Hazel Dormouse: Outline Mitigation Strategy

Gladman Developments Ltd

9432 - Land off Scamps Hill Road, Lindfield

16.10. 2024

Documents & Plans

The following documents are referred to within this report:

Title	Ref	Author	Date
Proposed Access Arrangements	Access Plan, March 2024	Ashley Helme Associates	March 2024
Ecological Impact Assessment	EcIA, July 24	FPCR	July 2024
Biodiversity Net Gain Report	BNG Report, July 24	FPCR	July 2024
Illustrative Framework Plan	9432-L-02 Rev V	FPCR	6th February 2024

1.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 The following Dormouse Mitigation Strategy has been prepared by FPCR Environment & Design Ltd on behalf of Gladman Developments Ltd for the site located at land off Scamps Hill, Lindfield (central OS Grid Reference: TQ 35218 24891) herein referred to as 'the site'.

1.2 Following consultation with the Local Planning Authority (Mid-Sussex District Council) on the outline scheme, this document has been requested by Place Services (on behalf of the LPA), to provide outline mitigation measures for dormice, that would potentially form the basis for the submission of a Natural England European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) to facilitate the development and maintenance of favourable conservation status of dormice on site. This information was requested via email with Place Services, dated 10th October 2024.

Site Location and Context

1.3 The site is located within the village of Lindfield. Lindfield Rural is a parish located in the central eastern portion of Mid Sussex District in West Sussex, the parish is mainly rural in nature, comprising several small hamlets such as Walstead and East Mascalls.

1.4 The survey area comprises the redline site boundary (6.6ha) and the ownership boundary combined. The red line boundary consists of one modified grassland compartment, and two species-poor neutral grassland field compartments, separated by mature hedgerows and trees.

1.5 A small industrial estate and residential houses lie to the north of Scrase Stream. Scamps Hill Road defines the southern boundary and Little Walstead Wood (ancient woodland) demarcates the north-eastern boundary. Directly north there are Christmas tree plantations, with large communications masts, and two areas of broadleaved woodland (Little Walstead Wood and

Beggars Grove). There is a new residential development immediately south of Scamps Hill, with arable field compartments and woodland blocks beyond this. Northlands brook flows northwards along the south-east boundary of the ownership boundary and Scrase stream runs outside the north of the ownership boundary; both lie >10m from the redline site boundary.

Site Proposals

1.6 Proposals are for a residential development of up to 90 dwellings. The site will deliver a residential development with new public open space and equipped play facilities. The current illustrative framework plan (FPCR 9432-L-02 Rev V), submitted with the outline application, illustrates the opportunity for the site to provide biodiversity benefits through the creation of SUD's, wildflower meadows, scrub planting, and hedgerow creation within the large areas of green infrastructure (approximately 3.2ha to the south and 0.55ha (off-site) to the north of the development), as well as the retention of the intrinsic habitats on site including the mature hedgerows, mature trees, and some of the grassland which will be enhanced by the proposals.

1.7 Site access from Scamps Hill will be via two points through the road-side hedgerow; centrally for vehicle access and at the southwestern corner for pedestrian / cycleway access. Access between plots will occur between the central hedgerow separating the central and northern field compartments.

2.0 SITE ASSESSMENT

2.0 A suite of ecology surveys has been completed at the site between 2020 – 2024 (inclusive). The habitats on site were assessed as being suitable for a range of protected species, including hazel dormouse and further surveys for this species were completed between March to October 2024. The survey effort achieved a score of 20, in line with Table 5 of the Dormouse Conservation Handbook[1] (*Table 5 Index of probability of finding dormice present in nest tubes in any one month).*

2.1 Evidence of dormice was identified during the final survey visit in October 2024; where an adult dormouse and nest were observed within a nest tube on the northeastern boundary hedgerow.

2.2 The habitats on site comprising scrub, hedgerows and trees are suitable for dormice, but evidence was confined to one nest. The site is well connected to other habitat suitable for dormice, including ancient woodland at the northeastern boundary. Several records of dormice were returned by the data search, with the closest record being 115m south of the Site, over Scamps Hill Road

2.3 The most up to date Illustrative Framework Plan (FPCR, 2024; ref: 9432-L-02-Rev V) has been assessed using the Defra Statutory Biodiversity Metric tool and this has demonstrated that the proposals will lead to a net gain of 4.57 habitat units, representing a +13.55% change in biodiversity units, and an uplift of 0.83 hedgerow units equating to a +19.22% gain in the site's hedgerow resource (for details refer to the Biodiversity Net Gain Report by FPCR, July 2024).

2.4 Most of the hedgerows (including the hedgerow where the dormouse nest was observed) and trees will be retained within the GI. Vehicle access from Scamps Hill will require the removal of approx. 29m of hedgerow and the pedestrian / cycle path will require approximately 9m. Site access between plots will use an existing field access within the central hedgerow, which is

[1] Dormouse Conservation Handbook, English Nature, 2nd edition

anticipated to require <5m of hedgerow removal either side of the gate. To compensate for the loss of hedgerows on-site, 149m of species-rich hedgerows are proposed between the built development and the green space to the south of the site. This will create linkages between the existing trees and scrub in the centre of the site with existing hedgerows and those proposed areas of scrub planting to the north and north-east. The new hedgerows will include at least five native woody species per 20m, such as hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn, spindle, dogrose, honeysuckle, wild privet, wild cherry and guelder rose, which will provide additional foraging opportunities for dormice.

3.0 LEGISLATION

3.0 The hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* is fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) hereafter referred to as 'the Regulations') or the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) making it a European Protected Species. It is an offence to:

- capture, kill or injure hazel dormice (intentionally or recklessly).
- damage or destroy a breeding or resting place (intentionally or recklessly).
- disturb a hazel dormouse while it's in a structure or place of shelter or protection (intentionally or recklessly).
- obstruct access to their resting or sheltering places (intentionally or recklessly); and
- possess, sell, control or transport live or dead dormice, or parts of dormice.

4.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.0 The Dormouse Conservation Handbook[2] gives the suggested population densities per habitat type; with the hedgerows on site possibly supporting a spring density of up to two adults per hectare for hedgerows. A peak count of one adult was identified within the northwestern boundary during the October 2024 survey, with no further evidence of dormice elsewhere.

4.1 The evidence from the 2024 surveys has identified a single dormouse within the northern boundary hedgerow, which is linked to offsite areas of ancient woodland, which are key habitats for this species. This northern hedgerow will not be impacted by the proposals, so direct loss of places of rest and refuge are not going to take place, however, the linkage to hedgerows that will be affected does exist. As this is an outline application, surveys will need to be updated for a reserved matters application, and there is a possibility other linear features within the scheme could be used in the future. It is therefore suggested as a precautionary measure that contingencies are put into place where a licence will need to be applied for, to ensure the safe removal of the access points through the site, which will be ultimately guided by up-to-date surveys.

4.2 Removal of the hedgerow sections has the potential to lead to killing and injuring any dormouse present and displacement of any dormouse in the affected area. Furthermore, there will be a slight reduction in suitable nesting, foraging and hibernating habitat for dormouse across the site.

[2] Dormouse Conservation Handbook, English Nature, 2nd edition

4.3 Temporary severance of connectivity directly across these areas is a likely impact whilst nearby replacement habitat is developed, however suitable alternative habitat remains intact and protected through the retained mature hedgerows and woodland edge, running around the site's boundary features.

4.4 Other licensable potential impacts arise through indirect damage and disturbance to dormouse habitat during the construction and operation phases including inappropriate management, accidental damage, deliberate or reckless damage and pollution (dust, chemicals, light and noise). Key potential effects on dormice resulting from these impacts are damage to and degradation of dormouse habitat, fragmentation of dormouse habitat and isolation of dormice populations in dissected hedgerows.

4.5 As a result of the small losses proposed, the impact is expected to be negligible / low impact, at site level. This would be dependent on survey results completed for a Reserved Matters application.

5.0 MITIGATION STRATEGY

5.0 A 'landscape led' approach to master planning has resulted in the retention of a significant amount of existing linear habitat, suitable for dormice, within the green infrastructure of the scheme. Removal of those sections of hedgerows that cannot be retained will be completed under a specific EPSL licence and Method Statement, whereby all works shall be completed under the supervision of an appropriately experienced, licenced ecologist.

5.1 All retained and newly created habitats suitable for dormice will be managed under a comprehensive Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) or Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) to ensure their long-term protection. The LEMP / HMMP or similar, will be a condition of the outline planning consent.

5.2 The management plan will ensure that hedgerows are managed specifically for wildlife including sensitive trimming of hedgerows in an 'A' profile to promote wide hedge bases and planned management will take place between late September to February to avoid both the bird nesting season and the period when dormice are likely to have dependant young. Management practice will ensure that fruiting bodies and nut provisions are optimised, providing a diverse range and food during the active seasons.

5.3 During the construction phase, 'Heras' type fencing shall be implemented adjacent to all retained hedgerows and trees (broadly in-line with the root protection requirements of BS 5937 [2012] Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction) and construction workers shall be briefed on the sensitivity of retained habitats.

5.4 Connectivity between the site and suitable dormouse habitat within the surroundings will be optimised with additional planting within gaps. Owing to the positioning of the dormouse nest identified, it is likely that the ancient woodland and hedgerows to the north, may play a part of the dormice population if it does extend in this woodland and those habitats further afield, thus by strengthening the existing linear features and providing more habitats the site will benefit dormice in the long term.

5.5 Construction of the proposed primary access route and visibility splays will result in an increase in vehicular use of areas adjacent to retained hedgerows. However, the proposed scheme borders existing vehicular disturbance (Scamps Hill) to the south. These areas are

already subject to high levels of traffic disturbance, and it is therefore considered that moderate increases in vehicular traffic use by the proposed development will not have an adverse effect on the species. All retained hedgerows are separated from the curtilage of the access road and visibility splays, and these will be protected by Heras fencing during the construction phase and during the operational phase, these will be managed in accordance with a LEMP (or similar) by a management company.

6.0 PRECAUTIONARY WORKING MEASURES

6.0 A Method Statement will further seek to avoid any adverse effect in respect of damage or destruction to breeding sites and resting places, based on updated surveys closer to construction, whereby disturbance and offences will be avoided by the implementation of a licence (if required) and/or appropriately timing works and employing one-stage removal of vegetation for critical areas (vehicle access).

6.1 It is proposed that the lengths of hedgerow requiring removal for vehicle access is to be removed using appropriate mitigation, depending on the season.

6.2 Two-stage removal seeks to manage the above ground canopy component within which individuals could potentially build breeding nests by coppicing to 1m at a time when dormice would be hibernating (November – end-March) and subsequent removal of the basal habitats (root balls, herbage etc.) at a time when dormice would not be utilising ground hibernation nests.

6.3 Single-stage removal where small amounts of canopy vegetation is removed each day, allows animals time to escape, before a period of at least 24 hours is allowed to pass before the associated basal vegetation is then removed from site.

6.4 Clearance using the single-stage method will be undertaken within best practice timing of April – May (inclusive) and/or mid-September – October (inclusive). Single-stage clearance would comprise:

- A search for dormouse nests will be undertaken by a suitably experienced/licensed ecologist in the above ground canopy portion of vegetation. All vegetation that is scheduled for removal will be checked for birds' nests prior to removal. The canopy vegetation will then be coppiced down to 150-300mm in height using handheld tools e.g. chainsaws, handsaws and handheld loppers under close supervision of the ecologist.
- Following this, a 24-hour period will be allowed to pass before the remaining basal vegetation is then searched for dormouse nests by a suitable experienced ecologist. Once the area has been searched the vegetation may then be removed under close supervision of the ecologist.
- No more than 0.25ha of hedgerow shall be removed in any one day to allow dormice present sufficient time to move into retained habitat.

6.5 All hedgerow management (coppicing) must be completed using hand tools only i.e. brush cutter, hedge trimmer, lopper etc. and extreme care must be taken to limit potential damage and disturbance to the ground.

6.6 Any, less woody shrub layer (common bramble, dog rose etc.) can be reduced using hand tools to an appropriate height that can be advised by the attendant ecologist. This vegetation shall be extensively searched for the presence of nests by the suitably experienced, licenced ecologists prior to commencement of works.

6.7 All arisings shall be removed from the working area and either chipped and left in appropriate locations on site; or removed from site.

6.8 All vehicles except for a tracked or wheeled chipper shall remain parked at a sensible distance from the hedgerow and working area or preferably on gravel / hardstanding near the entrance to the site to prevent unnecessary damage or disturbance to the ground. Extreme care must be taken to limit potential damage and disturbance to the ground; although both canopy and basal habitats shall be extensively searched for the presence of nests by the suitably experienced, licenced ecologists prior to commencement of works.

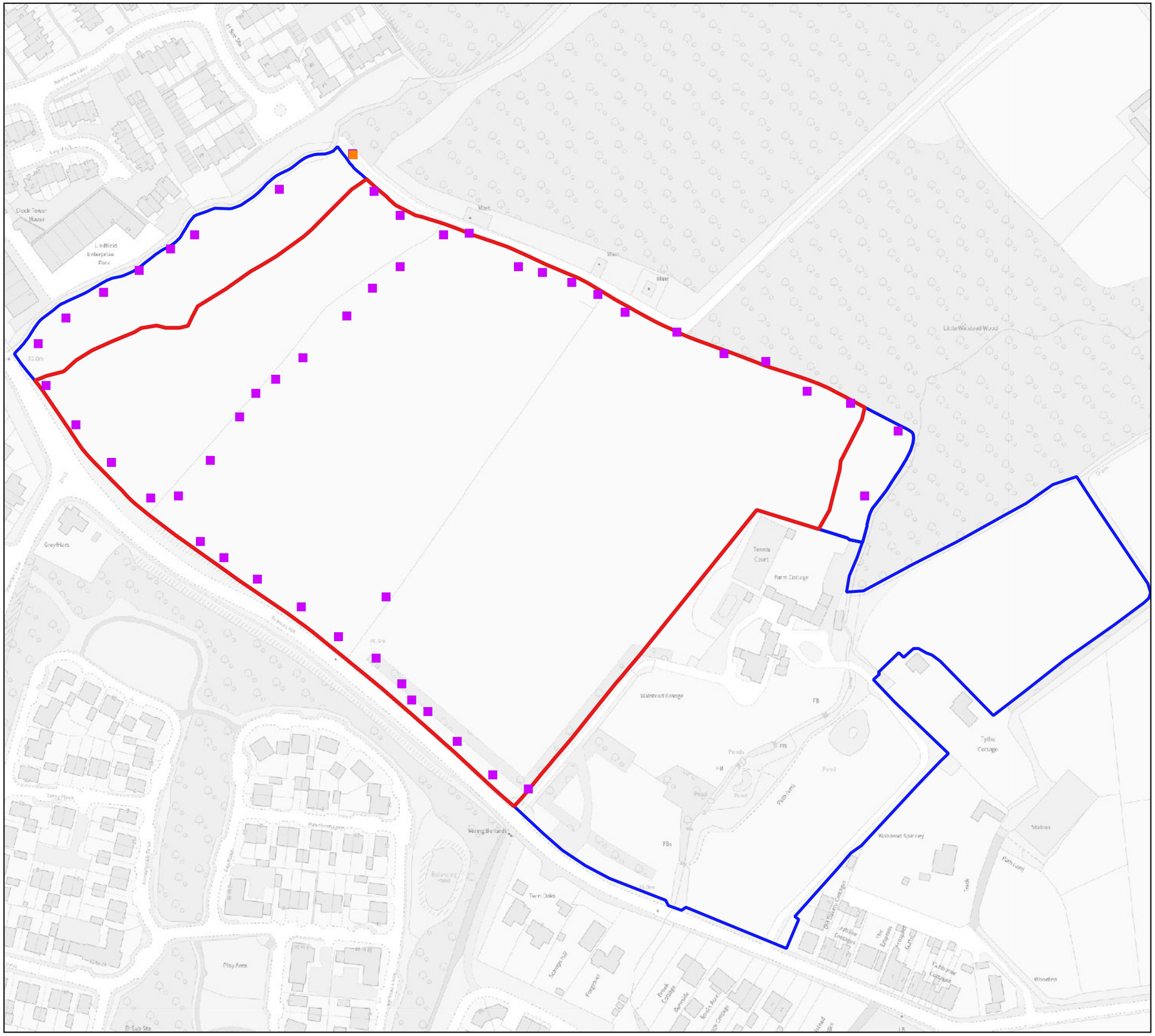
6.9 All works will only be commenced following operative checking in with the relevant site staff and gaining permission to enter the relevant working areas.

7.0 INHERENT MITIGATION (OVERVIEW)

7.0 The proposed mitigation designed into the scheme is to:

- Retain, buffer and appropriately manage the majority of currently accessible dormouse habitat on site in the long-term.
- Protect retained, accessible dormouse habitat in the short-term with Heras type fencing and minimum 2m buffer during construction works.
- Increase the available dormouse habitat on-site through provision of new native woody species planting (Green Infrastructure across the site) through the creation of native scrub planting (0.4 ha), native tree planting with wildflower grassland (0.5 ha) and new native hedgerow (150m).
- Improve the connectivity through the site by enhancing retained hedgerows, implement instant hedgerows further into the site to mitigate loss for visibility splays, to be replaced with woody species more appropriate for dormice. In addition, any brash which is being removed will be retained and placed against nearby existing hedges/woodland to improve connectivity for dormice.
- Appropriate timings and methods of habitat clearance works.
- Increase the carrying capacity site-wide by installing nest boxes in retained and newly created habitats.

FIGURE 1: DORMOUSE SURVEY PLAN 2024



Key

- **Site Boundary**
- **Land Ownership Boundary**
- **Dormouse Tube Locations**
- **Dormouse Sighting and Nest**

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client
Gladman Developments Ltd

project
Walstead Grange,
Lindfield

drawing title
DORMOUSE SURVEY PLAN

scale @ A3
1:2000

drawn
LW

issue date
15/10/2024

drawing / figure number
Figure 1

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