



Ecological Impact Assessment

West Hill Village Hall, West Hill

Client: West Hill Parish Council

Date: May 2021

Richard Green Ecology Ltd

The Natural Selection

9C, Mill Park Industrial Estate, White Cross Road, Woodbury Salterton, Exeter, EX5 1EL

01395 239234

office@richardgreenecology.co.uk

www.richardgreenecology.co.uk

Reg no. 07287436



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1.0	01/05/2021	Jen Paget BSc (Hons)	William Dommett MSc MCIEEM

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Executive summary

It is proposed to create a new pedestrian route linking the Village Hall car park to West Hill Road, located in West Hill, Devon, EX11 1UQ, NGR SY 06845 93742.

An extended phase I habitat survey of the site was undertaken on 21 April 2021 by Richard Green Ecology Ltd.

The site is not within any designated sites for wildlife interest and there are no statutory designated sites within 500 m of the site.

The development would result in the loss of approximately 30 m² of modified grassland, some small shrubs, and 10 m² of species-rich hedge, considered to result in a negligible ecological impact.

In mitigation, it is recommended to plant a new native hedge adjacent to the east side of the new footpath, connecting to the existing hedge and using sensitive lighting to illuminate the path.

Other ecological mitigation measures recommended include sensitive timing of works, habitat manipulation to avoid potential impacts on reptiles, and searching the hedge prior to clearance for protected and notable species.

Wildlife Checklist

Protected and priority species (Grid reference of the site: NGR SY 06845 93742)

Species - terrestrial, intertidal, marine	Walkover shows that suitable habitat present and reasonably likely that the species will be found? <u>Yes or No</u>	Detailed survey needed to clarify impacts and mitigation requirements?	Detailed survey carried out and included?	Species Present or Assumed to be present on the site <u>Indicate with P or A and name the species</u>	Impact on species?	Detailed Conservation Action Statement included? Sets out actions needed in relation to avoidance / mitigation / compensation / enhancement	EPS licence required?
Bats (roost)	x						
Bats (flight line / foraging habitat)	✓	x		A	Not if recommendations followed	✓	x
Dormice	✓	x	✓	x			
Otters	x						
Great crested newts (*check consultation zone)	x						
Cirl buntings (*check consultation zone)	x						
Barn owls	x						
Other Schedule 1 birds	x						
Breeding birds	✓	x		A – Turdus sp.	Not if recommendations followed	✓	x
Reptiles	✓	x		A	Not if recommendations followed	✓	x
Native crayfish	x						
Water voles	x						
Badgers	x						
Other protected species	x						
UK BAP priority species	✓	x		A - Hedgehog, common toad	Not if recommendations followed	✓	x

Local BAP key species (other than those included above)	✗						
Invasive species	✓	✗		P – Crocosmia	Not if recommendations followed	✓	✗

Designations / important habitats

Designation	Within the site or potential impact. <u>Yes or No</u>	Name of the site / habitat	Detailed Conservation Action Statement included in report?	Relevant organisation consulted & response included in the application?
Terrestrial, intertidal, marine				
Statutory designations				
European designations - Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and RAMSAR site or within Greater Horseshoe consultation zone	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A
Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) (not before 2012)	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non statutory wildlife designations				
County or Local Wildlife Site (CWS\LWS)	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ancient woodland	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A
Special Verge	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A
Habitat of Principal Importance / BAP habitat	✓	Hedge	✓	N/A
Local Biodiversity Network	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

It is proposed to create a new pedestrian route linking the Village Hall car park to West Hill Road, located in West Hill, Devon, EX11 1UQ, NGR SY 06845 93742.

The study area is defined by the red line boundary shown on the design plan (drawing no. SK 001 P4) from Phil Jones Associates Ltd (PJA), approximately 600 m². Refer to Figure 1.

The extended phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken on 21 April 2021 by Richard Green Ecology Ltd.

This report considers the potential impacts of the Proposed Development on habitats and protected/notable species. It includes the findings of the survey and makes recommendations for ecological mitigation, in accordance with national and local planning policy and BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity - Code of practice for planning and development.

1.2 Planning considerations

1.2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), February 2019

The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) outlines the Government's commitment to protect and enhance sites of biodiversity value, and minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity, including the principle of refusing planning permission if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for.

1.2.2 East Devon District Local Plan

The East Devon District Local Plan 2013 to 2031 (adopted in 2016) contains the following relevant strategy and policy:

Strategy 47 – Nature Conservation and Geology

All development proposals will need to:

1. Conserve the biodiversity and geodiversity value of land and buildings and minimise fragmentation of habitats.
2. Maximise opportunities for restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats.
3. Incorporate beneficial biodiversity conservation features.

Development proposals that would cause a direct or indirect adverse effect upon internationally and nationally designated sites will not be permitted unless:

- a) They cannot be located on alternative sites that would cause less or no harm.
- b) The public benefits of the development clearly outweigh the impacts on the features of the site and the wider network of natural habitats.
- c) Prevention, mitigation and compensation measures are provided.

- d) In respect of Internationally designated sites, the integrity of the site will be maintained.

EN5 - Wildlife Habitats and Features:

Wherever possible sites supporting important wildlife habitats or features not otherwise protected by policies will be protected from development proposals which would result in the loss of or damage to their nature conservation value, particularly where these form a link between or buffer to designated wildlife sites. Where potential arises positive opportunities for habitat creation will be encouraged through the development process.

Where development is permitted on such sites mitigation will be required to reduce the negative impacts and where this is not possible adequate compensatory habitat enhancement or creation schemes will be required and/or measures required to be taken to ensure that the impacts of the development on valued natural features and wildlife have been mitigated to their fullest practical extent.

2 Methods

2.1 Desk study

2.1.1 Designated sites

A search for sites designated for nature conservation and any notable habitats was undertaken on the DEFRA Magic website (<http://magic.defra.gov.uk>). This resource includes statutory designated sites (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest, SSSIs) and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats. As impacts outside of the site are limited, only sites within 500 m of the site are noted.

2.1.2 Protected and notable species

Given the small extent and limited effects of the proposal, it is considered that any protected species outside the site would be unaffected. As a detailed survey has been undertaken and any protected species present or potentially present on the site would have been identified, it was not considered necessary to obtain any species records from a local records centre.

2.2 Field survey

2.2.1 Extended phase 1 habitat survey

An extended phase I habitat survey of the site was undertaken following recommendations made by the former Institute of Environmental Assessment (1995). Habitats present are shown in Figure 2 using the primary habitat symbology based on the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) system. Note was taken of the more conspicuous flora, and any evidence of, or potential for the presence of protected and alien invasive species was recorded.

2.2.2 Timings and weather conditions

Date	Method	Timing	Personnel	Weather conditions
21/04/2021	Extended phase 1 habitat survey	Daytime	William Dommett	7/8 oktas, light wind, light drizzle, 12°C

2.2.3 Personnel

William Dommett holds Natural England scientific licences to disturb dormice [2016-20777-CLS-CLS], bats [2015-15554-CLS-CLS], great crested newts [2017-29119-CLS-CLS] and barn owls [CL29/00117]. He is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

2.3 Evaluation

Habitat evaluations are based on guidance from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). The level of value of specific ecological receptors is assigned using a geographic frame of reference, i.e. international value being most important, then national, regional, county, district and lastly, local.

Value judgements are based on various characteristics that can be used to identify ecological resources or features likely to be important in terms of biodiversity. These include site designations (such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)), or for undesignated features, the size, conservation status (locally, nationally or internationally), and the quality of the ecological resource. In terms of the latter, 'quality' can refer to habitats (for instance if they are particularly diverse, or a good example of a specific habitat type), other features (such as wildlife corridors or mosaics of habitats) or species populations or assemblages.

3 Survey Results

3.1 Desk study

The site is not within any designated sites for wildlife interest and there are no statutory designated sites within 500 m of the site.

3.2 Field survey

3.2.1 Habitats

The site was located in the centre of West Hill. It consisted of an area of well managed modified grassland, some semi-mature trees, ornamental shrubs, a beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) dominated species-rich (more than 5 woody species per 30 m) hedge bank, a small fence and beech hedging, patch of Montbretia and hardstanding.

Refer to Annex B for a list of plant species recorded on the site.

Aerial photograph showing the site and surrounding landscape



3.3 Protected species

3.3.1 Bats

Bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

No potential roost features (PRFs) were found in any of the trees on the site.

The trees and hedge are likely to provide occasional foraging and commuting habitat for bats. Given the small size of the site, the site is considered of no more than of local value for bats.

3.3.2 Dormice

Dormice are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Dormice are known to be present throughout Devon (including West Hill – surveyors pers. knowledge) and live in hedgerows. No dormice nests were found in the section of hedgerow proposed for removal.

The hedgerow is relatively isolated from the wider hedgerow and woodland network and is surrounded by residential housings and roads. The presence of dormice in the section of hedgerow proposed for removal is considered very unlikely.

3.3.3 Nesting birds

Nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

An inactive thrush (*Turdus* sp.) nest was found in part of the hedge. The hedge, trees and shrubs offer potential habitat for nesting birds.

Given the small size of the site, the site is considered of no more than of local value for nesting birds.

3.3.4 Reptiles

Common reptiles, such as slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*) are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) against killing and injury and are species of principle importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act, 2006).

The area of grassland was well managed and does not provide optimal reptile habitat. The margins around the hedge, hedge bank and shrub borders may be used occasionally by common reptiles, e.g., slow worms.

Given the small area of suitable vegetation on site to support reptiles and its isolation from other suitable habitat, the site is not considered of more than local value for reptiles.

3.3.5 Amphibians

Great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Common toad (*Bufo bufo*) is a species of principle importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act, 2006).

The site is within a great crested newt (GCN) consultation zone, i.e., within 5 km of a known GCN record. However, there are no ponds on the site or within 500 m of the site (from aerial photography/OS maps). Therefore, it is unlikely that GCN are present on site.

Other amphibians such as common toad (*Bufo bufo*) may be present in the hedge and hedge margin.

Given the small area of suitable vegetation on site to support amphibians and its isolation from other suitable habitat, the site is not considered of more than local value for amphibians.

3.3.6 *Hedgehog*

Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) is a species of principle importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act, 2006).

The hedgerow, hedge margin and areas of shrubs provide suitable foraging and shelter habitat for hedgehogs. It is considered possible that hedgehogs are occasionally present on site.

3.3.1 *Invasive species*

It is an offence under Section 14(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to plant or cause the spread of any plant listed under Schedule 9 of the Act.

A small patch of Montbretia (*Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora*), a Schedule 9 plant species, was recorded growing by a small fence to the north of the hedge.

4 Assessment, recommendations and mitigation

4.1 *Habitats*

4.1.1 *Impacts*

The development would result in the loss of approximately 30 m² of modified grassland, some small shrubs, and 10 m² of species-rich hedge, considered to result in a negligible ecological impact. There may be a requirement to remove two semi-mature silver birch (*Betula pendula*) trees, subject to arboricultural advice.

4.1.2 *Mitigation*

It is recommended that the section of hedge proposed for removal be cut back to no less than 200 mm above ground by hand between November and March when any protected species, e.g., reptiles, would be in hibernation below ground or likely absent, e.g., nesting birds. Care should be taken to avoid disturbing the earth bank until at least mid-May when it can be removed as the risk of hibernating species being present is minimal. If this is not possible, a detailed hand-search should be undertaken of the hedge and bank during removal, to ensure no protected species are harmed.

It is recommended to plant a new native species hedge adjacent to the east of the new pedestrian route. Any trees removed should also be replaced.

4.2 *Bats*

4.2.1 *Impacts*

The loss of 30 m² of modified grassland and 10 m² of hedge would have a negligible impact on potential bat foraging and commuting habitat from the wider area.

It is proposed to install three lighting columns/bollards along the new pathway. Any new lighting could adversely affect foraging and commuting bats within the area.

4.2.2 Mitigation - habitats

Any proposed lighting should follow the guidance in 'Bats and artificial lighting in the UK' (BCT and ILP 2018) to avoid potential impacts on foraging and commuting bats.

It is recommended that directional bollard lighting be used, using LEDs within the warm spectrum of light <2700 k, as opposed to full height latens.

4.3 Nesting birds

4.3.1 Impacts

The removal of hedge and some small shrubs would result in the negligible loss of potential bird nesting habitat.

4.3.2 Mitigation

Any potential bird nesting habitat should be cleared between October and February (outside of the nesting season) or if this is not possible, a thorough inspection for any active nests should be undertaken immediately before it is removed. Should birds be nesting at that time, work will have to wait until the young birds have fledged.

4.4 Reptiles

4.4.1 Impacts

It is possible that slow worm may be present within the hedge margin and hedge bank. Removal of these habitats could potentially result in the killing or injury of slow worms.

4.4.2 Mitigation

As a precaution, the hedge bank should be removed under the supervision of an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW). The ECoW should thoroughly check the earth bank for any reptiles and be present when it is dismantled, e.g., by a digger. Any reptiles found should be captured and moved outside of the clearance boundary. The earth bank should be removed in the active period for reptiles, i.e., between April and October, to avoid any potential impacts on hibernating reptiles.

The area of modified grassland should continue to be strimmed and maintained at 100 mm high (or less) prior to works, to discourage any reptiles from these areas.

4.5 Amphibians

4.5.1 Impacts

The hedge bank may provide habitat for common toads and other amphibians, which may be at risk of killing or injury through hedge clearance.

4.5.2 Mitigation

The removal of the hedge bank should be under the supervision of an ECoW (as 4.4.2). Any amphibians found should be captured and moved outside of the clearance area.

4.6 Hedgehog

4.6.1 Impacts

Clearance of the hedge could result in the killing or injury of hedgehog (if present).

4.6.2 Mitigation

A walkover of the site prior to clearance should be undertaken to thoroughly check the hedge for any hedgehogs. Any hedgehogs found should be captured and moved outside of the clearance/development boundary.

4.7 Invasive species

4.7.1 Impacts and recommendations

Measures should be put in place to avoid the spread of invasive Montbretia into the wild. As there is only a small amount present it is recommended that the plants are dug out by hand and the corms disposed of appropriately, e.g., to licenced landfill.

5 Conclusions

The development would result in the loss of approximately 30 m² of modified grassland and 10 m² of species-rich hedge, considered to result in a negligible ecological impact.

In mitigation, it is recommended to plant a new native hedge adjacent to the east side of the new footpath, connecting to the existing hedge and using sensitive lighting to illuminate the path.

Other ecological mitigation measures recommended include sensitive timing of works, habitat manipulation to avoid potential impacts on reptiles, and searching the hedge prior to clearance for protected and notable species.

6 References

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UK Habitat Classification Working Group (2018). UK Habitat Classification - Habitat Definitions V1.0

Figures

Figure 1 - Proposed site plan

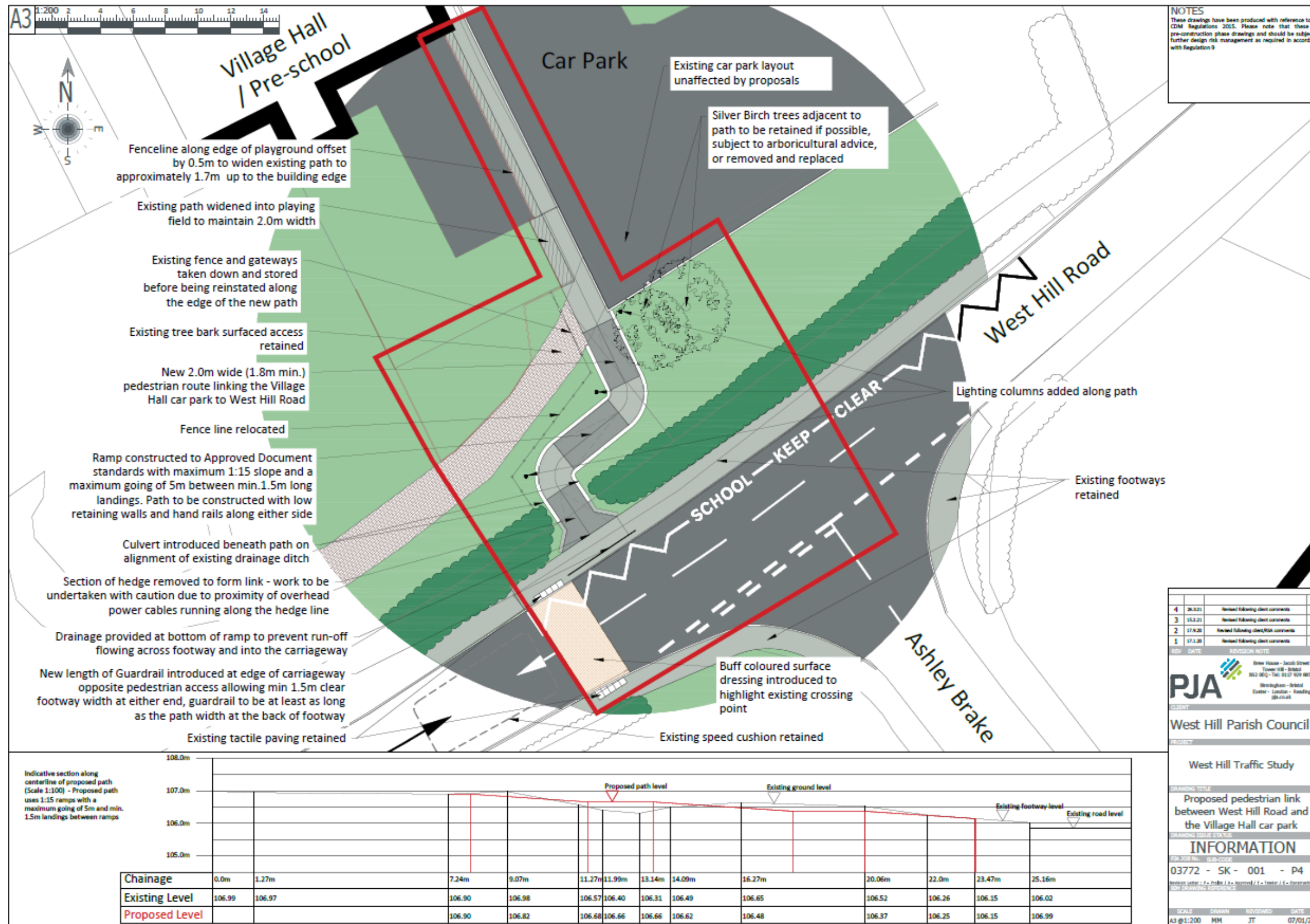


Figure 2 – Phase 1 habitat map



Appendices

A Photographs

Species-rich hedge (southern elevation). Approximate area of hedge removal highlighted



Area of modified grassland, existing footpath, semi-mature trees, beech hedge, fence and gate – view east



Ornamental shrubs, modified grassland, and semi-mature trees



B Plant species list

Modified grassland	
Common name	Scientific name
Annual meadow grass	<i>Poa annua</i>
Bittercress	<i>Cardamine sp.</i>
Broadleaved plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>
Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>
Common mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>
Cow parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>
Cuckoo flower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>
Daffodil	<i>Narcissus sp.</i>
Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale agg.</i>
Speedwell	<i>Veronica sp.</i>
Lesser celandine	<i>Ficaria verna</i>
Mint sp.	<i>Mentha sp.</i>
Speedwell	<i>Veronica spp.</i>
Ribwort plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
White clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Yorkshire fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>

Trees and shrubs	
Common name	Scientific name
Buddleia	<i>Buddleia davidii</i>
Cherry laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>
Common beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Silver birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>

Hedgebank and hedge margin	
Common name	Scientific name
Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>
Common beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Common gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>
Common Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>
Common nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>

Dog-rose	<i>Rosa canina</i>
Dove's-foot crane's-bill	<i>Geranium molle</i>
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>
Lords and ladies	<i>Arum maculatum</i>
Navelwort	<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>
English oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Privet	<i>Ligustrum sp.</i>
Red campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>
Ribwort plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
Willow	<i>Salix sp.</i>
Wood sage	<i>Teucrium scorodonia</i>
Male fern	<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>
Polypody	<i>Polypodium vulgare</i>

C Conservation Action Statement and Summary Balance Sheet

Address:	Village Hall car park to West Hill Road, located at, West Hill, Devon, EX11 1UQ
OS grid reference:	SY 06845 93742
Planning application reference:	Not known

This net gain/loss table assumes all recommendations made in this report are implemented in full						
Ecological receptor	Potential impact	Avoidance measure	Mitigation measure	Compensation measure	Enhancement measure	Net gain / loss for receptor
Habitats	Loss of 30 m ² of modified grassland and 10 m ² of species-rich hedge.	Protect retained habitats during construction.	Plant new hedge to east of new footpath.		N/A	Neutral
Bats	Indirect loss of bat commuting and foraging habitat through increased lighting on the site.	N/A	Use of low-level bollard lighting in accordance with ILP guidance.		N/A	Neutral
Nesting birds	Loss of potential nesting habitat.	Remove habitats outside of bird nesting period.	Plant new hedge to east of new footpath.		N/A	Neutral
Reptiles and amphibians	Minor loss of habitat and potential killing or injury.	Managed site with a low sward height and time works to avoid impacts on hibernating animals.	Hedge clearance supervised by an ECoW.	N/A	N/A	Neutral
Hedgehog	Minor loss habitat and potential killing or injury.	Protect retained habitats during construction.	Hedge clearance supervised by an ECoW.	N/A	N/A	Neutral
Invasive species	Potential to spread	N/A	Remove from site	N/A	N/A	Neutral