



Rainier Developments Ltd.

**Land fronting Waste Lane, Balsall Common**

**[Solihull Local Plan Site Allocations Site BC4 Pheasant Oak Farm (part)]**

**ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REVIEW**

December, 2020

**FPCR Environment and Design Ltd**

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**Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Additional Sites Options Ecological Assessment:**  
Pheasant Oak Farm Habitat Biodiversity Audit Partnership for Warwickshire, Coventry and  
Solihull – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust & Ecological Services Warwickshire County Council

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Solihull Local Plan (2011-2028) was adopted December 2013. This was then subject to a legal challenge which resulted in the overall housing requirement being deleted and requiring reconsideration. This resulted in a Call for Sites, with a submission deadline of 13 May 2016<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.2 A c.0.72 ha single field plot fronting Waste Lane, Balsall Common was submitted as part of the Call for Sites process and was allocated the Site Ref. 79 as part of the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.3 Submissions resulting from the Call for Sites were then forwarded to consultants commissioned by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to carry out the SHELAA. Assessment for biodiversity constraints formed part of the Sustainability Criteria and was based on a sole factor, the presence of a Local Wildlife Site (LWS)<sup>A</sup> either, within or near to the site under consideration.
- *Site is not within, or adjacent to, a Local Wildlife Site* 5.
  - *Site is adjacent to a Local Wildlife Site* 4.
  - *Less than 10 per cent of the site is within a Local Wildlife Site* 3.
  - *10 – 24 per cent of the site is within a Local Wildlife Site* 2.
  - *25 – 50 per cent of the site is within a Local Wildlife Site* 1.
  - *Over 50 per cent of the site is within a Local Wildlife Site* 0.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.4 Site 79 was afforded a score 5, which represented no constraint.
- 1.5 Progression of the SHELAA resulted in Site 79 becoming part of a larger 12 ha site named Pheasant Oak Farm (Ref. Site 23). Further assessment of the sites for biodiversity constraints were published in January 2019 as part of the Draft Concept Masterplan Reviews<sup>4</sup>. However, this did not include a full site appraisal for Pheasant Oak Farm.
- 1.6 A final Concept Masterplan Review was subsequently undertaken, which included a full assessment of the Pheasant Oak Farm site, with an amended boundary and an increase in size to 13 ha, but still incorporating the original Site 79<sup>5</sup>. The site is now referenced as BC4.
- 1.7 The review has marked the entire site as “*semi-improved grassland – significant habitat value*” and the Landscape Assessment goes on to refer to the land as ‘*Notable habitats*’<sup>5</sup>. Whilst the assessment does not specifically state that the Ecological Assessment has concluded that this part of Pheasant Oak Farm site should not be included for development, it simply states that “...*adverse impact on sites of ecological importance should be avoided.*”<sup>5</sup>, this does seem to imply that development within this part of BC4 should be avoided.
- 1.8 In the knowledge that the site did not support a grassland type that would be considered to be of ‘significant habitat value’, Rainier Developments Ltd. commissioned FPCR to investigate this anomaly and this document reports that assessment.

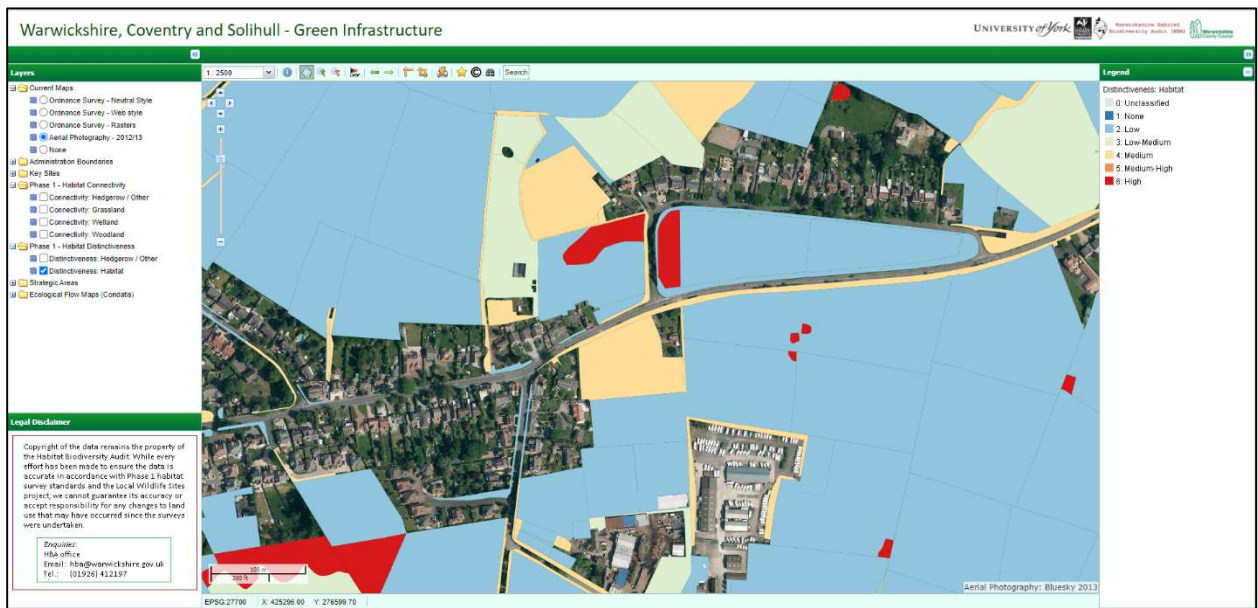
<sup>A</sup> Local Wildlife Site is a non-statutory ecological designation. Whilst the designation does not confer any obligation on a landowner to manage their land specifically for nature conservation objectives, the designation is a material consideration in the planning process. This is reflected in Policy P10 Natural Environment of the Solihull Local Plan, which seeks to avoid any adverse effects on a designated Local Wildlife Site unless the reasons for the development clearly outweigh the nature conservation interest for which the site has been designated.

2.0

2.0 DESK STUDY

**Warwickshire Habitat Biodiversity Audit**

- 2.1 Warwickshire is unique in that there is an ongoing continuous revision of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey map which was first produced in 1995. This is undertaken by the Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) which is managed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and funded by the various local authorities in Warwickshire<sup>6</sup>.
- 2.2 One of the many outputs from the HBA has been to provide reliable and up to date baseline information to develop the Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull Green Infrastructure Strategy<sup>7</sup> and Biodiversity Offsetting in Warwickshire<sup>8</sup>. The Green Infrastructure Strategy has an online interactive mapping tool<sup>9</sup> and the screen shot below shows the field shaded in pastel yellow, which represents a habitat of medium distinctiveness.



- 2.3 The underlying data extracted from the interactive map is:

HABITAT ID.....SP2504676372  
 HABITAT CODE.....B22  
 HABITAT DESCRIPTION .....Semi-improved neutral grassland  
 FEATURE AREA.....0.7251  
 SURVEY DATE .....2012-07-25  
 DISTINCTIVENESS SCORE .....4  
 DISTINCTIVENESS CLASS .....4: Medium  
 DISTINCTIVENESS VALUE .....Medium

- 2.4 The Habitat Distinctiveness values are derived from the Warwickshire Biodiversity Offsetting - Biodiversity Impact Assessment Calculator<sup>10</sup>. The definition of the habitat within the calculator is:

*“Semi-improved neutral grasslands have been subject to some form of agricultural improvement such as fertilizer application, use of herbicide, intensive grazing or drainage but are typically not subjected to regular reseeding (improved grasslands). Semi-improved grasslands cover a very*

*broad range of grassland quality from almost unimproved (species-rich) to species-poor semi-improved grassland that is just slightly more species-rich than agriculturally improved grassland.*<sup>10</sup>

2.5 An additional note is also provided.

*“Species-rich semi-improved grassland is more widespread in the sub region than unimproved grassland but still scarce. Species diversity will be lower than unimproved grasslands but still of high botanical diversity supporting grassland communities that resemble MG5 or MG4 grassland with species such as common knapweed, lady’s bedstraw, yellow rattle, common bird’s-foot-trefoil, meadow vetchling, oxeye daisy and great burnet but often at lower frequencies than seen in unimproved meadows. Rarer species associated with true unimproved grasslands will also tend to be absent.”<sup>10</sup>*

2.6 So when the field was assessed as part of the HBA work on 25 July 2012 the grassland present could have been anything between the range described in para. 2.4.

### **Ecological Assessments Undertaken to Inform the Local Plan Site Options**

2.7 The methodology used for the Concept Masterplan reviews is a six-stage process<sup>5</sup>:

- Stage 1 (Assessment) – Desk Top Analysis;
- Stage 2 (Assessment) – Site Visit;
- Stage 3 (Evaluation) – Development of constraints plans;
- Stage 4 (Design and involvement) – Discussion with developer / site promotor of the Draft Concept plans;
- Stage 5 (Design and involvement) – Consultation on emerging plans; and
- Stage 6 (Evaluation) – Write up final report and recommendations.

2.8 The Desk Top Analysis for Ecology involves a review of:

- Statutory designation of sites (SSSI<sup>B</sup> and LNR<sup>C</sup>) and non-statutory sites (LWS, PLWS<sup>D</sup>, LGS<sup>E</sup>);
- Protected / Notable species records (WBRC<sup>F</sup>); and
- Phase 1 Habitat Data (HBA) – Distinctiveness Connectivity.

2.9 During 2019 the HBA Partnership undertook an Ecological Assessment of Pheasant Oak Farm to inform the site allocation process. This was published in January 2020<sup>11</sup> and is appended to this report. This involved a Phase 1 Habitat Survey undertaken on 24 August 2019<sup>G</sup> and Figure 4 of the HBA report shows the habitats present. The field under review (i.e. former Site 79) is mapped as ‘improved grassland’ which is a habitat of low to negligible nature conservation importance.

2.10 Figure 2 of the report is a Constraints Map showing areas of biodiversity value which the HBA assessment considered should ideally be retained and incorporated into any development

<sup>B</sup> SSSI – Site of Special Scientific Interest

<sup>C</sup> LNR – Local Nature Reserve

<sup>D</sup> PLWS – Potential Local Wildlife Site

<sup>E</sup> LGS – Local Geological Site

<sup>F</sup> WBRC – Warwickshire Biological Records Centre

<sup>G</sup> The survey date was confirmed by B Wood (Assistant Ecologist – Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council) in an email to FPCR, dated 23.10.2020)

proposal. With the exception of a single tree on the northern boundary of the field, the field and its habitats are not included within the map.

### 3.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 It is not clear why the Concept Masterplan Review has incorrectly mapped this field within Site BC4 as supporting “*semi-improved grassland – significant habitat value*” and referred to it as ‘*Notable habitats*’<sup>5</sup>. From the evidence presented here it is assumed that this can only have come from the Green Infrastructure data, but this is eight years old, and, in this case, inaccurate because it is out of date.
- 3.2 The field supports species-poor improved grassland of low to negligible ecological value, a habitat type that should not represent a constraint to development. It continues to be managed as such, and is currently a silage ley that has been resown this autumn.
- 3.3 The fact that this part (i.e. Concept Masterplan review) of the Local Plan Site Allocations assessment process has not used, or chosen to ignore, the HBA assessment that was undertaken to specifically inform the assessment process, is of concern. In the absence of an explanation, this must cast doubt on the accuracy of all the Ecology assessments that are being undertaken as part of the Local Plan Review.

### 4.0 REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. (2020). *Solihull Local Plan Review*. [webpage] Available at: <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/lpr> [Accessed 27.09.2020].
- <sup>2</sup> Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. (2016). *Reviewing the Plan for Solihull’s Future – Solihull Local Plan Review – Schedule of “Call for Sites” Submissions*. Available at: [http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/Planning/LPR/Schedule\\_of\\_Call\\_for\\_Sites\\_Submissions.pdf](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/Planning/LPR/Schedule_of_Call_for_Sites_Submissions.pdf) [Accessed 27.09.2020].
- <sup>3</sup> Peter Brett Associates. (2016). *Solihull Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment 2016 – Volume B: Appendices*. Available at: [https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/Planning/LPR/Strategic\\_Housing\\_and\\_Employment\\_Land\\_Availability\\_Assessment\\_Vol\\_B.pdf](https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/Planning/LPR/Strategic_Housing_and_Employment_Land_Availability_Assessment_Vol_B.pdf) [Accessed 27.09.2020].
- <sup>4</sup> Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. (2019). *Solihull Local Plan Review DRAFT Concept Masterplans – January 2019*. Available at: <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/Planning/LPR/Solihull-Local-Plan-Review-Draft-Concept-Materplans.pdf> [Accessed 27.09.2020].
- <sup>5</sup> Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. (2020). *Solihull Local Plan Concept Masterplans – September 2020*. Available at: <http://eservices.solihull.gov.uk/mgInternet/documents/s84348/LP%20APPENDIX%20A3%20viewable%20online%20only.pdf> [Accessed 09.11.2020].
- <sup>6</sup> Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. (2020). *Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA)*. [webpage]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/eia-agriculture-regulations-apply-to-make-changes-to-rural-land> [Accessed 27.09.2020].
- <sup>7</sup> Warwickshire Museum and Natural Environment. (no date). *Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull Sub-Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy*. Available at: [https://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/2397/g03\\_-\\_warwick\\_coventry\\_and\\_solihull\\_sub\\_regional\\_green\\_infrastructure\\_strategy\\_-\\_november\\_2013.pdf](https://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/2397/g03_-_warwick_coventry_and_solihull_sub_regional_green_infrastructure_strategy_-_november_2013.pdf) [Accessed 27.09.2020].
- <sup>8</sup> Warwickshire County Council. (2020). *Biodiversity offsetting activities*. [webpage]. Available at: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/biodiversityoffsetting> [Accessed 27.09.2020].
- <sup>9</sup> Warwickshire County Council. (2020). *Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull – Green Infrastructure Interactive Map*. Available at: <http://maps.warwickshire.gov.uk/greeninfrastructure/> [Accessed 27.09.2020].
- <sup>10</sup> Warwickshire County Council. (2020). *Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull – Habitat Impact Assessment Calculator v.19*. Available at: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/46/biodiversity-impact-calculator-xls-1-1-mb-> [Accessed 27.09.2020]

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<sup>11</sup> Habitat Biodiversity Audit Partnership for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, & Ecological Services Warwickshire County Council. (2020). *Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Additional Sites Options Ecological Assessment: Pheasant Oak Farm*. Available at: [https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/Planning/LPR/BC4\\_Site21\\_PheasantOak\\_Ecol\\_Assess\\_Jan\\_2020.pdf](https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/Planning/LPR/BC4_Site21_PheasantOak_Ecol_Assess_Jan_2020.pdf) [Accessed 10.11.2020].



**Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Additional Site Options  
Ecological Assessment:**

**Pheasant Oak Farm**

**Habitat Biodiversity Audit Partnership for Warwickshire, Coventry  
and Solihull**

**Warwickshire Wildlife Trust**

**Ecological Services Warwickshire County Council**



**January 2020**



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# PHEASANT OAK FARM

Area: 9.7 hectares

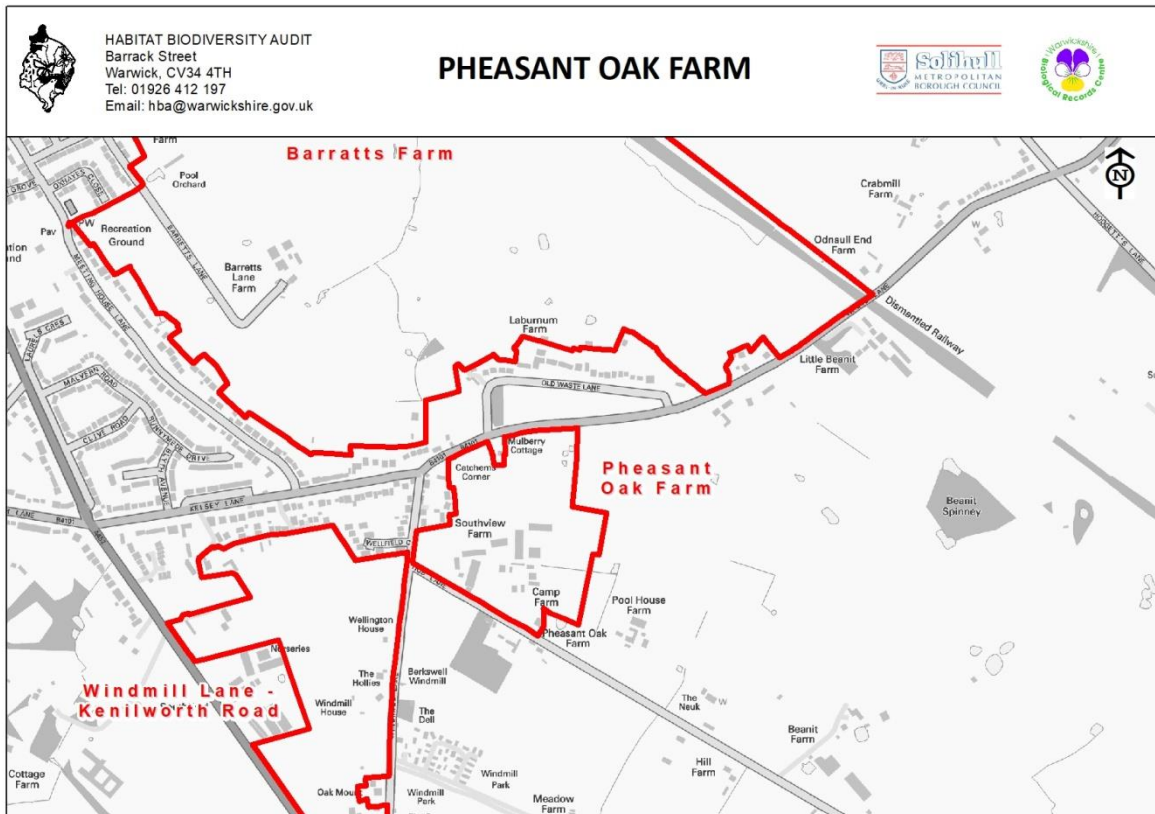


Figure 1 Site Location

## Overview

The development parcel is sandwiched between two other proposed sites to the east and south east of the settlement of Balsall Common. The parcel comprises semi-rural farm holdings of Pheasant Oak Farm and Camp Farm in the south-east corner, the larger component of Southview Farm forming the central belt with Catchems Corner in the north-west corner. The parcel boundary skirts around Mulberry Cottage with Waste Lane marking the northern boundary, Hob Lane the southern periphery and the western boundary in part by Windmill Lane before it skirts around housing properties of Catchems Corner. The farm hosts improved pasture fields and small holdings for rearing poultry as part of operations under Adlington Ltd.

## Key Features

- Dense scrub
- Veteran/Notable Trees
- Ponds
- Arboriculture Survey
- Great Crested Newt Suitability Survey

- Ecological Constraints Relate to 23.7% of the Total Area

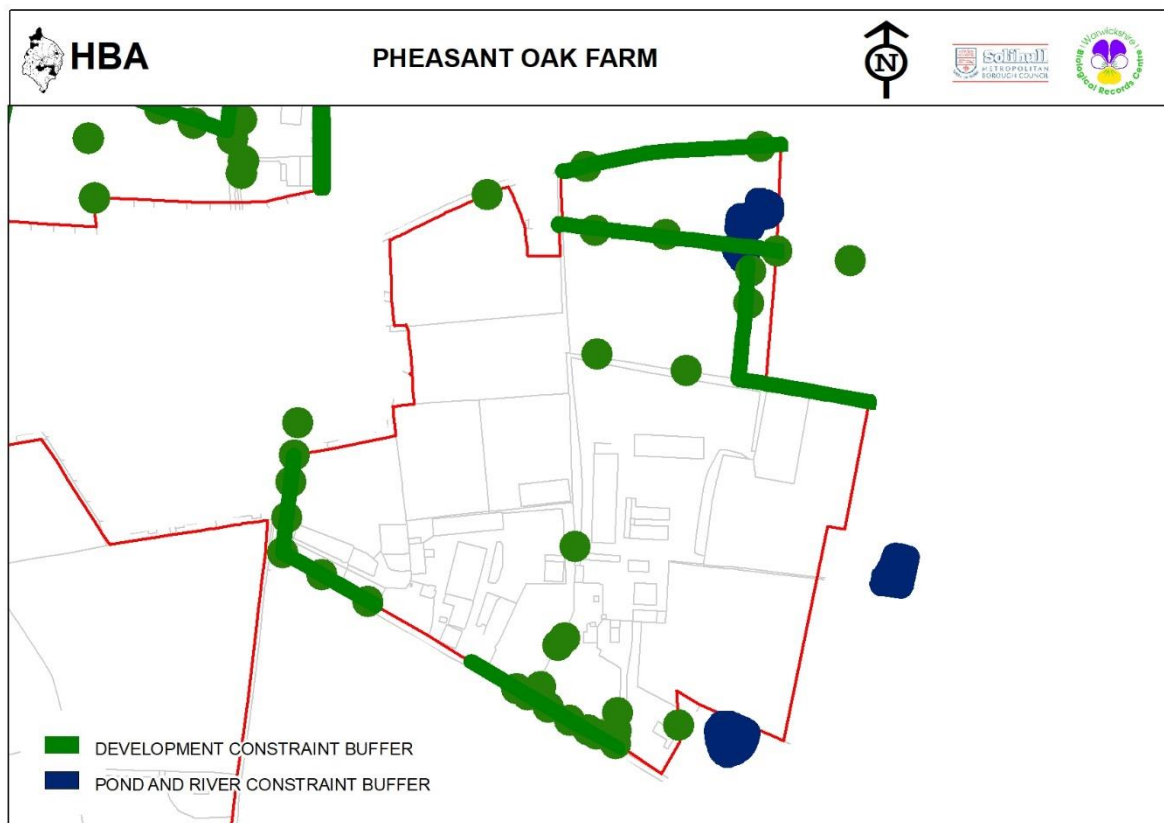
## **Recommendations**

The ponds should be buffered by eight metres especially during any construction works and incorporated as open green space. The ponds should be surveyed for their potential to support Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*).

A tree or arboriculture survey is recommended for the development parcel to determine the height of any tree and the spread of the tree's canopy so that adequate buffers can then be calculated. Trees should be utilised into development plans; to retain the development parcels most valuable features and to remove the need to re-create green infrastructure. The maintenance of any trees and allocation of green space should take place in and around the ponds present on site. Equally, the creation of ponds to complement the existing ponds on site would increase connectivity and ecological resilience of the pond network.

Trees along Hob Lane and the corner of Windmill Lane should be surveyed as potential Tree Preservation Orders (TPO; Town and Country Planning Act 1990) and thus would require consent from the local planning authority before such protected trees are cut down, topped or lopped.

## Constraints



**Figure 2 Constraints Map**

The areas marked in green and blue on the above constraints map as a component of a very early and preliminary assessment represent existing biodiversity value and should ideally be retained and incorporated into any development proposals. They indicate where development should be avoided, and ecological enhancement encouraged. The maps show's a feasible case scenario with the aim to meet no net loss and the net gain approach. The green and blue areas at the absolute minimum highlight the need for further ecological investigation.

They include:

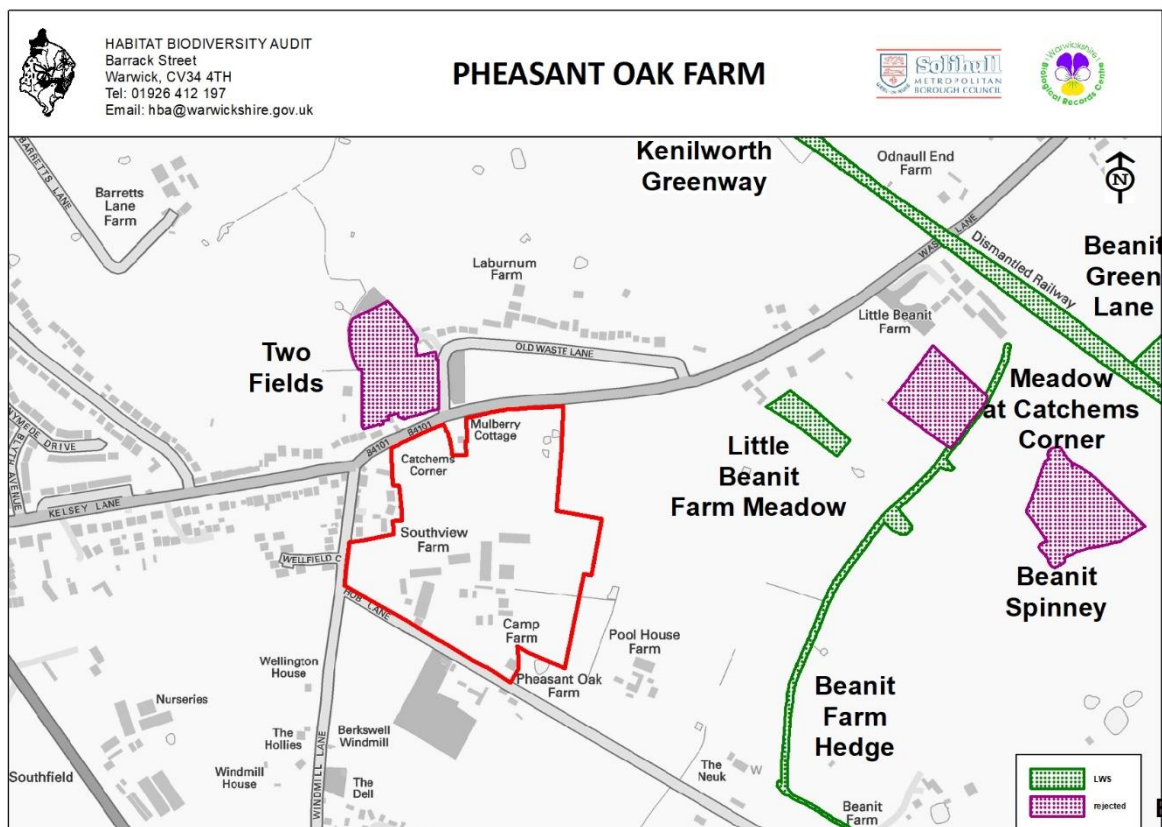
- 30m buffer around woodland
- 8m buffer either side of adjacent to watercourses
- 8m buffers around ponds
- 5m buffer either side of intact hedgerows
- Areas of medium to high distinctiveness habitats (Values 4, 5 & 6)
- Local Wildlife Sites
- Veteran/Notable Trees

The circular green dots represent notable/veteran trees which should be retained and incorporated into green infrastructure. They are currently buffered by default at 15 metres as recommended by Natural England. A tree or arboriculture survey is recommended for the site to distinguish on such issues,

determining height of tree and the spread of the tree's canopy so that adequate buffers can then be calculated. The buffers are not exact but illustrative based on the extent of the canopy from aerial photography. You could buffer these trees either by 5m from the extent of the canopy, or by the length of the tree trunk or by a standard length being 15 to 30m depending on results from an arboriculture survey. If veteran trees are identified, a buffer of 30m would be recommended. Trees within existing urban infrastructure may not be subject to such buffers as the root zone may well be established around such obstacles but should be left in-situ depending on the level of disturbance envisioned by proposed works. This is of note for trees along Hob Lane and Windmill Lane bordering existing road groundworks.

Ecological Constraints relate to 23.7% of the total area of the development parcel, yet veteran/notable trees and the pond network can be simply integrated into development scheme as the supplement of green space needed for a development of this size and nature.

## Designated Sites



**Figure 3 Designated Sites**

The development parcel does not encompass any designated sites. A rejected LWS named Two Fields sits across Waste Lane, north-west of the development parcel.

## Local Wildlife Site

Two Fields Rejected LWS<sup>1</sup> SP27N2

Area; 1.69ha

Survey Date; 24/08/19

## Habitat Description

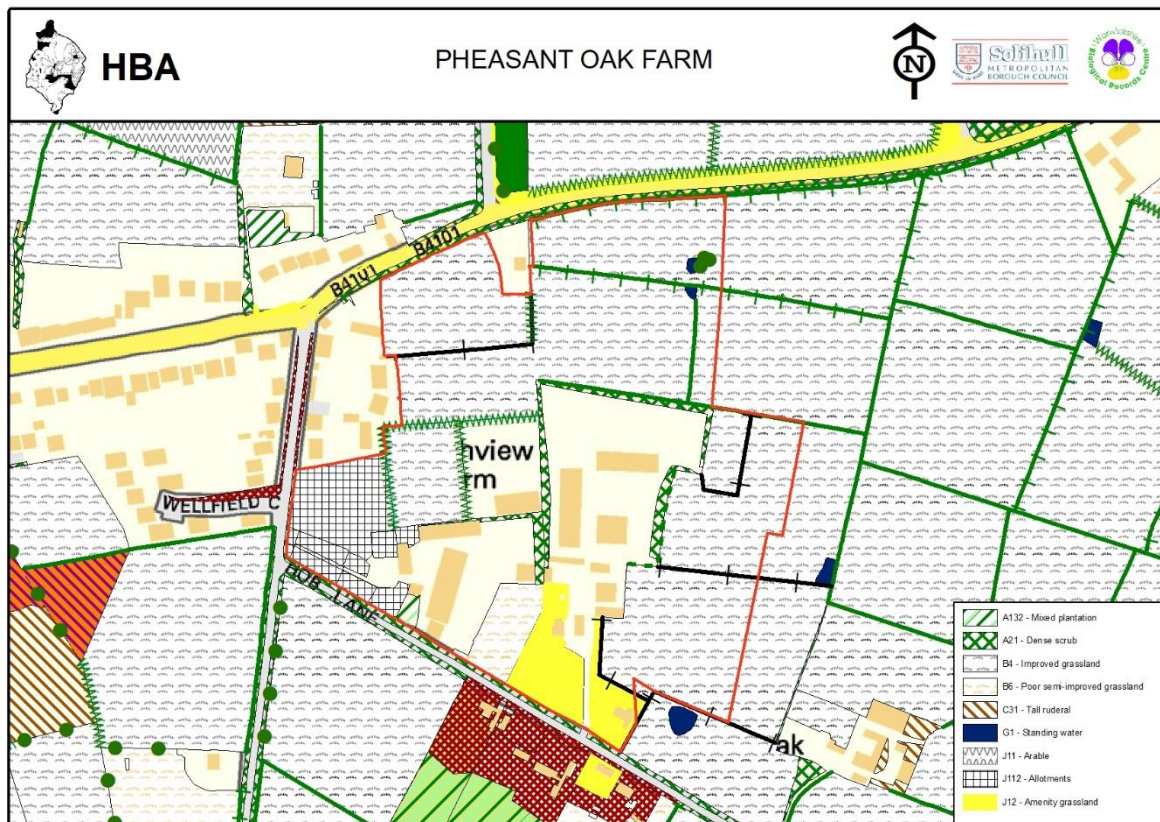
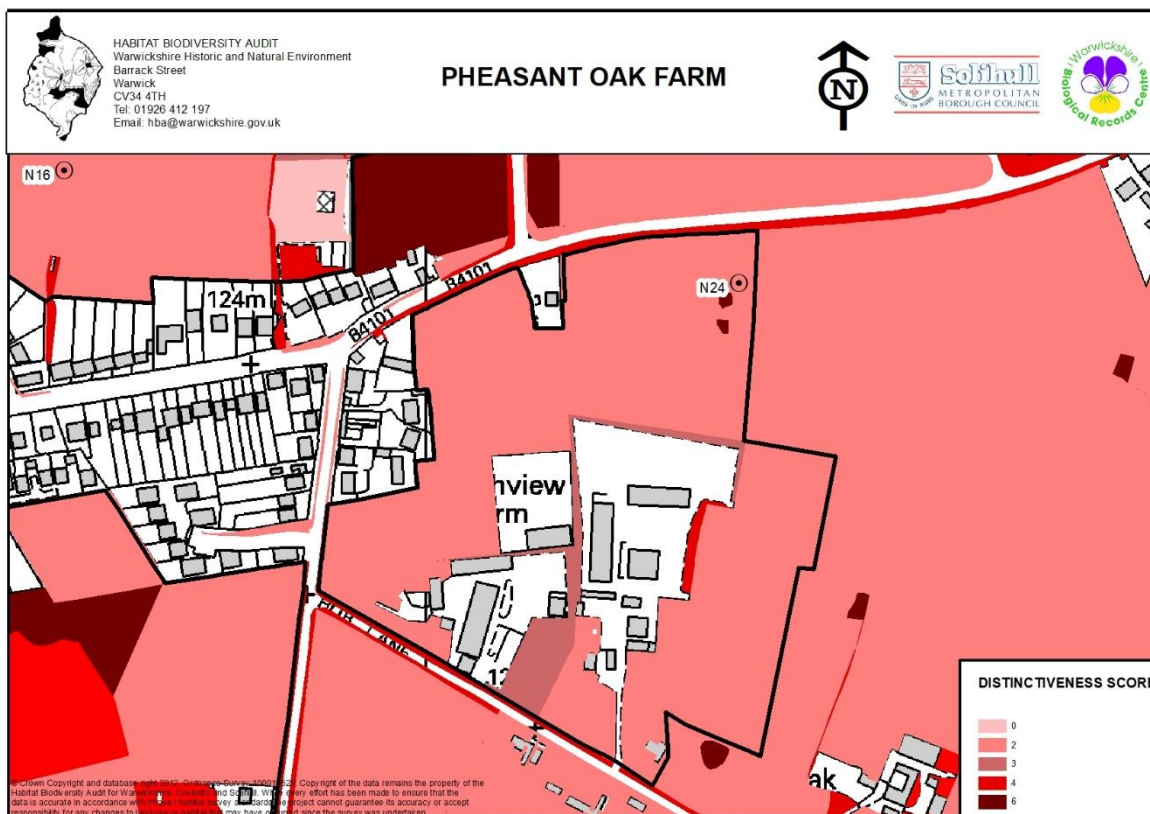


Figure 4 Phase 1 Habitats

The habitats within the parcel comprise predominately intensively grazed improved grassland. A large section of the parcel comprises a small holding (J112) for rearing poultry and domestic livestock. Amenity and poor semi-improved grassland shadow the frontage of the farm entrance off Hob Lane associated with the residential and recreational areas of Southview Farm, Camp Farm & Pheasant Oak Farm. Veteran and notable trees (A3) mark the border with Hob Lane and Windmill Lane. Several ponds lie within and just outside development parcel boundaries.

<sup>1</sup> Local Wildlife Site



**Figure 5 Habitat Distinctiveness & Target Notes**

Much of the development parcel remains marginally distinct with a noticeable parcel of semi-improved grassland on the frontage of Southview Farm along with a small band of dense scrub associated with the storage of motorhome vehicles. The urban influenced hedgerow abounding Hob Lane and the corner of Windmill Lane containing veteran and/or notable trees remains highly distinct and constitutes an important feature for consideration.

## Target Notes

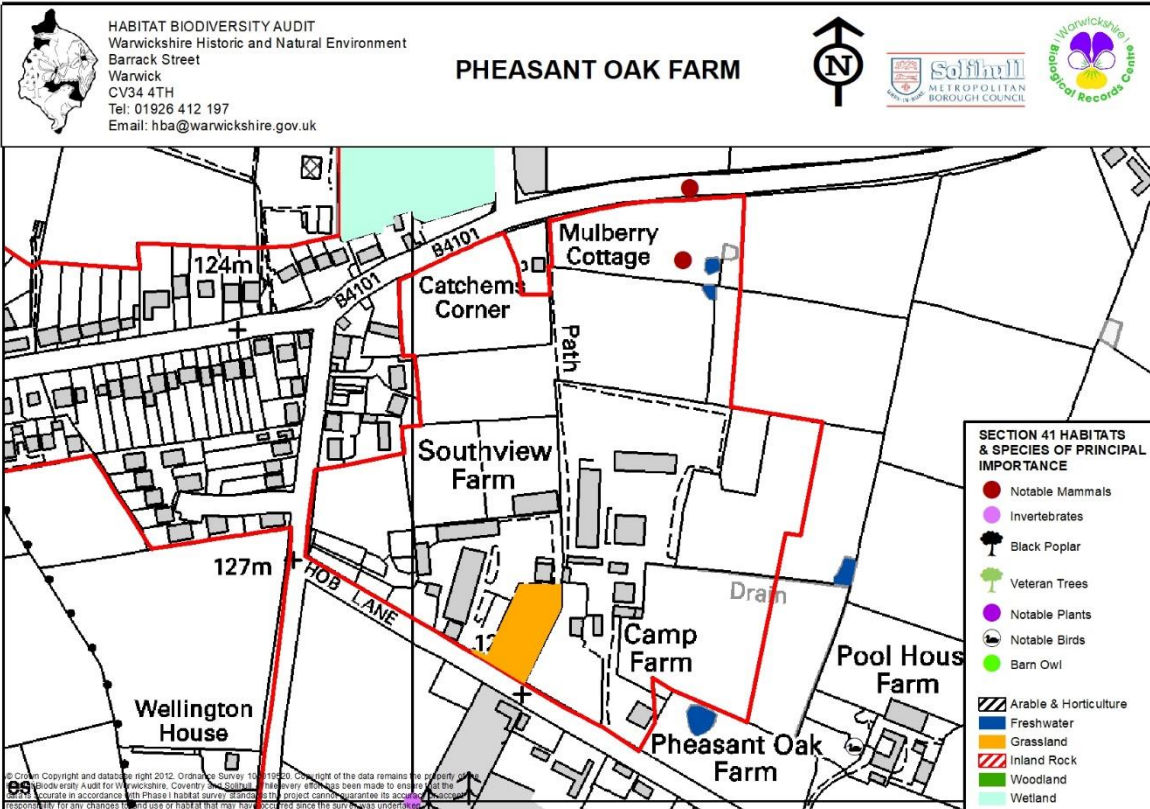
Number	Grid Reference	Survey Date
SP27N24	SP2523176398	21/07/1997

Mesotrophic pond shaded by pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), goat willow (*Salix caprea*) and blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and surrounded by tall ruderal vegetation. The pond contains abundant duckweed (*Lemna* sp.), celery-leaved buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*), water plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), floating sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*) and soft rush (*Juncus effuses*). Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*) have recently nested.

## UPDATE 24/08/2019 GP

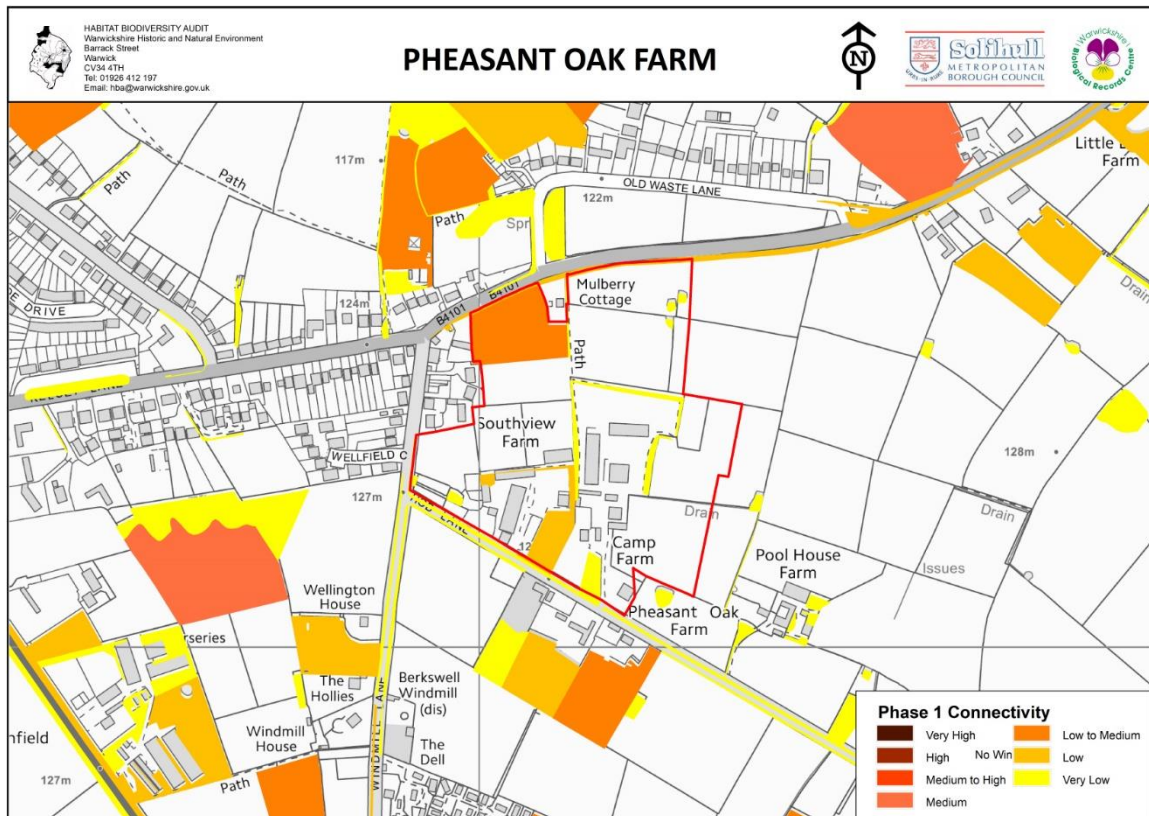
The pond remains as described.





**Figure 6 Section 41 Habits and Species of Conservation Importance**

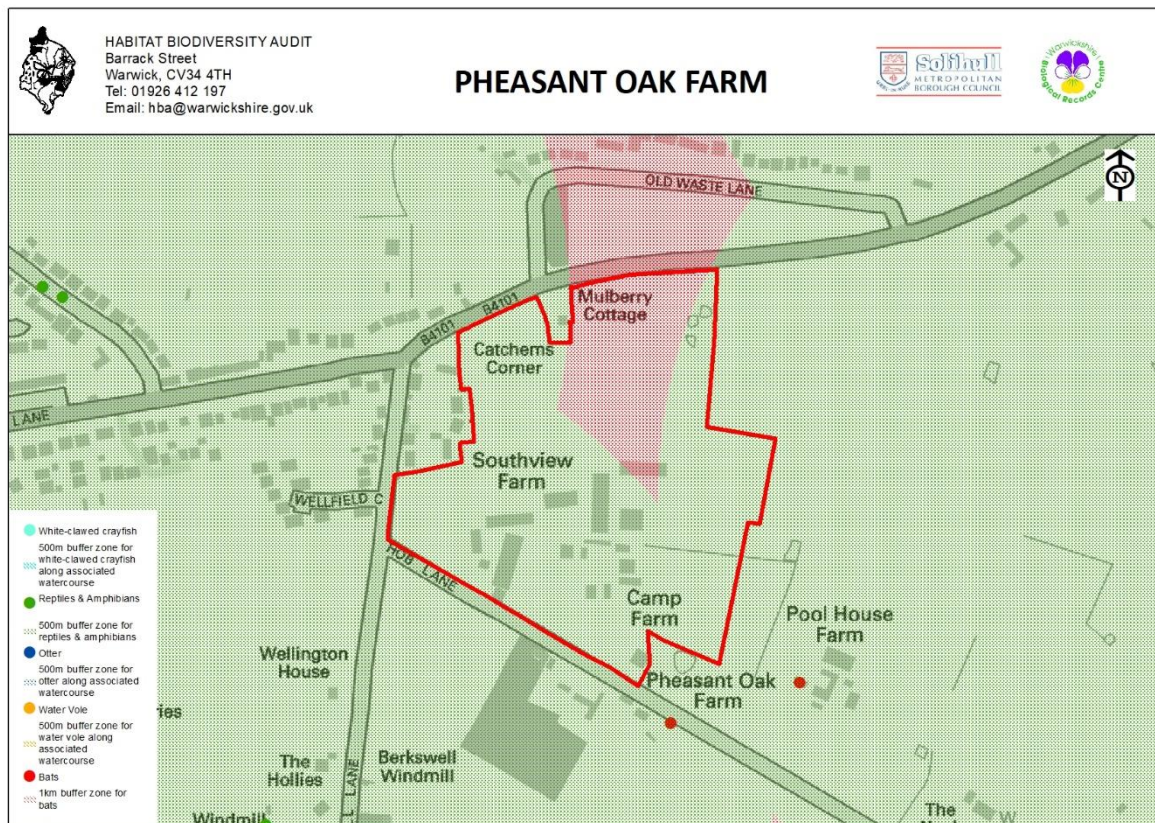
# Habitat Connectivity



**Figure 7 Habitat Connectivity**

Grassland and scrub connectivity continue to range from Low to Medium with several component parts scattered across the farm network.

## Protected Species



**Figure 8 Protected Species**

There are no protected or notable species records located within the development parcel but immediately adjacent and within farm buildings, is the potential for roosting bats. Foraging and roosting records dating from 2014 exist for Pool House Farm and along Hob Lane in 1981 for common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*)

The presence of such records and the habitat provision provided by the network of farm buildings within the complex of Pheasant Oak Farm demands that bats should be thoroughly considered in development proposals, in mitigation and in survey effort.

The network of farm-ponds across the parcel should be surveyed for their potential to host Great Crested Newts.

A toad crossing ensues for Windmill Lane recorded in 2016, not far from the development parcels south-western corner boundary.

We recommend that protected species are taken into consideration through more detailed ecological assessments regarding works taking place to farm buildings and in relation to any farm-ponds. Please take note that an absence of species records does not mean an absence of species.