



Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Barnards Meadow, Hilcott, Pewsey SN9 6LE

For Patrick Wilson Architects and on behalf of Trustees of Hilcott Village Hall

September 2026

DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET

Project Name: Barnards Meadow, Hilcott, Pewsey SN9 6LE
Biodiversity Net Gain Report

Client: Trustees of Hilcott Village Hall

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The evidence which Herdwick Ecology 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.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Herdwick Ecology Ltd has been commissioned by Patrick Wilson Architects and on behalf of Trustees of Hilcott Village Hall to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and subsequent Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment at Barnards Meadow, Hilcott, Pewsey SN9 6LE (Central Reference SU 11248 58381) to inform proposals for a new parking area and community garden and play area.
- 1.2 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was prepared by ESL Ltd in June 2023 (Report Ref: EA_Barnards-Meadow_Hilcott-Village-Hall_June_2023). The planning application was submitted and during determination the Wiltshire County Ecologist requested that an update PEA was prepared, together with a Biodiversity Net Gain assessment.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared to support a full application to Wiltshire Council and aims to:
- Update the baseline conditions and any changes since 2023 to inform the BNG assessment;
 - Review the relevant biological records and assess their significance;
 - Identify any protected species issues or potential issues that may exist; and
 - Assess possible ecological constraints to development and make recommendations to avoid, minimise and mitigate for any potential impacts during the development of a detailed application; and
 - Set out opportunities for net gain and ecological enhancements in line with relevant planning policy, legislation and other published guidance to inform a detailed application.
- 1.4 This report has been prepared by Ceri Griffiths, Director at Herdwick Ecology, who is a Full Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). Reference is made to CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal¹ and BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity - Code of practice for planning and development².

2.0 Legislation and Planning Policies

- 2.1 In carrying out this assessment relevant legislation, planning policies, and best practice guidelines were consulted and include:
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended);
 - Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
 - Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000;
 - Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006;
 - National Planning Policy Framework 2026 (NPPF);

¹ CIEEM (2017) *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal* (2nd. Ed.) CIEEM

² BSI (British Standards Institute) BS4202:2013 *Biodiversity – A code of practice for planning and development*. BSI, London.

- Local Planning Policies and supplementary planning documents/technical guidance.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2026

- 2.2 National planning policy on biodiversity and conservation is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The 2026 revision of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) introduces strengthened national policy provisions relating to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. The updated framework aligns more explicitly with the statutory requirements established under the Environment Act 2021, including the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regime, and reinforces the expectation that development proposals must contribute positively to ecological recovery.
- 2.3 Chapter 19: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment, is of particular relevance to this report as it relates to ecology and biodiversity. Relevant policies are set out below:
- 2.4 National decision-making policy N2: *'Improving the natural environment'*. This policy states that development should:
- '1: contribute positively to the natural environment, and support nature's recovery, development proposals should'*, in summary:
- a. Consider the environmental qualities of land proposed for development and identify opportunities for those qualities to be conserved or enhanced (including through requirements for biodiversity net gain where these apply);
 - b. Take into account the quality of agricultural land;
 - c. Take suitable opportunities to connect to and strengthen ecological networks that extend beyond the site, drawing on the measures proposed by Local Nature Recovery Strategies, National Forest Strategies and Community Forest Plans, where present, and other relevant assessments;
 - d. Conserve and enhance existing natural features of visual, historic or nature conservation value (such as established trees and hedgerows) where possible; and use appropriate landscaping to help create a well-designed place and integrate the development into its surroundings;
 - e. Use green infrastructure provided as part of the scheme and nature-based solutions to secure multiple benefits;
 - f. Minimise any adverse impacts on biodiversity and include features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs. Development proposals should incorporate integrated nest boxes (commonly known as swift bricks) into their construction unless there are compelling technical reasons which prevent their use, or would make them ineffective; and

g. Ensure that green infrastructure and other features to support nature are located and designed to minimise risk of future failure, and that appropriate measures are in place for any necessary long-term management.

2. 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 the development should be refused.

3. Relates to development proposals that exceed the statutory objective for BNG.

N3: *'Trees in new development'*. This policy relates to the benefits which trees can provide for biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the character and quality of the built environment, development proposals.

N6: *'Areas of particular importance for biodiversity and geodiversity'*. This policy sets out the conservation of important habitats and species with regard to sites of international importance i.e. Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar sites, and National importance i.e. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and local importance i.e. local or County wildlife sites.

British Standard BS 42020:2013 – Biodiversity: Code of Practice for Planning and Development

2.5 BS 42020:2013 provides a nationally recognised code of practice for biodiversity in the planning and development process. It sets out principles for ensuring that ecological information is proportionate, robust, and fit for purpose, and that biodiversity considerations are integrated effectively into land-use planning and development management.

2.6 It states the following step-wise process:

- Avoidance – avoiding adverse effects through good design;
- Mitigation – where it is unavoidable, mitigation measures should be employed to minimise adverse effects;
- Compensation – where residual effects remain after mitigation it may be necessary to provide compensation to offset any harm; and
- Enhancement – planning decisions often present the opportunity to deliver benefits for biodiversity, which can also be explored alongside the above measures to resolve potential adverse effects.

2.7 The measures for avoidance, mitigation, compensation, and enhancement should be *'proportionate to the predicted degree of risk to biodiversity and to the nature and scale of the proposed development'*

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)

- 2.8 In summary these regulations, also referred to as the Habitat Regulations, cover the designation and protection of European sites and the protection of European protected species (EPS).

Environment Bill and Biodiversity Net Gain

- 2.9 The Environment Bill received Royal Assent on 9th November 2021, becoming the Environment Act; this includes the provision of biodiversity gain for developments in England, which will be mandated through an amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The two-year transition period that follows Royal Assent means that mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became law on 12th February 2024, with small sites being mandatory on the 2nd April 2024 under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021)

- 2.10 The BNG Regulations also include 'The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024' which prescribe exemptions for categories of development to which biodiversity net gain does not apply. The exemption policy was subsequent updated on the 6th August 2026, which includes, amongst others, the following:

'Developments of 0.2 hectares or below:

From 6 August 2026, BNG does not apply to planning applications for developments where the site area within the red line boundary is 0.2 hectares or below.'

Local Plan

- 2.11 The Wiltshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document ('the plan') was formally adopted on 20 January 2015. The plan provides a positive and flexible overarching planning policy framework for Wiltshire for the period up to 2026. Policy 50 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' states that: *'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.... All development proposals shall incorporate appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance of sensitive wildlife species and habitats throughout the lifetime of the development.* The policy goes on to state that all developments should seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity.

Species Protection

- 2.12 A number of species, including all bats and great crested newts, are afforded protection under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- 2.13 Under this legislation, a person is guilty of an offence if a person intentionally or recklessly:
- disturbs any animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection;

- obstructs access to any structure or place which any animal uses for shelter or protection.

2.14 In addition the protection afforded through UK legislation, further protection is provided to a small group of species, commonly referred to as 'European Protected Species' under the Conservation of Habitats and Species 2017 (as amended) (also known as the Habitats Regulations), including bats and great crested newts.

2.15 With regards to European Protected Species listed under Schedule 2 of the Act, it is an offence to:

- Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill, or intentionally injure the animal;
- Deliberately disturb the animal or intentionally or recklessly disturb them in a place used for shelter or protection;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection.

2.16 The NERC Act also listed species of principle importance under Section 41 of the Act. This places further duties on the LPA to have due regard for the conservation of these species, such as hedgehog or certain bird species, which may be present on-site.

3.0 Methodology

Data Search

3.1 Online sources were reviewed, such as MAGIC³, to search for designated sites, priority habitats and records of local European Protected Species (EPS) licence. In addition, the Wiltshire Council planning portal was searched for nearby applications.

3.2 Given the small scale of the development and habitats within the locality, a full data search was not considered necessary.

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3.3 The site was surveyed on 29th August 2025 by Ceri Griffiths, Director of Herdwick Ecology, with full membership of Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and a Natural England bat and great crested newt licence holder. Weather conditions were dry and clear, with a temperature of 26°C.

3.4 Habitats and obvious features within the site were assessed under the UKHab criteria to inform the Biodiversity Net Gain calculations.

³ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

4.0 Baseline Conditions

- 4.1 The site lies in a rural location in the small village of Hilcott, Wiltshire, approximately 13km southwest of Pewsey. It lies to the north of a lane along which are a number of individual properties of varying construction and age. The surrounding landscape comprises agricultural under a mix of arable and pasture. There are large swathes of woodland to the north that provides good connectivity to offsite habitats.

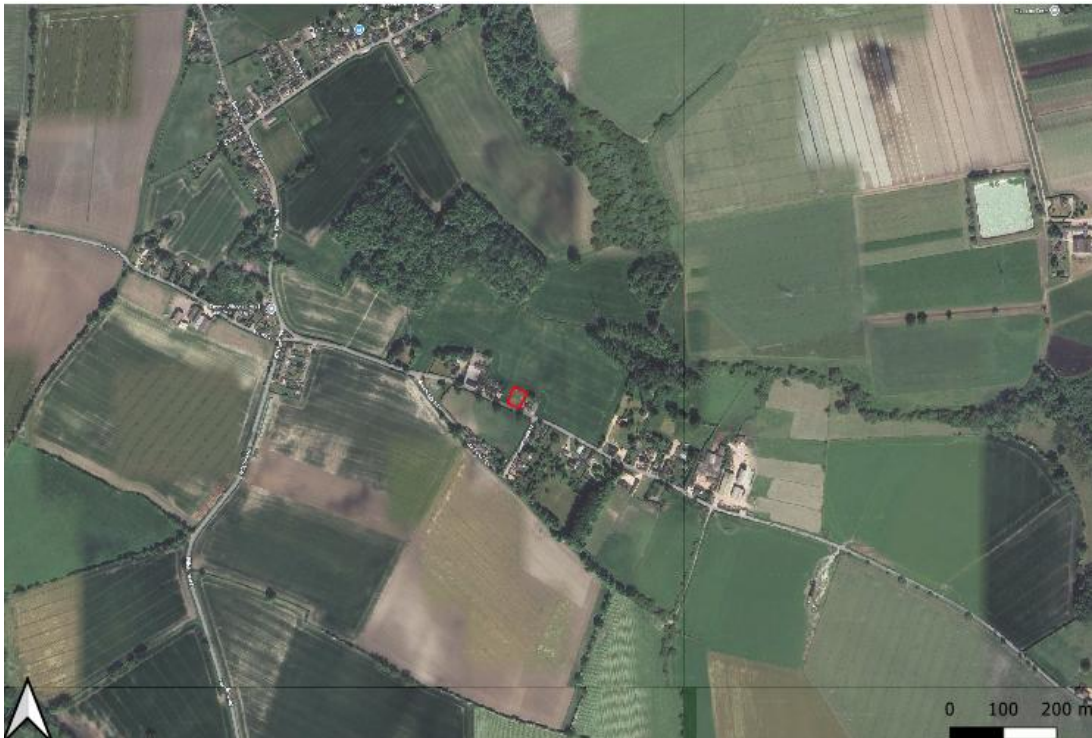


Plate 1: Site Location

Data Search

Statutory Designated Sites

- 4.2 The Application Site lies within the 6.4km zone of influence of the Salisbury Plain Special Protection Area (SPA) which lies 4km to the south. This SPA is selected for its important breeding populations of stone curlew, quail and hobby, together with the overwintering population of hen harrier. However, as the site does not result in any increase in overnight accommodation, there is no requirement for mitigation and there will be negligible impact on this SPA.
- 4.3 The Application Site also lies within the River Avon Special Area of Conservation SAC catchment. The closest SAC component lies 5.65km to the northeast. As there will be negligible impacts and no increase in overnight accommodation, it can be concluded that there are no Likely Significant Effects and can be screened out of the Appropriate Assessment.

- 4.4 There are additional SAC & Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within 5km but given the small scale and type of development, no impacts are predicted to any designated sites.

Habitats

- 4.5 There are a number of blocks of woodland within 120m that lie to the north, which have been identified as Priority Habitat as deciduous woodland.
- 4.6 A waterbody is present 130m to the west of the Application Site. This was not holding water at the time of the survey and it was also dry during the 2023 PEA. However, it is known to hold water over winter, and at times of heavy rain fall, but is very ephemeral in nature, almost acting as a swale.

Species

- 4.7 There are three European Protected Species (EPS) licences within 2km of the site boundary.:
- Brown long eared and serotine bat resting place Common pipistrelle, lesser horseshoe bat resting place (dated 2015-2020) – within 200m of the Application Site to the east
 - Common & soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared and serotine bat resting place (dated 2017-2022) – 1.45km north
 - Brown long eared and common pipistrelle bat breeding site (dated 2019-2029) – 3.8km northeast
- 4.8 There is no EPS licence for great crested newts or eDNA survey data within 2km of the site.

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- 4.9 The Application Site is 860m² in area and comprises an area of grassland with small patches bramble scrub that have grown over some piles of brash and debris. There had been more extensive stands of bramble scrub to the north and west of the site that had been cleared. There is a 'nuclear bunker' present to the eastern side of the site that is inaccessible. Ruderal vegetation has encroached over the bunker and around the boundaries of the site. Four small hazel and hawthorn trees lies just off site, within the northern fence line.
- 4.10 The UK Habitat Classification and Biodiversity Metric equivalents are provided in Table 1 below, along with justification for the habitat choice, where relevant.

Table 1: Baseline Habitats

UK Habitat equivalent	BNG Metric & Condition	Justification
Other neutral grassland g3c 10 17 47 48	Other neutral grassland – poor condition	Species poor (meets criterion C, F & G)
Bramble scrub h3d	Small patches of bramble scrub still present	The baseline from 2023 showed a more significant amount of bramble,

UK Habitat equivalent	BNG Metric & Condition	Justification
		which has been included in the assessment.
Native Hedgerow h2b	Native hedgerow – Poor condition	Dominated by hawthorn , single height, flailed annually.

- 4.11 Species with the g3c included false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, Annual meadow-grass *Poa annua*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*, prickly sow-thistle *Sonchus asper*, ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*, hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, lesser burdock *Arctium minus*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, broad leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis* and creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, white dead nettle *Lamium album* and yarrow *Achillea millefolium*.
- 4.12 Where the nuclear bunker is present, the ground is slightly disturbed with loose substrate present, there is occasional nipplewort *Lapsana communis*, nettle *Urtica dioica*, elder saplings *Sambucus nigra*, autumn hawkbit *Scorzoneroidea autumnalis* and bramble.
- 4.13 There are some non native ornamental plants, including a larger Sumac *Rhus typhina*. The number of forbs are sparse and the UKHab classification meets g3c 10 17 47 48.
- 4.14 There is a single tree on the northern boundary, with three that lie offsite. These are hawthorn and hazel and do not offer any potential bat roosting opportunities.
- 4.15 A well maintained, species-poor hedgerow runs along the southern boundary that is dominated by hawthorn, with a single young sycamore tree *Acer pseudoplatanus*



Plate 3: Baseline Habitats and Condition

*Species*Bats – Foraging/Commuting Habitats

- 4.16 There are no buildings or trees within the application boundary and no potential roost features were noted within the tree immediately adjacent. Therefore, there are no bat roosts onsite. The surrounding habitats are likely to offer foraging and commuting habitat for bats. However, due to the small scale of the development and size of Application Site, the loss of a small area of species poor grassland will not have a detrimental impact to the local bat population. Therefore, no further survey or assessment is required but avoidance, minimisation and enhancement measures have been set out in Section 5.

Badgers

- 4.17 The grassland may offer some foraging habitat for badgers but the Application Site itself does not provide suitable sett building habitat. Precautionary construction measures have been set out in Section 5.

Breeding Birds

- 4.16 The site offers limited opportunities for nesting birds, give the lack of dense vegetation and trees. The hedgerow is well maintained and thin in sections. Whilst the hedgerow may offer some nesting habitat, it is not considered significant and no further survey or assessment is required. Avoidance, minimisation and enhancement measures have been set out in Section 5

Amphibians - Great crested newts (GCN)

- 4.17 The ESL Ltd PEA (June 2023) did not identify any records for great crested newts. The ephemeral pond that lies 130m to the west may not hold sufficient water to support a population, particularly one breeding. As such, it is considered highly unlikely that great crested newts will be impacted on by the proposals. This can be substantiated through the use of the Natural England rapid risk assessment, as illustrated below. This is also precautionary as it assumes that the pond is used for breeding.

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.01
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
Maximum:		0.01
Rapid risk assessment result:		GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY

- 4.18 The site has had some clearance of the bramble since the 2023 PEA was undertaken. This has removed the majority of the more tussocky areas of grassland, although smaller tussocks of cock's foot and false

oat grass were present. However, overall the suitability of the site to support amphibians has decreased but a low risk is still present.

- 4.19 As such, whilst no further survey or assessment is required, a precautionary site clearance approach should still be adopted, as set out in Section 5 below.

Reptiles

- 4.20 As with the amphibians, the management of the site is likely to have reduced the suitability of the site for reptiles. However, there is still a low risk of a small population being present. Further surveys are not considered necessary but a phased and sensitive site clearance must be adopted as set out in Section 5 below.

Other protected/notable species

- 4.21 There is no suitable habitat for dormice. Other species that could be present within the locality are hedgehogs. Again, standard best practice site construction methods should be adopted, where necessary, as detailed in Section 5.

5.0 Avoidance, Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

- 5.1 In line with National and Local planning policies, developments should seek to ensure the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations. Therefore the following section sets out avoidance and mitigation measures that should be implemented, together with enhancement opportunities, with the aim of delivering a net gain in biodiversity, in line with the mitigation hierarchy.

Development Description

- 5.2 The proposals will involve the creation of a new parking area, and a community space with children play area. Whilst there will be the removal of a small section of species poor hedgerow, there will be a new native species rich hedgerow along the western, northern and eastern boundaries and a species rich wildflower area.

- 5.3 No further surveys are required to inform the application but appropriate measures to be implemented during construction are set out below.

Avoidance and Protection of Features

Design and Location of Proposed Development

- 5.4 The site is considered to be of low ecological value comprising species grassland which is a common and widespread habitat.

Mitigation Measures

5.5 Given the low ecological value of the site, there are minimal mitigation requirements but following measures should be implemented and secured via condition attached to the planning consent:

- No lighting is proposed. For reference, should this change then any lighting should be sensitively designed and should adhere to the principles set out in the ILP Guidance Note 08/18 Bats and artificial lighting in the UK to avoid excessive light spill particularly on the boundaries.
- A phase vegetation clearance will be undertaken to allow any species that may be present to move away from the clearance area. This should be done in a south to north direction. Following the nesting bird check (if required), the vegetation will be strimmed back to a height of 150mm, without affecting the soil. This will be done in the presence of an (ECoW). The vegetation will be left for 3 days and then a second cut to ground level will be undertaken with all scrub cuttings removed from site. Finally, the area can be cleared/soil stripped.
- Removal of the section of hedgerow, or any areas of dense vegetation i.e. scrub that re-establishes will avoid the core breeding bird season, March to August inclusive; although it should be noted that bird nesting can take place outside this period. Prior to any vegetation clearance/ground works within the nesting bird season, or at any time when bird nesting is suspected, a nesting bird check will be conducted of the affected area by the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) to confirm that no nesting birds are present which will be harmed by the works.
- Foundation trenches and all excavations must either be covered overnight or must have scaffolding boards, or similar, placed within them to ensure that any animals that fall in are able to escape.
- Raise stored materials (that might act as temporary resting places for species such as amphibians and reptiles) off the ground, e.g. on pallets.
- Should any fencing be installed, occasional gaps must be left at the base (130 x 130mm) to allow movement of hedgehogs.

Habitat Enhancements

5.6 The proposals include the planting of a species rich native hedgerow around the western, northern and eastern boundary. This will improve connectivity across the site to the wider landscape. The hedgerows will be appropriately managed to maximise species diversity and to act as a commuting/foraging route. Again, the above can be secured via planning condition.

Species Enhancements

5.7 Habitat boxes or log piles for invertebrates, hedgehogs and reptiles can be placed along the western and northeastern boundaries to provide further opportunities for species

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.8 The site sits below the 0.2ha threshold and no priority habitats are present onsite. Therefore, the application is exempt from BNG.
- 5.9 In conclusion, the Application Site comprises species poor grassland of low value and has negligible/low potential to support protected/notable species. Positive enhancements that been incorporated in the proposed plans through the planting of species rich hedgerow more diverse grassland in line with National and Local Planning Policy.

Appendix 1: Photographs



Photo 1: Northern and Western Boundary



Photo 2 Native, species poor hedgerow along southern boundary



Plate 3 View looking east across the site



Photo 4 View NW across site from SE corner

Appendix 2 Proposed Site Plan (Patrick Wilson Architects)

