

# Technical Briefing Note

Ref: 1006163 TN01 ECN vf

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Land at Wymington Glebe, Bedfordshire  
(Project No. 1006163)

## Preliminary Ecological Survey Results: Constraints, and Opportunities

Date: May 2021

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### 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1. Aspect Ecology Ltd has been commissioned by The St Albans Diocesan Board of Finance in regard to ecological matters relating to the site, located west of Rushden Road, Wymington, centred at grid reference SP 951 651 (see Plan 6163/BN1).
- 1.2. The site is proposed as a suitable location for strategic residential development in order to contribute to the local housing requirement, including as identified within the adopted Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030.
- 1.3. The purpose of this document is to provide initial information in regard to the nature of the habitats and ecological features at the site in order to inform the proposed allocation.

### 2. Site Location and Surroundings

- 2.1. The site forms an overall area of approximately 53ha land, located immediately west of Rushden Road and associated development within Little Wymington at the northern margin of the Bedford Borough and immediately south of Rushden.
- 2.2. Accordingly, immediately north of the site is extensive existing residential development within the town of Rushden, whilst further residential development is present immediately east of the site within Little Wymington. The extreme western site boundary is marked by an existing railway line, beyond which is largely agricultural (arable) land. Green Lane runs along the southern site boundary, with largely undeveloped agricultural land beyond, along with an existing watercourse corridor.

### 3. Survey Methodology

#### *Desktop study*

- 3.1. In order to compile background information on the site and its immediate surroundings, ecological information has been requested from Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre (BRMC). In addition, further ecological information on the site and surroundings was sourced from available sources including the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database and online information available.

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### *Site survey work*

- 3.2. The site was subject to initial ecological survey work undertaken during May 2021 in order to identify the broad habitat types present and highlight any likely ecological issues, constraints or opportunities.
- 3.3. The site was surveyed based on Phase 1 survey methodology (Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2010), as recommended by Natural England, whereby the habitat types present are identified and mapped, together with an assessment of the species composition of each habitat. This technique provides an inventory of the basic habitat types present and allows identification of areas of greater potential which require further survey. General faunal activity, such as mammals or birds observed visually or by call during the course of the surveys was recorded, whilst the potential of the site to support protected species was also assessed.

### *Survey constraints and limitations*

- 3.4. All of the species that occur in each habitat would not necessarily be detectable during survey work carried out at any given time of the year, since different species are apparent during different seasons. The initial Phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken outside the optimal season, albeit the nature of the habitats within the site allowed for the broad habitat types to be identified and for an adequate assessment of the intrinsic ecological interest of the site to be made.

## **4. Ecological Designations**

### *Statutory Designations*

- 4.1. No identified statutory ecological designations are present within or immediately adjacent to the site, nor are any present within 2km of the site.
- 4.2. The nearest statutory nature conservation designation to the site is Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area (SPA), RAMSAR site and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which is located approximately 2.5km north of the site at its closest point, beyond existing development within Rushden. The majority of the site is located within the identified 3km "Impact Risk Zone" (IRZ) in relation to the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits designation, with particular relevance to proposed residential development resulting in a total net gain in residential units. Accordingly, further consideration and assessment is likely to be required in respect of potential for any proposed development of the site to result in likely significant effects on the interest features of this designation, with particular reference to recreational impacts and potential for loss of functionally-linked land.
- 4.3. Information available on the MAGIC database identifies that no other identified international designations are located within 25km of the site, whilst similarly all other identified statutory ecological designations are well-removed and separated from the site.

### *Non-statutory designations*

- 4.4. No identified non-statutory ecological designations are present within the site itself.
- 4.5. The nearest confirmed non-statutory designation identified to the site is Wymington Meadow County Wildlife Site (CWS), which is located approximately 1.3km south of the site at its closest point, beyond existing development within Wymington (see Plan 6163/BN1).

- 4.6. A narrow, linear area of woodland located adjacent to the north of the site is identified as a potential Local Wildlife Site (pLWS). A short section of the pLWS boundary (approximately 100m) is located adjacent to the site boundary, extending offsite to the north along the western edge of the existing residential development within Rushden. A well-used public Bridleway runs along the eastern margin of the pLWS from where it continues along the northern site boundary to Rushden Road.
- 4.7. All other identified non-statutory designations are well-removed and separated from the site.

#### *Ancient Woodland, Notable Trees and Other Features*

- 4.8. No records of any ancient woodland, priority habitats or notable / veteran trees have been identified within the site itself, including from the BRMC and the MAGIC database, albeit the south eastern field adjacent to Rushden Road is identified as 'long term neutral grassland' within information obtained from the BRMC.
- 4.9. In addition, a narrow area of woodland, (identified as 'Priority Habitat Inventory – Deciduous Woodland' on the MAGIC database), is located immediately adjacent the northern site boundary (consistent with the above identified pLWS), whilst a small area identified as priority habitat 'Traditional Orchard' is identified offsite adjacent to the southern site boundary within the MAGIC database.

#### Constraints and Opportunities

- 4.10. The site is located within the identified Impact Risk Zone associated with the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA/RAMSAR/SSSI designation. Accordingly, (in line with comments received from Natural England in relation to the promotion of the site for allocation), any development proposals will require specific consideration and mitigation measures in order to ensure that there are no adverse effects on the integrity of the designation. Further specific consideration in regard to this designation in relation to the proposed strategic allocation of the site is set out separately within Aspect Ecology's report ref: 1006163 HRA dv1.
- 4.11. Given the size and strategic nature of the site, it is anticipated that substantial new open space provision will be incorporated into any proposed development, such that appropriate buffers and protection measures would be available to avoid any potential impacts on the adjacent pLWS and associated potential priority habitats.
- 4.12. All other identified ecological designations are well-removed and separated from the site, such that they are unlikely to represent a constraint or require further consideration as part of any strategic allocation.

## **5. Habitats and Ecological Features**

- 5.1. The survey work undertaken has confirmed that the internal areas of the site are dominated by intensively managed arable land within 4 large fields (see Plan 6163/BN2). The habitats within these areas were recorded to be intensively managed, cropped areas, with generally narrow margins and lacking internal features or weed species, such that they clearly offer negligible ecological value as a habitat type and do not appear to represent a potential constraint in their own right.

- 5.2. The eastern parts of the site include a substantial area of allotments, which are in active use and management, and similarly are unlikely to represent a potential ecological constraint. A single grassland field is present adjacent to Rushden Road, which was noted to support ridge and furrow (which can be indicative of raised botanical value) and is identified as 'long-term neutral grassland' within information obtained from the BRMC, albeit during the survey work it was recorded to be heavily poached and grazed by horses, whilst the field is not understood to be in receipt of any designation or other information indicating raised habitat quality. It is recommended that any detailed masterplanning proposals for the development of the site incorporate further survey and consideration in relation to the grassland habitat at the appropriate stage, however given the overall size and strategic nature of the site, it is anticipated that any raised botanical value could be readily incorporated into the masterplanning stage associated with any strategic development of the site, such that this is unlikely to represent a significant constraint on the strategic allocation of the site as a whole for development.
- 5.3. Other habitats are extremely limited in extent and largely restricted to the site boundaries in the form of field boundary hedgerows and associated trees. Such features are limited across the site, such that it is anticipated that they could be readily incorporated into wider green infrastructure provision as part of a suitably designed development scheme, whilst considerable potential exists for strategic enhancement as part of a linked network under any proposed green infrastructure strategy associated with the strategic development of the site.

#### Constraints and Opportunities

- 5.4. Overall, in terms of habitats it is considered that the size and nature of the site, as well as the distribution and character of ecological habitats and features present are such that, in terms of ecological habitats, the site could readily accommodate an appropriate strategic development scheme, particularly where this would enable the incorporation of enhancement measures as part of a substantial and comprehensive open space/green infrastructure provision.

## **6. Fauna**

- 6.1. As part of the Phase 1 habitat survey, general observations were made of any faunal use of the site, with particular attention paid to the potential presence of protected or notable species.
- 6.2. An initial summary in regard to relevant key faunal groups is set out below, along with associated likely constraints and opportunities with regard to the proposed strategic development of the site where appropriate.

#### Bats

- 6.3. The only buildings present within the site boundary are in the form of small wooden allotment sheds and associated structures and animal shelters that do not offer potentially suitable opportunities for use by roosting bats.
- 6.4. A number of mature trees are present within the site (predominantly associated with the boundary corridors – see Plan 6163/BN2), several of which were recorded to support features likely to provide potential opportunities for roosting bats. Any works affecting individual suitable trees may need to be informed by specific bat survey work to confirm the likely absence (or otherwise) of roosting activity, albeit it is recommended wherever possible that suitable trees (along with any other mature trees) be retained and incorporated as part of any proposed masterplan and associated green infrastructure scheme. Given the location of

individual trees of bat roosting potential, along with the size and strategic nature of the site, it is likely that this could be readily achieved under any suitable development masterplan.

- 6.5. In terms of foraging and commuting bats, the boundary hedgerows and trees are likely to provide potential foraging habitats/commuting corridors for use by bats, albeit the vast majority of the internal areas across the site are formed by intensively managed arable land which is lacking in taller vegetation, cover or navigational features and unlikely to support significant invertebrate prey populations such that they are unlikely to be of high importance to this group.
- 6.6. Further, any proposed strategic development at the site presents an opportunity to provide a number of enhancement measures for bats, through the creation of new roosting opportunities and foraging corridors/resources, for example within the enhanced boundary features, SUDs and landscaping as part of any comprehensive green infrastructure provision. In particular, the detailed design of any new lighting scheme would need to pay particular regard to nocturnal/crepuscular wildlife such as bats, with dark areas and corridors maintained throughout the site and in particular a substantial dark buffer to the southern site boundary in order to ensure no light spill or associated disturbance associated with the woodland edge habitats to ensure this resource remains unlit and available for use by bats.
- 6.7. Further, it is recommended that any new development masterplan aim to incorporate new vegetated corridors and native planting to enhance connectivity across the site for bats, whilst the opportunity exists for suitable design of features such as SUDs and open space areas to provide new enhanced foraging opportunities for this group.

#### Badger

- 6.8. A small number of records of Badger within the 2km search area around the site were returned from the desktop study, indicating this species to be present within the local area, albeit none of the records appear to arise from the site itself.
- 6.9. During the survey work undertaken, evidence for limited use of the site by Badger was recorded at the site margins, whilst the habitats within the site (particularly the boundary features) appear to provide suitable habitats for this species in combination with the wider offsite areas (particularly undeveloped areas located south and west of the site). Accordingly, it is recommended that any progression of development works at the site be subject to appropriate precautionary measures and safeguards to safeguard individual Badgers should they access the site. Nonetheless, on the basis of the current survey information it is unlikely that Badgers would represent a significant strategic constraint on the proposed development of the site.
- 6.10. Any suitably designed development scheme is therefore unlikely to significantly affect this species in the long term on the basis of the current information, whilst the opportunity exists (subject to minor safeguards and considerations in regard to other groups) for new planting to provide enhanced foraging and movement opportunities for Badger, should this species frequent the site, as part of a sensitively designed scheme.

#### Birds

- 6.11. The boundary hedgerows and trees present at the site provide suitable opportunities for use by common nesting bird species, albeit in general these habitats are limited in extent and restricted to the narrow site margins. The open arable fields are unlikely to provide significant

potential for use by any diverse bird assemblage, albeit (in line with the above information) the habitats present may provide some potential for use by foraging wetland birds associated with the nearby Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits designation such as Golden Plover and Lapwing, should these be present. As such, in line with advice set out elsewhere, it is recommended that any detailed masterplanning for substantial development at the site (particularly any proposals affecting the more open western areas) be informed by specific surveys for wintering birds. Where such surveys confirm the absence of any use by qualifying species, no further consideration or measures would likely be required, albeit should significant use be identified further mitigation and/or compensation measures within residual areas would likely be required.

- 6.12. In any event, it is recommended that the field boundary vegetation lines are retained where possible within any comprehensive masterplan to minimise impacts on nesting birds, and indeed the opportunity exists to incorporate substantial new native planting as part of a comprehensive green infrastructure package that would provide enhanced opportunities for bird species (the precise nature of which would need to be informed by the results of the wintering bird survey work).
- 6.13. Where appropriate, vegetation clearance safeguards should be employed during any proposed site works to avoid damage or destruction of nests (and therefore avoid any potential offence in this regard) during any construction, or other works. Any development proposals present an opportunity to provide new nesting and foraging opportunities for bird species, including boxes for declining urban species, such as the UK Priority Species House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, along with enhancements for other species through inclusion of additional buffer habitats and enhancement measures (including long-term favourable management) as part of any open space/green infrastructure scheme at the site.

#### Amphibians (Great Crested Newt)

- 6.14. A number of records of the protected species Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* were returned within the 2km search area around the site, albeit none appear to relate to the site itself or immediate vicinity.
- 6.15. No ponds are present within the site (a former pond appears to be marked on the available mapping, adjacent to Rushden Road, albeit was recorded to be dry, with no signs of recent water holding and evident poaching by horses within the wider grassland field). The majority of the site is located considerably over 250m from any identified waterbodies, albeit a small number of offsite ponds are present south of the site, within 250m (typical commuting distance of Great Crested Newt) of the site boundary.
- 6.16. Areas of suitable terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newt are present within the site in the form of grassland and hedgerows (albeit the vast majority of the site is located substantially over 250m from the nearest identified potential breeding opportunities, whilst the arable areas making up the majority of the site are unlikely to provide opportunities for amphibians such as Great Crested Newt). Accordingly, overall the strategic development of the site is unlikely to result in significant impacts on Great Crested Newt, albeit depending on the precise detail and location of individual proposals, should works be required within 250m of suitable ponds, it is recommended that further, specific consideration and/or Great Crested Newt survey work be undertaken at the appropriate stage to confirm the presence or likely absence of this species group and any potential mitigation measures or further considerations that may be required to inform detailed masterplanning considerations.

6.17. Nonetheless, the size and nature of the site is such that it is evident that any suitably designed masterplan would offer the ability to incorporate the retention of considerable areas of open space and habitats able to support any existing Great Crested Newt population present at the site and indeed provide substantially enhanced opportunities for this species should it be present. Accordingly, subject to appropriate consideration and (where necessary) mitigation measures at the appropriate detailed design stages, it is clear that amphibians are unlikely to represent a significant over-riding strategic constraint on the proposed future development of the site. Indeed the proposed strategic development of the site offers the potential opportunity to incorporate substantial enhancement opportunities for amphibian species (including Great Crested Newt should this species be present within the offsite ponds located within the vicinity of the site).

### Reptiles

6.18. A small number of records of the common reptile species Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* were returned from within the 2km search area around the site albeit none appear to relate to the site itself.

6.19. The vast majority of the site is occupied by intensively managed arable land, with limited margins which clearly does not offer potentially suitable opportunities for reptile species. Occasional small areas are present associated with the grassland, field margins and woodland edge that could support reptile species should they be present within the wider areas, albeit such habitats are extremely small and relatively isolated within the site. Given the size and nature of the site and habitats present, it is likely that suitable reptile habitats could be incorporated (and indeed potentially substantially enhanced opportunities created) within any suitable strategic development scheme as part of a comprehensive green infrastructure scheme.

### Overall faunal consideration

6.20. Overall, on the basis of the survey work and background information reviewed to date, with the exception of potential for use of the arable areas of the site by SPA qualifying bird species (Golden Plover and Lapwing), minor use by Badger and potential for individual trees to be utilised by roosting bats, few potential faunal issues or constraints appear to be present within the site. Further, where these are present the size and strategic nature of the site and current/likely levels of use are such that individual species could clearly be appropriately accommodated within any suitably designed development scheme, with suitable mitigation measures and safeguards available to ensure individuals are protected as part of the proposed development of the site.

6.21. Indeed, the potential future strategic development of the site offers potential to incorporate significant opportunities to benefit faunal species, including a number of protected species (should they be present) in the long term, through the provision of an integrated green infrastructure scheme and associated habitat provision, where this is designed on the basis of suitable and up-to-date ecological baseline information and best-practice methodology at the appropriate time.

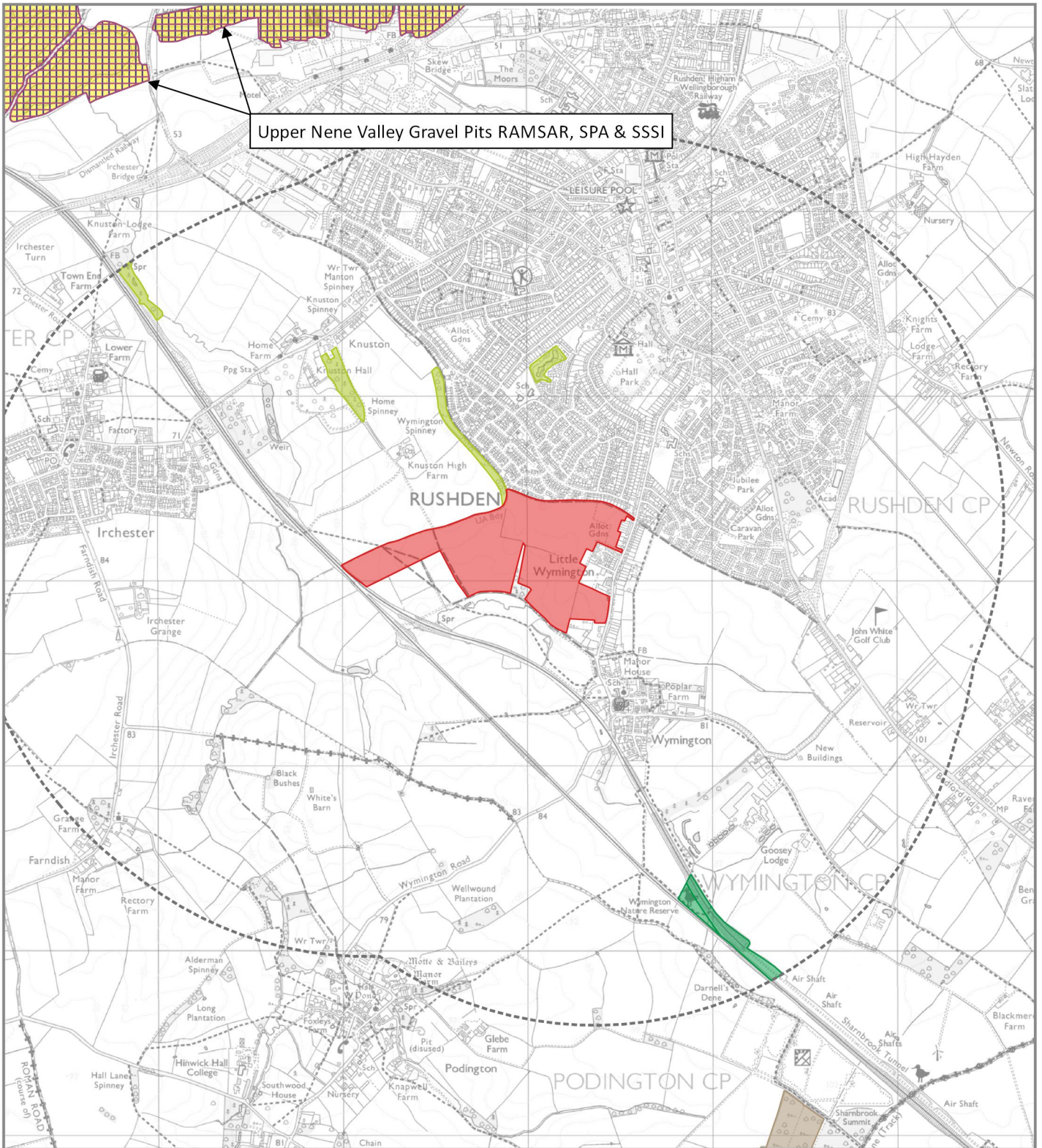
## **7. Summary and Conclusions**

7.1. The site itself is not subject to any identified statutory or non-statutory ecological designations.

- 7.2. The site is located within the identified Impact Risk Zone associated with the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA/RAMSAR European Site, with particular relevance to residential developments and associated recreational impacts. Accordingly, any proposed allocation and subsequent proposed development scheme will need to be subject to specific detailed consideration and assessment in line with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended), with associated mitigation measures in order to avoid any potential adverse effects on the integrity of the designation.
- 7.3. A narrow section of offsite woodland located adjacent to the north of the site is identified as a pLWS (non-statutory designation) and priority habitat and the proposed strategic development of the site provides the opportunity to extend and enhance this habitat as part of the wider green infrastructure provision and subject to the incorporation of suitable mitigation measures and buffer zones. Other ecological designations are well-removed and separated from the site, such that they are unlikely to represent an over-riding constraint on the strategic development of the site.
- 7.4. The habitats present are dominated by large, intensively managed arable fields, which are lacking internal vegetation or features (albeit sloping aspect may limit sight-lines in respect of wetland bird species), and based on the initial survey appear unlikely to support any particularly rare or diverse assemblages, which are therefore likely to provide no more than low ecological value overall.
- 7.5. Nonetheless, limited ecologically valuable features are present, including those likely qualifying as Priority Habitats (e.g. hedgerows), and it is recommended these features be retained (along with suitable buffer zones and associated protective measures) as part of a comprehensive open space and green infrastructure strategy, in order to safeguard any significant ecological value, albeit this would appear to be readily available under any suitably designed masterplan for the strategic development of the site, whilst indeed the opportunity exists under any comprehensive green infrastructure strategy to provide substantial enhancements and strengthen the existing features and corridors for wildlife use at the site.
- 7.6. Opportunities for faunal species are similarly limited across the majority of the site, albeit evidence of minor use by Badger and potential for use by bats and bird species was noted, and should be taken into account as part of any detailed masterplanning or design at the appropriate stage. However, the potential presence of such species and associated mitigation and continued habitat opportunities, would appear to be readily achievable as part of any suitable masterplanning for the site, such that on the basis of the currently available information, and given the scale and nature of the site, any such species could likely be adequately accommodated and safeguarded. Indeed, opportunities likely exist for substantial enhancement measures to be incorporated as part of any suitably designed development proposals at the site (in particular within a comprehensive green infrastructure scheme), that could provide considerable benefits for individual faunal species and expand and enhance the existing habitat corridors, through the introduction of favourable management of retained habitats, creation of new habitats and provision of specific faunal measures and enhancements.
- 7.7. Overall therefore, with the exception of specific consideration in relation to potential for likely significant effects in relation to the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA/RAMSAR designation (consideration of which is set out elsewhere) on the basis of the initial survey work and consideration undertaken (and subject to suitable considerations during design and masterplanning, along with the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures and safeguards at the appropriate stages), the habitats and species present at the site do not



appear to represent any over-riding ecological constraints associated with the proposed strategic development of the site. Indeed considerable opportunities exist to incorporate substantial ecological enhancements and net gains as part of as part of any suitably designed comprehensive development proposals and green infrastructure strategy at the site in the long term.



Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits RAMSAR, SPA & SSSI

Key:

- Site Location
- RAMSAR
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- County Wildlife Site (CWS)
- Potential Wildlife Site (PWS)
- Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland (ASW)
- Local Records Centre 2km Search Area  
(Only non-statutory designations occurring within 2km of the site centre are shown)



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Land at North-West  
 Wymington  
 Site Location &  
 Ecological Designations

6163/BN1

PROJECT

TITLE

DRAWING NO.

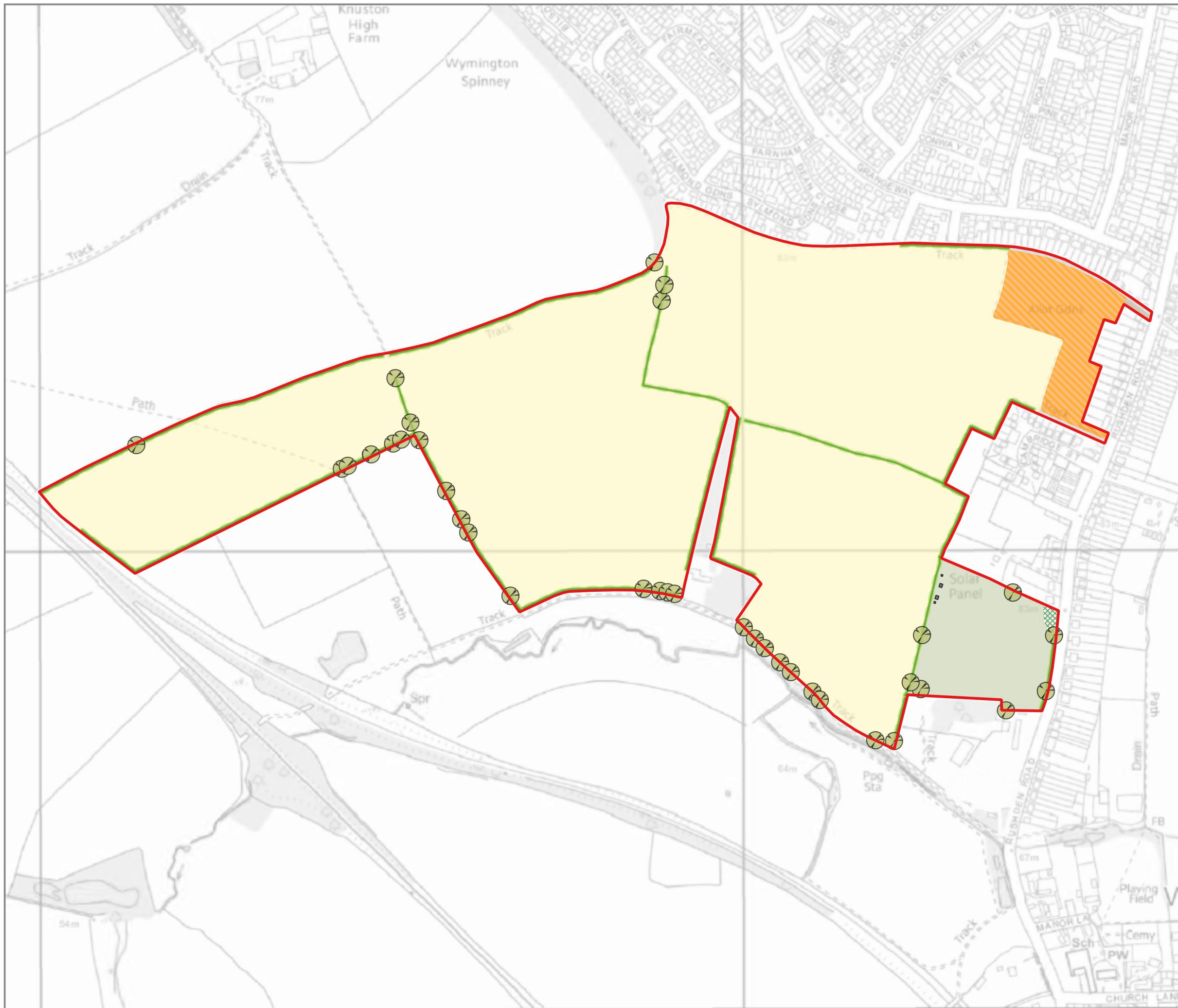
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REV

May 2021

DATE





Key:

- Site Boundary
- Semi-improved Grassland
- Improved Grassland
- Arable
- Dense Scrub
- Woodland
- Allotments
- Hedgerows
- + Tree
- Building
- Bare Ground
- Track



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<b>Land at North-West Wymington</b>	PROJECT
Habitats and Ecological Features	TITLE
6163/BN2	DRAWING NO.
A	REV
May 2021	DATE



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