

---

Land West of Ratcliffe Road, Sileby, Leicestershire

# Ecological Constraints and Opportunities

16<sup>th</sup> August 2021

---

## Introduction

1. Land to the West of Ratcliffe Road, Sileby, Leicestershire is being promoted for residential development. Aspect Ecology was commissioned by Redrow Homes East Midlands in August 2021 to carry out initial ecological survey work to evaluate any potential ecological constraints and opportunities to development of the site. This appraisal has been informed by a desktop study and rapid ecological walkover survey of the site. The results are illustrated on the accompanying plan (Plan 6328/ECOP1) and detailed below.

## Ecological Designations

2. **Statutory Designations.** A review of the MAGIC database indicates the site is not subject to or adjacent any statutory ecological designations. The nearest such designation is Halstead Road Centenary Pasture Local Nature Reserve, located ~3.2km west of the site. Due to the separation distance, residential development at the site is unlikely to have an impact on the LNR. The next nearest statutory designation is Buddon Wood and Swithland Reservoir Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), located ~4km west of the site. The site lies within an Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) of the SSSI, which indicates the SSSI could be adversely impacted by any discharge of water or liquid waste of more than 20m<sup>3</sup>/day to ground or to surface water, such as a beck or stream. However, subject to the design of an appropriate drainage strategy as part of the development proposals, impacts on the SSSI should be avoidable.
3. All other statutory designations in the local area are physically well separated from the site and unlikely to pose a significant constraint to development.
4. **Non-Statutory Designations.** Information received from the Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre confirms there are no non-statutory designations (e.g. Local Wildlife Site) within or adjacent the site. It is therefore anticipated that no such designations would be adversely affected by development of the site.

## Habitats

5. The site is dominated by arable land cultivated with Oats at the time of survey. The arable is of limited intrinsic ecological value and does not constitute an important ecological feature, albeit may support protected / notable species (see below).
6. The site is bound by and divided into fields by hedgerows. The hedgerows are of varying quality but all are considered to qualify as a Priority Habitat and are therefore important ecological features, and should be retained and suitably buffered (min. 5m) as far as practicable within any development proposals.
7. A tree-lined stream runs through the site from north-east to south-west. This may potentially qualify as a Priority Habitat and is likely to be an important ecological feature of intrinsic ecological value, therefore it should be retained and suitably buffered (min. 10m) within any development proposals. There is the opportunity to enhance the stream as part of the development proposals, providing a wetland corridor through the site.

8. A single pond lies within the site, within the second arable field south of Ratcliffe Road. The pond is unlikely to qualify as a Priority Habitat but nonetheless is of intrinsic ecological value and should be retained if possible; albeit its loss could be justified subject to replacement pond provision. If retained, there is scope to enhance the pond.
9. Woodland is present off-site, adjacent to the north-western corner of the site. The woodland is identified as a Priority Habitat within the MAGIC database. The woodland is unlikely to pose a constraint to development subject to inclusion of a suitable buffer (min. 10m) from development. There may be an opportunity to plant additional woodland at the north-west boundary, extending across to the railway line. This would help towards delivery measurable biodiversity net gain (see below).
10. **Biodiversity Net Gain.** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states '*opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity*'. The forthcoming Environment Bill will be expected to include a requirement for developments to demonstrate a 10% net gain in biodiversity. At the time of writing, the Bill has not been enacted into law and is currently expected to become an Act of Parliament in autumn 2021.
11. In addition, **Policy EV6** of the Charnwood Local Plan 2021-37 Pre-Submission Draft July 2021 states:

*'Development proposals should be accompanied by an ecological survey including a Biodiversity Impact Assessment and demonstrate how they have been designed to minimise ecological impact and provide 10% net gain on site in the first instance or through biodiversity offsetting, where appropriate.'*
12. As such, consideration will need to be given at an early stage to achieving biodiversity net gain on-site and significant areas of semi-natural green space will need to be included within any scheme layout. Opportunities for delivering biodiversity net gain include enhancement of the existing hedgerows and stream, new native woodland planting and the creation of wildflower grassland areas and wetland habitat (e.g. ponds, swales, etc.).

### **Fauna**

13. **Bats.** A number of trees are present within the site, a proportion of which are likely to provide potential roosting opportunities for bats. Should any of the trees require removal to facilitate future development these will require further survey to confirm the presence / absence of roosts. The optimal period for bat roost presence/ absence surveys is between May and August/September. Nonetheless, it is likely that any potential loss of bat roosts can be mitigated.
14. The majority of the site is dominated by arable, which is of very limited value for foraging bats. However, the hedgerows and tree-lined watercourse provide suitable foraging and commuting habitat for bats, linking with the railway line to the west, and it is therefore recommended these features be retained and suitably buffered (including the railway line) within any future scheme design to retain foraging opportunities and connectivity with the wider landscape. As there will likely be some hedgerow loss to facilitate development, bat activity surveys are recommended prior to the submission of any planning application. As a minimum, surveys would likely be required once per season between April and October. However, subject to retention of boundary hedgerows and the implementation of a sensitive lighting scheme, bats are unlikely to pose an overriding constraint to development at the site. There is the opportunity for enhancements in the form of bat box installation and new foraging habitat creation.
15. **Dormice.** The on-site hedgerows provide suitable habitat for this species, however the site lies outside the core distribution of this species. Therefore, subject to confirming there are no background records of Dormice from within the local area, Dormice are unlikely to pose a constraint to development at the site.

16. **Other Mammals.** The site is suitable for Badgers, albeit no setts were recorded on-site or immediately adjacent to the site and no other signs of Badger activity were recorded on-site. As such, this species is unlikely to be a constraint to development. However, as Badgers are a highly mobile species, an update survey is recommended prior to submission of any future planning application. The on-site watercourse and ditches are suboptimal for Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius* or Otter *Lutra lutra* and no evidence of either species was recorded during the walkover survey. As such, these species are unlikely to be a constraint to development. The site may potentially be used by Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* (Priority Species), albeit this species is unlikely to pose an overriding constraint to development, subject to retention of suitable habitat (e.g. hedgerows).
17. **Amphibians.** There are background records of Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* within the surrounding area, the closest being within a pond just over 250m north of the site. A single pond is present within the site itself. The on-site pond was subject to a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment, which identified that the pond is of 'poor' suitability for GCN. The terrestrial habitat within the site (mainly arable) is largely unsuitable or suboptimal for GCN, therefore the site is unlikely to be of significant value for GCN. Therefore, GCN are unlikely to be a significant constraint to development of the site. Nonetheless, should a planning application be progressed, further consideration of all suitable ponds within 500m of the site is advised, including a presence/absence survey of relevant ponds (including the on-site pond for completeness). Great Crested Newt presence/ absence surveys can be completed between mid-March and mid-late June, dependent on the methods used. Alternatively, Leicestershire's District Licence could potentially be relied on.
18. **Reptiles.** The site provides relatively few opportunities for reptile species, with the exception of small areas where the field margins contain suitable habitat. A presence/absence survey is recommended prior to any future planning application. The optimal months for reptile surveys are April, May and September. Should reptiles be present on-site then suitable habitat would need to be retained, however this is unlikely to pose an overriding constraint to development.
19. **Birds.** The site contains suitable habitat for nesting and foraging birds, including a variety of declining farmland bird species. However, the habitats present are widely replicated in the surrounding area, such that this species group is unlikely to pose an overriding constraint to development. Nevertheless, a breeding bird survey would be advised to inform any future planning application for the site, for which the survey season is typically April to June. Retention of the hedgerows would ensure suitable nesting habitat is retained under any future development and the creation of new habitats such as wildflower grassland, wetland, scrub and woodland as part of any future landscape proposals provides the opportunity to enhance foraging and nesting opportunities on-site.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

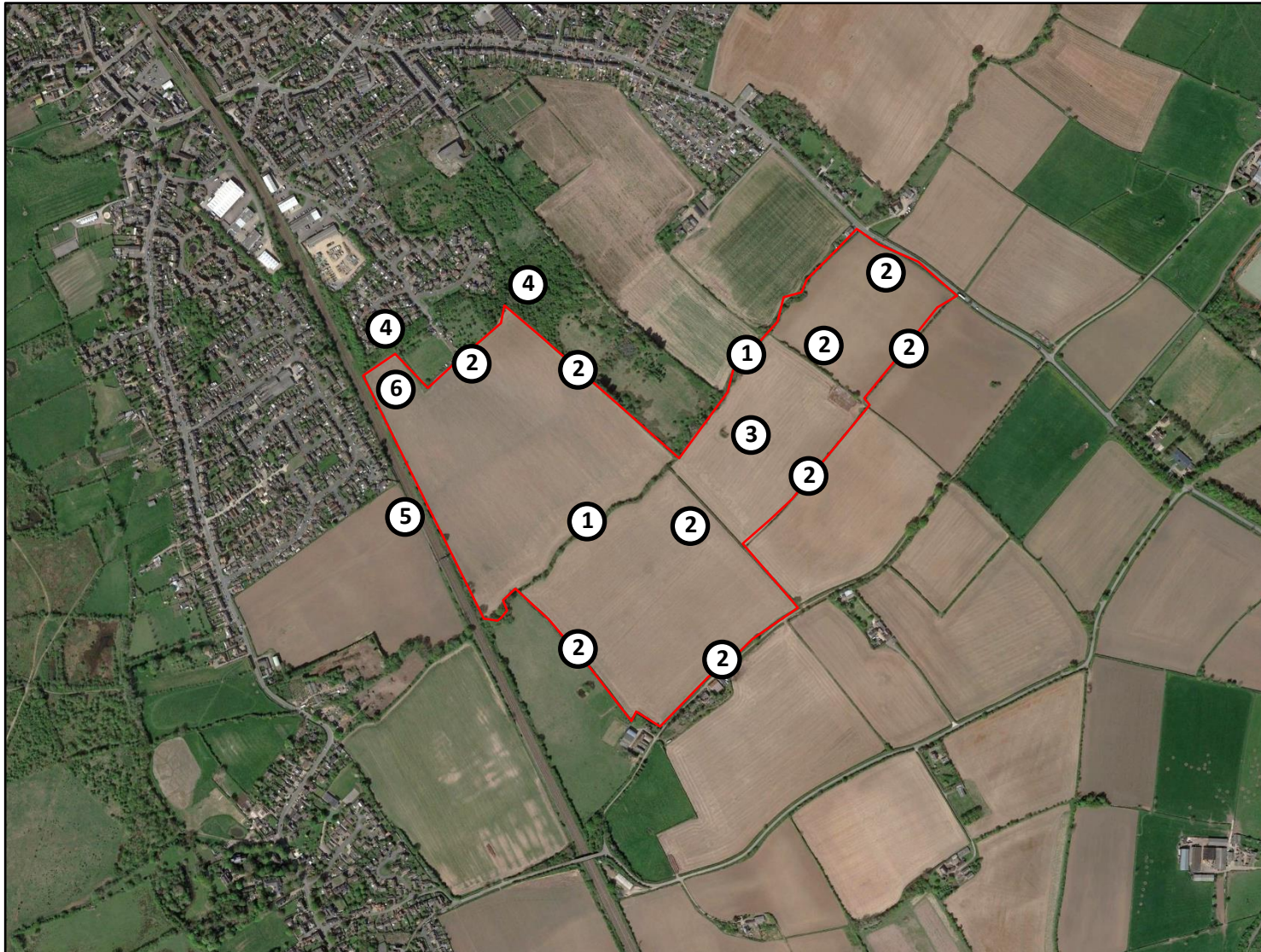
20. The on-site habitats are unlikely to pose an overriding constraint to development subject to the retention of the existing watercourse and majority of hedgerows. However, early consideration will need to be given to opportunities to achieve biodiversity net gain at the site, including the retention / creation of sufficient areas of informal open space.
21. The habitats present provide some opportunities for protected or notable faunal species, and further survey work in respect of bats, Great Crested Newt, reptiles and breeding birds is recommended should a future planning application be progressed. Retention of the watercourse and hedgerows within a sensitive scheme design would retain foraging and refuge opportunities for a number of species and ensure connectivity with the wider landscape is retained such that fauna can continue to commute through the site.
22. In conclusion, subject to a sensitive scheme design, there are no likely overriding ecological constraints to development of the site.

**Enclosed**

Plan 6328/ECOP1

Ecological Constraints and Opportunities





**Constraints & Opportunities:**

- ① Retain and buffer watercourse. Opportunity to provide enhanced wetland corridor through site
- ② Retain and buffer hedgerows. Opportunity to bolster with native planting
- ③ Retain existing pond or provide replacement
- ④ Retain and buffer off-site woodland
- ⑤ Buffer off-site railway corridor
- ⑥ Opportunity for new woodland planting

**Plan 6328/ECOP1:**  
Ecological Constraints and Opportunities