Preliminary Ecological Appraisal –
The Vixen , Millfields Way, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 0JB

28th March 2025

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

At 'The Vixen' former public house, off Millfields Way in Haverhill, Suffolk, planning permission is being sought for the conversion of the building.

In March 2025, ML-Ecology was instructed to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Survey of the site.

This was undertaken to determine the presence of any important habitats or species which might be impacted on by the proposed development.

In view of the proposed works (a small-scale development on an existing public house), the likely low impact on protected species, and in line with current guidance on accessing and using biodiversity data (CIEEM, 2016), a background data search was not carried out in this case.

The Phase 1 visit took place on 19th March 2025 in mild conditions.

The site encompassed a derelict former public house 'The Vixen' with small associated rear yard.

The site was dominated by building and hard standing, with a small yard area comprising piles of spoil and scattered scrub.

No rare vascular plants were found, and all species recorded were common and widespread. There were no invasive or notifiable weeds.

A total of 2 species of birds were observed, both of which were Species of Low Conservation Concern (RSPB Green list).

The scrub and the building itself provided nesting habitat for birds.

As all in-use bird's nests and their contents are protected from damage or destruction, any scrub removal or building demolition works should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to 31st August inclusive. If this time frame cannot be avoided, a close inspection of the vegetation/buildings should be undertaken prior to felling. Work should not be carried out within 5.0 metres of any in-use nest, although this distance could be more depending on the sensitivity of the species.

An inspection of the building revealed no signs or evidence of roosting bats. However, a number of potential access points along with suitable internal niches and cavities were present.

As such the building was classified as having moderate suitability for roosting and hibernating bats.

It is therefore recommended that two nocturnal emergence surveys are undertaken within the period May to August to confirm the presence or absence of roosting bats.

With an absence of any ponds or other still water wetland features on the land itself, the site had no potential for breeding amphibians.

The site was considered to offer poor habitat for common reptiles (i.e. dominated by building and hardstanding).

There was no suitable habitat present on the site itself for riparian mammal species such as Otters and Water Voles.

There was no evidence or signs of Badger activity, or indeed any other mammal species.

Since the site was dominated by habitats with very low floristic diversity, it was concluded that there was low potential for invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

If excavations are to be undertaken, it should be noted that open trenches could potentially trap wildlife, especially if these fill up with water. If trenches cannot be infilled immediately then they should either be covered overnight or escape routes should be provided. These can be in the form of branches or boards placed on the bottom of the trench, with their upper ends above ground level and touching the sides, or sloping ends left in trenches.

Finally, it is recommended the proposed development seeks to provide biodiversity enhancements, to meet the requirements of the NPPF, with suitable measures to include;

- Using nectar and pollen rich plant and shrub species for any landscaping;
- The installation of build in bat tubes;
- The installation of build in Swift Bricks.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and survey objectives

At 'The Vixen' former public house, off Millfields Way in Haverhill, Suffolk, planning permission is being sought for the conversion of the building.

In March 2025, ML-Ecology was instructed to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Survey of the site.

This was undertaken to determine the presence of any important habitats or species which might be impacted on by the proposed development.

In view of the proposed works (a small-scale development on an existing public house), the likely low impact on protected species, and in line with current guidance on accessing and using biodiversity data (CIEEM, 2016), a background data search was not carried out in this case.

The Phase 1 visit took place on 19th March 2025 in mild conditions.

1.2 Site description

The site encompassed a derelict former public house 'The Vixen' with small associated rear yard.

The site was dominated by building and hard standing, with a small yard area comprising piles of spoil and scattered scrub.

The small areas scattered scrub which had colonised the small outdoor yards comprised Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, Butterfly Bush *Buddleia davidii* along with self-set Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Hazel *Corylus avellana*.

No rare vascular plants were found, and all species recorded were common and widespread. There were no invasive or notifiable weeds.

The Ordnance Survey Grid Reference is TL 67559 45763 centred on the middle of the plot.

1.3 Proposed works

It is thought the proposed development is likely to involve alteration to the existing building with associated landscaping.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk study

In view of the proposed works and the likely low impact on protected species, and in line with current guidance on accessing and using biodiversity data (CIEEM, 2016), a background data search was not carried out in this case.

2.2 Habitat survey

A Phase 1 Habitat Survey was carried out across the whole of the survey site. It was conducted using standard JNCC (2003) techniques and methodologies.

The site was visited on the 19th March 2025 in mild conditions.

2.3 Protected species survey

During the surveys the potential for other protected and important species was assessed. This included European Protected Species, legally protected species and Local Biodiversity Action Plan Species (and habitats).

2.3.1 Badgers

Badgers are generally nocturnal and evidence of their presence in an area often comes from field signs rather than sightings of the animals. Useful field signs include:

- Setts (main, outlying, annex or subsidiary)
- Tufts of hair caught on barbed wire fences;
- Conspicuous Badger paths;
- Footprints;
- Latrines – small excavated pits in which droppings are deposited;
- 'Snuffle holes' – small scrapes where Badgers have searched for insects and plant tubers;
- Day nests – bundles of grass and other vegetation where Badgers may sleep above ground;
- Scratch marks on trees (usually near the sett).

Daytime surveys looking for field signs can be carried out at any time of the year, and should be non-intrusive, but nocturnal surveys of setts (if required), are only likely to be effective from April to November, when Badgers are most active, and any cubs present will have emerged.

Main setts

These usually have a large number of holes with large spoil heaps, and the sett generally looks well used. They usually have well used paths to and from the sett and between sett entrances. Although normally the breeding sett is in continual use, it is possible to find a main sett that has become disused because of excessive digging or for some other reason, in which case it is recorded as a disused main sett.

Annex setts

These are always close to a main sett, usually less than 150 m away, and are usually connected to the main sett by one or more obvious, well worn paths. They consist of several holes, but are not necessarily in use all the time, even if the main sett is very active.

Subsidiary setts

These often these have only a few holes, are usually at least 50 m from a main sett, and do not have an obvious path connecting them with another sett. They are not continuously active.

Outlying setts

These usually only have one or two holes, often have little spoil outside the hole, have no obvious path connecting them with another sett, and are only used sporadically. When not in use by badgers, they are often taken over by foxes or even rabbits. However, they can still be recognised as badger setts by the shape of the tunnel (not the entrance hole), which is at least 250 mm in diameter and rounded or flattened oval in shape.

A search for evidence of Badger presence on site was undertaken as part of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey.

2.3.2 Bats

In order to fully assess bat occupation of a particular site, the Bat Conservation Trust (2023) recommends that information gathered from a desk study of known bat records, and a daytime site walkover, is used to inform the type and extent of future bat survey work, potentially including nocturnal emergence surveys.

The preliminary roost assessment (PRA) is usually in the form of a diurnal walkover and can be carried out at any time of the year. It provides an opportunity to check for signs of bat occupancy and/or the suitability for bat roosting.

Evidence of bat activity includes droppings, scratch marks, feeding remains, carcasses, or even roosting animals, whilst suitability is determined by the type and number of potential roost features (PRFs) typically used by bats.

Roosting places vary depending on the species. Pipistrelles usually inhabit narrow cracks or cavities around the outside of buildings, but they will roost in similar niches inside larger barns. Typical sites include soffit spaces, gaps behind fascia boards and end rafters, crevices around the ends of projecting purlins, under warped or lifted roof and ridge tiles, or in gaps in stone and brickwork where mortar has dropped out.

Larger species such as Brown Long-eared Bats *Plecotus auritus*, Myotis bats (Natterer's *Myotis nattereri* and Whiskered/Brandt's *M. mystacinus/M. brandtii*), and Lesser Horseshoes *Rhinolophus hipposideros*, like to roost in the roof voids of buildings, and can often be found hanging singly or in small groups from ridge boards or roof timbers, especially where these butt up against gable walls or chimney breasts. They especially favour older structures with timber frames. Here they squeeze into tight crevices making them difficult to observe.

Where bats are found, or there is evidence of bat occupation or activity, i.e. that bat use is confirmed, a roost characterisation survey is undertaken. The results are used to inform the impact assessment and design of mitigation measures. Roost characterisation includes nocturnal emergence surveys, unless sufficient information has already been collected using robust survey methods with no significant constraints.

Nocturnal emergence surveys allow numbers and species of bats to be confirmed, and should only be undertaken when bats are out of hibernation and in their summer roosts.

The bat active period is generally considered to be between April and October, although particularly cold weather will affect the level and extent of bat activity. Indeed, the air temperature at the start of each survey should be at least 10°C or above, with no strong wind or heavy rain. The survey starts 15 minutes before sunset and continues for one and a half to two hours after sunset.

Visits will be a minimum of three weeks apart, and the number of surveys and timing is dependent on the evidence found or the suitability of the site to bats. This will be determined by the ecologist. In general, at least two emergence nocturnal surveys will be carried out, but a third visit may be necessary if the results are inconclusive or further information is required.

Nocturnal emergence surveys are also used to determine the presence or absence of bats, where signs of bat activity are indeterminate or absent but the suitability for bat roosting is considered to be low, moderate or high.

For a site with no evidence but low suitability, just one nocturnal emergence survey is required, this to be in the period May to August.

For moderate suitability a minimum of two visits are needed between May and September, of which one must be in the period May to August.

With high suitability, three visits will be necessary between May and September, of which two must be in the period May to August.

Where there is no evidence of bat presence, and no suitability for roosting, no nocturnal surveys will be needed.

The number of surveyors and/or the use of night vision aids (NVAs) is determined by the ecologist, and is dependent on the complexity of the structure. For simple structures just

one surveyor using an appropriate number of NVAs will be sufficient, but for larger sites and/or more complex or irregularly shaped structures, e.g. those with multiple elevations and/or roof slopes, more surveyors will be required.

10x42 Nikon binoculars and a Clulight CB2 torch were used for the inaccessible/unreachable areas. On this occasion an endoscope was not used, as there were no out of reach crevices and cavities that could not be inspected with a torch and binoculars.

2.3.3 Birds

Most resident and migrant birds breed in the spring and summer, although Woodpigeons *Columba palumbus* and Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* nest throughout the year, and as a result could be on eggs in almost any month.

In season, signs of breeding include singing males, display and copulation, birds gathering nesting materials, adults carrying food, calling chicks, etc.

In winter none of these activities may be occurring, so a survey for old nests and/or nest holes is the most reliable method of determining the presence or absence of breeding birds. This was carried out during the Phase 1 Habitat Survey, along with a general site walkover to identify the presence of foraging birds.

2.3.4 Great Crested Newts

A survey for Great Crested Newts (GCN) may be indicated when background information on distribution suggests that they may be present. More detailed indicators are:

- *Any historical records of Great Crested Newts on the site or in the general area*
- *A pond on or near the site (within around 500 m), even if it holds water only seasonally*
- *Sites with refuges (such as piles of logs or rubble), grassland, scrub, woodland or hedgerows within 500 m of a pond*.

There are several field survey methods which can be employed depending on the time of year:

- *Bottle or funnel trapping – adults ideally February to May, with June and July sub-optimal, and August to September for detection of larvae (i.e. young)*
- *Egg search – April to June ideally, with March and July sub-optimal*
- *Torch survey – March to May for adults, with February and June to July sub-optimal, and August to September for larvae*
- *Netting – March to May for adults, with February and June to July sub-optimal, and August to September for larvae*
- *Pitfall trapping – March to May and September for adults, with February, June to August and October sub-optimal*
- *Refuge search – April to September ideally, with March and October sub-optimal.*

The latter two methods involve terrestrial habitats, the others aquatic habitats, for which a minimum of 4 visits per year are recommended, with at least 2 visits between mid-April and mid-May to record peak numbers (English Nature, 2001).

2.3.5 Otters

Otters are nocturnal and are active all year round. They are large with an adult male reaching up to 1.2 m from nose to tail, and weighing about 10 kg.
Feeding mainly on fish and amphibians, Otters live by undisturbed waters where there is plenty of cover, mostly by freshwater lakes, rivers and quiet small streams as well as some coasts.

An Otter may use over 40 km of river and needs many resting places throughout this range. A female otter will give birth to 1 to 3 cubs in a natal holt, which is often away from the main river and must be completely undisturbed. Field signs include:

- Prints in soft mud;
- Spraints (faeces);
- Holts.

A search for evidence of Otter presence on site was undertaken as part of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey.

2.3.6 Reptiles

Commoner reptiles which may be encountered in rural areas include Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, and Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*.

During the winter months, from mid-October to late February or early March, they are in hibernation, usually deep in underground hibernacula, such as holes and cracks in the ground, among rocks or the roots of large trees, down animal burrows, or in piles of rubble or stone.

In the spring and summer they live above ground in well-vegetated places, with Grass Snakes often near or in water. Being cold-blooded all reptiles like to bask, and can often be found in open places.

There are very few signs of reptile presence, but these include:

- Shedded skin (snakes);
- Eggs (but not Common Lizard which gives birth to live young).

All potential refugia on site were checked where possible as part of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey.

2.3.7 Water Voles

The Water Vole is the largest of the British voles. It lives in a series of holes or burrows at the water's edge and can be found along the banks of ditches, streams, rivers, lakes and canals.

Although Water Voles live in colonies, the breeding females are territorial, each defining their contiguous territory with latrines during the breeding season. This lasts from March to October.

The Water Vole is herbivorous, feeding primarily on the lush aerial stems and leaves of waterside plants. Its activity is normally confined to the area within two metres of the watercourse, the bankside vegetation in this area not only essential for food, but also for cover from predators.

Water Vole activity can be assessed by looking for the following signs:

- Burrows;
- Faeces and latrines;
- Feeding stations;
- Runs;
- Paw prints in areas of soft mud;
- Feeding 'lawns';
- Predator field signs.

A search for evidence of Water Vole presence on site was undertaken as part of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey.

2.4 Constraints

There were no constraints.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Desk study

In view of the proposed works and the likely low impact on protected species, and in line with current guidance on accessing and using biodiversity data (CIEEM, 2016), a background data search was not carried out in this case.

3.1.1 Designated sites

N/A

3.1.2 Protected species

N/A

3.1.3 Invasive species

N/A

3.2 Habitat survey

3.2.1 Habitat descriptions

The following habitats were recorded across the site:

- Scattered scrub and spoil;
- Buildings and hard standing;
- Fence.

These are shown on the Phase 1 Habitat Survey map in Appendix 1, with the target notes (where applicable) in Appendix 2.

Scattered scrub and spoil

The small areas scattered scrub which had colonised the small outdoor yards comprised Bramble, Butterfly Bush along with self-set Ash, Hawthorn and Hazel (Fig. 1and 2).

Figs. 1 & 2 Scattered scrub and spoil

Buildings and hard standing

The former public house building and yard represented building and hard standing (Figs. 3 and 4 - overleaf).

Figs. 3 & 4 Building and hard standing

Fence

Wooden panel and security fencing enclosed the entire plot.

3.2.2 Flora

The botanical composition of each habitat was typical, and all species recorded were common and widespread. No rare vascular plants were found, and there were no invasive species or notifiable weeds.

3.3 Protected species survey

3.3.1 Badgers

No evidence of Badger presence was recorded during the survey, i.e. no setts, tufts of hair, footprints or latrines.

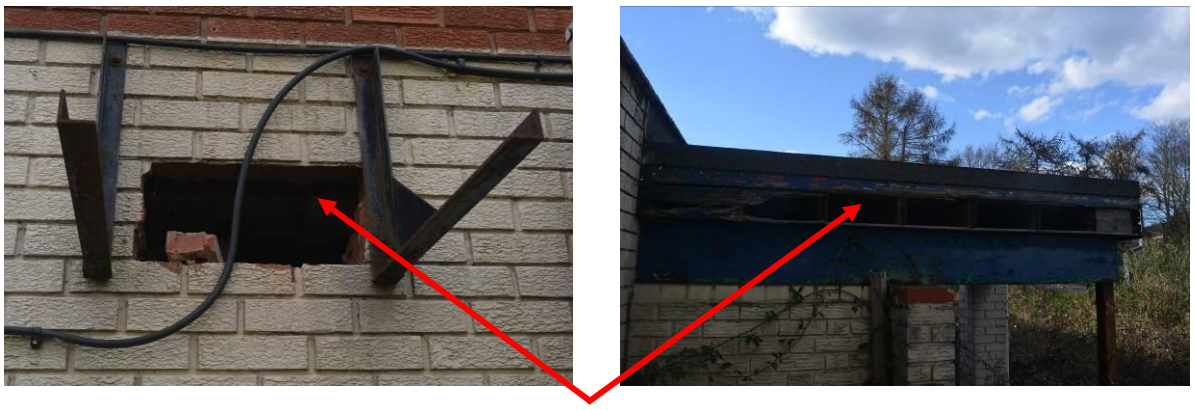
3.3.2 Bats

The daytime inspection was carried out on 19th March 2025, commencing at 15:30 pm. The weather conditions during the time of the survey were recorded and are presented in Table 1 below.

Parameter	Value
Temperature (ºC)	13.0
Cloud cover (%)	20
Precipitation	None
Wind speed (Beaufort scale)	0

Table 1 Weather conditions during the diurnal survey

The external inspection of the building revealed a number of potential access points, typically associated with holes through brickwork, missing doors and broken windows (Figs. 5, 6, 7 and 8).



Figs. 5 & 6 External gaps and potential access points (arrowed)


Figs. 7 & 8 External gaps/potential access points (arrowed)

Internally, the inspection revealed no roof voids were present, with narrow spaces between ceilings and the flat roofing providing internal niches and cavities (Figs. 9, 10,11 and 12).


Figs. 9 & 10 Internal cavities beneath flat roofing


Figs. 11 & 12 Internal cavities beneath flat roofing

No signs or evidence of bat roosting was found at the time of the survey.

3.3.3 Birds

The scrub and building provided nesting habitat for birds.

A full list of species noted is given in Appendix 4.

3.3.4 Great Crested Newts

All pieces of loose material that provided refugia were checked, but no Great Crested Newts or other newt species were found.

With an absence of suitable waterbodies, the site had no potential to support breeding amphibians.

3.3.5 Otters

There was no suitable habitat for Otters on the site.

3.3.6 Reptiles

The site was dominated by building and hardstanding and as such was considered to offer poor habitat for common reptiles.

3.3.7 Water Voles

There was no suitable habitat for Water Voles on the site.

3.3.8 Invertebrates

Since much of the site was dominated by habitats with limited floristic diversity, it was concluded that there was low potential for invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

3.3.9 Other species

No other protected or LBAP species were observed during the site visit.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Site evaluation

The site was concluded to be of low wildlife interest.

This was due to the site being dominated by habitats (i.e. building and hardstanding) with limited floristic diversity.

However, small areas of scattered scrub and indeed the building itself provided potential nesting habitat for birds.

An inspection of the building revealed no signs or evidence of roosting bats. However, a number of potential access points along with suitable internal niches and cavities were present.

As such the building was classified as having moderate suitability for roosting and hibernating bats.

The site was considered to offer poor habitat for common reptiles (i.e. dominated by building and hardstanding).

With an absence of any ponds or other still water wetland features on the land itself, the site had no potential for breeding amphibians.

There was no suitable habitat present on the site itself for riparian mammal species such as Otters and Water Voles.

There was no evidence or signs of Badger activity, or indeed any other mammal species.

Since much of the site was dominated by habitats with limited floristic diversity, it was concluded that there was low potential for invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

4.2 Possible impacts of proposed work and recommendations

The proposals are likely to affect the building and associated yard areas.

As all in-use bird's nests and their contents are protected from damage or destruction, any hedge, tree or shrub removal works should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to

31st August inclusive. If this time frame cannot be avoided, a close inspection of shrubs/trees should be undertaken prior to clearing. Work should not be carried out within 5.0 metres of any in-use nest, although this distance could be more depending on the sensitivity of the species.

If excavations are to be undertaken, it should be noted that open trenches could potentially trap wildlife, especially if these fill up with water. If trenches cannot be infilled immediately then they should either be covered overnight or escape routes should be provided. These can be in the form of branches or boards placed on the bottom of the trench, with their upper ends above ground level and touching the sides, or sloping ends left in trenches.

Finally, it is recommended the proposed development seeks to provide biodiversity enhancements, to meet the requirements of the NPPF, with suitable measures to include;

- Using nectar and pollen rich plant and shrub species for any landscaping;
- The installation of build in bat tubes;
- The installation of build in Swift Bricks.

4.3 Further surveys

As the building was classified as having moderate suitability for roosting and hibernating bats, it is recommended that two nocturnal emergence surveys are undertaken within the period May to August to confirm the presence or absence of roosting bats.

If any vegetation removal and building demolition works cannot be timed appropriately to avoid the bird nesting period (considered to be March to August inclusive), then further surveys of the these habitats will be required.

5. REFERENCES

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map

Appendix 2: Target Notes

Appendix 3**:** Bird species list

Appendix 4: Relevant legislation

Appendix 1: Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map (not to scale)

Map not to scale

Legend

Survey boundary

Fence

Buildings and hard standing

Scattered scrub

Target Note

Appendix 2: Target Notes

TG1: Spoil piles comprising household waste and rubble.

Appendix 3: Bird species list

Common name	**Latin name**
Magpie	*Pica pica*
Blackbird	*Turdus merula*

Appendix 4: Relevant legislation

4.1 – Birds

In Britain, all wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. There are penalties for:

- *Killing, injuring or capturing them, or attempting any of these;*
- *Taking or damaging the nest whilst in use;*
- *Taking or destroying the eggs.*

4.2 – Bats

In England, Scotland and Wales, all bat species are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) (as amended), through inclusion in Schedule 5. In England and Wales this Act has been amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW), which adds an extra offence, makes species offences arrestable, increases the time limits for some prosecutions, and increases penalties.

All bats are also included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 1994, (or Northern Ireland 1995) (the Habitats Regulations), which defines 'European protected species of animals'.
The above legislation can be summarised thus (Mitchell-Jones and McLeish, 2004):

- *Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture (or take) bats;*
- *Deliberately disturb bats (whether in a roost or not;*
- *Recklessly disturb roosting bats or obstruct access to their roosts;*
- *Damage or destroy roosts;*
- *Possess or transport a bat or any part of a part of a bat, unless acquired legally;*
- *Sell (or offer for sale) or exchange bats, or parts of bats.*

The word 'roost' is not used in the legislation, but is used here for simplicity. The actual wording is 'any structure or place which any wild animal…uses for shelter or protection' (WCA), or 'breeding site or resting place' (Habitats Regulations).
As bats generally have both a winter and a summer roost, the legislation is clear that all roosts are protected whether bats are in residence at the time or not.

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