

# Technical Briefing Note

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Project: Windmill Lane / Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common (1004619)

## TN02: Ecological Constraints and Opportunities Appraisal

December 2020

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### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Aspect Ecology has been commissioned by Catesby Estates to assess the ecological deliverability of the site known as land at Windmill Lane / Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common, centred at grid reference SP 2474 7600. The site is identified as draft allocation BC3 'Windmill Lane / Windmill Lane' within the Draft Submission Version of the Solihull Local Plan dated October 2020.
- 1.2 The site has previously been subject to a desktop study in 2012 and a site walkover in March 2017, the results of which are detailed in the report entitled 'Ecological Review of Draft Solihull Local Plan Allocation' dated July 2017 prepared by Aspect Ecology Ltd. Furthermore, additional site assessment has been undertaken by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in 2016 / 2017 and 2020 which identified a number of potential ecological constraints at / in proximity of the site.
- 1.3 This Ecological Constraints and Opportunities Appraisal has been informed by the above, and based on the results of an updated Phase 1 habitat walkover survey undertaken in June 2020. The 2020 Phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken to provide an up-to-date ecological baseline in order to inform recommendations to guide any future development within the site, in order to comply with relevant provisions of Local Plan Policy BC3 (an extract is reproduced below) and minimise any potential adverse effects on ecological features. Where future development may adversely affect habitats or species identified as 'important ecological features', mitigation is outlined in order to demonstrate where suitable measures can be put in place to safeguard features / species and avoid detrimental effects. Opportunities are also outlined as to how the proposals could achieve net gains for biodiversity.

### 2 Overview of the ecological status of the site

Ecological Designations	
<b>Constraint</b>	Low
<b>Notes</b>	<i>European designations:</i> The closest European-level designation is Ensor's Pool Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is located approximately 17.1km north-east of the site at its closest point. The SAC is designated on the basis of the presence of a large population of White-clawed Crayfish <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i> within isolated

	<p>standing water. The SAC is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). No other European-level designations are located within 25km of the site.</p> <p>The site itself is not subject to any European-level ecological designations and all European-level ecological designations in the surrounding area are well separated from the site by existing development and given the nature and scale of the proposals, these designations are unlikely to be affected.</p> <p><i>Other statutory designations:</i> No other statutory designations are located within or adjacent to the site. The nearest identified statutory designation to the site is Lavender Hill Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR), which is located approximately 1.2km north of the site and comprises grassland, plantation, old hedgerows and ponds. The next nearest identified statutory designation is Park Wood LNR, which is located approximately 3.2km east of the site and comprises ancient semi-natural and ancient replanted woodland.</p> <p>Natural England has developed Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) as an initial tool to help assess the risk of development adversely affecting SSSIs, taking into account the type and scale of development. The site falls within a number of SSSI IRZ's, however, residential development is not listed as a category requiring the LPA to consult with Natural England on a future planning application.</p> <p>Non-statutory designations: No non-statutory designations are present within or adjacent to the site. Based on the results of the data search undertaken in 2012 the nearest identified non-statutory designation is Field east of Balsall Common Ecosite (Ref: 143/27), which is located approximately 0.2km north of the site and comprises areas of semi-improved grassland and a spring. The next nearest identified non-statutory designation is Marshy Grassland at Black Hales Farm potential Local Wildlife Site (pLWS) / Ecosite (Ref: 129/27), which is located approximately 0.6km south of the site and comprises marshy grassland with scattered scrub.</p> <p>Due to the age of the information returned from Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) it is recommended that an update data search is undertaken to inform a subsequent planning application. Nevertheless, given the separation and existing setting of the designations, together with the provision of substantial areas of on-site open space, no adverse effects on non-statutory designations as a result of the proposed development of the site are anticipated. Furthermore, the assessment undertaken by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in 2016 / 2017 and 2020 states that <i>'it is not considered that any designated sites including Local Wildlife Sites will be affected by any works regarding the development parcel'</i>.</p> <p><i>Other:</i> A review of Natural England's MAGIC database did not identify the presence of any Priority Habitats within or adjacent the site. Furthermore, no areas identified as ancient woodland and no veteran or ancient trees are known to be present within or adjacent to the site.</p>
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<b>Habitats</b>	
<b>Constraint</b>	<b>Low - Moderate</b>
<b>Notes</b>	The results of the update Phase 1 habitat walkover survey identified that site is dominated by a number of short-sward, horse-grazed grassland fields in addition to a number of arable fields under active production. Two fields are present within the site which comprise long-sward, semi-improved grassland. The field boundaries are demarcated by post and rail fences, whilst a number of boundaries are also demarcated by hedgerows, trees and scrub. Other habitats present include tall ruderal, a number of buildings, amenity garden, a garden pond, and hardstanding.

	<p>The assessment provided by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in 2016 / 2017 identified a number of habitats with 'medium to high' distinctiveness as present within the site, including grassland characteristic of flood-meadow grassland with swamp and marshy grassland, and an area of semi-natural woodland. Following a review of these areas, and ground-truthing this assessment during the June 2020 Phase 1 habitat survey, it is considered that the area identified as high distinctiveness woodland was mapped in error as this comprises long-sward semi-improved grassland and an area of dense bramble scrub and does not appear characteristic of felled / cleared woodland. Furthermore, although Soft Rush <i>Juncus effusus</i> was recorded in a number of fields, its abundance was noted to be rare / very infrequent and the associated fields were largely under arable production. As such, although these fields may become waterlogged during the winter, they are not currently considered to be of greater than low distinctiveness with an unremarkable botanical diversity recorded in June 2020.</p> <p>The assessment provided by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in 2020 identifies an area of broad-leaved parkland to the south of the site, in addition to broad-leaved woodland at the south-west site boundary. No areas of broad-leaved parkland were recorded within the site during the update Phase 1 habitat walkover survey undertaken in 2020, whilst the areas identified by the Council's assessment are located outside of the site boundary. Furthermore, the area identified as broad-leaved woodland at the south-west site boundary is considered to be mapped in error as this comprises a hedgerow. The assessment provided by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in 2020 also identifies that the site continues to support an area of high distinctiveness marshy grassland, albeit, as detailed above, although these fields may become waterlogged during the winter, they are currently under arable production and not currently considered to be of greater than low distinctiveness, with an unremarkable botanical diversity recorded in June 2020.</p> <p>Overall, the site is dominated by habitats of low botanical and ecological interest. Nevertheless, habitats of inherently elevated ecological value are present in the form of field boundary hedgerows and semi-mature / mature trees, whilst the areas of long-sward semi-improved grassland are likely to be of elevated value in the context of the site only, and could be readily re-created within other parts of the site, if required.</p>
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<b>Fauna</b>	
<b>Constraint</b>	<b>Moderate</b> ( <i>dependant on further survey work</i> )
<b>Notes</b>	<p>The majority of the habitats within the site (dominated by short-sward, horse-grazed grassland fields and arable fields) offer limited potential for protected faunal species. However, long-sward semi-improved grassland, scrub, tall ruderal, hedgerows, trees and both on-site and off-site ponds provide potential opportunities for a number of protected species groups, including bats, Badger <i>Meles meles</i>, Dormouse <i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i> amphibians, common reptile species and nesting birds as discussed below:</p> <p><b>Roosting Bats.</b> The 2020 Phase 1 habitat walkover survey identified a number of trees present within the site, largely associated with the hedgerows, with bat roosting potential. A number of these trees were also recorded to support bat boxes likely provided as mitigation and / or enhancement as part of adjacent developments. A number of buildings with bat roosting potential were also recorded within the site. Should any of these trees or buildings be lost to the proposals, or be incorporated into areas of built form, additional Phase 2 survey work for roosting bats is recommended to confirm the presence / absence status of roosting bats within the site. Overall it is considered that this species group is unlikely to represent</p>

an overriding constraint to any future development, with any required mitigation likely to be readily incorporated into the proposals.

**Foraging Bats.** Habitats within and adjacent to the site, including the hedgerows, trees and the long-sward grassland are likely to provide a suitable commuting / foraging resource for bats. As such, additional survey work is recommended to confirm the extent to which bats utilise the site. Nevertheless, it is considered that foraging bats are unlikely to represent an overriding constraint to any future development at the site, with any required mitigation (such as a sensitively designed lighting scheme and replacement planting) likely to be readily incorporated into the scheme.

**Badger.** The site supports areas of long-sward grassland, arable fields, hedgerows and developing scrub, which may provide suitable habitat for Badger. No active Badger setts or evidence of Badger was identified within the site during the walkover survey, albeit a single area of mammal foraging was recorded at the north-east of the site which may be attributable to Badger. Furthermore, Badger is a highly mobile species and areas of dense scrub are overgrown with Bramble such that Badger field signs could have been obscured. As such, this situation should be kept under review as part of the planning submission for the site, with an update / comprehensive survey undertaken.

**Dormouse.** The boundary habitats within the site provide potential to support Dormouse, although the site would be unlikely in its own right to support a viable population of Dormouse, whilst the site does not appear to be connected to offsite areas of elevated value to this species, such as woodland. The site is also located well outside of the known core range for this species. As such, Dormouse are considered unlikely to be present and unlikely to represent a constraint to the proposals.

**Amphibians.** A single amenity pond is present within the site, associated with a residential garden at the east of the site. However, this pond was recorded to be stocked with fish including Koi Carp such that it is considered unlikely that this pond would support Great Crested Newt or other amphibian species. A number of additional ponds are located within 250m of the site (the typical commuting distance of Great Crested Newt), of these, one pond which is located 10m west of the site is known to support a low population of Great Crested Newt. The majority of the site, being dominated by short-sward, horse-grazed grassland, provides low quality habitat for Great Crested Newt, albeit the field boundary habitats and the long-sward grassland is considered to provide elevated opportunities for this species in the context of the site. Given the proximity of this off-site pond, the potential for Great Crested Newts to make use of suitable terrestrial habitats within the site will likely form the basis of a mitigation / safeguarding strategy.

As such, Phase 2 survey work is recommended to confirm the extent to which Great Crested Newt may utilise the site, as they are known to be present within proximity. Consideration should be given to the potential presence of this species throughout the masterplanning process.

**Reptiles.** The site is largely dominated by short-sward, horse-grazed grassland and arable fields which provides negligible opportunities for reptile species. Nevertheless, a number of the field boundaries were recorded to support a long and 'tussocky' sward which, along with the areas of long-sward grassland, boundary hedgerows, tall ruderal and scrub, could provide opportunities for common reptile species. A number of brush piles were also recorded within the site which could provide sheltering and hibernating opportunities.

Additional Phase 2 survey work for reptiles is therefore recommended to confirm the

	<p>presence / absence status of reptiles within the site. Overall it is considered that this species group is unlikely to represent an overriding constraint to any future development, with any required mitigation likely to be readily incorporated into the proposed development.</p> <p><b>Birds.</b> The site offers potential suitable habitat for nesting birds in the hedgerows, tree lines, scrub, long-sward grassland, tall ruderal, arable fields and buildings. As such, a range of common bird species are likely to be present. However, nesting birds are unlikely to form masterplanning constraints and can be readily addressed via safeguards included under any Ecological Appraisal undertaken to inform the planning application.</p>
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#### Key Considerations for Masterplanning

<b>Notes</b>	<p>Overall, the site is dominated by habitats of low botanical and ecological value. Nevertheless, habitats of inherently elevated ecological value are present in the form of field boundary hedgerows and semi-mature / mature trees, whilst the long-sward semi-improved grassland is likely to be of elevated value in the context of the site only.</p> <p>A number of ponds are present within 250m of the site which may have the potential to support Great Crested Newt, whilst a pond located approximately 10m west of the site is known to support a low population of Great Crested Newt. As such, implementation of a number of mitigation measures will be required to ensure this species is safeguarded during development works.</p> <p>Due to the size of the site, other protected faunal species that may be present are unlikely to represent a major masterplanning constraint. However, it is recommended that further survey work is undertaken to ensure that safeguards are included for any species found to be present. Particular consideration is recommended to be given to the potential presence of bats, Badger, Great Crested Newt, and reptiles to inform a planning application.</p>
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#### Opportunities for Ecological Enhancement

<b>Notes</b>	<p>Opportunities available include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is the potential to improve the hedgerow network through additional native hedgerow planting and infilling of any gaps present;</li> <li>• Habitat creation within the site could include areas of wildflower grassland and wetland features which could be subject to ecologically sensitive management in the long-term. This would provide foraging and shelter opportunities for a wide range of species;</li> <li>• Thermally favourable conditions could be promoted within the development, which, along with the provision of pollen and nectar foraging resources, would benefit species groups such as reptiles and butterflies;</li> <li>• A number of bat boxes can be incorporated within the proposals. The provision of bat boxes would provide new roosting opportunities for bats in the area;</li> <li>• A number of bird nesting boxes can be incorporated within the proposals, thereby increasing nesting opportunities for birds within the site; and</li> <li>• A proportion of any deadwood arising from vegetation clearance works could be retained to create a number of habitat piles located within areas of new planting or areas of wildflower grassland in order to provide enhanced habitat</li> </ul>
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	<p>opportunities for invertebrate species, which in turn would provide a prey source for a range of other wildlife.</p> <p>The habitat creation and enhancement opportunities detailed above would also benefit a wide range of other species, including bats and birds. Overall, it is considered that there is the potential to increase the ecological value of the site and provide enhanced green infrastructure compared to the existing situation.</p>
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### 3 Summary

- 3.1 In conclusion, a number of ecological constraints have been identified within the site, with the presence of potential Great Crested Newt habitat representing the most likely constraint to the masterplanning process. Additional faunal constraints in the form of potential for protected faunal species are identified, which will require consideration as part of a planning application. However, it is considered that these potential constraints could likely (subject to confirmation from Phase 2 ecological survey work) be accommodated within an appropriately designed mitigation strategy, alongside a sensitively designed masterplan. Indeed, the retention of key areas of the site within green infrastructure provides an opportunity to bring forward net gains for biodiversity. Accordingly, with careful planning and the inclusion of embedded mitigation within the design of any emerging masterplan, the allocated site is considered to be deliverable in ecological terms.

#### Enclosed:

Plan 4619/ECOA1 – Preliminary Ecological Constraints

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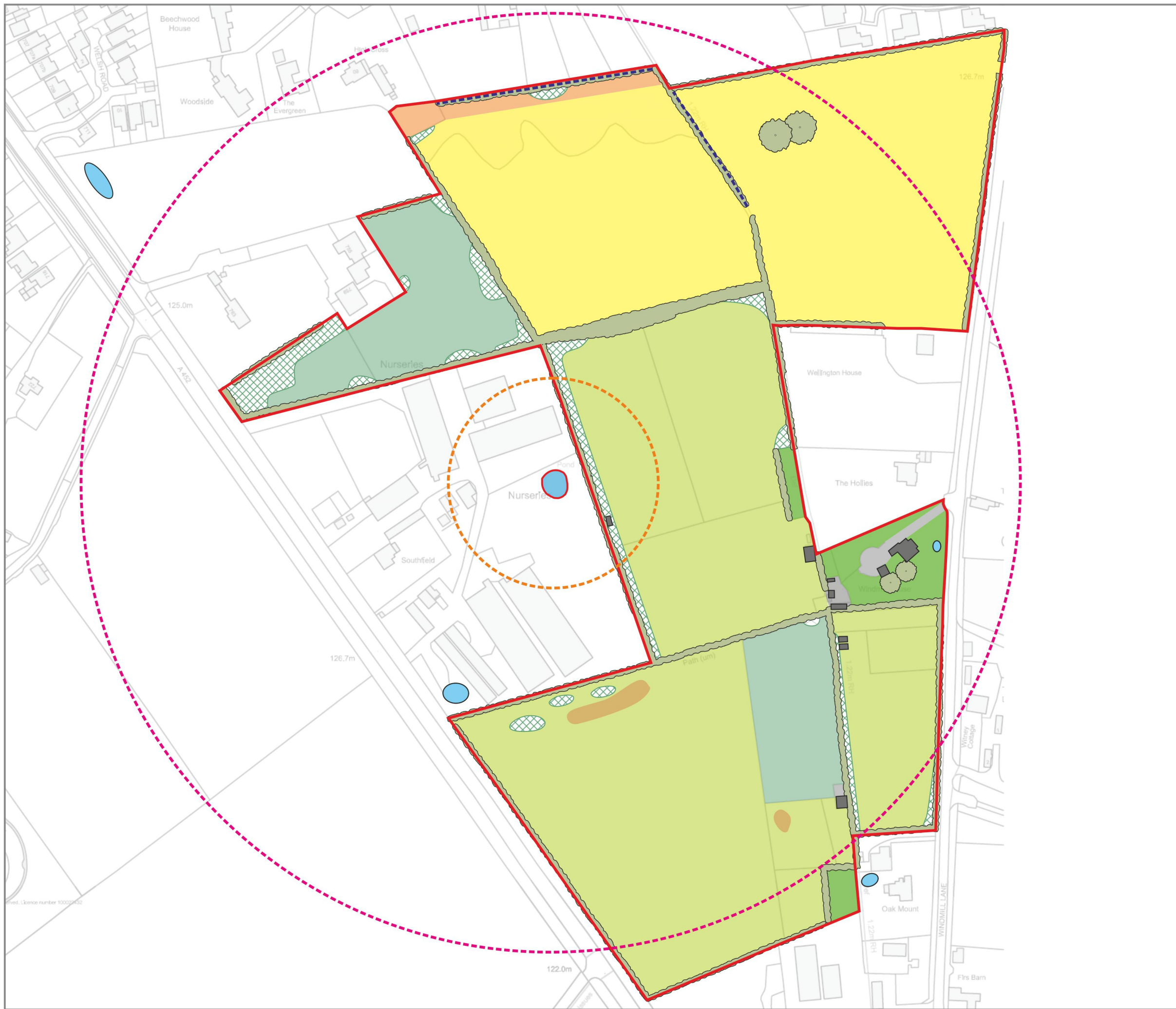
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- KEY:**
- Site Boundary
  - Short-sward Grassland
  - Arable
  - Long-sward Semi-improved Grassland
  - Amenity Grassland and Planting
  - Hedgerows
  - Dense Scrub
  - Tall Ruderal
  - Tree
  - Building
  - Hardstanding
  - Ditch
  - Brush Pile
- Great Crested Newts**
- Offsite Pond known to support a low population of Great Crested Newts
  - 50m Buffer around Pond
  - 250m Buffer around Pond
  - Pond (No Known Great Crested Newt Population)



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Windmill Lane / Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common PROJECT  
 Preliminary Ecological Constraints TITLE

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