ECOLOGICAL SCOPING ASSESSMENT

Site Name:	The Hatches	**Location (Address):**	GU16 6HG
Grid Reference:	SU 88372 56752	**Report Date:**	13/10/2020

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/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made

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] (Hons) on 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, great crested newts (GCNs) (*Triturus cristatus*), nesting birds, hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), 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

The site is located at the western end of The Hatches, a residential road situated within the village of Frimley Green. The site consists of a length of track running north to south; a pedestrian crossing which is located between the end of The Hatches and a footpath that leads to Farnborough North train station; and the onsite habitats which include unimproved grassland, bare ground, bramble scrub, the edge of a deciduous woodland, a deciduous treeline, and a coniferous treeline.

Directly east of the running line, north of the pedestrian crossing adjacent to the cess is a strip of unimproved grassland with a long sward. A strip of shrub and scrub habitat is also present which contains species such as bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), and Russian vine (*Fallopia baldschuanica*). Towards the northern end of the site the shrub/ scrub habitat changes to a treeline of pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), and beech (*Fagus sylvatica*).

Directly west of the running line, north of the pedestrian crossing adjacent to the cess is a strip of unimproved grassland with a long sward which contains several log piles and patches of bramble (*R. fruticosus*). Adjacent to the unimproved grassland is strip of woodland. Species here include scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), and pedunculate oak (*Q. robur*).

Directly east of the running line, south of the pedestrian crossing adjacent to the cess is a strip of unimproved grassland and bramble (*R. fruticosus*) scrub. Adjacent to this habitat is a patch of deciduous woodland which includes the species pedunculate oak (*Q. robur*), ash (*F. excelsior*), hazel (*C. avellana*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), holly (*I. aquifolium*), bramble (*R. fruticosus*), and bracken (*Pteridium sp.*).

Directly west of the running line, south of the pedestrian crossing is an area of shrub/ scrub habitat measuring approximately 60 m in length. Species here include ash (*F. excelsior*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), hazel (*C. avellana*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), young pedunculate oak (*Q. robur*), a species of honeysuckle (*Lonicera*), bramble (*R. fruticosus*), a species of rose (*Rosa*), and common nettle (*Urtica dioica*). A large pile of

garden waste is also present here. South of this habitat the vegetation adjacent to the cess ends and is replaced by bare ground with a strip of coniferous trees to the east.
In the wider landscape the village of Frimley Green extends to the north and east; fishing lakes are present to the west; and the village of Mytchett is to the south. There are several large blocks of woodland approximately 1 km east, 1 km south-east, and 3.4 km north-west of the site.

Biodiversity Baseline Units
1.01

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

Table 1. Statutory designated sites within 5 km of the site.

Level of designation	Designation	Name	Distance & direction from site
International	SPA	Thames Basin Heaths	1200 m south-east
		Thames Basin Heaths	3360 m west
		Thames Basin Heaths	4660 m south-west
	Ramsar	N/A	N/A
	SAC	Thames Basin Heaths	1200 m south-east
		Thursley, Ash, Pirbright, and Chobham	1870 m south-east & 3480 m north-east
		Thames Basin Heaths	3360 m west
		Thames Basin Heaths	4660 m south-west
National	SSSI	Basingstoke Canal	990 m east & 4550 m south
		Ash to Brookwood Heaths	1290 m south-east
		Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons	3360 m north-west
		Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath	3450 m east
		Blackwater Valley	4340 m north-west
		Eelmoor Marsh	4630 m south-west
		Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths	4890 m north
	NNR	N/A	N/A
County	LNR	Snaky Lane	2570 m south
		Lakeside Park	4930 m south

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.

[redacted]

Great Crested Newts
The site provides high value terrestrial habitat for GCNs. The desktop study found one pond (*c.*460 m west) and 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.*, 2000[1]; ARG UK, 2010[2]) was not undertaken on these lakes. In addition, a HSI assessment was not carried out on the pond approximately 460 m west of the site.

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

Research[3] 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.
The desktop study found that there have been no European protected species (EPS) licences granted for GCNs within a 5 km radius of the site. Additionally, the data search conducted by SBIC found no records of GCNs within 1 km of the site.

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 unimproved grassland and patches of bramble scrub provide good foraging habitat. In addition, there are several log piles on site that provide suitable hibernation habitat. Furthermore, 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 is incorporated into the works, any impacts to reptiles are expected to be low.

Nesting Birds
The site was considered to be of moderate-high suitability for nesting birds, with the trees, shrubs, and scrub providing suitable nesting habitat for a variety of bird species.

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

Dormice
The site offers some low suitability habitat for dormice. However, no evidence of dormice was observed during the survey. In addition, the data search conducted by SBIC found no records of dormice within 1 km of the site; and according to MAGIC there have been no EPS licences granted for dormice within a 5 km radius 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
None of the trees on site were considered to be suitable for roosting bats. However, the woodland provides good, sheltered bat foraging habitat in the immediate vicinity of the site. The woodland connects to lines of trees which in turn connect to high quality foraging habitat such as further patches of woodland. In addition, the nearby fishing lakes provide good foraging habitat for a range of bat species.

For the reasons discussed above, the site is considered to have negligible suitability for roosting bats and high suitability for foraging and commuting bats. Although foraging habitat has been identified, providing basic mitigation measures are implemented, any impacts to bats as a result of the works are expected to be negligible.

Invasive Species
Russian Vine is present on site. Although this species is not listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is still a highly invasive species.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED	**Yes**	☒	**No**	☐	*If yes, describe below*
• High suitability for reptiles; • Moderate-high suitability for nesting birds; • High quality foraging habitat for bats; • Russian Vine is present on site.					
FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED?	**Yes**	☒	**No**	☐	*If yes, describe below*

[3] Cresswell, 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.

The site is considered to be suboptimal for badger sett creation However, if any active badger setts were found prior to or during works, appropriate mitigation would need to be implemented. Mitigation would be likely to include exclusion of the badgers and closure of the sett(s) under licence if significant impacts resulting from the works could not be avoided.

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.

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 were 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.

As the works will impact suitable reptile habitat, 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 sheets of heavy-duty roofing felt (artificial refugia) in areas where they are most likely to be used by reptiles (*e.g.* at the edges of bramble scrub, in the unimproved grassland with long sward, next to the log piles). 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).

GCNs are considered unlikely to be present on site. However, in the improbable event that any are encountered during 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.

Russian Vine is present on site. Although this species is not listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is still a highly invasive species. Therefore, great care should be taken to prevent the spread of this species to other areas of the site and into the wild.

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.

Figure 1. Site location plan.

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

Image 1. East of the running line, north of the pedestrian crossing facing north.

Image 2. View of the Russian vine (plant with white flowers).

Image 3. Area of unimproved grassland with long sward – west of the running line, north of the pedestrian crossing.

Image 4. Several log piles – west of the running line, north of the pedestrian crossing.

Image5. Stood at the southern end of the site facing north.

Image 6. Stood approximately 70 m south of the pedestrian crossing facing north.

Image 7. Pile of garden waste south of the pedestrian crossing.