

ECOLOGICAL SCOPING ASSESSMENT



Site Name:	Farnborough North	Location (Address):	GU14 8AQ
Grid Reference:	SU 87754 56613	Report Date:	14/10/2020

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69	The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1012/contents/made
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SCOPE OF WORKS *(Briefly describe the extent of works planned to be undertaken at the site):*

Due to health and safety concerns it has been proposed that a footbridge should be installed to replace the current pedestrian level crossing. In accordance with Network Rail's environmental policy and relevant UK legislation, an ecological assessment was required to determine any ecological constraints to the proposed works.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site and adjacent habitats (where access was available) was conducted by Ecologist [REDACTED] 20th September 2020. The purpose of the survey was to determine the value of the site and surrounding areas for protected and notable species and check for any evidence of their presence, as well as the presence of any protected or notable habitats. The survey was carried out with specific regard for the presence or otherwise of badgers (*Meles meles*), bats, hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), great crested newts (GCNs) (*Triturus cristatus*), nesting birds, and reptiles, as well as the potential for any other protected or notable species or any invasive species to be present. In addition, as part of the desktop study forming part of the overall assessment, the presence of any statutory or non-statutory ecological designations on or adjacent to the site was determined using the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) resource and records of protected and notable species and any non-statutory designated sites not available through MAGIC for a 1 km radius surrounding the site were also requested from Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre (SBIC).

SITE DESCRIPTION AND NOTES *(Description of ecological features identified on site):*

Overview

Farnborough North station is in the town of Farnborough, Hampshire. The immediate surroundings consist of a school to the west; shops, business properties and residential properties to the south; and a strip of ruderal vegetation with patches of trees such as sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) to the north and east. A footpath is situated directly south of the station and runs east to Frimley Green. A community garden and an area of tall ruderal vegetation, bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) scrub, ivy (*Hedera helix*), and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), and sycamore (*A. pseudoplatanus*) trees is present to the east, south of the footpath. A treeline and area of unimproved grassland are situated south of the station east and west of the running line respectively.

In the wider landscape the urban area of Farnborough extends to the north, south, and west; the main road (A331) and fishing lakes are present to the east followed by the villages of Frimley Green and Mytchett. There are several large blocks of woodland approximately 2 km east, 2.8 km north-west, 4.5 km south-west, and 5 km north of the site. In addition, Blackwater River runs north to south approximately 160 m west of the site.

Biodiversity Baseline Units

3.52

Designated Sites

There are no statutory designated ecological sites located on or adjacent to the proposed work site, according to MAGIC. However, there are several statutory designated sites within 5km of the site. These are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Statutory designated sites within 5 km of the site and non-statutory sites within 1 km of the site.

Level of designation	Designation	Name	Approximate Distance & direction from site
International	SPA	Thames Basin Heaths	1770m south-east
		Thames Basin Heaths	2840 m north-west
		Thames Basin Heaths	4020 m north-east
		Thames Basin Heaths	4130 m south-west
	Ramsar	N/A	N/A
	SAC	Thames Basin Heaths	1770 m south-east
		Thursley, Ash, Pirbright, and Coghham	2430 m south-east
		Thames Basin Heaths	2840 m north-west
		Thursley, Ash, Pirbright, and Coghham	4020 m north-east
		Thames Basin Heaths	4130 m south-west
Thames Basin Heaths		4130 m south-west	
National	SSSI	Basingstoke Canal	1610 m east & 4390 m south
		Ash to Brookwood Heaths	1920 m east
		Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons	2880 m north-west
		Foxlease and Ancells Meadows	3660 m west
		Colony Bog at Bagshot Heath	4150 m east
		Blackwater Valley	4150 m north-west
		Eelmoor Marsh	4200 m south-west
	NNR	N/A	N/A
County	LNR	Snaky Lane	2660 m south
		Lakeside Park	4910 m south
Local	Ancient woodland	N/A	N/A

Due to the distance of the work site from these designated sites and the small-scale, localised nature of the works, it is expected that any potential impacts (either direct or indirect) to these or any other statutory designated sites in the wider area will be negligible.

Non-Statutory Designated Sites

There are no non-statutory designated ecological sites located on or adjacent to the proposed work site, according to MAGIC. However, the following non-statutory designated sites are located within a 1km radius of the site:

- Hay Meadow west of Coleford Bridge Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI);
- Coleford Bridge SNCI;
- Frimley Hatches (including Frimley reedbeds) SNCI.

Due to the distance of the work site from these designated sites and the small-scale, localised nature of the works, it is expected that any potential impacts (either direct or indirect) to these or any other non-statutory designated sites in the wider area will be negligible.



Great Crested Newts

The area of ruderal vegetation east of the station, north of the footpath provides suitable terrestrial habitat for GCNs. In addition, the area of tall ruderal vegetation and scrub also provides suitable terrestrial habitat for GCNs.

The desktop study found five ponds within 500m of the site (c.70 m east; c.130 m north; c.200 m south-east; c.260m south-east; c.270 m north). In addition, the desktop study found four fishing lakes within 500 m of the site. Although the fishing lakes are within the roaming range of GCNs, the lakes provide unsuitable breeding habitat for GCNs due to the presence of large numbers of fish. Therefore, a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI)

assessment (Oldham *et al.*, 2000¹; ARG UK, 2010²) was not undertaken on these lakes. Of the five ponds, three were located within 250 m of the site. Research³ has found that, while 500 m is considered to be the typical maximum roaming range of GCNs from a pond which they occupy, in reality they will rarely roam further than 250 m from a pond which they occupy if suitable terrestrial habitat is present within this radius. For this reason, the two ponds outside of a 250 m radius of the site did not undergo a HSI assessment. The three ponds within a 250 m radius of the site did not undergo a HSI assessment due to a lack of access.

However, the data search conducted by SBIC found no records of GCNs within 1 km of the site. Furthermore, according to MAGIC there have been no granted EPS licences for GCNs within 5 km of the site; the closest pond on record surveyed for GCNs (c.920 m north) found them to be absent; and data collected from Class Survey Licence returns shows the closest record of GCNs is 4240 m east from the site. This is substantially outside of the GCN roaming range and is separated from the site by an urbanised landscape, including busy roads.

Based on a combination of the above factors, GCNs are considered unlikely to be encountered on site and, in turn, any impacts to them as a result of the works are expected to be negligible.

Reptiles

The site is considered to be of high suitability for reptiles. The area of ruderal vegetation east of the station, north of the footpath provides excellent habitat for a wide variety of reptile species. Furthermore, the area of unimproved grassland and the area of tall ruderal vegetation with bramble scrub provide suitable habitat for a wide variety of reptile species. In addition, the data search conducted by SBIC found records of adder (*Vipera berus*), grass snake (*Natrix natrix*), slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*), and common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) within 1 km of the site.

Providing mitigation measures are incorporated into the works, any impacts to reptiles are expected to be low.

Nesting Birds

The site was considered to be of moderate suitability for nesting, with the trees and bramble scrub providing suitable nesting habitat, but with a sub-optimal vegetation structure overall to provide high suitability for nesting birds.

Providing basic mitigation measures are implemented, any impacts to nesting birds as a result of the works are expected to be low.

Dormice

No evidence of dormice was observed during the survey. In addition, the habitat on site was suboptimal for dormice. Additionally, according to MAGIC there have been no EPS licences granted for dormice within a 5 km radius of the site. Furthermore, the data search conducted by SBIC found no records of dormice within 1 km of the site.

Due to the above factors, it is unlikely that dormice will be using the site. Therefore, any impacts to local dormouse populations is thought to be negligible.

Bats

The majority of trees on site were identified as having negligible bat roost potential. However, one mature Alder (*A. glutinosa*) tree situated in the area of tall ruderal vegetation east of the station, south of the footpath (approximate grid reference SU 87765 56638) was identified as having low bat roost potential due to being covered with ivy (*H. helix*). In addition, the vegetation on and surrounding the site provides some suitable foraging habitat for bats.

Although roosting and foraging habitat has been identified on site, providing mitigation measures are implemented, any impacts to bats as a result of the works are expected to be negligible-low.

¹Oldham *et al.* (2010) Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). *Herpetological Journal*, 10(4), pp. 143 – 155.

²Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (2010) *ARG UK Advice Note 5: Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index*. Available: <http://www.arguk.org/download-document/9-great-crested-newt-habitat-suitability-index-arg-advice-note-5>

³Cresswell, W. and Whitworth, R. (2004) *An assessment of the efficiency of capture techniques and the value of different habitats for great crested newts*. English Nature Research Reports 576. English Nature, Peterborough.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>If yes, describe below</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High suitability for reptiles; • Moderate suitability for nesting birds; • Alder tree with low suitability for roosting bats; • Suitable foraging habitat for bats. 					
FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>If yes, describe below</i>
<p>If the tree identified as having low potential for roosting bats is to be felled or have any other work undertaken on it then this should be carried out under ecological supervision. The trees should be soft felled, and the sections of the tree should be left overnight to allow any potential roosting bats to disperse.</p> <p>If any night works are required at any stage, a sensitive lighting regime should be implemented to minimise unnecessary light spill and consequent disturbance of any foraging or commuting bats present in the area.</p> <p>Any vegetation clearance works should ideally be timed to commence outside of the nesting season, which is defined as running from March to August, inclusive. If this is not feasible for any reason, a nesting bird survey must be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist (SQE) shortly prior to the start of works to confirm the absence of any active nests. In the event that any active nests are found during this check or at any point during the works, a suitable exclusion zone must be put in place around the nest, with no work taking place in the area until the nest can be confirmed as no longer active by a SQE. In addition, if works take place during the nesting season, they should be carried out under a watching brief by a SQE.</p> <p>As the site has been identified as having high potential to support reptiles, reptile surveys should be carried out to establish whether reptiles are present. This is in line with Natural England's standing advice: (https://www.gov.uk/reptiles-protection-surveys-and-licences). Standard methods involving a SQE placing 50x50cm sheets of heavy-duty roofing felt (artificial refugia) in areas where they are most likely to be used by reptiles (e.g. in the areas of ruderal vegetation and at the edges of bramble scrub). So far as possible, the artificial refugia should be placed on slightly uneven ground so as not to lie completely flat (to create a varied microclimate).</p> <p>GCNs are considered unlikely to be present on site. However, in the unlikely event that any are encountered during the works, it is a legal requirement to stop work until appropriate discussions have taken place and an alternative work strategy has been agreed, which may include consultation with Natural England.</p> <p>Depending on the time elapsed between the September 2020 ecological survey and any further work to be carried out on site, an update assessment is likely to be required to determine any significant changes in habitat composition and how this may alter the findings discussed above.</p>					



Figure 1. Site location plan.

(Image taken from Google Earth Pro ©2020 Google).



Image 1. Area of tall ruderal vegetation east of the station, north of the footpath.

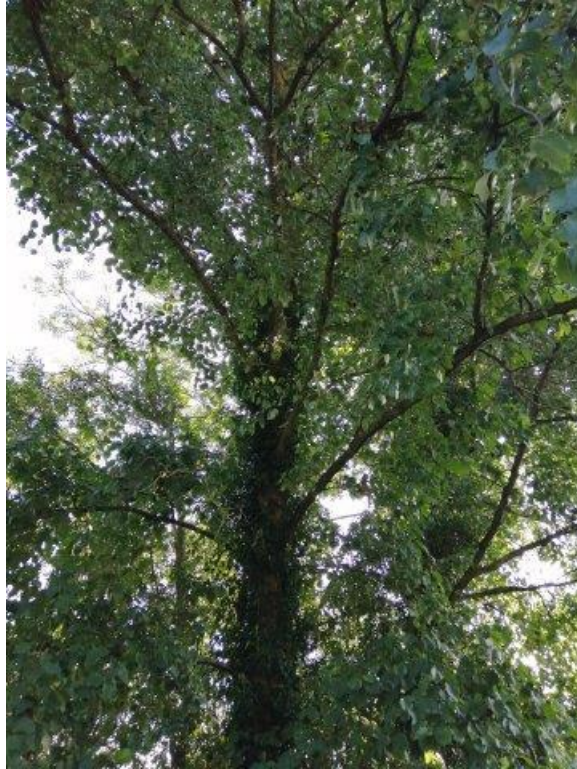


Image 2. Alder tree with low bat roost potential.



Image 3. Area of tall ruderal vegetation and scrub east of the station, south of the footpath.



Image 4. View of the footpath and railway crossing standing east of the station facing west.



Image5. View of the footpath standing east of the station facing east.



Image 6. Treeline and area of unimproved grassland south of the station.