Sensible Ecological Survey Solutions

(former)

Village Hall, Knowsley Village

Preliminary Ecology Appraisal

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1. Introduction

Sensible Ecological Survey Solutions was commissioned to complete a 'Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) at a site referred to as:

(former) "**Village Hall, Knowsley, Merseyside, L34 9BD**" (to be subsequently referred to as '**the site'**)'.

The site (**Figures A & B; Photographs 1-4**) currently comprises of a roughly triangular plot of land measuring approximately 70m long by 30m wide (at widest points), which narrows to its northern frontage.

The site's footprint is largely occupied by a former Village Hall building **(Photograph A)** which is located to the centre of the site, and is surrounded by strips of amenity grassland, hard standing and scattered trees.

The site is located at the centre of Knowsley Village with roads passing to the immediate north and east; a burial ground and fields are found to the south, and finally an established residential development to the west with amenity grassland.

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was completed to determine if the site and its immediate surrounds contain important habitats, or have the potential to support wildlife species protected under law and/or listed under national or local biodiversity action plans. The survey findings presented in this report, along with conclusion and recommendations will assist the Local Planning Authority in its assessment of potential impacts on biodiversity.

<u>Figure A:</u> Aerial view of site and surrounds.

Note: The centre of the site, and former Village Hall building, is marked with a red 'X'. The site is enclosed by roads to the east and north, a burial ground and fields to the south, and residential development to the west. The location of the scattered trees falling within the site boundary can be made out.

Figure B: Plan of site with red line indicating current site boundary.
Note: The small substation structure to the south east is under different ownership and falls outside the application area.

Photograph 1: General view of north facing (front) to site.
Note: The former village hall building, which accounts for the majority of the site area, can be seen to the fore.

Photograph 2: General view of west facing side to site.
Note: The small number of semi-mature broadleaved trees and line of conifer trees to the site margin.

Photograph 3: General view looking along southern margin to site.
Note: The rear of the former village hall building can be seen to the left of image, and a line of semi mature trees marking the site boundary can be seen to the right.

Photograph 4: General view looking along eastern margin to site.
Note: The flat roofed substation structure falls outside the application area (see Figure B). The east facing frontage to the Village Hall building can be seen behind the substation. The east side of the site contains a number of large mature deciduous trees.

1.1 Scope

The ecological assessment reviewed in this report comprises of three key elements:

1. An evaluation of the conservation status of the site based on a desktop review of collated data for the site and surrounds, including protected species records and nature conservation designations for the area;

2. An assessment of the site's habitat composition and floristic abundance, which is derived from a walkover survey.

3. A protected species audit that evaluates the likelihood of protected or otherwise notable species occurring on the site based on appraisal of the site's habitats and features.

1.2 Acting Consultant Qualifications

The ecological appraisal was completed by Dr David Bell, Director, Sensible Ecological Survey Solutions Ltd (SESS). Dr Bell has forty years' experience as a professional ecologist. He was a Local Planning Authority Principal Ecologist for fourteen years before moving into private sector consultancy. He has led on ecological appraisals at sites across the North West and wider UK, prepared Environmental Impact Assessments and served as an ecology expert witness at Public Inquiries. Dr Bell is a long-standing member of the 'Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management' (MCIEEM). He has considerable experience in the completion of protected species surveys and assessments, and the development of species mitigation schemes associated with development proposals.

2. Methodology

The Phase I Ecology Survey was undertaken with reference to the Institute of Environmental Assessment's 'Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment' (IEMA, 1997). In accordance with these guidelines the survey comprises of both a desk-based data trawl and field study, as described below.

2.1 Desk Study

The desk study component of the ecological appraisal comprises reference to statutory and non-statutory nature conservation agency data bases. The aim of this exercise is to supplement the field survey results by collating and reviewing existing ecological information relevant to the site and the local area. Records of legally protected species and sites of importance for nature conservation, e.g. '**Sites of Special Scientific Interest'** (SSSI) are obtained in order that potential impacts from the development proposals can be assessed.

Species and local wildlife sites data was requested from **Merseyside Biobank** for a 2km radius search area around the site. Statutory wildlife sites data was also obtained from the DEFRA's '**Magic**' **Interactive Mapping** web site.

2.2 Field Survey

The field survey of the site was undertaken on the 26th November 2024. Weather conditions were ideal. There was restricted surveyor visual access to the site and immediate surrounds.

Habitats Survey

An Extended Phase I Ecology Survey was undertaken for the whole site and land and features up to 250m radius out from the site, following the guidelines recommended by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (IEA). The Phase I survey aims to identify habitat types and species present at the time of survey, and also assess the potential of the habitats and features present to support other protected or notable species.

According to IEMA 1997, Phase I ecology surveys can be undertaken all year round to support and verify the findings of the desk study. Although certain protected species surveys need to be undertaken during particular seasons it is possible through a Phase I habitat survey to identify any potential habitats on site where protected species may be present. In the event that suitable habitats

are identified, it will be necessary to undertake further seasonal surveys to investigate the potential for protected species fully. However, in the event that no suitable habitats for protected species are identified on site, a Phase I Ecology Survey is sufficient to determine the potential impacts associated with a proposed development. The dominant plant species were recorded and habitats classified according to their vegetation types. These are presented in the standard Phase I habitats survey format with habitat descriptions and plan (see **Appendix A to rear of report**).

The presence of noxious and invasive species, such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica),* if encountered during the field survey was also recorded.

3. Results

3.1 Desk Study

Designated Wildlife Sites

No part of the application site has been designated as a wildlife site for its nature conservation interest, including any statutory designation such as **Site of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI) or **Local Nature Reserve** (LNR). The nearest LNR is '**Acornfield Plantation LNR**' located 1.8 km to the north; the nearest SSSI is the southern tip of the '**Sefton Coast SSSI'** 12km to the west. (**Table 1, Figure D**).

Table 1: Statutory Designated Sites within 10km radius of site

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's)

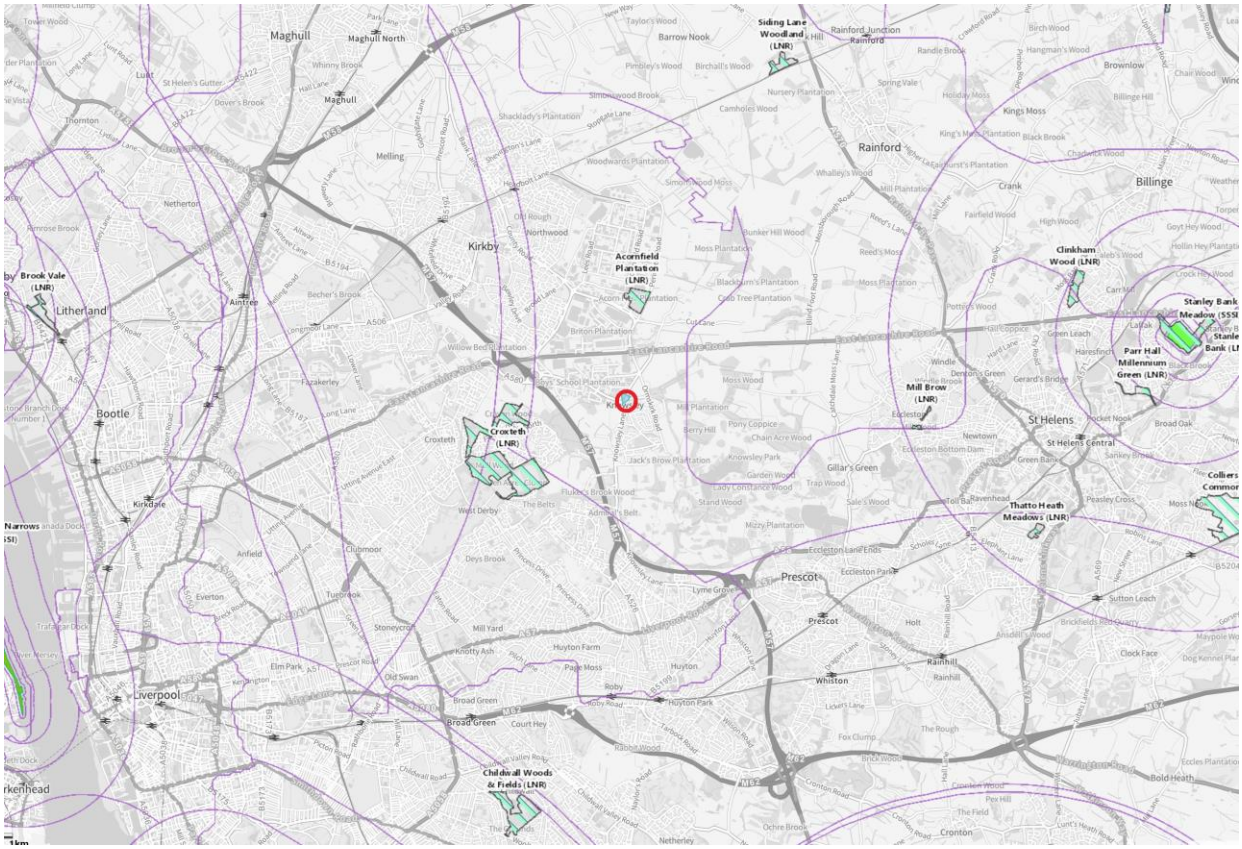
Name	*Location*
None	

Local Nature Reserves (LNR's/ proposed LNRs

Name	*Location*
Acornfield Plantation LNR	1.8km N
Croxteth LNR	2.4km SW
Millbrow LNR	5.4km E
Siding Lane Wood LNR	6.5km NE
Childwall Wood LNR	7.6km S
Thatto Heath LNR	7.9km E
Clinkham Wood LNR	8.3km NE
Stanleybank LNR	9.9km E

<u>Figure D:</u> Plan showing distribution of Statutory Wildlife Sites around the site.

Note: A small red circle indicates the approximate location of the target site. The purple rings superimposed on the plan identify the Natural England SSSS Impact Risk Zones. The site does not fall within any SSSI Impact Risk Zones.



Protected Species Records

Merseyside Biobank was approached for species records for a **2.0 km radius** around the site. [**Please see separate submitted rear of the report to review the Biobank generated data in detail**] The data search generated records for the following notable species which have the potential to be present at the site or associated with habitats present in proximity to the site boundaries, given the range of habitats or features present:

Mammals

European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)	widespread
Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipisterellus*)	widespread
Soprano Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*)	widespread
Brown long-eared (*Plecotus auratus*)	scattered
Badger (*Meles meles*)	rare

Amphibians

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)	widespread
Common toad (*Bufo bufo*)	widespread
Smooth Newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*)	scattered

Reptiles

Common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*)	rare

Birds (*incomplete species list – sample of notable species which could be dependent on the site due to location and habitats present*)

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Nuthatch (*Sitta evropaea*)

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

3.2 Field Survey

Phase 1 Ecological Survey

A site walkover survey was undertaken in order to identify the habitats present within the site and any habitats or features of ecological importance which may be directly or indirectly affected by any proposed development.

Habitat Descriptions

During the field survey, all habitats present at the site were mapped using the standard methodology (JNCC, 1993). Findings are presented as a **Habitats Plan** (see '**Appendix A'** to the rear of report).

The survey identified the following habitats within, or in close proximity, to the site (listed in approximate order of decreasing area:

ON SITE

- **Buildings**
- **Amenity grassland**
- **Hard standing**
- **Scattered trees**
- **Bare ground**

IN PROXIMITY TO SITE

- **Hard standing**
- **Improved grassland**
- **Amenity grassland**
- **Buildings**
- **Scattered trees**
- **Hedgerow**
- **Scattered Scrub**

Descriptions of Key Habitats recorded within the Site

Buildings

The former Village Hall building (**Photographs 1, 3, & 5**) accounts for the majority of the site area. The large two storey building is of brick construction with pitched slate covered roofing, with flat roofed extension attached to rear (**Photograph 6**). A metal shed outbuilding is located to the south west corner of the site (**Photograph 7**). A small substation structure (**Photograph 4**) is located to the south east corner of the site, but does not fall within the planning application area (**see Figure B**).

The structures were subject to survey and appraisal and all were assessed to have negligible nature conservation interest.

All the onsite buildings were assessed as having negligible nature conservation value.

Amenity grassland

Small stands of species poor rough grassland can be found to the site margins (**Photographs 8. 9 & 10**). The grassland has limited nature conservation interest but may offer restricted foraging opportunities to birds and mammals.

The improved grassland is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Hard standing

An area of hard standing is present to the front of the Village Hall building (**Photograph 9).** The hard standing represents a generally hostile environment to wildlife offering no foraging or refuge opportunities.

The hard standing is assessed as having negligible nature conservation.

Scattered Trees

Small stands of semi mature and mature trees are present to the site margins and site corners **(Photographs 2, 3 & 8)** The semi mature trees have low overall nature conservation interest, but may offer limited foraging opportunities to birds. The stand of large mature trees found to the south east

corner of the site (**Photograph 10**) do however constitute a locally important nature conservation feature and can be expected to offer forging and potentially breeding opportunities to birds. None of the trees on site were assessed to have potential to support roosting bats but bat may be attracted to the trees to forage.

The trees to the site margins are assessed as having low to moderate nature conservation value at the local level.

Bare Ground

Small areas of bare ground are present to the site margins, where recent vegetation clearance works have taken place (**Photographs 4 & 11).** The small area of the bare ground scores down any nature conservation value.

The areas of bare ground areas assessed as having negligible nature conservation value.

Spoil/vegetative waste

A number of recently created small piles of vegetation clearance arisings (**Photographs 4, 7 & 9)** are present to the site margins. Piles of vegetative materials are known to attract small mammals, including hedgehog, and amphibians as shelter and hibernacula.

The piles of vegetative material have negligible nature conservation interest, unless they are found to offer refuge to valued wildlife.

Descriptions of Key Habitats recorded in proximity to the Site

Hard Standing

The site entrance to the north is directly onto a public footpath and road (**Figures A & B; Photograph 1),** and a further road runs along the eastern margin of the site (**Photograph 11**). Hard standing represents a hostile terrestrial environment for wildlife.

The hard standing is assessed as having negligible nature conservation value.

Improved grassland

An improved grassland field (**Figure 1**) is present to the south west of the site (**Photograph 12**). The grassland at the time of survey had not been managed for some time and the grass had gone rank and was starting to be invaded by tall ruderal plant species. The grassland has overall low nature conservation interest, but its current rank state would make it attractive to small mammals and birds

The improved grassland is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Amenity Grassland

A large burial ground of managed amenity grassland is present to the immediate south of the site (**Photograph 13**). Further amenity grassland is associated with the residential plot to the immediate west of the site. The species poor amenity grassland has limited nature conservation interest.

The amenity grassland is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Buildings

Residential buildings are present to the north and west of the site; and a church and large grounds is present to the east. None of these buildings approach to within 10m radius of the site, and therefore the risk to protected species were they to be dependent on the structures is assessed as negligible.

The risk of harmful disturbance to wildlife dependent on buildings located in proximity to the site is assessed as negligible.

Scattered Trees

Stands of mature trees are associated with the church grounds to the south east of the site (**see Figure A**) The nearest mature trees are over 20m from the site boundary so although the trees may have potential to support protected wildlife, the risk of harm is assessed as negligible.

The trees beyond the site margins are assessed as having moderate nature conservation value at the local level.

Hedgerow

A managed hawthorn dominant hedgerow runs along the western boundary of the burial ground to the immediate south of the site (**Photograph 13**) and extends up to the southern site boundary. The hedge will serve as a local wildlife dispersal corridor and could attract wildlife to the site however the hedge is not connected to a wider hedgerow network which scores down its overall nature conservation importance.

The hedgerow is assessed as having moderate nature conservation value at the local level

Scattered Scrub

Small stands of scattered bramble dominant scrub is found immediately beyond the southern site boundary. The scrub will offer limited shelter and foraging opportunities to birds, small mammals and amphibians, however its very restricted area scored down its nature conservation value and the habitats is widespread in the local area.

The scattered scrub is assessed to have negligible nature conservation interest.

Invasive Plants

No evidence of listed invasive plants such as Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) were recorded within the site or in close proximity to the site.

3.3. Protected Species

Protected species are those with statutory protection measures, as:

- Listed on Schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
- Covered under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, and;
- Listed on Annexe's of the European Communities Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (implemented by the Conservation Regulations 1994 (as amended).

Notable species are those that are not specifically protected by the statutes mentioned above, but are nevertheless important in a regional or local context; this includes species covered within BAPs and those that are regionally or locally scarce or rare.

Given the nature of the site and historical species records for the local area, the following individual species, or animal groups, are considered worthy of special reference.

Birds

No evidence of specially protected bird species, such as barn owl (*Tyto alba*) was recorded during the site walkover. The site overall is assessed to have negligible value to specially protected bird species.

The site is unsuitable for ground nesting birds due to its small area and high levels of urban disturbance.

The small areas of amenity grassland will have limited foraging value to small numbers of common passerine species; however, the habitat is widespread and better represented in the local area.

The mature and semi mature trees to the site margins can also be expected to support a range of common passerine bird species.

No evidence of breeding bird activity was recorded in association with the former Village Hall building, either externally or internally.

The impact on birds is assessed as low overall; however, it is recommended that any site clearance works, including the removal of trees, are avoided during the bird breeding season (1st March - 31st August in any year). If works must commence during the bird breeding season then appropriate checks for active nests should be completed by a suitably qualified person, no more than two weeks prior to commencement of works.

Bats

The former Village Hall building was subject to a Phase 1 Buildings Bat Survey and no evidence of bat roosting activity was recorded, either external and internal. The building was appraised as having 'negligible' overall potential to support either external or internal bat roosting. The slate roofing and associated ridge tiling are in good repair and well-sealed (**Photographs 5, 6 & 14**). The external stone work and brickwork are again in good repair and well-sealed (**Photographs 17 & 18**). There are no enclosed roof chambers or other features within which bats could seek refuge internally ((**Photographs 15 & 16**).

A stand of mature trees to the south east corner of the site were subject to special inspection and all the trees were assessed to have negligible potential to support roosting bats (**Photograph 10**).

No buildings or features in proximity to the site were assessed to having negligible bat roost potential.

The scattered trees on site can be expected to attract small numbers of foraging bats, however the small size of the site scores down its potential value to the local bat population. The proposed alteration and conversion work to the former Village Hall structure would not be expected to interfere with established foraging areas or flight paths used by the local bat population

The impact on roosting bats is assessed as negligible, the impact on the local bat population is assessed as negligible.

Hedgehogs

The site's currently offers limited foraging opportunities to hedgehogs. The small areas of scrub to the southern boundary to the site, and the heaps of recently cut vegetation found scattered throughout the site could potentially offer foraging and refuge opportunities.

The overall impact on the local hedgehog population is assessed as low however individuals would be harmed during site clearance works. It is recommended that potential hedgehog refuges/hibernacula are hand searched by a suitably qualified person prior to site clearance works. Recovered animals should be removed to a suitable receptor area off site.

Amphibians

The site has negligible potential to support Great crested newt (*Trituris cristatus*), however it can be expected to offer refuge and foraging to common amphibian species, such as Common frog, Common toad & smooth newt.

Preliminary site clearance should be phased to allow amphibians time to disperse out of harm's way. The potential refuge/hibernacula mitigation checks proposed above for hedgehogs are equally applicable to amphibians.

4. Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

HABITATS

The majority of the site area is accounted for by the former Village Hall building and it's perimeter hard standing (**see Appendix A: Habitats Plan**). The building and hard standing were assessed to have negligible nature conservation interest. The outer margins of the site are generally covered in amenity grassland of low nature conservation interest. The most significant features on site are the scattered semi-mature and mature trees, which were assessed at having moderate nature conservation value at the local level. A small number of semi-mature deciduous trees and a line of **Leylandii** conifer trees located to along the western margin to the site (**Photograph 2**) have been identified for removal, however their loss is assessed as having negligible nature conservation impact. The more important stand of large mature trees to the south east corner of the site (**Photograph 10**) will be retained.

The site is surrounded to the north and east my hardstanding roads of negligible nature conservation interest; and amenity grassland is present to the immediate west and south of low nature conservation interest.

There are no buildings other notable habitats or features within a 10m radius of the site boundaries.

The risk to valued habitats has been assessed as negligible.

WILDLIFE SITES

The nearest LNR is '**Acornfield Plantation LNR**' located 1.8 km to the north; the nearest SSSI is the southern tip of the '**Sefton Coast SSSI'** 12km to the west. (**Table 1, Figure D**). **Acornfield Plantation LNR** is separated from the site by established urban development, the risk of impacts on any of the LNR is assessed negligible. The site does not fall within any SSSI Impact Risk Zones (**Figure D**).

The risk of direct or indirect impacts on any designated wildlife sites has been assessed as negligible.

SPECIES

The current site habitats are of negligible or low value to wildlife. The threat to legally protected and/or biodiversity action plan species is assessed as low overall; and negligible provided some basic mitigation measures to protect breeding birds, common amphibian species, and hedgehogs are adopted.

BATS

The former Village Hall building and onsite trees were all assessed to have negligible potential to support roosting bats. The proposed conversion work to the building, and the loss of a small number of semi mature trees, is not expected to interfere with the flight paths and foraging behaviour of the local bat population. Phase 2 bat surveys are not considered to be justified and are not recommended.

No special bat protection measures are recommended.

BIRDS

The scattered trees to the site perimeters have potential to support small numbers of breeding birds. The risk of harmful disturbance to breeding birds is overall assessed as low; and mitigation measures can be proposed to reduce the risk to negligible.

It is recommended that works, including preliminary site vegetation clearance, commence outside the bird breeding season (1st March – 31st August). If this recommendation cannot be met then a breeding birds survey should be completed no more than two weeks prior to scheduled commencement of works. If evidence of an active nest (or nests) is recorded then works may need to be delayed, or alternatively a standoff of at least 4 metres from the nest site should be retained until the nest is confirmed as abandoned.

HEDGEHOGS & AMPHIBIANS

Hedgehogs and amphibians can be considered together as the same general protective measures are applicable. Both can be expected to be present in low numbers within the site, and both will seek shelter/hibernacula refuge as well as forage within the site, and are therefore at risk.

It is recommended that immediately prior to commencement of site clearance works hand searches are completed of potential animal refuges, such as piles of vegetation and rubble. Recovered animals should be recovered and moved to a suitable receptor area out of harm's way. Escape ramps should be placed overnight in any external construction excavations to minimise the risk of animal entrapment.

NATURE CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENTS RECOMMENDATIONS

The erection of bird and bat boxes on trees and/or bat tubes in-cooperated into external works on the former Village Hall building will serve to enhance the overall value of the site to the local bat and breeding bird populations.

It is recommended that at least two permanent bat boxes and two bat boxes (or alternatively bat tubes built into the building) are erected on site. The design and erection location of the boxes to be supervised by a suitably qualified person to maximise the potential wildlife occupancy uptake of the boxes.

5. References

Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report (1995). UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Institute of Environmental Assessment (1997) Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (1993) Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: A Technique for Environmental Audit.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

Appendix A : Phase 1 Habitats Plan

Habitats Key

- Buildings
- Hard standing
- Scattered trees
- Amenity grassland
- Improved grassland
- Hedgerow
- Scattered scrub
- Ornamental shrub

Appendix B: Photographs

Photograph 5: **View of west and south facing frontages to former Village Hall building..**

Photograph 6: **Close up sample view of slate roofing on the Village Hall building.**

Photograph 7 View of metal shed outbuilding to south west corner of site.

Photograph 8: View of amenity grassland and scattered trees to south west corner of site.

Photograph 9: **View of hard standing to north facing (front) of building.**

Photograph 10: **View of scattered mature trees to south east corner of site.**
Note: The small substation building to the fore is in separate ownership falls outside the application area.

Photograph 11: View of recently disturbed bare ground to south east corner of site.
Note: The piles of bricks and cut vegetation to the fore which could offer refuge to wildlife.

Photograph 12: View of improved grassland field to south of site.
Note: The field is currently unmanaged and the grass has gone rank.

Photograph 13: **View looking back at the site from the burial ground to the south.**
Note: The amenity grassland and the hawthorn dominant hedgerow running up to the southern boundary of the site.

Photograph 14: **Close up sample view of slate roofing on the Village Hall building.**
Note: The good repair of the slate roofing and associated ridge tiling which are well sealed.

Photograph 15: Internal view of large main chamber with the former village hall building.
Note: The internal chambers are well sealed throughout with no viable opportunities for bats or birds to gain access recorded.

Photograph 16: View looking up at ornate timber backing to pitched roofing on village hall building.
Note: The ceiling extends up into the roofing and there are no enclosed roof chambers within the building.

Photograph 17: Sample close up view of external stone work to village hall building.
Note: The stone work is in good repair with no viable openings for bats or birds recorded.

Photograph 18: Sample view of external brickwork to village hall building.
Note: The brick work and mortar seal is in good repair throughout and well-sealed with no gapping or holes recorded through which bats could gain access.