



Arches Farm, Arches Lane, Malmesbury, SN16 0EJ

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal



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Notice to Readers:

The results of the survey and assessment work undertaken by All Ecology are representative at the time of surveying.

Every endeavour has been made to identify the presence of protected species on site, where this falls within the agreed scope of works.

The flora and fauna detailed within this report are those noted during the field survey and from anecdotal evidence. It should not be viewed as a complete list of flora and fauna species that may frequent or exist on site at other times of the year.

Up to date standard methodologies have been used, which are accepted by Natural England and other statutory conservation bodies. No responsibility will be accepted where these methodologies fail to identify all species on-site.

All Ecology cannot take responsibility where Government, national bodies or industry subsequently modify standards.

All Ecology cannot accept responsibility for data collected from third parties.

Reference to sections or particular paragraphs of this document taken out of context may lead to misrepresentation.

Summary

In August 2026, All Ecology was commissioned to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of a site known as Arches Farm, Arches Lane, Malmesbury, SN16 0EJ. The site occupies the northern edge of a single field of modified grassland, grazed by cattle.

The site is the subject of a planning application for the installation of 20 ground-mounted solar panels in a single row enclosed by a timber post-and-rail fence, including a narrow underground cable trench passing beneath a public bridleway and an adjacent off-site hedgerow.

There are no statutory designated sites within the site boundary or immediately adjacent. No significant impacts to sites in the wider area are predicted.

The effect of the development has been considered and key constraints identified. The habitats present within the development footprint are of low ecological value in terms of their vegetation. The adjacent off-site native hedgerow is of moderate value and will be fully retained, with minor, temporary disturbance restricted to the installation of an underground cable route. The minor loss of modified grassland is not significant, and the long-term impact on local wildlife habitats is expected to be negligible.

The habitats on site have limited potential to support protected or notable species. The following species/groups are either present, potentially present, or could be encouraged onto the site and the recommended actions are as follows:

Bats – There are no buildings on-site and no suitable roosting features were recorded in trees, meaning roosting bats are absent. The site is dominated by short grassland which is poor foraging habitat, but the adjacent off-site hedgerow provides potential for foraging and commuting. The minor disturbance below the hedgerow for cabling is not significant. No artificial lighting of the hedgerow and trees is proposed and no further surveys for bats are therefore required.

Dormice – The adjacent off-site species-rich native hedgerow provides suitable habitat for Dormice. Presence or absence within this boundary habitat is unknown, but because the cable route avoids structural removal of the hedge, a formal survey is not proportionate. Provided that works follow precautionary methods of working and avoid the sensitive hibernation period, no impact to this species is predicted.

Birds – Nesting opportunities are restricted to the off-site boundary hedgerow and trees. The hedge structure will be fully retained. As a precaution, if trenching works near the hedge base take place during the nesting season (March – August), a nesting bird check by an ecologist is required immediately prior to breaking ground.

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1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 In August 2026, All Ecology was commissioned to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of a site known Arches Farm, Arches Lane, Malmesbury, SN16 0EJ. The site occupies the northern edge of a field of modified grassland, occasionally grazed by cattle, and is adjacent to a public bridleway (MALW86), separated by a wooden fence. On the other side of the public bridleway is a hedgerow, separating it from a residential dwelling.
- 1.2 The site is located approximately 1 km south of Malmesbury centre and 22 km west of Swindon, the nearest large town. The site is situated within a predominantly rural landscape, characterised by a mosaic of agricultural land, a network of hedgerows, and scattered pockets of woodland.
- 1.3 The site is the subject of a planning application for the installation of 20 ground-mounted solar panels in a single row and enclosed by a timber post-and-rail fence. The proposal includes excavation of a narrow underground cable trench, passing beneath the public bridleway and hedgerow, to connect to a consumer unit within an existing garage.

Objectives and Aim

- 1.4 The main objectives and aim of the survey were to identify features of ecological interest, undertake a basic search of habitats present for evidence of use, or potential use, by protected species, and to identify any other possible ecological constraints to the proposed redevelopment.

Site Location



Figure 1: Site location plan.

Aerial Photograph with Proposed Site

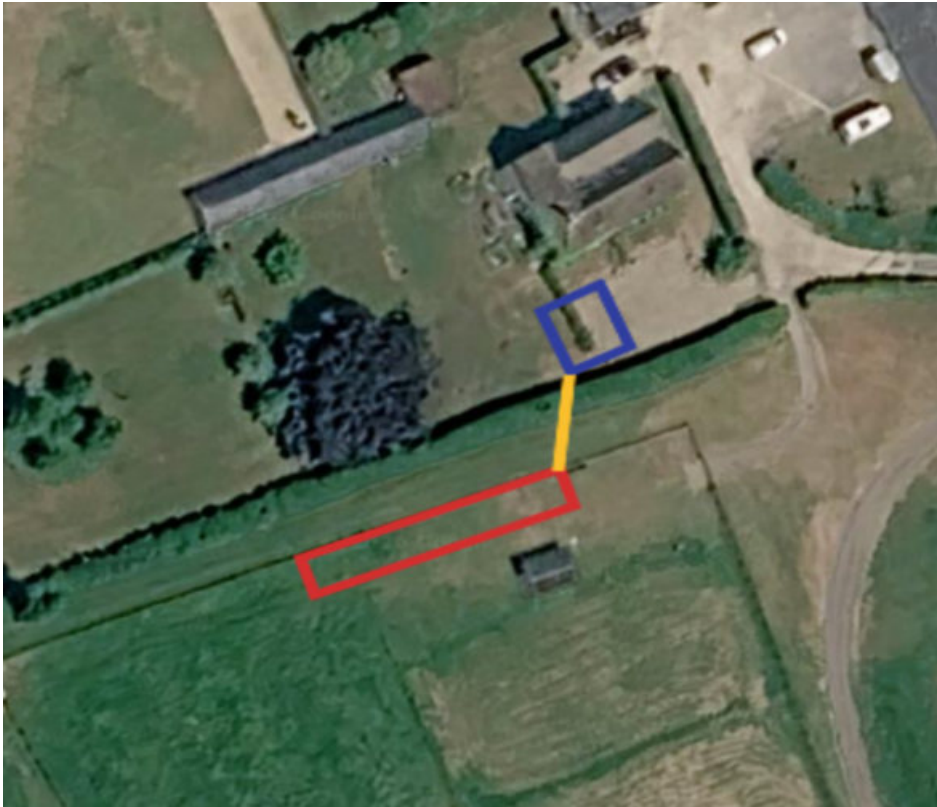


Figure 2: Aerial view with proposed location of solar panels (red).
Underground cabling (yellow) will run to garage (blue) not visible on maps.

2.0 Methodology

Personnel

- 2.1 The survey was carried out by James Godbeer BSc Hons MCIEEM, an ecologist with over 19 years' experience working as a consultant. James has extensive experience of managing environmental contracts, and particular experience in surveying, assessment and mitigation for rare and protected species. He has considerable knowledge of the development and planning process including Ecological Impact Assessments, sustainable ecological design and he has completed ecology chapters of Environmental Statements. James holds a number of protected species licences including bats (all species, all counties, Class Licence Registration No. 2015-12313-CLS-CLS), and Great Crested Newts (Class Licence Registration No. 2019-44282-CLS-CLS). He has successfully obtained European Protected Species mitigation licences for a number of bat species including Lesser Horseshoe, Greater Horseshoe, Serotine, Brown Long-eared, Common Pipistrelle and Natterer's bats, for a number of roost types including maternity and hibernation sites.

Desk Survey

- 2.2 Online OS maps and aerial photographs were inspected for the presence of ponds in the surrounding area. Additionally, MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside, 2026) was used to establish the distance and direction of any statutory sites within the search area.
- 2.3 Given the small size and nature of the site, which is predominantly comprised of modified grassland and features only minor potential disruption to a small section of native hedgerow, alongside the low-impact scale of the proposal, a request for data from the local records centre was not deemed necessary.

Field Survey

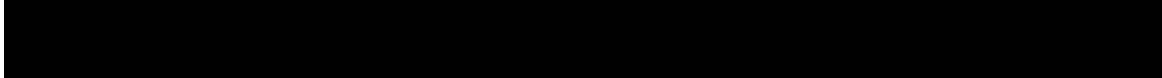
Habitats

- 2.4 The site was visited on the 6th August 2026 and surveyed in accordance with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) Phase I Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC,2010). In addition to Phase I, UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) methodology was also used to categorise and map the primary habitat types present within the survey area using a standard set of habitat categories, with associated secondary codes/features identified where applicable (UKHab Ltd, 2023). This technique provides an inventory of the basic habitat types present and allows identification of areas of greater potential that might warrant further study. Details of current management and habitat condition have also been recorded where appropriate.
- 2.5 The presence/absence of injurious and legally controlled weeds was also determined.

Fauna

- 2.6 The habitats present on the site were searched for signs of animal activity. There were no trees on site of sufficient size/age to be assessed for their potential to support bat roosts.

2.7



A casual search for any signs of Dormice such as gnawed nuts, or nests was also carried out.

- 2.8 Incidental observations of invertebrates and birds were recorded and a search made for any signs of previous nesting.
- 2.9 There were no refuges on site, such as logs or other debris, to be lifted and inspected for reptiles and amphibians. In regards to Great Crested Newts, OS mapping identified one small pond approximately 200 m southeast of the site. However, Great Crested Newts are unlikely to be present on site given the surrounding habitat of modified grassland and the distance to the pond. This was the only mapped waterbody identified within 250 m of the site, and therefore no Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessments were undertaken.

Equipment

- 2.10 Equipment used to aid the survey included a high-powered torch, ladder, binoculars and a camera.

Valuation of Ecological Features

- 2.11 The valuation process used in this report follows the Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, 2018).
- 2.12 The value of areas of habitat and plant communities has been measured against published criteria where available. Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) have been searched to identify whether action has been taken to protect all areas of a particular habitat and to identify current factors causing loss and decline of particular habitats. The presence of injurious and legally controlled weeds has also been taken into account.
- 2.13 When assigning a level of value to a species, its distribution and status (including a consideration of trends based on available historic records) has been taken into account. Other factors influencing the value of a species are: legal protection, rarity and Species Action Plans (SAPs). Guidance, where it is available, for the identification of populations of sufficient size for them to be considered of national or international importance has also been considered.

Nomenclature

- 2.14 The English name only of flora and fauna species is given in the main text of this report; however, scientific names are used for invertebrates where no English name is available. Vascular plants and charophytes follow the nomenclature of The Botanical Society for the British Isles (BSBI) 2007 database (BSBI, 2007) with all other flora and fauna following the Nameserver facility of the National Biodiversity Network Species Dictionary (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nbn/>), which is managed by the Natural History Museum.

Limitations

- 2.15 The site itself was fully accessible with no limitations to undertaking the survey in accordance with the stated methodology.

3.0 Results

Desk Survey

- 3.1 There are no statutory designated sites within 1 km of the site.
- 3.2 No impacts are predicted to statutory sites in the wider area given the small-scale and nature of the proposal.

Field Survey

- 3.3 The following table presents a description of the habitats present.

Table 1: Details of habitats present on and bordering the site.

Habitats	Description
g4- Modified grassland	The grassland is dominated by Perennial Ryegrass, with rare occurrences of Field Bindweed, Greater Plantain, Common Thistle and Dandelion. The grassland is subject to grazing by cattle.
Individual Trees	A row of 11 immature Field Maple trees have been planted along the field boundary, a section of which is adjacent to the proposed development site. The trees extend significantly beyond the proposed development boundary to the east and west.
h2a5 Species-rich Native Hedgerow	North of the proposed development site is defined by a hedgerow approximately 2–3 m in height and 2–2.5 m in width. Only a small section of the hedgerow may be subject to minor disturbance associated with the installation of underground cabling. The hedgerow consists of frequent English Elm, with occasional Hawthorn, and rare Field Maple, Elder, Dog-rose and Blackthorn. Bramble, Field Bindweed and Common Thistle are present at the base of the hedgerow.



1: General view of the proposed site. The small animal shelter is outside of the proposed development site.



2: Modified grassland on proposed site.



3: Row of Field Maple trees bordering the proposed site and
bridleway.



4: Immature Field Maple tree.



5: Hedgerow along the edge of the bridleway.



6: Section of hedgerow under which the cable would likely
pass.

Fauna

3.4 The following table assesses the potential for other protected species to be present.

Table 2: Protected Species Assessment

Fauna	Description
Bats	Habitats (roosting): No buildings or trees are present within the site boundary. Off-site, a row of 11 immature Field Maple trees has been planted along the field boundary but this do not provide any potential roosting features; roosting bats are absent. Habitats (foraging/commuting): The site comprises modified grassland, which offers limited foraging value. However, the active presence of grazing cattle enhances its localised value by attracting diverse assemblages of dung-associated insects and flying insects. The adjacent off-site species-rich native hedgerow provides foraging and commuting habitat, offering connectivity to the wider landscape, including a small pocket of woodland 350 m to the west. Bats may also forage over the site's grassland in connection with this boundary. Presence/absence: Roosting bats will be absent from the site. Foraging and commuting individuals are likely present within the off-site hedgerow corridor.

Dormice	Habitats: The site is dominated by modified grassland, offering no habitat for Hazel Dormice. The off-site species-rich native hedgerow provides woody foraging and nesting habitat, containing species such as Hawthorn, Elder, and Blackthorn. The hedgerow is well connected to the wider landscape, including a small pocket of woodland 350m to the west. Presence/absence: No evidence of Hazel Dormice was recorded on the site. Dormice are likely absent from the development footprint but may potentially utilise the adjacent off-site boundary hedgerow.
Otters & Water Voles	Habitats: The site contains no suitable aquatic habitat for Otter or Water Vole. Presence/absence: Otter and Water Vole are absent from the site.
Other Mammals	Habitats: The site is dominated by managed modified grassland, offering poor habitat for other small mammals. The off-site species-rich native hedgerow increases the area's overall suitability, as this dense structure provides cover and high foraging value. Presence/absence: No evidence of mammal presence was recorded within the site, though cattle were active during the survey. Common small mammals, foxes, hedgehogs, and deer may occasionally transit or pass through the adjacent off-site boundary hedgerow.
Birds	Foraging Habitats: The intensively grazed modified grassland across the entire site offers limited foraging opportunities for common bird species. The off-site species-rich native hedgerow provides foraging and good connectivity to the wider agricultural landscape for commuting birds. Nesting Habitats: The modified grassland provides no nesting opportunities. The adjacent off-site native hedgerow provides good nesting opportunities. Presence/absence: No evidence of nesting birds or historical nesting material was found. However, given the high suitability of the adjacent hedgerow, the seasonal presence of nesting birds cannot be ruled out.
Reptiles	Habitats: The site is dominated by managed modified grassland, which provides negligible cover or foraging value for reptiles. The adjacent off-site species-rich native hedgerow base provides cover but is only associated with short grassland. Presence/absence: Expected to be absent.
Amphibians	Terrestrial Habitats: The site is dominated by modified grassland, which does not provide any cover, making it generally unsuitable for amphibians. The hedgerow provides some cover and foraging opportunities.

	Aquatic Habitats: None present on site. Presence/absence: In regards to Great Crested Newts, OS mapping identified one small pond approximately 200 m southeast of the site and separated from by poor habitats. Great Crested Newts are unlikely to be present on site given the surrounding habitat of modified grassland and the distance to the pond. This was the only mapped waterbody identified within 250 m of the site, and therefore no Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessments were undertaken. Amphibians including Great Crested Newts are expected to be absent from the site.
Invertebrates	Habitats: the site is dominated by modified grassland providing limited habitat for invertebrates. The off-site species-rich native hedgerow offers the greatest habitat diversity and is likely to support the majority of invertebrates present. Presence/absence: Small assemblages of common invertebrates are expected to be present in limited numbers. The potential for rare or notable invertebrate species to be present within the open grassland development footprint is negligible.

4.0 Development Constraints and Recommendations

Development Proposals

- 4.1 The site is the subject of a planning application for the installation of 20 ground-mounted solar panels in a single row and enclosed by a timber post-and-rail fence. The proposal includes excavation of a narrow underground cable trench, passing beneath the public bridleway and hedgerow, to connect to a consumer unit within a garage on the farm.

Habitats

- 4.2 The grassland on site was identified as modified grassland. In order to qualify as a NERC Priority Habitat, grassland typically has to be unimproved (good semi-improved grassland can also qualify) and would have to be examples of grasslands such as lowland calcareous grassland or lowland dry acid grassland, habitats not found on site. Any impacts as a result of loss/changes to the grassland on site are considered to be negligible.
- 4.3 The NERC Priority Habitats include all hedgerows with at least 80% cover of at least one woody UK native species (JNCC, 2017). The off-site boundary hedgerow had at least 80% cover of native species (including Field Elm, Hawthorn, Field Maple, Elder, and Blackthorn) and as such qualifies as a NERC Priority Habitat. The base of the off-site boundary hedgerow may be disturbed to accommodate the installation of a narrow underground cable trench but because works are limited to a minor underground cable route without permanent above-ground loss or removal of the hedge structure, the impact to the hedgerow would be negligible. A formal hedgerow assessment to determine if the hedgerow is classified as 'important' under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 would not be required and in any case the hedge is exempt as it forms part of residential curtilage.
- 4.4 The row of immature Maple trees, planted in preparation for the proposal, may provide higher value future habitat and will be fully retained.

Fauna

Bats

- 4.5 There are no buildings on site and no roosting features were associated with trees. Roosting bats are absent from the site. The site provides potential bat foraging habitat associated with the site adjacent hedgerow and its connectivity to the wider landscape but no impact on bats would arise as a result of the installation and no lighting is proposed. A bat activity survey will not be required.

Dormice

- 4.6 The hedgerow adjacent to the site provides suitable habitat for Dormice, also connecting to the wider hedgerow network, including a small pocket of woodland 350 m to the west. Presence of Dormice within off-site hedgerows is unknown. The length of hedgerow, under which the cabling will pass, is not sufficient to undertake a survey for Dormice using nest tubes and such a survey would not be proportionate to the impact, which is likely to be negligible.

- 4.7 The hedge does not appear to provide any deadwood or below ground voids that could be used by hibernating Dormice. The hedgerow will be retained and any long-term impacts to Dormice will be avoided and the hedgerow will continue to provide suitable habitat for this species in the event that they are present.

[REDACTED] mammals

- 4.9 In order to prevent trapping mammals that may cross the site, it is recommended that during the construction phase of the project any trenches and other excavations are back-filled before nightfall or a ramp left to allow animals to easily exit, and any open pipes larger than 150 mm should be capped off overnight.

Birds

- 4.10 The adjacent off-site hedgerow provides opportunities for nesting and foraging. No nests or evidence of historical nests were found; however, birds may nest here in the future. The modified grassland field is completely unsuitable for ground-nesting birds.
- 4.11 The hedgerow structure will be fully retained, with disturbance limited to a narrow underground cabling route. All wild birds, their nests, and eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Because works are restricted to a minor trench, full vegetation clearance is not required. However, as a precaution, if the trenching works near the hedge base are scheduled during the main bird nesting season (March to August inclusive), a nesting bird check must be undertaken by an ecologist immediately prior to breaking ground. If an active nest is identified near the cable route, an appropriate exclusion buffer must be retained around the nest site until the young have fully fledged.

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