



PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

Chownes Mead, Chownes Mead Lane, Haywards Heath

On behalf of: RCM Partnership LLP

Client:	RCM Partnership LLP			
Project:	Chownes Mead, Chownes Mead Lane, Haywards Heath			
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Validity:

This report is valid for 18 months from the date of the site visit, providing conditions on site have not changed and this can be verified by a suitably qualified ecologist. If works have not commenced by this date, an updated site visit should be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist to assess any changes in the habitats present on site, and to inform a review of the conclusions and recommendations made.



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SUMMARY

Lizard Landscape Design and Ecology (LLDE) has been commissioned by RCM Partnership LLP to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of land at Chownes Mead, Chownes Mead Lane, Haywards Heath (located around central grid reference: TQ 31674 23750– hereafter referred to as ‘the site’). This report presents the results of an initial scoping survey which was undertaken on the 26th of April 2024 to evaluate the existing ecological resources within and adjacent to the site and to highlight any potential ecological constraints and opportunities. A further site visit was completed on the 01st May 2025 to further assess habitats to be directly impacted by the proposals.

The site consists of short, modified grassland, buildings, hardstanding and non-native hedgerows / shrubs which are habitats of broad low ecological value. The greatest ecological interest at the site is associated with the woodland, mature trees and treelines which should be retained and protected throughout proposals, wherever practicable. A strip of remnant ancient woodland exists to the northern boundary of the site which should be retained and protected.

Habitats present have the potential to support various protected species; recommendations for further survey and / or avoidance measures are outlined below.

Table No. 01 - Summary of Recommendations

Ecological Receptor	Recommendations	Time Constraint
Great crested newt	eDNA survey of 4no. ponds within / adjacent to the site.	15 th April – 30 th June
Reptiles	Undertake a detailed survey consisting of 7no. survey visits.	Mid-March - October
Bats	Survey buildings to be impacted. Retain all trees identified as offering potential roost features, or survey where this is not possible. Retain (with no lighting) hedgerows, trees and woodland as commuting and foraging features for bats.	May – August
Breeding Birds	Remove any scrub, trees etc outside the nesting season.	Avoid March – August inc.
Small Mammals and Invertebrates	Sensitive clearance of habitats to avoid harm, and compensatory planting for loss of scrub, trees and diverse grassland.	N/A
Woodland and Mature Trees	Retain all valuable habitat and protect with suitable semi-natural buffers.	N/A

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Lizard Landscape Design and Ecology (LLDE) has been commissioned by RCM Partnership LLP to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of land at Chownes Mead, Chownes Mead Lane, Haywards Heath (located around central grid reference: TQ 31674 23750– hereafter referred to as ‘the site’).
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to record the ecological baseline and identify key potential ecological constraints and opportunities associated with future development proposals. This report has been prepared with due consideration for existing best practice guidance (CIEEM, 2017) (BSI, 2013) and aims to provide general advice on ecological constraints associated with development of the site. The report includes recommendations for further assessment where necessary. It is not intended that this report should be submitted with a planning application for development of the site, unless supported by the results of further surveys and a detailed assessment of the effects of the proposed development.

Site Information

- 1.3 The entire site covers an area of 7.4ha, of which the red line boundary encompasses 1.72ha of land to the south of Chownes Mead Lane, Haywards Heath. The survey area is bound by large residential properties and their associated gardens to the east and west, Chownes Mead Lane to the north and an area of woodland to the south.

Surrounding Landscape

- 1.4 The site is located c. 0.2km west of Haywards Heath and c.1.0km south-east of the village of Cuckfield. Land to the south and west is formed of areas of woodland, ponds and small field parcels; typical of the High Weald.

Development Proposals

- 1.5 Amendments to hotel layout approved under DM/18/2193 and DM/18/2201, new single storey extension to main building and erection of new detached two-storey spa building, provision of relocated secondary access to Chownes Mead Lane, new parking area and landscaping of the site.

Scope of the Assessment

1.6 In accordance with current guidance (CIEEM, 2017), the aim of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been to:

- Identify the likely ecological constraints associated with a project;
- Identify any mitigation measures likely to be required, following the 'Mitigation Hierarchy' (BSI, 2013);
- Identify any additional surveys that may be required to inform an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA); and
- Identify the opportunities offered by a project to deliver ecological enhancement.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

2.1.1 The Multi-Agency Geographical Information Centre (MAGIC) website¹ was consulted for information regarding the location of waterbodies, priority habitats, statutory designated sites and existing wildlife mitigation licences, within a potential zone of influence of the site. Additionally, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) website was consulted for information regarding the location of non-statutory designated areas, and satellite imagery and historic mapping was used to inform an assessment of the recent land use changes and habitat types within the area. The following potential zones of Influence's have been used for the following potential ecological receptors during the desk study assessment:

Table No. 02 – Zones of Influences for Ecological Receptors

Potential Zone of Influence	Type of Record / Designation/s / Ecological Receptor
0.5km	• Ponds, ditches and other water bodies.
2.0km	• Priority Habitats (UKBAP) (NERC, 2006); • European Protected Species Mitigation Licences (EPSMLs); • Local Nature Reserves (LNRs); • National Nature Reserves; • Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs); and • Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) / Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI).
10.0km	• Special Protection Areas (SPAs); • potential Special Protection Areas (pSPAs); • Ramsars (Wetlands of International Importance); • proposed Ramsars (pRamsar); • Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); and • possible Special Areas of Conservation (pSACs).
12.0km	• Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and possible Special Areas of Conservation (pSACs) designated for supporting Annex II bat species.

¹ www.magic.go.uk

- 2.1.2 All protected / notable species records within a 2.0km radius of the site were provided by Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC).
- 2.1.3 The Local Planning Authority website was consulted to inform of additional relevant information to this assessment, including local development plan policies in relation to ecology and biodiversity (see *Appendix A – Planning Policy and Legislation*) as well as any Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) etc.

2.2 Field Survey

- 2.2.1 The field survey was undertaken on 26th of April 2024 by a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (Catherine O'Reilly, MCIEEM, 10 years professional experience). Weather conditions were warm (c.18°C), with a moderate south-westerly wind (Beaufort Scale 2) and 20% cloud cover. A further assessment of grassland on site was completed on the 1st of May 2025.
- 2.2.2 The field survey comprised a walkover inspection of the site, immediately adjacent land and boundaries features, in which ecological features were noted and mapped in accordance with principles of the UKHabs-Professional Classification System (UKHabs Ltd., 2023). A minimum mapping unit of 25m² / 5m length was used and habitats were identified to at least level 4 wherever practicable.
- 2.2.3 A list of plant species noted was compiled, together with an estimate of relative abundance made according to the DAFOR scale. In addition, Target Notes were used where necessary to provide supplementary information on any features encountered which were notable, relevant to the assessment or too small to map.

2.3 Evaluation of Ecological Features

- 2.3.1 An assessment was made to determine the likely importance of any flora / habitats present, as well as determining whether any qualified as being of conservation merit, such as those listed as habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity (NERC, 2006). Likely importance was determined in reference to a predefined geographical frame of reference, as laid out in *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment* (CIEEM, 2022), this was assessed in accordance with the criteria outlined below:

Table No. 03 – Likely Importance Assessment Criteria

Likely Importance Categories	Likely Importance Criteria
Negligible	Of no notable ecological value.
Site	Ecologically valuable within the context of the site
Local	Ecologically valuable within the context of the immediate surrounds, i.e., c. 1km ²
District	Ecologically valuable within the context of the wider surrounds / LPA district, i.e., c. 10km ²
County	Ecologically valuable within the context of the wider county, i.e., c. 100km ²
Regional	Of ecological value within the region, i.e., south east, south west, midlands etc.
National	Of ecological value within the context of the United Kingdom, such as a SSSIs, NNR's etc.
International	Ecological value of global significance, such as SACs, SPAs etc.

- 2.3.2 Habitats within and adjacent to the site were assessed to determine their potential to support protected and notable fauna. This assessment was based on professional judgment and experience, with due consideration to industry standard best practice guidance for the relevant taxa, as laid out in the table below. The possible presence of each taxon was summarised as either negligible, low, moderate, high or confirmed.

Table No. 04 – Habitat Suitability Assessment References

Fauna	Relevant Best Practice Guidance
Great Crested Newts	<i>Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook</i> (Langton <i>et al</i> , 2001) & <i>Evaluating the Suitability of Habitat for the Great Crested Newt</i> (Oldham <i>et al</i> , 2000)
Reptiles	<i>Herpetofauna Workers' Manual</i> (Gent and Gibson, 2003)
Bats	<i>Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition)</i> (Collins, 2023)
Dormice	<i>The Dormice Conservation Handbook</i> (English Nature, 2006)
Badger	<i>Survey Badgers</i> (Harris <i>et al</i> , 1989)
Water Vole	<i>The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook</i> (Dean <i>et al</i> , 2016)
Birds	<i>Guidance for Bird Surveys in Relation to Development</i> (NE, 2022)
Invertebrates	<i>Considering Terrestrial Invertebrates in Preliminary Ecological Appraisals</i> (Jukes, 2021) and <i>Organising Surveys to Determine Site Quality for Invertebrates</i> (English Nature, 2005)

2.3.3 Photographs were taken as evidence and to illustrate any notable ecological features on site. These have been provided within the body of the relevant parts of the Results section, where appropriate.

2.4 Daytime Bat Walkover Survey

2.4.1 A Daytime Bat Walkover (DBW) survey was undertaken as part of the field survey assessment by Catherine O'Reilly (Licence number 2016-20460-CLS-CLS).

2.4.2 The Daytime Bat Walkover (DBW) survey entailed a slow walkover of the site, during which time the surveyor identified any structures, trees and other features that could be suitable for bats to roost in, and any habitats which could be suitable for bats to commute, forage or swarm in.

2.4.3 During this survey any direct evidence of bats was searched for and recorded, such as grease marks, urine stains, bat droppings, feeding remains and dead / live bats. Furthermore, any structures or trees which offered features with the potential to support bats were noted. For trees this included the identification of features typically associated with decay, such as, but not limited to, cracks, crevices and holes naturally formed by trees.

- 2.4.4 All suitable bat habitat was assessed in accordance best practice criteria (Collins, 2023), which is outlined herein. During the survey all trees within and immediately adjacent to the site were assessed using the following criteria:

Table No. 05 – Criteria for Assessing the Bat Roosting Suitability of Trees

Suitability	Description
None	Either no potential roosting features in the tree, or highly unlikely to be any.
FAR	Further assessment required to establish if potential roosting features are present in the tree.
PRF	A tree with at least one potential roosting feature present.

- 2.4.5 If it was possible to adequately assess a Potential Roosting Feature (PRF) from ground level then this was completed, and the feature classified as either:
- **PRF-I:** Feature only suitable for individual or very small numbers of bats, either due to size or lack of suitable surrounding habitat; or
 - **PRF-M:** PRF is suitable for multiple bats and therefore has the potential to be used by a maternity colony.

2.5 Great Crested Newts – Habitat Suitability Assessment

- 2.5.1 Any ponds identified within or adjacent to the site were subject to a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment to determine their suitability to support GCN, in line with current guidance (Oldham *et al*, 2000). The HSI is a numerical index, between 0 and 1 (0 representing completely unsuitable habitat and 1 representing optimal habitat), calculated based on the suitability of 10 calculable indices.
- 2.5.2 HSI assessment is useful to aid in determining how suitable a given waterbody is for GCN, but it does not directly correlate with GCN presence or population numbers and serves as information only.
- 2.5.3 The 10 indices considered as part of the HSI assessment include geographic area, pond area, permanence of waterbody, water quality, shading, waterfowl presence, fish presence, number of ponds within 1.0km, suitability of terrestrial habitat and macrophyte cover, which were investigated during the field survey assessment.

2.6 Badgers

2.6.1 A walk over assessment of the site, and all land within 30m of the site where access was available and practicable, was conducted in order to search for evidence of badgers. This survey was conducted in line with best practice guidance (Harris *et al*, 1989) and included a systematic search for signs such as:

- 'Push-throughs';
- 'Snuffle-holes';
- Latrines;
- Badger guard hairs;
- Setts;
- Badger footprints; and
- Mammal runs.

2.7 Constraints and Limitations

2.7.1 Due to the field survey consisting of only one site visit, certain species, particularly some of late the flowering plants, may not have been visible or may have been otherwise inconspicuous at the time of the survey and hence overlooked. These are accepted constraints associated with the UKHabs Survey Methodology.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Desk Study

Pond Search

- 3.1.1 4no. ponds are located within or adjacent to the red line boundary of the site. A further 8no. ponds are located within 500m of the site, 3no. of which are located within 250m.

Priority Habitats Search

- 3.1.2 In accordance with the MAGIC dataset, within a 2.0km search radii of the site there were UKBAP Priority Habitats (NERC, 2006) of lowland mixed deciduous woodland, traditional orchard and wood pasture and parkland. Much of the woodland within the surrounding landscape is classified as ancient semi-natural woodland.

European Protected Species Mitigation Licence (EPSML) Search

- 3.1.3 A total of 10no. European Protected Species Mitigation Licences (EPSMLs) were returned within 2.0km of the site, including species such as great crested newt, dormouse, and bat species including brown long-eared, common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, natterers. The nearest licence is located 0.6km south-east.

Local Non-Statutory Designated Areas

- 3.1.4 The following non-statutory designated areas were identified within 1.0km of the site.

Table No. 08 – Non-Statutory Designated Areas

Site Name	Description	Location
Copyhold Gill and Woodland Complex	Ancient semi-natural woodland	c. 0.4km SW
Catt's Wood Complex & Meadows	Ancient semi-natural woodland and supports a range of mammals and invertebrates	c. 0.6km SE
Blunts and Paiges Wood	Ancient semi-natural woodland	c. 0.7km N
Bolnore Wood	Ancient semi-natural woodland	c. 0.8km SE

Statutory Designated Sites

- 3.1.5 Statutory designated sites identified within a potential zone of influence of the site include:

Table No. 09 – Statutory Designated Sites

Site	Description	Location
Blunts and Paiges Wood LNR	Habitats include hazel coppice, mixed coppice, birch woodland, bluebell woodland, meadow, grassland, hedgerows, pond and wetland area.	c. 0.4km N
Ashenground and Bolnore Woods LNR	The woodland consists of relic stands of hornbeam, ash and hazel coppice, with oak and mature beech also common.	c. 0.5km SE

- 3.1.6 The site is located within the Impact Risk Zone of Ditchling Common SSSI however the proposals do not meet the criteria which would require the local planning authority to consult with Natural England regarding potential impacts upon this designated area.

3.2 Existing Habitat Assessment

Site Assessment

- 3.2.1 Habitats within and adjacent to the site include:
- Developed Land; Sealed Surface
 - Artificial Unsealed Surface
 - Modified Grassland with Individual Trees
 - Mixed Scrub
 - Ponds
 - Introduced Shrub
 - Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland
 - Other Neutral Grassland with Scattered Trees
 - Non-native Ornamental Hedgerow
 - Ephemeral
 - Other Woodland; Mixed

Developed Land; Sealed Surface

- 3.2.2 Large areas of hard surfaces exist across the site, including footprints of the existing buildings, paved patio areas and terraces, access pathways, tennis court and concrete hardstanding surrounding the agricultural barn. These areas are of **negligible** ecological value.



Image 1 - Existing hardstanding

Artificial Unsealed Surface

- 3.2.3 The main access driveway and parking areas are formed of pea shingle. The secondary access, former basketball court and access tracks to the southern section of the site comprise compacted hardcore. These areas are of **negligible** ecological value.

Modified Grassland with Individual Trees

- 3.2.4 The area to the south of the main building is a sunken garden currently utilised for housing chickens and turkeys and comprises short, modified grassland. Species in these areas included perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* with occasional, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* and daisy *Bellis perennis*. The sward diversity to the base of the dell is c. 3-4sp/m². Similar composition grassland was also noted within small lawn areas associated with the garage / annex. This common and widespread habitat is of **site value**.
- 3.2.5 Various scattered trees are located within this area, the majority of which are non-native ornamental species including Monterey cypress *Cupressus macrocarpa*, coastal redwood *Sequoia sempervirens*, blue atlas cedar *Cedrus atlantica* and cypress *Cupressus* sp. These non-native species are of **site value**.



Image 2 - Modified grassland and trees

- 3.2.6 Further areas of modified grassland are present to the east of the former basketball court. Grassland here has become rank and is now formed of 4-5sp/m² including perennial ryegrass and cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata* with areas of common nettle *Urtica dioica*, thistle *Cirsium sp.* and burdock *Arctium minus*. This common and widespread habitat is of **site value**.

Mixed Scrub

- 3.2.7 The margins of the woodland area, and bank separating the agricultural barn from the storage area to the south, are formed of areas of scrub including bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.*, willow *Salix sp.*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, laurel *Laurus sp.* and rhododendron. Given the abundance of similar habitat within the surrounding area, this habitat is of **site value**.

Pond

- 3.2.8 Pond P1, a small pond to the edge of the woodland which is heavily shaded by willow scrub. This pond is of **site value**.



Image 3 – Pond P1

Introduced Shrub

- 3.2.9 Ornamental planting beds exist to the margins of the main house and within the garden areas to the south, as well as within the area currently utilised by chickens and ducks. Large areas of laurel and rhododendron are also present. Non-native shrub species dominate and as such these areas are of no greater than **site value**.

Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

- 3.2.10 A narrow strip of woodland exists on a bank to the northern section of the site. Locally dominant areas of sycamore and beech *Fagus sylvatica* are present along with oak *Quercus robur* and yew *Taxus baccata*. Non-native species such as laurel is abundant and cypress trees dominate the western section of the woodland area. The understorey is poorly developed, consisting of occasional hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*, and ground flora was sparse but included rare occurrences of bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*. Numerous areas of builder's waste were recorded within the southern extent of the woodland area.



Image 4 – Small strip of woodland to north of the site

Other Neutral Grassland with Scattered Trees

- 3.2.11 Areas to the margins of the sunken garden are relatively species poor, averaging 6.5 species per square meter. This included abundant sweet vernal, as well as more typical improved grassland species such as white clover, perennial ryegrass, ragwort and creeping buttercup.

- 3.2.12 The area of vegetation to the north of the existing secondary access comprises of common nettle, Mediterranean spurge *Euphorbia characias*, dock, pendulous sedge, green alkanet *Pentaglottis sempervirens*, thistle, bristly ox-tongue *Helminthotheca echioides* and ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, with areas of dominant Japanese knotweed *Reynoutria japonica* and winter heliotrope *Petasites fragrans*. Evidence of machinery tracking was present in this area as well as extensive areas of hardcore through which ephemeral species such as annual meadow *Poa annua* grass and forget-me-not *Myosotis arvensis* are now growing. Although both areas are relatively poor examples of the habitat, these areas qualify as ONG due to passing criteria 1, 3 and 4 of the UKHabs definition.



Image 5 – Areas of grassland to the south of the swimming pool (left) and along the existing secondary access (right).

- 3.2.13 More diverse pockets of grassland were present within the small area of grassland to the immediate south of the existing swimming pool. This included species such as bugle *Ajuga reptans*, ox-eye daisy, primrose, field woodrush *Luzula campestris*, cuckoo flower, sorrel and sweet vernal *Anthoxanthum odoratum* in addition to species such as Yorkshire fog, ragwort and creeping buttercup. This area supported on average 8-9 species per square meter.

Tall Forbs

- 3.2.14 To the north of the barn lies an area dominated by pendulous sedge. This area is of **negligible / site** value.

Non-Native Hedgerow

- 3.2.15 The driveway and former basketball court is lined with cherry laurel hedgerow c. 3m in height. The secondary access is also bound to the south by a dense laurel hedgerow, while a recently planted cypress hedgerow is present along the roadside. These areas are of **negligible value**.

Ephemeral

- 3.2.16 A small area of ephemeral vegetation was noted growing through a former hoggin area to the west of the agricultural barn. This habitat is of **negligible / site** value.

Other Woodland; Mixed

- 3.2.17 An area of dense tree planting, dominated by non-native species exists to the southern bank of the dell area. This woodland was structurally poor with no discernible woodland ground flora due to the dense canopy. The woodland is of **site value**.

3.3 Invasive Species

Desk Study

- 3.3.1 The data search returned records of *Rhododendron ponticum*, Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*, Japanese Knotweed, Three-cornered Garlic *Allium triquetrum* and Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum*.

Site Assessment

- 3.3.2 Areas of Japanese knotweed were identified on site including to the banks of pond P1, near the secondary access, margin of the ancient woodland, within the sunken dell and to the north-western corner of the site (shown as TN01). Areas of rock-splay cotoneaster *Cotoneaster horizontalis* were recorded within planting beds to the south of the main house (TN02). These species are listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, making it illegal to allow or cause the spread of these species into the wild.
- 3.3.3 Winter heliotrope was also recorded to the north-western corner of the site and margin of the northern ancient woodland and areas of cherry laurel were also recorded on site. Despite not being listed on schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, these species are listed as an invasive species within Sussex and care should be taken to avoid their spread.

3.4 Protected and Notable Fauna - Likely Presence Assessment

Amphibians

Desk Study

- 3.4.1 SxBRC returned 66no. records for great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* from within the search area, the most recent of which was from 2020. Records of common toad *Bufo bufo*, palmate newt *Lissotriton helveticus*, smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris* and common frog *Rana temporaria* were also returned by the search.

Site Assessment

- 3.4.2 A total of 4no. ponds exist within or adjacent to the site, which were considered to offer average - excellent habitat suitability for great crested newt and other amphibians.
- 3.4.3 Areas of woodland, scrub and longer grassland on site could offer optimal terrestrial habitat for amphibians during their terrestrial phase, should they be present in the local environment. Furthermore, the proposed construction zone is connected to ponds within / adjacent to the site via areas of habitat which could act as commuting corridors. The habitats on site are therefore considered to be of **high** suitability for great crested newt and other amphibians.

Reptiles

Desk Study

- 3.4.4 SxBRC returned 42no. records for grass snake *Natrix natrix helvetica*, 14no. records of slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, 5no. records of adder *Vipera berus* and 7no. records of common lizard *Zootoca vivipara*. No records of any other reptile species were returned within the 2.0km search area.

Site Assessment

- 3.4.5 Reptiles require a mosaic of habitats to persist in a landscape, including vegetative cover for refuge opportunities, open areas for basing and a diverse flora to support viable invertebrate prey throughout the year. The longer grassland and scrub to eastern section of the site provide all of these habitat niches. The habitats are therefore considered to be of **high** suitability for reptile species.

Bats

Desk Study

- 3.4.6 SxBRC returned records of common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, Daubentons *Myotis daubentonii*, whiskered *Myotis mystacinus*, serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*, Bechsteins *Myotis bechsteinii* and brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus*, from within the search area.

Preliminary Roost Assessment

- 3.4.7 Numerous buildings are present on site which were subject to an internal and external assessment, a summary of which is included in the table below.

Table No. 11 – Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment Results

Ref	Description	Category
B01	Main house of brick and render construction with part Horsham stone and part clay tile roof, many of which were lifted, warped or raised. Hanging tile present to the southern and eastern aspects with numerous gaps.	High
B02	Single-storey extension to main house of brick construction with clay tile roof. Small gaps noted between coping stones and areas of raised / lifted roof tiles noted.	Moderate
B03	Garage building of more recent construction but still containing small gaps to the western gable and small number of raised tiles.	Low / Moderate
B04	Small wooden kennel building of timber construction with corrugated metal roof.	Negligible
B05	Agricultural barn c. 10 years old of timber cladding with corrugated cement roof. Some small gaps recorded at the gable ends which may be suitable for individual pipistrelles.	Low
B06	Flat roof single-storey pool house with small gap between flat roof and wall however this was not found to be substantial on inspection. No other features.	Negligible.
B07	Gate house cottages of brick construction with Horsham stone and clay tile roofs. Numerous gaps beneath tiles noted.	High
B08	Pavilion building of timber construction with felt shingle roof. No potential access points noted.	Negligible
B09	Recently constructed stable block of timber	Negligible

	construction with corrugated roof.	
B10	Dilapidated single storey brick building with slate roof. Significant damage to roof / fascia's to western aspect due to surrounding vegetation. Surrounded by dense laurel scrub.	Low / moderate

- 3.4.8 Trees which have been indicated as requiring removal (2no. trees to the immediate west of the agricultural barn) were subject to a ground level assessment which determined these trees as offering **negligible** suitability. Numerous trees within the wider survey area however contain potential roost features of high suitability for both crevice and void dwelling species.

Foraging and Commuting Suitability

- 3.4.9 The woodland, mature tree lines and grassland with scattered trees within the site is of **high** suitability for foraging bats. The ornamental hedgerows, buildings, hardstanding and grassland areas however are of generally low value to this species group.

Dormice

Desk Study

- 3.4.10 45no. records of dormice were returned by the data search, the most recent being from 2021.

Site Assessment

- 3.4.11 The woodland within the wider site is of **high** suitability for dormice. The ornamental hedgerows, buildings, hardstanding and grassland areas however are of **negligible** value to this species.

Badgers

Desk Study

- 3.4.12 Badger records are confidential and as such none were returned by the data search.

Site Assessment

- 3.4.13 A number of potential mammal holes were recorded within the ghyll woodland to the western boundary of the site however no evidence of badgers, such as latrines, footprints or badger guard hairs were identified during the site visit. Badgers may still commute through the area on occasion and are therefore considered to have **moderate** potential to occur.

Birds

Desk Study

- 3.4.14 Numerous species of protected or notable bird were returned by the record search, including Schedule I species such as barn owl *Tyto alba*, osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*.

Site Assessment

- 3.4.15 Much of the grassland is too short and too regularly disturbed to support ground nesting bird species and as such is of **negligible** value to these species. The surrounding woodland, trees and hedgerows however are of **high** suitability for small passerines who may nest in these areas.

Invertebrates

Desk Study

- 3.4.16 SxBRC returned records of notable invertebrate species within Sussex such as purple emperor *Apatura iris*, dingy skipper *Erynnis tages* and brown hairstreak *Thecla betulae* butterflies, 40no. priority moth species and stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*.

Site Assessment

- 3.4.17 The matrix of trees, scrub, ponds and longer grassland provides habitat of high suitability for many common and widespread invertebrates. The modified grassland, buildings and hardstanding however are of **low** value to invertebrates.

Others

- 3.4.18 The site contains no suitable habitat for any other protected or notable species.

4.0 ECOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Internationally Designated Sites

- 4.1.1 No internationally designed site exists within the potential zone of influence of the development and as such no impacts are predicted to occur.

4.2 Nationally and Locally Designated Sites

- 4.2.1 Given the nature of the proposals and intervening distances between the site and surrounding Local Nature Reserves and / or Local Wildlife Sites, no impacts are predicted to occur. Construction should adhere to best practice guidance regarding minimising of dust, pollution and emissions to absolutely avoid any impacts arising within the surrounding area.

4.3 On Site Habitats

- 4.3.1 The following section provides an evaluation of the potential impacts of proposals on the habitats on site and outlines any recommendations required in order to ensure proposals accord with planning policy and legislation (see *Appendix A*), and to maximise opportunities to deliver net gains for biodiversity. Where identified, any potential impacts should be addressed in line with the mitigation hierarchy (BSI, 2013) (CIEEM, 2022) and where possible, mitigation should be embedded in the scheme design as this gives assurance of delivery.

Biodiversity Net Gain Statement

- 4.3.2 As of 12th of February 2024, Biodiversity Net Gain is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). The scheme would be classified as a major development and as such shall be subject to the standard biodiversity gain planning condition.

Evaluation and Recommendations

- 4.3.3 The existing areas of hardstanding, buildings and modified grassland are of broad low ecological value and as such it is considered that any loss of these habitats could be compensated for within the final scheme.

- 4.3.4 The greatest ecological interest at the site associated with the mature trees, surrounding woodland and diverse grassland areas. Proposals should aim to retain and protect these areas wherever practicable through the inclusion of suitable semi-natural buffers to woodland areas. Much of the area mapped as ancient woodland to the north-eastern section of the site was cleared of the majority of trees between 2018 and 2021 and any ancient woodland soils within this area are likely to have been degraded through the importation of hardcore and spoil. Furthermore, the remaining strip of ancient woodland is in relatively poor condition owing to the presence of laurel and builders debris. Any development within this area should be limited to areas of developed land with a buffer of semi-natural habitat implemented between areas of remaining ancient woodland and proposed development.
- 4.3.5 Areas of bramble, mixed-species scrub and rough grassland are likely to require removal to facilitate development proposals. These habitats are of medium distinctiveness and consideration must be given as to how the loss of these areas could be compensated for within the scheme. Furthermore, it is strongly advised that existing individual trees are retained and protected during construction and operation to ensure that the required levels of Biodiversity Net Gain can be achieved on site. This should be supported by a full arboricultural package to demonstrate that the protection of existing trees has been considered.
- 4.3.6 Control of Japanese knotweed by a specialised company should be undertaken to prevent its further spread on site. Any removal of spoil which may be contaminated with fragments of Japanese knotweed or any other Schedule 9 species must be removed by a licenced contractor and disposed of at permitted landfill or incineration facility.

4.4 Protected and Notable Species

- 4.4.1 Varying levels of legal protection are afforded to certain protected animals, certain species of conservation importance and broader biodiversity (see *Appendix A – Planning Policy and Legislation*). Therefore, in order to ensure proposals accord with statutory legislation further surveys for these taxa may be required to determine their presence and, if present, to devise an appropriate mitigation strategy. Any proposed impacts should be addressed in line with the mitigation hierarchy (BSI, 2013) (CIEEM, 2022) and where possible, mitigation should be embedded in the scheme design. The presence, or potential presence, of protected species is a material consideration in the planning process, as per the *Town and Country Planning Act (1990) (as amended)*.
- 4.4.2 Any protected / notable species assessed as having negligible potential to exist on site during the possible presence assessment were scoped out of further assessment at this stage.

Amphibians

- 4.4.3 The protected species assessment identified that the site and adjacent habitats offered **high** potential to support great crested newt should they be present locally. To ascertain the presence / likely absence of great crested newt within surrounding ponds a single eDNA survey should be completed mid-April to June inclusive. Should GCN eDNA be identified further GCN population surveys would need to be completed, which would need to be completed between mid-March and June inclusive and in line with current guidance (Langton *et al*, 2001).

Reptiles

- 4.4.4 The protected species assessment identified that the site and adjacent habitats offered **high** potential to support reptiles. As reptiles are protected from reckless killing and injury (Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981), a presence / absence survey should be completed between mid-March to October inclusive, in line with current guidance (Froglife, 1999), to determine whether reptiles are present at the site. Should reptiles be present then the survey data would be used to inform a mitigation strategy. This would likely need to include the incorporation of habitat for reptiles into the scheme design, to be used to relocate reptiles to prior to the construction phase.

Bats

- 4.4.5 The protected species assessment identified that a number of buildings on site contain features suitable for supporting a bat roost. Further survey of buildings which shall be impacted by the works should be completed between May – August to ascertain the presence / absence of a bat roost. Buildings assessed as high suitability shall require 3no. survey visits, moderate requiring 2no. visits and low suitability subject to a single visit.
- 4.4.6 Any further trees proposed for removal (aside from the 2no. trees assessed to the west of the agricultural barn) should be subject to a ground level assessment potentially followed by 1no. climbed survey to assess the presence or absence of potential roost features. Should suitable features be found a further 2no. survey visits would be needed, to be completed May – September and spaced at least 3 weeks apart.
- 4.4.7 The protected species assessment also identified that the habitats on site may be of value to commuting and foraging bats in the area. The habitats within the proposed construction zone are unlikely to support a notable assemblage of foraging / commuting bats and therefore, bat activity surveys are unlikely to be required. However, proposals should be mindful of the potential for bats to occur in the area by ensuring that woodland and trees are retained and protected from inappropriate nocturnal lighting during construction and operation. Any external lighting designs should comply with best practice standards in regard to external lighting and bats (BCT & ILP, 2023).

Badgers

- 4.4.8 The protected species assessment identified that the site and adjacent habitats supported **moderate** potential for badgers and no evidence of badgers was identified on site or in the immediately surrounding area. Therefore, further targeted badger surveys will not be required. However, as a precaution, standard badger protection measures should be incorporated into the construction phase, e.g., including a pre-commencement check for badgers, trenches or excavations to be covered overnight or have a broad and shallow ramp installed to prevent badgers becoming trapped, etc.

Birds

- 4.4.9 The protected species assessment identified that the site and adjacent habitats offered habitats of high value to wild birds. Any habitat suitable to support nesting birds scheduled for removal, i.e., scattered trees and scrub, should be cleared outside of the main bird nesting season (March – August inclusive) or first be subject to a bird nesting check prior to removal, to be conducted by suitably qualified ecologist or arborist.

Invertebrates

- 4.4.10 The protected species assessment identified that the site and adjacent habitats offered **moderate** potential to support common and widespread invertebrates. All valuable invertebrate habitat, such as mature trees, ponds and hedgerows, should be retained within the scheme. Where this is not possible, adequate compensation should be provided in the form of new native species rich planting.

Hedgehogs

- 4.4.11 Scrub and longer grassland habitat provides suitable hibernation and shelter opportunities for hedgehogs who may also utilise the grassland for foraging. The removal of any dense scrub or longer vegetation should therefore be mindful of the potential for hedgehogs to occur by first cutting vegetation to no lower than 150mm to prevent harm.

Dormouse

- 4.4.12 Surrounding woodland is highly suitable for dormice and should be retained and protected throughout construction and operation. The existing buildings, hardstanding and grassland are of negligible value to dormouse and any scrub / trees to the south of the barn which require removal are isolated by large expanses of modified grassland and as such are unlikely to support a dormouse population. Works adjacent to the northern woodland area should be minimised to avoid any removal of suitable habitat which may constitute an offence under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Should extensive removal of trees / scrub in this area be required (>100sqm) then further dormouse surveys may be needed to prove the absence of this species on site.

5.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENT

5.1 In addition to the requirement to deliver +10% Biodiversity Net Gain outlined by the Environment Act (2021), net gains for biodiversity are a requirement outlined in National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, 2023) and local planning policy guidance. Opportunities for ecological enhancements which could be incorporated into the scheme design are provided below:

- Enhancement of the grassland areas through a more sensitive management regime to encourage species diversity. This could include 1-2 cuts a year with mown pathways to allow hotel guests to walk amongst the meadow area.
- The use of seed and fruit bearing species of tree and shrub such as cherry, rowan, birch, hawthorn and crab apple as part of any compensatory planting to provide a foraging resource for birds and insects.
- The use of flowering lawn in areas which require regular mowing rather than a standard amenity mix.
- The proposed lake to the south of the main house should include shallow shelves to allow a diverse range of emergent and marginal native plant species to establish. Fish stocking within the pond is to be avoided as fish reduce overall levels of biodiversity.
- Enhancement of the northern ancient woodland through removal of waste and debris, removal of non-native species of cypress and laurel and select thinning to encourage a more diverse ground flora.
- Replacement of laurel hedging with native species-rich hedgerows.
- Enhancement of pond P2 through reed and bulrush control and silt removal.
- The use of biodiverse green roofs and façade bound green walls to new buildings.
- Creation of a small bare earth 'bee bank' with meadow areas to provide habitat for mining bees;
- Installation of 3no. general purpose bird boxes, 2no. crevice bat boxes and 2no. cavity bat boxes to surrounding trees.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The entire site covers an area of 7.4ha, of which the red line boundary encompasses 1.72ha and is located to the west of Haywards Heath. The site consists of short, modified grassland, buildings, hardstanding and non-native hedgerows / shrubs which are habitats of broad low ecological value. The greatest ecological interest at the site is associated with the woodland, mature trees and treelines which should be retained and protected throughout proposals, wherever practicable.
- 6.2 The habitats within and adjacent to the site were found suitable to support reptiles, bats and great crested newt therefore detailed surveys in relation to these species are required. As the presence, or potential presence, of protected species is a material consideration in the planning process these surveys shall need to be undertaken before determination of the planning application.
- 6.3 Proposals have negligible potential to impact upon any statutory designations identified within a potential zone of influence of development. Therefore, further assessment in regard to the *Habitat Regulations (2017)* or site-specific mitigation would not be required.
- 6.4 Opportunities for ecological enhancement have been provided to allow the ecological value of the site to be maximised. Recommendations on how best to achieve BNG are detailed herein to try to ensure the layout of the scheme would comply with the +10% mandate in the *Environment Act (2021)*. Given the presence of medium and high distinctiveness habitat on site, consideration shall need to be given to how these habitats can be compensated for within the scheme.
- 6.5 Subject to a sensitively designed scheme, which gives due consideration to the survey and mitigation requirements outlined herein, no major ecological constraints have been identified which would preclude the proposed development.

7.0 REFERENCES

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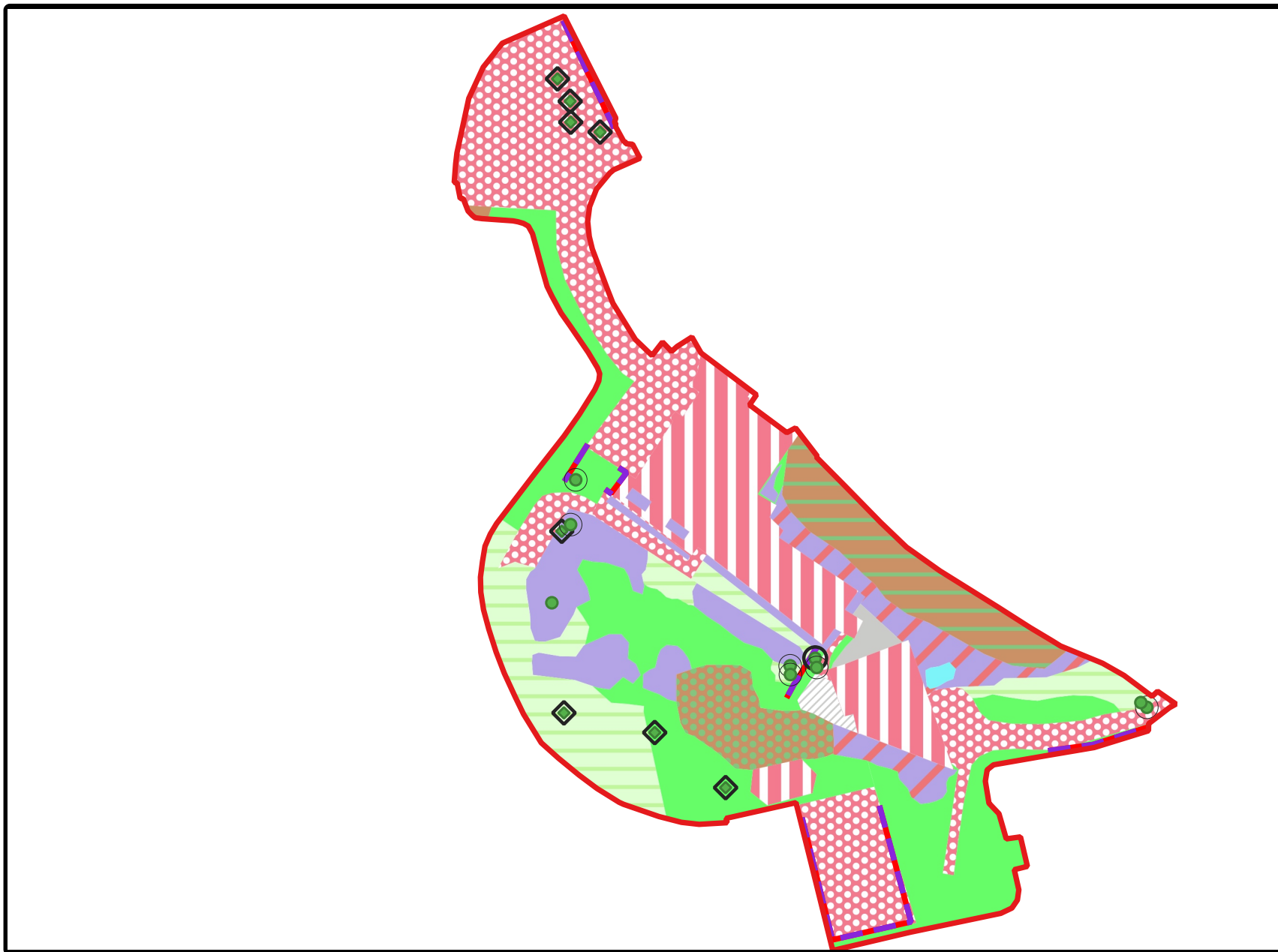
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Client			
RCM Partnership LLP			
<u>Project Title & Location</u>			
Chownes Mead, Haywards Heath			
Drawn by	Approved by	Rev	Date
CO	HS	02	08/01/26

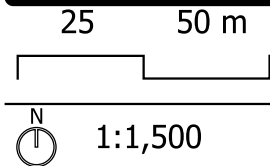


Figure No. 01 - Site Habitat Plan

Appendix A – Ancient Woodland Assessment

06th January 2025
LLD3233 / Rev 01



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Chownes Mead, Haywards Heath – Assessment of Ancient Woodland

An initial ecological appraisal of habitats at Chownes Mead was completed on the 26th of April 2024. This included a thorough assessment of the area to the south-east of the existing buildings, much of which is shown on MAGIC as Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland, as shown below.



Figure No. 01 – Extent of area designated as Ancient Woodland.

Large parts of the area designated as Ancient Woodland are comprised of the footprint of an existing agricultural building and areas of associated concrete and hardcore hardstanding to the south and east (shown at area 1 above). This includes an access track which joins to Chownes Mead Lane to the east. As well as removal of trees (works approved under a previous planning application), the underlying soil, seedbank and mycorrhizal network within these areas of built form is likely to have been irreparably damaged. Given the works which have occurred in these areas, it is considered that development here would not be contrary to protection afforded Ancient Woodland by the NPPF, and that the ancient woodland designation here should be removed.

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Trees within area 2 (shown on Figure 1 above) include abundant non-native specimens, such as coastal redwood, holm oak, Monterey cypress and wellingtonia. Furthermore, the ground within this section of the site has evidently been artificially re-profiled at some point in the past to create a sunken garden area which is currently utilised for keeping poultry. Ground flora within this part of the site was limited to typical modified grassland species; no ancient woodland indicators were identified during the site assessment. Given that this area could not have been continuously wooded whilst historic ground re-profiling and planting of non-native trees took place, it is our opinion that the Ancient Woodland designation in this area is also likely to be incorrect, and as such development impacting this area would not be contrary to the NPPF.

Area 3 is a narrow strip of woodland growing on a steep bank which leads up to Chownes Mead Lane. Locally dominant areas of sycamore and beech are present within the woodland along with oak and yew. Non-native species such as laurel and rhododendron are abundant throughout. The understorey is poorly developed, consisting of occasional hawthorn and holly, and ground flora was sparse but included rare occurrences of native bluebell and wood anemone. Numerous areas of builder's waste were recorded within the southern extent of the woodland area. The western section the woodland strip, nearest the existing property, is dominated by non-native ornamental cypress species which are considered to be of a similar age to those present within the sunken garden area. Overall, the woodland is considered to be in generally poor condition, but is likely to be an area of remnant Ancient Woodland.

The existing pool area and pool house is on a lower elevation than the woodland to the north, with a brick retaining wall separating the two. The area surrounding the pool as well as the terrace to the east of Chownes Mead house is formed of a paved patio of negligible ecological value.

The area of land between the pool and agricultural building (area 4) was found to be dominated by pendulous sedge with rhododendron, willow and bramble alongside sycamore saplings to the woodland edge. Areas of gravel provide a pathway between the barn and pool area, as well as a storage area to the west of the barn which currently houses a caravan. These areas of heavily modified ground and hardstanding associated with access to the adjacent agricultural building are not characteristic of Ancient Woodland and it is considered that the designation here is incorrect.

To the east of the area currently designated as Ancient Woodland (area 5) remains a single oak tree beside a cherry laurel hedge which separates Chownes Mead from the neighbouring property. Hardstanding immediately abuts this hedge and tree. Other than the oak tree, no other vegetation within this area is suggestive of Ancient Woodland, and as such its designation is considered to be incorrect.

The area of land between the existing secondary access and the fence line to the north (area 6) comprises an artificial mound which is now covered in bramble. Occasional small saplings are present, however no trees exist in this area. Furthermore, Japanese knotweed is present in this area which is indicative of imported / disturbed soils. Given the previous disturbance works which have taken place in this area, it is suggested that the Ancient Woodland designation here is also incorrect.

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The design of the scheme is sensitive to the presence of the small remaining area of woodland (area 3), with development proposed to focus primarily on areas of existing hardstanding, existing built footprint or areas of extant planning permission. The development has been carefully designed to avoid all direct or indirect impacts to the remaining area of woodland and has been fully informed by a detailed tree survey completed in accordance with BN5837. A cantilevered link across area 4 is proposed to minimise disturbance to soils in this area.

A slightly re-aligned access from Chownes Mead Lane is necessary to provide safe access to the site, however this will impact only upon area 6, and will be accompanied by Japanese knotweed removal and restoration of soft ground in the immediate surroundings, to include removal of hoggin within the vicinity of the remaining woodland.

All negative impacts during construction could be managed through the implementation of a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) which could be secured by condition. Furthermore, given the nature of the development and challenging topography of the remaining ancient woodland, adverse impacts arising from issues such as trampling or recreational disturbance during the operational phase shall be negligible. Enhancement of the remaining woodland area could be secured through implementation of a Woodland Management Plan, to include elements such as laurel and rhododendron control, removal of debris / waste, selective thinning / coppicing and implementation of new soft landscaping to create a gradual ecotone between woodland and the development.

In summary, given the extensive works which have evidently taken place over the years, including extensive ground re-profiling and importation of materials, it is considered that much of the area designated as Ancient Woodland has been irreparably damaged and the designation within these areas should be removed / amended. A narrow strip of remnant ancient woodland remains along Chownes Mead Lane, however this is in poor condition and appears to have been degraded through inappropriate storage of materials and lack of management.

The proposed development focuses largely on an area of existing built land and / or areas which have extant planting permission. No removal of remaining Ancient Woodland shall occur, and development will not result in the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or ancient / veteran trees. Furthermore, the development is considered to represent an opportunity for restoration and enhancement of the remaining woodland area and could accord with protection afforded Ancient Woodland with the NPPF.

Yours sincerely,

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Image 02 – View across area 1 looking west.



Image 03 – View from the pool area towards the remaining woodland, with area of non-native cypress clearly visible within the western section of area 3.

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Image 04 – Area of pendulous sedge and artificial surface within area 4.



Image 05 – View of sunken garden area (area 2) looking east.

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Image 06 – Remnant woodland (area 3) on steep slope.



Image 07 – Hard standing and ground re-profiling in area 5 (centre and right) and area 6 (left of frame), looking east.

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Image 08 – Location of proposed new access route (left of frame) with area of Japanese knotweed, artificial surface, and bank covered in bramble shown.

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