

TECHNICAL NOTE: ECOLOGY WALKOVER AND CONSTRAINTS SUMMARY

Bellway Homes Ltd. (Southwest)

Melksham Road, Holt Application

18th May 2026

J12541/IRM/PJP

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Technical Note has been prepared by FPCR Environment and Design Ltd., on behalf of Bellway Homes (South West) Ltd. It provides an Ecological Appraisal related to a walkover survey undertaken on the site at Melksham Road, Holt, Wiltshire.
- 1.2 The site measures approximately 3.7ha in area and encompasses a single improved grassland field, containing areas of tall ruderal and ephemeral habitat, largely enclosed by native species hedgerows and fencing. The field was previously used as a commercial equine cross-country course with an unmanaged varied sward length. The surrounding land-use to the west consists of residential buildings, with a wide expanse of pastoral and arable farmland extending to the north, east and south.
- 1.3 The survey was instructed as an update to previous ecological survey work conducted by FPCR Environment & Design Ltd. during 2021, 2022, 2024 and 2025. These surveys informed the outline planning application (ref: PL/2022/03315) for a residential development for up to 90 dwellings, with 1.27 ha of green infrastructure. The walkover detailed in this technical note was undertaken to provide an update to the baseline ecological data for the site, to ascertain whether the ecological constraints previously identified remain consistent, to support a Section 73 amendment to the existing Reserved Matters consent (appeal ref: APP/Y3940/W/23/3315432) for Bellway Homes to take on the scheme, in lieu of Bewley Homes.
- 1.4 A full suite of ecological surveys have been conducted previously, and further ecological survey can be largely scoped out due to the unchanged nature of the site since these surveys were conducted, although since the previous surveys a new water body has established in the south west corner of the site, resulting from remediation works undertaken in the latter half of 2024 for the approved Reserved Matters application.
- 1.5 This technical note should be read in conjunction with the 2023 Ecological Impact Assessment and 2025 technical note, which provide a detailed overview of the ecological constraints and opportunities identified, and recommendations for mitigation and compensation, where appropriate. Where the updated site walkover found no material change to the impacts on the ecological receptors, these have been omitted, with the findings and recommendations detailed in the Ecological Impact Assessment at the time of outline planning consent considered to remain valid and should be followed accordingly.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 Previous site walkovers were conducted on 18th April 2024 and 6th May 2025 to review baseline conditions subsequent to the surveys conducted to inform the outline planning consent during 2021/22. This update focusses on a further walkover, conducted on the 5th May 2026. These surveys were used to classify the broad habitat types present on-site, and to highlight any changes to the site that have occurred in the intervening period since the initial survey was undertaken in November 2021.
- 2.2 Surveys were undertaken by Paul Perrins and John Williams (principal ecologists at FPCR, who have achieved FISC level 3 and level 4, respectively). With the 2026 update being undertaken by Katie Oliver (FISC Level 4). The walkovers followed the standard UKHab Survey technique (version 2.0), as recommended by Natural England¹ and the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)².

Ground-Based Tree Surveys

- 2.3 During the extended phase 1 habitat, trees that were considered likely to be directly affected by the proposals were assessed for the presence of Potential Roosting Features (PRF) for bats such as the following (Based on P16, British Standard 8596:2015 Surveying for bats in trees and woodland, October 2015):
- Natural holes (e.g., knot holes) arising from naturally shed branches or branches previously pruned back to a branch collar.
 - Man-made holes (e.g., cavities that have developed from flush cuts or cavities created by branches tearing out from parent stems).
 - Woodpecker holes.
 - Cracks/splits in stems or branches (horizontal and vertical).
 - Partially detached, loose bark plates.
 - Cankers (caused by localised bark death) in which cavities have developed.
 - Other hollows or cavities, including butt rots.
 - Compression of forks with occluded bark, forming potential cavities.
 - Crossing stems or branches with suitable roosting space between.
 - Ivy stems with diameters in excess of 50mm with suitable roosting space behind (or where roosting space can be seen where a mat of thinner stems has left a gap between the mat and the trunk).
 - Bat or bird boxes.
 - Other suitable places of rest or shelter.

¹ Natural England (2014) *Protected species and development: advice for local planning authorities*. (updated 2021) [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protected-species-how-to-review-planning-applications> [Accessed 27/03/2024]

² CIEEM (2017) *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*, 2nd edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

- 2.4 Certain factors such as orientation of the feature, its height from the ground, the direct surroundings, and its location in respect to other features may enhance or reduce the potential value.

eDNA Sampling Survey

- 2.5 A test for environmental DNA (eDNA) for Great Crested Newts *Triturus cristatus* (GCN) was undertaken on the new onsite pond on the 12th May 2026, to determine the presence / absence of GCN, in accordance with the guidance set out in *Analytical and Methodological Development for Improved Surveillance of the Great Crested Newt, WC1067, Appendix 5. Technical advice note for field and laboratory sampling of great crested newt (Triturus cristatus) environmental DNA15*. This methodology has been approved by Natural England for the determination of GCN presence/ absence.
- 2.6 Sampling was undertaken using a kit obtained from ADAS and involved taking samples of agitated water from 20 discrete locations around the pond, and mixing thoroughly. 15 ml of this mixed water was then placed into each of six sterile sample tubes containing preservative, precipitates, and a DNA sequence that was used for degradation control. All samples were stored in accordance with the protocols provided by the laboratory. The samples were then transported under suitable conditions to the ADAS laboratory for analysis. Following analysis, results provided by the laboratory could have one of three outcomes which are described in *Table 1* below.

Table 1. Description of Possible eDNA Analysis Results

Result	Description
Positive	A positive result means that eDNA from GCN was detected and they have been present within the water in the 20 days preceding sampling. An eDNA score would be provided indicating the number of positive replicates from a series of twelve.
Negative	DNA from GCN was not detected; in the case of negative samples the DNA extract is further tested for PCR inhibitors and degradation of the sample.
Inconclusive	Controls indicate degradation or inhibition of the sample, therefore the lack of detection of GCN DNA is not conclusive evidence for determining the absence of the species in the sample provided. Degradation can occur through poor storage of the samples or kits, and inhibition can occur through unexpected chemicals in the sample.

3.0 RESULTS

Site Walkover

- 3.1 The update site walkover was undertaken on 5th May 2026 concluded the site was largely unchanged from the previous 2025 walkover, with conditions being consistent with the habitats described below.
- 3.2 In April 2024, most of the site consisted modified grassland (g4), which was previously managed by horse-grazing. This modified grassland was in 'good' condition, passing six out of seven criteria. The sward was dominated by perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*.

- 3.3 As of May 2025, the ongoing low intensity management and lack of continued grazing, meant the grassland composition transitioned, with red fescue *Festuca rubra* becoming dominant, and meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis* and Yorkshire fog establishing as abundant.
- 3.4 The shift in grass species assemblage between 2024 to 2025 has resulted in the grassland type being revised to 'other neutral grassland' (g3c). The species assemblage identified in 2026 remains consistent with those in 2025, with the grassland still considered to constitute other neutral grassland, in line with UK Habs version 2.0 classification.
- 3.5 Hedgerows constituted the majority of the site's boundaries, and where hedgerow was not present, following removal of hedgerows H3 and H4 under existing Reserved Matters consent, stock fencing or Heras fencing demarcated the site boundary. The retained hedgerows were of consistent composition and structure and were materially unchanged since the previous walkover in 2025.

Bats – Roosting Habitat

- 3.6 Details of the potential roost features on-site are described in *Table 2* and shown on *Figure 1: Baseline Habitat Plan*.

Table 2. Tree Roost Assessment Details

Tree Ref.	Tree Species	Potential Roost Features Present (if any)	Suitability for Roosting Bats
T1	English oak	Natural knot hole on southwest aspect (2m height).	Negligible
T2	Common lime	n/a	Negligible
T3	Common lime	n/a	Negligible
T4	Ash	n/a	Negligible
T5	English oak	Natural knot hole on southeast aspect (3m height), shallow. Torn out limb on southern aspect (5m height).	Low
T6	English oak	Knot holes/cavity from pruning on south aspect (3m height). Rotted out sections of branches on west aspect.	Low
T7	Crab apple	Butt rot at base of trunk. No external evidence of bat presence identified.	Moderate
T8	English oak	n/a	Negligible
T9	English oak	Natural knot hole on east aspect (3m height), small but sufficient for individual bat. Partially detached, plate-like bark.	Low
T10	English oak	n/a	Negligible
T11	Crab apple	Heavily matted ivy (>50mm) but insufficient for sheltering a bat.	Negligible
T12	English oak	n/a	Negligible
T13	English oak	Natural knot hole on northeast aspect (3m height), woodpecker hole on northwest aspect	Moderate

- 3.7 Following review of trees along the northern boundary, tree T1 was re-assessed as of negligible potential after the potential roost feature on the southwest aspect was ruled out via endoscope survey.
- 3.8 The remaining trees are retained within the boundary hedgerows, with a wide green corridor to be implemented around the south and southeast boundaries of the site, buffering the trees from direct impacts of development. These retained mature trees support the functionality of the commuting corridor the new GI provides and maintains permeability through the site and to neighbouring habitats, consistent with the scheme, as agreed under Reserved Matters consent.

Great Crested Newts

- 3.9 Since the previous surveys in 2025, the excavation that was conducted in the southwest corner of the site, for remedial works, has subsequently filled with water and formed a pond (referred to here as Pond P1). In view of the existing District Level Licence for the scheme, eDNA survey was undertaken to establish GCN presence. The results from the GCN eDNA testing on water from P1 were returned positive (Appendix A).
- 3.9 The location of pond 'P1' is mapped on *Figure 1*.

Badgers

- 3.10 The 2026 update survey found no signs, or evidence of, badger presence across the site, or immediately adjacent. While the species continues to be absent from the site, the hedgerow along the southern boundary and wider grassland across the field, continues to offer potential foraging habitat.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- 4.1 In the intervening period since acquisition, the grassland on site has continued to be managed at a low intensity and the assemblage remains consistent with that identified in 2025; comprising recently transitioned other neutral grassland of low ecological value.
- 4.2 Hedgerow H4 and part of hedgerow H3, both of low ecological value, were removed prior to 2025, since the initial surveys; however, their loss is considered to have a negligible effect on the overall ecological value of the site, given the poor condition and the lack of botanical and structural diversity of these hedges.
- 4.3 All of the mature trees bordering the site are to be retained and root protection areas enforced. Trees T9 and T13 remain within the proposed dark corridor along the southern boundary of the site, and trees T1, T5, T6, and T7 are unlikely to be subjected to greater illumination as a result of the proposals than their current baseline, given that they are adjacent to the B3107. As such, the scheme is not anticipated to result in direct damage, or disturbance to these trees. The impact of the proposals on these trees remains negligible.

Reptiles

- 4.4 Low populations of both slow worm *Anguis fragilis* and grass snake *Natrix natrix* have previously been recorded on site, predominantly within taller vegetation around the field margins, where the more varied sward height offers suitable habitat available for use by common reptiles.

- 4.5 The current management of the main bulk of the field makes the sward more uniform and unsuitable for reptiles, and consequently colonisation of the field by reptiles is considered unlikely, restricting them to peripheral hedgerows and field margins.
- 4.6 Precautionary working measures for vegetation removal will be implemented. Five artificial hibernacula will be created within the site boundary as part of the development proposals, consistent with the Reserved Matters consent (see *Figure 2: Ecological Parameters Plan*). These will be distributed around the site perimeters within suitable habitat in site-wide GI, including near to scrub/grassland interfaces and hedgerow bases.

Hedgehogs

- 4.7 Two hedgehog houses are to be included in the development proposals, within the green infrastructure at the site boundaries (mapped on *Figure 2*), as well as accessible routes across the site via a hedgehog highway.

Birds

- 4.8 All the mature trees bordering the site are to be retained, offering nesting opportunities for birds. The addition of new mixed native species scrub, tree planting, and residential gardens will provide new nesting and foraging resources for the generalist and urban-edge assemblage previously recorded; with twenty-five bird boxes installed across the new dwellings offering further improvement to the on-site provision for birds, particularly for notable, declining urban birds, such as house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, starling *Sternus vulgaris*, and swift *Apus apus* (mapped on *Figure 2*).
- 4.9 Removal of suitable nesting habitat should be undertaken outside the bird nesting season (March to September inclusive), or if not possible, subject to a pre-commencement survey and inspection by a suitably experienced ecologist. In the event an active nest is identified, a buffer will be implemented and the habitat retained in situ and undisturbed until the young have fledged, and this has been verified by the ecologist.

GCN

- 4.10 The new pond on-site is a relatively recently established one, having been incidentally formed following excavations conducted for remedial works in September 2024. The walkover in 2025 found the excavation to constitute no more than bare earth and was dry. In the intervening time however, the excavation has collected water and now holds standing water sufficient for use by newts. The positive eDNA result indicates it has established as a pond that has been colonised by GCN from ponds in the wider landscape.
- 4.11 Natural England will be notified of the updated baseline information with the new waterbody and GCN population, and an enquiry conducted to determine any required revision to the District Level Licence (DLL) for the approved scheme, if required.

APPENDIX A: eDNA Result Sheet – ADAS (May 2026)

Client:
12451, Victoria Palmer, FPCR Environment and Design
1040091-FPCR0VP, 12451, version 1



RSK ADAS Ltd
Spring Lodge
172 Chester Road
Helsby
WA6 0AR

Tel: 01159 229249
Email: Helen.Rees@adas.co.uk

www.adas.uk

Sample ID: ADAS-11067			
Client Identifier: New P1		Grid references/coordinates: 51.21344 21120.2	
Description: pond water samples in preservative		Condition on Receipt: Good	
Date of Receipt : 14/05/2026		Volume: Passed	
Determinant	Result	Method	Date of Analysis
Inhibition Control [†]	2 of 2	Real Time PCR	15/05/2026
Degradation Control [§]	Within limits	Real Time PCR	15/05/2026
Great Crested Newt*	2 of 12 (positive)	Real Time PCR	15/05/2026
Negative PCR Control (Nuclease Free Water)	0 of 4	Real Time PCR	As above for GCN
Positive PCR Control (GCN DNA 10 ⁻⁴ ng/μL) [#]	4 of 4	Real Time PCR	As above for GCN
Report Prepared by:	Dr Helen Rees	Report Issued by:	Dr Ben Maddison
Signed:		Signed:	
Position:	Director: Biotechnology	Position:	MD: Biotechnology
Date of preparation:	19/05/2026	Date of issue:	19/05/2026

eDNA analysis was carried out in accordance with the stipulated methodology found in the Technical Advice Note (WC1067 Appendix 5 Technical Advice Note) published by DEFRA and adopted by Natural England.

* If all PCR controls and extraction blanks give the expected results a sample is considered: negative for GCN if all of the replicates are negative; positive for GCN if one or more of the replicates are positive.

[†] Recorded as the number of positive replicate reactions at expected C_t value. If the expected C_t value is not

[§] No degradation is expected within time frame of kit preparation, sample collection and analysis.

[#] Additional positive controls (10⁻¹, 10⁻², 10⁻³ ng/μL) are also routinely run, results not shown here.

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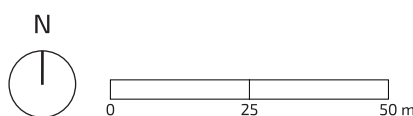


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Ecological Parameters

- Reptile Hibernacula Locations
- Hedgehog House Locations
- Bat Boxes
- Bird Box Approximate Locations

Retained Hedgerow

New Hedgerow

Bat Corridor

Sustainable Drainage

Mixed Scrub

Wildflower Grassland

date
20/05/26

drwn/chkd
IRM / PJP

client
Bellway Homes Ltd. (South West)

project
**Land off Melksham Road,
Holt**

title
ECOLOGICAL PARAMETERS PLAN

scale
1:1,359 @ A3

number
FIGURE 2

rev

-

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