Ecological Walkover Survey

Site Address:	Palacelands Farm, Hooklands Lane, Billingshurst, West Sussex RH13 8PX
Client Name:	Mr and Mrs Roger and Lucy Sheridan
Reference:	Ecological Walkover Survey
Date:	27/10/2025

Background

Arbtech Consulting Limited was instructed by Mr and Mrs Roger and Lucy Sheridan to undertake an Ecological Walkover Survey at Palacelands Farm, Hooklands Lane, Billingshurst, West Sussex RH13 8PX (hereafter referred to as "the site"). The survey was required to inform a previous extant approval (DC/25/1153) with the Horsham District Council for the demolition of an existing agricultural barn and construction of a holiday let accommodation (hereafter referred to as "the proposed development"). A plan showing the proposed development is provided in Appendix 1.

Previous surveys at this site include a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Arbtech Consulting LTD, 2019) and a Preliminary Roost Assessment (Arbtech Consulting LTD, 2023).

The updated walkover survey was required as the previous reports are now considered out of date, and no longer deemed valid. The purpose of this survey was to determine if any changes had occurred to the site.

Site Location and Landscape Context

The site is located at National Grid Reference TQ 12337 20106 and has an area of approximately 0.01ha comprising developed land; sealed surface with a barn building. It is surrounded by open agricultural fields in all directs, with the main dwelling to the east and an additional structure to the west. Approximately 100m north of the survey area is a ~3ha parcel of priority habitat deciduous woodland. A site location plan is provided in Appendix 2.

Survey Methodology

The survey was undertaken in dry conditions with temperatures just over 14°C on 27th October 2025 by Anya White BSc (Hons).

A walkover of the site was undertaken to establish whether any material changes to the habitats on the site and their suitability for protected or notable species have occurred since the original survey was completed.

Results

Habitats present within the site

g3c – Other neutral grassland

The wider ownership boundary of the site is predominantly grassland, which is encroaching on the hardstanding and delapidated barn. The encroaching grassland is low value, with a dominance of undesirable and competitive species, however the extended grassland outside of the site boundary is well managed. There is only a small area of grassland within the site boundary.

The following species were recorded:

F – Common nettle *Urtica dioica,* white clover *Trifolium repens,* Perennial rye *Lolium perenne,*
O – Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata,* cleavers *Galium aparine*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris,*
R – Dandelion *Taraxacum agg.*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus,* bristly oxtongue *Helminthotheca echiodes,* ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris,* broadleaved dock *Cirsium arvense,* bindweed *Convolvulus sp.*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens.*
The grassland was assessed using the 'Grassland – medium, high and very high distinctiveness' habitat type condition assessment sheet with the following criteria:

- The parcel represents a good example of its habitat type, with a consistently high proportion of characteristic indicator species present relevant to the specific habitat type **FAIL**
- Sward height is varied (at least 20% of the sward is less than 7 cm and at least 20% is more than 7 cm) creating microclimates which provide opportunities for insects, birds and small mammals to live and breed. **PASS**
- Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 5%, including localised areas, for example, rabbit warrens **FAIL**
- Cover of bracken Pteridium aquilinum is less than 20% and cover of scrub (including bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg.) is less than 5%. **PASS**
- Combined cover of species indicative of suboptimal condition and physical damage (such as excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, damaging levels of access, or any other damaging management activities) accounts for less than 5% of total area. If any invasive non-native plant species (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA) are present, this criterion is automatically failed. **FAIL**
- There are 10 or more vascular plant species per m2 present, including forbs that are characteristic of the habitat type **FAIL**

Poor condition assessment has been given.

u1b, 5 – Developed land; sealed surface, buildings

The main survey site and majority of the land cover is hardstanding, with a dilapidated single storey barn. The barn is open on all elevations and appears in significantly worse condition that in previous surveys. The roof of the barn is corrugated metal, with steel and concrete beams supporting the structure. There is a small room to the northwest corner, which is separated from the rest of the barn and accessible through a door from the north of the barn.
This habitat is not subject to a condition assessment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary of survey findings – Invertebrates

The limited grassland on site likely provide common invertebrates with opportunities to forage and shelter, however

the area is small and the loss would be insignificant to local populations, particularly with the extensive grassland immediately adjacent. No habitat for protected or notable invertebrates is found on site.

Summary of survey findings – Bats

B1 was assessed in line with the previous PRA report, which assigned the building with low value for roosting bats. The PRA stated 'B1 has no evidence of roosting bats, although there are external features such as slightly lifted cladding and possible crevices between the building beams and roof structure.' However, during the previous PRA survey, one bat dropping was observed, which was thought to indicate a one-off exploratory visit rather than a roost. The barn is in significantly worse condition than during previous surveys, and therefore the value of the barn remains at low. The PRA recommended one bat emergence or re-entry survey, required during the active bat season (optimal May to August, suboptimal September), whereby if a roost was confirmed an EPSL would be required. The walkover supports these recommendations.

Summary of survey findings – Birds

The PRA survey recorded two inactive birds nests, and the PEA survey recorded a barn own inside the barn, however neither of these features were observed during the updated walkover survey. A barn owl box has been erected near the site. Due to the small size of the site and the condition of the barn, the site not considered suitable to support a significant assemblage of protected and/or notable birds however any building or vegetation removal should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to 31st August. If this timeframe cannot be avoided, a close inspection of the vegetation should be undertaken immediately, by a qualified ecologist, prior to the commencement of work. All active nests will need to be retained until the young have fledged. Precautions should be taken with machinery and noise levels when working close to any retained nests so as not to disturb any nearby nesting birds during construction works. At least a 3-5m buffer should be created between any machinery and active nests until the young have fledged.

Summary of survey findings – Reptiles

Habitats recorded on site are assessed on their suitability to foraging, commuting, basking and refuge opportunities for reptiles. No reptile habitat is present within the site interior, although the hardstanding could be used for basking. Isolated individuals may still be present at the time of survey in the site interior. The site has good connectivity to suitable reptile habitat in the wider landscape via grasslands and woodland. Further surveys are considered disproportionate.

Summary of survey findings – Amphibians

Amphibians require suitable aquatic habitat in which to breed. There are two local ponds within 500m according to the MAGIC database, and an additional pond not shown which was observed during the site visit. Whilst there are local ponds, there is no suitable terrestrial habitat as the hardstanding and small area of grassland is sub-optimal. Therefore, further surveys are considered to be disproportionate.

Summary of survey findings – Badger

No badger setts were noted on site or within a 30m radius of the site, where accessible. The foraging habitat on site is considered sub-optimal for badgers given the size of grassland, along with a lack of fruiting scrub. The site area provides no habitat for excavation, therefore reducing the likelihood of badgers being present within the surrounding area of the site.

Summary of survey findings – Hazel Dormouse

Dormice typically utilise a three-dimensional habitat structure as to commute between feeding and breeding sites whilst avoiding predation. Although there are pockets of woodland locally, there is no suitable dormouse habitat on the site itself. Alongside this, there are limited linear routes directly onto the site. As such habitats on site are considered unsuitable for hazel dormice and therefore the likelihood of this species being present on site is considered acceptably low.

Summary of survey findings - Other

There are no habitats on site to support hedgehog populations, although the site is connected to ancient deciduous woodland to the northeast and surrounding grassland.

The Ecological Walkover survey confirmed there are no material changes to the habitats present within the site boundary, and the recommendations from previous reports (Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Arbtech Consulting LTD, 2019) and a Preliminary Roost Assessment (Arbtech Consulting LTD, 2023)) are correct and should be undertaken.

Author

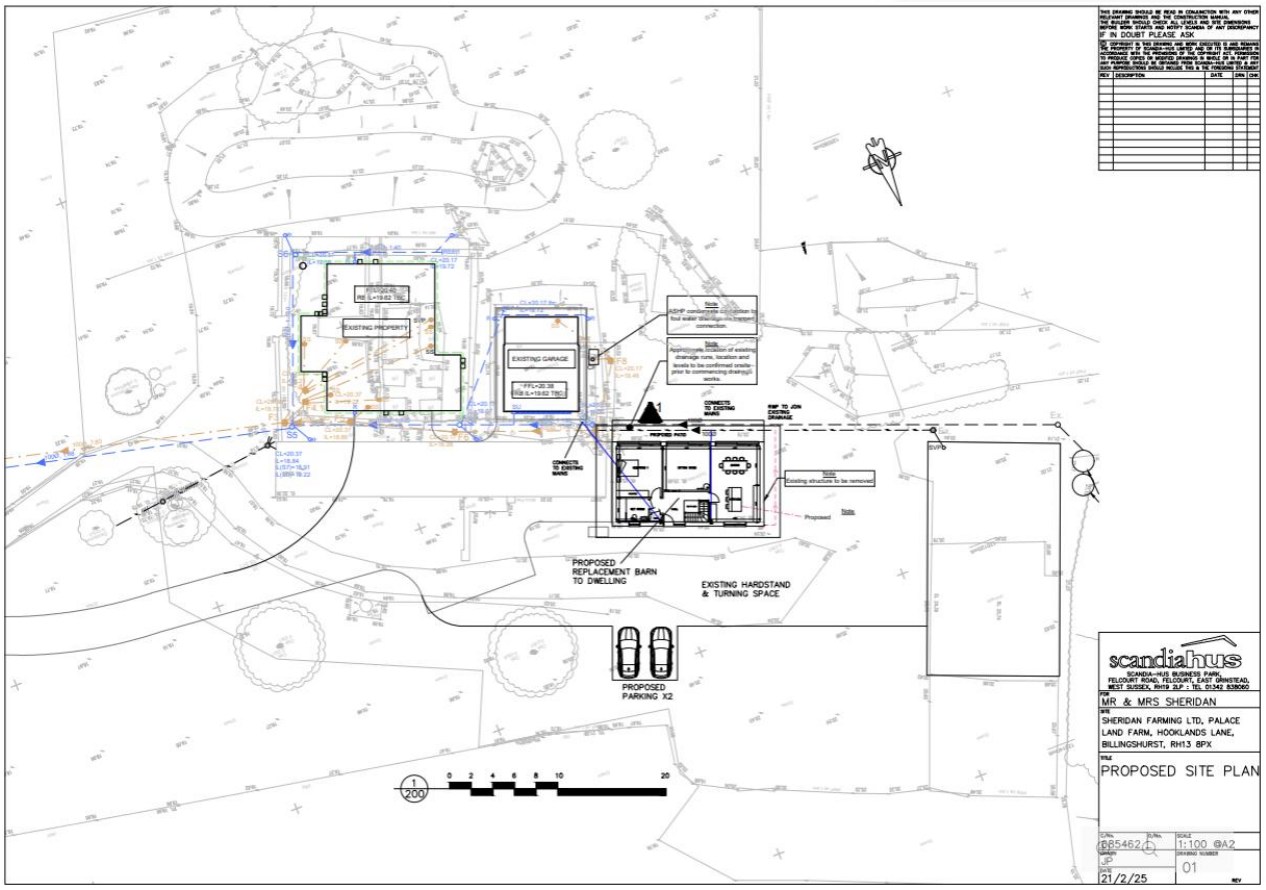
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Appendix 1 – Proposed Development Plan



Appendix 2 – Site Location Plan



Appendix 3 – Habitat Map

