

SCALES Consultancy Ltd
Sarah Carver Amphibians Landscape Ecology Services

Ecological Appraisal – Pickhill Farm, Wrexham

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Site Name: **Pickhill Farm**

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Balancing Ecology and Development

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SUMMARY

SCALES Consultancy Limited undertook an ecological appraisal at Pickhill Farm in Wrexham. The purpose of the appraisal was to identify any ecological constraints in Amey undertaking essential maintenance and upgrading works to an electricity powerline and provide recommendations to reduce ecological impacts. The report details the results of the ecological survey undertaken and provides recommendations made in relation to reducing impacts on protected species and their habitats.

Proposed developments at the site involve the installation of new electricity poles and excavation of trenches to facilitate associated works. The felling of approximately nine willow *salix sp.* and other pruning works to mature willow and an oak *Quercus sp.* is also required.

The majority of the broadleaved woodland plantation and vast majority of the grassland will be unaffected by the development save for temporary disturbance caused by the excavation of pits for poles and ancillary equipment and access for tracked machinery to undertake the work.

It is predicted that nine mature willow trees will be required to be felled to facilitate the work. The overall loss of nine mature willow trees is considered to have a relatively insignificant impact on local wildlife and landscape aesthetics and will be adequately compensated by the retention and maintenance of the remaining woodland, scrub and grassland which promotes wildlife biodiversity and ecological sustainability.

The woodland, scrub and grassland will be retained and maintained for the benefit of wildlife and landscape aesthetics.

A detailed bat roost potential assessment of the trees was undertaken on the 22nd February 2016. The bat roost potential assessment of the trees survey identified that the willow trees to be felled and the oak tree to be pruned were assessed as having a range of between low to moderate potential for bats.

The site was assessed as high quality for bats to use for foraging and commuting but no historic or current evidence of roosting was recorded.

The surveys did not identify any evidence to confirm that bats and roosting birds are present in any of the mature trees to be pruned or felled. Nevertheless, given the potential for these trees to support roosting bats, as a precautionary reasonable avoidance measure, it is recommended that the trees should be sensitively 'soft felled' under ecologist supervision to minimise the risk of harm to any individual bats.

All habitats within the survey area have the potential to support nesting and roosting birds. Therefore works to any buildings, trees, scrub and other vegetation where undertaken during the bird nesting season should only be carried out immediately following an assessment by an ecologist to check the presence or absence of nests (nesting season is March to September inclusive). Any nests identified should be clearly marked and a buffer zone of 5m radius placed around them. No disturbance will take place within this buffer zone until all young have fledged.

Prior to the removal of any of the trees, a check should be made to ensure that there are no Tree Preservation Orders.

The nearest pond was assessed to be within 300 metres of the proposed work. A known exceptional population of great crested newts is present within the vicinity.

The proposed works will not impact on or affect a great crested newt breeding pond or other water-body with the potential to be used by great crested newts for breeding purposes within the site but will affect surrounding terrestrial habitat. Therefore a rapid risk assessment and precautionary non-licenced method statement approach is recommended and the details are provided in Appendix A.

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Introduction

1.1 Background

SCALES Consultancy Limited undertook an ecological appraisal at Pickhill Farm in Wrexham, LL13 9PS to provide protected species information. The purpose of the appraisal was to identify any ecological constraints in Amey undertaking essential maintenance and upgrading works to an electricity powerline and provide recommendation to reduce ecological impacts. The report details the results of the ecological survey undertaken and provides recommendations made in relation to reducing impacts on protected species and their habitats.

Proposed developments at the site involve the installation of new electricity poles and excavation of trenches to facilitate associated works. The felling of approximately nine willow *salix sp.* and other pruning works to mature willow and an oak *Quercus sp.* is also required to facilitate the works.

The survey and report assesses the habitats and the species they support and highlights any potential ecological issues and recommendations for further detailed survey in order to determine the impacts of any development works during construction on any species and habitats on site or in the vicinity.

The survey was conducted by Sarah Carver of SCALES Consultancy Limited. Sarah has extensive knowledge and experience of botanical and ecological surveys and is a full member of the CIEEM.

The survey was conducted on Wednesday 17th February 2016. Weather conditions were persistent heavy rain.

Further to this survey and its recommendations, a bat roost potential assessment of the trees was undertaken on the 22nd February 2016 where weather conditions were clear and fine.

Further to advice provided to Amey from Wrexham Borough Council Ecologist, given the known presence of an exceptional population of great crested newts, a European Protected Species in the area, a Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement is provided in relation to the protection of great crested newts and their habitat.

1.2 Site Context

The area of study focussed on the proposed development footprint and its immediate surroundings along the electricity cable route. The setting is within farmland with associated field margins, mature trees and predominantly broadleaved woodland along the meandering River Clywedog. Land use in the local area is extensively agricultural and the heavily developed Wrexham Industrial Estate.

Site grid reference: SJ 385490

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Desk Study

Method

The following methods are used to gather data to advise on the presence of significant habitats and species:

- Ordnance Survey maps at scale 1:25000 are used to identify any geographic features which may be of significance for supporting wildlife.

2.1.1 Flora

Habitats

The habitat survey was carried out by Sarah Carver. The survey comprised a walkover to note botanical species and classify habitats.

2.1.2 Fauna

Amongst others, a search was undertaken for the following key habitats and/or field signs for protected or conservation priority species (see Table 1 below).

Table 1 Key habitats & field signs of protected & priority species.

Taxon	Indicative Habitat(s)	Field Signs (in addition to sightings)
Bats	Roosts – Trees, buildings, etc. Foraging areas – e.g. water bodies, woodland edge, hedgerow Commuting routes – linear features (e.g. hedgerows, water courses, tree lines)	In or on potential roost sites: Droppings stuck to walls; urine spotting in roof spaces; oil from fur staining round roost entrances; feeding remains (e.g. moth wings under a feeding perch)
Badger	Found in most rural and many urban habitats	Excavations and tracks: sett entrances, latrines, hairs, well worn paths; prints; scratch marks on trees
Water vole	Rivers, streams, ditches, ponds, pools	Burrows, latrines, feeding stations, feeding signs, runs, tracks
Dormice	Woodland, scrub and hedgerows with hazel, bramble and honeysuckle.	No specific field signs.
Birds	Trees, scrub, hedgerow, field margins, grassland, buildings	Nests and droppings / pellets
Reptiles	Rough grassland, scrub, log and rubble piles	Sloughed skins.

Taxon	Indicative Habitat(s)	Field Signs (in addition to sightings)
Great Crested Newt	Ponds within 500 m of suitable habitat within the site boundary. Suitable (terrestrial) habitat includes rough grassland, scrub and woodland, log and rubble piles and other debris, animal burrows	No specific field signs
Otter	Linear waterways, lakes / pools, associated terrestrial areas, trees on water's edge with exposed roots	Holts, runs, sprints, sprinting points.
Red Squirrel	Pine woodlands, mixed woodlands	Dreys in tree canopy, scratch marks on bark, gnawing of pine cones.

2.2 Limitations

Due to the seasonal nature of plant growth and flowering, not all botanical and tree species were readily identifiable at the time of survey in February; however species recorded were considered sufficient for classifying habitats within the site boundary. Dense vegetation may have obscured field signs, however all attempts were made to access all parts of the site.

3.0 Results

A desk study of protected habitats and species was not undertaken. The study area is outlined on the habitat map.

Habitat Descriptions

3.1 Overview

The results of the ecological survey are illustrated in a Phase 1 type habitat form (see Drawing 01).

3.2 Habitats

Broadleaved Woodland, Scrub and Mature Trees

Woodland and scattered mature trees are present within the study area.

Oak, *Quercus robur* is present at Target Note 1. Hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna*, Blackthorn *prunus spinosa*, bramble, *Rubus fruticosus*, Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and crack willow, *salix fragilis* were also present. The mature willow trees were assessed to be in a fairly poor condition with an abundance of features such as cracks, crevices, cavities, fissures, broken branches and holes.

Evidence of rabbit and fox activity was recorded and what appeared to be historic badger activity.

Buildings

A track and pumping station building was present. Adjacent to this was a rubble pile capable of supporting hibernating amphibians.

Grassland

The grassland at target note 2 consists of a medium length grass sward. It comprised species such as Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Willowherb sp, *Epilobium* sp., greater burdock *Arctium lappa*, black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, dock *rumex* sp. and buttercup *ranunculus* sp.

Agricultural Land

There is extensive surrounding grazed pasture and agricultural grassland and scrub and hedgerows.

Running Water

The meandering River Clywedog is present with fairly fast flowing water and frequent marginal reed canary grass, *Phalaris arundinacea* and rush, *juncus* sp..

3.3 Protected Species

Bats

Broadly in accordance with The Bat Conservation Trust, Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines 2012 Protocol for visual inspections for trees affected by arboricultural work was used to assess the value of the trees to bats.

Trees scheduled for arboricultural work were assessed in terms of the value of their features in terms of their potential ability to support bats.

Following an initial search, binoculars were used from ground level to individually assess the trees for their potential to support roosting bats on the 22nd February 2016:-

The detailed inspection of each tree affected by the work involved evaluating the trees in terms of their overall condition and specific features and signs based broadly on the following:

Features of trees used as bat roosts

Natural holes. Woodpecker holes. Cracks/splits in major limbs. Loose bark. Hollows/cavities. Dense epicormic growth.

Signs indicating possible use by bats

Tiny scratches around entry point. Staining around entry point. Bat droppings in, around or below entrance. Flies around entry point. Distinctive smell of bats. Smoothing of surfaces around cavity.

The oak tree at Target Note 1 will be retained and was assessed to be in fairly good condition. It is proposed to prune a side branch (east). There was a lack of features considered to be highly suitable for bat roosts although some holes and a split were present. No conclusive evidence such as staining or bat droppings was recorded.

There are a total of four mature willow trees present at Target Note 2 proposed to be felled. Two were considered to be in a fairly poor condition with a variety of features potentially suitable for roosting including fallen limbs. However, many splits and holes were found to be fairly exposed and not of high suitability for bat roosts, though some rot cavities orientated upwards, most were shallow in nature. In places there were long splits and some peeled bark. These trees are evaluated at having low to moderate potential. The remaining two smaller mature willow trees in this location were assessed to be in moderate condition and as having fewer roost opportunities and low potential to support bats. No conclusive evidence such as staining or bat droppings was recorded in any of the trees at Target Note 2.

The three mature willow trees at Target Note 3 along a river meander proposed to be felled were considered to be in poor condition with fallen limbs, splits, rot holes, cracks and fissures and assessed as having low to moderate potential to support roosting bats. There were a variety of splits and cracks along with woodpecker holes, some of which were water filled and shallow, though one orientated upwards, it appeared fairly shallow. No conclusive evidence such as staining or bat droppings was recorded.

Two mature willow trees were inspected at Target Note 4 though it is understood that only the larger of the two will be felled. The larger one proposed to be felled was assessed to have moderate potential to support bats and the other low potential. Both trees appeared to be in moderate to fairly poor condition with fallen limbs. Features noted were some splits and fissures, some of which were exposed and some holes with cobwebs present providing evidence of no recent use. No conclusive evidence such as staining or bat droppings was recorded.

The mature willow tree and adjacent willow and alder trees at Target Note 5 on the south of the river were inspected and found to be in fairly good condition with low potential to support roosting bats with few features present and no conclusive evidence of presence.

The mature woodland is generally considered to provide commuting and foraging habitat and in conclusion there appeared to be a variety of potential roost features and roosting opportunities within the mature willow trees at target notes 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Badgers

Historic evidence of the presence of badgers was found during the survey. Some excavations at Target Note 4 in amongst the woodland habitat were identified to be rabbit and fox behaviour. At this location, possible historic badger evidence was recorded in the form of excavations which appeared to have commenced but been abandoned. No current badger evidence was identified.

Birds

The woodland, scrub and trees have the potential to support nesting birds providing good nesting opportunities for a variety of songbirds.

Features such as any holes within the mature trees also have the potential to be used by owls.

A kingfisher was recorded on the 22nd February 2016.

Water Voles

The river provides potential habitat capable of supporting water vole. No evidence was recorded during the survey.

Otters

The river provides potential habitat capable of supporting otter. No evidence was recorded during the survey.

Great Crested Newts

The grassland, woodland and scrub provide good quality terrestrial habitat for great crested newts. The nearest pond however, was assessed to be within 300 metres of the proposed work. A known population of great crested newts is present within the vicinity of the development.

3.4 Non-native Invasive Plants

No non-native invasive plants listed on Schedule 9 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act were found to be present on the site during the survey though they may not be evident during February. Decayed plant material which could possibly be the remnants of Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* was present on the north side of the River Clywedog but this was not a definite identification.

4.0 WILDLIFE LEGISLATION & POLICY

4.1 Legislation

The two principal pieces of legislation in the UK protecting wild species are Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. In addition to this, some animals are protected under their own legislation, e.g. The Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

Two other pieces of legislation, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, have also strengthened the protection of wildlife by amending the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

4.1.1 Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Part 1 is concerned with the protection of wildlife and the Act protects:

- all birds, their eggs and nests with special offences related to birds listed in Schedule 1;
- any wild animal listed in Schedule 5;
- any wild plant listed in Schedule 8

The Act also contains measures for preventing the establishment of non-native species which may be detrimental to native wildlife. It prohibits the release of animals and planting of plants listed in Schedule 9. There is a mechanism making the above offences legal through the granting of licences by the appropriate authorities. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act).

4.1.2 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010

The Habitats Regulations are the UK legislation implementing the European Habitats Directive. European Protected Species are listed on Schedules 2 and 4 of the Regulations.

The Regulations make it an offence to

- deliberately capture, kill, disturb, or trade in the animals listed in Schedule 2;
- deliberately destroy or take their eggs from the wild;
- damage or destroy their breeding sites or resting places; and
- pick, collect, cut, uproot, destroy, or trade in the plants listed in Schedule 4.

These actions can be made lawful through the granting of licences by the appropriate authorities for purposes such as education, science, conservation, preserving public health and safety. The authority must be satisfied that there are no satisfactory alternatives and that such actions will have no detrimental effect on the wild population of the species.

4.1.3 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Amendments to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 have been made in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 (in England and Wales).

The Act strengthens the legal protection for threatened species and brings the 1981 Act up to date. It has provided stronger powers for the police and wildlife inspectors and created a new offence of

reckless disturbance of a protected species. It also enables the courts to impose heavier fines and prison sentences for wildlife offences.

Breaching protected species legislation can give rise to a criminal offence. The CROW Act increased the penalties for offences under the W&C Act in relation to protected species to a maximum fine of £5000 (per individual, per egg) and/or custodial sentence of up to six months.

4.1.4 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

This act further amends the W&C Act to improve wildlife protection. It places a duty on the Local Planning Authority to ensure due regard for the conservation of biodiversity. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act 2006) provides a list of habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity in Wales (section 42).

4.1.5 Protection of Badgers Act 1992

Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. It is a criminal offence to kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat badgers or to interfere with a badger sett. Interference with a sett would include blocking tunnels or damaging the sett. Work within 30m may require a licence.

4.2 Policy

4.2.1 National Planning Policy Framework

NPPF March 2012 section 11 'conserving and enhancing the natural environment' sets out current government policy on biodiversity and nature conservation and places a duty on planners to make material consideration to the effect of a development on biodiversity when considering planning applications. It maintains that the planning system should aim to minimise impacts to biodiversity and promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats and protection of priority species. The LPA should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

5.0 Discussion & Recommendations

Habitats

The proposed development will involve the temporary disturbance of small areas of grassland, approximately four excavations of 1m x 1.5m.

The proposed development is predicted to result in the loss of nine mature willow trees, crown reduction and pruning of several others at target notes 2, 3, 4 and 5 and the removal of a side branch of the oak tree at target note 1 at Target Note 1.

The mature trees are considered to have high ecological value but given the retention of the remaining trees within the woodland which comprise good bat foraging and commuting habitat and nesting bird and mammal habitat, the loss of eight individual trees is not considered to constitute a significant detrimental impact. The capability of this habitat to continue to provide a high value foraging and commuting wildlife corridor will not be compromised by the temporary works.

A further detailed assessment of the trees was recommended in order to evaluate them and determine their potential to support nesting birds and or roosting bats and the results are summarised within this report.

Prior to the removal of any of the trees, it is recommended that a check should be made to ensure that there are no Tree Preservation Orders.

It is considered that there are no direct or indirect impacts on the river.

The rubble pile adjacent to the pumping station should remain undisturbed given that it is capable of supporting hibernating and resting great crested newts and other amphibians.

Protected species

Bats

The nine mature willow trees identified to be felled and oak tree to be pruned are considered to have low to moderate potential to support roosting bats (and nesting birds). This is based on an evaluation of the quality and type of roost opportunities available within the trees. There are a number of farm and industrial buildings and many features such as mature trees present within the trees and hedge lines within the surrounding landscape providing roost opportunities and foraging and commuting habitats.

The surveys did not identify any definite conclusive evidence to confirm that bats or roosting/nesting birds are present in any of the mature trees to be pruned or felled. Nevertheless, given the potential for these trees to support roosting bats, as a precautionary reasonable avoidance measure, it is recommended that the trees should be sensitively 'soft felled' under ecologist supervision to minimise the risk of harm to any individual bats.

Birds

All habitats and within the survey area have the potential to support nesting birds. Therefore works to any buildings, trees, scrub and other vegetation undertaken during the bird nesting season should only be undertaken following an assessment by an ecologist (nesting season is March to September inclusive). Any nests identified should be clearly marked and a buffer zone of 5m radius placed around them. No disturbance will take place within this buffer zone until all young have fledged. Soft felling of trees should occur following ecologist inspection to establish the absence of nesting or roosting birds.

Great Crested Newts

The nearest pond was assessed to be within 300 metres of the proposed work. A known exceptional population of great crested newts is present within the vicinity.

The proposed works will not impact on or affect a great crested newt breeding pond or other water-body with the potential to be used by great crested newts for breeding purposes within the site but will affect surrounding terrestrial habitat. Therefore a rapid risk assessment and precautionary non-licenced method statement approach is recommended and the details are provided in Appendix A.

References & Bibliography

Anon (1995) *The UK Biodiversity Action Plan*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2007) *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey – A Technique for Environmental Audit* (Revised reprint). Joint Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough.

Stace, C. (1997) *New Flora of the British Isles* (2nd edition). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Oldham, R.S., Keeble, J., Swan, M.J.S. and Jeffcote, M. (2000), Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). *Herpetological Journal* 10 (4), 143-155.

The Bat Conservation Trust, Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines 2012

PHOTOGRAPHS



Mature Oak Target Note 1



Limb to be removed Mature Oak at Target Note 1



Pole 2 to be replaced by Pumping Station



Mature Willows on the river bank at Target Note 3



Examples of potential roost features assessed at Target Note 2



Mature Willows to be felled at Target Note 2



Mature Willows to be felled or heavily pruned at Target Note 2



Mature Willow to be felled or heavily pruned at Target Note 2



Trees at Target Note 2



View of Grassland



Mature Willow to be felled at Target Note 4



Excavations in woodland at Target Note 4

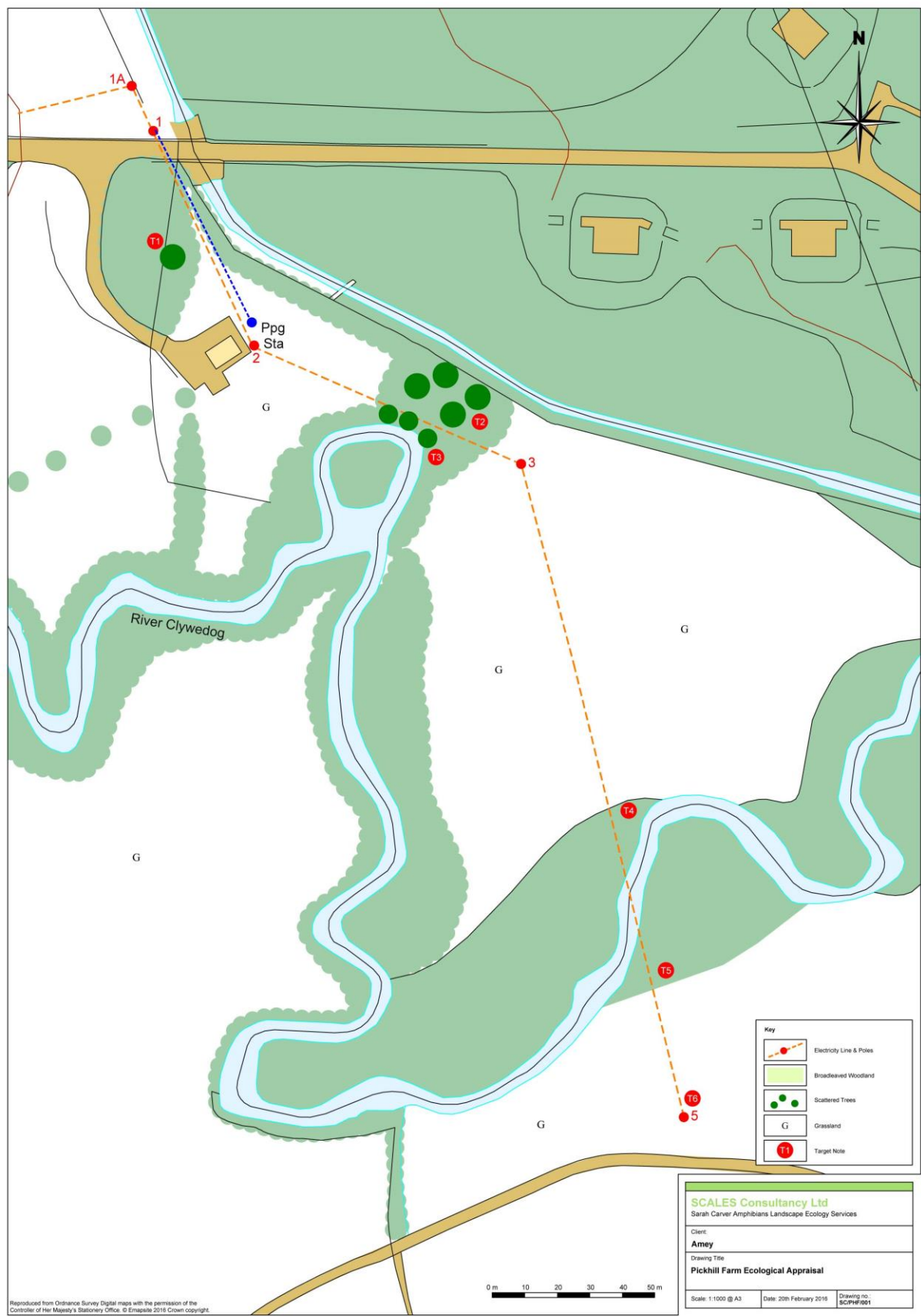


Mature Willows to be felled at Target Note 5



Possible evidence of remnants of Himalayan Balsam at Target Note 4

Drawing 01 – Ecological Survey Drawing



APPENDIX A

Great Crested Newt Reasonable Avoidance Measures/Non-Licensed Risk Assessment Precautionary Method Statement Report – Woodland Management

RISK ANALYSIS

Impacts

The nearest pond was assessed to be within 300 metres of the proposed work. A known population of great crested newts is present within the vicinity.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) suggests that suitable terrestrial habitats up to 500m from GCN breeding ponds may be used by newts for foraging, resting, hibernation and migration. However, Natural England suggests that great crested newts commonly use terrestrial habitat within 250m of a breeding pond. Jehle (2000) determined that 95% of summer newt refuges are located within 63m of a breeding pond whilst trapping surveys have recovered few great crested newts at distances greater than 100m.

Based upon published research and surveyor experience, high quality terrestrial habitats have been broadly identified and defined as mature deciduous woodland close to breeding ponds or connected by linear habitat features such as hedgerows.

The proposed works will not impact on or affect a great crested newt breeding pond or other water-body with the potential to be used by great crested newts for breeding purposes within the site but will affect surrounding terrestrial habitat.

The proposed woodland management will be carried out by Amey Utility Services Ltd. Where possible, much of the work will be with hand tools. Tracked machine access will be required for pole replacement. Some of the access will be gained from existing tracks, however, access through woodland habitats is required. Tracked machinery will have the least impact.

The majority of the ground in the pathway of the works was found to support typically high quality terrestrial habitat as the majority of the area was grassland, woodland and scrub. However, the ground will only be disturbed at the four pole points specified on the drawing and excavations for equipment installation at Target Note 6 and thus the impact to habitats potentially used by great crested newts is considered to be low. The temporary ground disturbance will result in a small excavation to allow a pole to be installed or replaced. The works are therefore only very temporary and will not result in the loss of substantial terrestrial habitat. Habitats affected include predominantly grassland with some small areas of scrub.

Woodland management by felling, thinning, pruning, side branch removal and crown lift will be undertaken to facilitate the works along power routes. Some minimal ground disturbance will be unavoidable in carrying out these operations.

No habitat suitable for use as hibernacula was identified within the areas to be affected, though some poles will affect some small areas of scrub. Should any areas be discovered that look as though they

could provide potential hibernacula, these will be avoided and remain unaffected by the activities. This will be at the discretion of the supervising ecologist

Great Crested Newts

The improvement works result in the movement of a tracked vehicle around the sites and ground disturbance at eight pole replacement locations, as shown on the drawing. The ground disturbance in these areas will be minimal and limited to just larger than the diameter of the pole (approximately 1.5m x 1m). The total area of ground to be disturbed and therefore temporarily affected is minimal.

To enable the vehicles to access the site, the vehicles will need to pass through the grassland. Following a site meeting with the ecologist and contractor, routes and woodland management work was discussed on the 17th February 2016. The trees will be cut via chainsaws to hedge height either to facilitate access and or to maintain a safe height under the cables. The majority of the trees will be allowed to re-grow.

This information has therefore been used in the rapid risk assessment tool provided in the Natural England Method Statement. The proposed works have been assessed as being highly unlikely to cause an offence:

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.001
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
Maximum:		0.001
Rapid risk assessment result:	GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY	

The proposed works have been given careful consideration to ensure the risk to killing or injuring great crested newts is as low as possible. Although the pole installation and woodland management are within 500m of great crested newt ponds it is considered that as the overall areas to be affected by the installation at each pole location and associated woodland management is so small, any great crested newt presents would only be present in very low numbers. Woodland management will be carried out in a sensitive manner and restricted to specifically identified areas within the woodland. It is considered therefore that the probability of causing an offence under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 would be unlikely.

It is considered therefore that the proposed works are below the threshold required for an application for a European Protected Species License as the probability of great crested newts using the habitat within the borehole area is considered to be low. An offence under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 with regards to great crested newts in the working area would be reasonably unlikely, and the insignificant loss of habitat would not be considered detrimental to the favourable conservation status of the great crested newt population within the site and local area. As this has been determined the following actions set out in the method statement will be followed to ensure the risk is reduced further.

METHOD STATEMENT

It is considered that the proposed works are below the threshold required for an application for a European Protected Species Licence however it is recommended that the following procedures are put in place to ensure the risk is greatly reduced:

- Works will be overseen by the appointed ecologist;
- The pole locations have been determined following a site walk over with contractor and ecologist to decide on location/access;
- The route of the vehicles will follow that shown on the drawing and agreed on site and will avoid any unnecessary removal of woodland, scrub or more established vegetation;
- Where vegetation requires clearance, it will be checked by the supervising ecologist prior to disturbance of leaf litter and/or breaking ground;
- Where poles are temporarily removed to allow replacement, the new pole will be installed without delay. However if there is a delay the excavated hole will be checked by the supervising ecologist;
- Materials will not be stored on site to reduce the risk of amphibians resting within them;
- In the unlikely event that a great crested newt is found at any point during the works, works would cease and Natural Resources Wales contacted for advice;
- The trees within the deciduous woodland will be removed by using a hand held chainsaw and cutting to hedge height. All cut material will be placed in habitat piles and once placed, left undisturbed;
- Any debris required to be removed will be assessed for its suitability for use by resting great crested newts and only then lifted and checked by the supervising ecologist;
- As the works will be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season, the presence of nesting birds is considered to be very unlikely. However, as a precautionary measure the working area will be assessed for roosting owls and nesting birds.