



An Ecological Assessment of Land South of Old Farm Grittenham.

Aim: To Assess the Importance of the Habitats on Site and their Potential to Support European Protected Species

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Land south of Old Farm
Grittenham
Chippenham
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SN15 4JY

Reference: 2JW/Ecoassmt.doc

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1.0 Introduction and Background

As part of the planning application for The Change of use of land to one Gypsy Traveller pitch & associated works including one Mobile Home & one touring caravan & one dayroom & Hard standing on Land South of Old Farm, Grittenham, Wilts SN15 4JY.

It is necessary to carry out an Extended Phase One Habitat Survey of the land within the proposed development boundary, to produce an ecological assessment considering the potential for the habitats on site to support any European protected species.

This site was originally permitted for the above works under application reference 20/05488/FUL on 23rd December 2020.

2.0 Methodology of Survey

2.1 Survey of Land

The original Extended Phase One Habitat Surveys of the site were carried out on the 14th October 2018 by First Ecology who produced An Ecological Appraisal Report of Land south of Old Farm dated November 2018. In addition, A Great Crested Newt Assessment by Sharpe Ecology was also carried out, dated June 2018.

In June 2020 at a further information request by LPA Ecologist an additional survey of the Habitats on site & ponds in the area was carried out on 24th June 2020 by Ros Willder & Additional Ecological Information for Land South of Old Farm by Willder Ecology dated 30th June 2020. A GCN District Licence was applied for & permitted & together with the results of these surveys the application was permitted with no ecological objections.

As such Ros Willder a full member of CIEEM, a Chartered Environmentalist and a Licensed Ecologist (CLS12870 & RC121) carried out an original surveys on 24th June 2020 & most recently on 28th July 2026 by Ros Willder.

The survey followed the standard Phase One Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC, 2010) and focused on:

- A habitat survey to determine type, quality and extent of habitats present (using the DAFOR scale which is Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional & Rare). Botanical lists of each habitat type where appropriate.
- A survey to determine the presence of, or the potential for the site to support protected animals which include the following:-
- Potential for reptile or amphibians particularly great crested newt.
- Potential for Badgers to use the site such as evidence of setts, latrines, tracks etc.
- Potential for breeding birds or bats to use the site

In addition, a desk top search was carried out using the MAGIC Map Service from Natural England to identify any designated sites nearby and any species records, as well as a pond search carried out and mapped, the results are discussed in Section 4 and included in Appendix 4.

Due to recent changes to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on the 6th August 2026 this application is exempt from BNG as the proposed site is <0.2hectare.

3.0 Results of Survey

3.1 Extended Phase One Habitat Survey

The main habitats on the land are:-

- Semi-Improved Grassland
- Bare disturbed Ground
- Nettle dominated tall ruderal vegetation

The boundaries comprising:-

- Hedgerows & trees

And the adjacent land (oft site) comprising:-

- Road (To the East) & M4 (To the North west)
- Residential Farm & buildings & pony paddocks (To the North)
- Arable & Pasture Fields (to the West, and South) (See Figure One)

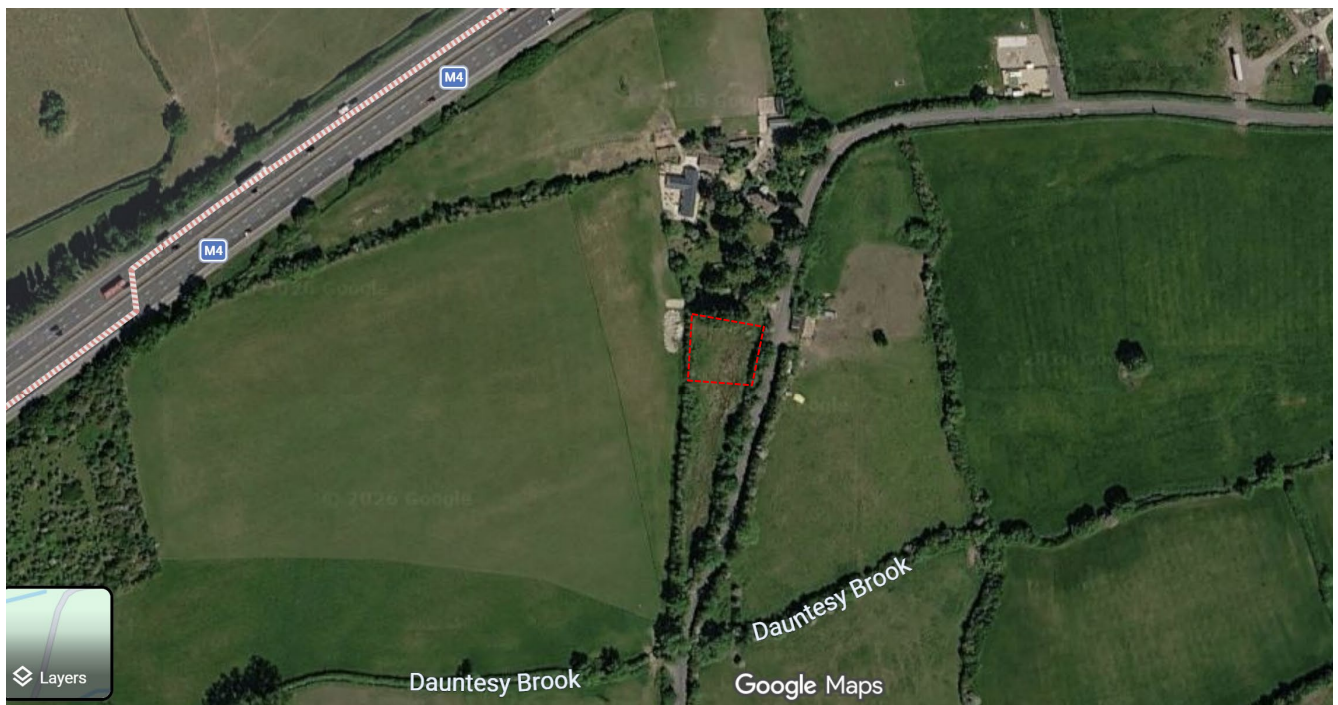


Figure 1: Satellite image(Google, 2026) of Land South of Old Farm- Red Square Marks Approx boundary of the site

The majority of the site is comprised Semi-Improved Grassland which is comprised of:- Yorkshire Fog, Rye grass, False oat grass, Meadow foxtail, Soft brome grass, Ribwort plantain, Bindweed, Common Docks, Creeping thistle & White clover. The species composition would indicate that it is species poor semi-improved neutral grassland habitat. The grassland is managed by regular cutting & topping as shown below in figure two.



Figure 2: Photo to Show Semi-Improved Grassland habitat on Site

In addition to the semi-improved grassland habitat there is a small area of bare disturbed ground next to the collapsed wooden shed & a small area of tall ruderal vegetation by the fallen tree (from the neighbouring boundary) as shown in figures three & four over the page.

The tall ruderal vegetation is dominated by Common nettles (D) with occasional Brambles (O), Bristle oxtongue (O) & Sow thistle (F) as shown over the page in figure three.

Alongside Boundary one is the collapsed shed/wooden building & the tree fallen from the neighbour's boundary & the tall ruderal vegetation which has developed as shown below in figure three.



Figure 3: The fallen tree on collapsed wooden building



Figure 4: Bare disturbed ground & developing tall ruderal vegetation

The Northern Boundary: **Boundary One** (See Phase One Habitat Map in Appendix One) is comprised of a post & rail fence with a tree line which appears to be on the neighbouring land comprised of tall Leylandii, & young Horse chestnut trees as shown below in figure five.



Figure 5: Photo to Show Boundary One - Tree Line along Northern Boundary

The existing site access is via a gateway which is accessible from the road in the North-East corner of the site with Boundary one on the right & Boundary two on the left of the gate in the photo in figure six below.



Figure 6: Existing gated entrance to the site with B1 & B2

Boundary Two is a species rich roadside hedgerow with trees and is comprised of:- Blackthorn, Ash, Elder, Field Maple, Dead Elms, (as shown in figure six) & Horse Chestnut.

This would be classed as a Native Species-Rich Hedgerow although there are many dead Elms which create gaps around the entrance to the site (as shown in Figure six on the previous page). Despite being a roadside hedge, it has grown out into the field, so it is developed into a wider hedge away from the entrance as shown below in figure seven.



Figure 7: Photo to Show Boundary two – Hedgerow & trees along eastern Roadside Boundary

Boundary Three is a species rich hedgerow with trees along the western boundary of the site and is comprised of:- Blackthorn, Ash, Elder, Field Maple, Dog rose & Elms many of which are now Dead Elms, as shown in figure seven below.



Figure 8: Photo to Show Hedgerow & trees along western Boundary Three

4.0 Ecological Assessment

The proposed site is a small part of the field as shown in the location plan in Appendix one. The proposal will comprises a mobile home, a touring caravan & a day room as shown in the proposed plans in appendix five. The access will utilize the existing field access in the corner of the field as shown in figure six.

The only loss of habitat will be the loss of species poor semi-improved neutral grassland which is regularly cut & topped as shown in figure two. As well as a small area of bare disturbed ground & developing tall ruderal nettle dominated habitat as shown in figures three & four.

The hedgerows & trees along Boundaries One & two have undergone minimal management with an increase in the number of dead Elms along both boundaries. The grassland has been managed by regular topping & cutting. No loss of trees or boundary habitats will be lost by this proposal.

Previously in 2018/19 when the site had small areas of taller vegetation, a reptile survey was requested by the LPA the results of this survey found no evidence of reptiles using the site as detailed in the previously permitted application. There is less tall vegetation on the site as the majority of the site is regularly topped & cut so the suitability of the site for reptiles has reduced due to the lack of suitable habitat on site.

Existing hedgerows and trees forming site boundaries will provide potential nesting and foraging habitat for birds and small mammals and will be retained and managed for wildlife. All trees within the hedgerows will be retained for their landscape character and wildlife value together with enhancement planting as shown in the proposed enhancement plan in Appendix five.

The fallen tree from the neighbour's boundary & the collapsed shed at the edge of the proposed site will provide some limited nesting habitat potential & as such it is recommended that this is cleared up outside of the main nesting season March/April to August/September.

Further to the site survey, a detailed designated site and pond search was carried out using the MAGIC Map Service from Natural England, the results of which are discussed in Section 4.1.

4.1 Desktop Search Results

A desktop search revealed that the Land south of old farm, Grittenham, has no designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within a 2km radius, However it does have two non-statutory designated sites known as Local Wildlife sites known as Grove Farm Meadows LWS which are hay meadows & pastures with unimproved neutral grassland as well as Great Wood which is a large ancient woodland site, formerly a coppice with standards which has conifers planted with some semi natural woodland remaining.

The site is identified as located within the impact zone for Ravenscroft Wood SSSI but this is located 5.2km away & Sutton Lane Meadows which is located 8.4km away & this proposal is of sufficient distance from both of these sites to have no potential adverse impacts on either of these designated sites or the non-statutory LWS.

Due to the nature and small scale of the development and distance of the proposed site as well as being divided from it by a motorway the likelihood of the proposed development impacting upon the designated sites & non statutory sites is negligible.

The desktop search revealed four types of BAP Priority Habitat within 2km of the proposed site; including Woodland, Lowland Meadow, Unimproved pastures and Traditional Orchard, however none of these habitat types were recorded within the development boundary.

In addition to the priority habitats recorded in the local area, the following birds were recorded Barn owl, lapwing, Nightingale, Woodcock. Invertebrates include Blood-vein moth, Common club -tail dragonfly, Forester moth, Gallium carpet moth, Grey dagger moth, Grizzled skipper butterfly, Marsh fritillary, Purple emperor moth, Small heath butterfly, Wall butterfly, White admiral butterfly, Wood white butterfly. Reptiles Slow worm, Grass snake & Adder & Mammals Badgers. In addition, Great Crested Newts have been previously recorded within 1km of the site.

4.2 Pond search & Surveys

A pond search using the Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside Map Service from Natural England, revealed the location of one pond within a 250m radius being sited 200m east of the site but two more additional ponds were identified on the ground one being 35m north in the garden of Old farm & another being 120m northeast & the site.

Pond one situated 35m north of the site was identified in 2019 as having a low population of Great crested Newts but when revisited on the 28th July 2026 it was found to contain no water & appeared to have been that way for some time as autumnal leaves were present on the concrete base of the pond as shown below in figure nine.



Figure 9: Pond one shown to no longer hold water

If this pond no longer holds water then it is reasonable to conclude that it is no longer used by Great Crested newts.

Pond two was situated 120m to the Northwest at the corner of a field & also found to no longer contain any water. Pond two was known to hold water during the February survey in 2021 but regularly dries up in late spring/ summer & is heavily shaded by the trees along the western edge of the pond as it was also noted that the edge of the pond was steep sided by the fence line & poached where stock have previously had access.

During the recent updated visit, on 28th July 2026 this pond no longer contained any water & appeared to be overgrown with bramble with no aquatic vegetation evident. The HSI score was 0.38 which is a poor suitability for GCN.

The other pond (Pond three) divided from the site by the road & situated 200m away to the east was originally visited by First Ecology in 2018 & then revisited on the 24th June 2020 at 12.30pm to carry out an eDNA sample of the pond by Willder Ecology.

An eDNA kit was purchased from Sure Screen Scientifics & taken to the pond however when the pond was visited despite the recent heavy rains the pond was completely dried up and appeared to have been dry for some time, (at least for the last four months) as shown below in figure 10.



Figure 10: Pond three shown to no longer hold water 2020

Pond three was revisited in July 2026 & also found to be completely dried out & judging by the grass growing as shown below in figure eleven it has remained dry in the intervening years.



Figure 11: Pond three shown to no longer hold water 2026

Due to the lack of suitability of the three ponds within a 250m radius of the site clearly the suitability of the area for GCN has changed & therefore reduced over the last six years.

The small scale nature of the development & the reduction of the potential impacts of the proposal upon the species or habitats recorded in the wider area will therefore be low & if all the recommend mitigation is followed it will be negligible for GCN.

The hedgerow and trees along Boundaries two & three will provide important nesting habitat for birds. However, as these boundary hedgerows and trees are retained & enhanced there should be no impact upon bats or nesting birds.

It is important that no additional external lighting be directed onto the retained trees and hedgerows. If lighting is imperative for safety reasons it should be directed downwards at the ground using hoods or baffles and be limited to a maximum of 2 Lux.

These recommendations should be adhered to in order to further negate any potential impact however low upon the potential local bat population and reduce light spill into the wider countryside.

There was no evidence to suggest that badgers are using the area within the development boundary.

5.0 Conclusion, Mitigation and Enhancement

In conclusion the habitats to be directly affected are of low conservation value for wildlife due to the regular cutting & topping of the species poor semi-improved grassland & a small area of bare disturbed land & a patch of nettles at the edge of the cut grassland.

The most important habitats on the site are the hedgerow and trees along Boundaries Two & Three on the east & west of the site as shown in the Phase one Habitat plan in Appendix one which will not be adversely affected by this proposal & will be enhanced as shown in Appendix Five.

None of the habitats identified within the development boundary to be affected are likely to support any protected species as the three ponds within 250m were found to no longer contain water & their suitability to support amphibians has been greatly reduced over the years & the grassland on the site is regularly cut & topped. Despite this a precautionary mitigation has been designed to ensure no harm can occur to GCN as detailed in section 5.1.

No specially protected plants or animals were identified within the proposed development area, but mitigation is proposed in order to ensure protection of the retained Hedgerows & trees & a precautionary approach has been designed to protect amphibians & reptiles however unlikely their presence in site.

The proposed development site: Land south of Old farm, is not covered by any nature conservation designations and will not impact on any designated site, see Appendix Three for the full designated site search results.

Due to the existing site access being utilized no loss of hedgerows or trees will be required as shown in the details in Appendix five.

5.1. Mitigation (a precautionary approach)

All persons involved in the works to land south of Old Farm Grittenham will receive a detailed 'Toolbox Talk' on Nesting birds & amphibians & reptiles from Ros Willder of Willder Ecology, or a similarly qualified ecologist.

The toolbox talk will cover the following: -

- ❖ The full legal protection of Amphibians (including GCN) & reptiles & the necessary fingertip search of any vegetation to be removed by a Licensed GCN Ecologist before any work can start on site.
- ❖ The legal protection of nesting birds & the need for any removal of the fallen tree works to be carried outside of the nesting season March/April to August/September.
- ❖ The necessary protection of the Hedgerow habitats whilst the works are carried out to protect the trees & native shrubs & the proposed planting enhancements to the hedgerows
- ❖ What to do if any unexpected evidence of nesting birds, reptiles or amphibians are found during works **STOP** & who to contact. Contact details of Ros Willder of Willder Ecology or a similarly qualified ecologist will be left with the attendees of the toolbox talk.

If any GCN are found all works will cease until Natural England has been contacted and way forward agreed which may include a GCN license application to permit the works to continue or a district Licence form Nature space.

Any additional lighting planned could cause light spill into the surrounding area and must be shielded and directional to minimize light spill into the retained hedgerows & the rest of the field. This is to avoid impacts of light spill into the retained wider habitats.

5.2 ENHANCEMENTS

As an enhancement for bats a viva pro bat box will be installed on gable end of the Day room as shown in Appendix five.

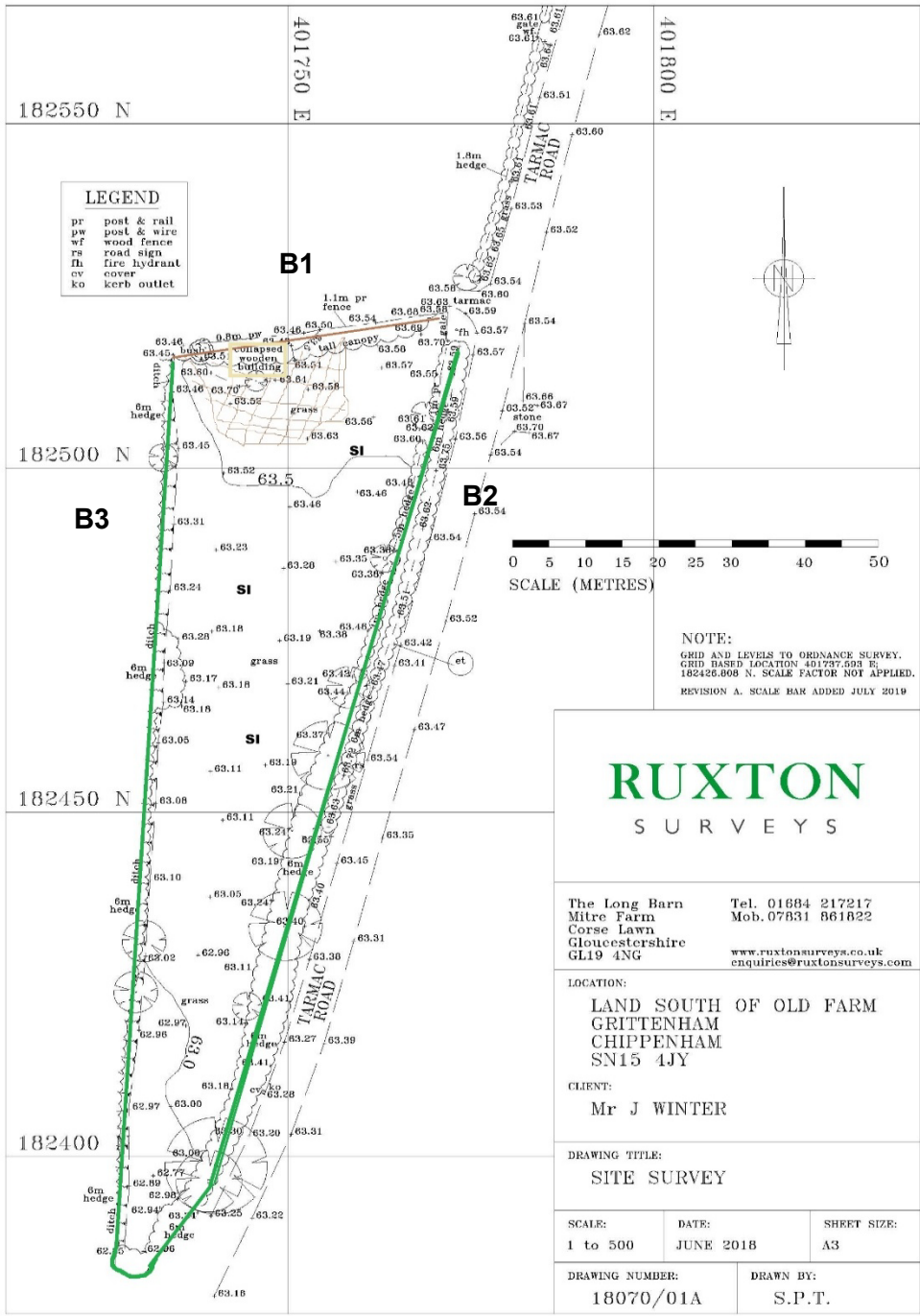
As an enhancement for birds open fronted bird box will be included on the walls of the Day room as shown in appendix five.

As an enhancement for the hedgerows the dead elms could be removed & enhancement planting included as shown in appendix five as well as areas of the grassland left tall around the wider field.

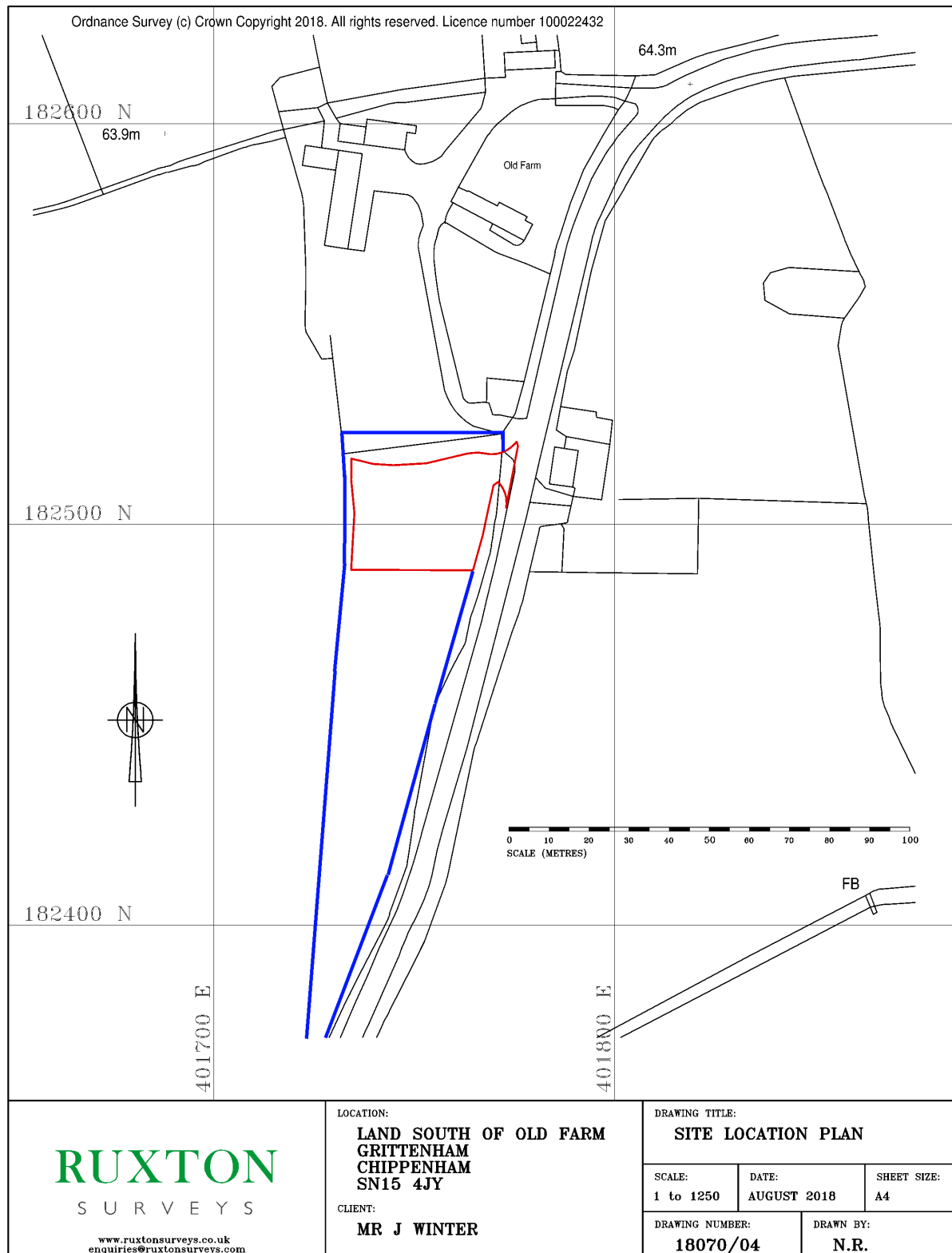
Ideally a permanent wildlife pond could be created within the field as a benefit for wildlife including amphibians as shown in appendix five.

If all the recommendations are followed no harm will occur to EPS or PS and enhanced provision will be made for future use by bats, birds & amphibians as an overall enhancement for biodiversity to the site.

APPENDIX ONE PHASE ONE HABITAT MAP & LOCATION MAP



Note that the phase one covers the whole field but the proposed site is only the area shown by the red line over the page



APPENDIX TWO EUROPEAN PROTECTED SPECIES

LEGAL PROTECTION OF BATS

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) transposes into UK law the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (commonly referred to as the 'Bern Convention'. The 1981 Act has been amended several times, most recently by the Countryside and Rights of Way [Crow] Act 2000, which added 'or recklessly' to S 9 (4)(a) and (b).

All species of bats are listed on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Act, and are therefore subject to the provisions of section 9, which make it an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take a bat
- Possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which consolidate the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 with subsequent amendments. The Regulations transpose Council Directive 92/43/EEC, on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EC Habitats Directive), into national law and came into force on 30th November 2017.

All bats listed on Annex IV of the Directive and some are also listed on the Annex II. The latter Annex relates to the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and covers Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats, barbastelle and Bechstein's bat.

Inclusion on Annex IV ('European protected species) means that member states are required to put in place a system of strict protection as outlined in Article 12; this is done through inclusion on Schedule 2 of the Regulations. Regulation 53 makes it an offence to;

- Deliberately capture or kill a bat
- Deliberately disturb a bat
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a bat
- Keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange alive or dead bat or any part of a bat

LEGAL PROTECTION OF BIRDS

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is the main instrument for the protection of wild birds in the law of England, Wales and Scotland.

It protects all wild birds of whatever species (certain exceptions apply within the act).

Barn Owls are listed on Schedule 1 which gives them special protection. The act makes it an offence "if any person intentionally-

a) Kills, injures or takes (handle) any wild bird;

b) Takes, damages or destroys the nest of any bird while that nest is in use or being built; (barn owls do not 'build' a nest but may make a nest scrape) or

c) Takes or destroys an egg of any wild bird"

It is also an offence "if any persons have in his possession or control:-

d) any live or dead wild bird or any part of, or anything derived from, such a bird; or

e) An egg of a wild bird or any part of such an egg" (s 1 (2)).

LEGAL PROTECTION OF AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Reptiles are protected from killing and injury (two species are fully protected, this includes, but is not confined to:

Disturbance and deliberate destruction of their habitat) under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

The Conservation (Natural habitats &c.) regulations 1994 (the habitats Regulations were recently updated by

The Conservation of Habitats and Species regulations 2017 Amphibians such as Great crested newts are fully protected, including protection against:

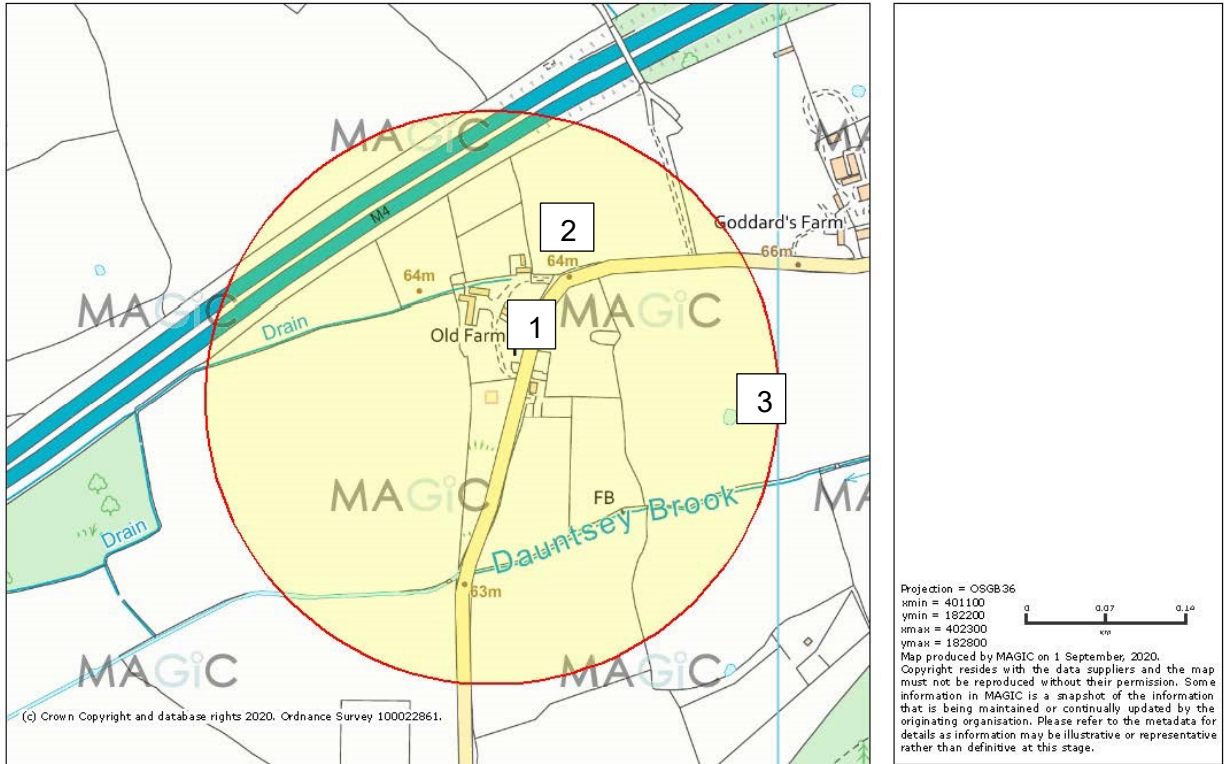
- Deliberate disturbance
- Deliberately killing or capturing
- Deliberately taking or destroying eggs
- Deliberately damaging or destroying breeding sites and places of shelter.

Licensing from Natural England OR District Licensing

A Licence simply permits an action that is otherwise unlawful. A licence should be applied for if, on the basis of survey information and specialist knowledge, it is considered that the proposed activity is reasonably likely to result in an offence (killing, breeding site destruction, etc - see above). No licence is required if, on balance, the proposed activity is unlikely to result in an offence (this is from the great crested newt mitigation guidelines).

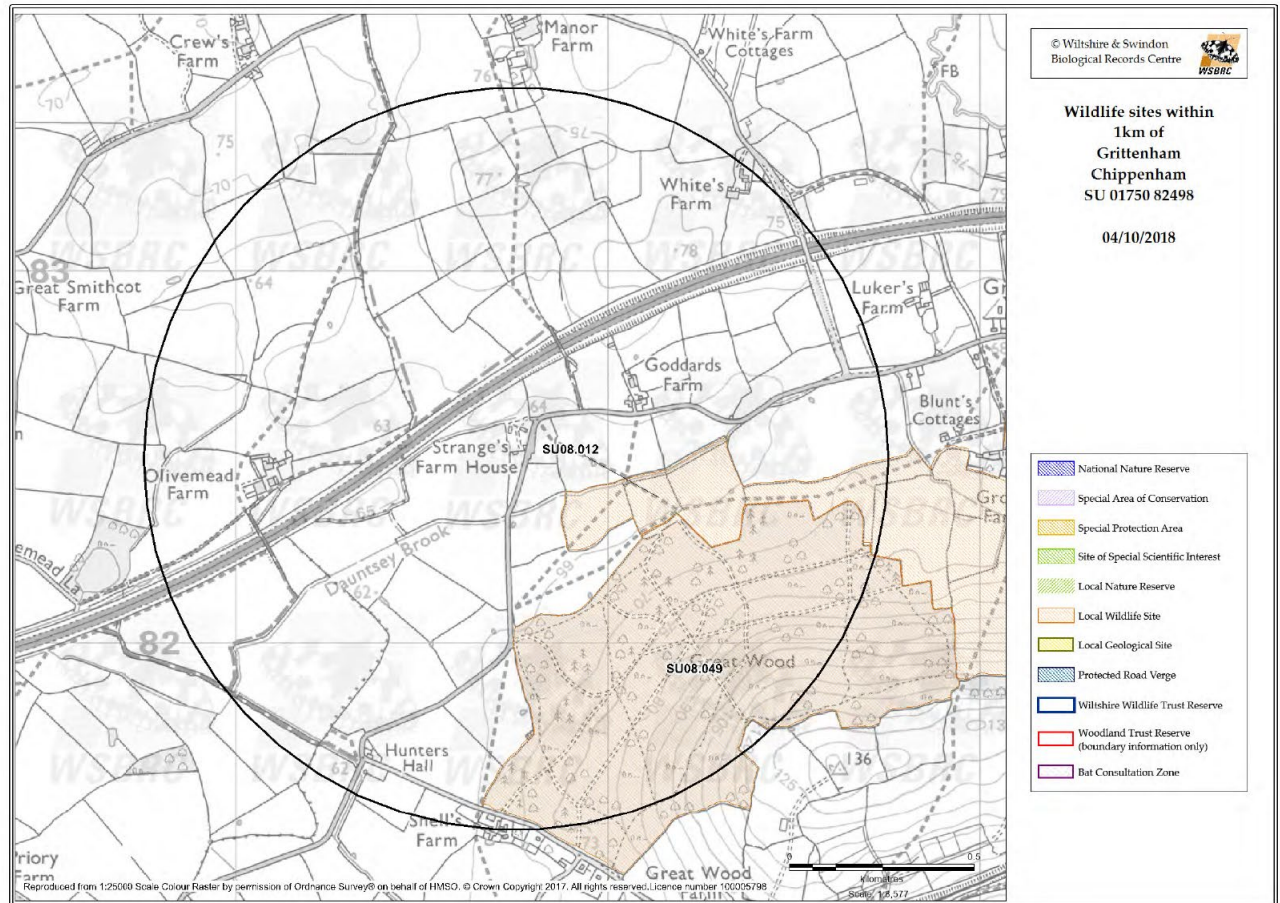
APPENDIX THREE POND SEARCH

MAGiC pond within 250m of land to the south of old farm

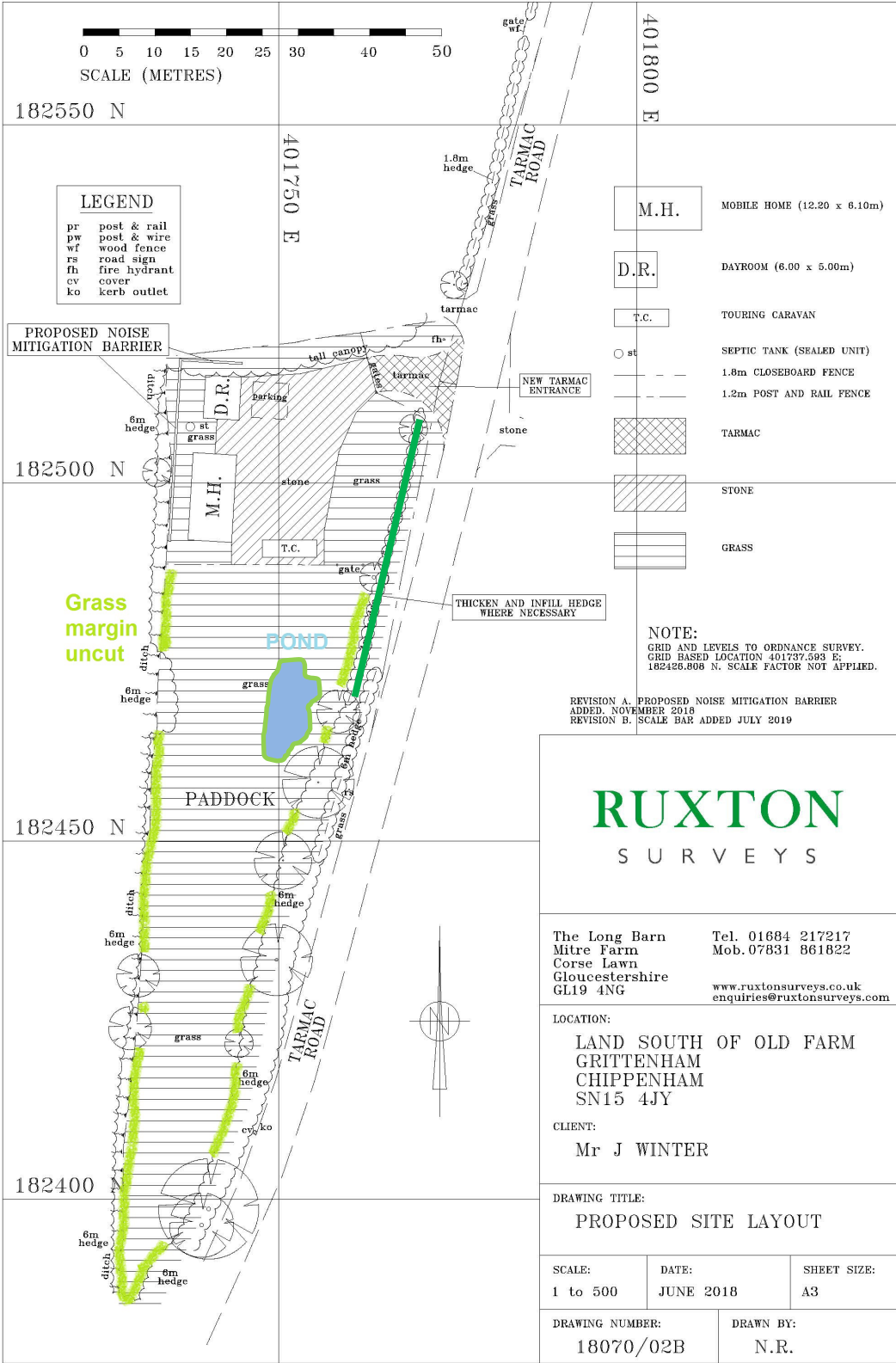


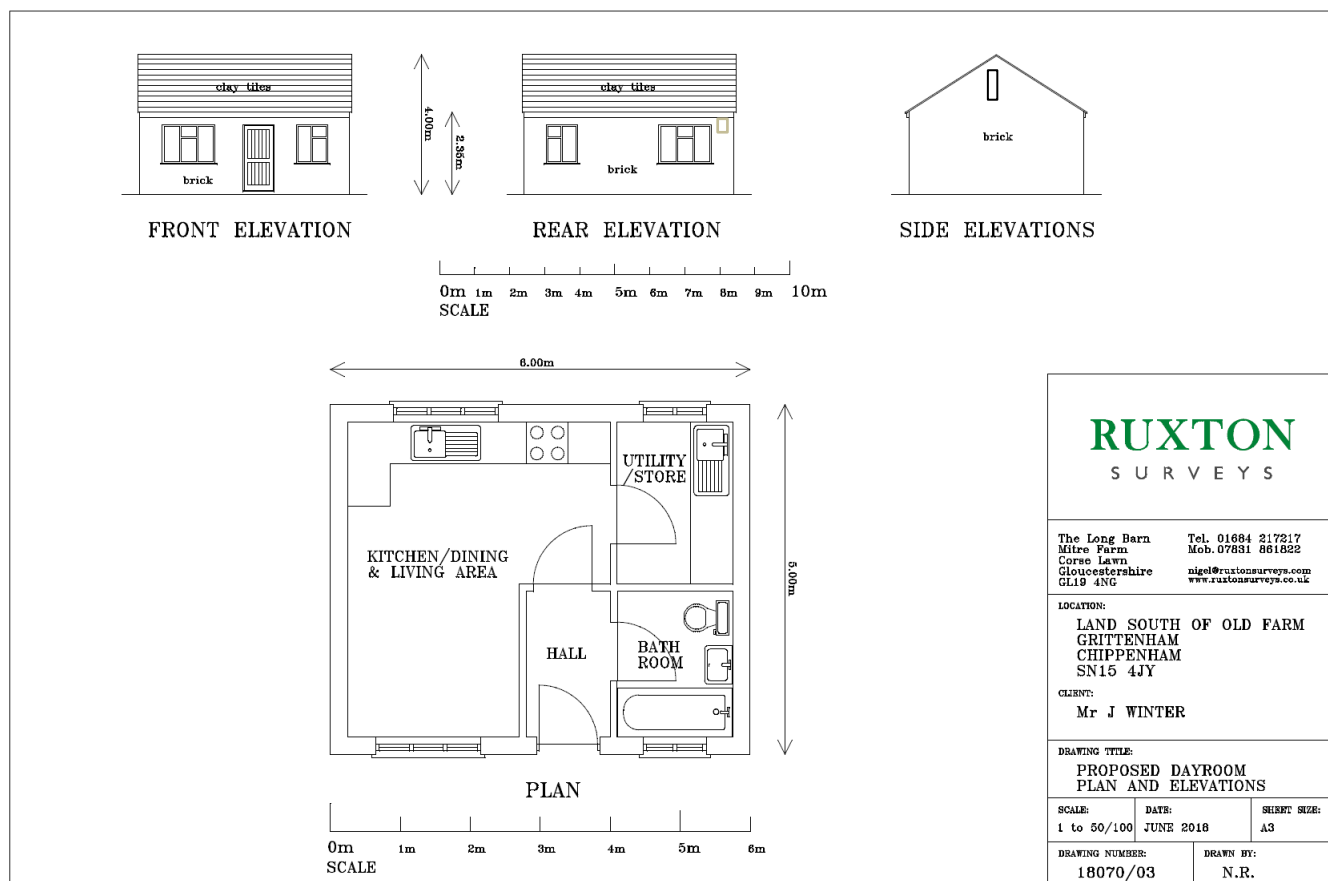
All ponds were found to have dried out & no longer suitable for GCN

Appendix four data search results



APPENDIX FIVE PROPOSED ENHANCEMENTS FOR WILDLIFE





The existing hedges will be restored by removal of the dead elms & planting with Hazel, Field maple, Holly, Dog rose where gaps have developed.

To be positioned in the top of the wall of the Day room at the rear as shown above

WoodStone Build-in Open Nest Box

Woodstone Build-in Open Nest Box is designed for use in new build or renovations. The nest box is intended to be built into walls to provide nesting cavities. This provides much needed nesting cavities for species such as Robins, Wagtails and Black Redstarts. Constructed from FSC certified Woodstone this nest box will not deteriorate like a traditional wooden nest box. NHBS Price: £17.95 including VAT.



An integral bat box on the gable end of the dayroom