



Bloor Homes North West
1 Champion Park
London Road
Holmes Chapel
Cheshire
CW4 8AX

DATE: 12th August 2025

SITE: Land south of Weaverham, Northwich

ECOLOGICAL FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

Dear Mr Hudson,

I am writing to provide a preliminary review of ecological receptors at Land South of Weaverham, Northwich. This document has been prepared to inform the selection of sites for residential allocation in the forthcoming Cheshire West and Chester local plan.

Site description

The site extends to approximately 56.4ha (139acres) and is located on the southern edge of Weaverham. The illustrative masterplan prepared by Bloor Homes North West includes residential housing and associated access roads and landscaping, as well as potential opportunities for local facilities, public open space, sports and play areas, and a nature reserve.

At this stage, a detailed preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) has not been undertaken onsite; however, a walkover survey was undertaken by Toby Hart BSc MCIEEM PIEMA, Managing Director at United Environmental Services (UES) Ltd in January 2025. The site is primarily intensively farmed agricultural land, which is of low ecological distinctiveness. Higher quality habitats are constrained to the field and site boundaries, with Beach Hill Wood Site of Biological Importance (SBI) located to the northeast of site.

Designated sites

European protected designated sites

There are four European protected designated sites located within 10km of the proposed development site:

- West Midlands Mosses Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

West Midlands Mosses SAC is located approximately 4.1km to the south of the proposed development site. The site is designated for its natural dystrophic lakes and ponds and

transition mires and quaking bogs, for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

- Midland Meres & Mosses Phase 1 Ramsar

Midland Meres & Mosses Phase 1 Ramsar is located approximately 5.4km to the southwest of the proposed development site, at its closest point. It forms a geographically diverse series of lowland open water and peatland sites in the northwest midlands of England and northeast Wales. The Ramsar site supports a number of rare plant species associated with wetland including cowbane *Cicuta virosa* and elongated sedge *Carex elongata*. Also present are the nationally scarce bryophytes waved fork-moss *Dicranum affine* and golden bog-moss *Sphagnum pulchrum*.

Bird species occurring at levels of national importance include cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, gadwall *Anas strepera*, pochard *Aythya farina*, and shoveler *Anas clypeata*.

- Midland Meres & Mosses Phase 2 Ramsar

Midland Meres & Mosses Phase 2 Ramsar is located approximately 6.3km to the southwest of the proposed development site, at its closest point. The site's primary interest is its wide range of lowland wetland types and successional stages within a distinct biogeographical area.

It supports a number of rare species of plants associated with wetlands, including the nationally scarce cowbane and elongated sedge. Also present are the nationally scarce bryophytes waved fork-moss and golden bog-moss. The Ramsar site also supports an assemblage of invertebrates including several rare species. There are 16 species of British Red Data Book insect listed for this site including the following endangered species: the moth *Glyphipteryx lathamella*, the caddisfly *Hagenella clathrata* and the sawfly *Trichiosoma vitellinae*.

Bird species occurring at levels of national importance include northern shoveler *Spatula clypeata*, great cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, great bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, and water rail *Rallus aquaticus*.

- Oak Mere SAC

Oak Mere SAC is located approximately 6.3km to the southwest of the proposed development site, at its closest point. The site is designated for its oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*), and transition mires and quaking bogs.

Nationally protected designated sites

There is one nationally protected designated site located within 2km of the proposed development site, Marshall's Arm, Hartford Local Nature Reserve (LNR), which is located approximately 1.9km southeast of the proposed development site, at its closest point.

Non-statutorily designated sites

A record search has not been undertaken for this site. However, two Sites of Biological Importance are known to be present onsite: Beach Hill Wood and an unnamed pond.

Summary

The development site is considered to be a sufficient distance from all statutorily designated sites that there will be no impacts as a result of the construction works or during occupation. The proposed development site lies within a risk zone where Natural England request that they are not consulted on a development of this type.

The two SBIs present onsite should be retained as part of the proposed development, with potential construction impacts addressed as part of a construction and environmental management plan (CEMP). An 8.5ha nature reserve is proposed adjacent to Beach Hill Wood SBI, which will serve to protect and enhance the existing ancient woodland.

Protected species and habitats

UES have identified various ecological receptors present, or potentially present onsite, notably; great crested newts (GCN) *Triturus cristatus*, bats, breeding birds, badgers *Meles meles*, trees, hedgerows, woodland and ponds. Depending on the extent of the development, further botanical and terrestrial invertebrate surveys may be required in relation to Beach Hill Wood SBI. Based on the preliminary findings and knowledge of the local area, further surveys in relation to wintering birds, reptiles, otters and water voles are unlikely to be required.

Great crested newts

A GCN impact assessment of ponds on and within 500m of site was undertaken by UES in June 2025, including eDNA analysis. There are four onsite ponds and sixteen offsite ponds within 500m of site. All of the onsite ponds were found to be negative for GCN. GCN were recorded as present within two ponds approximately 220m to the northwest of site, which are known to have supported GCN historically and have previously been subject to a European protected species mitigation licence. Although the site has potential support terrestrial GCN, only a small proportion of the site (3.3ha) is located within 500m of the known GCN ponds. This can be compensated for by registering the site under Natural England's district level licensing (DLL) scheme. By joining Natural England's district level licensing scheme, you comply with your legal duty to protect great crested newts by paying for offsite compensation ponds instead of carrying out detailed surveys and applying for a mitigation licence onsite.

Bats

No buildings are present onsite which could be used by roosting bats. Although numerous mature trees are present onsite; the illustrative masterplan indicates that the majority of trees onsite can be retained as part of the scheme design. Trees due to be removed or subject to arboricultural works should be subject to a ground level tree assessment (GLTA) to assess their potential to support roosting bats. GLTAs, and any further aerial tree assessments (ATA) if required, can be undertaken any time of year and often reduce the overall scope of survey work required as trees can be discounted due to a lack of potential roosting features (PRFs). If following these inspections, the trees still have potential to support roosting bats then further surveys would be required during the peak bat survey season (May to August inclusive). The findings of these surveys will ensure

that if any bat roosts are present onsite, then suitable mitigation and compensation measures can be implemented as part of the development.

Bat activity surveys are currently being undertaken by UES, which involves installing static detectors and undertaking transect surveys across April to October inclusive. The findings of these surveys will ensure that any important foraging and commuting corridors, if present onsite, are retained as part of the development proposals.

Breeding birds

Hedgerows, trees, woodland and scrub all provide suitable nesting opportunities for breeding birds in the summer. Breeding bird surveys were undertaken by UES across April to mid-July inclusive. The species recorded represent a typical hedgerow and farmland bird assemblage. Birds of conservation concern (BoCC) recorded during the surveys include house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, greenfinch *Chloris chloris*, skylark *Alauda arvensis* and linnet *Linaria cannabina*. Amber list species observed include song thrush *Turdus philomelos*, dunnoek *Prunella modularis*, wood pigeon *Columba palumbus* and wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*.

The majority of birds were recorded using the onsite hedgerows or woodlands, which can be retained and enhanced as part of the proposed development. As only a single skylark was recorded during the surveys, bespoke compensation is not required, and the necessary mitigation can be addressed through a sensitive onsite landscaping strategy.

Badgers

A large sett and series of entrances have been identified along the southern development boundary for a distance of approximately 70m. Further activity surveys should be undertaken to ascertain how badgers are using the sett and determine whether a mitigation licence is required from Natural England. Natural England has guidelines on the types of activity that it considers should be licensed within certain distances of sett entrances and the following activities all require a licence:

- Use of heavy machinery within 30 metres of any sett entrance.
- Use of lighter machinery (particularly any digging operations) within 20 metres of any sett entrance.
- Light work such as hand digging or scrub clearance within 10 metres.

If the above works are proposed within 30m of the sett, a licence will be required to close the sett between July and November inclusive. Depending on the development proposals and usage of the sett, this may entail the construction of an artificial sett onsite, or redesigning the scheme to avoid impacts on badgers.

Trees, hedgerows and woodland

Numerous trees, hedgerows and woodland are present on and adjacent to site. The illustrative masterplan indicates that the majority of trees, hedgerows and woodland onsite can be retained as part of the scheme design; however, a tree survey and arboricultural impact assessment should be undertaken in accordance with BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction to identify any opportunities or constraints onsite. A hedgerow survey should also be undertaken to assess whether the hedgerows onsite are ecologically and / or historically important under the Hedgerow Regulations (1997).

Ponds

The illustrative masterplan indicates that ponds onsite are due to be retained as part of the proposed development. If proposals change and the ponds are due to be impacted, a predictive system for multimetrics (PSYM) survey should be undertaken, which uses the location of a pond and geographical data, as well as its plant and invertebrate composition, to determine the overall ecological quality of the waterbody.

Beach Hill Wood SBI

The illustrative masterplan indicates that Beach Hill Wood SBI will be retained as part of the proposed development. If development proposals change, then further botanical surveys and terrestrial invertebrate surveys may be required of any woodland habitats that are due to be impacted and / or to inform management prescriptions.

Biodiversity net gain

The current optioneering and development principles follow the mitigation hierarchy of choosing poor quality ecological land in the first instance rather than higher quality habitats. In summary, around 90% of all habitats affected are unequivocally of 'low ecological distinctiveness', in this case, vast fields of homogeneous cereal crops which are actively farmed.

The proposed development scheme utilises areas of low biodiversity value for development, ensuring that the highest quality habitats are retained as part of the scheme design, where practicable. In addition, an 8.5ha nature reserve is proposed adjacent to Beach Hill Wood SBI, which will serve to protect and enhance the existing ancient woodland. On this basis, it is considered likely that the scheme will achieve a 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) onsite.

Conclusion

UES were instructed by Bloor Homes North West to identify the key ecological constraints onsite and ensure that the highest quality habitats were retained as part of the scheme design, where practicable. Pre-application discussions between UES and the client were taken at the earliest stage to inform design, layout and options in early adoption of the mitigation hierarchy. This has allowed for significant habitat retention, enhancement and creation to be incorporated into the illustrative masterplan.

The proposed development layout has been designed to be ecologically sympathetic and ensures that the retained and proposed green infrastructure onsite creates effective links with existing ecological networks offsite promoting the natural distribution of species.

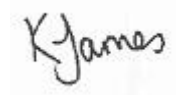
In summary, it is considered likely that the scheme could be accomplished with minimal impacts on priority habitats, if existing habitats along the field boundaries are retained and enhanced where possible. Early adoption of the mitigation hierarchy, such as retaining the ponds, trees, hedgerows and woodland, will ensure impacts on protected species, if present, are minimised. Furthermore, the development also presents an opportunity to enhance the habitats available to wildlife onsite, through the creation of a new nature reserve and securing the long-term management of Beach Hill Wood SBI.

Further surveys undertaken as part of any planning application will identify any mitigation and compensation measures required to minimise any potential impact on ecology and nature

conservation. Any planning application will also be supported by a BNG assessment, which will ensure the site achieves a 10% biodiversity net gain.

If you require any further information or wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact myself or another member of staff at UES.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K James". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kathryn James BSc MRes MCIEEM
Senior Project Manager
United Environmental Services Ltd