

Ecological Appraisal Report
on behalf of Mr Bengry
re: proposed development: residential at
Longmoor, Shirtheath, Leominster, HR6 9RG
December 2015



Figure 1: aerial view of the site and local landscape

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1. SUMMARY

This ecological assessment comprises a Phase One Survey and habitat assessment, and desk study to identify the impact on wildlife of a proposed site for a small residential development. Narrow strips of traditional orchard lay west and south-west of the site, and this important habitat will not be affected by proposals, due to the small size of the proposed residential development and their occupants and pets. The proposed development will have no impact on other habitats, and there are no important habitats on the site, which is species-poor semi-natural grassland, apart from the native roadside hedge.

The survey found no signs of presence of protected species, although the hedged boundaries are potentially good bird nesting habitat. With regard to dormice and reptiles, there were no biological records of these species close by, and habitat on the site was not suitable. Badgers may forage over the site, but as an adaptable species are unlikely to be affected by the development. A judgement that likelihood of presence of great crested newts was very low indeed was based on the fact there were no records of these species within 500 km, and there are no suitable ponds within that distance of the site, and no features (such as old walls or rough grassland) to provide good habitat for newts on the site. Bats could be using the shelter of hedges on the boundaries of the site to forage for insects, but recommended protective plastic barrier mesh alongside the hedges will protect the hedge and its root system, foraging bats, and nesting birds. Any loss of hedgerow caused by a new access through the roadside hedge will be replaced by new native hedge on the north boundary of the site.

No additional surveys are recommended, as disturbance or harm to protected species during the development was considered highly unlikely. If recommendations made in the Evaluation in section 5 of this report, in addition to a new native hedge, standard fruit trees will enhance the developed site, adding young fruit trees to the local landscape of traditional orchard, and habitat for bats, birds, including lesser spotted woodpecker, and woodboring insects.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Janet Lomas was commissioned by Sarah Hanson, on behalf of Mr B. Bengry to carry out a Phase One Extended Survey which took place on 1st December 2015

at Longmoor, Shirl Heath, near Leominster, where a small residential development of four new dwellings is proposed on a small area of a field which is currently in agricultural use. The area of the field where the development is proposed is shown outlined in red in Figure 2 below, and is referred to in this report as 'the site'.



Figure 2

The roadside location is at grid reference SO437 603, on a lane off the A4110 in Shirl Heath, approximately 4 miles west of the outskirts of Leominster.

This report provides the results of the Phase One Survey, which identifies habitat on the site, and signs of protected species or suitable habitat for them, recommending further survey in the breeding season if necessary. The survey is informed by the results of a desk study carried out to identify nearby habitat and records of protected species, as well as special wildlife sites, traditional orchards and ancient woodlands (both of which are Habitats of Principle Importance under the NERC Act 2006), and SSSIs. A resulting evaluation aims to indicate whether there is risk of impact on protected species and important habitats by the proposed development.

Management of water are covered outside this report.

2.2 Ecological context

The proposed development site lies is part of a small roadside field between two residential properties in the rural village of Shirl Heath. The field is grazed by sheep, and is permanent pasture, and lies beside a small traditional orchard (west of the site). There is extensively managed grassland, intensive grassland and arable crops in fields within 200 metres of the site. Figure 1 shows the rural landscape, with small fields adjacent to the houses in the village, and large fields beyond, with hedges with ash and oak, wooded watercourses and many small

traditional orchard. The local landscape has very little woodland, but there is an area of secondary woodland south of Cornhill Farm, 400 metres west of the site, and an ancient woodland site, 750 kms west of the site, south-east of Street Court.

The site is in the catchment of the Pinsley Brook which flows into the River Lugg approximately 10 kms south-east of Shirl Heath, near Leominster. The Lugg is a SSSI and it flows into the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is a European designation, and therefore the proposed development lies in a catchment of international significance.

2.3 Surveyor profile

The Ecological Assessment and this report was undertaken by Janet Lomas (MIAgrE CEnv) Gt Crested Newt Class Licence WML-CL08, registration number 2014-5326-CLS-CLS, and Bat Class Licence Registration No. CLS00278, 2015-10954-CLS-CLS. Janet Lomas is experienced in ecological survey and assessment, including great crested newt and bat surveying, and holds survey licences for over fifteen years. She is a member of the professional body, Institute of Agricultural Engineers, and is a Chartered Environmentalist.

2.4 Legislation

All bats and their roosts are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* and the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010*. As such it is an offence to kill, injure, capture or disturb bats or to obstruct access to, damage or destroy bat roosts. This protection has been extended by the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* to include reckless damage, destruction or disturbance of a roost. A roost is defined as any structure or place used for shelter or protection, and all bat roosting sites receive protection even when bats are not present.

It is an offence to disturb a nesting bird.

The great crested newt is protected against destruction of its resting places as well as the killing or disturbance of the newts themselves under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000. The dormouse is strictly protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). The deliberate capturing, disturbing, injuring and killing of dormice is prohibited, as is damaging or destroying their breeding sites and resting places. A wide range of breeding birds protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, with some having further protection, also occur in the area.

The law requires that, if protected species are disturbed on the development site, work should cease, and Natural England should be notified. Where it is necessary to carry out an action that could result in an offence, it is possible to apply for a licence from Natural England.

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

3.1 Desk study

This report gives the results of a desktop study, used to establish the presence of nearby habitats, and to indicate if protected species have been recorded nearby and to thereby inform the evaluation of the site's potential for protected species which may not be seen on the field survey.

- A search was carried out using the MAGIC website to identify the presence of statutory designated sites (e.g. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); Special Protection Areas (SPAs); Sites of Special Scientific interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs));
- A data collection exercise was undertaken with the local Biological Records Centre within a radius of 2 kms of the site.
- Local old maps were viewed, including the 1880s First Ordnance Survey Map, to provide evidence of age of pond, woodland and hedges, and to identify other characteristics and features which were present in the 1880s.
- Ordnance Survey maps (scale of 1:10,000) and online aerial photography (Google Earth and Bing Maps) were reviewed to identify the presence of any water bodies within 500m of the site and any direct habitat connections to the site.

3.2 Field survey

A site visit was undertaken on 1st December 2015. The site survey took the form of an Extended Phase One Survey, and noted habitats present on site in relation to their suitability to support protected species. Habitats and features are described in section 4 of this report, and illustrated by photography. Potential foraging habitat for bats and potential for great crested newt dispersal routes were also considered, and suitability of habitat on the site for other protected species found in Herefordshire.

3.3 Survey limitations

The limitations to the survey were related to the time of year, because some protected species were in hibernation, but conditions and time of year did not affect identification of habitats on this site or their value, nor did they limit the surveyor's ability to assess suitability of the site for protected species.

4. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY – FEATURES AND HABITATS

4.1 Desk Study

Herefordshire Biological Records Centre was consulted, and the Map in Appendix 1 shows designated sites within 2 kms:

Name/ Designation SWS=Local Wildlife Site	Site Description (refers to Map in Appendix 1).
SO35/25	<p>River Arrow Leominster, Eardisland and Huntingdon</p> <p>The register states: “A fast flowing river with a rocky substrate in its upper reaches.</p> <p>There is a good margin of mostly alder, willow, holly and more notably black poplar. Aquatic and marginal plants include yellow water-lily, marsh speedwell and purple loosestrife. Various bryophytes grow on the rocks.</p> <p>The site is good for birds, heron, sand martin and kingfisher being amongst those recorded. Otter is known to frequent the river.”</p> <p>Date 1993</p>
SO46/12	<p>Field north of Harbour Farm SWS</p> <p>The register states: “A hay meadow with a moderately rich flora which includes pignut and yellow rattle.”</p> <p>Date 1993</p>
SO46/16	<p>Pinsley Brook SWS</p> <p>The register states: “A gravel-bedded, slow-moving stream. The stream supports a rich wetland flora, including yellow iris, greater tussock-sedge, and water avens. The sites forms a good habitat for birds and mammals: dipper and otter have been observed.”</p> <p>Date 1993</p>

Protected Species from HBRC data

The search for data from HBRC found species recorded within 2 km of the proposed development shown on the annotated map in Appendix 2, and spreadsheet of recorded species in Appendix 3. Mammal recording in the area has shown many records. The most relevant records are shown on the map and the most significant are described below:

- Great crested newt records around SO440 595, in 2003 and 2004. This is 750m from the site.
- Bat records are recorded widely within the 2 km radius of the site, including lesser horseshoe at SOSO44399 61606, 1.5 km north-east of the site. Pipistrelle bats and long-eared bats have been recorded many times in the

north of the 2 km radius, and the closest bat species, an unidentified myotis bat, was found approximately 1 km north-east of the site.

- Lesser spotted woodpecker and barn owl are recorded approximately 1 km south of the site.

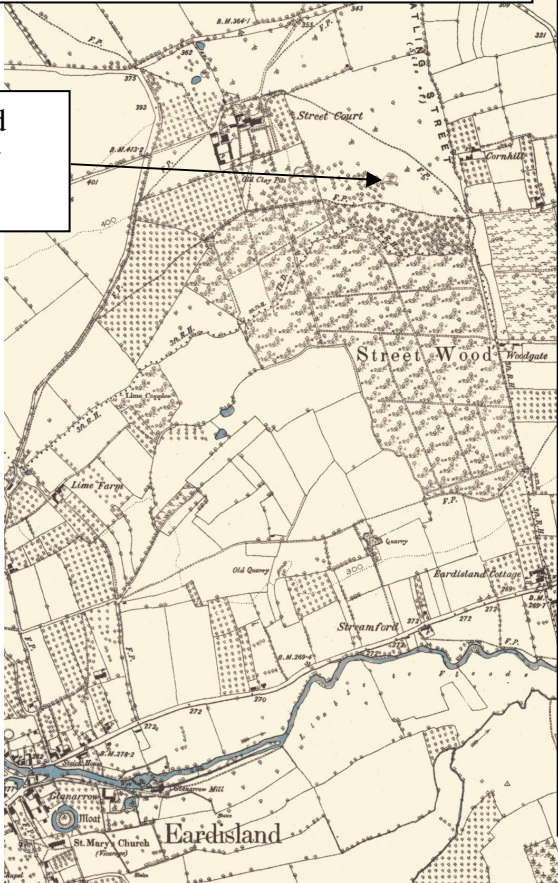
Information from maps

Aerial photography and maps show the following:

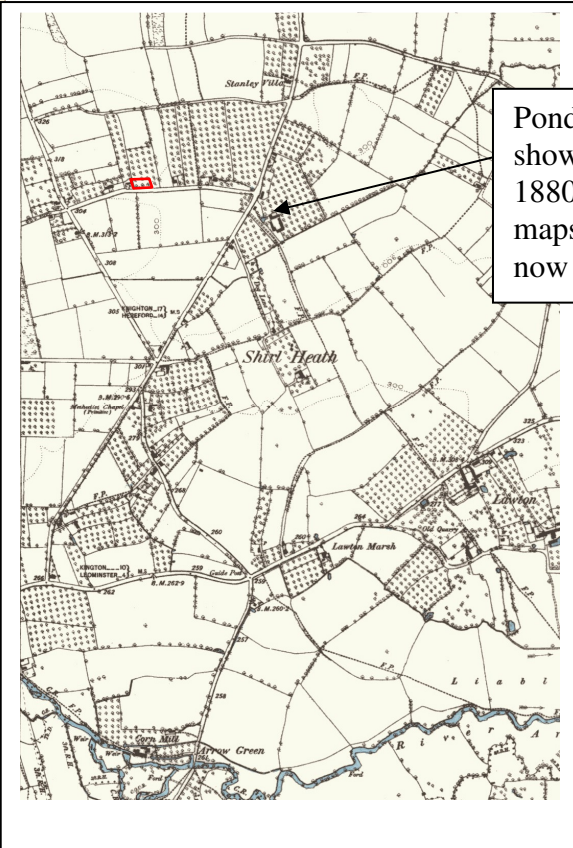
1. The nearest pond shown on modern OS mapping is near woodland south-east of Street Court, at SO429603. It is marked on the 1880s OS map as one of several 'old clay pits'. This is difficult to confirm on modern aerial photography, as the adjacent woodland has been extended over the area. This pond is 750 metres from the site, and there are large arable fields between this pond and the site.
2. A small pond appears at Shirl Heath Farm (250 metres south-eastward) on 1880s OS mapping, but is not shown on modern maps, nor is it visible on aerial mapping.
3. In the 1880s, there was a traditional orchard on the site and remainder of the field (see below), but this is no longer an orchard. The field immediately west of the site was orchard in the 1880s, and is still orchard.

Figure 2: 1880s OS mapping showing survey site outlined in red.

'Old clay pit'



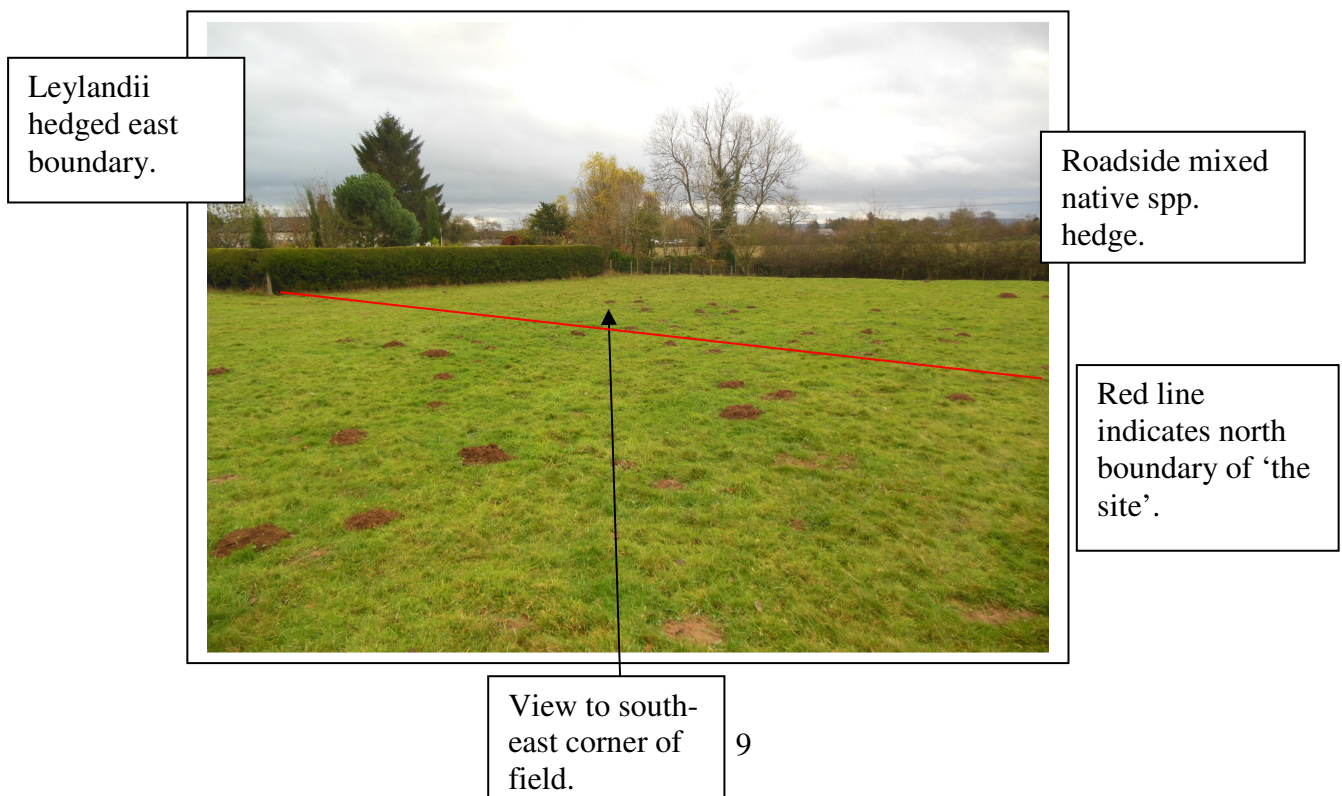
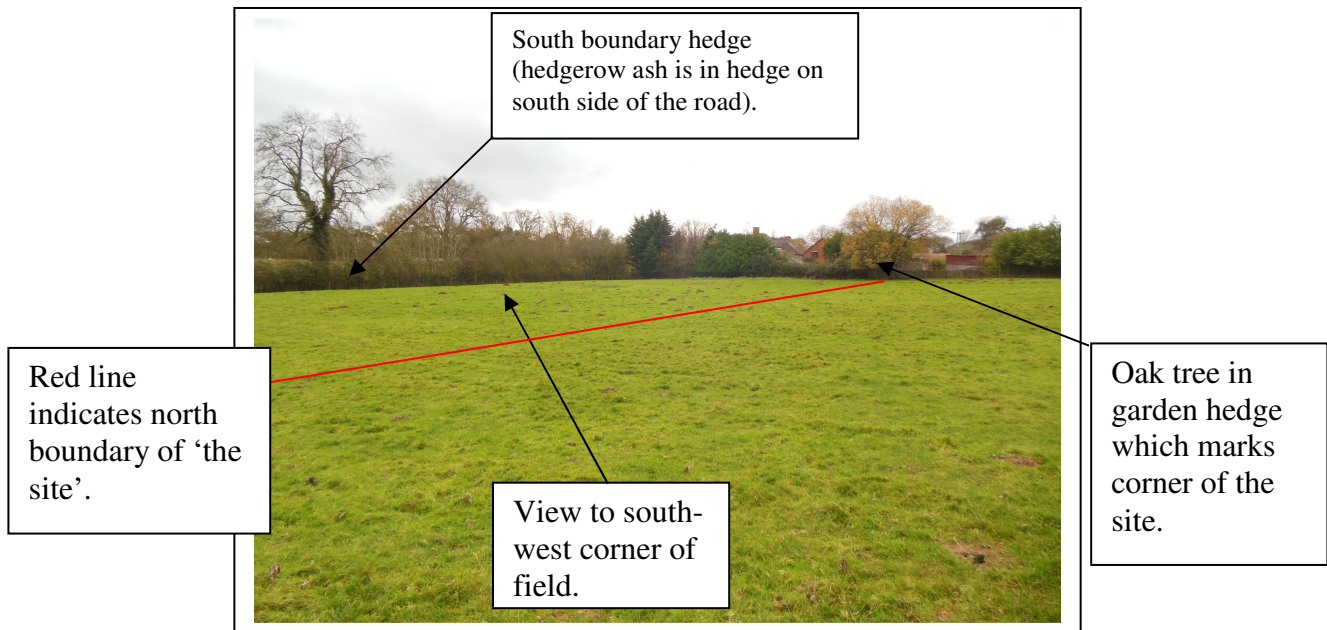
Pond shown on 1880s maps, but now gone.



4.3 Field survey

The trimmed, tall roadside (south boundary) hedge (1 below) was probably an old hedge, and was comprised of hawthorn, hazel and field maple. The east and west boundary hedges were tall Cypress leylandii/mixed garden species.

The grassland was species poor semi-improved grassland, dominated by Yorkshire fog and cocksfoot. It was grazed by sheep at the time of the survey.



5. EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Local Wildlife Sites are unlikely to be at risk of impact from the development of the proposed site at sufficient due to the distance between the site and the LWSs, although these special sites may support species which could disperse towards the proposed development site.

The site lies in an area where there remain several small traditional orchards, which are valuable habitats providing decaying wood and habitat for invertebrates, hole-nesting birds and bats as well as many unusual species associated with orchards. The proposals will not affect the closest of these, a very small traditional orchard immediately west of the site, and another small one, south-west of the site, as the development proposals involve building a small number of new dwellings in an area which is already a village, where wildlife is adjusted to the presence of houses and small businesses. Impact on the traditional orchard by pets, associated with the new development should be low, due to the low number of houses proposed.

The hedges between the site and the orchards will buffer these habitats. Other small orchards, 0.5 km and 0.75 km east of the site will also not be affected.

The proposed development will have no impact on other habitats nearby, woodland and watercourses.

Bats: Several species of bats have been recorded locally, and may forage along the boundaries of the survey site, using hedges as wildlife corridors.

Recommendations:

- The north boundary of the developed area could be marked by planting a native species hedge with the following species: Hawthorn (50%), hazel (20%), field maple (10%), dogwood (10%), spindle (5%) and blackthorn (5%).
- If access to the site is from the road, retain as much of the roadside hedgerow as possible.
- Erect orange plastic barrier mesh on 1.3 metre fencing pins to protect the retained native hedge, 5 metres from the centre of the hedge.
- Standard fruit trees, planted as part of the landscaping of the development, could provide the wildlife habitat and landscape characteristic of traditional orchards, found commonly around the site.

Great crested newt (GCN): The distance that newts are known to range from their breeding ponds is 500 metres, and the HBRC data search revealed records of breeding GCN 750 m south-east of the site. This is beyond the normal range of dispersal from a breeding pond, and the desk study found no ponds within range of the site, except one where adjacent arable land would make newt dispersal towards the site unlikely. The site is grazed, without walls or other features likely to provide good terrestrial habitat for newts.

Nesting birds: All hedged boundaries are potentially good nesting sites for birds. It is an offence to disturb nesting birds, their young or their nests.

Recommendations:

- If development work takes place during the nesting season, 1st March-31st August, erect some barrier mesh described above.

Other protected species: the table below summarises the risk to other protected species found in Herefordshire.

Table: impact of development on protected species found in Herefordshire

FAUNA Confirmed presence CP Potentially present PP Unlikely presence UP No possibility NP	Code	Need further work or survey (Y/N)	Reason/Notes (e.g. field signs present or desk study revealed presence in area and/or suitable habitat present on site).
Badgers	PP	N	No setts or other signs, but badgers may forage over the area. No risk of impact.
Otters	UP	N	Otters are very likely to travel along the nearby network of brooks and smaller watercourses, but are very unlikely to cross the site.
Water voles	NP	N	No suitable habitat.
Common dormice	UP	N	No local records. Roadside hedge unlikely habitat, and adjacent garden hedges not suitable for the species. Poor links with semi-natural woodland.
Bats	PP	N	Potential foraging habitat; no roosting habitat, and very low risk of impact.
Nesting birds	PP	N	Potential nesting habitat in the hedges, and measures need to be taken to avoid impact.
Reptiles	UP	N	Not recorded nearby, and an unlikely site for reptiles.
Great crested newts	UP	N	Not considered at risk.
White-clawed crayfish	NP	N	No suitable habitat.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – HBRC map showing designations within 2 km of the site.

Appendix 2 - HBRC map showing protected and notable species records within 2 km of the site.

Appendix 3 – Spreadsheet of HBRC protected and notable species records within 2 km.