

Land at Thorncroft,

New Mills

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

2026



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Client Caulmert

Project Title Thorncroft, Lower Hague, New Mills

Project Reference RHE.4674

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Executive Summary

Development Details

The client is proposing residential development at Thorncroft, New Mills, hereafter referred to as the 'site'.

This report describes the ecological features of the site and its surroundings and assesses the potential impacts of the development on the ecological interest. Recommendations are provided so that the development is compliant with biodiversity policy and legislation.

Ecological Interest

The site has a low level of ecological interest comprising common and widespread habitats. The building on site offers negligible potential to support roosting bats.

Outcomes

No further surveys are required. The proposed development will not impact more than 25m² of vegetation and is therefore exempt from BNG requirements.

Bird and bat boxes should be incorporated into the exterior of the new building to provide enhancements for biodiversity.



1. Introduction

1.1 Project Brief

- 1.1.1 Rachel Hacking Ecology Ltd (RHE) was commissioned in 2025 by Caulmert Ltd (the Client) to carry out an updated ecological appraisal of land at Thorncroft, New Mills (the 'site'). The site is located at O.S. grid reference: SJ 98495 85680 (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Map showing the location of the site (courtesy of Bing Maps)

- 1.1.2 The site is comprised of areas of developed land, modified grassland, and an outbuilding (Building 1). The site is in a semi-rural setting west of the town of New Mills. It is surrounded by grassland fields, strips of woodland, and scattered residential developments. A railway line runs adjacent to the northern site boundary, and the River Goyt is present beyond the southern site boundary.

Relevant Planning History

- 1.1.3 Two daytime bat surveys have been completed on Building 1 as part of previous planning applications (HPK/2017/0219, HPK/2024/0495). Both surveys found Building 1 to offer negligible potential to support roosting bats^{1,2}.

¹ SLR - Thorncroft Outbuilding, Bat Survey Report (2017).

² LM Ecology – Bat Survey Report, Outbuilding at Thorncroft, Lower Hague, New Mills, SK22 3AP.

1.2 Scope of Work

- 1.2.1 The Client commissioned RHE to carry out the following works:
- Desk-based study to obtain details of designated sites, protected and notable species within a specified search area.
 - Record the extent, type, and condition of habitats within and next to the site.
 - Calculate the baseline and post-development biodiversity units.
 - Search for signs of protected species and assessment of the potential of habitats and features to support protected and notable species.

1.3 Site Visit Information

Surveyor Details

- 1.3.1 Stephen Griffith (Ecologist) visited the site on the 3rd December 2025. Stephen is fully trained and has over 2 years of experience undertaking the listed surveys.

Weather

- 1.3.2 The weather at the time of the survey was cold and dry. The temperature was 4°C. Conditions allowed for a thorough assessment to be undertaken.



2. Methods

2.1 Desk Study

- 2.1.1 The Magic website (Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside) was interrogated for the presence of Statutory Designated Sites (and European Protected Species licences) within a 1km radius of the site.
- 2.1.2 The site was checked to determine if it is located within an Impact Risk Zones for any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and if so, whether the Local Planning Authority will need to consult Natural England.
- 2.1.3 The Derbyshire Biological Records Centre was contacted to provide details of non-statutory designated sites and records of protected and notable species within a 1km radius of the site.

2.2 Field Survey

UK Habitat Survey

- 2.2.1 In accordance with UK Habitat Classification system³ the site was walked over, and the habitats and features of ecological interest were mapped and described. Habitats and features of particular interest were target noted.
- 2.2.2 During the walkover habitat and features were assessed for their suitability to support protected and notable species in accordance with CIEEM guidelines⁴. Field signs of protected, notable, and invasive non-native species, if encountered, were mapped, and described.

Bats

- 2.2.3 The exterior of the building was surveyed from the ground using binoculars and a high-powered torch. Features offering potential access to roosting bats were recorded. Such features may include suitable gaps in roof coverings, gaps behind external cladding/facia and gaps in masonry.
- 2.2.4 Evidence indicating the presence of roosting bats was also searched for. This may include bat droppings on walls, windows or on the ground below roost entrances or staining from fur oil around roost entry points.

³ Butcher, B., Carey, P., et al. (2020). UK Habitat Classification – Habitat Definitions V1.1. at <http://UKhab.org>

⁴ CIEEM (2017). *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

- 2.2.5 The interior of the building was surveyed to identify any evidence indicating use by roosting bats. Such evidence may include bat droppings, feeding remains, urine splashes, live or dead bats and staining from fur oil on timbers.

2.3 Biodiversity Net Gain

- 2.3.1 During the site walkover the ecological condition of each habitat was assessed in accordance with the Defra (2024) guidelines⁵. Habitat types mapped during the field survey were recorded using UK Habitat Classification system⁶.
- 2.3.2 Habitat data were uploaded to the Defra Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculator spreadsheet to determine the baseline value of the site. The extent of any habitats to be retained or enhanced was also entered into baseline worksheets.
- 2.3.3 The post-development masterplan was interrogated to determine areas of hard standing, buildings, and associated infrastructure. New, retained and enhanced habitats were classified and allocated a target condition, based on habitat type, location and management input. This information was uploaded to the metric spreadsheet to obtain a post-development value.
- 2.3.4 The pre- and post-development values were compared to determine whether the yield of biodiversity units achieved a deficit or gain.

2.4 Mitigation Hierarchy

- 2.4.1 Mitigation measures should be embedded within the masterplan design and planning application process. Measures during the construction phases should be included in a Construction Environmental Management Plan: Biodiversity (CEMP). This process from proposal to implementation needs to consider the 'mitigation hierarchy' of avoid, reduce, compensate, and enhance:
- Aim to avoid negative effects through the design process.
 - Mitigate if negative effects cannot be avoided.
 - Use compensation measures to offset residual impacts.
 - Identify and implement opportunities to enhance biodiversity

⁵ The_Statutory_Biodiversity_Metric_-_User_Guide_.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

⁶ UKHab-v2.01-July-2023-Final-2.pdf. at <http://UKhab.org>

3. Results

3.1 Survey Constraints

- 3.1.1 The survey was undertaken in December. The habitats on site are subject to regular management and are typical of semi-urban/agricultural context, therefore lacking botanical diversity. As such, an appropriate level of assessment was still possible.

3.2 Designated Sites

- 3.2.1 One statutory designated site was recorded within the study area. This is Mousley Bottom Local Nature Reserve, located 600m south-east of the site. Previously used for landfill, gas works and sewage works, this site is designated for its woodlands and wetland area. The River Goyt intersects the south of the site.
- 3.2.2 The site is located within the Impact Risk Zone of Tatton Meres Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). However, the proposed development does not meet the criteria for the Local Planning Authority to consult with Natural England.
- 3.2.3 Four Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are present within the study area. They are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Local Wildlife sites		
LWS	Distance	Designation
Mousley Bottom	130m South-east	Habitat Mosaic with high botanical and faunal diversity
Brook Bottom Wood	600m North	Ancient woodland plantation - mixed
Knathole Wood	820m South-east	Ancient semi-natural woodland – mixed deciduous and invertebrate assemblage
New Mills Community Orchard	960m East	Habitat Mosaic – a small site with a wide variety of plant and wildlife species

3.3 Habitats

3.3.1 The habitats survey plan is contained in Appendix 2.

Modified Grassland

3.3.2 A small stretch of modified grassland is present on the site to the west of Building 1. This grassland is regularly managed with a short sward height. To the east of Building 1 and beyond the gate, the sward length is slightly longer (~10cm). This makes up part of the grassland field to the east of the residential property. Species include Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, Cock's Foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Colt's-foot *Tussilago farfara*, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Common Vetch *Vicia sativa*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Dandelion *Taraxacum*, Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, and Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*. This habitat was assessed as in poor condition using the statutory habitat condition assessment sheet 5a Grassland Low.

Developed Land; Sealed Surface

3.3.3 The access drive and outbuilding are comprised of developed land. Condition assessment is not necessary for this habitat type.

Individual Trees

3.3.4 Six semi-mature, individual trees are present along the fence to the south of the site, extending parallel to Building 1. The trees were assessed as moderate condition using the statutory condition assessment sheet 9a Individual Trees.

3.4 Invasive Species

3.4.1 No invasive non-native species were recorded on site.

3.5 Baseline Biodiversity Net Gain

3.5.1 Table 2 provides a summary of the baseline habitats units.

Table 2. Baseline Habitats Units			
Habitat	Area (ha)	Condition	Units
Developed land; sealed surface	0.028	NA	0.00
Developed land; sealed surface	0.008	NA	0.00
Modified Grassland	0.039	Poor	0.08

Urban tree	0.0244	Moderate	0.2
Total Area (excluding individual trees)	0.08	-	0.27

3.6 Species

Bats

- 3.6.1 The desk study returned 30 records of bats, with species including Brown Long-eared *Plecotus auritus*, and unidentified bat species. Two records of roosting bats were returned dating from 2004 and 2008. Both records were from the same bat box, located 1.7km south-east of the site for an unidentified bat species.
- 3.6.2 The site contains a single structure (Building 1), comprising a stable in good condition, currently in use for storage. The building is timber framed with tongue-and-groove cladding and has four doors. A security light is present above each door (see Photographs 1 and 2).

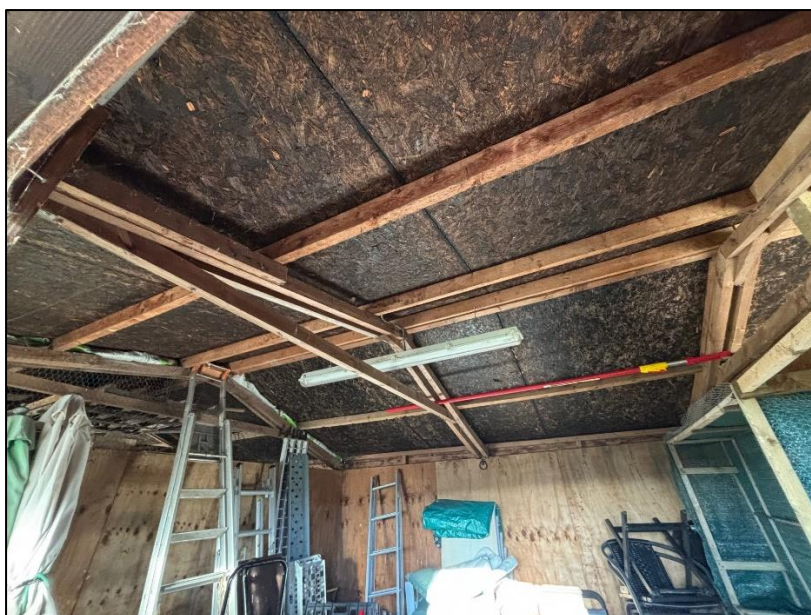


Photograph 1. End of B1.



Photograph 2. Front of B1.

- 3.6.3 The roof of Building 1 is pitched, comprised of chipboard and bitumen felt, and overhangs the eaves on the south elevation. Barge boards on the east and west gable ends are well fitted and in good condition with a small vent at the east gable end allowing access to the interior.
- 3.6.4 The internal space is separated into four stalls by timber partitions that extend to the rafters. The stall furthest west is blocked from the others by chicken wire but the remaining three are linked by vents or gaps in the timber. Joists and beams are in good condition. There is no roof void, and the internal spaces are well-lit throughout due to the presence of numerous windows. No PRFs were present on the exterior or interior of Building 1.
- 3.6.5 No evidence of bats or nesting birds was recorded.



Photograph 3. Interior of B1.

Badger

- 3.6.6 Ten records of Badger *Meles meles* were returned from the data search. The closest of these records was located 570m from the site boundary, dating from 1989. Exact locations cannot be disclosed due to the confidential nature of this information.
- 3.6.7 No Badger sett or evidence of Badger was recorded on or immediately adjacent to the site
- 3.6.8 The surrounding habitats of woodland and grassland fields, offer suitable foraging habitat for Badgers.

Other Mammals

- 3.6.9 Three records of Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* were returned from the data search. The closest of these records was located 920m east of the site, within a residential estate, dating from 2018.
- 3.6.10 The surrounding woodland and scrub habitats offer suitable sheltering habitat for Hedgehog. Whilst it is unlikely the species will be nesting on site, the grassland may be used for commuting and foraging.
- 3.6.11 Two records of Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus* were returned from the data search. The records were both located 900m north-east of the site boundary, dating from 1999 and 2000.
- 3.6.12 The surrounding woodland and grassland meadow habitats offer suitable habitat for Brown Hare, and the species may use the field adjacent to the site for commuting and foraging.

Otter and Water Vole

- 3.6.13 Two records of Otter *Lutra lutra* were returned from the data search. Both records were located 830m south-east of the site boundary by the River Goyt, dating from 2021 and 2023.
- 3.6.14 One record of Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius* was returned from the data search. This record was located 1.4km west of the site boundary by the Peak Forest Canal.
- 3.6.15 No habitats are present on site that are suitable for either species and no evidence was found. Otter and Water Vole are not considered further in this report.

Nesting Birds

- 3.6.16 No evidence of nesting birds was found within Building 1 or on the adjacent land at the time of survey. The adjacent offsite scrub and woodland habitat offers suitable nesting habitat for birds, with the onsite trees also offering some suitable nesting habitat for smaller birds.

Reptiles

- 3.6.17 One record for Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis* was returned from the data search. This record was located 260m west of the site boundary, dating from 1988. The edge of the neighbouring woodland offers suitable habitat for reptiles such as Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*.

Great Crested Newt

- 3.6.18 No records of Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* were returned from the data search.
- 3.6.19 No ponds are present within 250m of the site boundary. MAGIC shows one pond adjacent to the residential property, but this was not present at time of survey. Great Crested Newt is not considered further in this report.



4. Assessment

4.1 Development Context

- 4.1.1 The following assessment assumes that B1 will be demolished and replaced with a new building with a similar footprint (see Appendix 6). All other habitats will be retained.

4.2 Impacts on Designated Sites

- 4.2.1 No impacts to designated sites are anticipated as a result of the proposed development, due to a lack of impact pathways.

4.3 Impacts on Habitats

- 4.3.1 Retained trees could be damaged through soil compaction during construction.

4.4 Biodiversity Net Gain

- 4.4.1 As no impacts to habitats other than buildings and sealed surface will occur, the development is exempt from BNG requirements.

4.5 Impacts on Species

Bats

- 4.5.1 No impacts to bats or their roosts are anticipated.

Badger

- 4.5.2 No impacts to Badgers are likely. There is a low risk of Badgers being harmed, should they access a construction site.

Other Mammals

- 4.5.3 Hedgehogs and Brown Hare could potentially be harmed if they access a construction site.

Nesting Birds

- 4.5.4 No impacts to nesting birds are likely.

Reptiles

- 4.5.5 There is a low risk of harm to individual reptiles during construction, should these be present.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Further Surveys

- 5.1.1 No further survey work is required.

5.2 Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

Habitats

- 5.2.1 Individual trees at boundary edges should be protected during construction by the installation of exclusion fences, in accordance with a Tree Protection Plan. Construction materials should be stored away from the trees.

Bats

- 5.2.2 Two bat boxes are proposed to be incorporated onto the new building. These should be installed at the south and west elevations of the new building.
- 5.2.3 New lighting should avoid illuminating the boundary habitat features, particularly woodland edge.

Badgers and Other Mammals

- 5.2.4 To ensure that Badger and any other mammals, including Hedgehog or Brown Hare, are not trapped or harmed during the construction work, smaller excavations should be covered if left overnight. Larger excavations, if left overnight or for longer periods, should be ramped to enable animals to escape.

Nesting Birds

- 5.2.5 Two nest boxes should be incorporated onto the new building. These should be on the east elevation.

Reptiles

- 5.2.6 To avoid the low risk of impacting reptiles, materials should be stored on hardstanding or short grassland where possible.

Appendix 1: Planning Policy & Legislation

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) describes the Government's planning policy for England and how it should be applied. Within this framework, the requirements in relation to biodiversity are included within several policies. The two most relevant to individual planning decisions are Paragraphs 180 and 186, shown below:

- 180. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
 - a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
 - b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
 - c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
 - d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
 - e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
 - f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.
- 186. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:
 - a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
 - b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments),

should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;

- c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Legislation

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000) includes the notification and confirmation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). SSSIs can be notified for their floral, faunal, geological, or physiographical features. Protection against damaging operations and management of SSSIs is also included within the Act. Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) are zones around an SSSI account for the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified and identify development proposal which could have adverse impacts.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000) protects native animals, plants and habitats. Under the Act it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal listed on Schedule 5 and it is an offence to interfere with places used for shelter or protection, or intentionally disturb animals occupying such places. The Act prohibits picking, uprooting or destroy any wild plant (or any attached seed or spore) listed in Schedule 8.

European Protected Species (EPS) such as bats, Hazel Dormouse, Otter, Natterjack Toad, Smooth Snake, Sand Lizard and Great Crested Newt are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The Acts make it an offence to:

- a) Deliberately capture, injure or kill an EPS;
- b) Deliberately impair an EPS's ability to survive, breed, reproduce, rear or nurture young; to hibernate or migrate; or significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the EPS.
- c) Possess or control live or dead EPS or any part of, or anything derived from a EPS;
- d) Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of an EPS;

- e) Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place that is used for shelter or protection by an EPS;
- f) Intentionally or recklessly disturb a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection that is occupied by an EPS.

All common herptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000). Grass Snake, Slow Worm, Common Lizard, Adder are protected against intentional killing or injury. Common Frog, Common Toad, Smooth Newt and Palmate Newt is protected against sale. In addition, all British reptiles, Common toad and Great Crested Newt are listed as Species of Principal Importance.

All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or take, damage, or destroy its nest whilst in use or being built, or take or destroy its eggs. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act while they are nest building or at or near a nest with eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it an offence to wilfully, or to attempt to kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a Badger, or intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett. Interference of a sett includes disturbing badgers during occupation of a sett, or damaging or destroying a sett, or obstructing access to the sett.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a duty on every public authority to have regard to conserving biodiversity. Section 41 of the same Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitats that are of 'Principal Importance' for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The Secretary of State must take steps, as appear reasonably practicable, to further the conservation of those living organisms and habitats in any list published under this section. The list of species and habitats of principal importance currently includes 943 species and 56 habitats. These are the species and habitats found in England which are regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework

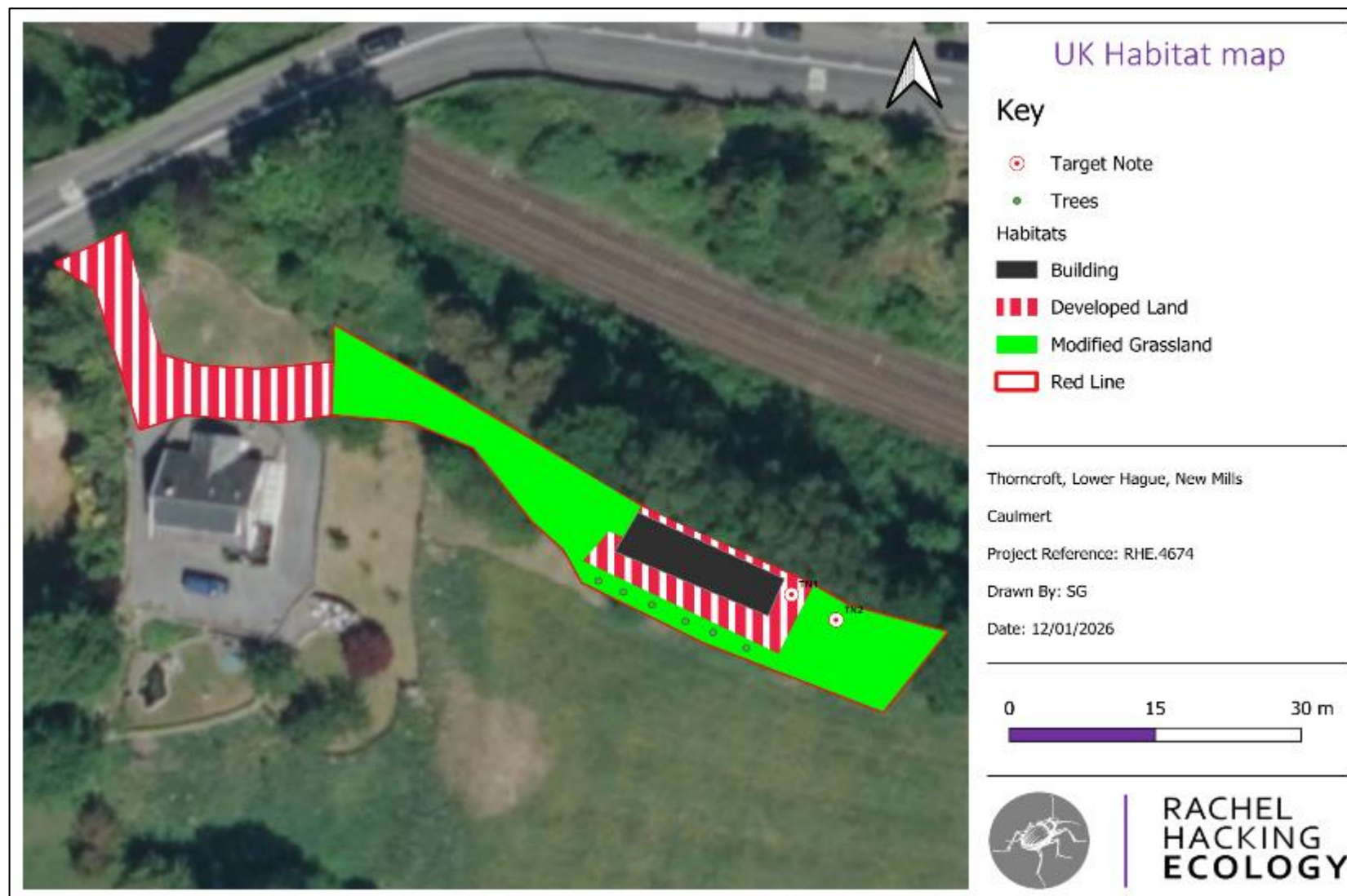
The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 protect 'important' hedgerows from destruction or damage. A hedgerow is 'important' if it (a) has existed for 30 years or more; and (b) satisfies at least one of the criteria listed in Part II of Schedule 1 of the Regulations. Under the Regulations, it is against the law to remove or destroy 'important' hedgerows unless permitted by the local planning authority.

The Environment Bill 2021 makes it mandatory for housing and development, subject to some narrow exemptions, to achieve at least a 10% net gain in value for biodiversity – a requirement that habitats for wildlife must be left in a measurably better state than before the development. Developers must submit a 'biodiversity gain plan' alongside usual planning application documents. The local authority must assess whether the 10% net gain requirement is met in order to approve the biodiversity gain plan.

The Environment Bill 2021 strengthens the duty on public authorities (NERC Act, 2006) to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity.

The Environment Bill 2021 amends the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to introduce an additional purpose for granting a protected species licence in relation to development, 'for reasons of overriding public interest', and two additional tests for the granting of such licences: that there is 'no other satisfactory solution' and that granting the licence is 'not detrimental to the survival of any the population of the species concerned'. These changes will reduce the scope for unlicensed activities to provide clear safeguards before licences can be granted, providing legal certainty and clarity to developers about their environmental obligation.

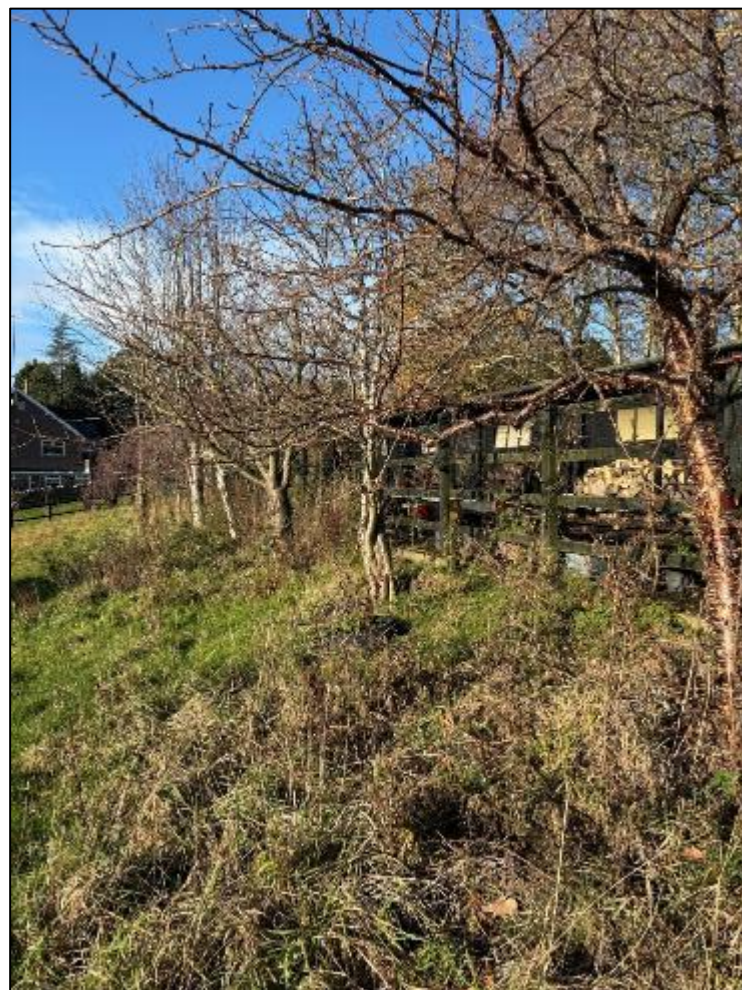
Appendix 2: Habitat Map



Appendix 3: Habitats

Habitat	Photograph
Modified Grassland	 

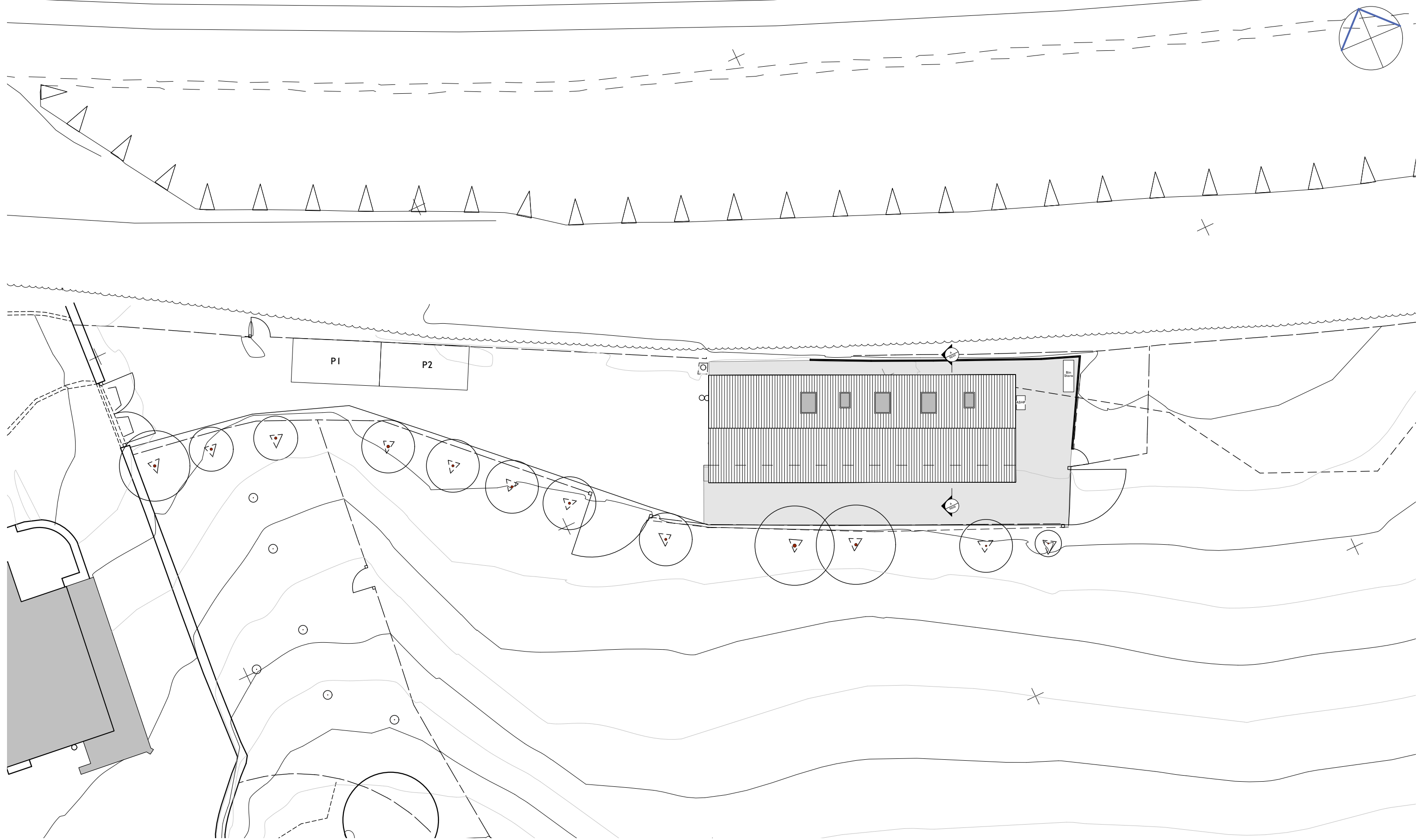
Urban Tree



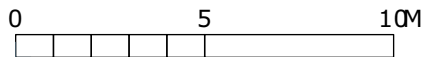
Appendix 4: Desk Study

The report includes a summary of the species records that were made available. Should you wish to see further details please submit a written request to Rachel Hacking Ecology. We will contact the client to ask permission to share the data.

Appendix 5: Site Proposals



1 | 1:200
Site Plan



HEM
ARCHITECTS

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Scale @ A3: 1:200
Purpose: For Information
Status: S2 **Revision:** P2
Drawn: NS **Checked:** JR

P2 29/10/24 NS
P1 04/06/24 NS
Planning Submission
Draft Planning Submission

Lower Hague
Proposed Site/Block Plan

Client: Keith Povah
Drawing No: PT138-HEM-00-ZZ-DR-A-00102

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