Clarke Webb Ecology Limited

ECOLOGICAL SURVEYORS & CONSULTANTS

Land at Court Farm, Much Birch

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

Rev 1

Survey date: **19th March 2014**

Surveyor: **Dr Peter Webb MCIEEM**

Clarke Webb Ecology Ltd Company No 4339567
111 Stackpool Road Bristol BS3 1NX
Email: clarkewebb@googlemail.com

1 Introduction

1.1 This survey relates to the proposed residential development of an area of land at Court Farm, Much Birch, Herefordshire.

1.2 A plan of the site can be found at Figure 1 and photographs at Figure 2.

1.3 The site can be divided into two parts:

i. an area previously occupied by a 'farm yard' and currently including areas of hard-standing, disturbed/compacted ground (with patchy ephemeral vegetation) and some marginal grassy patches. At the time of the survey several modern agricultural-type buildings were present though in the process of being removed under an existing outline planning consent;

ii. part of an adjacent arable field to the south.

1.4 Site boundaries are either unmarked or marked by garden hedgerow or post-and-wire fencing. Immediately adjacent land is given over to arable cultivation (to the south and west) or the gardens of neighbouring dwellings (to the north and east).

1.5 The site is located on the southern edge of the village of Much Birch with open countryside to the south.

2 Method

2.1 A walkover survey of the site was carried out during fair weather by day on the 19th March 2014. The intent of the survey was to identify:

i. the presence of any habitats of conservation importance or other features of ecological interest likely to be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed works (either during the construction phase or the operational phase);

ii. the presence or possible presence of protected species likely to be affected;

iii. any need for further ecological survey.

2.2 The survey covered:

i. the site as indicated on Figure 1;

ii. immediately surrounding accessible land where thought appropriate;

iii. any other accessible adjacent land or features thought to be of potential relevance.

Habitats

2.3 Habitat survey broadly followed the guidelines given in the Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey (JNCC 1993). Target notes were used to identify specific areas on a plan, cross-referenced where appropriate in the text. Detailed species lists were not compiled.

Protected species

2.4 The site and accessible immediately adjacent land were searched for sign of use or likely use by protected species including:

Bats

2.5 We note the presence of several building on the site at the time of the survey. These buildings were in the process of being demolished at the time of the survey (various other buildings or parts of buildings having already been demolished). We understand that these buildings are being removed under an existing outline planning consent and are likely to be no longer present within c 2-4 weeks of the survey. No bat survey of them was therefore carried out other than to note that they all appear(ed) to be of no greater than low potential in this respect.

2.6 There are no trees present on the site (other than a small beech of no substance within one of the boundary hedgerows).

2.7 Notwithstanding the above, an assessment was made of the likely use of the site by bats for foraging/commuting.

Badger

2.8 The site and, if deemed appropriate, accessible land within 20-30 m of it was surveyed during daylight for the presence of badger setts or any other sign of use by badger including badger tracks, dung, dung pits and foraging sign.

Nesting birds

2.9 Habitats present were assessed as to their potential for use as nest sites by birds. A thorough search for old birds nests was not carried out.

Reptiles

2.10 An assessment was made of the general suitability of habitats present for use by reptiles.

Other species

2.11 Any other sign of use by protected or notable species and/or the presence of habitats with a reasonable potential to support protected species was noted.

Data search

2.12 The MAGIC website was checked for the presence of adjacent statutory or non-statutory wildlife sites.

2.13 Where appropriate the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) was checked for local records of protected species.

3 Results

Habitats

3.1 The site consists of various areas of hard-standing and/or disturbed/compacted ground either bare, supporting a patchy cover of low ephemeral vegetation together with part of an adjacent arable field. Several remnant buildings are scheduled for imminent removal and can therefore be considered as no longer present.

3.2 Site boundaries are either unmarked or marked by garden hedgerow or post and wire fencing.

3.3 Further details of habitats present can be founding the Target notes associated with Figure 1.

3.4 The site does not include, fall within or abut any statutory or non-statutory wildlife site.

Protected species

Bats

3.5 Notwithstanding the soon-to-be-removed buildings, the site does not present any potential roosting locations for bats.

3.6 The site itself does not appear suitable for significant use by bats for foraging or commuting – it is relatively open and lacks significant features such as tall hedgerows, trees, tall scrub, water-features etc. Nevertheless, given the relatively rural location, bats are likely to foraging and/or commute to at least some extent along surrounding/adjacent hedgerows.

Badger

3.7 No evidence found for use of the site or immediately adjacent accessible areas by badgers.

Nesting birds

3.8 The main body of the site does not appear suitable for use by birds for nesting provided the sward remains short. There is a small risk of common birds nesting within small areas of rougher grassy vegetation during the spring and summer months and a greater risk of nesting within surrounding/adjacent hedgerows.

Reptiles

3.9 Small, marginal areas of rougher grassy vegetation appear potentially suitable for low level use by common reptiles if they are otherwise present locally. However, surrounding land (arable/gardens) is generally of no greater than low suitability in this respect. Given the general lack of cover, the main body of the site does not appear suitable for significant use by reptiles even if they are otherwise present locally.

Other

3.10 No other evidence was found for use or likely use of the site by protected species. In this regard we note that there are no ponds present on or apparent in the vicinity of the site (a previous pond in the middle of the site appears to have been filled in some time ago) and none marked on the OS 1:25000 plan within 250 m of the site.

4 Interpretation and recommendations

Habitats

4.1 The site does not include any priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitats or habitats otherwise of particular ecological interest or conservation concern.

4.2 The site does not include, fall within or abut any statutory or non-statutory wildlife site.

Bats

4.3 The proposed works will not impact upon any trees, buildings or other structures liable to support bat roosts.

4.4 We understand that there will be no significant lighting. Given the elevation and open nature of the site and its surroundings the site is unlikely to be subject to significant use by bats for foraging or commuting. Nevertheless, we recommend that:

i. To ensure no impact of the proposals on local bat activity and external lighting be such as not to spill significantly onto existing or new boundary hedgerows.

Nesting birds

4.5 There is a small risk of birds nesting within various small areas of rougher grassy vegetation during the spring and/or summer months. Birds are unlikely to nest elsewhere on the site unless the sward is allowed to grow long.

4.6 It is an offence to damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is being built or in use. Precautions should therefore be taken to minimise the risk of damaging or destroying any active nests during works. We therefore recommend that:

i. Any significant removal of vegetation (other than as normal agricultural practice) should be confined to the months of September-February inclusive or otherwise immediately preceded by a thorough check to confirm that no active birds nests are present at the time.

Reptiles

4.7 There is small risk of common reptiles using various small areas of rougher grassy vegetation if they are otherwise present locally. The vast bulk of the site does not appear suitable for use by reptiles. Surrounding land is of no greater than low potential.

4.8 It is an offence to injure or kill any wild reptile. We therefore recommend that as a sensible, best-practice precaution that:

i. prior to the commencement of works and during the construction phase vegetation within the development footprint is maintained short to deter any use of the site by reptiles.

Other

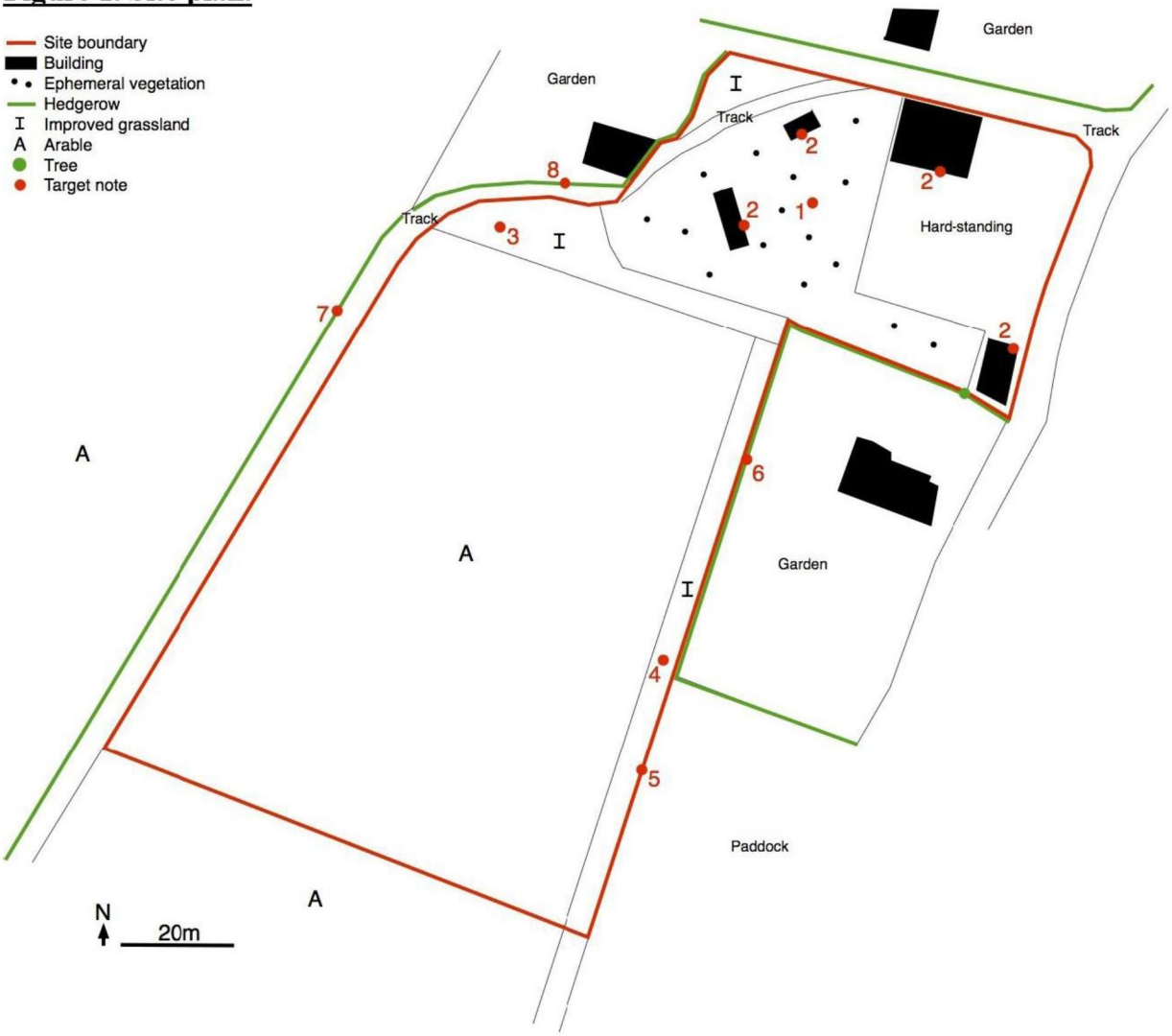
4.9 No evidence was found for significant use of the site by any other protected species.

4.10 Given the nature of the proposals they are unlikely to have any impact (either during construction or during operation) on any adjacent habitats or any use of such habitats by protected species. We see no need for any further ecological survey in relation to the proposed works.

4.11 Notwithstanding the above, we recommend that in order to enhance to overall biodiversity value of the site:

i. the biodiversity enhancements proposed in appendix 1 of this report are enacted.

Figure 1. Site plan.



Target Notes

1 Former farmyard now occupied by disturbed or compacted gravel/dirt with a patchy, low ephemeral vegetation including White clover (*Trifolium repends*), Dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp), Broad-leaved dock (*Rubus obtusifolium*), Common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), Doves-foot cranesbill (*Geranium molle*) etc. Occasional light Willow (*Salix* sp) or Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) scrub

2 Various modern agricultural sheds constructed from block, asbestos, tin etc. In the process of removal.

3 Disturbed ground supporting a cover of rough grassy (improved) and tall ruderal vegetation including species as per Target note 1.

4 Field margin of improved grassland.

5 Post-and-rail fence.

6 Garden hedgerow to around 2 m in height. Mainly conifer with some Beech (*Fagus sylvaticus*- including a single small tree as indicated) at the eastern end.

7 Field hedgerow to around 2 m in height. Largely intact. Includes Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Holly (*Ilex aquifoium*), Ivy (*Hedera helix*) etc.

8 Garden hedgerow to around 2 m in height. Mainly conifer.

Figure 2. Photographs

P1. Looking north from the southern edge of the site across the area of arable cultivation.

P2. The area of rougher grassy/tall ruderal vegetation at Target note 3.

P3 and P4. Typical views across the main body of the site (former farm yard).

Appendix 1. Proposed biodiversity enhancement.

A1. To increase to overall biodiversity value of the site over an above that current, an area (new small field) of the existing arable field at the southern end of the site will be given over to and managed as wildlife habitat (see Figure A1). This area will also act as a buffer between the new development and open countryside to the south.

A2. The new field to be given over for biodiversity enhancement will measure approximately 85 m east-west by 50 m north-south and will include the following (as indicated on Figure A1):

1. A new native hedgerow along each boundary. This hedgerow will consist of native shrubs planted in two, staggered rows at a density of not less than 5 per metre with approximately 450 mm between in plants in the same row and 300-400 mm between rows. Species mix to be as follows:

   Main matrix (transplants/quicks)
   70% of planting stock

   Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*
   Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*

   Interplant (whips/transplants planted in clusters of 2-3)
   30% of planting stock

   Hazel *Corylus avellana*
   Holly *Ilex aquifolium*
   Dog rose *Rosa canina*
   Field maple *Acer campestre*
   Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*
   Spindle *Eunymous europaeus*
   Wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*

   New hedgerow thereafter managed to a height of 2m by trimming as required in January-February.

   The hedgerow will be continual other than breaches to allow pedestrian access from the north and farm access (for management) from the south or west.

2. An area (the main body of the field) to be sown with general wildflower grassland mix (Emorsgate EM1 or equivalent). Once established to be managed as hay meadow through one or more cuts each year between late July and September. All arisings to be removed from site.

3. Field corners to be planted up with native scrub. Each corner to measure approximately 25 m^2 in area. Species and mix as per hedgerows in 1 above. Once established to be manage by trimming to a height of c 3m as required in January-February.

4. A new pond. The pond will:

   i. be unlined;

   ii. be 100-200 m^2 in surface area;

   iii. include a marginal ledge of c 0.5 m in width and c 0.2 m deep (ie below normal water level) and thereafter slope down at a gradient of no more than 1/3 to a central depth of at least 1.2 m;

   iv. be fed by treated water from an onsite treatment plant within the new development. Overflow will be channelled into the existing arable field to the south;

v. not contain fish;

vi. be largely allowed to develop its own flora. However, colonisation will be assisted by planting of the flowing native specimens:

Flowering rush	*Butomus umbellatus*	Three clumps on marginal ledge
Water mint	*Mentha aquatica*	Three clumps on marginal ledge
Bog Bean	*Menyanthes trifoliate*	Three clumps on marginal ledge
Starwort	*Callitriche palustris*	Three clumps free-floating
Frogbit	*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*	Three clumps free-floating

A3. Notwithstanding the above a new native hedgerow (labelled 5 in Figure A1, details as per A2.1 above) will be planted along the western side of the new development to shield it from the adjacent retained farm track.

Figure A1. Proposed site indicating biodiversity enhancement measures.