



envirotech

Ecological Consultants
Environmental and Rural Chartered Surveyors

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Sea View, St Bees



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ACCURACY OF REPORT

This report has been compiled based on the methodology as detailed and the professional experience of the surveyor. Whilst the report reflects the situation found as accurately as possible, all of the protected species this survey covers are wild and can move freely from site to site. Their presence or absence detailed in this report does not entirely preclude the possibility of a different past, current or future use of the site surveyed.

We would ask all clients acting upon the contents of this report to show due diligence when undertaking work on their site and/or in their interaction with protected species. If protected species are found during a work programme, and continuing the work programme could result in their disturbance, injury or death, either directly or indirectly an offence may be committed.

If in doubt, stop work and seek further professional advice.

Quality and Environmental Assurance

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1 Envirotech NW Ltd were commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of land at Sea View, St Bees. It is proposed that a new house is constructed on the site.
- 1.1.2 A data search and desk study of the site and an area within 2km of the site were undertaken to establish the presence of protected species and notable habitats.
- 1.1.3 The site was then visited by a licenced ecologist from Envirotech NW Ltd on the 25 October 2022. A full botanical survey of the site was initially undertaken and this was followed by surveys to establish the presence or absence of notable species at the site or in proximity such that they may be affected by the proposed development.
- 1.1.4 The plant species assemblages recorded at the site are all common in the local area and are considered to be of low ecological value.
- 1.1.5 There is no potential for bat roosting on site. Badgers are absent. The site has low value to reptiles. Birds may utilise scrub on site for nesting between March and September. The vegetation on site is not consistent with that found in the SSSI adjacent.
- 1.1.6 No other notable or protected species were recorded on the site.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

2.1.1 In October 2022 Envirotech NW Ltd were commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of land at Sea View, St Bees, central grid reference NX970106 (Figure 1). A site investigation was undertaken and a report compiled which includes recommendations for any future actions and or mitigation required.

2.1.2 The survey was requested in connection with the proposed construction of a new house.



2.2 Objectives

2.2.1 The main objectives of the study were:

- The completion of a Phase 1 Habitat Survey including the preparation of a vegetation and habitat map of the site and the immediate surrounding area.
- The survey and assessment of all habitats for statutorily protected species.
- An evaluation of the ecological significance of the site.
- The identification of any potential development constraints and the specification of the scope of mitigation and enhancement required in accordance with wildlife legislation, planning policy and other relevant guidance, and;
- The identification of any further surveys or precautionary assessments that may be required prior to the commencement of any development activities.

3. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

3.1 *Data Search*

- 3.1.1 The Envirotech dataset, and the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) were searched to establish the presence of any records of statutorily protected, notable or rare species, and any designated sites of international, national, regional or local importance within a 2km radius of the site boundary.
- 3.1.2 The Envirotech dataset is compiled from extensive field surveys from the period 2004-present, as well as records obtained from third parties during this time.
- 3.1.3 Google Earth and Google Street View were consulted to establish the presence of any features of ecological importance within the local area.
- 3.1.4 Due to the scale of development, in accordance with CIEEM guidelines, a data search of the county records centre was not required. The likely presence and impact on protected species could be adequately determined from the level of data search undertaken.

3.2 *Vegetation and Habitats*

- 3.2.1 A vegetation and habitat map was produced for the site and the immediate surrounding area. The mapping is based on the Joint Nature Conservation Committee Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC 2003).
- 3.2.2 Searches were made for uncommon, rare and statutorily protected plant species, those species listed as protected in the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and indicators of important and uncommon plant communities. All plant nomenclature follows Stace (2019).
- 3.2.3 Searches were carried out for the presence of invasive species, including those listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), namely Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) on terrestrial habitat and aquatic species such as floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*), water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) and New Zealand pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*).
- 3.2.4 The survey was also informed by questioning the landowner/site agent to ascertain the recent history of the site.

3.3 *Timing and Personnel*

- 3.3.1 During the visit, weather conditions were suitable for the survey types undertaken being warm and dry in mid autumn.
- 3.3.2 The site and surrounding land was visited on the 25th October 2022 by

- (AG) Mr Andrew Gardner BSc (Hons), MSc, MRICS
Natural England Bat Class Licence (Level 2)
Natural England Bat Low Impact Class Licence
Natural England Barn Owl Licence
Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence (Level 1)
Natural England Badger Class Licence
Natural England White Clawed Crayfish Licence

4. SPECIES SURVEY METHODOLOGY

4.1 *Badger*

- 4.1.1 Badgers (*Meles meles*) and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act (1992). This legislation arises from animal welfare issues (rather than on the basis of nature conservation grounds) and protects badgers from being killed, injured or disturbed whilst occupying a sett.
- 4.1.2 A disturbance to badgers in their setts may occur as a result of construction operations. Natural England recommends that the use of heavy machinery in proximity of a sett entrance should be avoided, with a 'disturbance free-zone' being established.
- 4.1.3 The degree of disturbance attributed to construction activity is a function of the background level of activity badgers are accustomed to and that which will be attributed to a proposed activity. The "disturbance free zone" is therefore site specific.
- 4.1.4 The survey for badgers comprised an assessment of all suitable habitat within and outside the study area boundary (where this was possible) to a distance of 30m for indications of use by badgers.
- 4.1.5 Signs of badgers which were searched for included:
- Setts - 'D' shaped entrances at least 25cms wide and wider than they are high with large spoil mounds
 - Discarded bedding at sett entrances (this includes grass and leaves)
 - Scratching posts on shrubs and trees close to a sett entrance
 - The presence of badger hairs which are coarse, up to 100mm long with a long black section and a white tip
 - Dung pit latrines and footprints
 - Habitual runs through vegetation and beneath fences
 - Hedgehog carcasses

4.2 *Bats*

- 4.2.1 All British bat species are fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), and are included on Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, as a Protected Species. Taken together, these pieces of legislation make it an offence to:
- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or capture bats;
 - Deliberately or recklessly disturb bats (whether in a roost or not);
 - Damage, destroy or obstruct access to bat roosts.

- 4.2.2 The Bat Conservation Trust (Hundt (2012) and Collins, J. (ed) (2016) issued guidelines on bat survey methodology, a key feature of their recommendation is for the undertaking of a pre-survey assessment - an initial desk-study and a walkover assessment of the survey area and its surrounding area to identify the relative value of the habitats present for bats and likely commuting routes. This is to be followed by a survey program that is appropriate to the likely level of bat activity within the survey area to be determined by and based on the experience of the surveyor.
- 4.2.3 The potential value of the survey area for foraging bats was assessed through consideration of two main factors: professional knowledge of bat ecology and foraging behaviour in combination with the geographical location, topography and habitats present within the survey area and surrounds.
- 4.2.4 Structures on and within the survey area boundary were assessed for their potential to support roosting or hibernating bats. This comprised a close inspection of all retaining walls and buildings on the site boundary to allow an assessment of their potential to be used by bats to be made by a licensed surveyor.

4.3 Birds

- 4.3.1 All breeding birds, other than pest species, are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 when building a nest, rearing young or sitting on eggs. Some bird species, such as barn owl (*Tyto alba*), are protected when near an active nest site. Several birds are listed as UK and or County BAP species.
- 4.3.2 Bird species and behaviour was noted during the other field surveys. All areas are covered equally, in order to avoid the subjective survey of better quality 'bird habitat'.

4.4 Invertebrates

- 4.4.1 A general assessment was made of the study area's suitability for supporting invertebrates during the phase 1 survey. The study area's lack of habitat diversity, species-poor composition and uniformity of vegetation structure (i.e., lack of variation in height and microtopography) resulted in our belief that a low diversity of invertebrates would be likely to occur across the site.
- 4.4.2 The presence of invertebrates was noted during the other surveys which were undertaken. The extent of sampling was limited in that it could be confirmed that no priority or BAP species would be likely to be affected by the proposal.

4.5 Reptiles

- 4.5.1 All native reptiles are protected in Britain under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure, sell or advertise to sell any of the six native species.
- 4.5.2 The survey for these species was based on assessing the habitat type and suitability of the site. This comprised an assessment of satellite imagery for the site and surrounding area as well as comparison of the results from the records searches with habitat types.

The general habitat at the site was evaluated in terms of its suitability to reptiles for foraging or breeding.

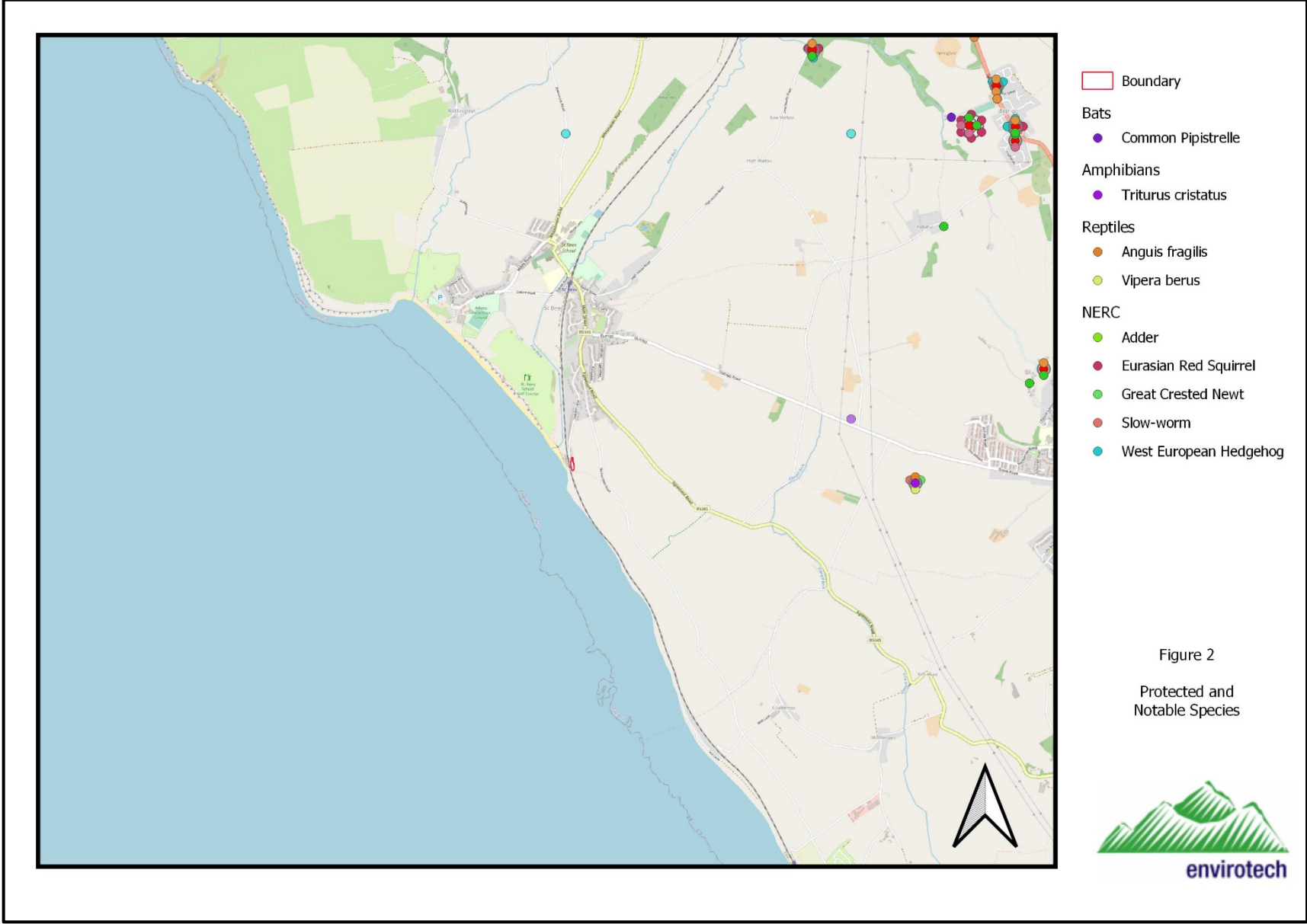
4.6 Survey limitations

- 4.6.1 The survey was undertaken in autumn. At this time of year plant species are less easily identified and the activity of some species is reduced.
- 4.6.2 Due to the habitats present on site there were no significant constraints in respect of identifying the botanical interest of the site.
- 4.6.3 No significant survey limitations were encountered.

5. RESULTS

5.1 *Data Search*

- 5.1.1 Envirotech hold no records of protected or notable species for the site. There are however records of protected or notable species within 2km (Figure 2). These are discussed in the relevant sections below.
- 5.1.2 There is no mapped BAP habitat on site. Martine Cliff and Slope occurs to the North and South (Figure 3). The site is not connected to these areas being separated by a railway line and cutting.
- 5.1.3 The nearest statutory protected site is St Bees Head SSSI (Figure 4). This is isolated from the site by a railway and railway cutting. The biological interest of the site is represented in a number of different 'habitats': natural cliff-top grassland and heath, sheer cliff face and cliff-fall rubble, shingle and wave-cut platform. The outstanding interest of this area lies, however, in the sheer cliffs which provide the only breeding site on the coast of Cumbria for a variety of colonial seabirds. The geological interest of the site is concentrated in three main areas, between Fleswick and Rottington Beck and the cliffs of St Bees golf course in the south and around Saltom Bay at the North End of the site.







SSSI
Boundary

Figure 4
Protected Sites



6. PHASE 1 SURVEY RESULTS

6.1 *Habitat Results*

6.1.1 The site comprises a steep bluff covered in dense scrub. There is open grassland to the South. The site is enclosed by a railway and footpath to the West and improved grassland to the East and South. The bluff continues to the North.

6.1.2 See Figure 5 for the Phase 1 Habitat Plan and Table 1 for the descriptive Target Notes.

Target Note	Description	Comment
TN1	Dense Scrub	The entire development area comprises dense scrub. This is dominated by Bramble (<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg). Western gorse (<i>Ulex gallii</i>) is sub-dominant, becoming dominant towards the South. False oat grass (<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>) and Yorkshire Fog (<i>Holcus lanatus</i>) was occasional to the lower slope. Occasional cutting has been undertaken by the site owners resulting in the localized regrowth of grasses. Overall the bluff is species poor and dominated by only two species.
TN2	Non native invasive	To the lower slope Montbretia (<i>Crocoshmia x crocosmiiflora</i>) is occasional
TN3	Grassland	A more open area of dry grassland to the South of the bluff. Gorse gives way to Yorkshire Fog (<i>Holcus lanatus</i>), Common Bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>), Mouse ear (<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>), Ribwort Plantain (<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>) and common Common Sorrel (<i>Rumex acetosa</i>)
Table 1 Details of Target Notes.		







-  Boundary
-  Target Note
-  Scrub - Dense/continuous
-  Neutral Grassland - Unimproved

Figure 5
Phase 1 Habitat Survey





TN1- The development area is dominated by Bramble and gorse to a steep bluff



TN2- Montbretia to the lower slopes



TN3- Gorse gives way to grassland to the South of the site outside the development boundary



Table 2 Photographs

6.2 Vegetation

- 6.2.1 Details of the plant species found on site are included in the target notes. Species recorded are all commonly occurring and undoubtedly occur elsewhere in similar habitats in the local area.
- 6.2.2 The scrub has a very low species diversity and ecological value. It is not indicative of the plant species found in the nearby SSSI.
- 6.2.3 There is no evidence of Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed or Himalayan balsam on the site. Montbretia (*Crococsmia x crocosmiiflora*) was found to the lower slope. No other invasive or notable weed species listed on Schedule 9 (Section 14) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) was identified within the site or adjacent land.

6.3 Badger

- 6.3.1 Records of badgers occur within 2km of the site.
- 6.3.2 Badger setts do not occur on site and a lack of feeding signs or runs across the site would suggest that they do not occur within 30m of site boundaries.
- 6.3.3 The proposed development will not impact on any existing badger runs or setts. The porosity of the surrounding fields to the passage of badgers will not be affected.

6.4 Bats

- 6.4.1 There are records of bats within 2km of the site.
- 6.4.2 The foraging habitat at the site is very poor for bat species being open and exposed. The scrub offers negligible foraging opportunities for bats. There are no hedge or tree lines connecting to the site.
- 6.4.3 It is not considered there would be significant degradation of foraging habitat as a result of the proposal so long as the adjacent scrub and grassland is retained.
- 6.4.4 There are no trees on the site.
- 6.4.5 The boundary walls and house are fully sealed and have no roosting potential.
- 6.4.6 We consider bat species are highly unlikely to rely on the site for feeding but may occur in the local area. Roosting by bats will not occur on the site.

6.5 Birds

- 6.5.1 There are records of birds within 2km of the site.
- 6.5.2 Potential nest sites were located within the core development area but the surveys were undertaken at a time of year when nesting had been completed. A risk assessment of the site in respect of its future potential for and value to nesting birds could however be adequately made.

- 6.5.3 The dense scrub to the bluff will provide potential nest sites for species such as blackbirds (*Turdus merula*). No indications of past use were recorded during the surveys.
- 6.5.4 The habitat on site is not considered to be of anything more than of local significance, habitats present are well represented in the local area. The impact on nesting birds is therefore considered likely to be minor.
- 6.5.5 The site would not support breeding seabirds associated with the nearby SSSI. There are no exposed or stable cliffs or banks on the site.

6.6 Invertebrates

- 6.6.1 Notable invertebrates have been recorded within 2km of the site.
- 6.6.2 A survey for invertebrates including, but not limited to solitary and mining bees and wasps and certain butterflies was triggered as a result of this site lying in proximity to semi-natural vegetation. The method of survey for these species was to assess the habitat type affected by development and therefore its likely importance at the local level to any of these species.
- 6.6.3 Dense scrub and grassland has some value to species such as common butterflies but this is not considered to be locally significant.
- 6.6.4 The significance of the site to invertebrates is likely to be limited in the local context although the habitat on site will support invertebrate species.
- 6.6.5 Species such as Bumblebees which relay on nectar would be negatively impacted by the removal of Montbretia on site as this is a good source of nectar. The benefits of the removal of this plant are however considered to outweigh the impact as a result of the loss of nectar sources on site.

6.7 Reptiles

- 6.7.1 There are no records for reptiles within 2km of the site.
- 6.7.2 Slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) and Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) will undoubtedly occur in the local area but they are unlikely to be using the site in significant numbers; the surrounding dense scrub is unsuitable for these species. The dense scrub would not provide suitable basking sites.
- 6.7.3 Open areas of ground and grassland to the South of the bluff may be suitable for basking, and dense vegetation for foraging occurs next to them.
- 6.7.4 As a consequence, precautionary mitigation would be appropriate in respect of construction activities so as to ensure reasonable avoidance measures are taken to avoid the killing or injury of these species.

6.8 Statutory and Non-Statutory Sites

Direct Impacts:

6.8.1 There are no statutory or non-statutory sites which are connected to the site such that site development would directly affect the dispersal of species between them or directly impact upon their integrity.

6.8.2 The habitats on site do not represent or are linked to those found in any of the statutory or non-statutory sites locally.

Indirect Impacts:

6.8.3 There are no statutory or non-statutory sites which are connected to the site such that site development would indirectly affect the dispersal of species between them or indirectly impact upon their integrity.

7. MITIGATION/RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 *Compensatory planting and habitat enhancement*

- 7.1.1 The landscaping scheme should utilise plants which are native and wildlife friendly. In particular night flowering species would be beneficial to bats. Wildflower seed could be used to plant verges to enhance the ecological value of the site and continuity between the site and the wider area.
- 7.1.2 Montbretia should be removed from the site in accordance with Environment Agency guidelines.

7.2 *Badger*

- 7.2.1 Badger setts are known to occur within 2km of the site. These setts will be undisturbed by work but in order to minimise impacts on badgers passing over the site the following points should also be followed.
- All work must take place during daylight hours as badgers are more likely to be commuting over the site at night and this will ensure the risk to any badgers passing through the site will be minimised.
 - Should any trenches and excavations be required, an escape route for animals that enter the trench must be provided, especially if left open overnight. Ramps should be no greater than of 45 degrees in angle. Ideally, any holes should be securely covered. This will ensure badgers are not trapped during work.
 - All excavations left open overnight or longer should be checked for animals prior to the continuation of works or infilling. Back filling should be completed immediately after any excavations, ideally back filling as an on-going process to the work in hand.

7.3 *Bats*

- 7.3.1 New roosting provision for crevice dwelling bats could be incorporated into the buildings on site.
- 7.3.2 Overall it is considered there is more than sufficient scope for mitigation and compensation at the site such that there will be no adverse impact on the favourable conservation status of bats affected by the proposal.

7.4 *Birds*

- 7.4.1 Any vegetation to be trimmed or cleared should be checked for nesting birds before it is removed. Ideally this should occur outside the bird nesting period March- September. If vegetation clearance is to occur in the March-September period a check for nesting birds should be conducted first by a suitably qualified individual.

- 7.4.2 If nesting birds are found at the site all site works shall cease and further ecological advice shall be sought with a view to a detailed method statement and programme of mitigation measures being prepared and implemented.

7.5 *Invertebrates*

- 7.5.1 Landscaping should include native or wildlife friendly species including night flowering plants.

7.6 *Reptiles*

- 7.6.1 Dense scrub and grassland on the edge of the development site should be retained such that it is in proximity to open areas of ground which will also be suitable for basking.
- 7.6.2 The points in respect of not leaving open trenches without means of escape detailed for badgers are also applicable to these species.

8. REFERENCES

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