

Preliminary Ecological Assessment report for 54 Bridge Road, Welwyn Garden City

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biocensus

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the report

This report is provided in order to identify ecological constraints to a project, identify further survey requirements needed to inform any EcIA, and make recommendations for design changes, and to highlight opportunities for ecological enhancement.

Context of the development

The study site is located at 54 Bridge Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6UR. The development plans are for two residential dwellings and an access road.

Methods

The brief was to assess the existing ecological value of the site, identify potential ecological issues associated with the development and make recommendations for general mitigation, compensation, enhancement and further surveys, as appropriate. A desk study and a Phase 1 habitat survey were carried out. This was extended to survey for the presence of badger setts, and the suitability of habitats on site for other protected species.

Key issues and further surveys

- The development is not expected to have any adverse effects on nearby statutory or nonstatutory designated sites.
- It is recommended that the development activities are kept within the site boundaries at all times, including any waste or pollution. Light levels during and post development should be kept to a minimum and should not illuminate areas used by wildlife.
- Removal of trees should be kept to a minimum and if those marked as having medium/high potential for roosting bats are to be removed then climbing inspections for roost sites will be required to inform mitigation plans.
- No demolition, tree felling or hedge removal works should take place within the bird breeding season (March September inclusive) unless absence of nesting birds can be confirmed by a pre-works check.
- No further surveys are recommended for badgers or great crested newts, however, should either of these species be encountered during development, then all works must cease and an ecologist contacted for advice.
- A Method Statement should be produced describing a precautionary working approach to avoid adverse impacts on reptiles. Some reptile habitat should be retained at the site margins.
- No further surveys are required for hedgehogs, common toads or stag beetles. However, care should be taken during clearance works and any species found should be moved to a safe location.



Declaration

We confirm that the information provided in this document is truthful and accurate at the time of completion.

Name and relevant qualifications of lead ecologist / principal author: Jessica Smith BSc (Hons) GradCIEEM

Date: 09/07/2018

Biocensus QA provided by: Dr Richard (Dez) Delahay PhD MCIEEM CEcol.



Signature:

Date: 16/07/2018



1. Introduction

1.1. Background

- 1.1.1. Biocensus was commissioned by Farrell Design Studio to carry out an extended Phase 1 survey of a proposed development site located at 54 Bridge Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6UR
- 1.1.2. The project involves the construction of two residential dwellings, an access road and associated landscaping.
- 1.1.3. The purpose of this report is to identify key ecological constraints, in order to inform the project planning such that significant ecological impacts are avoided or minimised. It also aims to highlight any further ecological surveys that may be required to inform any future Ecological Impact Assessment, so that they can be appropriately designed. Finally, the report aims to provide the information required in order to develop appropriate mitigation or compensation measures.

1.2. Site description

- 1.2.1. The site is located in Bridge Road in the centre of Welwyn Garden City, and consists of a rectangular plot adjacent to Bridge Road (see Figure 1).
- 1.2.2. The proposed scheme relates to land in the ownership of No 54 Bridge Road, which can be seen in the south-east of the site in Figure 1. However, this dwelling itself will not be affected by the proposals.





Figure 1. Map of the proposed development site.

2. Planning and legislation

2.1. Legislation

2.1.1. Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 – Species of Principal Importance in England. Species "of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity" covered under section 41 (England) of the NERC Act (2006) and therefore need to be taken into consideration by a public body when performing any of its functions with a view to conserving biodiversity.



- 2.1.2. In the UK all birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and it is thus an offence (with certain exceptions) to:
 - Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird.
 - Intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird whilst it is in use or being built.
 - Intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.
 - Have in one's possession or control any wild bird, dead or alive, or any part of a wild bird, which has been taken in contravention of the Act or the Protection of Birds Act 1954
 - Have in one's possession or control any egg or part of an egg which has been taken in contravention of the Act or the Protection of Birds Act 1954
 - Use traps or similar items to kill, injure or take wild birds
 - Have in one's possession or control any bird of a species occurring on Schedule 4 of the Act unless registered, and in most cases ringed, in accordance with the Secretary of State's regulations (see Schedules)
 - Intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bird listed on Schedule 1 while it is nest building, or at a nest containing eggs or young, or disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

Committing an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (in respect of a single bird, nest or egg) can result in a fine of up to £5,000, and/or six months imprisonment.

Birds listed under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) receive special protection. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb these species at, on or near an 'active' nest.

- 2.1.3. Bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) as well as the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations (2010). It is an offence to:
 - Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat.
 - Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats.
 - Damage or destroy a bat roosting place (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time).
 - Possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat (dead or alive) or any part of a bat.
 - Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost.
- 2.1.4. Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act (1992). The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 protects badgers from taking, injuring, killing, cruel treatment, selling, possessing, marking and having their setts interfered with, subject to exceptions.
- 2.1.5. Great crested newts (GCNs) are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. It is an offence to disturb, handle without a licence, kill or injure a GCN or their eggs. Their breeding sites and resting places are also legally protected.
- 2.1.6. Reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to deliberately kill or injure a reptile. Rare reptiles (smooth snake and sand lizard)



also receive protection under the Conservation Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, making it also an offence to disturb them.

2.2. Planning policies

2.2.1. This report is prepared with reference to the National Planning Policy Framework 2012

3. Methods

3.1. Desk study

- 3.1.1. Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre was contacted to provide locations and details of ecological information for the site and the surrounding area to a distance of 1 km. The following information was requested:
 - Designated nature conservation sites (statutory and non-statutory)
 - Records of protected and / or notable species.
- 3.1.2. The following publicly accessible websites were searched for relevant ecological information:
 - www.magic.gov.uk (the Multi-Agency Geographic Information website for maps of statutory designated nature conservation sites).
 - http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/
 - http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1376 (summary of nature conservation legislation)
 - www.ukbap.org.uk (archived 2012)
 - www.google.com for aerial photography

3.2. Field surveys

- 3.2.1. The survey was carried out by Jessica Smith (B.Sc., GradCIEEM).
- 3.2.2. A Phase 1 habitat survey of the site was carried out. This involved systematically walking over the site and classifying each parcel of land according to the standard JNCC Phase 1 survey methodology (JNCC, 2010). Notes were made on the structure and composition of habitats and a botanical species list was collated.
- 3.2.3. The area was searched for the presence of badger setts and other signs of activity.
- 3.2.4. The trees and buildings on site were assessed for their potential to supporting nesting birds and roosting bats.
- 3.2.5. The survey was undertaken at the optimal time of year and no survey limitations were experienced.



4. Baseline Ecological conditions

4.1. Desk study.

- 4.1.1. One statutory designated site was identified within 1 km of the site. This was Sherrardspark Wood SSSI LNR, which is located approximately 160 m to the north-west of the proposed development site and contains areas of ancient woodland, dominated by sessile oak and hornbeam.
- 4.1.2. There are four Local Wildlife Sites within 1 km of the proposed development site. The nearest is the Dismantled Railway E. of Sherrardspark Wood, which the proposed development site backs onto. This is a dismantled railway route supporting old, possibly ancient woodland. The ground flora supports bluebells and is well connected to Sherrardspark Wood. The other three Local Wildlife Sites include Valley Road Open Space, an area of grassland 850 m from the proposed development site; Digswell Place Park, and Twentieth Mile Bridge Allotments which both lie approximately 930 m away.
- 4.1.3. Within Sherrardspark Wood are two areas of ancient woodland, 180 m and 730 m from the proposed development site, and one area of plantation on ancient woodland 270 m from the proposed development site. There are also two veteran trees listed within 1 km of the site. One is an oak tree 160 m away and the other is a wild service tree 450 m from the proposed development site.
- 4.1.4. A number of protected plant species and plants of conservation concern were recorded including sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Solomon's-seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) and wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*).
- 4.1.5. Several animal species of conservation concern or protected status were identified from the data search. These included great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*), slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*), barn owl (*Tyto alba*), kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), badger (*Meles meles*) and several species of bat (see Appendix 1).
- 4.1.6. Several records of non-native invasive species were identified during the data search, including grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), Chinese muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*), Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), ring necked parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), black headed cardinal beetle (*Pyrochroa coccinea*), ground beetle (*Platysma niger*) and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*).

4.2. Site survey

4.2.1. The site comprised mainly semi-improved grassland, with some scattered trees, an area of tall ruderal vegetation, some small areas of scrub and several hedgerows (see Figure 2 and Table 1). The semi-improved grassland in the back garden had been recently cut and was dominated by smooth meadow grass (*Poa pratensis*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*). Herb species included herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), wood avens (*Geum urbanum*), creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*) and wild strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*). The area of tall ruderal vegetation was dominated by



common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), ivy (*Hedera helix*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.). Scattered trees included hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) and elm (*Ulmus* sp.). The hedgerows at the front of the property were dominated by hawthorn, yew (*Taxus baccata*), privet (*Ligustrum* sp.) and blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*). A full species list is given in Appendix 3.

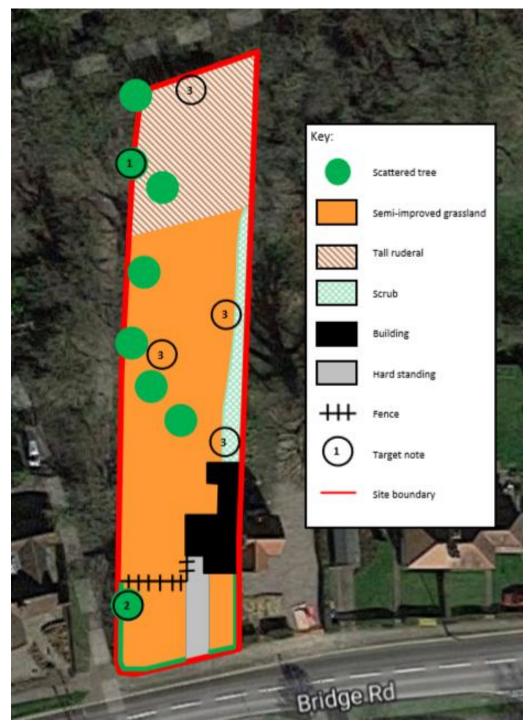


Figure 2. Phase 1 habitat map, including numbered target notes (details in Table 1).



 Table 1. Target notes for phase 1 map (Figure 2).

Target Note	Details
1	Pedunculate oak with medium bat roosting potential
2	Pedunculate oak with medium/high bat roosting potential
3	Log and rubble piles

- 4.2.2. No badger setts or field signs were found on the site.
- 4.2.3. Some areas of long grass and log piles were identified which could provide suitable habitat for reptiles, amphibians and hedgehogs.
- 4.2.4. The trees, buildings and hedgerows on site provide suitable habitat for nesting birds.
- 4.2.5. Many of the trees on site provide suitable habitat for roosting bats, particularly in old woodpecker holes and behind thick ivy. The buildings on site provide suitable habitat for roosting bats under missing tiles and holes into the eaves.

5. Ecological constraints and opportunities

5.1. Designated nature conservation sites

- 5.1.1. Due to the nature of the proposed development and the distance between the proposed development site and Sherrardspark Wood SSSI LNR, no impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed project. Hence, no recommendations are made in relation to Statutory Designated Sites within 1 km of the proposed development site.
- 5.1.2. As the Dismantled Railway E. of Sherrardspark Wood Local Wildlife Site backs onto the proposed development site, steps should be taken to ensure that this LWS is not adversely affected by the development. Tree root protection areas should be set up to ensure the trees within this local wildlife site are not affected by the proposed development. During and post development, lighting should be turned off at night and directed away from the local wildlife site to ensure that animals can commute and forage without disruption. Provisions should be made to ensure any waste and pollution from the development remains contained within the proposed development site and is removed safely.

5.2. Habitats

5.2.1. Due to the nature of the proposed development and as it will affect only the land on the site itself, no impacts on nearby ancient woodland are anticipated as a result of the proposals. However, there are some old trees in the local wildlife site behind the proposed development site, some of which could be remnants of ancient woodland. Therefore, steps should be taken to prevent these trees from being adversely affected by the proposed development (see 5.1.2 above also).



5.3. Species / species groups

- 5.3.1. Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. No badgers, setts or signs of badgers were identified on the proposed development site. However, badgers are known to be present in the local area and were identified during the data search. The surrounding land is suitable for badgers are advised, although should any signs of badgers be encountered during development of the site then works should cease immediately and an ecologist contacted for further advice.
- 5.3.2. Bats and their roosts are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 as well as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Several bat species were identified during the data search, and the land surrounding the proposed development site, including the Local Wildlife Site and the nearest Local Nature Reserve, provides good habitat for foraging, roosting and commuting bats.
- 5.3.3. The building on site provides suitable roosting opportunities for bats under ivy, missing/slipped tiles and through holes into the eaves. However, this property will not be affected by the development proposals.
- 5.3.4. There are also several trees on site which provide good opportunities for roosting bats in old woodpecker holes, cracks in the branches and under thick ivy around the trunks. It is recommended that the two trees with medium/high potential are left intact and unaffected by development. The oak with medium bat roosting potential has already been identified for removal in a previous planning application (N6.2014.2504.FP) which was approved. Removal of either of these trees will need to be preceded by a tree climbing survey to identify any occupied roosts, so that appropriate mitigation measures can be implemented. Any new lighting should be avoided near mature trees and should face away from potential foraging areas.
- 5.3.5. Breeding birds, their eggs and their nests are protected during the breeding bird season. The buildings, trees and hedgerows on site provide suitable habitat for nesting birds. Some nesting material was seen in gaps in the eaves of the main building and an egg shell was found in the garden suggesting that the trees are being used by nesting birds. It is recommended that all work involving tree felling and hedge removal is undertaken outside of the bird nesting season (March – September inclusive). If any work takes place during these months, a breeding bird check will be necessary before works commence to ensure no breeding birds are present.
- 5.3.6. GCNs are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). GCNs were identified during the data search although the exact location is unknown as only a 1 km grid square is recorded. The land surrounding the proposed development site provides some good terrestrial habitat for GCNs but there are no ponds within 500 m. The only water bodies present nearby are ditch systems within Sherrardspark Wood SSSI LNR. It is therefore unlikely that GCNs are present on the proposed development site due to the distance to the nearest waterbodies. No further surveys for GCNs are recommended. However, should a newt be found during development works, then all works should cease and an ecologist contacted immediately.



- 5.3.7. Reptiles are protected against killing and injuring under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Slow worms were identified during the data search. The habitats on the proposed development site provide some good opportunities for reptiles, particularly in areas of long grass and in the several log piles identified on site. We therefore recommend that a precautionary working approach is described in a Method Statement to provide guidance that should avoid adverse impacts on reptiles during the development. This should involve staged and systematic removal of reptile habitat (including refuge sites such as piles of rubble) under supervision where appropriate. Retention of some suitable reptile habitat at the margins of the site would be beneficial.
- 5.3.8. There are several species of conservation concern which could be present on the proposed development site. Common toads were identified during the data search and could be using the site during their terrestrial stage. Hedgehogs were also identified during the data search and the site provides good foraging and nesting opportunities, particularly in long grass and within the log piles. Stag beetles were not recorded during the data search but the site provides suitable habitat, particularly in log piles as they require dead wood to sustain their larvae. These three species are listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 NERC SPECIES as being species of conservation concern, with rapidly declining populations. No further surveys are recommended for these species, but care should be taken during demolition and if any are found on site, they should be moved carefully to a safe location. Rubble and log piles should be removed by hand (which could be embodied in the Method Statement described in 5.3.7 above). If hedgehogs are found nesting with young then a local wildlife rescue centre should be contacted for advice.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1.1. The proposed development is not expected to have any adverse effects on nearby statutory or non-statutory designated sites. It is recommended that the development activities are kept within the site boundaries at all times, including any waste or pollution. Light levels during and post development should be kept to a minimum and should illuminate away from areas used by wildlife, including the Local Wildlife Site that backs onto the proposed development site.
- 6.1.2. It is advised that as few of the trees on site should be removed as possible. In particular the two trees identified as having medium/high potential for roosting bats should be retained if possible. The oak with medium bat roosting potential has however already been identified for removal in a previous planning application (N6.2014.2504.FP) which was approved. If either of these trees are to be removed then a tree climbing inspection for bat roost sites is recommended to determine if it is being used by roosting bats and to inform appropriate mitigation measures.
- 6.1.3. No demolition, tree felling or hedge removal works should take place within the breeding bird season (March September inclusive) unless an ecologist first confirms the absence of nesting birds.



- 6.1.4. No further surveys are recommended for badgers or GCNs, however, should either of these species be encountered during development, then all works must cease and an ecologist contacted for advice.
- 6.1.5. Prevention of adverse effects on reptiles should be secured through adherence to a Method Statement describing a precautionary working approach. Some reptile habitat should be retained at the site margins.
- 6.1.6. No further surveys are required for hedgehogs, common toads or stag beetles. However, care should be taken during clearance works and any species found should be moved to a safe location. Rubble and log piles should be removed by hand.



References

Hundt, L. (2012). *Bat surveys: Good Practice Guidelines*. 2nd Edition. Bat Conservation Trust.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey – a technique for environmental audit*. JNCC. Peterborough.

Stace, C.A., 2010. New Flora of the British Isles (3rd Ed.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1 – Photographs



Photograph 1 – Recently cut tall ruderal vegetation



Photograph 2 – Tree line behind the Site, forming part of the Local Wildlife Site



Photograph 3 – Log pile

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Photograph 4 – Recently cut semiimproved grassland and view of building



Photograph 5 – View of the building



Photograph 6 – Access into eaves of main building





Photograph 7 – View from front of building and semi-improved grassland



Photograph 8 – Ivy clad pedunculate oak with medium/high bat potential



Common Name	Latin Name	Protection
Invertebrates		
Rain-Clock	Pterostichus (Steropus)	Rare
Rain-Clock	madidus	
Scaphidium quadrimaculatum	Scaphidium	Rare
Scaphidium quadrimaculatum	quadrimaculatum	
Purple Emperor	Apatura iris	Rare
White Admiral	Limenitis camilla	Sec. 41
White-letter Hairstreak	Satyrium w-album	Sec. 41
Reptiles and Amphibians		
Common Toad	Bufo bufo	Sec. 41
Great Crested Newt	Triturus cristatus	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5, Sec. 41
Slow-worm	Anguis fragilis	WCA5, Sec. 41
Birds		
Barn Owl	Tyto alba	WCA1
	Chroicocephalus	BAmb
Black-headed Gull	ridibundus	
Bullfinch	Pyrrhula pyrrhula	BAmb
Common (Mealy) Redpoll	Acanthis flammea	BAmb
Common Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra	WCA1
Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus	BRed, Sec. 41
Dunnock	Prunella modularis	BAmb
Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris	WCA1, BRed
Firecrest	Regulus ignicapilla	WCA1
Gadwall	Anas strepera	BAmb
Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus	WCA1, BAmb
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	BRed
Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	BRed
Hobby	Falco subbuteo	WCA1
House Martin	Delichon urbicum	BAmb
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	BRed, Sec. 41
Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	BAmb
Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis	WCA1, BAmb
Lesser Redpoll	Acanthis cabaret	BRed, Sec. 41
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos minor	BRed
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	BAmb
Marsh Tit	Poecile palustris	BRed
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis	BAmb
Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus	BRed
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	BAmb
Peregrine	Falco peregrinus	WCA1
Red Kite	Milvus milvus	WCA1
Redwing	Turdus iliacus	WCA1, BRed
Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus	BAmb, Sec. 41
Shoveler	Anas clypeata	BAmb

7.2. Appendix 2 – Data search results: Protected species within 1 km of the site



Skylark	Alauda arvensis	BRed, Sec. 41
Snipe	Gallinago gallinago	BAmb
Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos	BRed
Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata	BRed, Sec. 41
Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	BRed
Stock Dove	Columba oenas	BAmb
Swift	Apus apus	BAmb
Tawny Owl	Strix aluco	BAmb
Teal	Anas crecca	BAmb
Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus	BAmb
Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola	WCA1, BAmb
Woodcock	Scolopax rusticola	BRed
Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis	BAmb
Mammals		
A Bat	Chiroptera	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5
Brown Long-eared Bat	Plecotus auritus	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5, Sec. 41
Common Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pipistrellus	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5
Eurasian Badger	Meles meles	Badger Act 1992
Hazel Dormouse	Muscardinus avellanarius	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5
Lesser Noctule	Nyctalus leisleri	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5
Serotine	Eptesicus serotinus	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5
Soprano Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pygmaeus	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5, Sec. 41
West European Hedgehog	Erinaceus europaeus	Sec. 41
Western Barbastelle	Barbastella barbastellus	Cons Regs 2010, WCA5, Sec. 41

BAmb – Birds of Conservation Concern Amber List

BRed – Birds of Conservation Concern Red List

Cons Regs 2017 – Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

Sec. 41 – Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Section 41. Species of Principle Importance for the purpose of Conserving Biodiversity.

WCA1 – Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) Schedule 1 - birds

WCA5 – Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) Schedule 5 – animals



Common Name	Latin Name
Ash	Fraxinus excelsior
Blackthorn	Prunus spinose
Bramble	Rubus fruticosus agg.
Cleavers	Galium aparine
Creeping cinquefoil	Potentilla reptans
Cocks foot	Dactylis glomerata
Common nettle	Urtica dioica
Dock	Rumex sp.
Elder	Sambucus nigra
Elm	Ulmus sp.
Hawthorn	Crataegus monogyna
Herb Robert	Geranium robertianum
lvy	Hedera helix
Perennial rye grass	Lolium perenne
Pedunculate oak	Quercus robur
Privet	Ligustrum sp.
Ribwort plantain	Plantago lanceolate
Smooth meadow grass	Poa pratensis
Sycamore	Acer pseudoplatanus
Yew	Taxus baccata
Yorkshire fog	Holcus lanatus
Wild strawberry	Fragaria vesca
Wood avens	Geum urbanum

7.3. Appendix 3 – Full Species List