Annex XII: Ecological Baseline & Supporting Evidence

1. Introduction & Purpose

This annex provides the ecological baseline and supporting evidence referred to within the Ecological Stewardship Statement (ESS).

It contains representative examples of habitat data, species records, ecological observations and photographic evidence gathered during the applicants' first year of occupation and management of Oak Court Farm between June 2025 and June 2026.

The purpose of this annex is not to provide a formal ecological survey, but to present the evidence base upon which the applicants' understanding of the holding has developed. The observations and photographs included below record the habitats, wildlife activity and environmental characteristics identified during routine occupation, agricultural activity, habitat management and site monitoring.

The evidence presented is representative rather than exhaustive. Collectively, it supports the ESS by establishing the ecological baseline and evidential context upon which the applicants' stewardship approach has developed.

2. Habitat Mosaic & Site Features

Oak Court Farm supports a varied mosaic of habitat types, including riparian habitats, ancient woodland, scrub, hedgerows and wetland features. Together, these habitats establish the ecological baseline referred to within the ESS and illustrate the principal ecological characteristics of the holding.

The figures within this section provide representative examples of these habitat features and illustrate how they informed the applicants' developing understanding of the holding.

2.1 River Corridor & Riparian Habitats

The River Gwenfro flows through the southern part of the holding within a mosaic of ancient woodland, riparian vegetation, wetter grassland and scrub habitats. Repeated observations since occupation, together with pre-purchase site visits, have informed the applicants' understanding of this corridor as one of the principal ecological features of the holding.



Figure 2.1.1. River corridor within ancient woodland, 2 February 2026



Figure 2.1.2. Possible burrow entrances within riverbank habitat, 28 February 2026



Figure 2.1.3. Riparian and marshland habitat, 6 April 2024 (pre-purchase observations)



Figure 2.1.4. Multi-species riverbank vegetation, 6 April 2024 (pre-purchase observation)



Figure 2.1.5. River corridor within ancient woodland, 6 April 2024 (pre-purchase observations)

2.2 Woodland & Woodland Edge Habitats

The holding includes areas of ancient woodland together with smaller woodland clumps and extensive woodland edge habitats. These areas support mature trees, deadwood habitats, mosses, lichens, woodland flora and naturally developing edge vegetation. Together, they contribute to the structural diversity and ecological connectivity of the holding.



Figure 2.2.1. Woodland edge habitat associated with ancient woodland clump, 21 February 2026



Figure 2.2.2. Deadwood habitat within ancient woodland, 5 March 2026



Figure 2.2.3. Woodland edge habitat, 26 February 2026



Figure 2.2.4. Ancient woodland slope adjacent to river corridor, 5 March 2026

2.3 Hedgerows, Scrub & Transitional Habitats

Established hedgerows, scrub margins and associated transitional habitats occur throughout Oak Court Farm, linking woodland, grassland, wetland and riparian habitats across the holding. Together, these features contribute to habitat connectivity and provide shelter, forage opportunities and wildlife movement routes.



Figure 2.3.1. Southerly end of central hedgerow, 25 June 2026



Figure 2.3.2. Scrubland at lower part of field 2, 21 February 2026



Figure 2.3.3. Scrubland at lower part of field 1, 21 February 2026

2.4 Wetland Features

Areas of wetter ground occur within the southern part of the holding, together with the marshpond, dewpond and associated wetland vegetation. Together, these habitats contribute to the ecological diversity of the holding and form part of the wider habitat mosaic described within this annex.



Figure 2.4.1. Marshpond, 2 February 2026



Figure 2.4.2. Dewpond, 26 February 2026

2.5 Orchard Design & Layout

The planned orchard layout has been developed with regard to the existing eastern hedgerow, which lies approximately 3 metres beyond the left-hand side of the illustrated plan. As described within the ESS, the proposed arrangement seeks to retain close associations between productive planting and existing habitat features.

Whilst the orchard is being established progressively, the layout demonstrates how ecological considerations have informed the relationship between fruiting trees, shrubs and existing wildlife corridors from the outset.

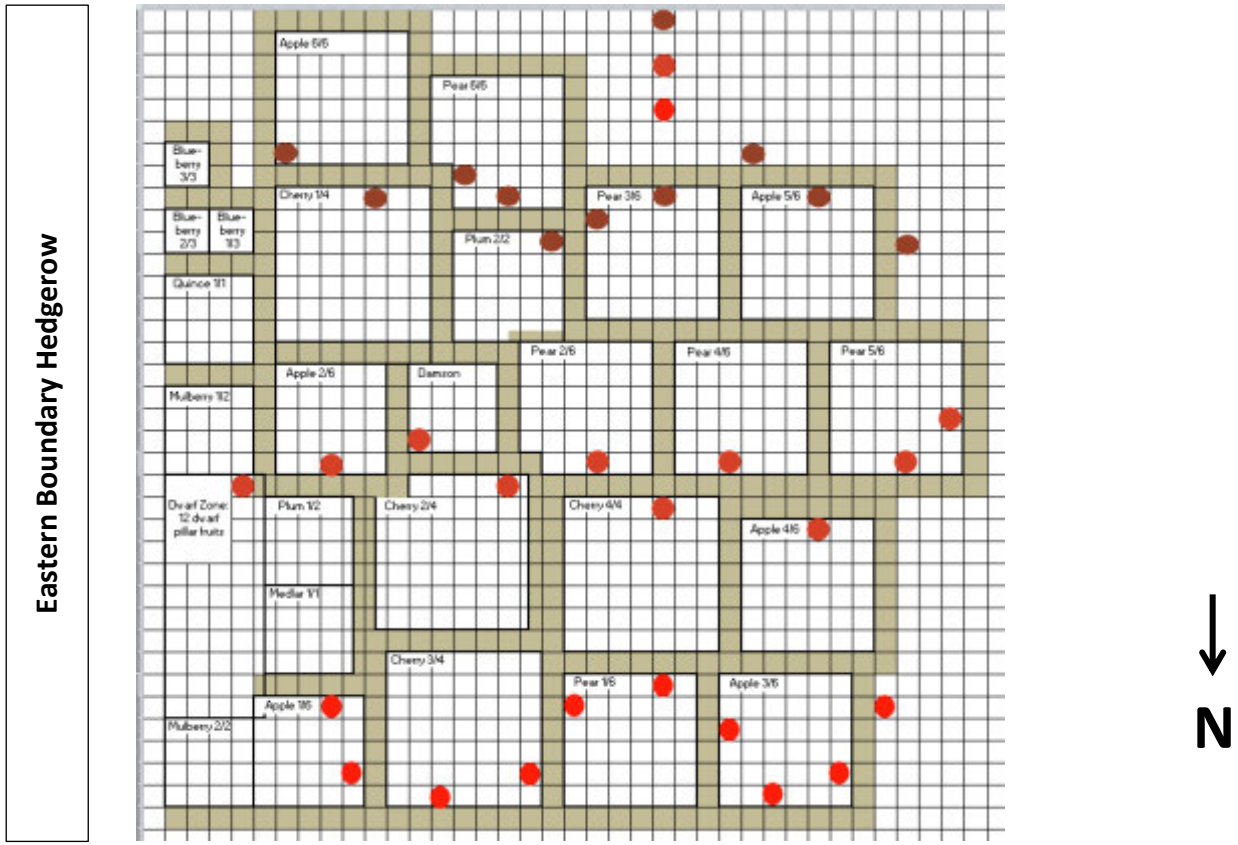


Figure 2.5.1. Planned orchard layout. Red circles indicate three raspberry varieties.

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Figure 3.1.4. Likely wildlife access route to woodland and river corridor, 21 February 2026

3.2 Deer Activity

Evidence of deer activity has been recorded within the north-western part of the holding, including tracks observed within grassland habitats. These records indicate that larger mammals utilise the holding and its associated habitat network, with movement routes appearing to link field margins, hedgerows, woodland edges and adjacent habitat areas.



Figure 3.2.1. Two sets of roe deer tracks, one continuing east towards the public footpath apparently traversing livestock fencing, while set 2 turns south along track, 2 January 2026



Figure 3.2.2. Roe deer tracks following farm tracks south-easterly, 2 January 2026

3.3 Other Mammal Observations

Additional evidence of smaller mammals and wildlife movement has been recorded within hedgerows, scrub habitats, open grassland, woodland margins and transitional areas throughout the holding.



Figure 3.3.1 Probable rabbit scat, adjacent to, Offa's Dyke, 28 February 2026



Figure 3.3.2 Burrow entrance, open grassland grassland close to ancient woodland clump, 2 February 2026



Figure 3.3.3 Further burrow entrance, with small animal trail, 2 February 2026

3.4 Wildlife Connectivity

Observations across the holding indicate a high degree of connectivity between habitat features. Wildlife trails frequently follow hedgerows, field boundaries, woodland edges, scrub habitats, open grassland and routes associated with the river corridor.

Several movement routes appear to link different habitat types, including the woodland clump, marshpond area, riparian corridor, hedgerow network and adjoining habitats beyond the site boundary. Collectively, these observations suggest that the holding functions as an interconnected ecological network rather than a series of isolated habitat features.

4. Wetland Features & Indicator Species

Wetland-associated habitats occur principally within the southern part of the holding and include the marshpond, dewpond, riparian corridor and adjacent areas influenced by seasonally wetter ground conditions. Together, these habitats support a range of plant and invertebrate species associated with damp grassland, wetland margins and transitional habitats, contributing to the ecological diversity described within the ESS.

4.1 Marshpond & Dewpond Features

The holding contains both a marshpond and a dewpond, each representing distinct wetland features within the wider ecological network of the site. The marshpond is associated with seasonally wetter ground conditions and adjoins grassland, scrub habitats, woodland edge vegetation, and the nearby river corridor. The dewpond similarly contributes to habitat diversity and illustrates the varied environmental conditions present across the holding.



Figure 4.1.1 Marshpond, below ancient woodland clump, 2 February 2026



Figure 4.1.2 Marshpond edge, adjacent to ancient woodland clump, 2 February 2026



Figure 4.1.3 Dewpond, within wetter grassland area, 5 March 2026

4.2 Wetland Indicator Species & Associated Fauna

A number of species associated with wetter ground conditions have been recorded within the holding, including Marsh Marigold, Soft Rush, Self-heal and other species associated with damp, seasonally wet or species-rich grassland habitats.

In addition, observations have recorded invertebrate species associated with clean flowing water and wetland habitats, including a Golden-ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*) observed within the north-eastern part of the holding on 28 June 2026. Although recorded away from the marshpond itself, the species is typically associated with unpolluted streams and river systems and provides a further indication of ecological connectivity across the holding. Together, these records provide representative examples of the species assemblages associated with wetter areas of the site.



Figure 4.2.1 Marsh Marigold, adjacent to marshpond, 21 February 2026



Figure 4.2.2 Soft Rush adjacent to marshpond, 21 February 2026



Figure 4.2.3 Self-heal adjacent to marshpond, 25 June 2026



*Figure 4.2.4 Partial photograph of Golden-ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*) recorded adjacent to the eastern hedgerow, 28 June 2026*

4.3 Relationship to the Wider Habitat Mosaic

Wetland-associated habitats occur alongside woodland edges, scrub habitats, grassland, hedgerows and the River Gwenfro corridor. Their close association with adjoining habitat features contributes to ecological connectivity within the southern part of the holding and forms an important component of the wider habitat mosaic described within the ESS.



Figure 4.3.1 Wetland/grassland, adjacent to scrub/hedgerow, leading towards marshpond and ancient woodland edge, 2 February 2026



Figure 4.3.2 Further along marshpond edge, adjacent to ancient woodland clump, 2 February 2026



Figure 4.3.3 Channel (left to right in centre of photo) from marshpond to ancient woodland edge and river, 2 February 2026

5. Pollinators & Invertebrates

Pollinating insects and other invertebrates have been recorded throughout the holding within grassland habitats, wetland-associated areas, field margins, scrub habitats, and transitional vegetation. Together, these records provide representative examples of invertebrate diversity associated with the habitat mosaic described within the ESS.

5.1 Pollinator Activity

Numerous bee species have been recorded utilising flowering plants throughout the holding. During a single period of observation undertaken whilst carrying out routine management activities, seventeen individual bees were photographed over a relatively short distance, illustrating the abundance of pollinator activity present across the site.

Hoverflies and other pollinating insects have also been recorded in association with flowering plants, field margins and wetter habitat areas.



Figure 5.1.1. White-tailed bumblebee, 31 May 2026



Figure 5.1.2. Red-tailed bumblebee, 31 May 2026



Figure 5.1.3. Possible hoverfly, 31 May 2026

5.2 Butterflies & Moths

A number of butterfly and moth species have been recorded utilising habitats across the holding. Species identified to date include Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Comma, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Green-veined White and Cinnabar moth, together with other invertebrates associated with grassland, scrub and transitional habitats.



Figure 5.2.1. Small tortoiseshell butterfly, 18 March 2026



Figure 5.2.2. Red Admiral butterfly, 26 May 2026



Figure 5.2.3. Comma butterfly, 27 May 2026



Figure 5.2.4. Meadow Brown butterfly, 25 June 2026



Figure 5.2.5. Green-veined white butterfly, 31 May 2026



Figure 5.2.6. Gatekeeper butterfly, 25 June 2026



Figure 5.2.7. Cinnabar moth, 25 June 2026

5.3 Relationship to Habitat Features

Pollinator activity has been recorded within a range of habitat types including grassland, nettle patches, wetland-associated areas, scrub habitats and unmanaged field margins. These habitats provide forage resources, breeding opportunities and shelter for a variety of invertebrate species and contribute to the ecological diversity described within the ESS.



Figure 5.3.1 Protected nettle zone with Small tortoiseshell butterfly, 13 April 2026



Figure 5.3.2 Grassland transition to wetland, adjacent to ancient woodland, 27 June 2026



Figure 5.3.3 Species-rich grassland, 27 June 2026

6. Bird Activity

Bird observations have been recorded throughout the holding in association with hedgerows, ancient woodland, woodland edge habitats, scrub areas, grassland and the River Gwenfro corridor. Species identified to date include Goldfinch, Buzzard, Red Kite, Jay, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat, Song Thrush and Wood Pigeon, together with observations of owl species associated with woodland habitats adjacent to the holding.

6.1 Birds of Prey

Evidence associated with predatory bird species has been recorded within and adjacent to the holding. Species observed to date include Buzzard, Red Kite, Tawny Owl and Little Owl.

Repeated Tawny Owl and Little Owl calls have been heard within the vicinity of the holding, with species identification independently supported through observations made using the Merlin Bird ID application. Although nesting locations have not been confirmed, these records suggest the presence of owl species within or adjacent to the holding.

Additional observations include raptors seen circling over woodland habitats and a possible owl pellet recorded during the monitoring period.



Figure 6.1.1. Possible owl pellet, 28 February 2026



Figure 6.1.2. Buzzard, 25 June 2026

6.2 Woodland & Habitat-Associated Birds

Bird records associated with woodland edges, hedgerows, scrub habitats and grassland areas include Jay, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat, Song Thrush, Goldfinch, Pheasant and Wood Pigeon.

Observations made using the Merlin Bird ID application have supplemented visual records and provide additional evidence of species presence within habitats associated with the holding.

Row #	Taxon Order	Category	Common Name	Scientific Name	Date
1	31678	species	Gray Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	21 Jun 2026
2	26966	species	Eurasian Nuthatch	Sitta europaea	21 Jun 2026
3	1477	species	Ring-necked Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus	21 Jun 2026
4	28433	species	Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos	20 Jun 2026
5	21575	species	Carrion Crow	Corvus corone	20 Jun 2026
6	9199	species	Tawny Owl	Strix aluco	20 Jun 2026
7	1885	species	Common Wood-Pigeon	Columba palumbus	20 Jun 2026
8	32552	species	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	19 Jun 2026
9	31534	species	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	19 Jun 2026
10	27258	species	Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	19 Jun 2026
11	25364	species	Greater Whitethroat	Curruca communis	19 Jun 2026
12	21467	species	Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica	19 Jun 2026
13	6545	species	European Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	19 Jun 2026
14	28500	species	Eurasian Blackbird	Turdus merula	18 Jun 2026
15	24853	species	Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita	18 Jun 2026
16	21514	species	Eurasian Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula	18 Jun 2026

Figure 6.2.1 Extract from Merlin Bird ID species records associated with Oak Court Farm, June 2026

6.3 Breeding Activity

Evidence of breeding activity has been recorded within habitats associated with the holding. Records include a hatched Wood Pigeon egg recovered from vegetation close to the site entrance together with a photograph of a pheasant hen accompanied by two juveniles recorded in June 2025 adjacent to the area now managed as the protected nettle zone.

Further observations undertaken on 8 May 2026 indicated repeated use of the nettle stand by a pheasant hen and chick, with the hen moving through the vegetation at ground level and calling the chick back into cover. Although the nest itself was not directly observed, these behaviours provide evidence of breeding activity within the holding and indicate that the nettle stand functions as nesting and refuge habitat. The area is now retained and protected as part of the site's ongoing ecological management.

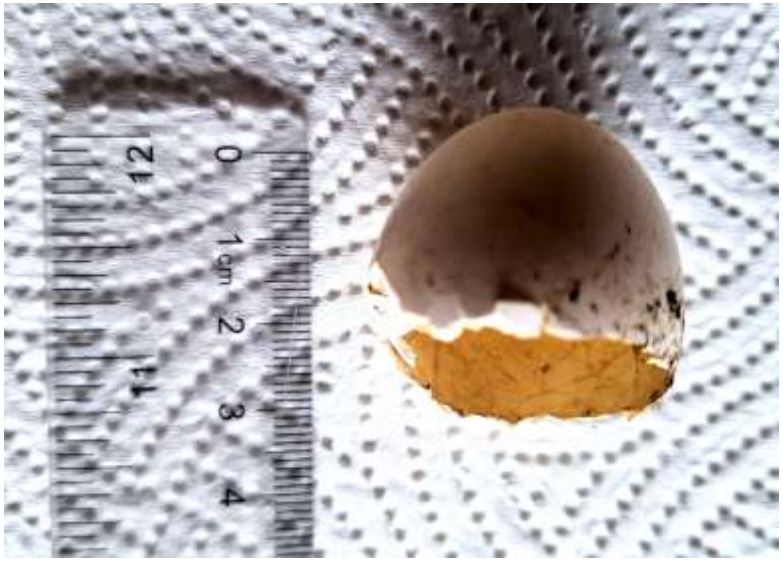


Figure 6.3.1. Hatched wood pigeon egg part, 25 February 2026



Figure 6.3.2. Pheasant hen with two juveniles, 17 June 2025

6.4 Relationship to Habitat Features

Bird observations have been associated with woodland habitats, hedgerows, scrub habitats, grassland, wetland features and transitional areas described elsewhere within this annex. Collectively, these records illustrate the range of bird species utilising habitats within and adjacent to the holding and contribute to the ecological baseline described within the ESS.

Species Name	Scientific Name	Origin / Introduction Status	Species Group	Terrain	Habitat(s) Observed	Status	Evidence Type	Notes
Tawny owl	*Strix aluco*	Native (naturally occurring)	Bird	Woodland edge	Woodland	Resident	Call	Classic 'who-hoohoohoohoo' call heard.
Little owl	*Athene noctua*	Native (naturally occurring)	Bird	Woodland edge	Woodland	Resident	Call	Oowip oowip' call heard.
Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	Native (naturally occurring)	Bird	Open ground/disturbed	Hedgerow, Open grassland	Resident	Visual	Single goldfinch first observed; then pair observed.

Figure 6.4.1. Extract from Oak Court Farm Monitoring Log, Species Register

7. Evidence Summary

The representative observations presented within this annex provide the supporting evidence referred to throughout the ESS. Collectively, they establish the ecological baseline identified during the applicants' first year of occupation and illustrate the habitats, species observations and ecological characteristics upon which the stewardship approach described within the ESS has been developed.