

Ecological Appraisal of 1349 Stratford Road, Solihull

Client Five Homes Ltd
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Non-technical Summary

Background

In September 2019, Crossman Associates was commissioned by Five Homes Ltd to undertake an ecological appraisal 1349 Stratford Road, Shirley. The site is two vacant semi-detached properties and gardens. The site is proposed for clearance to make way for residential development.

Methodology

The ecological appraisal follows standard Phase 1 habitat survey methodology that was extended to record signs or potential for protected and notable species. The survey was undertaken by Alex Crossman, an experienced ecologist and full member the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

Results

1349 Stratford Road is a pair of currently unoccupied semi-detached dwellings. The property includes amenity grassland, introduced shrub and scattered scrub and there is an access driveway, parking and a patio. Part of the site is also heavily disturbed and is being used in relation to an adjacent development. The site is heavily disturbed and well managed and generally lacks ecological value. The site is considered to have **Site Value**.

The building has low suitability for roosting bats. The site may also support nesting birds and small numbers of reptiles.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the following to be undertaken as part of the development proposals;

- Removal of bird habitat outside nesting bird season and installation of new nesting habitat.
- A single emergence survey between May and August.
- New landscape planting.

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1. Background

- 1.1. In September 2019, Crossman Associates was commissioned by Five Homes Ltd to undertake an ecological appraisal 1349 Stratford Road, Shirley. The site is two vacant semi-detached properties and gardens.
- 1.2. The objectives of the ecological appraisal were to;
- Produce a map of existing habitats on site.
 - Assess the likely presence/absence of any rare, notable or protected species.
 - Identify any planning policy and legislative constraints relevant to the site.
 - Provide recommendations for further studies, mitigation, compensation as appropriate.

Site Description

- 1.3. 1349 Stratford Road is a pair of currently unoccupied semi-detached dwellings. The property includes amenity grassland, introduced shrub and scattered scrub and there is an access driveway, parking and a patio. Part of the site is also heavily disturbed and is being used in relation to an adjacent development. The site lies along the southern edge of Monkspath residential development and is centred on Ordnance Survey grid reference SP 139 764.
- 1.4. The site is surrounded by high density residential development to the north, west and east. Beyond the Stratford Road, which runs adjacent to the south of the site, lies Shirley golf course with associated soft landscaping including ponds and parkland. Stratford Road is a busy road but is planted on both sides by lines of

trees that form a continuous green corridor extending to the north-west and south-east of the site.

- 1.5. The wider landscape is very urban to the north east and west and rural to the south beyond the A34, which is generally characterised pastureland with dividing hedgerow networks.

Proposals

- 1.6. The site is proposed for clearance to make way for a new development.

2. Methodology

Desktop Study

- 2.1. The MAGIC website was accessed to gain information on any statutory site designations within 2 km of the site. This was extended to 4 km in relation to bats.
- 2.2. Warwickshire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) was contacted for information on non-statutory Ecosites and Local Wildlife sites site designations and protected/notable species within a 1 km radius of the site.
- 2.3. National planning policy has been reviewed for policies that relate to nature conservation relevant to the site.

Field Survey

Ecological appraisal

- 2.4. The ecological appraisal follows standard Phase 1 habitat survey methodology, which is a survey method and habitat classification system that was developed by the Nature Conservation Council, now Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC, 2003) to map habitats and land use categories to a 'consistent level and accuracy'. Habitats present on site are shown in Figure 1, which is the Phase 1 Habitat Map, and are also described within the text below. Where appropriate, Target Notes are used within the map to locate features or areas of interest that are described in the text.

Species Observations

- 2.5. The Phase 1 habitat survey is extended to also record evidence of protected or notable species and assesses the suitability of the habitats on-site and within the accessible surroundings of the site to support such species.

Bat scoping survey

- 2.6. The dwelling was methodically inspected internally and externally for any evidence of roosting bats, including actual bats, droppings, urine staining and evidence of feeding activity such as discarded insect wings and cases.
- 2.7. The building was also assessed for its suitability to support roosting bats by considering several factors including whether bats can access internal and external voids within the building and whether these voids provide adequate protection and shelter for roosting bats. If the building is not confirmed as a roost, it is assessed from High to Negligible Suitability as follows;

- **High Suitability** – many roosting opportunities. Buildings tend to be old, large and rural
- **Moderate Suitability** – some roosting opportunities. Building tend to be old, rural with some recent maintenance
- **Low Suitability** – few roosting opportunities. Buildings tend to be modern, urban and well maintained
- **Negligible Suitability** – insignificant roosting opportunities. Buildings tend to be small, modern, urban and very well maintained

Site Evaluation

- 2.8. The site evaluation for the habitat areas and species present (where appropriate) is based on published criteria given in the CIEEM guidelines for ecological impact assessment. Values are assigned between International Value and Negligible Value

to habitats that are likely to be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed development.

2.9. The value categories used the assessment are as follows:

- International – Europe
- National – England
- Regional – South-west
- District – Solihull
- Local – Shirley
- Site – Within the immediate zone of influence

2.10. The conservation and ecological status of the site is assessed using the Ratcliffe criteria (1977).

3. Results

Desk Study

Data search

3.1. The MAGIC website informed of the following statutory sites within 2 km of the site;

- River Blythe Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies approximately 800 m south of the site (at its closest) and is designated as a good example of a lowland river, flowing on clay.
- Monkspath Meadow SSSI – Lies approximately 600 m east of the site and is designated for nationally important species rich, unimproved hay meadow with
- Hillfield Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR) lies approximately 500 m north of the site and is designated for woodland, lake, grassland and scrub habitat.

3.2. None of the statutory sites are ecologically inked to the site.

3.3. WBRC informed that there are no LWS on site or adjacent to the site. The followings LWS's lie within 1 km of the site;

- Moat Coppice and Adjacent Meadow Ecosite/LWS lies 1 km west of the site and is designated for mixed woodland and semi-improved meadow.
- River Blythe Ecosite (as above).

- Monkspath Meadow and Porters Croft Pit Wood, Shelley Lane, Narrow Lane and Shuttecote Lane Ecosite lies 500 m east of the site and encompasses LWS and SSSI designations and include unimproved meadow, woodland and hedgerow.
- Pond Behind Trustees Savings Bank College Ecosite lies 600 m east of the site and is designated for pond habitat.
- Provident Park and Sainsbury's Hypermarket Site Ecosite/LWS lies 600 m east of the site and is designated for grassland and swamp habitat.
- Blythe Tributary LWS lies 800 m south of the site and is designated for stream habitat, with gravel substrate.
- Winterton Farm Wood and Pasture lies 800 m south of the site and designated for wet woodland, scrub and grassland.
- River Blythe Floodplain LWS lies approximately 600 m south of the site and is designated for wet meadow habitat.
- Fields at Bickenhill Farm Ecosite lies 700 m north of the site and is designated for semi-improved grassland, swamp and open water
- Shirley Golf Course Ecosite lies 50 m south-west of the site and is designated for woodland and habitats associates with the River Blythe.

3.4. None of the non-statutory sites are ecologically inked to the site.

3.5. WBRC also replied with records of the following protected species within 1 km of the site;

- Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* – approximately 590 m south-west of the site.

- Soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* – approximately 1 km south-east of the site.
- Otter *Lutra lutra* – approximately 1 km south-east of the site.

Planning Policy

3.6. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) contains sections of relevance to nature conservation that include:

- Paragraph 174: To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:
 - a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation;
 - b) and promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.
- Paragraph 175: 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 incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.

Field Survey

- 3.7. The habitats and site can be broken down into the following habitat types and are shown in Figure 1, Appendix I and photographic reference can be found within Appendix II;

- Amenity grassland
- Species-poor hedgerow
- Trees
- Introduced shrub

- Scrub
- Hardstanding
- Building

Amenity Grassland

- 3.8. At the entrance of the site is an area of amenity planting with several small areas of lawn that have been heavily managed to a sward height of approximately 20 mm. Grass is species poor with typical lawn species including perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and fescues *Festuca sp.* with ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and daisy *Bellis perennis*.

Species-poor hedgerow

- 3.9. The southern section of the north-west boundary is defined by a recently unmanaged hedgerow of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Cypress.

Trees

- 3.10. The south-east boundary of the site is defined by a fence line and a number of semi-mature trees including sycamore, alder and Scots pine.

Introduced shrub

- 3.11. An area of recently unmanaged planting around the rear garden of the property. (Target Note 1) includes butterfly bush *Buddleja davidii*, *Acer sp.*, *Cypress sp.*, and firs. These are interspersed with some ruderal species on unmanaged areas of the site that includes sow thistle *Sonchus arvensis*, willowherb *Epilobium sp.*, sedge *Carex sp.*, common nettle *Urtica dioica* and
- 3.12. There are a small number of semi-mature trees on site that tend to occupy the boundaries but also there are two lines of trees that divide sections of the car park.

One line of trees is a group of semi-mature alder *Alnus sp.* and a second line of trees is a group of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*.

- 3.13. There is an area of ornamental shrub planting including non-native evergreens at the south of the site (Target Note 2).

Scrub

- 3.14. There is a narrow band of bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.* along the boundary of the rear garden.

Hardstanding

- 3.15. A large proportion of the site by area is covered by hard standing which makes up driveway, parking area and rear patio. The hardstanding is in good condition with some encroachment of ephemeral species including annual meadow-grass *Poa annua* and sow thistle.

Buildings

- 3.16. There is one building on site, which is described in the Species Observation section below.

Species observations

Flora

- 3.17. The site is very heavily managed and manipulated which is likely to preclude the presence of any notable species of flora.
- 3.18. The site does not contain any non-native and invasive species that are included within Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as Amended.

Invertebrates

- 3.19. The site does not support many habitats types and habitats tend to be heavily managed and species poor; therefore, any invertebrate assemblage is therefore likely to be low.

Amphibians

- 3.20. The site does not have any ponds or other potential amphibian breeding habitat.
- 3.21. WBRC has records of great crested newt approximately 590 m south of the site, which relates to a pond within a nearby golf course. Great crested newts travel up to 500 m from breeding ponds, so the site is beyond this distance. In addition, the site is isolated from the golf course by the A34 dual carriageway, which is likely to create a barrier to movement.

Reptiles

- 3.22. The site is unlikely to support any significant population due to the small size of the site, recent management and the sites isolation from any other areas of reptile habitat in the wider landscape.

Birds

- 3.23. The site offers nesting habitat for birds in the form of dense cypress hedgerows that form parts of the boundary and there are also areas of scrub and tree planting that offer cover and nesting opportunities.
- 3.24. The site is not considered to offer a significant foraging resource.

Badgers

- 3.25. The site is not considered to offer any suitable habitat for badgers *Meles meles* other than small areas of amenity grassland, but these are heavily managed and heavily disturbed. There are no setts on site and no setts associated with boundary features.

Bats

- 3.26. The site offers limited habitat for bats due to the lack of structural diversity and built-nature of the site. Boundary hedgerows may provide a limited commuting and foraging resource, linking the site to adjoining gardens. Trees may also provide a limited commuting corridor or stepping stone habitat for bats, particularly at the south of the site where lines of trees run east and west along Stratford Road.

Trees

- 3.27. All trees are semi-mature, well-maintained and lacking in any features suitable for roosting bats.

Buildings

- 3.28. The site contains one building which is a pair of semi-detached dwellings. Further description and assessment of the building is provided in Table 1 below. Photographic reference can be found within Appendix II.

Table 1: Bat Scoping Survey Results

Building	Feature	Feature Description	Bat suitability
House	Overview	A two storey, currently unoccupied pair of semi-detached dwellings. The building has not been recently maintained but is in reasonable condition.	Low Suitability —
	Exterior	<p>The building is constructed of redbrick and timber beams which have been rendered with concrete on the northern aspect; no significant cracks or crevices are present on the external walls.</p> <p>The roof is pitched with four dormers on the north-east elevation of the building. The roof is covered with clay tiles, which are generally well-sealed with concrete along the verges and a clay pitch. There are a small number of slipped tiles. Wooden soffit boxes in generally good condition and are sealed to the eaves. This hole within this soffit was thoroughly inspected in order to discount its current or historic use by bats.</p>	

		Three chimneys are present at the roof apex, along with four dormer windows are present on the northern aspect of the roof, all of which are in good condition and well-sealed with lead flashing	
	Interior	<p>Both sections of the building were recently used for accommodation but are currently unoccupied. All living areas are in good order and well-sealed. The roof spaces of the building are utilised for dormer accommodation, so there are not significant roof voids with the exception of small crawl spaces.</p> <p>A conservatory lean-to is present on the north-east elevation, providing no suitable features for roosting bats.</p> <p>No evidence of bat activity.</p>	

Evaluation

3.29. Small areas of the site, particularly at the boundaries, contain small areas of overgrown vegetation which afford the site an element of permanence. Small areas of scrub and ruderal vegetation have come about through succession and afford the site a small area of naturalness.

3.30. The site is considered to have **Site Value**.

Bats

3.31. The building has a small number of potential abiotic bat roosting features associated with the roof and walls. These features are suitable for small numbers of crevice dwelling bats. There is no evidence of bat activity, which strongly suggests that no significant roost is present.

3.32. The building occupies an urban area and tends to be isolated by busy roads and dense housing, although there some bands of vegetation in the area. The site occupies suboptimal bat habitat.

3.33. The building is considered to have **Low Suitability** for roosting bats.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1. The recommendations in the paragraphs below are provided to help ensure that wildlife and important ecological features are protected during the course of works. Recommendations also set out mitigation measures to minimise harm where this cannot be avoided and provide compensation measures to allow the proposals to meet current legislative and planning policy objectives.
- 4.2. Under the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged.
- 4.3. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006) states that a public authority must 'in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity; Conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat'.
- 4.4. Paragraph 174b) of the NPPF (2018) states 'Plans should ...identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity' and Paragraph 175d) states that '...opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity'.

Species Recommendations

Bats

- 4.5. All bats within the UK are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as Amended and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Under this registration there are strict liability offence to injure or destroy a bat or to disturb, damage or destroy the resting place (roost) of a bat. Under the

Bonn Convention, the UK is obliged through the planning system to protect important bat habitats.

- 4.6. The building has been assessed to offer **Low Suitability for roosting bats**. According to Best Practice Guidance (Collins, 2016) any building which has low, moderate or high suitability for roosting bats must be subject to further studies to more fully assess the likely presence/absence of roosting bats. Accordingly, and prior to any works on site, a single emergence survey is required between the months of May and August.

Birds

- 4.7. All species of bird within the UK are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as Amended, which makes it an offence to damage or destroy a nest when being built or in use. This legislation has implications for the removal of vegetation, which will need to take place to create a new access to the site at the west of the site. Vegetation must be removed outside of the nesting bird season (which run between March and September inclusive), or if this timing is not possible then works must be overseen by an ecological clerk of works for an ecologist.
- 4.8. It is recommended that compensation is made for the removal of vegetation by the installation of new bird boxes on new buildings. Bird boxes that have good uptake in urban areas include sparrow boxes. It is recommended that two sparrow terraces (Schwegler 1SP) are installed on site and are orientated in an east, south or west direction.

Reptiles

- 4.9. Reptiles are partially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as Amended, which makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly destroy or injure a reptile.

- 4.10. The site is suboptimal for reptiles but may support small numbers in conjunction with surrounding gardens. Reptiles will be encouraged to move away from the site by using a regime of habitat manipulation. During warm summer weather (above 10°C) when reptiles are active and mobile, all areas of habitat on site will be strimmed or cut back to a height of approximately 100 mm. Areas of rubble, dead wood and other potential areas of refuge will also be removed. This will open up the sward and reduce cover, thus rendering the habitat less favourable to reptiles. The site will be left for at least 5 days to allow reptiles to move away from the site before final vegetation removal and soil strip.

Landscape Recommendations

- 4.11. New landscape planting should be chosen to have maximum value to wildlife and should include a range of native and non-native species that flower and fruit. An information sheet is included within Appendix III which details plant species that are valuable to bats but are a good selection for a range of wildlife. There should be ecological input into proposed landscaping plans.

5. Limitations

- 5.1. This report records wildlife found during the survey and anecdotal evidence of sightings. It does not record any plants or animals that may appear at other times of the year and were therefore not evident at the time of visit.
- 5.2. This report represents a preliminary assessment only. Recommendations and conclusions are subject to change should further findings significantly differ from those collected from the survey efforts to date.
- 5.3. The advice contained in this report relate primarily to factual survey results and general guidance only. On all legal matters you are advised to take legal advice.

6. References

Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) *Bats and Lighting in the UK*. BCT

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Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)
Website at www.magic.gov.uk

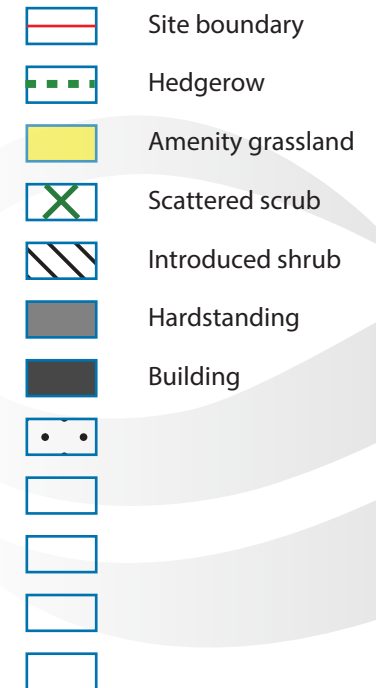
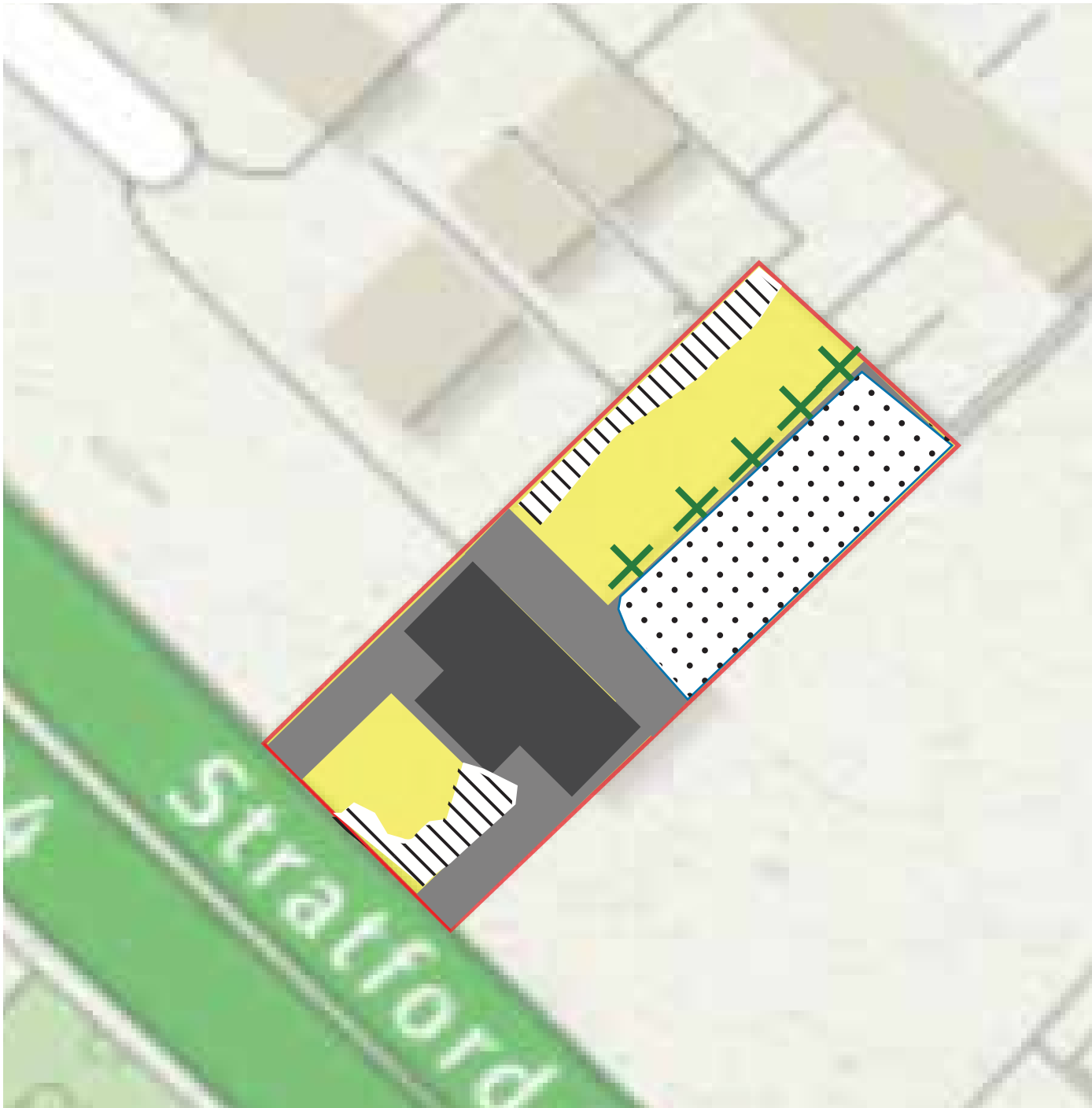
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TSO (2012) *National Planning Policy Framework*

TSO (2006) *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act* TSO

Appendix I – Site Figures



Client Five Homes Ltd
Title Habitat plan
Site 1349 Stratford Road
Figure 1
Date 2 March 2020
Scale 1:2,000



Appendix II – Site Photographs

Photographs 1- 3



Photograph 1:

Front (south-west) elevation of property



Photograph 2:

Rear (north-east) elevation of property



Photograph 3:

Gable walls and barge boards

Photographs 4 - 6



Photograph 4:

Rear garden of amenity grassland,
scattered scrub and introduced
shrub



Photograph 5:

Boundary hedgerow



Photograph 6:

Front garden of amenity grassland,
and introduced shrub



Appendix III– Information Sheets

Bat Habitat Suitably Criteria

Bat Roosting Suitability	Criteria	Survey requirement to prove likely absence
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.	No further survey work required
Low	A building, structure or tree with one or more potential roosting sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically; however, these possible roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used by large numbers of bats and are unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation roosts.	One activity survey
Medium	A building, structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to the size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habit, but is unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.	Two activity surveys
High	A building, structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.	Three activity surveys

Survey requirements are taken from Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (2016), which is the recognised industry standard guidance used by local planning authorities and other statutory consultees.