

**TAXAL LODGE
LINGLONGS ROAD
WHALEY BRIDGE
HIGH PEAKS
DERBYSHIRE**

ECOLOGICAL WALKOVER ASSESSMENT
Including
BAT and BARN OWL SURVEY

For

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contract Ecology and Landscapes was commissioned by Ruttle Contracting Ltd in January 2010 to undertake a walkover assessment to include a presence/absence survey for bats and barn owls at Taxal Lodge former school and associated outbuildings, off Linglongs Road, Whaley Bridge, Derbyshire. Grid Ref: SK 00648 80208.

1.2 The purpose of this survey is to:

- Assess potential for protected species presence within the site
- Identify any evidence of bat or barn owl usage
- Assess bat roost potential.
- Identify any further survey requirements
- Provide recommendation in view of survey findings

2.0 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

2.1 The site is located on the eastern side of Linglongs Road, to the south of Whaley Bridge.

2.2 The survey area comprises four main school buildings and two outbuildings:

2.2.1 **Building 1** is the main school building. The building is three-storey and of stone construction with a multiple pitched slate roof (see photograph 1, Appendix 2). The building has a number of extensions to the north including both flat and pitched slate roof sections. A loft space approximately 1 metre in height extends along the southern end of the building (see photograph 2, Appendix 2). This loft space is largely open to the elements due to missing roof slates and is largely inaccessible as the roof timbers are damp and rotten. The northern part of the main original building has a loft space approximately 2 metres in height (see photograph 3, Appendix 2). The loft space is divided into 3 sections by interior walls with each section having an exterior gable wall, two facing north and one facing west. Additional small loft spaces are located around the eaves of the main building, only two of these were accessible for survey. None of the roofs are felted on the interior. The building has two small cellars, one accessible by internal stairs and the other by an external door.

2.2.2 **Building 2** is located to the north-west of building 1 (see photograph 4, Appendix 2). This building is single storey and previously had a pitched slate roof. The building has been burnt out at some point in the past and no longer has a roof.

2.2.3 **Building 3** is a single storey former sports halls and classroom located to the north of the main school building. The building has a pitched felt roof which is in a poor state of repair. The eastern section of the building has a dilapidated hanging tile ceiling.

- 2.2.4 **Building 4** is located to the north-east of the site (see photograph 5, Appendix 2). The building is two-storey and of stone construction. The main section of the building has a pitched slate roof which is in a poor state of repair with large numbers of missing slates. The loft space is exposed to the elements and the roof timbers are unsound.
- 2.2.5 **Outbuilding 1** is a single storey brick and corrugated sheet shed located to the north of the site (see photograph 6, Appendix 2). The building is open to the roof on the interior.
- 2.2.6 **Outbuilding 2** is a single storey timber shed with a shallow pitched felt roof (see photograph 7, Appendix 2)
- 2.3 The site layout is shown in Drawing No.2 (Appendix 1).
- 2.4 The site is bordered by mature trees and areas of woodland (see photograph 8, Appendix 2) with the River Goyt located approximately 100m to the east of the site.

3.0 DESKTOP DATA SEARCH

- 3.1 Information regarding known historical protected species usage and non-statutory protected sites was obtained from Derbyshire Wildlife trust and all data records held were cross referenced to the site prior to undertaking the survey. The data gathered was based on a search area of 1km radius for protected species and 500 metre radius for protected sites.
- 3.2 Further details of statutory protected sites and land classification were obtained from Natural England's online mapping service, 'Magic' and the National Biodiversity Network's online 'Gateway' site.
- 3.3 The desktop data study revealed that there is one statutory protected wildlife site within 1km of the survey area. This is listed as 'Toddbrook Reservoir SSSI' citation number 1001257, which is cited for its community of unusual of mosses and liverworts. The site is located approximately 550 metres to the north of the survey area and the proposed re-development works at Taxal Lodge will therefore not affect the integrity of the SSSI.
- 3.4 Data search records obtained from Derbyshire Wildlife Trust show that there is a total of 2 non-statutory wildlife sites located within 500 metres of the site, the closest of which being 'Taxal Pond' local wildlife site (reference no. HP012) which is located approximately 230 metres to the south of the Lodge. Connectivity between Taxal Pond and Taxal Lodge is considered by be excellent with uninterrupted woodland connecting the sites providing optimal shelter and coverage for migratory animals.

- 3.5 The pond is however designated for its rare aquatic plant species and it considered unlikely that the proposed re-development works will affect the integrity of the ponds rare flora.
- 3.6 The second local wildlife site is 'Shallcross Wood' (reference no. HP013/3), which is located approximately 500 metres to the south of the survey site. Shallcross wood is however isolated from Taxal Lodge by the River Goyt and it is considered highly unlikely that the proposed re-development will impact upon the site.
- 3.7 Records of Slow worms were returned within 20 metres to the south of the site. These records date from 1990, however it is reasonable to suggest that very little in the way of habitat modification or disruption has occurred since this date and therefore it is considered highly likely that slow worms are still present within the immediate locality of Taxal Lodge.
- 3.8 One record of common lizard was returned within 1km of the site at Taxal moor. The record however is considerably dated, occurring in 1976. It is likely that the habitats present at Taxal Moor differ to those surrounding the lodge; however, species presence should be ascertained prior to any re-development works commencing.
- 3.9 Several badger setts are known to be present within 1km of the lodge, with the closest located within 300 metres. Exact locations have at this stage been excluded from publication within this report, due to the sensitivity of the information. Connectivity between the known setts and the site is considered to be suitable for the species ranging abilities and habitats onsite are considered suitable for foraging and shelter opportunities.
- 3.10 A total of three ponds are present within 500 metres of the site. No records relating to great crested newts were returned in the desktop study, this does not conclusively prove species absence. However, the species has not been mentioned with the citation for Taxal Pond as a local wildlife site which has most recently been surveyed in 2009. Brown trout are also present within the pond and it is widely considered that newt populations do not typically benefit from successful breeding within ponds known to contain populations of fish, who predate upon their eggs and larvae. It is therefore considered unlikely that great crested newts are present within the site.

4.0 SITE WALKOVER SURVEY

4.1 Walkover Survey Methodology

- 4.1.1 The site was walked in a single visit during which the habitats present were assessed for their potential to support protected species.

4.1.2 The site walkover survey was carried out on the 22nd January 2010. Weather at the time of survey was cloudy with persistent light rain and a recorded temperature of 4°C. The assessment was conducted by experienced Senior Ecologist, Ms Oonagh Nelson MIEEM.

4.1.3 It should be noted that January is not the optimal time of year for surveying habitats and flora. The best possible description of the main habitats is given although species lists are not comprehensive.

4.2 Walkover Survey Results

4.2.1 Much of the site comprises of grassland remnant of former ornamental lawns now overgrown due to non-maintenance, largely comprising several grasses, including False-Oat grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*).

4.2.2 The grassland may provide habitat for butterflies and other invertebrates but it was not possible to assess this fully at the time of survey. There was evidence however of small mammals including grey squirrels and rabbits using the grassland and deer are also present, with several latrines recorded throughout the survey area.

4.2.3 A double entrance mammal hole was noted on an embankment to the north of the site. The soil structure would appear to be very soft, possibly comprising of accumulations of coal ash given its dark and loose nature. The entrance contained much leaf litter and is considered most likely to be fox given the size and structure of the opening. Several carcasses of rabbit and pheasant were noted within the changing room annex of building 1, these are thought to be the discarded remains of fox prey. However, no carcasses were found within the vicinity of the mammal hole.

4.2.4 There are many areas of introduced conifers, shrubbery and cultivars, which are remnant from the landscaped garden areas of the old school. Buddleia (*Buddleia davidii*) is one such example which has freely self seeded along the periphery of the numerous tarmac roads and paths throughout the site. A dense pocket of overgrown ornamental shrubbery is located along the frontage of the lodge and building No.2.

4.2.5 Much of the southern section of the site beyond the terraced former vegetable garden and part boundary wall consists of dense broadleaved woodland which is dominated by beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). This continues un-interrupted down a steep escarpment towards pasture land adjacent to the River Goyt.

4.2.6 There are many individual scattered mature trees located throughout the grounds of the Lodge, again dominated by beech with occasional yew (*Taxus baccata*). Yew features more predominantly however in the form of a well established hedgerow which flanks the

approaching driveway and continues to the rear of the property. A mature yew hedge is also present dividing the ornamental garden and vegetable garden to the rear of the property.

4.2.7 Several large stands of Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) (shown in photograph 14, appendix 2) were recorded along the northern edge of the site boundary with a smaller stand located to the west of the small timber building (outbuilding 2) opposite the sports hall (building 3).

4.2.8 Numerous piles of stone and rubble litter the eastern section of the site to the rear of the main lodge. Much of which is assumed to be tumbled sections of ornamental walling and steps which would have originally lead towards pathways through the woodland to the south. Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) has colonised many of the rubble piles and such habitat is considered highly suitable for slow worms which are known to be present within the woodland immediately beyond the rear wall. There was also evidence of a tumbled brick built outbuilding to the north of building 4, again with many associated rubble piles suitable for harbouring reptiles.

4.2.9 Within the main lodge building, there was evidence of previous and repeated nesting bird activity within the chimney stacks. Photograph 13, appendix 2 shows one of several fireplaces which contained exposed nest debris assumed to be that of jackdaw.

5.0 BAT SURVEY

5.1 Bat Survey Methodology

5.1.1 An internal and external inspection of the buildings on site was undertaken on the 22nd January 2010 by Mr. Joseph Whittick MIEEM, assisted by Ms. Oonagh Nelson MIEEM under Natural England license number 20090428.

5.1.2 During the survey the buildings were inspected on the interior and exterior for evidence of past or present usage by bats and their suitability as bat roosts including:

- droppings
- feeding remains (e.g. moth and butterfly wings)
- potential roosting sites
- potential entrance points
- discolouration around entrance points
- absence of cobwebs in potential roosting points

5.1.3 Particular attention was paid to the ridge line and gable ends which are favoured roosting sites. A high powered torch (1,000,000 candles) and an endoscope (ProVision 300) were used to aid in the survey.

5.2 Bat Survey Results

5.2.1 Building construction and suitability for bats

5.2.2 **Building 1** (the main school building) has a large unobstructed two metre high roof space at the northern end of the building. The loft space provides suitable roosting sites for a variety of bats species including Pipistrelles and Brown long-eared bats. The loft space over the southern section of building 1 also has suitability as a roosting site for bats species. Numerous small gaps and crevices suitable as roosting sites for single or small numbers of bats were also noted beneath roofing slates, lead flashings and gaps beneath the coping stones along the edge of the roof. Free-flight access for bats into the loft space of building 1 is available where the roofing slates have been removed. The two cellars of the main building offer suitable conditions for hibernating bats.

5.2.3 **Building 2** no longer has a roof and offers few suitable roosting sites for bats with the exception of small holes and cavities in the remaining walls.

5.2.4 The northern section of **building 3** has timber sarking boards on the interior face of the roof providing suitable roosting opportunities for a variety of bat species. Access into the building is freely available through open doors and broken window.

5.2.5 The roof of **building 4** is in a poor state of repair making the loft space damp and draughty and therefore unlikely to be suitable as a roosting site for significant numbers of bats. Single or small numbers of bats could however roost beneath the remaining roof slates or in gaps in the walls of the building.

5.2.6 **Outbuildings 1 and 2** have corrugated sheet and felt roofs respectively which offer limited potential roosting sites for bats.

5.2.7 Evidence of Bats

5.2.8 Survey results are shown on Drawing No. 2 (Appendix 1). R1-5 corresponds to numbering on the drawing.

5.2.9 R1 - Several hundred bats droppings of varying ages from 1 year to several years old were found in the 2 metre high loft space above the northern section of the main school, **building 1** (see photographs 9 and 10, Appendix 2). The droppings were characteristic of the Brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*). The droppings were primarily concentrated beneath the ridge line of the north-western and northern sections of the roof. The droppings would

indicate a summer or maternity roost of Brown long-eared bats. Access for bats into the roof is thought to be via gaps beneath ridge/roof tiles and lead flashings, gaps behind timber fascias and the missing slates on the eastern aspect of the roof.

5.2.10 R2 - Approximately 15 droppings characteristic of the Brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*) and a number of moth wings were found beneath the curtain rail of a second floor window on the western aspect of the main school, **building 1** (see photograph 11, Appendix 2). The droppings and moth wings indicate a Brown long-eared feeding perch which has been used within the last year.

5.2.11 R3 - Approximately 20 bat droppings characteristic of the Brown long-eared bat and over 50 moth wings were found beneath a strip-light in a changing room extension to the north of the main school, **building 1** (see photograph 12, Appendix 2). The droppings and moth wings indicate a brown long-eared feeding perch which has been utilised repeatedly within the last year. Access is thought to be through the open door to the changing room area.

5.2.12 R4 - Approximately 20 bat droppings characteristic of the Brown long-eared bat and 20 moth wings were found scattered in the northern section of the building (**building 3**) indicating a feeding perch in this location. Access is thought to be through open windows and doors.

5.2.13 R5 - 4 bat droppings characteristic of the Brown long-eared bat were found in a pantry to the north-east of the building (**building 4**) indicating that a bat has perched in this location on at least one occasion. Access is thought to be through a nearby broken window.

5.2.14 Bat Habitats

5.2.15 Habitats adjacent to the site have good suitability for bats with large areas of suitable foraging habitat nearby including broadleaved woodland, Toddbrook reservoir and the River Goyt. A number of the mature trees within the survey area also have cracks/fissures suitable as roosting sites for bats.

6.0 BARN OWL SURVEY

6.1 Barn Owl Survey Methodology

6.1.1 An internal and external inspection of the buildings on site was undertaken on the 22nd January 2010 by experienced barn owl surveyor Ms. Oonagh Nelson MIEEM under Natural England licence number 20091383.

6.1.2 During the survey the buildings were inspected on the interior and exterior for evidence of past or present usage by barn owls and their suitability as a barn owl roost including:

- regurgitated pellets

- feeding remains (e.g. dead field voles, mice)
- white splashing
- potential roosting sites

6.1.3 A high powered torch (1,000,000 candles) and close focusing binoculars were used to aid in the survey.

6.2 Barn Owl Survey Results

6.2.1 Many of the buildings onsite contain suitable points of entry for barn owls through the broken window and missing roof sections, which are considered to be of particular suitability for the species as often the roof battens and beams which once would have held the slates are often left exposed creating an instant perching site offering vantage point views over the birds feeding territory.

6.2.2 Habitats onsite are considered to offer excellent opportunity for barn owl foraging, particularly the overgrown lawn areas which contain evidence of small mammals favoured by the species as prey items.

6.2.3 Barn owls will use favoured sites for roosting and shelter throughout the year and may have more than one site within their territorial range. Evidence of occupation such as pellets, discarded feathers or typical splashes of white faeces on or around roosting places such as beams if left undisturbed, will remain for many years.

6.2.4 No evidence of barn owl pellets, staining or feathers were found to suggest recent or historic use by this species in any of the buildings surveyed. Nor did the desktop data search reveal any records of Barn Owls within 1km of the survey site.

6.2.5 There are therefore no apparent implications to the re-development of Taxal lodge with regards to this species.

7.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

7.1 It should be noted that January is not the optimal time of year for surveying habitats and flora. Although the best possible description of the main habitats has been given it should be remembered that species lists are not comprehensive.

7.2 Similarly, due to the timing of the survey, signs of bat activity on the exterior of buildings from the previous year are considered likely to have been removed by the action of wind and rain of the winter months.

- 7.3 Full access was not available to the southern section of the roof of the main building (building 1) due to unsafe roof timbers. Access was also fully restricted to building 2 due to the unsafe nature of the fire damaged roof structure which had collapsed onto the floor of the building.
- 7.4 Much of the site contains dense areas of shrubbery and bramble, particularly abutting the exterior walls of the main lodge and within the former ornamental garden, which is considered to have limited the surveyors view for any evidence of protected species field signs such as pellets, dropping and burrows etc.
- 7.5 Timing of the survey will have excluded incidental observations of any species currently in hibernation, such as amphibians and reptiles and any migratory bird species.

8.0 CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 BATS

- 8.1.1 The northern section of the roof of the main school building contains field evidence of what is considered likely to be a summer/maternity roost of Brown long-eared bats. A Natural England bat mitigation license will be required for any works that would result in loss, alteration or disturbance of the roost area. It is likely that such a license will include timing restrictions on the proposed works (dependent on their scope) and mitigation measures to ensure that bats are retained on site. Wherever possible bats should be retained within their existing roosting areas and these areas should be left undisturbed during the site works. It is likely that additional bat activity surveys at dusk or dawn during the active period (May to September) will be required to be undertaken in order to confirm the species of bat, the type and size of the roost and to determine the location of access points into the roost before a licence can be granted. Such a survey should be undertaken to review the status of the bat roost prior to works commencing onsite and will be used to advise upon any mitigation measures required.
- 8.1.2 A number of feeding perches were noted around the site. Wherever possible existing feeding perches should be retained or replaced as part of the proposals.
- 8.1.3 Potential for bats to roost in buildings 2, 3 and 4 and inaccessible areas of building 1 was identified during the survey. Further dusk or dawn activities surveys of these building between May and September are recommended in order to identify any roosts not detected during the daytime survey.
- 8.1.4 A number of mature trees within the survey area were identified as having potential to support roosting bats. Additional bat activity surveys should be undertaken if any of these trees are to be lopped/felled.

8.2 SLOW WORMS

8.2.1 Desktop data records have revealed the presence of slow worms within the wooded area, approximately 20 metres from the rear of the lodge. The record was dated 1990, however habitats are not considered likely to have adversely changed since this date. It is likely in fact that the lack of grounds maintenance since the closure of the school will have led to an increase in suitable habitat for the species, with particular reference to the rank grassland and numerous low walls in the rear gardens offering suitable basking sites for the species. It is therefore recommended that a reptile presence/absence survey be undertaken to establish the species status and range.

8.2.2 The optimum survey window for this species is March to June and September to October. It is recommended that provision for such a survey be secured as a condition of planning permission. If slow worms are found to be present at this site an exclusion and capture programme shall be implemented in order to safeguard the species during the restoration of the overgrown grounds.

8.3 BREEDING BIRDS

8.3.1 Although no statutorily protected birds were recorded during the site walkover survey, the site contains numerous individual trees, shrubs, bramble patches and rank grassland throughout. Future proposed development works should therefore take in account that all UK wild breeding birds are protected at the nest under part 1 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended) which makes it an offence to:

- Kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Take, Damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built
- Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird

8.3.2 It is recommended that works which might affect nests, e.g. Restoration of chimneys, slate stripping, tree felling, mowing of areas used by ground nesters and grubbing out of existing shrubbery to make way for soft landscaping should be carried out outside the breeding season (March-August) to avoid any unnecessary or reckless disturbance. **However vegetation removal and ground clearance works may only commence once the presence or absence of slow worms at the site has been clarified following a full presence/absence survey for the species in order to prevent any offence being committed. Similarly, a number of mature trees within the survey area were identified as having potential to support roosting bats. Additional bat activity surveys should be undertaken if any of these trees are to be lopped or felled.**

8.4 JAPANESE KNOTWEED

8.4.1 Japanese knotweed is classed as an invasive weed under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended). Under provisions made within the Act it is an offence to spread

Japanese knotweed, liability may also extend in situations where a landowner has knowingly permitted the spread of the plant onto neighbouring land. There are therefore implications for development with regards to this species (control and removal). However any proposed treatment of this plant will need to be considered the potential for slow worms to be present at the site. Topical treatments for the weed (glyphosate) when applied under the recommended site conditions are unlikely to cause any offence in relation to slow worms, however **should any treatment be proposed that requires 'breaking ground' or strimming to a height shorter than 200mm, such works should only commence once the presence or absence of slow worms at the site has been clarified following a full presence/absence survey for the species in order to prevent any offence being committed.**

8.5 BADGERS

- 8.5.1 Several badger setts are known to be present within 1km of the lodge, with the closest located within 300 metres. A second sett is located within 950 metres of the southern boundary. Section 3(e) of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it an offence for a person to interfere with a badger sett by *disturbing* a badger that is occupying the sett.
- 8.5.2 A recent guidance note published by Natural England reflecting recent changes to the law in relation to what is classed as disturbance concludes Some examples of activities at or near setts that we do not consider likely to cause disturbance to badgers, and therefore would not normally expect to require a licence, include:
- Development, or other activities occurring close to badger setts (use of hand tools and/or machinery), where there is no reason to believe that the 'disturbance' will be greater than that which badgers commonly tolerate, and therefore any badger(s) occupying the sett are unlikely to be disturbed;
 - Vegetation removal (including felling small trees or shrubs) over or adjacent to setts (using hand tools and/or machinery);
 - Clearing out of ditches/watercourses using machinery and/or hand tools where badger setts are present.
- 8.5.3 The above list is not exhaustive however it does provide an indication as to what works may realistically be permitted without the requirement for a licence. The guidance note also surmises that "persons involved in activities near setts will need to exercise judgement as to whether their action may or may not cause disturbance to badgers".
- 8.5.4 There are therefore no apparent implications to the re-development of the lodge and grounds with relation to this species however, contractors should be mindful of the potential for badgers to be present. Should a badger or a sett be found at any time during the re-development, all works should stop immediately and the advice of ecological specialist sought without delay.

9.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Barn Owl Trust (2009) '*Barn Owls and Rural Planning applications – What needs to Happen, A guide for Planners*'. Barn Owl Trust, Ashburton.

Bat Conservation Trust (2007) '*Bat Surveys, Good Practice Guidelines*'. Bat Conservation trust, London.

English Nature (2003) '*Barn owls On Site – A guide for developers and planners*'. English Nature, Peterborough.

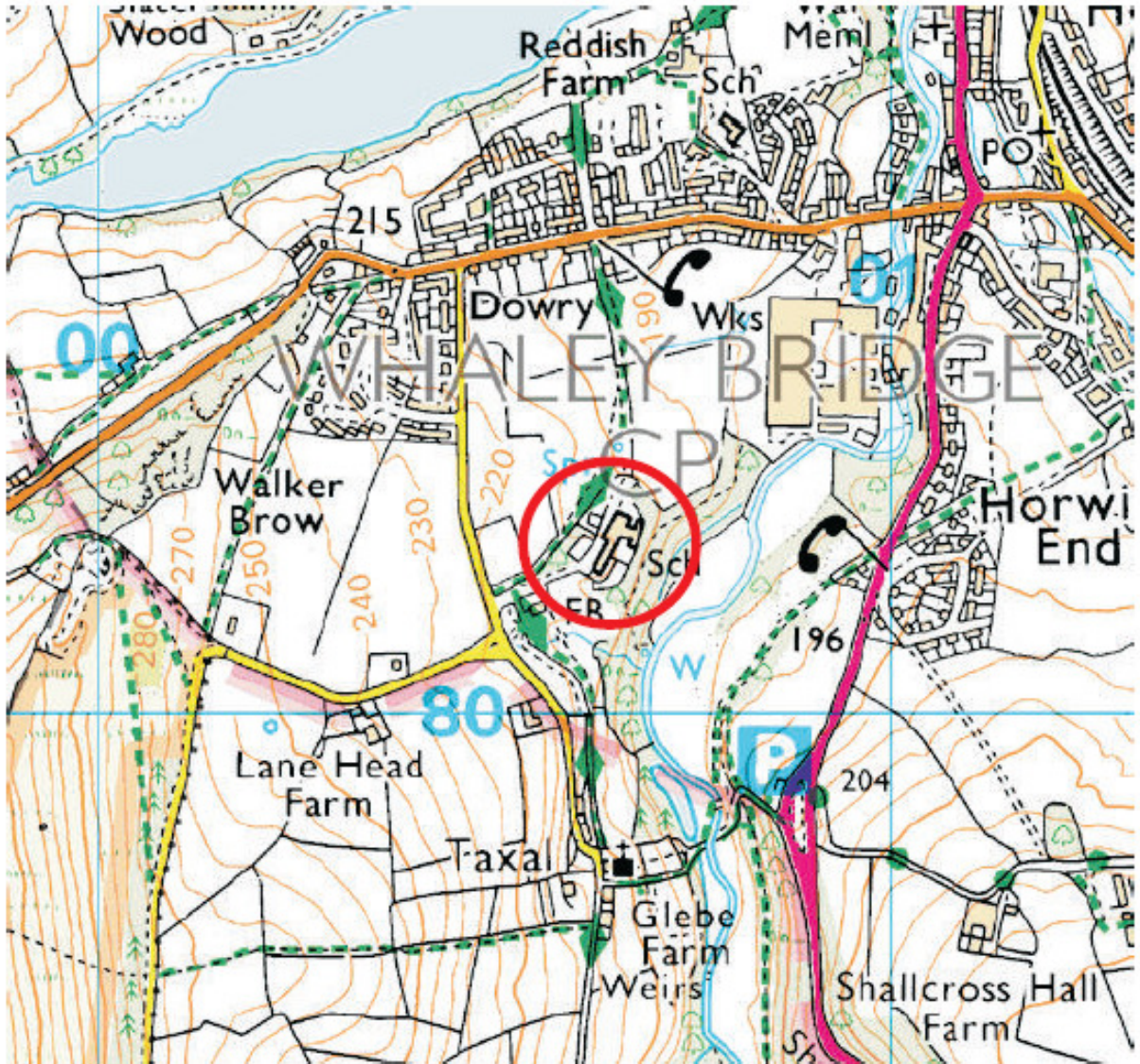
Hutson, A. M. (1993) '*Action Plan for conservation of Bats in the United Kingdom*'. The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2004) '*Bat Workers Manual*'. JNCC, Peterborough.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (1998) '*Herpetofauna Workers Manual*'. JNCC, Peterborough.

APPENDIX 1

**Drawing No.1 Site Location Plan
Drawing No. 2 Site Layout Plan**



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 = Site Location



TITLE: Site Location Plan

SITE: Taxal Lodge

NGR: SK 00648 80208

DRAWING NO. 1

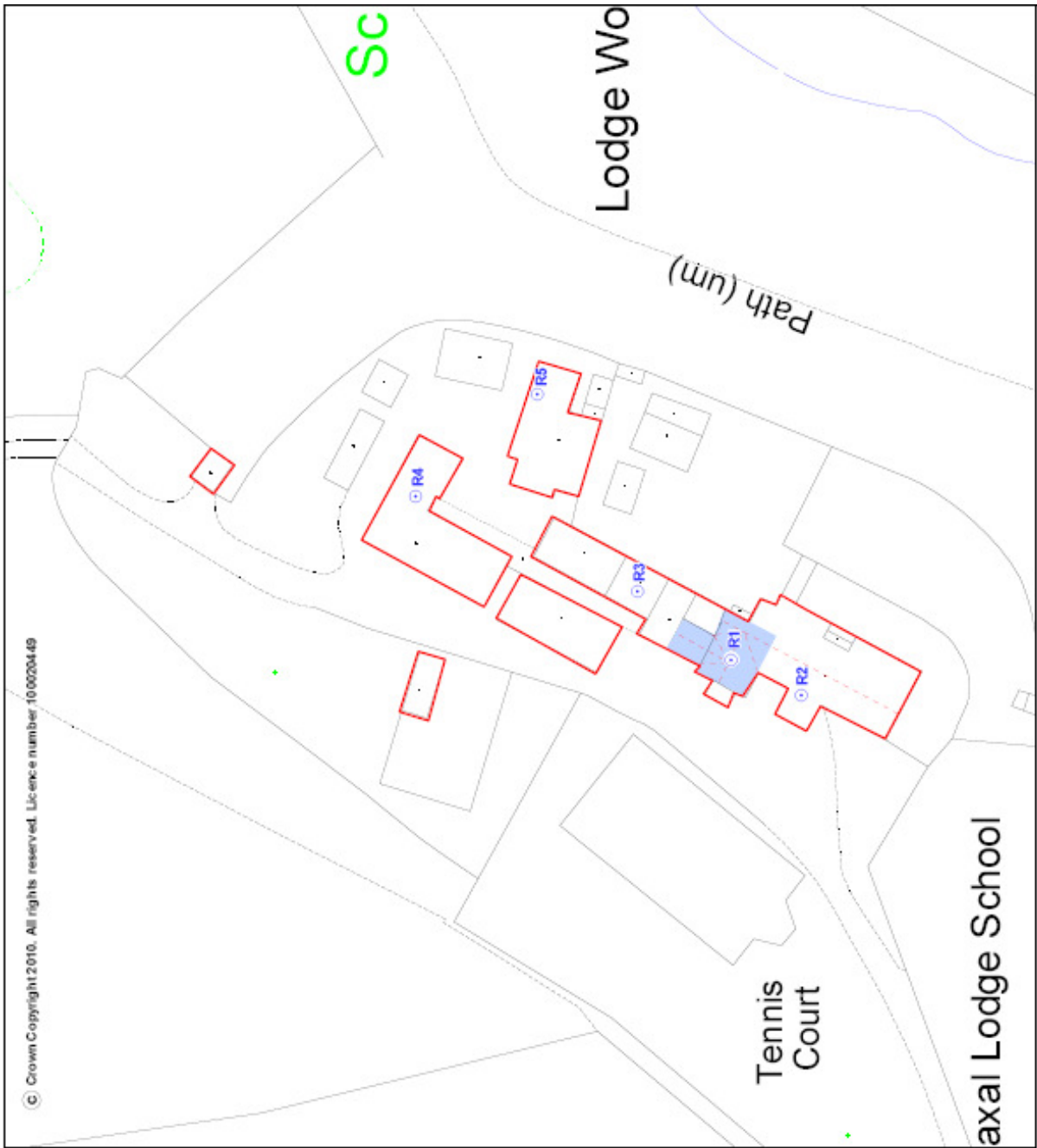


Site: Taxal Lodge
Title: Site Layout Plan
<p>KEY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site buildings Main roost (R1) ○ R1 Brown long-eared bat summer/maternity roost in main building ○ R2 Feeding perch ○ R3 Feeding perch ○ R4 Feeding perch ○ R5 5 brown long-eared bat droppings
Drawing No. 2

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APPENDIX 2

Site Photographs

<p>Photograph 1</p> <p>Building 1 (main school building)</p>	
<p>Photograph 2</p> <p>Loft above southern section of building 1</p>	
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<p>Photograph 13</p> <p>Evidence of nest debris inside fireplace</p>	
<p>Photograph 14</p> <p>Japanese knotweed along northern site boundary, stands also occur along western boundary</p>	
<p>Photograph 15</p> <p>Remnants of tumbled brick outhouse onsite, now overgrown providing possible shelter for slow worms</p>	
<p>Photograph 16</p> <p>View of ornamental garden and vegetable garden with yew hedge division to the rear of the main lodge (building 1)</p>	

Photograph 17

View of entrance to Lodge



Photograph 18

Gardens to south of main Lodge



Photograph 19

Garden to north of site



Photograph 20

Woodland adjacent to site



Wildlife Exclusion Fence Installation, Maintenance & Removal

Habitat Restoration, Enhancement & Creation

Mitigation Design & Implementation

Ecological Impact Assessment

Protected Species Survey

Invasive Species Survey

Phase1 Habitat Survey

Management Plans

Contract Ecology and Landscapes

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