

ECOLOGICAL SURVEY  
[AND NEGATIVE REPTILE SURVEY]

LAND ADJACENT TO ASHLEIGH HOUSE, SAGESTON



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- PLANeco was commissioned by Thomas Scourfield to carry out an Ecological Appraisal of c.0.6ha land / garden area associated with Ashleigh House, Sageston SA70 8SG.
- The survey was carried out on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2022 by an experienced ecologist, who is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and holder of the requisite protected species' licences – so as to inform a residential development.
- No statutory or non-statutory sites would be affected by the proposed development of the site.
- No badger setts would be affected by any proposed works.
- No local population of bats would be significantly affected by the proposed development of the site; no trees were identified as roosts. A precautionary approach should be employed for any necessary felling of trees - including the fruit trees and dead standing ash trees - whereby an experienced ecologist will inspect / supervise prior to works commencing.
- The perimeter boundary features did not link to any habitats of significant value so the site had limited commuting value; the habitats provided an isolated foraging resource.
- Any vegetation clearance should be kept to a minimum; work that is required should be undertaken outside the breeding season [October – February inclusive].
- The site's vegetation was isolated and of poor vegetative structure; no impacts on dormouse was relevant.
- The mosaic of part-managed grassland provided potentially suitable reptile habitat; further survey work was recommended and undertaken through the period 1<sup>st</sup> September – 15<sup>th</sup> September so as to evidence presence / absence.
- No reptiles were identified during the survey period; the number of negative results during very suitable weather conditions was deemed appropriate survey effort. No reptiles were relevant to the proposed development.

- The habitats of most value on site were the areas of more diverse semi-improved grassland, standing dead wood and the mature fruit trees. Access works will necessitate the loss of individual fruit trees and ash die-back will necessitate the felling of the standing dead wood.
- Proposals will include enhanced and new hedgebank / hedges – planting will be of native species of ‘local’ provenance, together a SuDS feature that incorporates swales / pond / wetland together with associated native planting.
- New south or west-facing building elevations will incorporate integrated bat boxes and new east or north-facing elevations integrated bird boxes within any stonework / render / cladding. Such features would enhance the potential ecological value of the site.

## INTRODUCTION

PLANeco was commissioned by Thomas Scourfield to carry out an Ecological Appraisal of c.0.6ha land / garden area associated with Ashleigh House, Sageston SA70 8SG.

The survey was carried out on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2022 by an experienced ecologist, who is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and holder of the requisite protected species' licences – so as to inform a residential development.

Survey results will be passed to the county biological records centre in order to augment their records for the area.

## SITE DESCRIPTION

The c.0.6ha survey area comprised land / garden habitats to the south of Ashleigh House and to the north-west of the A477 roundabout off Hays Lane, Sageston - at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SN0583703271.

The area was made-up of grassland habitats, a garden shed, polytunnel frame, gravelled track and a group of small dead ash trees to the south; together with hedges, grassland and individual fruit trees to the north off Hays Lane – together with perimeter boundaries of hedges, post and rail fencing and breeze-block walls.



*Figure 1 & 2. Small dead ash trees in south-easternmost corner of site [left] and built structures towards the 'middle' of the survey area – behind Ashleigh House*



Figure 3 & 4. Site viewed from south and west showing associated house and track



Figure 5 & 6. Garden area to the north-west adjacent to Ashleigh House with occasional fruit trees and tussocky grassland

The survey area was bordered by Ashleigh House, Hays Lane, highways attenuation ponds and adjacent fields.

## METHODOLOGY

### DESK STUDY

A desktop data search to identify statutory and non-statutory designated sites and records of protected species within 1km of the site was carried out using the National Biodiversity Network [NBN] gateway website and the government's MAGIC website. Aerial photographs were also interpreted.

### HABITATS

Phase 1 habitat types were noted and mapped where necessary using the standard methodology published by the Nature Conservancy Council in 1990 [reprinted by JNCC in 1993].

#### BADGERS

A search was made within and adjacent to the site for signs of badgers, comprising:

- setts [comprising either single isolated holes or a series of holes].
- faeces [usually deposited in characteristic excavated pits].
- paths [between setts or leading to feeding areas].
- snuffle holes [small scrapes where badgers have foraged].
- day nests [vegetation where badgers may sleep above ground].

#### BATS

Any potentially suitable trees within and adjacent to the site were inspected using binoculars and a powerful torch. External signs of occupation by bats including urine staining, fur rubbing and droppings were noted together with suitable crevices.

Habitats were considered so as to assess the site for its foraging and commuting value.

#### DORMICE

The hedgebanks and any parcel vegetation were assessed for their suitability as dormouse habitat.

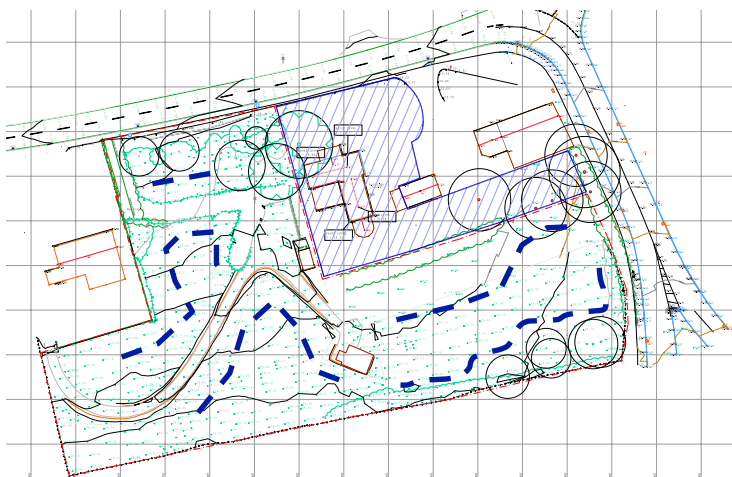
#### BIRDS

The habitats were assessed for their breeding bird suitability.

#### REPTILES

The habitats were assessed for their potential to support a reptile population.

Fifty squares of roofing felt – or refuges – were located across the site in areas of suitable habitat on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2022.



*Figure 7. Indicative locations of refugia within potentially suitable habitat*

The refuges were left for ten days and then checked on five suitable occasions in the period 1<sup>st</sup> September – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Basking reptiles were also searched for during each visit.

Table 1. Visit dates and environmental parameters for refuge checks

| Date                       | Weather parameters |                           |                       |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
|                            | Temp °C            | Cloud cover [oktas scale] | Wind [beaufort scale] |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Sept 2022  | 15                 | 1                         | 1                     |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2022  | 14                 | 1                         | 1                     |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2022  | 16                 | 2                         | 2                     |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2022 | 14                 | 2                         | 2                     |
| 15 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2022 | 14                 | 5                         | 2                     |

## LIMITATIONS

It should be noted that this survey takes no account of seasonal differences and a lack of signs of any particular species does not confirm its absence, merely that there was no indication of its presence at the time of survey.

If no action or development of this land takes place within eighteen months of the date of this survey, then the findings of this survey will no longer be considered reliable and should be repeated.

## RESULTS

### DESK STUDY

Milford Haven Waterway SSSI / Pembrokeshire Marine SAC were situated c.700m to the north-west; there were no non-statutory designated sites within a 1km radius of the survey area. Legally protected and notable species records within 1km included: otter, badger, hedgehog, stoat, polecat; merlin, peregrine, hobby, barn owl.

### HABITATS

The field / garden habitat comprised part-managed SEMI-IMPROVED GRASSLAND with areas of greater diversity, rank areas, tussocky patches and predominant species-poor areas; herbaceous species included: fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, creeping buttercup, perforate St. John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, clover *Trifolium* sp., hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, silverweed *Potentilla anserine*, knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, herb-Robert *Geranium robertianum*, cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, nettle *Urtica dioica*,



bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, cinquefoil *P. reptans*, agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, sorrel *Rumex acetosa*.

Dominant grasses included Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, rye grass *Lolium* sp., cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and false-oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*.

Five dead small ash *Fraxinus excelsior* STANDARD TREES were situated in-field in the south-easternmost corner; occasional non-native garden SHRUBS were associated with the gravelled TRACK; and an internal tall privet HEDGE divided the main field area with a north-westernmost small garden of tussocky grassland with individual FRUIT TREES [c.5 apple, crab apple, damson].

A garden shed of single-skin timber construction was situated close to a redundant polytunnel [internal concrete with occasional buddleia] in the 'middle' of the site.

#### BOUNDARIES

H1: easternmost roadside boundary of 'let-up' hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* [some thick ivy – low], blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, *Rosa* sp., hazel *Corylus avellana*, ash with occasional gaps and associated post rail fencing; much of this feature appeared to have been planted as part of pavement / highways work.

Ground flora included hart's-tongue fern *Asplenium scolopendrium*, soft rush *Juncus effusus*, sow thistle *Sonchus oleraceus*, willowherb, male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*; ivy *Hedera helix* was dominant.

H2: post and rail fencing with 'gappy' planted hawthorn, willow *Salix* sp., elder *Sambucus nigra* - and gateway to container in south-westernmost corner. Ground flora included red dead nettle, docks, creeping thistle, docks, creeping buttercup, willowherb - with bramble *Rubus fruticosus*.

H3: post and rail fence.

H4: breeze-block garden boundary including to the north crab apple, sycamore and ash close to the road to the north.

H5: roadside boundary to the north-west of crab apple, sycamore, ash, hawthorn; ground flora included hart's-tongue fern, dominant ivy, lord's-and-ladies *Arum maculatum*.

H6: tall privet hedge to the north of the redundant polytunnel.

**BADGERS**

No setts were found on or immediately adjacent to the site; during the reptile survey a latrine was identified within the survey area.

**BATS**

Occasional trees with potentially suitable roosting features were present:

- dead ash trees in the south-easternmost corner had multiple cracks / splits
- fruit trees in north-westernmost corner had knot holes and cracks

All features were accessible and no signs of roosting bats were identified; multiple visual inspections were undertaken during the reptile survey period.

**BIRDS**

The boundaries and associated vegetation together with in-field shrubs, trees and internal privet hedge provided suitable bird breeding habitat.

**DORMICE**

The site's vegetation did not provide any suitable dormouse habitat [gappy with little structure and isolated from any more suitable habitat]. No further surveys were deemed necessary.

**REPTILES**

The unmanaged grassland habitats together with adjacent brash piles and attenuation ponds - provided very suitable reptile habitat.

**OTHER SPECIES / HABITATS**

No other species or habitats of note were recorded.

**LEGISLATION AND SPECIES INFORMATION****BATS**

All bat species and their roost sites are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended and are included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 and amended by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) (Amendment) Regulations 2007 (the Habitats Regulations). Under UK law a bat roost is "any structure or place which any wild [bat]... uses for shelter or protection". As bats tend to reuse the same roosts, legal opinion is that the roost is protected

whether or not the bats are present at the time. Microchiroptera (the insectivorous species of bat found in the UK) are able to exploit a wide diversity of roost sites such as caves, trees, tunnels, mines and buildings. Species which have adapted to utilise buildings as alternative roost sites make use of various parts of the building including hollow walls, roof spaces and areas above soffit boarding, behind weatherboarding and under hanging tiles, habitats which can be replicated when designing mitigation measures. It is important to note that individual roosts are not usually occupied all year round, as bat colonies move frequently (depending upon the species). The same site, however, does tend to be occupied at the same time each year.

#### BIRDS

All British birds, their nests and eggs (with certain exceptions) are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended. This makes it an offence to: intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird; intentionally damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

#### REPTILES

All six native reptile species receive protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The four more common species (common lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, adder *Vipera berus* and grass snake *Natrix natrix*) receive partial protection which makes it an offence to intentionally kill or injure a reptile. The two other reptile species (smooth snake *Coronella austriaca* and sand lizard *Lacerta agilis*), both of which are rare with very restricted UK ranges receive full protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended).

### DISCUSSION AND MITIGATION

#### DESK STUDY

No statutory or non-statutory sites would be affected by any appropriate proposed development.

#### BADGERS

No badger setts would be affected by any proposed works.

#### BATS

No local population of bats would be affected by the proposed development of the site; no trees were identified as roosts. A precautionary approach should be employed for any necessary felling of trees including the fruit and dead ash trees whereby an experienced ecologist will inspect / supervise prior to works

commencing.

The perimeter boundary features did not link to any habitats of significant value; the site had limited commuting value and the habitats provided an isolated foraging resource.

#### BIRDS

Any vegetation clearance should be kept to a minimum; work that is required should be undertaken outside the breeding season [October – February inclusive].

#### DORMICE

No further surveys were necessary; habitats were not relevant to this species.

#### REPTILES

The mosaic of part-managed grassland provided potentially suitable reptile habitat; further survey work was recommended and undertaken through the period 1<sup>st</sup> September – 15<sup>th</sup> September so as to evidence presence / absence.

No reptiles were identified during the September survey period; the number of negative results during very suitable weather conditions was deemed appropriate survey effort.

No reptiles were relevant to the proposed development.

#### HABITATS

The habitats of most value on site are the areas of more diverse semi-improved grassland, standing dead wood [south-easternmost corner] and the mature fruit trees [north-westernmost area]. Access works will necessitate the loss of individual fruit trees – and ash die-back will necessitate the felling of the standing dead wood. Proposals will include enhanced and new hedgebank / hedges – planting will be of native species of 'local' provenance, together a SuDS feature that incorporates swales / pond / wetland together with associated native planting.

New south or west-facing building elevations will incorporate integrated bat boxes and new east or north-facing elevations integrated bird boxes within any stonework / render / cladding. Such features would enhance the potential ecological value of the site.

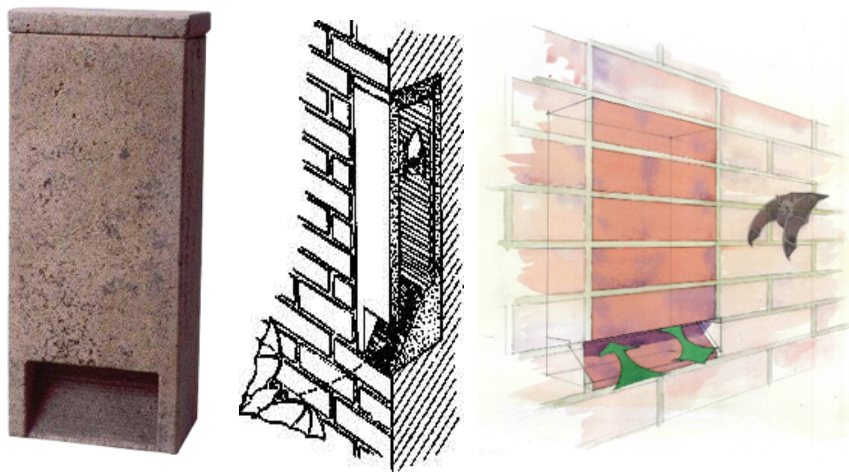


Figure 8. Indicative Schwegler and Habibat bat features

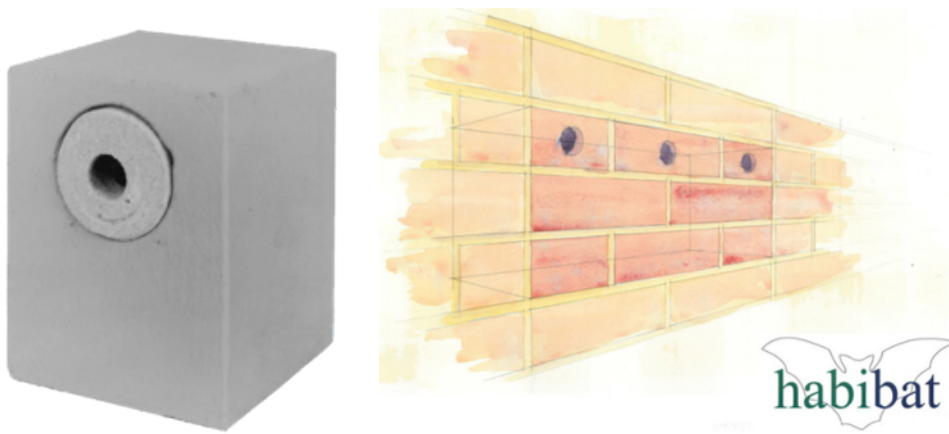
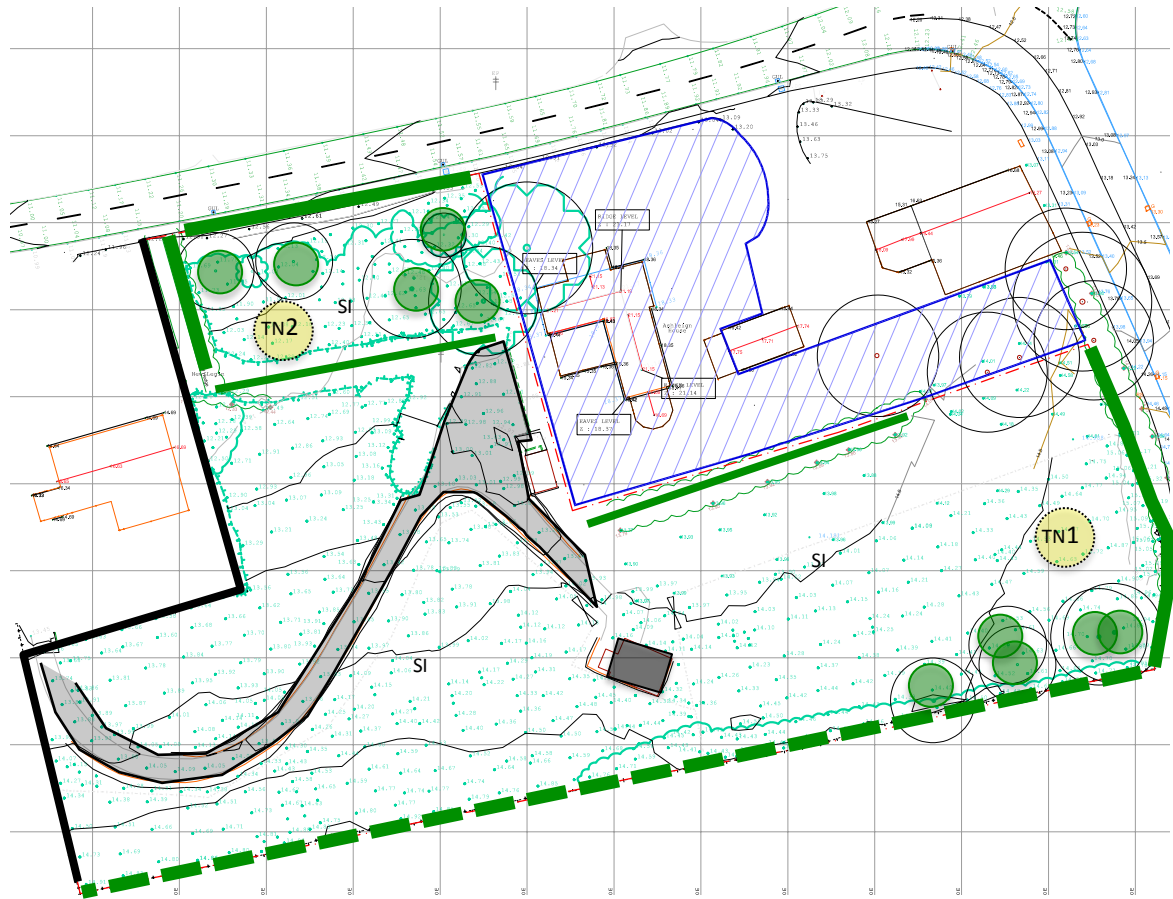









Figure 9. Indicative Schwegler and Habibat bird features

APPENDIX 1

PHASE 1 MAP:



**KEY**

-  **tree**
-  **target note**
- TN1** **dead ash trees with low bat roosting potential**
- TN2** **fruit trees with low bat roosting potential**
- SI** **semi improved grassland**
-  **native intact hedgebank**
-  **native defunct hedgebank**
-  **non-native defunct hedgebank**
-  **fencing / breeze-block boundary**
-  **shed / gravelled track**

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