

FAUNA FOREST

ECOLOGY

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal & Bat & Bird Assessment

Prepared for Osprey Property Investment Limited
Land off Meadowside View, Alton Staffordshire

July 2025

Land off Meadowside View, Alton, Staffordshire

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Methods used to prepare this report, including those carried out in the field, followed The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct.

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	METHODOLOGY	4
3	RESULTS	6
4	DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS	10
APPENDIX A: LEGISLATION SUMMARY		12
APPENDIX B: MAPS & SITE PLANS		14
APPENDIX C: SITE IMAGES		16

SITE PLANS & MAPS

Figure 1: Habitat Map	15
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by Fauna Forest Ecology Limited on behalf of Osprey Property Investment Limited. It provides the results of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Bat and Bird Assessment undertaken on land off Meadowside View, Alton, Staffordshire (the application site) (grid reference SK 07532 41866).
- 1.2 The PEA along with the Bat and Bird Assessment were undertaken following good practice¹ to identify the ecological value of the application site, considering both habitats and protected species. The results of a desk study and field survey are included in this report, and in context to the proposed development, they have been used to inform the level of further survey effort and mitigation required to comply with relevant nature conservation policies and legislation. The evaluation and findings in this report can be used by the local planning authority (LPA) in their view of the planning application.
- 1.3 The proposals are to develop the application site for residential use, involving renovation of buildings (B1-B4), and landscaping the garden area surrounding it.
- 1.4 The application site is in Alton, a relatively small Staffordshire village, approximately 7km east of Cheadle and 9km north of Uttoxeter.

2 METHODOLOGY

Desk study

- 2.1 A search was undertaken using desktop resources including the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside² (MAGIC) website. MAGIC was used to search for records of designated sites and ecologically important habitats within a 1km radius of the application site. Google Earth³ was also used to study the nearby landscape. In addition to this, records of non-statutory sites and notable animal species (from within 1km of the application site) relevant to the site and the proposed development will be provided by Staffordshire Ecological Record (SER) in due course.

Field survey

- 2.2 The field survey was carried out by ecologists Frances Horsford BSc (Hons) MSc and David Nixon MSc MCIEEM MRSB (bat licence number 2015-18322-CLS-CLS) on 13th June 2025. A UKHabs assessment was undertaken, during which time the surveyors carried out a walking transect of the application site following guidelines from the UK Habitat Classification (UKHabs) system (note* for the purpose of this

¹ UKHab Ltd (2023) UK Habitat Classification version 2.0 (at <https://www.ukhab.org>)

² Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC). Crown Copyright and database rights [2015]. Ordnance Survey 100022861. Available at: <http://www.magic.gov.uk/>

³ https://www.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/earth/

report habitat codes are shown on the habitat map (Figure 1))⁴. Key habitats present within the boundaries were mapped and broad habitats were categorised. During the walked transect, consideration was given in regard to the potential presence of protected species and where possible the surveyor searched for evidence of protected species.

Bat and Bird Assessment

- 2.3 During the survey, where possible, all areas of the buildings were internally and externally examined for evidence of bats and birds . The building survey included an assessment using a powerful torch and endoscope. All accessible holes and crevices suitable for use as a bat roost or nest site were examined. Visual ground inspections were undertaken using binoculars, and photographs were taken to capture notable features such as missing tiles, damaged or missing mortar, exposed gable ends, gaps within soffit boards, rotten timbers and other potential entry points. Other aspects of the buildings were surveyed, including windows, window sills, external doors, and the ground within close proximity of the structure was thoroughly inspected for bat droppings and feeding remains.
- 2.4 Following a detailed assessment of the buildings, they were classified according to their roosting suitability based on the presence of features and the surrounding landscape (Table 1).

Table 1: Guidelines summary for assessing potential bat roost suitability

Suitability	Description of building or structure
Negligible	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically at any time of year. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitats to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. maternity or hibernation).
Moderate	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats, but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.
High	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time.
Confirmed roost	Evidence of bats or use by bats found.

⁴ UKHab Ltd (2023) UK Habitat Classification version 2.0 (at <https://www.ukhab.org>)

3 RESULTS

Desk study

- 3.1 The application site is 580m west of Saltersford Lane Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 3.2 This document will be updated to include records provided by SER in due course.
- 3.3 The site is positioned on the eastern fringe of Alton, approximately 7km east of Cheadle and 9km north of Uttoxeter, surrounded by a landscape dominated by grazed pasture and meadows, as well as an abundance of woodland blocks and corridors, especially along the Churnet Valley that runs in a northwesterly direction from the northern reaches of Alton.

General site description

- 3.4 The application site is set back from Meadowside View, a road with new residential properties along much of it. The parking area adjacent to the road is block-paved and access to the garden is via a narrow timber gate leading into the northern extent, before a set of steps lead down to a lower elevation towards the buildings, which include a large two storey barn and three smaller adjoining buildings north of it (B1 – B4, Figure 1). The buildings are set back against the eastern boundary, a narrow-compacted gravel pathway leads alongside the north and western side aspects and a higher-elevated lawn area edged with local stone faces the western front aspect of the buildings. The north and western boundaries of the site are defined by timber fencing, whereas the southern boundary is defined by an ornamental copper beech *Fagus sylvatica* hedgerow.
- 3.5 Habitats identified within the application site in accordance with UKHabs are as follows:
- Urban: Vegetated garden
 - u1: Built up areas and gardens
 - 108: Frequently mown
 - 612: Fence
 - 828: Vegetated garden
 - 853: Mortared wall
- 3.6 The lawned area was elevated above the ground level of the buildings by approximately 1.2m and was dominated by perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*. It covered an approximate area of 149m² and appeared to have been mown some weeks before the site visit, although at the time of the assessment the sward was long enough for many of the plants to flower. Based on quadrat assessments of the lawn, species ratios were found to be 10 per m². Aside from perennial ryegrass, other grasses included false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* (R), Yorkshire fog *Holcus lana* (F), cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* (R), rough meadowgrass *Poa trivialis* (F), red rescue *Festuca rubra* (F), common couch *Elymus repen* (F) and common bent *Agrostis capillaris* (F).

- 3.7 White clover *Trifolium repens* was dominant throughout the sward. Other herbaceous species included creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* (F), selfheal *Prunella vulgaris* (R), ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris* (R), smooth sowthistle *Sonchus oleraceus* (O), spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare* (R), broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius* (F), ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* (O), red clover *T. pratense* (O), common mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum* (O), common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* (O), cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* (O), common sorrel *R. acetosa* (R), lesser trefoil *T. dubium* (R), wavey bittercress *Cardamine flexuosa* (R), cleavers *Galium aparine* (R), meadow buttercup *R. acris* (R) and yarrow *Achillea millefolium* (R).

Urban: Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface (0.0144 ha)

u1c: Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface

- 3.8 Botanical species growing through the compressed stone included rare amounts of red fescue, American willowherb *Epilobium ciliatum*, greater willowherb *E. hirsutum*, cleavers, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* (sapling), nettle *Urtica dioica*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg., ash *Fraxinus excelsior* (sapling), and common couch.
- 3.9 The parking area beyond the fence along the northern extent of the garden was hard standing with modern block-paving up to the footpath.

Urban: Unvegetated garden (0.0018 ha)

612: Fence

829: Unvegetated garden

853: Mortared wall

- 3.10 There was a small area of garden to the front of the property between the fence and pavement. This had been covered in woodchip with a planted laurel hedge.

Hedgerows

Heathland and shrub: Non-native and ornamental hedgerow (0.014 km)

h2b: Non-native and ornamental hedgerow

- 3.11 An ornamental copper beech hedge positioned along the southern boundary was approximately 8m in length and 2.5-3m in height, it had been previously manged although at the time of the site visit, it had an unmanaged appearance where the top was uneven.
- 3.12 A 6m laurel hedgerow has been planted along part of the northern boundary between the fence and pavement. It was approximately 1m in height.

Buildings

Urban: Developed land; sealed surface (0.0136 ha)

u1b6: Other developed land

Buildings descriptions

- 3.13 Four buildings were onsite, which included a substantial two-storey barn (B1) as well as three adjoining smaller single-storey buildings (B2-B4), forming a line (gable-to-gable) in a north-south direction across the eastern edge of the application site.
- 3.14 B1 supported a timber-framed pitched roof that was clad with clay tiles and underlined with modern breathable membrane. It featured a single ridge line facing north-south which was covered with overlapping traditional ridge tiles and fitted within each pitch was a series of VELUX-style windows. The eaves were edged by plastic guttering and windows were boarded up on both storeys. Internally, restoration works had been carried out and were ongoing, much of the roof timbers were relatively new and could be seen from ground floor level. Ladders were in place for access to the first floor although it was not assessed due to health and safety concerns.
- 3.15 B2 was a single-storey stone building adjoining the north-facing gable wall of B1 and south-facing gable wall of B3. The front west-facing side aspect featured two gaps within the stonework, one being a door and the other presumably for a window or garage-style shutter door. The roof was timber-framed, pitched and clad with clay tiles with traditional overlapping ridge tiles. At the time of the site visit the building was used as a general storage facility for tools and other small-scale equipment associated with the development. VELUX-style windows were fitted in the roof pitch like B1.
- 3.16 B3 was a single-storey stone building adjoining the gable walls of B2 and B4. It was lower in height than B2, supporting a timber-framed mono-pitched roof clad with clay tiles that sloped in a westerly direction towards the lawn area. The entire front of B3 was open and at the time, it was used for storage among other purposes.
- 3.17 B4 was the end most northerly building that adjoined the northern gable wall of B3. It was stone built and like B3, it supported a timber-framed mono-pitched roof that was clad with clay tiles. This building was secured with a large timber door at the time of the site visit, although it is assumed it is used as a general garden shed for storage.

Buildings suitability for roosting bats and nesting birds

- 3.18 All four buildings provided high bat roosting suitability based on presence of potential roosting features (PRFs) and the connectivity to the wider landscape.

- 3.19 B1: many of the roof tiles, including those along the pitches as well as ridge tiles were gappy and raised in areas, providing suitable roosting opportunity and ingress features for bats, and gaps within the stonework were also considered to offer a suitable environment for bats to roost in.
- 3.20 B2: the roof tiles along the pitches and ridge were gappy and raised in areas, providing suitable roosting opportunity for bats. Ample access for bats to enter the building was provided due to the large openings at the front.
- 3.21 B3: like B2, pitch and ridge tiles provided roosting opportunity for bats and access inside the building could be achieved via the large opening at the front.
- 3.22 B4: bats could roost or potentially enter the building via roof or ridge tiles, or through gaps in the stone wall via B3.
- 3.23 Birds could potentially nest between the roof tiles or in the buildings with open access.

Other fauna

Mammals - Badger

- 3.24 The wider landscape setting provides opportunity for badgers to forage and commute, and local woodlands will potentially be used for sett creation. The application site will unlikely be used by the species because it is fenced in for residential use.

Hedgehog

- 3.25 Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* may utilise the local area, especially nearby hedgerows, woodland margins and grasslands, and given the relative small size of the species, it may at some point find access points into the application site itself.

Amphibians

- 3.26 No aquatic waterbodies suitable for use by breeding amphibians were present within the application site boundaries and no suitable terrestrial habitat was present for species such as great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* to utilise.

Limitations

- 3.27 No survey limitations were identified.

4 DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The wider landscape includes important habitats from an ecological perspective, especially woodland throughout the Churnet Valley, however the site itself is restricted to a garden setting with relatively low value habitat. The lawn provides some interest from a botanical point of view so if feasible, it should be managed to ensure herb ratios are maintained by only cutting the grass after mid-late July to allow seed dispersal. Grass cuttings should be removed from the lawn after 48 hours.
- 4.2 Inappropriate use of nocturnal lighting either during or post-development may impact nocturnal animals. Light spill over semi-natural habitats such as nearby trees and hedgerows for example, may affect foraging or commuting animals, forcing nocturnal animals to select alternative routes, subsequently affecting the favourable conservation status (FCS) at site and potentially local level.
- 4.3 During the construction phase it is recommended that works are not carried out after dusk and they do not commence until after dawn. Generators and machinery that emit significant noise levels must not be left to run through the night.
- 4.4 The roof lines of all four buildings were found to provide high bat roosting suitability. No work associated with the roofs is planned, however if the proposals change in such a way that work to the roof lines is required, three nocturnal bat surveys must be carried out following industry guidelines to ascertain if bats roost within the buildings.
- 4.5 The buildings may be used by nesting birds. As such, in the event works are carried out between February and September (inclusive), it is recommended that a suitably qualified ecologist is appointed to carry out an inspection for nesting activity ahead of works commencing. Works should not be initiated until the ecologist has confirmed that no nesting birds exist within the area of impact. If an active nest is discovered, an exclusion zone should be established, and works must be halted in that area until the nest is no longer active. Works should not commence without confirmation from a suitably qualified ecologist that no nesting birds exist within the area of impact. Irrespective of the time of year, if any nesting birds are discovered on site, an area around the nest site will be protected from disturbance with a suitable fence (not HERAs fencing) that would include an appropriate buffer zone, as determined by the suitably qualified supervising ecologist. Work will then be avoided in this area until the nest is no longer in use. Buffer zones in this respect will normally be 5m in diameter, and will be delineated by canes, cordon tape and signage.
- 4.6 No follow-up badger surveys are recommended because the species is unlikely to access the site or create a sett within it. However, hedgehogs will commute through gardens and often forage on lawns and other garden habitats. They are also known to take shelter in gardens, sometimes beneath rubble or in dense vegetation. The possibility of hedgehogs using the site should not be discounted and the species should be considered while development is taking place and after.

- 4.7 Ways to support local hedgehog populations would be to ensure appropriately sized hedgehog gaps are incorporated in the design of fences and gates of newly built residential properties. Consideration should be made so that in their commute, hedgehogs are able to pass freely through gardens and into the wider landscape without restrictions. A hedgehog friendly fence should have a gap measuring at least 130mm by 130mm in the gravel board. These gaps allow any hedgehogs to pass through but are they are too small for nearly all pets. At least one hedgehog friendly fence panel should be located on each side of a garden to provide unimpeded access. Almost all fencing materials can be made hedgehog friendly but may require DIY adaptations. Please note that some concrete gravel boards contain metal rods running along the length of the boards to provide strength and rigidity and cannot be cut. To overcome this, a gap can be left between the gravel board and post to provide the required gap.
- 4.8 No waterbodies were found within the application site boundaries and given work associated with the development is restricted to the confines of the garden, no impacts to local amphibian populations are likely and therefore no specific follow-up surveys are recommended.
- 4.9 As a matter of caution, it is advised that only building products to be used on the day are brought and stored on the site. If building products need to be stored onsite (e.g. overnight or for more than one day), they will be stored on pallets or retained in bags on pallets to ensure that refuges are not created that may attract animals. Building products should be placed on existing hard standing if possible. Additionally, all holes created during the construction period (e.g. to lay a concrete pad) will be filled in and finalised on the same day so as not to leave any pitfall traps. If this is unavoidable, they should be left with a sloping end or ramp to allow animals that may fall in to escape. Finally, holes should be covered over at night. Also, any pipes over 150mm in diameter should be capped off at night to prevent other animals from entering.

APPENDIX A: LEGISLATION SUMMARY

Bats

In England and Wales, bats and their roosts are protected under the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Taken together, this legislation makes it an offence to:

- Deliberately capture (or take), injure or kill a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a group of bats where the disturbance is likely to significantly affect the ability of the animals to survive, breed, or nurture their young or likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species whether in a roost or not
- Damage or destroy the breeding or resting place of a bat
- Possess a bat (alive or dead) or any part of a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost
- Sell (or offer for sale) or exchange bats (alive or dead) or parts of bats

A roost is defined as being 'any structure or place that is used for shelter or protection' and since bats regularly move roost site throughout the year, a roost retains such designation whether or not bats are present at the time.

Badger

Badger is protected in Britain under the *Protection of Badgers Act 1992* and *Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended).

The legislation affords protection to Badgers and Badger setts and makes it a criminal offence to:

- wilfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a Badger, or to attempt to do so;
- interfere with a sett by damaging or destroying it;
- to obstruct access to, or any entrance of, a Badger sett; or
- to disturb a Badger when it is occupying a sett.

Birds

All common wild birds are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and as amended). Under this legislation it is an offence to:

- Kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built
- Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird

Certain rare breeding birds are listed on Schedule 1 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and as amended). Under this legislation they are afforded the same protection as common wild birds and are

also protected against disturbance whilst building a nest or on or near a nest containing eggs/unfledged young.

Great Crested Newts

Great crested newts are a European Protected Species, listed on Annex II and IV of the EEC Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora, receiving protection under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. This species is also afforded full protection under the Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (WCA 1981) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994 (Regulation 38). Under such legislation it is an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or capture a great crested newt;
- Possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a great ^[L]_[SEP]crested newt;
- Intentionally or recklessly* damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or ^[L]_[SEP]place used for shelter or protection by a great crested newt; and
- Intentionally or recklessly* disturb a great crested newt while it is occupying a ^[L]_[SEP]structure or place which it uses for that purpose.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place.
- Sell, barter, exchange or transport or offer for sale great crested newts or parts of them.

*Reckless offences were added by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which applies only to England and Wales.

APPENDIX B: MAPS & SITE PLANS

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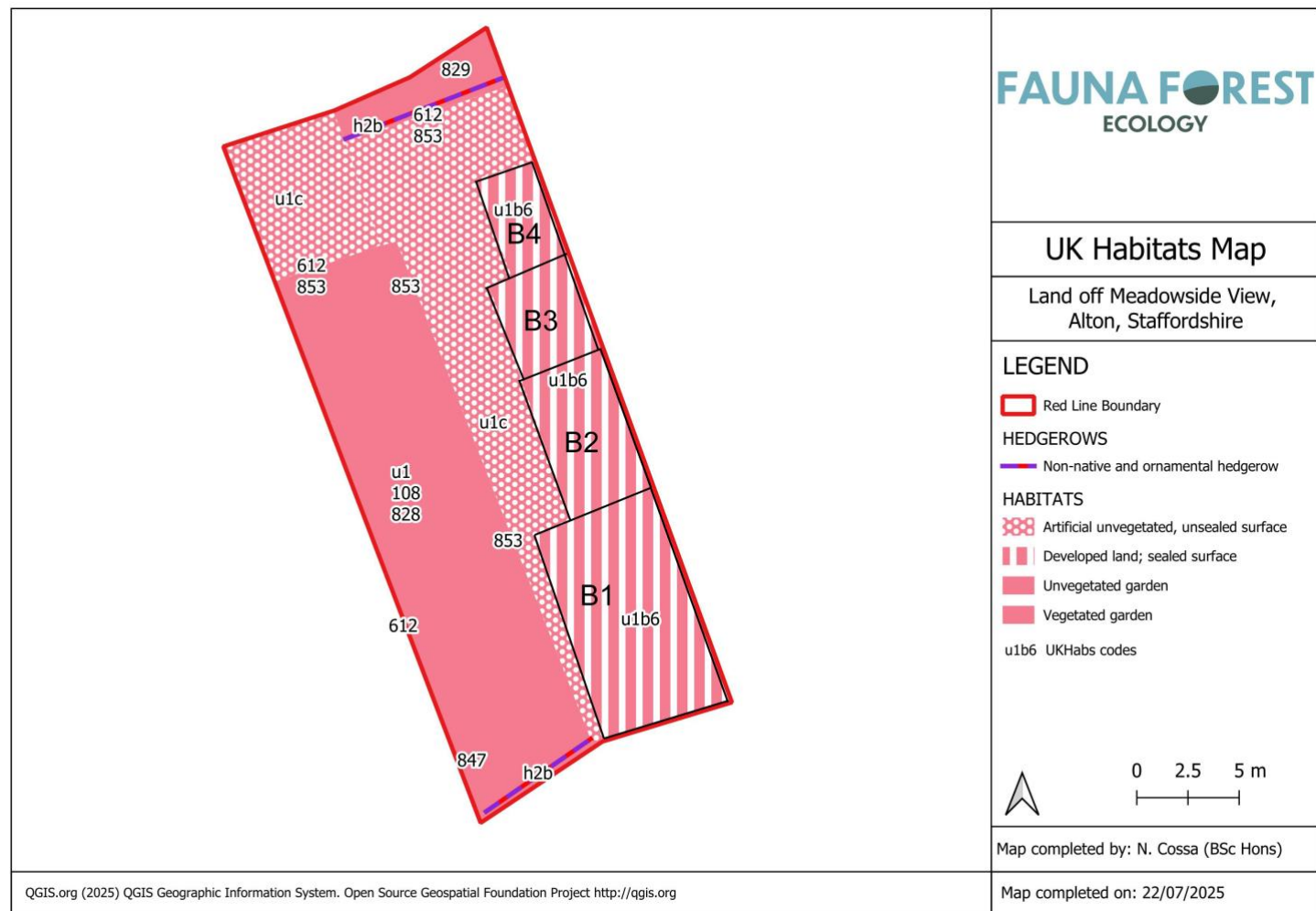


Figure 1: Habitat Map

APPENDIX C: SITE IMAGES



Image 1: southerly views towards B1 and the beech hedgerow along the southern boundary



Image 2: northerly views across the lawn towards the new residential housing estate. B1 is pictured furthest to the right



Image 3: B1 to the left of the image and the beech hedgerow towards the centre



Image 4: views of the timber roof structure within B1