



LAND NORTH OF SANDERLING WAY, IWADE

Overwintering Bird Habitat Suitability Assessment

Date of Report: January 2020

Report Expiry Date: January 2021



Overwintering Bird Habitat Suitability Assessment

Client: Boat House Properties Ltd

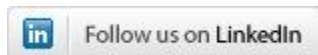
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VAT Number: 601216305

Issue:	Date:	Written by:	Reviewed by:	Amended by:	Approved by:
One	12/02/2020	Chloe Tustain	SK, RR		SB

Ecosulis Ltd
The Rickyard, Newton St Loe, Bath, BA2 9BT

www.ecosulis.co.uk
01225 874 040





NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Site location and size	Land North of Sanderling Way, Iwade, TQ 89864 68110, 3.4ha
Scope and purpose of works	Overwintering bird habitat suitability assessment to support comments made in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (report ref: J006378) on habitat suitability for overwintering birds, which states: 'There are no suitable opportunities for ground-nesting birds or overwintering birds'. This is in response to comments made by the Kent County Council (KCC). Proposals for the site include the construction of up to 60 homes and associated infrastructure.
Dates of site visits and names of surveyors	16 December 2019 – Andrew Bodey BSc ACIEEM
Overview	The site is divided up into seven habitats: A3.1 – Broadleaved parkland/scattered trees B2.2 – Neutral grassland – semi-improved B4 – Improved grassland G1 – Standing water G2 – Running water J1.4 – Introduced shrub J2.3.2 – Hedge with trees – species-poor The site consists of a large field, which has been divided into five sections for grazing. These sections are identified as Fields A–E within this report. All the fields support a short sward and therefore provide limited opportunities for wildlife. Scrub and trees border most of these sections. A stream runs along the northern boundary of the site and a hedge is present along the western edge. There are three ponds on site (labelled Ponds 1–3 throughout this report); Ponds 1 and 2 are located along the northern boundary and Pond 3 is located to the south-west of the site. The Medway Estuary & Marshes (RAMSAR and SSSI) and The Swale (RAMSAR, SPA, NNR and SSSI) are within 2km of the site and support large numbers of migrant and wintering bird species.



	The site supports little to no field margins, therefore limiting opportunities for breeding birds. The field is subject to regular management, and high levels of disturbance from the public and dog walkers, therefore provides low suitability for ground-nesting, migrant or overwintering birds.
Action required for planning and/or legal compliance	This survey will be used to inform the Habitats Regulations Assessment, which is required as the site is within 6km of The Swale SPA. This will help to assess any significant impacts from the proposed development on a European site designated for its nature conservation interest. Vegetation clearance should avoid nesting bird season (survey season: March to September) where possible. Grassland swards should be inspected prior to removal for any ground-nesting birds when works are within the nesting bird season.
Recommendations for ecological enhancement (Site ecological enhancement is required under current planning policy)	The site has a low suitability for overwintering/migratory birds; however, the adjacent fields to the north of the site, provide higher suitability for overwintering species in the area. A new tree belt has been proposed for the site, along the northern and western borders of the site. This will screen the proposed development and reduce the amount of disturbance to the adjacent fields. Planting should consider native, fruit-bearing trees and scrub, which will provide a food source for wildlife using the site.



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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In December 2019, Ecosulis was commissioned by BDB Design to undertake an overwintering bird habitat suitability assessment of Land North of Sanderling Way, Iwade.
- 1.2 In 2017 Ecosulis carried out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of Land North of Sanderling Way, Iwade (report ref: J006378). At the time of survey, the site supported few to no field margins, therefore limiting opportunities for breeding birds. The field was subject to regular management through grazing; therefore, it was concluded that there were no suitable opportunities for ground-nesting or overwintering birds on site. An update Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was carried out in July 2018 (job ref: J006494) to determine if the site conditions were the same. One of the changes that might have an impact on overwintering birds is the stopping of grazing on the eastern side of Field B.
- 1.3 Following this report, an overwintering bird habitat suitability assessment was carried out to provide further information to supplement the findings of the 2017 and 2018 Preliminary Ecological Appraisals, specifically in relation to overwintering birds. This is in response to comments made by Kent County Council's ecologist.
- 1.4 The current proposals for the site include the construction of up to 60 homes and associated infrastructure, including roads and open space.

The Swale Special Protection Area (SPA) & RAMSAR Site

- 1.5 The development is within the zone of influence (6km) of The Swale Special Protection Area (SPA) and Wetland of International Importance under the RAMSAR Convention. As a result, a Habitats Regulation Assessment is required as part of the planning application for the site. The aim of this survey is to inform the Habitat Regulations Assessment, to be undertaken by the Competent Authority (in this case, Kent County Council). The Swale SPA is designated for its breeding bird assemblages, waterbird assemblages and populations of dark-bellied brent goose and dunlin. SPAs receive full protection under Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds and are areas of the most important habitat for rare, vulnerable and migratory birds within the European Union.
- 1.6 Experienced ecologist Andrew Bodey (BSc ACIEEM) visited the site on 16 December 2019 to undertake the survey. Access was provided by the landowner.

Objectives of Study

- 1.7 The objectives of this study are to provide further information in relation to the suitability of the site to support overwintering birds. The assessment will inform the



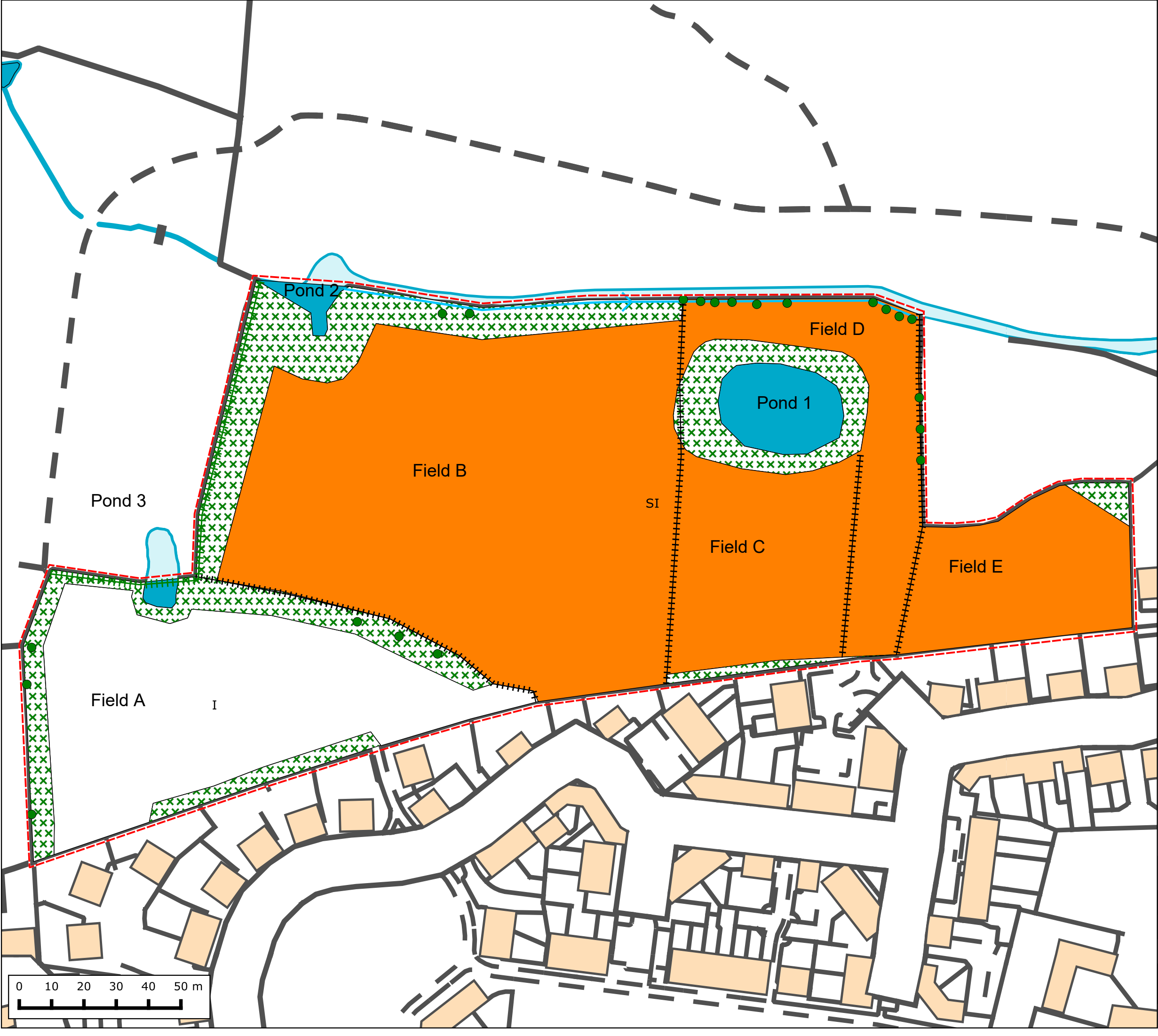
need for any further surveys, as well as the Habitat Regulations Assessment for the planning application.

General Description of Site

- 1.8 The site is located north of Sanderling Way, to the north of the town Iwade in Kent. It comprises five fields (Fields A–E) of varying sizes. There are three ponds on site, one of which is thought to be permanent all year.
- 1.9 Field A is located in the south-west of the site and is roughly triangular in shape. Field B is the largest field and borders Field A with a defunct hedge on its south-western edge. Field C is located to the east of Field B and is not bordered by any hedgerows on its eastern or western sides. Field D is a small rectangular field to the north-east of Field C. A stream is located to the north of Field D. Field E lies to the east of Field C and is the field furthest to the east of the site. An intact hedge borders all the fields at their northern boundary and Field B on its western boundary (Figure 1).
- 1.10 Residential housing exists immediately south of the site along Sanderling Way. An area of parkland fields exists as Raspberry Hill Park to the north of the site. An area of allotments is located to the west of Field A.
- 1.11 Figure 1 shows the habitats currently on site and the location of Fields A–E.

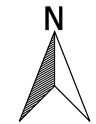
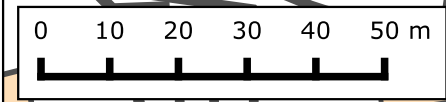


FIGURE 1 – SITE MAP AND HABITATS



Key

- Site Boundary
- A3.1 Broadleaved parkland/scattered trees
- Target Note
- G2 Running water
- J2.1.2 Intact hedge - species-poor
- J2.4 Fence
- A2.2 Scrub - scattered
- B4 Improved grassland
- G1 Standing water





The Rickyard, Newton St Loe, Bath BA2 9BT
T: 01225 874 040 E: info@ecosulis.co.uk

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Project: Land North of Sanderling Way, Iwade

Title: Phase 1 Habitat Survey

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2 METHODS

Overwintering Bird Site Suitability Assessment

- 2.1 On 16 December 2019, Andrew Bodey (BSc ACIEEM), an experienced ecologist representing Ecosulis, visited the site to carry out an overwintering bird habitat suitability assessment. The survey was carried out in accordance with the Bird Census Techniques (Bibby et al, 2000), Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the United Kingdom (CIEEM, 2016), Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (CIEEM, 2017) and information was drawn from Kent and Medway Biological Record Centre to inform the survey.
- 2.2 The site was systematically walked, and all habitats present were recorded and mapped. Where appropriate, target notes were used to highlight the suitability of habitats for overwintering birds and any species using the site. The survey considered the suitability of the habitats on site and within the accessible surroundings to support overwintering bird species.
- 2.3 The survey was carried out during 13:00–15:00 as this was during high tide, which is when wetland birds would most likely be inland. This increases the chances that birds will be present on the site. At the time of the visit it was 8°C, with no precipitation and low wind speed (1 SW).



3 RESULTS

Desktop Study

- 3.1 In 2017, Ecosulis was commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site (report ref: J006378). A desktop study was carried out to inform this. The table below outlines the relevant results.

Table 1: Desktop study search relating to birds

Feature	Desk Study
Statutory designations on site	There are no designations within the site boundary.
Statutory designations within 2km	<u>Medway Estuary & Marshes (RAMSAR and SSSI)</u> Located 1km north-west of site the estuary and includes a complex of grazing marsh. It forms a single tidal system with the Swale. The complex and diverse mixes of coastal habitats support important numbers of waterbirds throughout the year. In the summer the estuary supports breeding waders and terns, whilst in winter it holds important numbers of geese, ducks, grebes and waders. The site is also of importance during spring and autumn migration periods, especially for waders. The site supports populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the directive: - Avocet - Little tern - Black-tailed godwit - Dark-bellied brent goose - Dunlin - Grey plover - Pintail - Redshank - Ringed plover - Shelduck <u>The Swale (RAMSAR, SPA, NNR and SSSI)</u> The Swale is a strip of sea separating North Kent from the Isle of Sheppey. The Swale contains the largest expanse of grazing marsh in Kent, which provides important feeding and roosting grounds for many waterbirds. The large areas of intertidal mudflats are submerged at high tide and exposed at low tide, providing an important feeding habitat for birds. The estuary also provides extensive roosting sites for large populations of waterbirds and is of major importance during the winter for duck and wader species and for supporting wader populations



Feature	Desk Study
	moving to the south-east coast of Britain during the spring and autumn migration periods. When classified in 1993, the site supported international important numbers of dark-bellied brent goose and dunlin, representing 3.1% and 3% of the British wintering populations, respectively. The Swale SPA is one of the key estuaries in the UK for wintering wildfowl and waders. The site qualifies under Article 4.2 of the directive (English Nature, 1993), as it is used regularly by over 20,000 waterbirds in any season. The wintering waterbird assemblage includes all the internationally important regularly occurring migratory species, as well as species present in nationally important numbers or species whose populations exceed 2,000 individuals. In addition to dunlin and dark-bellied brent geese, the mudflats also support internationally and nationally important numbers of waterbirds, including shelduck, wigeon, teal and curlew.
Statutory designations within 2.1km–5km	<u>Elmley (NNR)</u> Elmley is a National Nature Reserve located 3km east of the site. It includes vast areas of grassland, streams and lake habitat and supports large numbers of waterfowl species.
Non-statutory designations on site	There are no non-statutory designations within the site boundary.
Non-statutory designations within 2km	There are no non-statutory designations within 2km of the site.

Overwintering Bird Site Suitability Assessment

3.2 The site is divided into seven habitats, shown on Figure 1:

- A3.1 – Broadleaved parkland/scattered trees
- B2.2 – Neutral grassland – semi-improved
- B4 – Improved grassland
- G1 – Standing water
- G2 – Running water
- J1.4 – Introduced shrub
- J2.3.2 – Hedge with trees – species-poor

3.3 The grassland has a uniform sward of approximately 20–40cm. Grazing no longer takes place on the site, resulting in a longer, more uniform sward. The site is not



currently managed to provide opportunities for overwintering birds associated with the designations.

- 3.4 The site itself supports no areas of standing water, except for a small pond located to the north-east of the site. Two ponds were dry at the time of the survey, which was undertaken in winter months following rainfall. The grassland on site supports a uniform sward of approximately 20–40cm. The grassland on site was previously managed through grazing, however there does not appear to be any current management on the site, allowing the grass to grow tall. The site itself is a small enclosed area with surrounding houses and scrub/hedgerow boundaries, restricting the availability of open areas.
- 3.5 In addition to the limited habitat opportunities on site for overwintering birds, the site is heavily disturbed by walkers, including dog walkers, along informal paths which cross the site. Disturbance to these habitats appears to be regular, and is likely to decrease the likelihood of wintering birds utilising the site. Additionally, it is within close proximity to housing developments and is deemed a highly disturbed site. Two domesticated cats were noted within the site at the time of the survey.
- 3.6 Only resident species were recorded on site during the survey. A full list of the species encountered is included in Appendix I and shown on Figure 2. No migratory overwintering species were seen on site throughout the duration of the survey.

Adjacent Habitats

- 3.7 The area of pasture to the north of the site is considered to have greater value for overwintering birds. It supports a diverse grassland sward, offering possible loafing and foraging areas for wildfowl and waders. A single curlew was spotted flying over this area. No flocks of wildfowl or waders were seen during the survey visit. The adjacent fields also support footpaths, which may reduce the likelihood of overwintering birds due to frequent public disturbance. The adjacent habitat is grazed by horses.

The Swale Special Protection Area (SPA) & RAMSAR Site

- 3.8 There are a number of internationally and nationally important species associated with The Swale SPA and the Medway Estuary and Marshes RAMSAR, located within 6km of the site. Table 2 lists the species associated with the designation, their preferred habitat and an assessment of the habitats on site to support them.



Table 2: Wintering birds and their suitability to the current habitat on site

Species	Habitat Requirements	Site Suitability Assessment
Avocet	Avocets predominately overwinter in coastal lagoons and estuaries.	The site supports a small pond, and is predominantly dry grassland. No estuary or coastal lagoons are present nearby, therefore the site does not provide overwintering habitat for this species.
Black-tailed godwit	The black-tailed godwit winters on coastal estuaries and marshes, and at inland shallow waters.	The site currently provides no suitable habitat for this species, with limited water present on the site.
Curlew	Curlew spend the winter in coastal areas – around the UK they can be found on mudflats and estuaries in large flocks, sometimes numbering into the thousands.	Improved and semi-improved grassland currently covers the site, which provides some opportunities for curlew, especially where grassland has been left tall and unmanaged. However, water sources on the site are restricted to one small pond, and marshy grassland is not present. The habitats on site have been assessed as having low suitability to support this species. Disturbance on the site is high, and as a result reduces the likelihood of curlew using the site over winter. Adjacent fields support better opportunities for curlew, and one was recorded using this area during the survey.
Dark-bellied brent goose	Dark-bellied brent goose habitat is mostly shallow coasts and estuaries, with extensive mudflats and intertidal areas. This species rarely occurs far from the sea.	The site is approximately 1km away from The Swale, which makes it unlikely to be used by dark-bellied brent geese, who prefer to stay close to the sea.
Dunlin	Dunlin roost and forage in large flocks in saltwater areas, namely estuaries and lagoons. They also forage in wet, flooded farm fields.	No estuaries or coastal lagoons are present nearby, therefore the site does not provide overwintering habitat for this species.



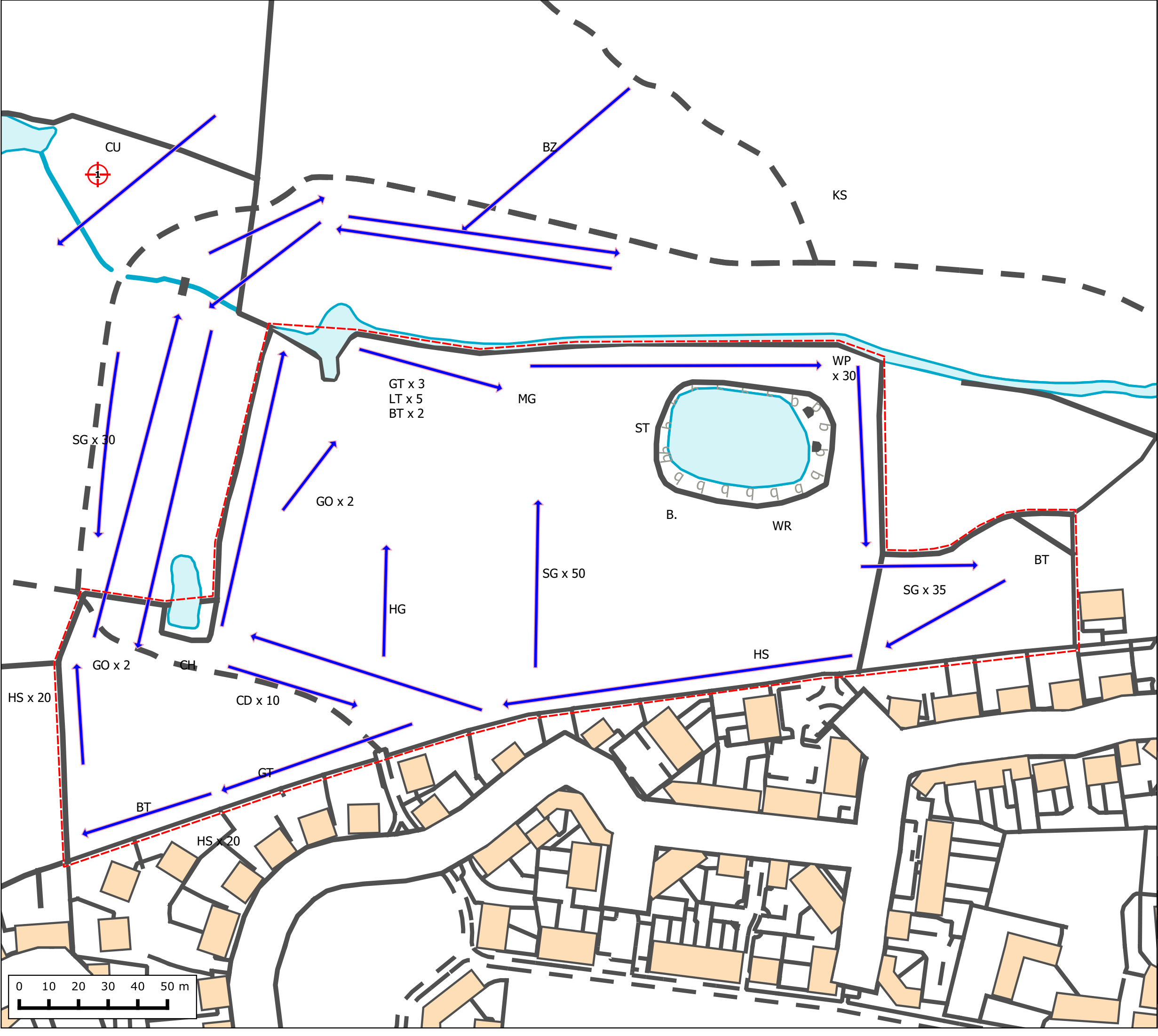
Species	Habitat Requirements	Site Suitability Assessment
	They typically select areas where the water is less than 2 inches deep. They gather on beaches, islands and upper edges of marshland. The site has unsuitable habitat for dunlin, who prefer these habitats and also tend to stay near saltwater and food sources.	
Grey plover	Grey plover prefer large, muddy estuaries and other soft-sediment coastlines for foraging opportunities.	The site contains no suitable habitat types for grey plover.
Little tern	Little terns nest exclusively on the coast, in covered shallow scrapes on sand and shingle beaches, spits or inshore islets.	As the site is further inland and provides little cover, there is no suitable habitat for nesting little terns, therefore it is considered unlikely that they will be utilising the site.
Pintail	Large numbers gather on selected sheltered estuaries, feeding at the surface.	Due to their preference for sheltered estuaries and coastlines, the likelihood of this species nesting or using the site is low.
Redshank	The redshank frequents coastal and inland wetlands such as coastal salt marshes, grassy marshes, swampy areas and inland wet grasslands.	The site has open areas of grassland, although it does not support marshy/wet grassland, which is preferable to the redshank. This, combined with the high levels of disturbance, reduces the suitability to support this species.
Ringed plover	The ringed plover is mostly found on sandy beaches feeding off species associated with these habitats.	The site does not have sandy beaches, therefore there are limited to no foraging opportunities for this species on site. They prefer spaces with little plant growth, so would be unlikely to use the grassland on site to nest.



Species	Habitat Requirements	Site Suitability Assessment
Shelduck	Shelduck are mostly found in coastal areas, although they can also be found around inland waters, such as reservoirs and gravel workings.	The site contains no suitable habitat types for shelduck.
Teal duck	Teal duck gather in large numbers on flooded gravel pits, reservoirs and floodplain meadows, commonly inhabiting sheltered freshwater wetlands with tall vegetation.	There is low suitability for teal duck. The site supports open grassland with limited opportunities for shelter, especially given the high levels of disturbance from dog walkers.
Wigeon	The wigeon uses similar habitat to the teal duck, including open wetlands or marshes with tall vegetation.	The lack of suitable vegetation and water sources on site, as well as high levels of disturbance, indicates that wigeon are unlikely to utilise the site.



FIGURE 2 – BIRD SIGHTINGS AND FLIGHT LINES



Key
 Site Boundary
 Flight Line
 Target Note

B. - Blackbird
BT - Blue tit
BZ - Buzzard
CH - Chaffinch
CD - Collared Dove
CU - Curlew
GO - Gold Finch
GT - Great Tit
HS - House Sparrow
K. - Kestrel
LT - Long-tailed tit
MG - Magpie
ST - Song Thrush
SG - Starling
WP - Wood Pigeon
WR - Wren

The Rickyard, Newton St Loe, Bath BA2 9BT
T: 01225 874 040 E: info@ecosulis.co.uk

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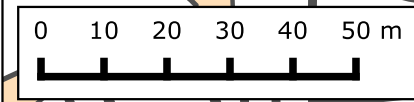
Project: Land North of Sanderling Way, Iwade

Title: Bird sightings and flight lines

January 2020

Figure 2

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4 ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The results of the survey found no overwintering birds associated with The Medway Estuary & Marshes (RAMSAR and SSSI) and The Swale (SPA, RAMSAR, NNR and SSSI) to be using the site at the time of visit. Only a single curlew was spotted flying over the adjacent land to the north-east of the site. Resident species of birds were recorded during the survey, in particular in the hedgerows and trees bordering the site. These are listed in Appendix I.
- 4.2 The site itself has low suitability for overwintering birds. Of the species associated with the designations, the site may support nesting opportunities for redshank, who use open grassland habitats, in particular tussocky grassland. However, the level of disturbance coupled with the unfavourable short-sward grassland habitat, means the level of suitability is reduced.
- 4.3 The site proposals currently include an area of grassland to the north of the development. This could be enhanced by creating a tussocky grassland area, which would create sheltered areas for overwintering birds to nest. Key species to include in creating tussocky grassland include cow parsley, hogweed, thistles, teasel, knapweed and scabious. Managing the cutting regime in rotation and mowing the grassland once a year will help to maintain rides, glades and scrub edges. Consideration should be given to increasing the wetland habitat in this area, especially through swales and scrapes, where possible.
- 4.4 Disturbance levels are high on the site, therefore significantly reducing the likelihood of it being used by overwintering birds. Dog walkers, members of the public and domestic cats use the site frequently. This is likely to deter many species from using the site due to risks of predation and habitat disturbance. It is recommended that future designs for the proposed grassland area in the north of the site consider limiting public access, to increase the likelihood of this area being used by overwintering birds in combination with adjacent habitats. The proposed new tree belts will support the creation of a sheltered area and screen visual and noise disturbance from the public and development works.
- 4.5 The lack of suitable habitat coupled with the current level of disturbance gives the site low suitability for migratory and overwintering wildfowl and waders associated with the nearby SPA, SSSI and RAMSAR sites. It is therefore considered unlikely that the proposed development will significantly affect these designations.



Considerations for Enhancement

- 4.6 The boundary hedgerows are intact, although they are species-poor and lack management. Enhancing and retaining these boundaries would provide additional shelter for all nesting bird species. Additionally, creating a buffer around the adjacent fields would minimise the impact and disturbance during development. This is important, as overwintering birds could currently be using the adjacent fields.
- 4.7 Pond 3 has potential to act as a refuge for water-dependent birds. Ponds are a valuable additional habitat for wetland birds and can be a source of water and food. Marginal planting will not only provide food sources for plant-eating birds, but it will also increase invertebrate populations, which are a valuable source of food for many species of waterfowl.
- 4.8 Additional habitat enhancements will help to ensure that the development meets the National Planning Policy Framework's (NPPF) sustainability criterion for not net loss, but rather net gain.
- 4.9 Although not within the site boundary, the area of pasture to the north of the site may hold greater value for overwintering birds. There is a diverse sward offering loafing and foraging areas for wetland birds, and is where a curlew was recorded. Should it be possible, ecological enhancements within this adjacent area could benefit the numbers of wetland birds currently in the area.



5 LIMITATIONS OF SURVEY AND REPORT

- 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. Some species that might use the site or be apparent at other times of year, or only in certain years, would not have been detected.
- 5.2 This report provides a provisional ecological baseline for the site and should not be considered to be conclusive until the ecological considerations have been undertaken and all necessary further surveys completed. Likewise, the ecological considerations at this stage are not necessarily final and may be subject to change or additional proposals made following the results of further surveys and detailed development plans.
- 5.3 The behaviour of animals can be unpredictable and may not conform to standard patterns recorded in current scientific literature. This report therefore cannot predict with absolute certainty that animal species will occur in apparently suitable locations or habitats, or that they will not occur in locations or habitats that appear unsuitable.
- 5.4 The data search can only provide information on species already recorded and cannot be taken to represent a complete overview of all species present in the survey site.
- 5.5 The advice contained in this report relates primarily to factual survey results and general guidance only. On all legal matters you are advised to take legal advice.



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Appendix I: SPECIES LIST

Fauna	
Common Name	Latin Name
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>



Appendix II: LEGISLATION AND PLANNING POLICY

Birds

In Britain all wild birds are granted legal protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This legislation protects birds, their eggs, dependant young, and nests whilst being built or whilst in use.

Schedule 1 Bird Species

Schedule 1(1) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) affords full protection to certain bird species. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb at or near an active nest of species on this list.

Internationally Designated Sites

Internationally designated sites are those which are protected by European Union (EU) Law, or have been granted special protection through international conventions and organisations. They come in two forms:

EU specific

EU specific designations include SPAs, a designation integrated within the Birds Directive 1979, and SACs, which aim to protect all habitats and species listed under the Habitats Directive 1992 (transposed by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)). Collectively, these two types of protected areas are known as Natura 2000 sites. In England and Wales these sites are designated and afforded protection under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

International

International habitat designations include RAMSAR sites. RAMSAR sites are wetlands of international importance designated under The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, which came into force in 1975. In England and Wales these sites receive statutory protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981(as amended). It is the government's policy to afford RAMSAR sites the same level of protection as that provided for Natura 2000 sites. In the UK, many RAMSAR sites are also SPAs and most have statutory underpinning as SSSIs.

Abbreviations: SPA – Special Protection Area; SAC – Special Area of Conservation; SSSI – Sites of Special Scientific Interest.



Appendix III: SITE PHOTOS



