

Land South of Reeds Lane, Sayers Common

## **Ecological Feasibility Appraisal**

September 2022

Quality Management	
<b>Client:</b>	Berkeley Latimer Estates Limited
<b>Project:</b>	Land South of Reeds Lane, Sayers Common
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Plan 2236-05/ECO2	Ecological Designations
Plan 2236-05/ECO3	Habitats and Ecological Features

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Aspect Ecology has been commissioned by Berkeley Latimer Estates Limited to undertake an ecological feasibility appraisal of land at Sayers Common (see attached Plan 2236-05/ECO1), in order to support the allocation of the site in the Mid-Sussex District Plan 2021-2039.
- 1.2 To inform the ecological feasibility appraisal, baseline ecological information has been sourced from the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database and Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (SxBRC) in October 2021, whilst a review of aerial photography and OS mapping has also been undertaken.
- 1.3 Following this, a survey of the site was undertaken in June 2022 based on Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology<sup>1</sup>, whereby the habitat types present are identified and mapped, together with an assessment of the species composition of each habitat. This method was extended, in line with the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal<sup>2</sup> to record details on the actual or potential presence of any notable or protected species or habitats.

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010) *'Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey: A technique for environmental audit'*

<sup>2</sup> Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (2013) *'Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal'*

## 2 Site Description

- 2.1 The site is located to the south-west of Sayers Common in the county of West Sussex (see attached Plan 2236-05/ECO1). The main part of the site is bounded by Reeds Lane to the north, Henfield Road (B2116) to the south and the B2118 to the east. A further parcel of land lies to the west, bounded by Henfield Road (B2116) to the north, Truslers Hill Lane to the west and a trackway to the east.
- 2.2 The site comprises a large area of farmland, largely in use for arable farming or grassland pasture. Fields are bounded by a network of hedgerows and treelines. A number of buildings forming Albourne Equestrian Centre are located in the western part of the main land parcel, whilst a number of business units are located at High Cross Farm in the western land parcel. A small number of ponds and small wooded areas are also present within the site.

### 3 Ecological Baseline

- 3.1 Based on a review of the online MAGIC database and information returned from SxBRC, no ecological designations are located within or bounding the site. The nearest statutory ecological designation is Wolstonbury Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located approximately 3.2km to the south-east. The SSSI is designated on the basis of its chalk downland habitat.
- 3.2 There are no designations of international importance within 10km of the site, the closest being Castle Hill Special Area for Conservation (SAC) approximately 14km to the south-east.
- 3.3 The closest Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) being Henfield Common SNCI, located approximately 2.8km to the south-west of the site. A notable road verge is also located approximately 1.85km to the east of the site.
- 3.4 A number of areas of Ancient Woodland are located within the nearby surrounds of the site, the closest located approximately 40m to the east of the site on the opposite side of the B2118 (see Plan 2236-05/ECO2).

#### Habitats and Ecological Features

- 3.5 Habitats and ecological features supported by the site have been identified following the review of baseline ecological information, OS mapping/aerial photography and a Phase 1 survey. A habitats plan is provided at Plan 2236-05/ECO3 and a discussion of the main habitat types is given below.

##### *Arable*

- 3.6 The eastern part of the site is dominated by a number of large arable fields. The southern fields were cultivated with cereal crops at the time of survey, with the north-western field left fallow, whilst the adjacent fields had been recently ploughed. Species-poor grass field margins were noted around the perimeter of a number of the fields, between 5-15m in width. Few arable weeds were noted within the cultivated fields, with species occurring within the fallow field including Docks, Mayweed spp., Scarlet Pimpernel, Bristly Oxtongue, Creeping Buttercup and grasses.

##### *Grassland*

- 3.7 The remainder of the site is dominated by grassland, divided into three main areas. The central area (grassland fields G1-G3 and G5-G7 on Plan 2236-05/ECO3) is used for horse grazing, and comprises a number of paddocks divided by hedgerows and fencing, subject to varying levels of grazing at the time of survey. These fields supported a moderate diversity of common grass and herb species, typically 7-9 species per m<sup>2</sup>, with frequent species including Perennial Ryegrass, Smooth Meadow-grass, Creeping Bent, Timothy, White Clover, Creeping Buttercup and Meadow Buttercup. This habitat is assessed as moderate-good condition modified grassland.
- 3.8 The eastern grassland area (G4) comprises a large field divided by a number of ditches and defunct, scrubby hedgerows, grazed by a large flock of sheep. The grassland supported a moderate sward length at the time of survey, typically with 5-6 species per m<sup>2</sup>. Grasses including Yorkshire Fog, Creeping Bent, Meadow Barley and Smooth Meadow-grass were

dominant, with very few herbs aside from Creeping Thistle and Curled Dock. This habitat is assessed as poor-moderate condition modified grassland.

- 3.9 The western grassland area comprises four fields divided by hedgerows and treelines, managed by occasional mowing. Two of the fields had been cut to a short sward length at the time of survey, with the remaining fields supporting a long grassland sward. The grass is dominated by Yorkshire Fog with some other occasional grass species and very few herbs, supporting typically 4-5 species per m<sup>2</sup>. This habitat is assessed as poor-moderate condition modified grassland.
- 3.10 Some rough grassland areas are also present, including a relatively large area in the central part of the main land parcel. This is dominated by Yorkshire Fog, with some Meadow Fescue and False Oat Grass together with occasional Docks and Creeping Thistle. This habitat is assessed as poor condition modified grassland. A further area of rough grassland is present at the eastern edge of the main land parcel, appearing largely unmanaged and becoming encroached with dense Bramble scrub.

#### *Woodland*

- 3.11 An area of woodland is present in the southern part of the western land parcel, identified as woodland W2 on Plan 2236-05/ECO3. This comprises plantation woodland, planted c.20 years ago based on a review of historical aerial photography. The northern section (W2a) is dominated by closely spaced Oak forming a tall drawn up canopy, around 10m in height, with largely bare ground or scattered Bramble beneath the trees. The southern section (W2b) is Ash dominated, with trees likely impacted by Ash dieback resulting in a sparse, open canopy. A dense ground flora of Bramble and Common Fleabane is present, with relatively frequent Common Spotted Orchid.
- 3.12 A wooded strip is also present in the north-eastern part of the site (W1), approximately 10m wide and supporting semi-mature trees to a height of around 15m. This is dominated by Oak with some Field Maple coppice and Hawthorn and Blackthorn scrub at the margins. The wooded strip is subject to heavy browsing by the sheep within the adjacent field, with a poor ground flora.
- 3.13 Lowland mixed deciduous woodland forms a priority habitat type, and woodland W1 falls under the broad definition for this habitat. Woodland W2 however is not considered to accord with this definition as a plantation woodland.

#### *Ponds*

- 3.14 Two ponds were noted within the site. P1 comprises a small hollow adjacent to a hedgerow with dense Willow growth. The hollow was dry at the time of survey but likely supports water during the winter. P2 is a large wooded pond in the northern part of the main land parcel, approximately 50m length by 10m width. The pond supports negligible aquatic or marginal vegetation due to shading from adjacent trees. Ponds form a priority habitat type, although those within the site do not appear to qualify under the relevant description, unless they are found to support priority species such as Great Crested Newt

#### *Buildings and Surrounds*

- 3.15 Two main groups of buildings are present within the site. Albourne Equestrian Centre is located in the western part of the main land parcel, comprising several barn and stable structures together with a number of smaller sheds and temporary cabins (building groups B1 and B2 on Plan 2236-05/ECO3). Areas of hardstanding and menage areas are associated

with the buildings, whilst a large bund feature dominated by tall ruderal vegetation occurs to the north of the buildings.

- 3.16 High Cross Farm is located within the western land parcel and comprises a number of newly built office/commercial buildings (building group B3). This is associated with a hardstanding car parking area.

#### *Hedgerows/Treelines*

- 3.17 Field boundaries throughout the site are generally formed by hedgerows and treelines. Hedgerows are mostly well established with relatively wide, dense growth and to a height of at least 2-3m, with typical species including Hawthorn, Field Maple, Blackthorn, Willow, Rose and Oak. Hedgerows typically supported an average of less than 5 species per 30m stretch, with only a small number identified as species-rich (more 5 or more species) or likely to qualify as important under the wildlife and landscape criteria of the Hedgerows Regulations 1997. Treelines mostly comprised semi-mature Oaks with a loose understorey of shrubby species including Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Field Maple and Rose.

#### *Ditches*

- 3.18 A number of ditches are present within the eastern grassland field G4. These comprise shallow channels approximately 50cm wide with a very shallow depth of water (less than 5cm at the time of survey), supporting some Soft Rush, Water Mint, Hemlock Water-dropwort and Common Nettle.

#### *Invasive Species*

- 3.19 Two stands of Giant Hogweed were recorded on the raised bund north of building group B1. Giant Hogweed is listed under Schedule 9 Part II of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) which makes it an offence to cause to grow in the wild.

## **Faunal Species**

#### *Bats*

- 3.20 Attention was given to bat roosting potential during the Phase 1 survey, albeit an extensive survey of trees and buildings was not undertaken. A small number of trees supporting bat roosting potential were noted as indicated at Plan 2236-05/ECO3, although the vast majority of standard trees and trees along treelines did not appear to support particular roosting features. A number of the structures at building group B1 and B2 were assessed as providing low-moderate or moderate bat roosting potential, whilst building group B3 was assessed as providing only low bat roosting potential.
- 3.21 The habitats within the site are likely to offer some opportunities for foraging and commuting bats, particularly in association with the hedgerow and tree network, whilst records of Serotine, Bechstein's, Whiskered, Natterer's, Noctule, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared bat were returned by SxBRC for the desk study area. However, given the relatively low species diversity of the arable and grassland fields and

few areas of woodland, the site is unlikely to be of particular importance in terms of bat activity, particularly for rarer bat species such as *Myotis* spp. or *Barbastelle*.

- 3.22 Accordingly, the site does not appear likely to be of elevated importance to bats, although further survey work is recommended to determine the extent of use of the site by roosting, foraging and commuting bats to inform any planning application.

#### *Badger*

- 3.23 Three Badger setts were recorded within the site, comprising a possible main or subsidiary sett adjacent to pond P2, and a further main/subsidiary sett and outlier sett within the southern part of the main land parcel. The presence of Badger would not necessarily obstruct development, nonetheless the potential for impact on the local Badger population may need to be informed by update survey work as Badgers are a dynamic species which readily create, abandon and re-open setts.

#### *Dormouse*

- 3.24 A single record of Dormouse was returned from SxBRC, relating to a 1km grid square approximately 2km to the south of the site. Some opportunities for the species are present within the boundary hedgerows, treelines and small woodland areas, albeit this is limited by the relatively species-poor nature of the hedgerows and lack of established woodland within the site. Further survey work is recommended to establish the presence/likely absence of this species to inform any planning application.

#### *Water Vole*

- 3.25 Records of Water Vole were returned by SxBRC for the desk study area, although suitable habitat for this species is considered to be absent from the site, the ditches in the east being very shallow and lacking a suitable bank profile for burrowing or abundant vegetation.

#### *Other mammals*

- 3.26 The site offers potential for other mammal species, including the Priority species Hedgehog and Harvest Mouse for which records were returned by SxBRC. However, habitats are not considered to be of elevated importance for such species, and they are not considered to form a significant constraint to development.

#### *Great Crested Newts*

- 3.27 Due to the potential suitability of terrestrial habitat, and presence of an extensive pond network within and immediately surrounding the site, it is recommended that presence/absence survey is undertaken to determine the use of the site by Great Crested Newt to inform the masterplan development and ensure the species is fully safeguarded during development. Conversely, the established network of ponds and terrestrial habitat provide the opportunity of enhancement for the species such that, should Great Crested Newt be present, open spaces and landscaping can increase the quality of habitat and therefore the carrying capacity for the local population.

#### *Reptiles*

- 3.28 Records of Common Lizard, Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Adder were returned by SxBRC for the desk study area, with records for Grass Snake and Slow-worm within the nearby surrounds of the site. Areas of longer sward grassland and scrub margins provide potential

habitat for common reptile species, albeit these are relatively isolated by well grazed grassland pasture or arable fields, such that the likelihood of reptiles occurring is reduced.

- 3.29 Due to the limited suitable habitat present within the site, reptiles are not considered likely to form a significant constraint to future development. However, further survey work is recommended to determine the presence/likely absence of the species from the site prior to submission of a planning application. If reptiles are present, additional mitigation strategies, such as habitat manipulation or translocation, could readily be implemented to ensure the species group is fully safeguarded

#### *Nesting Birds*

- 3.30 The hedgerows, trees, woodland and scrub on-site provide suitable nesting opportunities for a number of common bird species. The site also provides suitable habitat for farmland bird species, with House Sparrow, Starling and Yellowhammer recorded during the Phase 1 survey. Records of the priority species Turtle Dove, Cuckoo, Skylark, Nightingale, House Sparrow and Song Thrush were returned by SxBRC for the 1km grid squares containing the site. As such, it is recommended that the site is subject to a breeding bird survey (comprising three spaced visits between April and June) to determine the use of the site by farmland birds, prior to the submission of planning application.

#### *Invertebrates*

- 3.31 Records of priority species Brown Hairstreak, Small Heath, Cinnabar moth, Knot Grass moth and Stag Beetle were returned by SxBRC for the nearby surrounds of the site. Overall, the habitats present are considered to be of low value to invertebrates, such that no significant invertebrate assemblage is considered likely to make use of these areas. As such, invertebrates are not considered to form a significant constraint to development.

## 4 Discussion of Constraints and Opportunities

### Ecological Designations

- 4.1 The site is well separated from the nearest statutory designation, such that proposed development of the site is unlikely to result in adverse effects on any such designations. Notably, the MAGIC SSSI Impact Risk Zone tool does not highlight any potential effects associated with residential development at the site. Similarly, no non-statutory designations are located within close proximity of the site, whilst the nearest area of Ancient Woodland is separated from the site by the adjacent B2118. As such, ecological designations are not considered to pose any particular constraints to development at the site.

### Habitats and Ecological Features

- 4.2 Field boundary hedgerows and treelines form a Priority Habitat and therefore constitute important ecological features, albeit the majority are relatively species-poor. In addition, an area of woodland at the south of the site has been identified as the Priority Habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, whilst the ponds recorded within the site may also qualify as a Priority Habitat, as such forming important ecological features. Priority Habitats are a material consideration in the making of planning decisions. Accordingly, the retention of the hedgerow and treeline network, woodland and ponds within the masterplan is recommended where possible. In the event of any loss, mitigation and/or compensation may be required.
- 4.3 The remainder of the site is dominated largely by intensively managed arable and species-poor grassland, with areas of plantation woodland, scrub, tall ruderal vegetation, buildings and ditches also recorded. These habitats are species-poor, appear to be common in the local area, are not considered to constitute important ecological features and therefore would not represent a particular constraint to development. The invasive species Giant Hogweed was noted at the site, and measures should be taken to eradicate this species as part of any development proposals, albeit it does not represent a significant constraint to the proposals.
- 4.4 Development of the site creates the opportunity to deliver significant habitat creation and enhancements, particularly in association with existing boundary features. For example, new tree planting could bolster existing hedgerows and treelines to strengthen ecological connectivity across the site, whilst habitats such as wildflower grassland would create new habitat opportunities at the site. Given the existing low value of current habitats, it is considered that such measures could deliver a biodiversity net gain in excess of 10%, in accordance with emerging legislation policy.

### Faunal Species

- 4.5 The site is considered to provide potential opportunities for a range of faunal species, including bats, Badger, Dormouse, breeding birds, Great Crested Newt and reptiles, and as such, specific Phase 2 surveys are recommended at the appropriate stage to determine presence/absence of protected and notable species. Key habitat features identified as supporting protected/notable fauna should be retained as far as possible and protected, with particular consideration given to maintaining ecological connectivity around and across the site, for example through strengthening hedgerow networks. However, based on the survey work undertaken to date, habitats likely to be of importance appear to be generally limited to boundary features, and could be readily retained under a sensitively designed masterplan, ensuring opportunities for faunal species are maintained. As such, it

is considered that faunal constraints could be readily accommodated as part of a sensitively designed masterplan and following implementation of appropriate safeguarding and mitigation measures.

- 4.6 With the site being dominated by grassland and arable farmland of low ecological value, the proposals present the opportunity to deliver significant benefits for a range of fauna. This would primarily be achieved with the creation of high-quality green infrastructure to increase habitat diversity, quality and extent of higher value habitats, improving ecological connectivity (for example by strengthening hedgerows) and implementing targeted enhancement measures (such as the installation of bat, bird and Dormouse boxes). This would be coupled with long-term management of the site for the benefit of biodiversity.

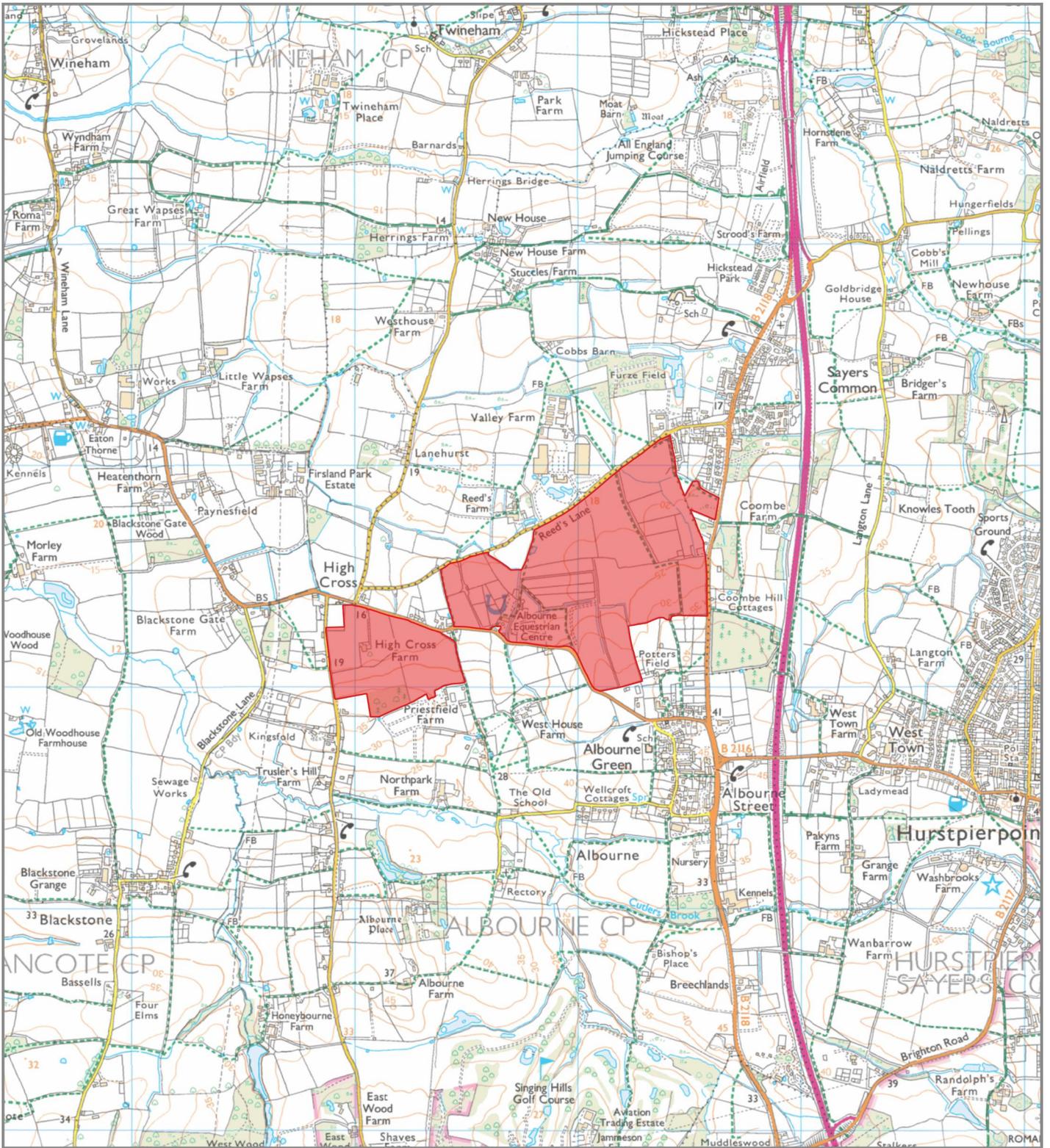
## 5 Deliverability of the Proposed Development

- 5.1 The site is not subject to any ecological designations, with the nearest designations being well separated from the site and not considered to form a constraint to future development. Habitats largely appear to be of low ecological value, although it is recommended that consideration should be given to retention of hedgerows, treelines, established woodland and ponds within any future development layout. The site also offers potential for faunal species including bats, Badger, Dormouse, breeding birds, Great Crested Newt and reptiles, and as such, further surveys are recommended at the appropriate stage to determine presence/absence of such species. However, following implementation of a sensitively designed masterplan, together with provision of appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures, it is considered that faunal species can be safeguarded. As a result, the site is not considered to be subject to any overriding ecological constraints, and the proposed development of the site is considered to be readily deliverable in ecological terms.

## Plan 2236-05/ECO1:

Site Location

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Key:

 Site Location



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Land at Sayers Common

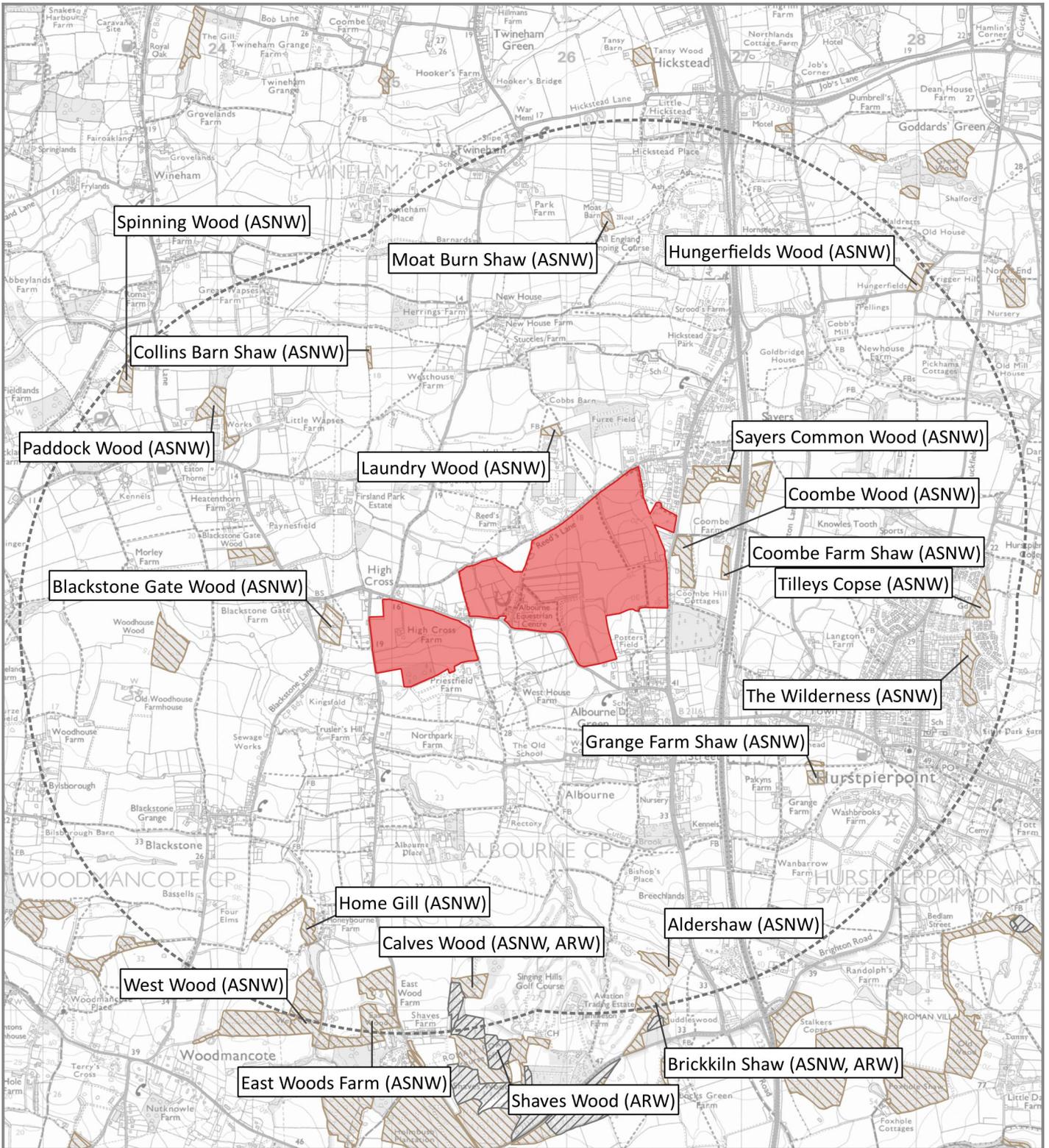
PROJECT	TITLE
Site Location	
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A/BG	REV
August 2022	DATE



## **Plan 2236-05/ECO2:**

Ecological Designations

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**Key:**

-  Site Location
-  2km Study Area
-  Ancient Replanted Woodland
-  Ancient Semi Natural Woodland



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**Land at Sayers Common**

**Ecological Designations**

2236-05/ECO2

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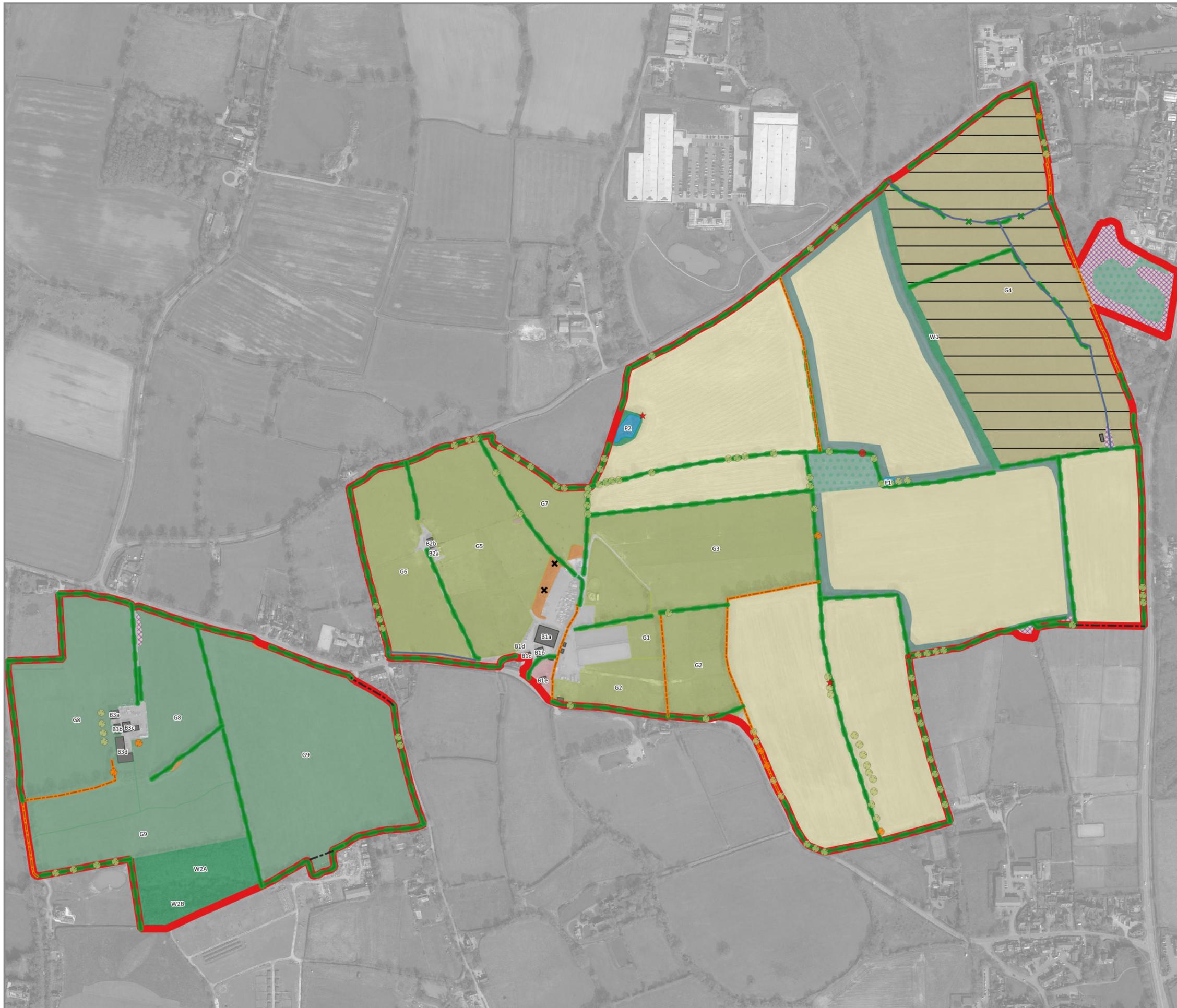


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## **Plan 2236-05/ECO3:**

Habitats and Ecological Features

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- Key:**
- Site Boundary
  - Amenity Grassland
  - Arable
  - Rough Grassland
  - Semi-improved Grassland (Field Margin)
  - Semi-improved Grassland (Horse Grazed)
  - Semi-improved Grassland (Mown)
  - Semi-improved Grassland (Sheep Grazed)
  - Building
  - Bund
  - Dense Scrub
  - Hardstanding/Bare Ground
  - Pond
  - Tall Ruderal
  - Woodland
  - Fence
  - Hedgerow
  - Tree Line
  - Ditch
  - Badger Sett
  - Tree
  - Tree with High Bat Roost Potential
  - Tree with Moderate Bat Roost Potential
  - Scattered Scrub
  - Giant Hogweed

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