Land at Lower Fold Stables, Langho

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

October 2026

KNIGHT SKY ECOLOGY
PRACTICAL ECOLOGY SOLUTIONS

E: info@knightskyecology.co.uk

W: www.knightskyecology.co.uk

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Author and Approver	Ryan Knight BSc (Hons) MCIEEM
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KNIGHT SKY ECOLOGY LTD

Email: info@knightskyecology.co.uk

Web: www.knightskyecology.co.uk

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Instruction & Background

Knight Sky Ecology Ltd was commissioned to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of land at Lower Fold Stables, Northcote Road, Langho, BB6 8BE (hereafter referred to as 'the site').

The appraisal was undertaken to provide ecological information to support a planning application for the proposed development, which is understood to comprise the construction of a rural worker's dwelling (managers accommodation), an extension to an existing building, additional stabling, a treatment-room building and a machinery store.

The PEA comprised a desk-based study and a field survey undertaken on 8 October 2026.

1.2 Site Description

The proposed development is situated within the existing stables, accessed off Northcote Rd. Directly north lies a network of pasture fields associated with the stables. To the south of the site are football pitches with associated parking and buildings. To the east, across Northcote Rd, is a large equestrian facility, and to the west is agricultural land and woodland.

The wider landscape comprises a mix of agricultural land and residential areas. Figure 1.1 shows the location plan for the site.

Figure 1.1. Location Plan



1.3 Legislation and Policy

UK wildlife legislation provides statutory protection for a range of species and habitats. The presence of protected species and habitats, together with the potential effects of development upon them, is an important consideration in determining the scope of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). The principal legislation of potential relevance to the site includes:

- Environment Act 2021;
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended);
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000;
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006; and
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

A summary of the legislation relevant to the findings of this report is provided in Appendix A.

In addition to wildlife legislation, this report has also considered the relevant provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), 2026) relating to the natural environment, together with local planning policy, including Policy EN4 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) of the adopted Ribble Valley Council Local Plan 2008–2028.

1.4 Report Aims

The framework of this report and its main objectives are to:

- Establish a baseline of ecological information for the site;
- Identify the likely ecological constraints associated with the proposed development;
- Identify any mitigation measures likely to be required, in line with the 'Mitigation Hierarchy';
- Identify any additional surveys that may be required to inform an Ecological Impact Assessment (if necessary); and,
- Highlight opportunities for ecological enhancement.

2 METHODS

2.1 Scope of Assessment

The methodology adopted for this Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), and the information presented within this report, follow the standard guidance set out by CIEEM (2017).

The level of detail provided is considered proportionate to the small-scale nature of the proposed development, the site's existing land use and location, and the complexity of the potential ecological impacts. In view of these factors, and the anticipated scope of the ecological assessment, a proportionate approach has been adopted, and biological records have not been obtained from the local biological records centre.

2.2 Desk Study

On-Line Resources

The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) mapping tool (available from: https://magic.defra.gov.uk/) was used to search for ecological information contained within the following datasets:

- SSSI Impact Risk Zones - to assess planning applications for likely impacts on international, European and nationally designated sites.
- Granted European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licenses for bats and great crested newts within a 1km radius.
- Survey licence returns for great crested newts within a 1km radius.
- Priority and irreplaceable habitats (e.g., ancient woodland) within a 250m radius.

Information of locally designated sites (e.g., Biological Heritage Sites (BHS)) within a 1km radius was accessed via the LERN Environment Information Map (Lancashire County Council, 2026a). Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy - Local Habitat Map (Lancashire County Council, 2026b) was also accessed to obtain relevant background information for any proposed biodiversity enhancement measures at the site.

Basic initial information about the site and surrounding area was obtained from aerial imagery (Google Earth) and Ordnance Survey mapping to provide contextual information to support the site survey findings. A search for waterbodies with the potential to support great crested newts within a 250 m radius of the site was also undertaken using the MAGIC mapping tool, alongside Google Earth and Ordnance Survey maps.

2.3 Field Survey

A site walkover was undertaken on 8 October 2026 by Ryan Knight MCIEEM. Ryan has extensive experience in survey and site assessment for habitats and protected species and holds a Level 2 Natural England Class Licence for bats (ref. 2015-12611-CLS-CLS) and a Level 1 licence for great crested newts (ref. 2015-16727-CLS-CLS). The aim of the site visit was to gather sufficient baseline information of the habitats within the site and to identify any habitats or features of potential ecological significance.

All habitats within the site were described and mapped using UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) definitions (UKHab Ltd, 2023) unless otherwise stated. Dominant and notable plant species were recorded, and relative abundance was expressed using the DAFOR scale: dominant, abundant, frequent, occasional and rare. Botanical taxonomic nomenclature follows the New Flora of the British Isles, Fourth Edition (Stace, 2019).

In addition, the site visit included a search for incidental evidence of protected and notable species and an assessment of the site's potential to support protected and notable species.

2.4 Survey and Report Comments

This report will remain valid for a period of **two years** from the date of issue. An ecologist should be contacted for advice on any revalidation requirements if planning permission is not obtained, or if works do not commence within this period.

3 BASELINE ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 Internationally / Nationally Designated Sites

There are no internationally or nationally designated sites for nature conservation within a 2.5km radius. In addition, the proposed development type does not trigger the need for an assessment of potential impacts with regards to any SSSI located in the wider area.

3.1.2 Locally Designated Sites

Biological Heritage Sites

The nearest BHS is Dinckley Bridge Wood located 750m north-west. The BHS is designated for its notable woodland habitat. There are no further BHS within a 1km radius.

Other Non-statutory Sites

There are no District Wildlife Sites within a 1km radius and the proposed development site is not within the Lancashire Ecological Network.

3.1.3 Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The land has been identified within the Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) as an 'area that could become of particular importance'. The area aligns with the following Potential Measures:

- U2.3 - Wooded habitat creation and enhancement in urban open spaces, including micro woods, orchards, street trees, urban woodland and hedgerows.
- W2.3 -Creation of new biodiverse woodlands incorporating appropriate native species.

3.1.4 Priority and Irreplaceable Habitats

There are no priority habitats within or directly adjacent to the site. Within a 250 m radius, the nearest priority habitat is an area of deciduous woodland located approximately 160 m south-south-west.

3.2 Field Survey

3.2.1 Habitats

Habitat Description and UKHab Classifications

Photos of the site are provided in Appendix B.

g4 Modified grassland

The accommodation building is proposed to be sited within an agriculturally improved pasture field, one of several fields used for horse grazing associated with the business. The rye-grass-dominated sward was closely grazed and supported very few forbs, which occurred only occasionally across the wider field area. These included white clover and occasional creeping buttercup.

u1b5 Buildings & u1b6 Other developed land

The application site includes the existing access from Northcote Rd, other hardstanding areas, the equestrian building, garage and timber stable.

Surrounding area (outside of development boundary)

Immediately to the west is a horse arena with paddocks and an agricultural storage area containing haylage bales and other storage items. A line of semi-mature ash and birch trees is present along the access road from Northcote Road. The fields to the north and west comprise grazed, improved pasture. Aside from the hawthorn and blackthorn hedgerow along Northcote Road, the fields are bound only by post-and-wire fencing.

The development site is bounded by football pitches with associated parking to the south, and by a large equestrian facility to the east across Northcote Road. Approximately 120 m west lies a minor, tree-lined watercourse, with woodland situated further beyond.

Invasive Non-native Species (INNS)

No INNS were observed within the site.

3.2.2 Protected and Notable Species

Amphibians

Based on the MAGIC database mapping, the nearest standing waterbody is located approximately 125 m south-west of the site, within the grounds of the adjacent equestrian centre. A review of Google Earth imagery suggests that this pond was created relatively recently.

A further waterbody, comprising a small field pond, is located approximately 200 m north-west of the site, along the edge of a pasture field. However, a review of aerial imagery suggests that this pond may be dry. Its condition was not verified during the site survey.

A search of the MAGIC database identified no great crested newt (GCN) survey licence returns or EPS mitigation licences within the search area.

Nesting birds

Aside from the equestrian buildings, there are no nesting bird habitats within the proposed development site. The grazed fields within the application site are not anticipated to support ground nesting birds.

Bats

It is understood that a separate survey report for bats has been submitted by the applicant. With respect to the existing habitats, the development plans are not anticipated to affect bat activity or distribution within the area.

Badger

No evidence of badgers were observed and the site presents unsuitable conditions for badgers setts.

Other

Based on the survey findings and available ecological information, no other specific protected-species constraints are anticipated (e.g. reptiles, water voles, notable invertebrates etc). The proposed works are not considered likely to significantly affect the distribution or abundance of notable species or result in an offence under relevant wildlife legislation.

4 EVALUATION & POTENTIAL CONSTRAINTS ASSESSMENT

4.1 Internationally and / or Nationally Designated Sites

There are no sites designated for their nature conservation interests within 2.5km of the development proposals and there is not considered to be any potential for adverse impacts to occur on any such sites within the wider area. Therefore, no further consultation or mitigation is advised in respect of internationally and nationally designated sites. **Statutory sites are not considered to represent a constraint to the proposal.**

4.2 Locally Designated Sites

Owing to the intervening distances and the absence of any functional hydrological or terrestrial connectivity, there is no conceivable pathway through which the development could significantly affect the qualifying features of any Biological Heritage Site (BHS). **Locally designated sites are not considered to represent a constraint to the proposal.**

4.3 Priority Habitats

There are no priority habitats within the site, and the buffer distances and intervening land uses between the site and the nearest areas of priority habitats are considered sufficient to avoid any potential impacts. No pathways for adverse effects on priority habitats are therefore anticipated. **Priority habitats are not considered to represent a constraint to the proposal.**

4.4 General Habitats

A proportion of the site comprises habitats of negligible biodiversity value, namely buildings and hardstanding. The proposal will result in the loss of modified grassland habitat. The grassland is considered to be in poor condition (in biodiversity-value terms) and is of low ecological significance.

Overall, the proposals will not result in the significant loss of habitats of biodiversity value, and **the loss of such habitats is not considered to represent a constraint to the development.**

It is understood that the development is exempt from the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain condition under Section 7A of the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024. However, relevant local planning policies relating to biodiversity remain applicable, and this is addressed through the biodiversity enhancement measures set out in Section 5.

4.5 GCN

The nearest pond with potential suitability to support GCN is located approximately 130 m south of the site and 165 m south-east of the construction area for the rural workers dwelling. A further pond is located around 200 m north-west, although its presence is uncertain.

The development footprint comprises existing buildings, hardstanding and a small area of closely grazed modified grassland. These habitats offer limited opportunities for amphibians, and no suitable refuge features were identified within the development footprint during the site survey.

Taking account of the limited suitability of the habitats within the development footprint, the intervening land uses and the separation between the development and the identified ponds, the potential for significant

adverse effects on great crested newts is considered low. On the basis, **GCN are not considered to represent a significant constraint to the proposed development.**

Proportionate mitigation recommendations are provided in Section 5.

4.6 Nesting Birds

There are no habitat features of suitability to support nesting birds in the site. The buildings do present opportunities for nesting birds; however, the proposals will not require significant structural changes to these buildings. The risk of impacting nesting birds is considered very low overall.

As a precaution, mitigation recommendations are provided in Section 5.

4.7 Other

Based on the survey findings and available ecological information, no other specific protected-species constraints are anticipated.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 GCN

In the unlikely event that a GCN is discovered during the works, all works in the immediate vicinity of the animal shall cease, and a suitably qualified ecologist shall be contacted for advice. The animal shall not be handled, captured or moved by site personnel. The area surrounding the animal shall be left undisturbed, and appropriate measures shall be taken to prevent accidental injury or disturbance until advice has been obtained.

5.2 Nesting Birds

Where works that could affect nesting birds are required during the nesting season, the affected areas should be checked by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately before works commence. If an active nest is identified, the nest and an appropriate surrounding area must be protected from disturbance until the young have fledged or the nest is no longer in use.

5.3 Biodiversity Enhancements

Habitats

The proposed plans indicate that landscaping will be provided around the new accommodation building, including the establishment of a native hedgerow. This would introduce a valuable habitat feature, providing opportunities for wildlife to forage, shelter and disperse through the site, whilst contributing to habitat connectivity within the wider landscape. The proposed hedgerow is also consistent with potential measure U2.3 of the Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which has been identified for the area in which the site is located.

It is recommended that other landscaped areas incorporate a diverse range of native plant species, including species of particular value to pollinating insects, such as bees and butterflies. Where practicable, the use of non-native ornamental shrubs with limited wildlife value should be avoided in favour of species that provide greater benefits to local biodiversity.

The proposed landscaping should be implemented in accordance with an appropriate planting scheme, incorporating suitable species selection, planting densities and establishment measures. The landscaping should be maintained to promote successful establishment and ensure that its intended biodiversity benefits are realised and retained in the long term.

These recommendations are consistent with Policy EN4 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) of the Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy.

Wildlife

The development proposal presents a good opportunity to provide roosting features for bats and nesting features for birds. Tables 5.1 – 5.2 present the details of these features and recommendations for installation.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Table 5.1. Bat box</th></tr>
<tr><td>Locations and positioning</td><td colspan="3">The box can be fitted on the building at a height of at least 3m from the ground (ideally just under the roof verge). Aspect is not important. The box should be sited outside of any light spill.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bat box models and purchasing</td><td colspan="3">Non-integrated Box Models (two options)

<table>
<tr><td>Greenwoods – two crevice bat box. For buildings.</td><td>
</td><td>Designed for small groups of crevice dwelling bat species, such as common and soprano pipistrelles.

Available from https://www.greenwoodsecohabitats.co.uk/shop</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lela Bat Box (two chambers)</td><td></td><td>Designed for small groups of crevice dwelling bat species, such as common and soprano pipistrelles.

Available from

https://www.nhbs.com/</td></tr>
</table></td></tr>
<tr><td>Maintenance</td><td colspan="3">The models chosen do not require cleaning as bat droppings do not typically accumulate within these types of boxes to a level likely to cause problems for future habitation.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Table 5.2. Bird box</th></tr>
<tr><td>Locations and positioning</td><td>The house sparrow box should be positioned approximately 2–4 m above ground level on a north- or east-facing wall, to avoid direct sunlight and the wettest prevailing winds. It should be tilted slightly forward to prevent rain entering the entrance, have a clear flight path and be positioned away from potential access by cats.

Either of the two box designs are recommended below.</td></tr>
</table>

Bird box models and purchasing	Vivara Pro WoodStone® House Sparrow Nest Box (double chamber)		Available from https://www.nhbs.com
	Eco Sparrow Tower		Available from https://www.wildcare.co.uk
Maintenance	The nests will need to be cleaned and inspected once a year from October to February. Gloves must be worn.		

6 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A. LEGISLATION

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 provide protection for certain species and habitats of European importance. In England, these regulations provide strict protection for European Protected Species, including great crested newts and bats. Relevant offences may include deliberately capturing, killing or disturbing protected animals, or damaging or destroying their breeding sites or resting places. Where development activities may affect a European Protected Species, the need for a licence from Natural England must be considered.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides protection for wild birds, certain animals and plants, and designated sites. All wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Act, subject to specified exceptions. It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take a wild bird, or to take, damage or destroy its nest while it is in use or being built. Additional protection applies to certain bird species listed under Schedule 1.

The Act also provides protection for various other wild animals and plants, including species listed under Schedule 5 and Schedule 8 respectively. The level of protection varies according to the species concerned.

Protection of Badgers Act 1992

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it an offence to wilfully kill, injure or take a badger, or to interfere with a badger sett by damaging or destroying it, obstructing access to it, or disturbing a badger while occupying a sett, subject to the provisions of the Act. Where development works may affect a badger sett, appropriate avoidance measures and, where necessary, a licence from Natural England may be required.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 strengthens existing wildlife protection provisions and provides additional protection for certain species and habitats. In particular, it amended the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to strengthen the protection afforded to certain species listed under Schedule 5.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as amended by the Environment Act 2021, places a duty on public authorities in England to consider what action they can take to further the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity when exercising their functions. Section 41 identifies habitats and species of principal importance in England, which are relevant considerations when assessing the potential ecological effects of development.

Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a range of measures intended to improve the natural environment and strengthen biodiversity protection in England. These include provisions relating to biodiversity net gain, nature recovery strategies and the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. Where applicable, the statutory biodiversity net gain requirements must be considered in determining the planning and ecological requirements of a proposed development.

APPENDIX B. SITE PHOTOS

Photos 1a – 1c

General photos of the field which is proposed for the siting of the rural workers dwelling







Photos 2a – 2b. Photos of access road and buildings.	 