Whitcher Wildlife Ltd.
Ecological Consultants.

DARFIELD PET CREMATORIUM.

OS REF: SE 40554 05218

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL.

Ref No: **230734.**

Date: **15th July 2023.**

Cliff Edge, Cliff Road, Darfield, Barnsley, S73 9HR.
Tel. 01226 753271. Fax. 01226 270993.
info@whitcher-wildlife.co.uk www.whitcher-wildlife.co.uk
Company No. 4401613.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. There are plans to construct a pet crematorium within the grounds of the Strawbridges Garden Centre, Darfield.

1.2. Whitcher Wildlife Ltd has been commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site to determine whether there are any ecological issues associated with the planned works.

1.3. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal survey was carried out on 7th July 2023. This report outlines the findings of all the above survey and makes appropriate recommendations.

1.4. Appendix I of this report provides additional information on specific species and is designed to assist the reader in understanding the contents of this report.

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2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY.

2.1. Prior to visiting the site, the survey area was cross referenced to maps and aerial photographs to give a general idea of the habitats and potential issues within the area and to identify potential access and walking routes.

2.2. The survey area was walked where access was agreed and public rights of way were used where no access was agreed. All habitats within and immediately around the survey area were documented and the dominant species within that habitat listed in line with the UK Habitat Classification methodology to identify the broad habitat types throughout the survey area.

2.3. The survey area and immediate surrounding area was thoroughly searched for evidence of badger (*Meles meles*) activity by looking for the following signs in line with Harris S, Cresswell P and Jefferies D (1989). *Surveying Badgers*. Mammal Society: -

* Badger setts.
* Badger latrines or dung pits.
* Badger snuffle holes and evidence of foraging.
* Badger paths.
* Badger prints in areas of soft mud.
* Badger hairs caught on fencing.

2.4. The survey area was searched for watercourses and where found all watercourses within the survey area and for approximately 50m in each direction were thoroughly searched for evidence of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) activity by looking for the following signs, in line with Rob Strachan, Tom Moorhouse and Merryl Gelling (2011). *Water Vole Handbook: Third Edition*: -

* Water vole burrows.
* Water vole faeces and latrines.
* Water vole feeding stations.
* Water vole runs.
* Water vole prints in areas of soft mud.
* Water vole lawns.
* Predator field signs.

2.5. The survey area was searched for watercourses and where found all watercourses within the survey area and for approximately 50m in each direction were thoroughly searched for evidence of otter (*Lutra lutra*) activity by looking for the following signs

in line with the P Chanin (2003). *Monitoring the Otter* and *Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers: Monitoring Series No10 Guidelines: -*

* Otter prints in soft mud.
* Otter spraints.
* Otter Holts.

2.6. The survey area was searched for watercourses and waterbodies. Where found, and where safe to enter the water, all were thoroughly searched for the presence of crayfish, for approximately 50m in each direction of the site, by searching under rocks and logs. Where stated, crayfish traps were also deployed into the watercourse. All survey work was carried out in accordance with the *Conserving Natural 2000 Rivers Monitoring Series No 1, Protocol for Monitoring the White Clawed Crayfish*.

2.7. The survey area was searched for mature trees and derelict buildings and where found these were checked for potential bat roosting sites in line with Collins, J. (ed.) (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edition)* by looking for the following signs: -

* Holes, cracks or crevices.
* Bat Droppings.

2.8. The land immediately adjacent to the survey area was assessed for bat roosting potential and bat foraging potential. Connective routes and flight lines were also assessed whilst on site and using maps of the area.

2.9. The area within 500m of the survey site was cross referenced to maps to highlight all ponds close to the site. Where possible, all ponds identified were accessed using agreed access or public rights of way to assess the potential for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) to be present.

2.10. The survey area was assessed for the potential for reptiles and suitable reptile habitats. Where applicable the area was also searched for the presence of reptiles.

2.11. Where appropriate, the habitat within and surrounding the survey area was searched for species such as hazel, oak, honeysuckle, bramble and other species which may provide potential habitat for hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*). Field signs such as feeding remains and nests were also searched for where possible, in line with P Bright, P Morris and T Mitchell-Jones *the Dormouse Conservation Handbook 2nd Edition*.

2.12. Where appropriate, the area within and surrounding the survey area was assessed for its potential to house habitat for red squirrels. Field signs of red squirrels were searched for at least every 50m, looking for any dreys, feeding signs or sightings of red squirrels.

2.13. All surveys were carried out in line with the Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management (CIEEM) survey standards and advice.

2.14. This document is prepared in line with The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This sets out the government policy on biodiversity and nature conservation and places a duty on Planning Authorities to give material consideration to the effect of a development on legally protected species when considering planning applications. The NPPF and the Planning Practice Guidance on "Natural Environment" also promote sustainable development by ensuring that developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity and that it is conserved and enhanced within the development.

2.15. This report is prepared in line with the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act that came into force on 1st Oct 2006. Section 41 (S41) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

2.16. This survey was caried out by Derek Whitcher who has over twenty years' experience of surveying for wildlife and has run his own wildlife consultancy since 1998. He has extensive experience of a wide variety of survey techniques for a variety of species of protected wildlife supplemented by attendance on a wide range of training courses through CIEEM, FSC and BCT. As a member of CIEEM he is committed to continuous professional development, a continual process of learning and career development, a condition of CIEEM membership. He holds current Natural England survey licences for barn owl, bat, great crested newt and white clawed crayfish.

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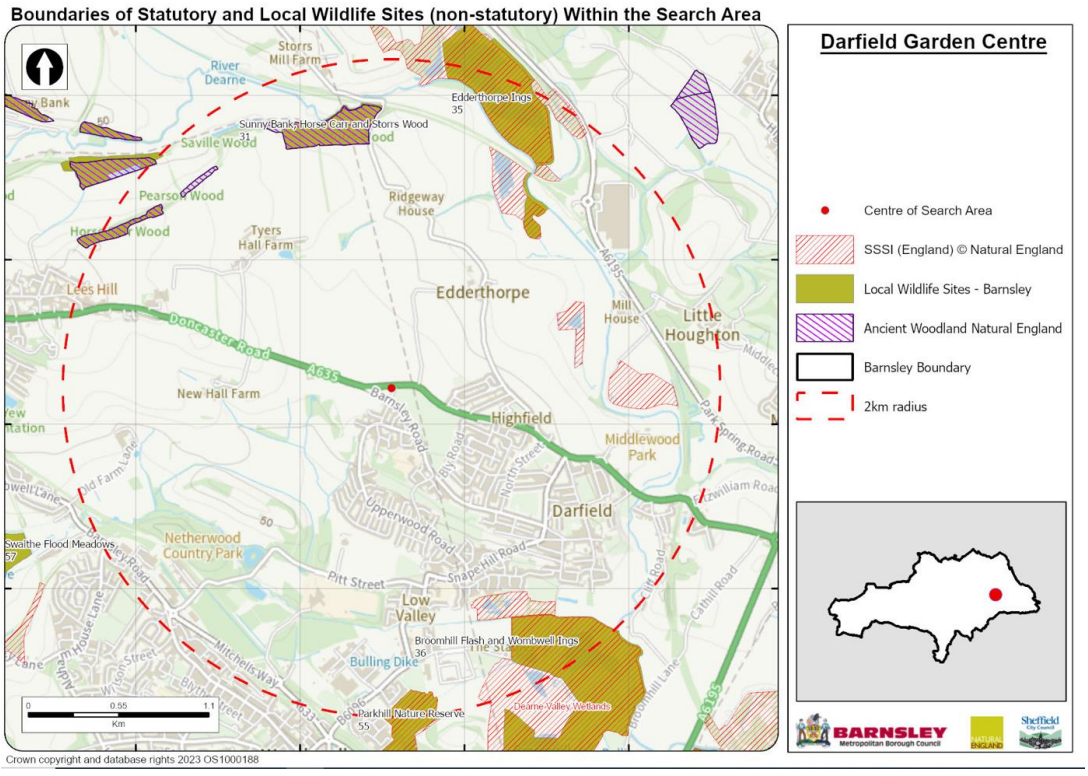
3. SURVEY RESULTS.

3.1. Data Search Results.

3.1.1. A desktop data search for existing records of protected species or designated sites within 2km of the surveyed area was submitted to Barnsley Biological Records Centre (BBRC).

3.1.2. BBRC hold records of a number of SSSI sites in the surrounding area, all part of the Dearne Valley Wetlands SSSI.

3.1.3. BBRC hold records of three Local Wildlife Sites within 2km, all in excess of 1.5km from the site. The sites are shown on the map below where the survey area is shown as a red dot.



3.1.4. None of the sites are close enough to the survey area to be an issue.

3.1.5. There are records of numerous birds and flowering plants in the data search results, predominantly recorded within the various designated sites above. None of the

records are relevant to this site that is well used by the public and surrounded by busy roads.

3.1.6. A copy of the data search is available on request.

3.1.7. The South Yorkshire Badger Group have no records of badger setts in the surrounding area. This is an urban area where badgers have traditionally been discouraged.

3.2. The Surveyed Area.

3.2.1. The aerial photograph below shows the location of the site marked with a red arrow and the surrounding area. The site lies to the west of the village of Darfield with open farmland to the north.

3.2.2. The site is within the existing Strawbridges Garden Centre site.

3.3. Description of Habitats.

Appendix II of this report contains an annotated map marked up with the varying habitats that are on the site cross referenced with target notes in Appendix III. The habitats on and adjacent to the site are: -

- h2b - Native Species Hedgerow
- u1e - 69 - Built Linear Feature – fence.
- 11- Scattered tree.

- u1c – 89 – Artificial Unvegetated Unsealed Surface – Car Park

3.3.1. h2b – Native Species Hedgerow.

3.3.1.1. Behind the footprint of the proposed new buildings there is an existing beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) hedgerow.

3.3.1.2. There is no condition assessment for this habitat under the small sites metric.

3.3.2. u1e – 69. Built Linear Feature – Fence.

3.3.2.1. There is a mesh security fence behind the hedgerow.

3.3.2.2. There is no condition assessment for this habitat under the small sites metric.

3.3.3. 11 – Scattered trees.

3.3.3.1. At the eastern end of the beech hedgerow, there is a single, semi—mature sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) tree.

3.3.3.2. To the west of the site of the new building there is a small group of apple (*Malus domestica*), plum (*Prunus sp(p))* and box elder trees (*Acer negundo*).

3.3.3.3. These lies outside the building footprint and there is no condition assessment for this habitat under the small sites metric.

3.3.4. u1c – 89. Artificial unvegetated, unsealed Surface – Car Park.

3.3.3.1. The entire proposed development the site is compacted hard core that is being used to park cars on. There is a small amount of ephemeral vegetation generating around the perimeter of the site.

3.3.3.2. There is no condition assessment for this habitat under the small sites metric.

3.4. Description of Fauna.

3.4.1. No badger setts or field signs were identified anywhere on the site and the site is assessed to be unsuitable for the species.

3.4.2. There is no watercourse close to the site and therefore no habitat for water voles, otters or white clawed crayfish.

3.4.3. There are no ponds close to the site to provide habitat for great crested newts and amphibians.

3.4.4. There are no buildings present on the site to provide potential for roosting bats.

3.4.5. The one tree close to the site is of insufficient maturity to provide opportunities for roosting bats.

3.4.6. The tree and the hedgerow adjacent to the proposed development site will provide very low value foraging habitat for bats as the site is located between busy roads.

3.4.7. The hedgerow and trees adjacent to the proposed development site provide opportunities for nesting birds during the nesting season, which extends from March to September each year. No nests were identified during this survey, but the habitat is suitable.

3.4.8. The site is assessed to have minimal potential for reptiles as the site is small, confined and well used and is lacking shelter and refugia.

3.4.9. The site is assessed to be unsuitable habitat for hazel dormouse, located outside the natural range for the species.

3.4.10. The site is assessed to be totally unsuitable habitat for red squirrels, located outside the natural range for the species.

3.4.11. No alien, invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) were found growing within the survey area.

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4. EVALUATION OF FINDINGS.

4.1. There are records of Internationally Designated Sites or Nationally Designated Sites within 2km of the site but these are at sufficient distance to be unaffected by the proposed development and therefore, there will be **No Negative Impact** on such sites.

4.2. BBRC holds records of three Local Wildlife Sites within 2km, all in excess of 1.5km from the site. There will be **No Negative Impact** on such sites.

4.3. The habitat to be affected by the proposed works is an area of compacted, bare ground that is currently used for parking cars and trailers.

4.4. The total baseline biodiversity units for the site are shown in the table below. This has been calculated using the Small Sites Metric 4.0, as is the most recent version at the time of writing this report. The Small Sites Metric auto assigns the condition assessment for each habitat.

Area Habitats.

Habitat Type	Area in M^2	Distinctiveness	Condition Assessment	Biodiversity Units.
Bare Ground	200	V.Low	N/A	0.
Total	200			0

4.3.2. The area Biodiversity value of the site prior to any works is nil.

4.3.3. The proposed development will be a hard surface and small buildings. This will also have a Biodiversity value of nil.

Habitat Type	Area in M^2	Distinctiveness	Condition Assessment	Biodiversity Units.
Bare Ground	200	V.Low	N/A	0.
Total	200			0

4.4. There are no badger setts or field signs present on the site and no records of badger activity in the area and therefore there will be **No Negative Impact** on the species.

4.5. There is no watercourse close to the site and therefore no habitat for water voles, otters or white clawed crayfish. There will therefore be **No Negative Impact** on these species.

4.6. There are no ponds close to the site to provide habitat for great crested newts and amphibians and therefore the proposed works are unlikely to impact on amphibians. There will be **No Negative Impact** on amphibians and great crested newts.

4.7. There are no buildings present on the site to provide potential for roosting bats. There will be **No Negative Impact on** roosting bats in buildings.

4.8. None of the trees adjacent to the site is of sufficient maturity to provide opportunities for roosting bats and therefore the works will have **No Negative Impact** on any bats roosting in trees.

4.9. The tree and the hedgerow adjacent to the proposed development site will provide very low value foraging habitat for bats as the site is located between busy roads and therefore there will be **No Negative Impact** on foraging and commuting bats as a result of the proposed works.

4.10. The hedgerow and trees adjacent to the proposed development site provide opportunities for nesting birds during the nesting season, which extends from March to September each year. No nests were identified during this survey, but the habitat is suitable. However, this vegetation will not be affected by the proposed development and therefore there will be **No Negative Impact.**

4.11. The site is assessed to have minimal potential for reptiles as the site is small, confined and well used and is lacking shelter and refugia. There are no reptile records in the data search results. The proposed development will have **No Negative Impact** on reptiles.

4.12. The site is assessed to be an unsuitable habitat for hazel dormouse, located outside the natural range for the species. The proposed development will have **No Negative Impact** on the species.

4.13. The site is assessed to be totally unsuitable habitat for red squirrels, located outside the natural range for the species. The proposed development will have **No Negative Impact** on the species.

4.14. No alien, invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) were found growing within the survey area. Therefore, there will be **No Negative Impact** on the potential spread of Schedule 9 plants in the wild.

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5. RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1. It is recommended that care be taken to avoid impact on the trees and hedgerow adjacent to the proposed development site.

5.2. Biodiversity enhancements are not recommended for such a small development.

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Prepared by:	
Derek Whitcher, BSc, MCIEEM, MCMI	Date: 15th July 2023.

Checked by:	
Ruth Georgiou, BSc, MCIEEM.	Date: 15th July 2023.

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Appendix I. NESTING BIRD INFORMATION.

Ecology

The nesting season will vary according to the weather each year but generally commences in March, peaks during May and June and continues until September. It is also worth remembering that some birds nest in trees and scrub, but others are ground nesting or prefer man- made structures or buildings.

Surveys

Nesting bird surveys search for potential nest sites in vegetation, buildings etc. Potential nesting sites are observed over a suitable period of time for bird movements or calling male birds that would indicate the presence of a nest. The presence of a nest can be identified from the field signs without the necessity to see the nest itself, thereby avoiding any disturbance of the nests. The best way to avoid this issue is to plan for vegetation clearance to be carried out outside the bird-nesting season.

Legislation

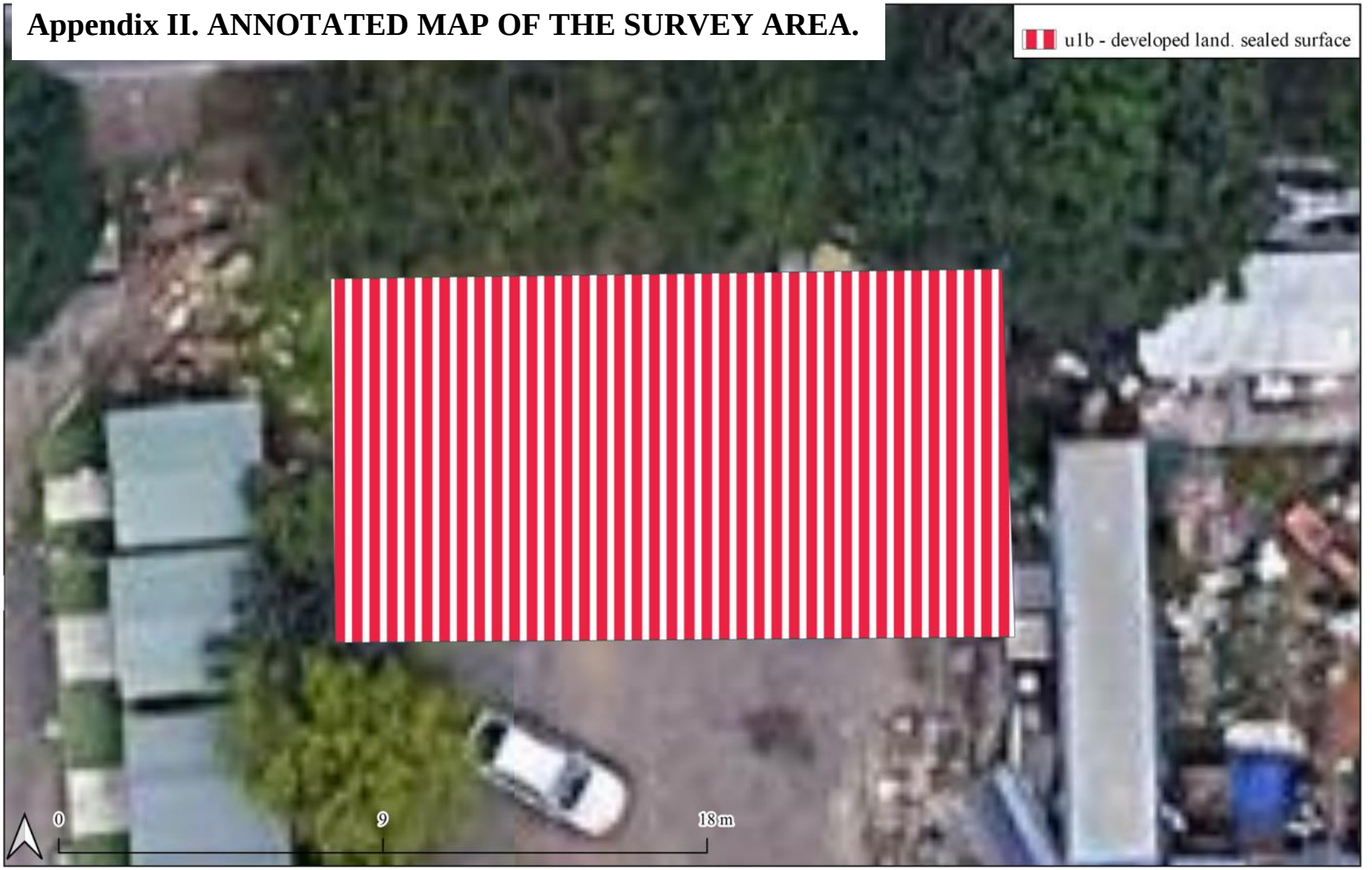
Nesting birds are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Part 1. -(1) Of the Act states that: - If any person intentionally: - kills, injures or takes any wild bird; takes, damages or destroys the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or takes or destroys an egg of any wild bird, he shall be guilty of an offence.

Part 1. -(5) of the Act states that: - If any person intentionally: - disturbs any wild bird included in Schedule 1 while it is building a nest or is in, on, or near a nest containing eggs or young; or disturbs young of such a bird, he shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a special penalty.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 amends the above by inserting after “intentionally” the words “or recklessly”.

Appendix II. ANNOTATED MAP OF THE SURVEY AREA.



Site: Darfield Garden Centre

Reference: 230734

Date: 14.07.2023

Produced by: Mitchel Greenhalgh

Appendix III. DEVELOPMENT PLAN.