Suitability Index Number	Habitat Suitability Index	Site Score
1	Geographic Location	1
2	Pond Area	0.2
3	Permanence	1
4	Water Quality	0.67
5	Shade	1
6	Waterfowl	1
7	Fish	1
8	Pond Count	0.65
9	Terrestrial Habitat	0.67
10	Macrophytes	0.75

Table 1: Habitat Suitability Index for Great Crested Newt Likelihood

Other

4.17 There are no other ecological issues associated with the change of use proposal.

Biodiversity Net Gain

4.18 A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment is not necessary for the change of use of the land as it is unlikely that there will be a decrease in Biodiversity Value.

5.0 Requirements and Recommendations

Birds

5.1 One swift box will be attached to the western elevation under the eaves

Landscaping

5.2 The ha-ha feature will be retained.

5.3 Ten new native or fruit bearing trees will be planted in the garden of the existing house.

Appendix A: Site location

Appendix B: Existing aerial

Appendix C: Proposals

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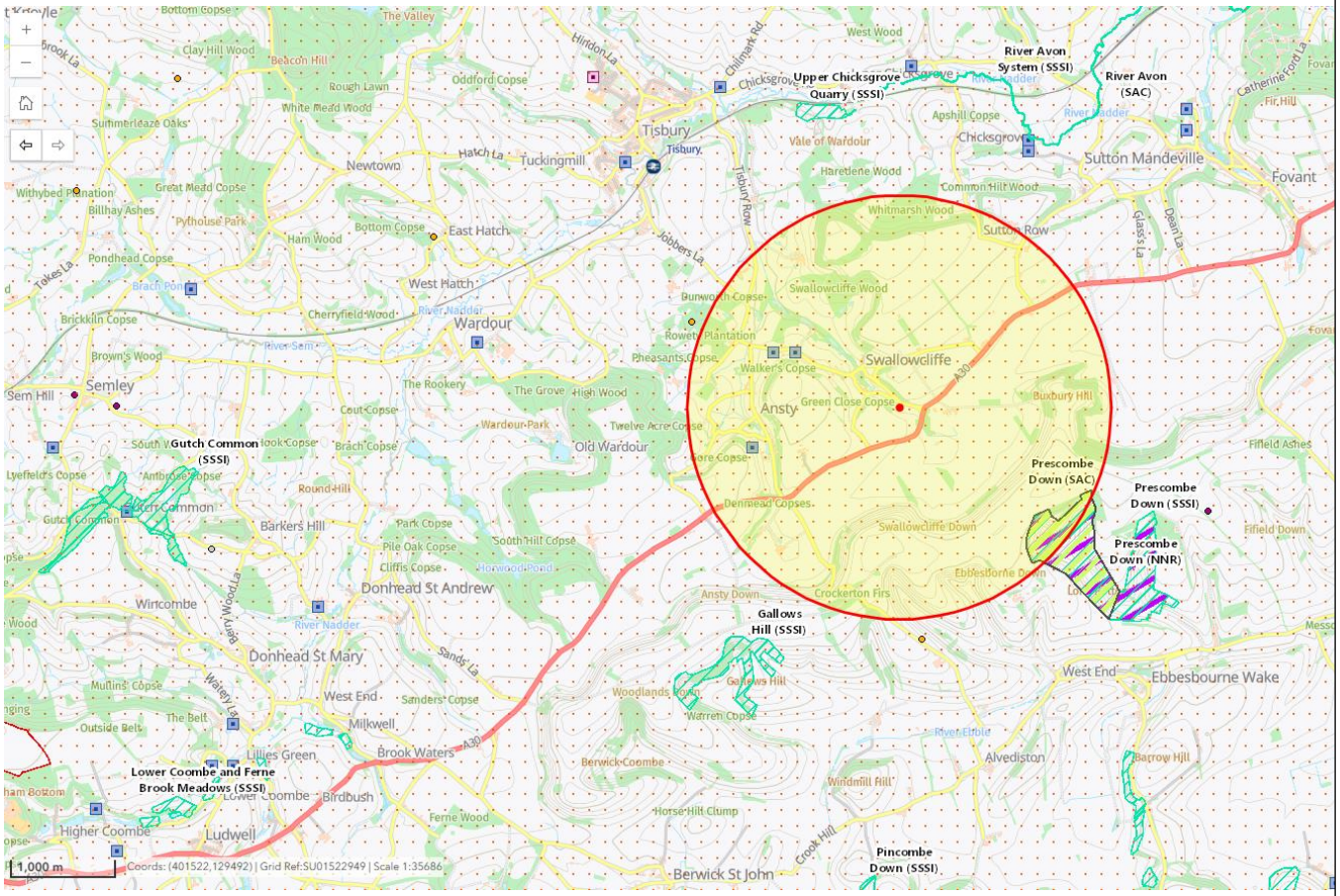
Location Plan

Scale 1:1250

1:1250 0 10 20 30 40 50

Proposed garden extension
Image © 2025 Airbus
Google Earth

Appendix D: Protected sites, habitats and species data from MAGiC database within 2km



Legend

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (England)
- Local Nature Reserves (England)
- National Nature Reserves (England)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)
- Special Areas of Conservation (England)
- Special Protection Areas (England)

Granted European Protected Species Applications (England)

- Amphibian
- Bat
- Cetacean
- Invertebrate
- Other Mammal
- Plant
- Reptile
- Great Crested Newt Class Survey Licence Returns (England)

Great Crested Newt Pond Surveys 2017 - 2019

- 10 FIG present
- 10 FIG absent
- 10 FIG inconclusive
- 8 FIG present
- 6 FIG present
- 4 FIG present
- 4 FIG absent
- 4 FIG inconclusive

Appendix E: Mitigation plan

Appendix F: Protected species legislation

Amphibians

Natterjack toad, pool frog and great crested newt are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). They are also afforded additional protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Natterjack toad, common toad, great crested newt and northern pool frog are also Species of Principal Importance (SPIs).

Reptiles

Smooth snake and sand lizard are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). They are afforded additional protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Adder, grass snake, common lizard and slow-worm are all protected from killing and injury under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). All UK reptile species are SPIs.

Birds

All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This includes damage and destruction of their nests whilst in use, or construction. Species listed under Schedule 1 of the Act, such as barn owl, are afforded protection from disturbance during the nesting season.

The following 50 bird species are SPIs: lesser redpoll, aquatic warbler, marsh warbler, skylark, white-fronted goose, tree pipit, scaup, bittern, dark-bellied brent goose, stone-curlew, nightjar, hen harrier, northern harrier, hawfinch, corncrake, cuckoo, Bewick's swan, lesser spotted woodpecker, corn bunting, cirl bunting, yellowhammer, reed bunting, red grouse, herring gull, black-tailed godwit, linnet, twite, Savi's warbler, grasshopper warbler, woodlark, common scoter, yellow wagtail, spotted flycatcher, curlew, house sparrow, tree sparrow, grey partridge, wood warbler, willow tit, marsh tit, dunnock, Balearic shearwater, bullfinch, roseate tern, turtle dove, starling, black grouse, song thrush, ring ouzel and lapwing.

Birds are also categorised according to their level of conservation concern indicated by their population status and stability. These are known as the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC4), Red, Amber and Green lists (Eaton et al, 2015). Where red and amber species are present, their conservation status should be considered in determining the likely impacts of proposed projects and plans.

The conservation status of birds recorded during the survey was assessed against the following criteria:

- EC Birds Directive 2009 Annex 1,
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (As Amended) Schedule 1, (Table 1, WCA1)
- Natural Environment and rural communities (NERC) Act 2006 – Section 41
- Red and Amber lists of Birds of Conservation Concern in England (BoCC4)

Badger

Badger is protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Under this legislation it is an offence to kill or injure a badger; to damage, destroy or block access to a badger sett; or to disturb badger in its sett. The Act also states the conditions for the Protection of Badgers licence requirements.

Bats

All bat species are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), as detailed above. Bats are further protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), making it an offence to:

- Deliberately or recklessly damage or destroy any structure or place which bat(s) use for shelter or protection.
- Disturb bat(s) while occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection.
- Obstruct access to any structure or place which they use for shelter or protection.

Furthermore, seven bat species are SPIs, covered under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. These include western barbastelle, Bechstein's, noctule, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared, lesser horseshoe and greater horseshoe.

Hazel dormouse

Hazel dormouse is protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). It is afforded additional protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), including obstruction to a place of shelter or rest.

Hazel dormouse is also a SPI.

Hedgerow

Under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 it is against the law to remove or destroy certain hedgerows without permission from the LPA, which are also the enforcement body for offences created by the Regulations. LPA permission is normally required before removing hedges that are at least 20 m in length, more than 30 years old and contain certain plant species. The authority will assess the importance of the hedgerow using criteria set out in the regulations. The regulations do not apply to hedgerows within the curtilage of, or marking a boundary of the curtilage of, a dwelling house.

Hedgerow is a Habitat of Principal Importance (HPI).

Other mammals

West European hedgehog, brown hare, mountain hare, pine marten, harvest mouse, polecat and red squirrel are all SPIs.

The following mammals are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended): wildcat, brown hare (Schedule 5A), mountain hare (Schedule 5A), pine marten and red squirrel.

Non-native invasive plant species

Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) is a list of non-native plant species for which Section 14 of the Act applies. It is an offence to plant, or otherwise cause to grow in the wild species listed under Schedule 9 of the act. These include, but are not limited to:

- Himalayan balsam
- Cotoneaster sp.
- Japanese knotweed
- Giant hogweed

Habitats of Principal Importance

Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 details 56 HPIs, of which the following could be present in south-east England: Lowland calcareous grassland, Lowland dry acid grassland, Lowland meadows, Lowland Heathland, Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land, Lowland fens, Lowland raised bog, Reedbeds, Lowland beech and yew woodland, Lowland mixed deciduous woodland and Wet woodland.

Impacts to HPI are of material planning consideration.

Ancient woodland and veteran trees

The NPPF 2021 states that 'Planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss'. In addition, Natural England's standing advice for ancient woodland indicates that a 15 m buffer is retained between ancient woodland and any works or development. Ancient woodlands, and ancient and veteran trees, may also be protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Details the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied, particularly to contribute to the Government's commitment to halt the decline of biodiversity. When assessing planning applications, LPAs should have regard to conserving and enhancing biodiversity by applying a number of principals, including:

- Avoiding impacts to biodiversity through appropriate site selection.
- Mitigating residual impacts.
- Encouraging the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity.
- Preventing the development of protected sites, such as SSSIs.
- Refusing permission where habitats that cannot be recreated, such as ancient woodland, would be lost.
- Encouraging good design that limits light pollution.
- Relevant paragraphs in the NPPF (2021) are detailed below.

Paragraph Number	Detail
174	"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by…minimising impact on and providing net gains for biodiversity" Protection of sites of biological values Preventing new and existing development from adverse impacts to soil, air, water or noise Development should help improve local conditions
175	Maintenance and enhancement of networks of habitats and green infrastructure; plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale
179	"To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should: a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity."
180	"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."
181	The following should be given the same protection as habitats sites: a) potential Special Protection Areas and possible Special Areas of Conservation; b) listed or proposed Ramsar sites64; and c) sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on habitats sites, potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation, and listed or proposed Ramsar sites.
185	"Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should: … c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation."

Environment Act (2021)

The Environment Act (2021) achieved Royal Assent in November 2021.

The Environment Act (2021) makes a provision for biodiversity net gain to be a condition of planning permission in England, however, it is not anticipated that a 10% biodiversity net gain will be mandatory until 2023. When it does become mandatory, planning applications will need to demonstrate a 10% biodiversity net gain can be met. A biodiversity net gain plan must be submitted and must include:

a) information about the steps taken or to be taken to minimise the adverse effect of the development on the biodiversity of the onsite habitat and any other habitat
b) the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat,
c) the post-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat,
d) any registered offsite biodiversity gain allocated to the development and the biodiversity value of that gain in relation to the development,
e) any biodiversity credits purchased for the development.

It should be noted however, that the NPPF (2021) as set out below on does require a project to provide a measurable net gain for biodiversity.

Countryside and Right of Way Act 2000

Amends and strengthens the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It also details habitats and species for which conservation measures should be promoted.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

Section 40 of the Act places a duty on local planning authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England whilst carrying out their normal functions. Section 41 comprises a list of Habitats of Principal Importance (HPIs) and Species of Principal Importance (SPIs) which should be considered.

The LPA will need to have particular regard to any relevant local nature recovery strategies, and any relevant species conservation strategy or protected site strategy prepared by Natural England.

Hedgerows Regulations 1997

Under these regulations it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly remove, or cause or permits another person to remove, a hedgerow. Important hedgerows are defined in Section 4 of the Regulations. This includes hedgerows that have existed for over 30 years or satisfies at least one criteria listed in Part II of Schedule 1.

Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996

Under this act wild mammals are protected from the intentional unnecessary suffering by crushing and asphyxiation.

ODPM Circular 06/05: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and Their Impact within the Planning System (2005)

The Government's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Circular 06/05 (ODPM 2005) presents the legal requirement for planning authorities with regard to statutory designated sites. Planning approval should not be granted where impacts to statutory designated sites that are not connected to the site maintenance for nature conservation, or will have a significant effect on the site's conservation objectives and/or affect the site's integrity. Permission may be granted if the proposed development overrides public interest.The presence of a protected species is a material planning consideration. The Circular clearly outlines that it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before planning permission is granted. Otherwise, all relevant considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision.