

**Update Baseline Ecological Survey
Land Adjacent to the Linnings
Sutton St Nicholas
Herefordshire**

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BASELINE ECOLOGICAL SURVEY – LAND ADJACENT TO THE LINNINGS - SUTTON ST NICHOLAS - HEREFORDSHIRE

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an update baseline ecological survey of land adjacent to the Linnings, Sutton St Nicholas, Herefordshire, HR1 3SZ.

A small housing development is proposed consisting of 27 dwellings.

A previous preliminary ecological appraisal was undertaken by Tyler Grange in December 2019 and is the subject of a separate ecological report.

The following presents purely an update to this ecological appraisal and should be read in conjunction with the Tyler Grange report.

The following report includes a habitat description and an assessment of the potential of the area to contain protected species. The results of this survey are presented below with recommendations for mitigation and enhancement.

Site photographs are included in appendix 1.

2. METHODOLOGY

The baseline ecological survey used the extended Phase 1 habitat survey methodology. This is based on the Phase 1 habitat survey methodology developed by the former Nature Conservancy Council (1990), a nationally accepted standard method for baseline ecological survey. Phase 1 habitat survey codes are used to classify habitats in the text below.

This update baseline survey of the site was carried out on the 13th April 2023, by Elizabeth Mckay an Ecologist of 30 years standing. Also an experienced licenced bat worker and great crested newt surveyor.

3. SITE DESCRIPTION

J2.3 Hedge and Trees / J2.1 Intact Hedge / G2 Running Water / B6 Poor Semi-Improved Grassland

The proposed residential development is located on the northern edge of a village in rural Herefordshire in the context of pasture and arable land with a network of hedgerows.

The site consists of horse grazed pasture surrounded by hedgerows with occasional mature trees.

The pasture itself is not species rich and would be classed as species poor semi-improved grassland.

Commonly occurring grasses within the sward included; Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*.

Other flowering plants present within the sward comprised; Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Daisy *Bellis perennis*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, Self Heal *Prunella vulgaris*, Common Thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Ground Ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*, Greater Plantain *Plantago major*, Lords and Ladies *Arum maculatum*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, Cut Leaved Cranesbill *Geranium dissectum*, and Broad Leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*.

For part of the eastern boundary alongside the road there is a continuous hedgerow (H1) which has a single mature Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* tree near to the southern end. The northern end of this boundary is fenced with a post and wire fence.

Species present in this hedgerow include Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* as well as a mature Ash tree.

The northern boundary hedgerow (H2) is continuous but contains no mature trees. Species include Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Elder *Sambucus nigra*.

Hedgerow 3 which lines the western boundary contains Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Elder and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* as well as three mature Ash trees. There is also a stream corridor running along this boundary.

The southern boundary (H4) alongside a garden contains only ornamental garden hedgerow sections, non-native trees including Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* as well as some Bramble and Hawthorn.

Approximately 50-100m to the south-east of the site within the grounds of a primary school are three shallow ponds which are shaded by Goat Willow *Salix caprea*. These contain marginal and aquatic vegetation including Reedmace *Typha latifolia* and Sedges *Carex sp.*

According to ordnance survey maps there is also a fourth pond approximately 240m to the south-east within the school grounds.

A full Desk Data Search is included within the Tyler Grange report. There are no sites of designated conservation interest in close proximity to the site.

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL FOR PROTECTED SPECIES

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulation 2017 (as amended) provides protection for the following species against killing, injury, disturbance or sale. It also protects their places of shelter, protection, breeding and resting sites.

Bats

Of the four mature / semi-mature Ash trees on the site two (T1 & T3 on the western boundary) were assessed during course of the Tyler Grange baseline survey and this more recent baseline survey as having potential to contain roosting bats because they contained suitable cavities / had broken limbs and were covered in Ivy.

On the 13th and 14th May 2019 and 3rd and 4th June 2019 dusk / dawn emergence / re-entry surveys for bats were undertaken by Tyler Grange with respect to these two trees. But no bat emergence was noted.

Very low levels of Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule and Myotis foraging activity were recorded during the course of these surveys.

According to the desk data search there are no records for bats for the site itself but many records exist for the surrounding area.

Birds

The hedgerows and trees around the site boundaries provide nesting and feeding habitats for birds and would be considered as being of local value in this respect. These are recommended for retention wherever possible.

Where trees / shrubs are to be removed, precautionary recommendations have been made below because of the legal protection which nesting birds receive.

Compensatory mitigation has also been recommended as detailed below.

Badgers

- Badgers are protected under the protection of Badgers act 1992.

The site was searched for evidence of badger setts, latrines, prints and trails. No evidence of badger activity was found on either survey visit.

Reptiles

The heavily grazed pasture provides a very sub-optimal habitat for Reptiles.

No further survey is recommended.

Great Crested Newts

Large scale ordnance survey maps and aerial photographs were studied for evidence of ponds within a 250m radius of the site.

Approximately 50-100m to the south-east of the site within the grounds of a primary school are three shallow, shaded ponds containing aquatic vegetation. These were assessed during both surveys as being suitable for Great Crested Newts.

According to ordnance survey maps there is also a fourth pond approximately 240m to the south-east within the school grounds.

Whilst these ponds have suitability, there is appropriate terrestrial habitat surrounding these ponds in the form of woodland scrub and hedgerow habitat, suitable for GCN to forage and take refuge / shelter.

Meanwhile the heavily grazed pasture within the proposed development site has low suitability as terrestrial habitat.

It is therefore considered that there is a low risk of GCN being present on the site.

Tyler Grange came to similar conclusions in 2019.

No further survey has therefore been recommended.

According to the desk data search the closest record for Great Crested Newts is 2km to the north-west.

Water Vole

The stream corridor on the western boundary of the site is heavily shaded by Bramble, as well as the hedgerow and trees and is therefore an unsuitable habitat for Water Voles which prefer more open grassy conditions.

No further survey has been recommended.

Other Protected Species

Given the nature of the habitats present it is considered unlikely that other protected species would be affected by the proposals.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It is proposed that 27 houses are built within a field on the northern edge of Sutton St Nicholas in Herefordshire.

This baseline ecological survey updates the one undertaken by Tyler Grange in December 2019 and is designed purely as an update addenda survey. It should be read in conjunction with the Tyler Grange report.

The current survey was undertaken on the 13th of April 2023 by an experienced Ecologist of thirty years standing.

The development proposals will involve the loss of horse grazed species poor semi-improved grassland and the southern section of hedgerow 1 on the eastern boundary of the site.

However the mitigation and enhancement proposals detailed within the Tyler Grange report and shown on the soft landscaping plan will mitigate for the loss of this hedgerow which is of only local ecological value.

Landscape proposals as detailed below will include native hedgerow and tree planting, wildflower seeding, bird, bat and hedgehog boxes which will more than compensate for habitat loss and lead to a small biodiversity net gain overall as consistent with planning policy guidance.

Hedgerow removal will either be timed to take place during the winter months or the appropriate nesting bird checks will be undertaken should removal take place between March and August.

Hedgerow 3 alongside the western boundary will be retained with an appropriate buffer and trees 1 and 3, identified as having bat potential, within this hedgerow will also be retained as monoliths.

Bat surveys with respect to these two trees undertaken by Tyler Grange in May / June 2019 did not reveal any evidence of roosting bats and levels of foraging activity were also low.

Any tree pruning will be subject to update bat surveys and appropriate soft pruning techniques.

Hedgerow 2 on the northern boundary of the site will also be retained.

Retained trees around the boundaries will also be protected via appropriate barriers.

A lighting strategy will also be included within the development proposals to ensure appropriate dark corridors alongside hedgerows for the benefit of wildlife.

There will also be appropriate consideration of drainage to ensure that surrounding habitats are not impacted.

There are no sites of designated conservation interest within or adjacent to the site. But the drainage ditch alongside the western boundary of the site feeds into the River Lugg approximately 800m downstream. The River Lugg is designated as a SSSI.

Therefore a drainage strategy has been designed by Reford Consulting Engineers (2019) to avoid adverse impacts.

No evidence of Badger activity was found on site during either survey.

The western boundary stream was not found to be suitable for Water Voles, being heavily shaded, Water Voles preferring more open grassy habitats.

Whilst there are four ponds which would have suitability for Great Crested Newts within a 250m radius of the site, within the primary school grounds to the south-east, suitable terrestrial habitat for GCN is present around these ponds.

Therefore it is considered unlikely that GCN would be present on the development site itself. The heavily grazed pasture is of low suitability as terrestrial habitat for GCN therefore no further recommendations have been made.

Likewise the heavily grazed pasture is of very low suitability for Reptiles no further survey is recommended.

Site conditions had not changed between the two surveys.

It is not considered that any other protected or notable species would be affected by the proposals given the nature of the habitats present.

Summary

All habitats of value will be retained and those habitats lost can be mitigated and compensated for with appropriate enhancement measures also put in place.

Appropriate ecological protection for retained features will also be put in place as well consideration of drainage issues to ensure that downstream habitats are also protected.

There will also be ecological protection with respect to nesting birds and foraging bats.

No other species of conservation note were identified.

If the recommendations for ecological protection and enhancement contained with the Tyler Grange report are followed – as summarised below – then a situation of biodiversity net gain should be achieved overall as consistent with planning policy guidance used by local planning authorities.

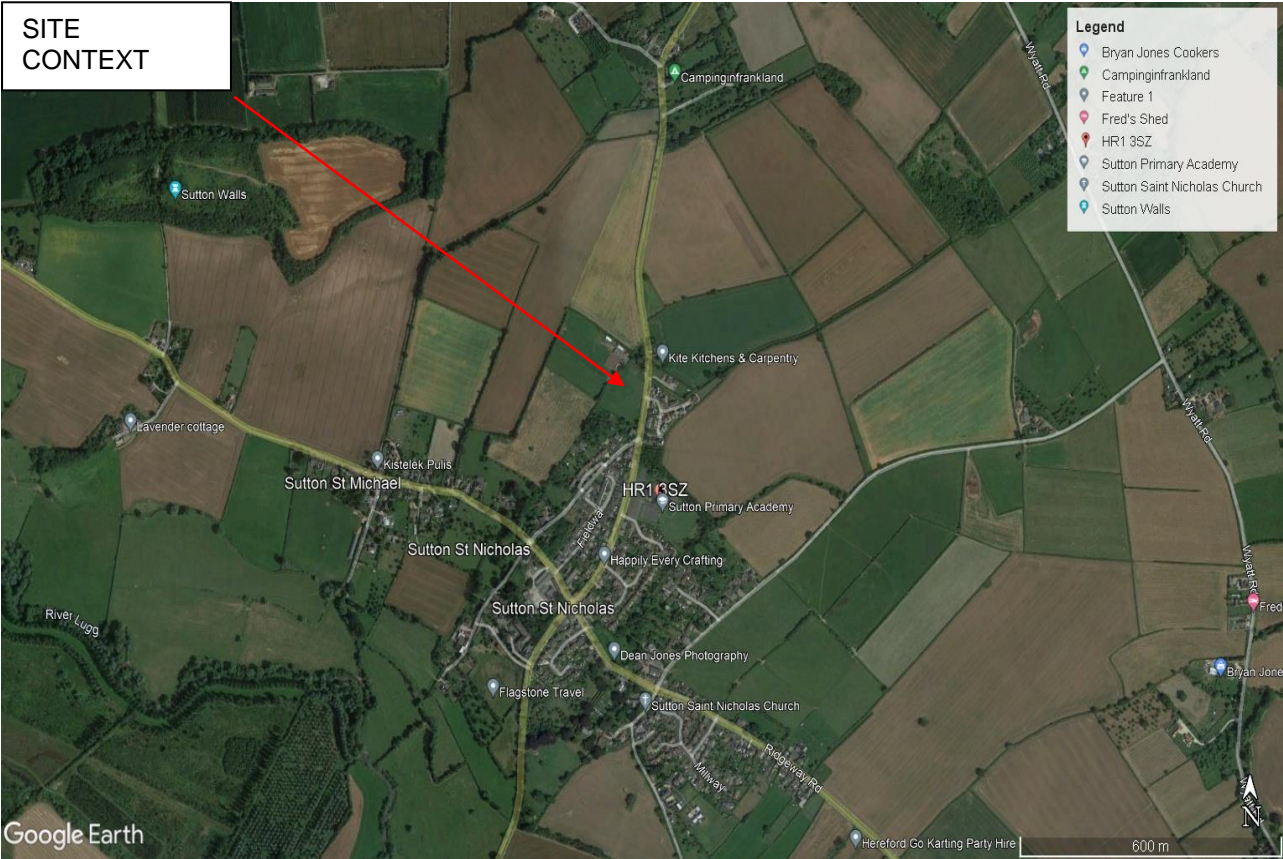
6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Full recommendations to achieve biodiversity net gain have been detailed within the Tyler Grange report dated December 2019. These proposals are also shown on the soft landscaping plan – drawing no. 18198.101. These proposals include native hedgerow and tree planting as well as areas of wildflower grass seeding and the incorporation of bat and bird boxes as well as hedgehog homes.
2. The landscape proposals also include the retention of trees 1 & 3 as monoliths on the western boundary of the site. These trees were identified as having bat potential. Any tree surgery would be subject to update bat surveys and employ the use of soft pruning techniques.
3. The western boundary hedgerow will also be retained with an appropriate buffer as well as the northern boundary hedgerow. Tree protection measures will also be put in place for retained trees during construction.
4. Only part of the eastern boundary hedgerow will be lost. The above mitigation and enhancement measures will compensate for loss of part of this hedgerow.
5. Any loss of hedgerow will be subject to nesting bird checks if removed within the nesting season. Or otherwise removed outside the nesting season which runs from March to August.
6. A lighting strategy will also be included as part of the proposals to ensure dark corridors adjacent to hedgerows.
7. Consideration of drainage issues is also detailed within the Tyler Grange report in order to avoid any impacts with regard to the wider landscape.

7. REFERENCES

JNCC (1993). *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey*. English Nature, Peterborough, UK.

APPENDIX 1 – SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



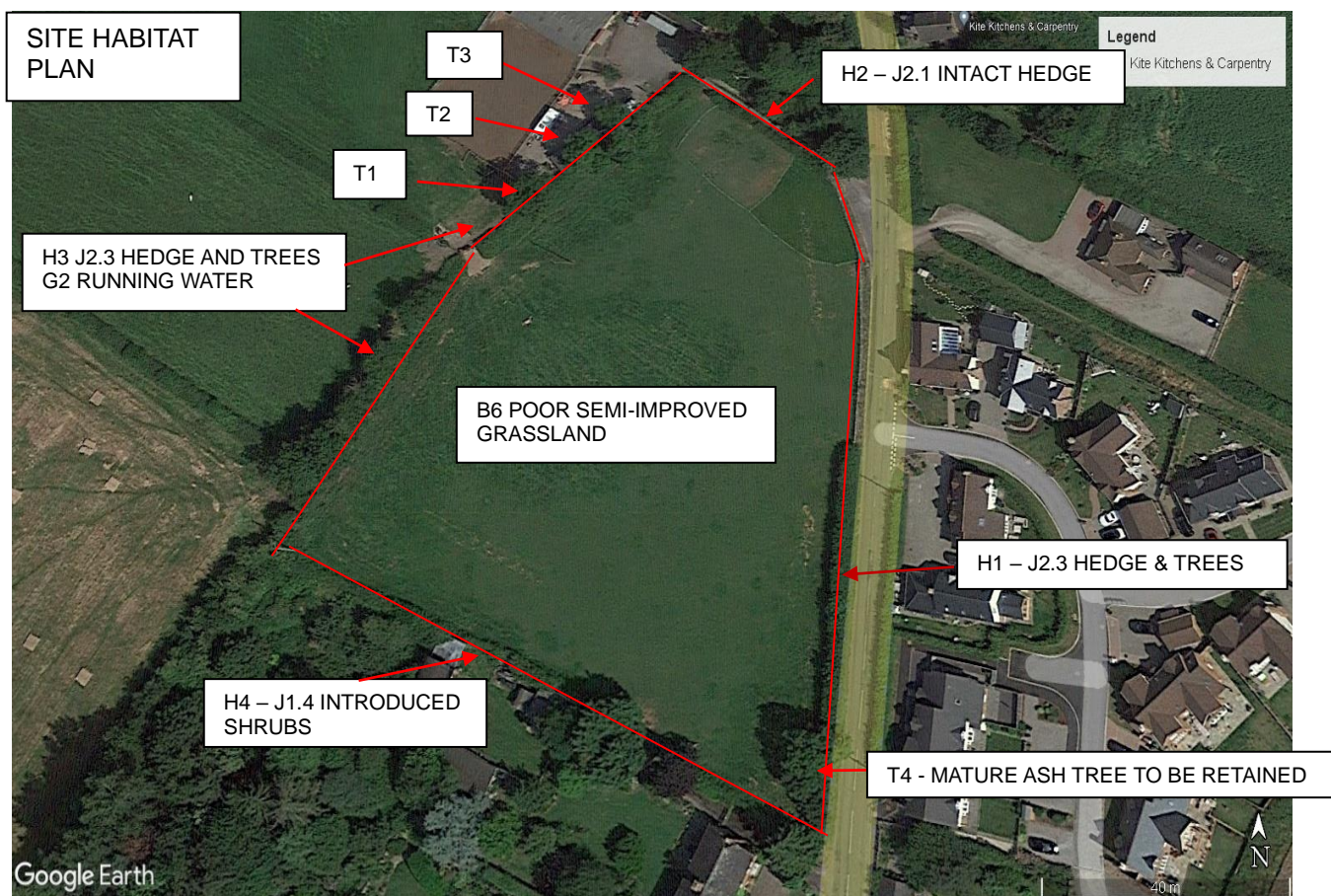


PHOTO 1 – FIELD FROM NORTHERN CORNER LOOKING SOUTH



PHOTO 2 - FIELD FROM NORTH-EASTERN EDGE LOOKING SOUTH-WEST



PHOTO 3 – FIELD FROM NORTH-EASTERN EDGE LOOKING SOUTH

**PHOTO 4 – FIELD FROM NORTH-EASTERN EDGE - LOOKING WEST TO TREES
T1 – T3**



PHOTO 5 – FIELD FROM EASTERN BOUNDARY – LOOKING SOUTH-WEST

**PHOTO 6 – LOOKING ALONG WESTERN BOUNDARY IN SOUTHERLY
DIRECTION FROM NORTHERN END – SHOWING TREES T1-T3**



PHOTO 7 – HEDGEROW 2 NORTHERN BOUNDARY - LOOKING WEST

PHOTO 8 – HEDGEROW 3 – WESTERN BOUNDARY AND TREES T1-3



PHOTO 9 – SHOWING HEDGEROW 2 – NORTHERN BOUNDARY



PHOTO 10 – HEDGEROW 1 – EASTERN BOUNDARY – LOOKING NORTH



PHOTO 11 – HEDGEROW 1 – EASTERN BOUNDARY SHOWING ASH TREE



PHOTO 12 – HEDGEROW 1 – EASTERN BOUNDARY INCLUDING ASH TREE



PHOTO 13 – PONDS WITHIN SCHOOL GROUNDS



PHOTOS 14 & 15 – PONDS WITHIN SCHOOL GROUNDS

