9th July 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to speak Mr Chairman

I am reading a speech on behalf of Julia ~~and~~ Lorraine who live in Anderson Crescent which is off Wilderness Lane. and Mr Chauhan who lives on Peakhouse Rd.

The loss of this irreplaceable Greenbelt will be the 'tipping point' of this area. If you remove this Greenbelt all the equilibrium and aspects that we value will be affected and lost forever. at present

Where will the infrastructure be, the school places, the open spaces that protect our nature and wellbeing?

A day in the life of

The following is the reality of the now. Traffic - It is one of many reasons that we have to protect and retain this precious Greenbelt. It is already an unacceptable situation. The impact of introducing potentially another 200 cars and possibly 400 people, or more, to this already saturated area will be catastrophic. .

At school times, with the amount of school traffic, we have witnessed arguments and aggression.

People getting out of their cars, threatening to punch each other. ~~We have notified the Police of this upsetting and disgraceful behaviour~~. The Police are aware of this upsetting & disgraceful behaviour

witnessed

We have ~~seen~~ a taxi driver - one of many, actually driving along the pavement in Wilderness Lane. This was to get past the school traffic, at the time, school children were on the pavement. ~~and on this point~~

This situation affects many of the local roads and lanes, for example Sycamore Road. Parents park anywhere they can, even over house drives.

We also have immense difficulty actually getting either to or from our house at certain times of the day. Should an ambulance or fire engine need to travel along any of these roads or lanes it would be impossible.

This beautiful area is already saturated with people and cars. It cannot take any more. The roads cannot be widened because many hundreds of school children walk along these pavements, particularly Wilderness Lane and Peakhouse Road, This is to get to and from the bus routes on the A34. The parents, children and young people who walk to one of the 3 schools in the immediate area have to be able to walk safely to their respective schools. +from

& Mr. Chauhan

PTO

This is already a densely populated area with many cars. It is located adjacent to the busiest motorway junction in Europe. We desperately need to retain our Greenbelt and Green Lung, for our mental health, wellbeing, wildlife, biodiversity and also to mitigate some of the ~~air pollution~~ that pollutes this area. We must protect this ever diminishing, irreplaceable asset, dire air quality

A quote from CPRE (Campaign for Rural England) - It is 'Our Countryside next door', amongst urban sprawl, therefore priceless

Thank you

> This being demonstated this morning = horrendous traffic making some of us late.

What is neighbourhood planning?

What is neighbourhood planning?

Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead. Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to plan for the types of development to meet their community's needs and where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.

This local neighbourhood community and the Council is saying not here we cannot take any more. The Planning policy is Brownfield or Greyfield first. Why isn't anyone listening to us?

Good morning/afternoon, my name is Jim Collingwood and I live in Wilderness Lane.

No matter where we live, inner city, towns, villages... where-ever... healthy living standards are hard to keep- up... especially with the levels of pollution about. We... the people in Wilderness, Peak house, Sycamore, Chapel lane... and other close surrounding roads in the village of Great Barr... are a bit more fortunate than others within Birmingham, Sandwell and Walsall... and we'd like to keep it this way.

We are all going to do our utmost to keep it this way... by speaking out today and sharing our points... about the green belt in our area.

I'd like to start my points by saying... that the area intended for development is designated greenbelt land... which we understand should be protected from buildings and developments. Green belts are a buffer between towns... and between town and countryside. The green belt designation is there... to prevent the spread of residential developments... by keeping land permanently open. This development goes against what a green belt actually means.

My next point is that the air quality above our area... which is extremely close to the M6 Great Barr interchange... is much lower than healthy levels state it should be at.

The oxygen released from our precious greenbelt land... helps to purify our air to keep it to a safe and healthy breathable level. We are grateful for this source of oxygen.

Green spaces are the ultimate carbon capture and storage machines. Like great carbon sinks... woodlands, fields and meadows... all absorb atmospheric carbon and lock it up for centuries. They do this through photosynthesis.

The entire meadow and fields eco-system... plays a huge role in locking up carbon... including the living wood, roots, leaves, deadwood, surrounding soils... and its associated vegetation.

Any trees on this land need to be fully mature... to do this to maximum affect. Immature trees and plants will need years of growth... before they can fully contribute to purifying our air. On these fields, there are at least 9 oaks... each over 2 to 3 hundred years old... that run across the intended planning site... these need protecting. Tree roots stretch out as far... if not further... than their branches. If houses, roads and pavements and accompanying services are attempted to go

between them... the heavy mechanical diggers and machinery will pull at their roots... causing irreparable damage and will indeed kill them. This must not happen at all costs.

Remember...Greenbelt land stores carbon! We already have unhealthy levels of pollution. This is even more essential to a site... that is in such close proximity to the Great Barr interchange. Over 200 thousand vehicles pass through this interchange every day. There are already speed restrictions along this stretch because of pollution levels.

For many hours, especially during peak times, this traffic is backed up far along the main roads. Exhaust fumes filled with deadly carbon fill our breathable space. There is no escape from this. Further homes will indeed bring more and more cars... adding to already unhealthy levels of pollution in our breathable air. By agreeing to these plans... not only will you be defying the very definition of green belt... you will be sentencing residents to breathe in even more serious levels of harmful pollution.

For my final point, I'd like to talk about the potential use of this site for future food growth... It is prime land for crops and vegetables... because of the depth of the topsoil in the meadows and beyond.... This foot-deep top-soil... is incredibly nutrient rich... and is far too precious a soil type to be losing to developers. Through the years... it already has been used in this way... Presently, our Wilderness fields are farmed for hay... and harvested each year providing animal feed. Although the government is not currently prioritising farming and food production... there are world-wide concerns on future food production. It can only be a matter of time... until good quality soil areas... that are not prone to flood risks- such as ours... are sought out to be farmed again.

We must preserve this land for the future potential of agricultural produce.

I, Jim Collingwood, my wife Bea Collingwood and my daughter Tina Collingwood... who all live in Wilderness lane... oppose any developments on this site. Local neighbourhood residents oppose any developments on this greenbelt site that runs alongside Wilderness Lane, Peakhouse Road and Birmingham Road.

Leave the greenbelt to the farmers and the wild life: not the mechanical diggers of developers.

Introduction

- **Greetings and Introduction**
  - Good morning, I'm Heidi Salter, I'm an in-house property lawyer for a large national organisation, and I have lived at 69 Wilderness Lane for over 19 years. I submitted an appeal objection to the Inspectorate in May on behalf of local residents, and I speak today on behalf of a number of residents who are elderly or unable to attend due to work time restrictions.
  - We strongly object to the developer's appeal and proposed development on the greenbelt land.
  - As you all are no doubt aware, Labour politicians have made several statements emphasizing the importance of preserving the green belt while also addressing housing needs. Keir Starmer has articulated a commitment to protecting green belt land. He stated that Labour will preserve the green belt by taking a more strategic approach to land designation and release, focusing on "lower quality 'grey belt' land" and ensuring that any development benefits both communities and nature. Furthermore, the Labour Party's 2024 manifesto includes a pledge to protect the green belt despite their ambitious housebuilding targets. The manifesto emphasizes a "brownfield first" approach, prioritizing the development of previously used land whenever possible.

Importance of Greenbelt Land

As the Insp. knows,

- The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; and the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their **openness and their permanence**.
- 143. The purpose of the Green Belt is: Taking into account that, we're all aware of
  - a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
  - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
  - c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
  - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

& how they apply to our objection to the prop. development.

- With limited time I'm unable to run through the Framework in detail – but in summary the Framework stresses the permanence of Green Belt in the long term. With changes to be made **only** in exceptional circumstances. Such exceptional circumstances need to be evidenced by the policy making authority – considering all alternatives – such as use of brownfield sites and under-utilised (non-Green Belt) land.
- With reference to the Council's original refusal of this development – together with points I will highlight shortly – this development proposal of 150 houses – constitutes an inappropriate development.
- **152. The Framework states that Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved** except in very special circumstances. 153. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. '**Very special circumstance**s' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. 154. **A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt.**

Impact on Environment and Ecology

- The area of Green Belt in question – has great ecological value: supporting biodiversity, natural habitats, and ecosystems.
- The pond and streams within the fields supports newts and the Herons often nest in and frequent the pond. The fields themselves have a diverse and extensive range of wildlife: including: migrating geese; fox and badger dens; bats; wild deer; owls. live I live opposite the fields so can give first-hand testimony of the thriving wildlife over the past 19 yrs. In fact recently I've seen an increase in wildlife. my home
- Following a Birmingham & Black Country Local Sites Assessment Report dated 19 Nov 2018, the Green Belt fields in question were upgraded from SLINC to SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation). The report recorders statement includes mention that.
- The fields lie within a core ecological area, according to the Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area ecological network mapping, and holds a critical position in connecting Sandwell Valley and inner areas of the conurbation to the wider countryside.

- The site supports a wide range of typical farmland habitats which have been established onsite for over 250 years
- Many of the typical farmland habitats present on site are uncommon within the Birmingham and the Black Country and rare in the Sandwell borough. The ponds and intact hedgerows on site are listed as habitats of principal importance.
- Historical mapping shows that the survey area has remained relatively unchanged for over 250 years
- This remains little changed and comprises an important surviving historic landscape in an area dominated by urban development
- The site forms an important green corridor across the landscape between Merrion's Wood Local Nature Reserve and Hill Farm Bridge Fields SINC
- A rare flora species was recorded in the fields, known as common cudweed Filago vulgaris.

- **With reference to relevant Case Law**
  - where developments on greenbelt land were refused:
    - **Case 1: Gallagher Homes Ltd v Solihull MBC (2014)**: Emphasized that inappropriate development on greenbelt land should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

      The case underscored the importance of local authorities conducting thorough and objective assessments of housing needs and carefully considering any changes to Green Belt boundaries. It reinforced that developments on Green Belt land should only be approved in very special circumstances and that local plans must align with national policies and guidelines.
    - **Case 2: R (Lee Valley Regional Park Authority) v Epping Forest District Council (2016)**: Highlighted the importance of interpretation of the Framework policy around maintaining greenbelt boundaries and protecting them from development.
    - many other material planning considerations can impact on determining whether a development is inappropriate for the Green Belt, including noise, visual impact, and habitat sensitivity.

Community Impact

- The proposed development will adversely affect the local community in the following ways:
    - Increased traffic and congestion. Recent reports and news articles indicate that traffic congestion is a significant issue in the Great Barr area and local Jct 7 of the M6. [*For instance, incidents such as a serious crash at the Scott Arms junction in July 2023 led to considerable delays and congestion on the A34 Walsall Road towards Birmingham (Express & Star). Additionally, a crash on Birchfield Road in March 2024 caused major disruptions, blocking the road and necessitating bus diversions (Express & Star). Another notable incident involved a two-car crash on the M6 near Great Barr, which resulted in delays of up to 60 minutes and about seven miles of congestion (Birmingham Live).*]
    - These incidents highlight that traffic congestion is already a problem in the area, exacerbated by accidents and high traffic volumes on key routes. This situation could worsen with the proposed housing development on greenbelt land, potentially adding to the existing traffic burden and causing further disruptions for local residents. The large Q3 Academy on Wilderness Lane and the numerous surrounding roads, rely on Wilderness Lane as the only main access road – there are issues with delays and bottlenecking at either end.
    - Strain on local infrastructure and services (schools, healthcare, busses, etc.). Q3 Academy Great Barr also faces a high demand for places, indicating a level of oversubscription.

[Viability of Alternative Sites

- **Alternative Solutions**

  In Great Barr, there are several brownfield development opportunities that could potentially accommodate housing, thereby preserving greenbelt land.

  [Government Initiatives: The UK government has been actively promoting the redevelopment of brownfield sites across the country, including in Birmingham. Recent rounds of funding through the Brownfield Land Release Fund have been aimed at transforming neglected land into residential and community spaces. Local councils, including those in Sandwell, Walsall and Birmingham, are encouraged to apply for this funding to facilitate the development of brownfield sites into housing (£80m to regenerate brownfield land and build thousands of homes - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk))]

  Prime Park: A major brownfield redevelopment project in Great Barr is Prime Park, which is situated on the site of the former GKN factory on Old Walsall Road. This site has been transformed into a £20 million business estate with 10 industrial units. Although this development primarily focuses on commercial use, the repurposing of

such large brownfield sites underscores the potential for housing projects as well (Express & Star).]

Personal Testimony

- Wilderness Lane, as the name suggests, is a narrow little lane (hundreds of years old) set along beautiful historic greenbelt Farm Fields (including their ancient hedgerow and ponds). The row of white historic character cottages were built originally by the farm owner (who owned the fields and surrounding land) over 100 years ago, as part of the farm for farm workers. The farmer included a pig sty for each cottage. Remnants of these pig sty's can still be seen in the back gardens of some of the cottages.
- It is a community much loved ritual or past-time and delight to gather every year together along Wilderness Lane on New Year's Eve to enjoy the view across the fields watch the fireworks on the horizon – with an unobstructed views across the Green Belt fields to West Bromwich, Tamebridge and neighbouring towns.
- Wilderness Lane and surrounding area is considered a beautiful much sought-after area – not least because of its Farm Fields, sunsets, trees, wildlife and views (which constitute an Open Space's visual amenity) – but also due to its historic background. The use of the fields as a farm - date back to at least 1750s – with aerial view maps and outlines indicating that prior to that - the fields may have supported a large manor house or structure with a moat. This was reported to the Archaeology and Historic Environment Office at Wolverhampton City Council.
- The local area is within a few seconds drive or short walk off the M6 motorway and very busy junction 7 – within a 'clean air zone'. The speed limit on this stretch of the M6 is usually limited to 60mph to limit pollution. Nevertheless, the fumes from the M6 and nearby M5 do still pervade the area. As an asthma sufferer this often causes breathing issues for me and many others. The local Green Belt helps to mitigate (in part at least) this level of pollution.
- Notwithstanding the developer's proposal for a low carbon development – it is considered highly probable that each household on the proposed 150 house development will have at least one motor vehicle – posing parking and traffic issues. Not only increasing carbon emissions, affecting air quality in the area; but also burdening the local infrastructure. Wilderness Lane provides the only way out of the local area to the main road – which often results in traffic congestion and bottleneck traffic and each exit.
- Already over-subscribed local schools and services will unfairly and adversely affect current and future communities.

Conclusion

- **Summary and Call to Action**

Wain will no doubt argue that even if there would be substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt – and this harm is attributed substantial weight – that the benefits of their proposed development would outweigh any harm to the Green Belt (and any other harm arising from the proposal). However, for the purposes of the Framework there are no defendable "special circumstances" here.

- We would argue that this developer and proposed development, is seeking to exploit the pressures imposed on the Local Authority to meet its housing targets - hoping that this will outweigh the long term harm and detrimental impact not only on the Green Belt itself (and by extension the wildlife corridor; non-coalescence; burden on infrastructure and amenities) – but also on the rich history and culture of this area and these fields.
- Yes, the developer has churned out the generic promises to build a park – and make this an eco-development. But we're all too aware that across similar developments these sorts of gestures are not sustainable long-term (making a mockery of the purpose of the Framework – perverting its intention) - causing irreparable damage to the environment and community. Furthermore, these developments seem to serve and support the developer in their future arguments for development of the remaining surrounding parcels of Green Belt land.
- Our research has revealed that the Wain Group has faced a number of Council and community objections /or been refused applications to develop various parcels of similar Green Belt land across the country (such as in Stockport, Wolverhampton and Buckinghamshire to name a few).
- We have a situation here where it's not only the local community imploring the Inspectorate not to grant the developer its appeal for this this harmful development – but the Local Authority itself, the local Councillors and business owners - all in complete agreement, with evidence backed information, objecting to this proposed development of the diminishing Green Belt.
- We understand the need for housing generally – but despite Labour's latest announcement (which has not yet been implemented) - equally with the consequences of more farmers selling prime agricultural land we will no doubt in the future be reaching a time when the

Government's focus will shift to prioritising food production and farming again.

- In light of the facts presented, and with so many brownfield sites available for development - we would urge the Inspectorate to refuse this appeal. By opting for nice clear Green Belt land - the developer is choosing the path of least resistance and higher profitability over the best interests of the community, environment and the country. Once our green belt is developed – it's gone forever, we can't get it back. Decisions like these made here today, will affect the country and generations to come.

I'd like to thank the Inspectorate for their time today.

Questions and Answers

- **Prepare for Questions**
    - Anticipate possible questions from the audience or panel and prepare concise answers.

Be ready to provide additional details or references if requested.

I live almost immediately on the Junction of Longleat and Wilderness Lane on the immediate southern side of Q3 Academy. I agree with all of the objections that have been, and will be, made by other parties; however my mayor concern over the development of land off Wilderness Land is safety and congestion. The only access points to any development of this land would be from and to Wilderness Lane itself or the main A34 Road from Birmingham to Walsall. Most residents of properties in developments like this have access to at least one car, sometimes two or more, leading to a potential increase in the region of 150 vehicles. There is no footpath on the side of Wilderness Lane where an entry point could be made to the proposed development. An ancient hedge abuts the road edge leaving only enough room on the Carriageway for one narrow lane in each direction. The proposed development is next to a High School Academy, currently oversubscribed, with almost 1200 students which results, at the start and end of the school day, one lane filled with parked cars waiting to drop off or collect children. There is already a problem for emergency vehicles and residents of Sycamore Road to get in and out of the area. If cars from a new development exit onto Wilderness Lane they would have to turn either left to then get on to the A34 or right to access Newton road in which case they would have to negotiate the queues of traffic outside Grove Vale Primary School and the Valer's Nursery. This will create gridlock and exacerbate an increasingly difficult situation where existing residents are marooned and isolated. If traffic from the new development tried to exit, or return via the A34, cars would have to do a U turn across the dual carriageway to get towards Birmingham and a U turn across the carriageway if they are returning from Walsall. The alternative would be to use the island at Junction Seven of the M6 motorway. I would remind you that Junction Seven is a particularly busy junction and one that is frequently used to clear the Motorway if there's a problem at Spaghetti Junction or with the link to the M5 at Junction eight. This has the knock on effect of diverting traffic from the Scott Arms interchange and Newton Road to Monksfield Avenue, Longleat and Wilderness Lane, roads which are already unsuitable for heavy traffic. Tragically there was a recent death of a student from Q3 Great Barr crossing the A34 near Peakhouse Road and the addition of more traffic, at what will undoubtedly become a pinch point, will create even more problems for both motorists and pedestrians. I would urge people who are dealing with this appeal to visit Wilderness Lane between 3.10p.m. and 3.35 p.m. when both Grove Vale and Q3 Academy are ending their school day. You could then experience the volume of children, parents and vehicles; to better assess the potential hazards to over 1500 children and innumerable adults. The counter argument would be that this would only happen at two relatively short periods during the day however does this make it acceptable to put in place an unnecessary risk when there are alternative sites which would not generate such risks at any time?

AGRICULTURAL QUALITY

OF LAND OFF CHAPEL LANE

GREAT BARR

Report 1896/2

2nd October, 2023

Land Research ASSOCIATES
www.lra.co.uk

AGRICULTURAL QUALITY

OF LAND OFF CHAPEL LANE, GREAT BARR

L Thomas, MSc, MISoilSci

Report 1896/2
Land Research Associates Ltd
Lockington Hall,
Lockington,
Derby

[redacted]

2nd October, 2023

SUMMARY

An agricultural land quality survey has been undertaken of 2.8 ha of land off Chapel Lane, Great Barr that is proposed as the location of a solar battery storage site. A further 1.3 ha of land to the south is proposed for landscaping.

The site is predominantly underlain by coarse loamy soils, with medium loams over clay in the east. The site contains grade 1, 2 and subgrade 3a agricultural quality land.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report provides information on the agricultural quality of 2.8 ha of land off Chapel Lane, Great Barr. A further 1.3 ha of land is proposed for landscaping. The report is based on a survey of the land in October 2021.

SITE ENVIRONMENT

1.2 The site comprises the northern part of a grassland field. The site is bordered to the north-west by Chapel Lane, to the north-east, east and south by adjoining grassland and to the west by woodland.

1.3 The land is gently sloping, at an average elevation of approximately 145 m AOD.

PUBLISHED INFORMATION

1.4 1:50,000 scale BGS information records the solid geology of the land as Enville Member Sandstone with subordinate conglomerate. No superficial deposits are recorded to overlie the basal geology.

1.5 The National Soil Map (published at 1:250,000 scale) shows the site as within the Brockhurst 2 Association: typically slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged reddish fine loamy over clayey soils and clayey soils, with some reddish clayey alluvial soils affected by groundwater.[1]

[1]Ragg, J.M., *et al.,* (1984). *Soils and their Use in Midland and Western England,* Soil Survey of England and Wales Bulletin No. 12, Harpenden.

2.0 Soils

2.1 A detailed soil resource and agricultural quality survey was carried out in October 2021. It was based on observations at alternate intersects of a 50 m grid, giving a sampling density of two observations per hectare. During the survey, soils were examined by a combination of pits and augerings to a maximum depth of 1.0 m. A log of the sampling points and a map (Map 1) showing their location is in an appendix to this report.

COARSE LOAMY SOILS

2.2 These soils occur across most of the site and comprise medium sandy loam topsoils over subsoils of the same texture that in places become more sandy with depth. The soils are unmottled, showing no signs of seasonal waterlogging.

2.3 An example profile is described from a pit at observation 6 (Map 1).

0-31 cm	Dark reddish brown (5YR 3/2) medium sandy loam; slightly stony with 5% small and medium rounded hard stones; well developed fine subangular blocky structure; very friable; many very fine fibrous roots; common bio-pores; smooth clear boundary to:
31-50 cm	Red (2.5YR 5/6) medium sandy loam; very slightly stony (small rounded hard stones); moderately developed fine and medium angular blocky structure; friable; few fine fibrous roots; low packing density; smooth clear boundary to:
50-100 cm+	Red (2.5YR 5/8) loamy medium sand; stoneless; single grain (loose).

2.4 These soils are freely-draining (Soil Wetness Class I).

MEDIUM LOAMS OVER REDDISH CLAY

2.5 These soils occur in the east of the site where sandy clay loam topsoil and upper subsoil overlie dense reddish clay at around 50 cm depth. The reddish upper subsoil shows signs of gleying (pale ped faces, ochreous/greyish/brownish mottles and ferri-manganiferous concentrations), indicating seasonal waterlogging to shallow depth.

2.6 An example profile is described from a pit at observation 5 (Map 1).

0-30 cm	Dark reddish brown (5YR 3/2) sandy clay loam; very slightly stony with <5% small rounded hard stones; well developed fine subangular blocky structure; friable; common very fine fibrous roots; 2% macropores; smooth clear boundary to:
30-47 cm	Red (2.5YR 5/6) sandy clay loam with pale red (2.5YR 6/2) ped faces, 5% yellow (5YR 4/8) mottles and black (5YR 2.5/1) ferri-manganiferous concretions; very slightly stony; moderately developed medium subangular blocky structure; friable; medium packing density; common fine fibrous roots; 1% macropores; smooth sharp boundary to:
47-100 cm+	Red (2.5YR 5/8) clay with pale red (2.5YR 6/2) ped faces and common fine reddish black (2.5YR 2.5/1) ferri-manganiferous concretions; stoneless;

weakly developed very coarse prismatic structure; very firm; high packing density; no macropores.

2.7 These soils are imperfectly-draining (Soil Wetness Class III).

3.0 Agricultural land quality

3.1 To assist in assessing land quality, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) developed a method for classifying agricultural land by grade according to the extent to which physical or chemical characteristics impose long-term limitations on agricultural use for food production. The MAFF ALC system classifies land into five grades numbered 1 to 5, with grade 3 divided into two subgrades (3a and 3b). The system was devised and introduced in the 1960s and revised in 1988.

3.2 The agricultural climate is an important factor in assessing the agricultural quality of land and has been calculated using the Climatological Data for Agricultural Land Classification[2]. The relevant site data for an average elevation of 145 m is given below.

• Average annual rainfall:	706 mm
• January-June accumulated temperature >0°C	1319 day°
• Field capacity period (when the soils are fully replete with water)	167 days early Nov – mid Apr
• Summer moisture deficits for:	wheat: 90 mm potatoes: 77 mm

3.3 The survey described in the previous section was used in conjunction with the agro-climatic data above to classify the site using the revised guidelines for ALC issued in 1988 by MAFF[3]. There are no climatic limitations at this locality.

SURVEY RESULTS

3.4 The agricultural quality of the land is determined by droughtiness and wetness. Other potentially limiting factors have been assessed, but do not affect the land grading.

3.5 Land of grades 1, 2 and 3 have been identified.

Grade 1

3.6 This land grade occurs in the north-west where deep coarse loamy soils occur. There are no significant limitations to agriculture on this land.

[2]Meteorological Office, (1989).*Climatological Data for Agricultural Land Classification*.
[3]MAFF, (1988).*Agricultural Land Classification for England and Wales: Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land*.

Grade 2

3.7 This land grade occurs where sandier soils occur at depth. The sandy subsoil stores below optimum moisture for crop uptake in dry summers, slightly affecting average crop yields.

3.8 Also included, is land in the south where permeable sandy clay loams with gleyed subsoil occur. They have slight wetness restrictions due to moderately high topsoil clay content meaning flexibility of cultivation may be restricted in winter in wet years.

Subgrade 3a

3.9 This subgrade comprises the medium clay loams over reddish clay in the east of the site. The combination of moderately high topsoil clay content and imperfect drainage (Soil Wetness Class III) means that land access with machinery is not usually possible in winter and early spring. Late spring and autumn sowings are possible most years.

Non agricultural

3.10 This comprises a stable yard in the north of the site.

Grade areas

3.11 The boundaries between the different grades of land are shown on Map 2 and the areas occupied by each are shown below.

Table 1: Areas occupied by the different land grades

Grade/subgrade	*Area (ha)*	*% of the land*
Grade 1	0.7	17
Grade 2	2.6	64
Subgrade 3a	0.7	17
Non agricultural	0.1	2
Total	4.1	100

APPENDIX

MAPS AND DETAILS OF OBSERVATIONS

Merrions Wood Bat Report: 2024

April 2024

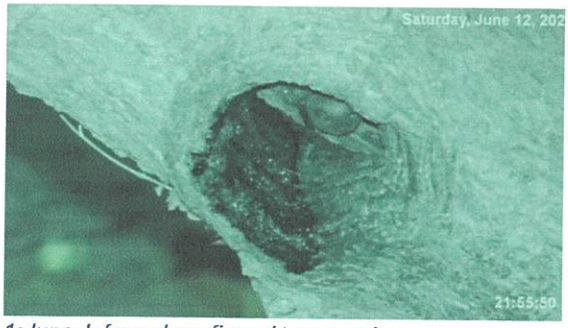
Dr Morgan Hughes CEcol, County Bat Recorder for Birmingham and the Black Country
morgan.hughes@umu.se

Introduction

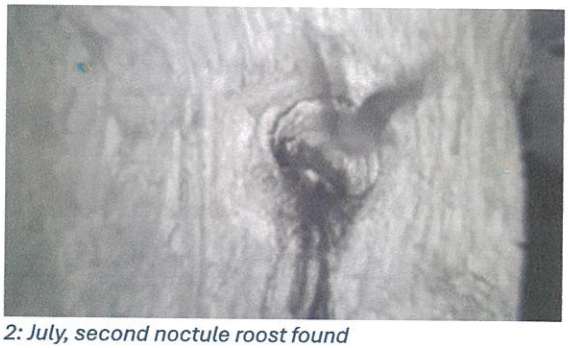
This report follows the previous Merrions Wood Bat Report (Dated October 2020) and will focus on survey works undertaken since that report, which itself contains details on the history and background of the bat box scheme at Merrions Wood LNR, Walsall, West Midlands.

2021

After a noctule roost was found by Carrie in 2020 (which subsequently turned out to be a noctule roost which we followed when we could around lockdown restrictions), the summer of 2021 turned out to be quite the year. Infra-red survey of the roost determined that it was a multi-species roost (noctules and Daubenton's bats) and we began monitoring it. However, in August Carrie messaged morgan to say that the roost had come down in Storm Evert. Morgan was out of the country that week but sent bat licensed volunteers to check that there were no injured bats (there were none) and after returning to the UK, Morgan met Tim from Walsall Council who kindly cut the branch into sections so that the internal measurements of the roost could be made and documented. We spent the rest of that summer using infra-red cameras to follow the bats around the woodland, finding many more roosts (shown below).



1: June, Infra red confirmed two species



2: July, second noctule roost found

3: August, Third noctule roost found

4: August, fourth roost found - two species

We also arranged for Scott (who is also a professional tree climber) to climb the original roost tree to measure the section that was left in place. We began a programme of ringing the noctules with the help of the Herefordshire Bat Research Group, who trained Morgan and Scott in ringing. We spend the rest of the summer ringing the bats we encountered in boxes and hand netting, as well as putting Bat Conservation Trust tree tags on all of the known roosts in the woodland.

5: August, tree climb to measure fallen roost limb

6: September, ringing noctules begins

7: October, Bat box checks continue

8: October Ringing training

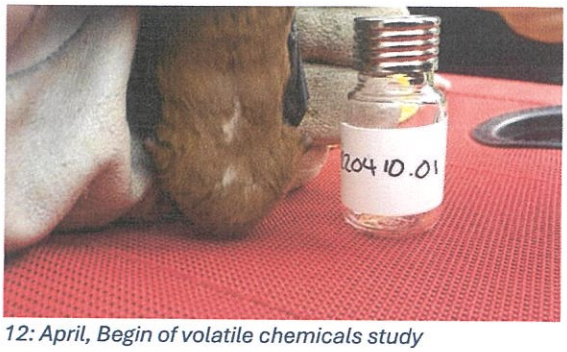
9: November tagging roosts

10: November ringing continues

2022

We stared 2022 with winter tree climbs to look for roosts, and when spring came started a new project with the University of Wolverhampton looking at the chemical signalling done by noctules. We gently swab the large glands in their mouths and put that through Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (GCMS) machines at the university lab. We are hoping to profile the chemical composition of these gland secretions through the year and hopefully publish a scientific paper on it, as no one has looked at this before. We continued box checks, roost trapping and ringing the noctules for the rest of the year. Then in September, Morgan was awarded the Bat Conservation Trust's Pete Guest Award for Outstanding Practical Contribution to Bat Conservation. She received a standing ovation at the National Bat Conference.

11: January roost inspection tree climbs



12: April, Begin of volatile chemicals study

13: July, bachelor roost found

14: August, Hand netting and ringing

15: August, trapping cohabitation roost

16: August, 24 more noctules ringed

17: Morgan receives the Pete Guest Award

18: Standing ovation at National Bat Conference

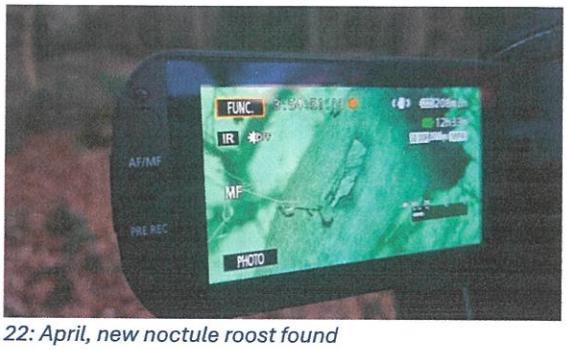
2023

We started 2023 with tree climbs looking for (and finding) more roosts, which included finding noctules hibernating that we had ringed in the summer (proving that some individuals are using the woodland year round). We found another roost using infra-red, and a tree climb and endoscope survey determined this to be yet another multi-species roost.

19: January roost finding tree climbs

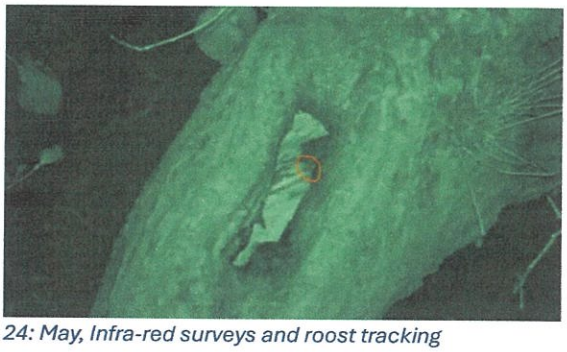
20: January, Male ringed noctules found hibernating

21: February noctules in boxes (undisturbed)



22: April, new noctule roost found

23: May, Endoscope confirmed cohabitation



24: May, Infra-red surveys and roost tracking

This finding was so important that we documented what we had learned so far and submitted the manuscript for publication in the Journal of Bat Research and conservation and spoke about it at the National Bats In Trees Conference, the British Bat Research Symposium and the National Bat Conference. The paper was accepted and published (below).

Additionally, the data collected as part of the Urban Bat Project (including all the work at Merrions Wood) was published in a paper on urban-rural bat morphometrics in the mammal journal of the Museum of Prague (Lynx, new series) (below). Links to both of these papers are provided below.

Data from Merrions Wood also contributed to the publication of the 2023 Provisional Atlas of Bats of Birmingham and the Black Country, which BrumBats published with the Wildlife Trust. This followed the previous year's Interim Atlas which also featured records from Merrions Wood.

In September of 2023 Morgan was awarded her PhD in the Assemblages and Movements of Urban Bats from the University of Wolverhampton, and secured a postdoctoral position at the University of Umea, Sweden, studying the bats in river basins all over Europe (but is also continuing the work in Birmingham and the Black Country as an honorary research Fellow at the university of Wolverhampton.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Interspecific cohabitation of maternity colonies of *Nyctalus noctula* and *Myotis daubentonii* (Chiroptera: Vespertilionidae) in a single roost feature in the West Midlands, UK

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.14709/BarbJ.16.1.2023.02

Keywords: behavioural ecology, infra-red technology, resource partitioning, roost-sharing, survey efficacy, woodland bats

received: August, 14th 2022
accepted: May, 4th 2023

ABSTRACT

Woodland bat species may 'time share' tree roost features and occasionally have been recorded cohabiting in low numbers. However, few observations exist of substantial maternity roosts of sympatric species cohabiting in a single roost feature. Following an emergence survey in June of 2021 of a known maternity roost of 28 *Nyctalus noctula* individuals (pre-parturition), a further emergence from the same feature of 59 *Myotis daubentonii* was recorded and filmed using infra-red and thermal cameras. Cohabitation records of maternity colonies of this size have not been previously submitted to the UK Bat Tree Habitat Key database, nor do similar observations appear in the literature. Following the 2021 destruction of the roost feature during a storm, we were able to describe the entire feature in detail, including transverse section analysis and photography. Subsequent surveys have now shown that these two bat species have cohabited in features in at least three separate trees within the study site (a small, suburban, broad-leaved woodland), over at least two seasons. This novel record of interspecific cohabitation not only adds to the body of knowledge regarding roost cohabitation of Vespertilionidae in temperate woodlands, but also highlights the value of infra-red and thermal optics for improving the efficacy of bat emergence surveys, particularly in forest habitats.

25: Paper in the Journal of Bat Research and Conservation

You can read the paper here:
https://secemu.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Hughes_et_al_2023.pdf

Lynx, n. s. (Praha), **54**: 75–82 (2023). ISSN 0024-7774 (print), 1804-6460 (online)

Big city bats: Species-specific effects of the urban matrix on forearm length and fat stores of bats in the West Midlands, United Kingdom (Chiroptera: Vespertilionidae)

Morgan HUGHES[1,2,*], Scott K. BROWN[2,3], Denise FOSTER-PLUME[4], David LEE[4], Tamar REDFERN[2], Simon MADDOCK[1,5,6] & Christopher H. YOUNG[1]

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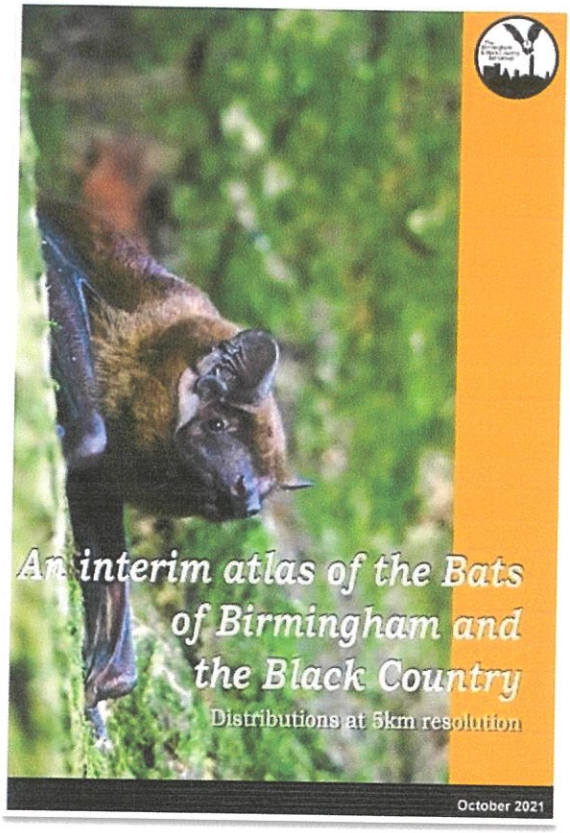
[4] Herefordshire Bat Research Group, Mount Pleasant, Gwynfe, Llangadog, Carmarthenshire SA19 9RU
[5] Department of Life Sciences, The Natural History Museum, London SW7 5BD, UK
[6] Island Biodiversity and Conservation Centre, University of Seychelles, Mahé, Seychelles
* corresponding author: m.hughes3@wlv.ac.uk

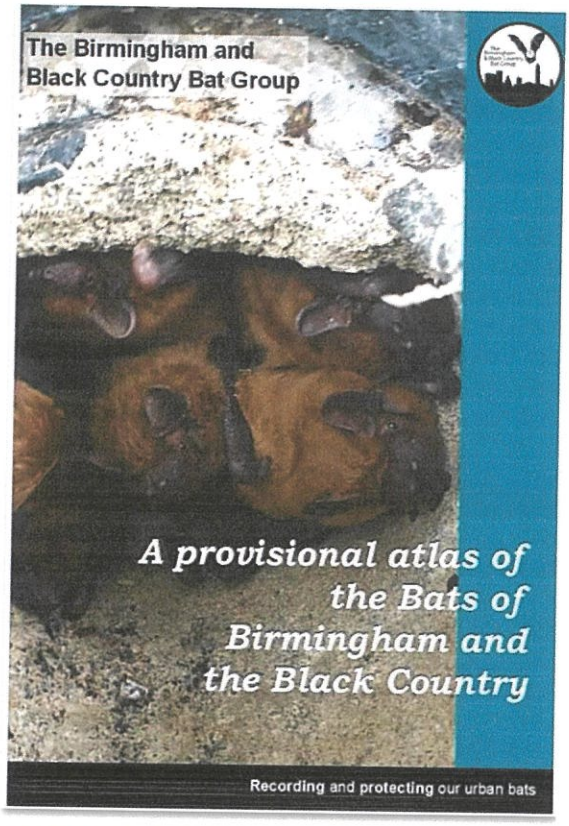
26: Paper in Lynx, n.s. Mammal Journal of the Museum of Prague

You can read the paper here:
https://publikace.nm.cz/file/b4a0d18476dc41ec00ae1eb0c1882353/43909/075_082_Hughes.pdf



27: 2021 Interim Atlas of Bats

You can get a copy here:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aYZg_6v2tTKYE77dzU4BMnkknax8tCTF/view?usp=sharing



28: 2022 Provisional atlas of bats

You can get a copy here:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JxDGXlOfNhUPrqEcxMZq9_Pc7GcxBt0u/view?usp=sharing

2024 and into the future

We couldn't be more excited about the future for the bats at Merrions Wood. We are continuing our box checks, trapping and ringing starting in May this year. This will be followed by the installation of more bat boxes (to be relocated from Brownhills Common due to vandalism). We are continuing to work on the chemical signalling project and are beginning to understand the movements of noctules as each year goes by.

Winter will see bi-weekly, non-handling bat box occupancy checks (so that we can get a better idea of what the bats are doing in the winter), with more winter tree climbs in early 2025.

From: Morgan Bowers
Sent: 01/08/2016 08:51 AM
To: Sonja Howell; Heather Allen; Bob Winkle
Cc: charlene@brumbats.org.uk
Subject: Bats at Merrions Wood

Hi Sonja, Heather and Bob,

I just wanted to keep you up to date with all things batty in Merrions Wood.

We did our July bat box checks and we recorded a new species for the wood - a Leisler's bat!

I cannot tell you what good news this is, as it is only the 4th record for the county (3 of which are my records all within the last 2 years, so either our increased recording effort is paying off, or perhaps these bats are just doing well in walsall!)

I have attached a photo for you - feel free to use it for newsletter, etc.

This is really big news, and a very significant discovery, making our little valley even more important than we already thought. This brings the Holbrook Valley species list to:

Common Pipistrelle*
Soprano Pipistrelle*
Whiskered Bat
Noctule*
Brown Long Eared Bat*
Leisler's Bat*
Lesser Horseshoe Bat
Serotine (unconfirmed but I'm SURE about this one!)

Land off Chapel Lane, Great Barr: ALC and soil resources survey – Details of observations at each sampling point

Obs	Topsoil			Upper subsoil			Lower subsoil			Slope	Wetness	Agricultural quality	
No	Depth (cm)	Texture	Stones >20 mm (%)	Depth (cm)	Texture and stoniness	Mottling	Depth (cm)	Texture and stoniness	Mottling	(°)	Class	Grade	Main limitation
1	Stable yard												
2	0-32	MSL	<5	32-95+	MSLr	o				2	I	1	-
3	0-31	MSL	<5	31-65+	MSLr	o				1	I	1/2	D
4	0-34	MSL	<5	34-70	SCLr	o	70-100+	MSLr	o	2	I	1	-
5	0-30	SCL	<5	30-47	SCL	xxx	47-100+	Cr	xx	2	III	3a	W
6	0-31	MSL	<5	31-50	MSLr	o	50-100+	LMSr	o	3	I	2	D
7	0-33	SCL	<5	33-90+	SCLr	xxx				2	I/II	2	W

Survey log key

Gley indicators[1]

o unmottled

x 1-2% ochreous mottles and brownish matrix
(or a few to common root mottles (topsoils))[3]

xx >2% ochreous mottles and brownish matrix
and/or dull structure faces (slightly gleyed horizon)

xxx >2% ochreous mottles
and greyish or pale matrix (gleyed horizon)
or reddish matrix and >2% greyish, brownish or ochreous mottles and pale ped faces
mottles or f-m concentrations (gleyed horizon)

xxxx dominantly blueish matrix
often with some ochreous mottles (gleyed horizon)

Slowly permeable layers[4]

a depth underlined (e.g. 50) indicates
the top of a slowly permeable layer
A wavy underline (e.g. 50 indicates
the top of a layer borderline to slowly permeable

Texture[2]

C - clay
ZC - silty clay
SC - sandy clay
CL - clay loam (H-heavy, M-medium)
ZCL - silty clay loam (H-heavy, M-medium)
SZL - sandy silt loam (F-fine, M-medium,C-coarse)
LS - loamy sand (F-fine, M-medium, C-coarse)
SL - sandy loam (F-fine, M-medium, C-coarse)
S - sand (F-fine, M-medium, C-coarse)
SCL - sandy clay loam
P - peat (H-humified, SF-semi-fibrous, F-fibrous)
LP - loamy peat; PL - peaty loam

Wetness Class[5]

I (freely drained) to VI (very poorly drained)

Limitations:

W - wetness/workability
D - droughtiness
De - depth
F - flooding
St – stoniness
Sl – slope
T – topography/microrelief

Suffixes & prefixes:

r-reddish, gn – greenish
o - organic
(m, v, x)st – (moderately, very, extremely)

(vsl, sl, m, v, x)(very slightly, slightly, moderately very, extremely) calcareous

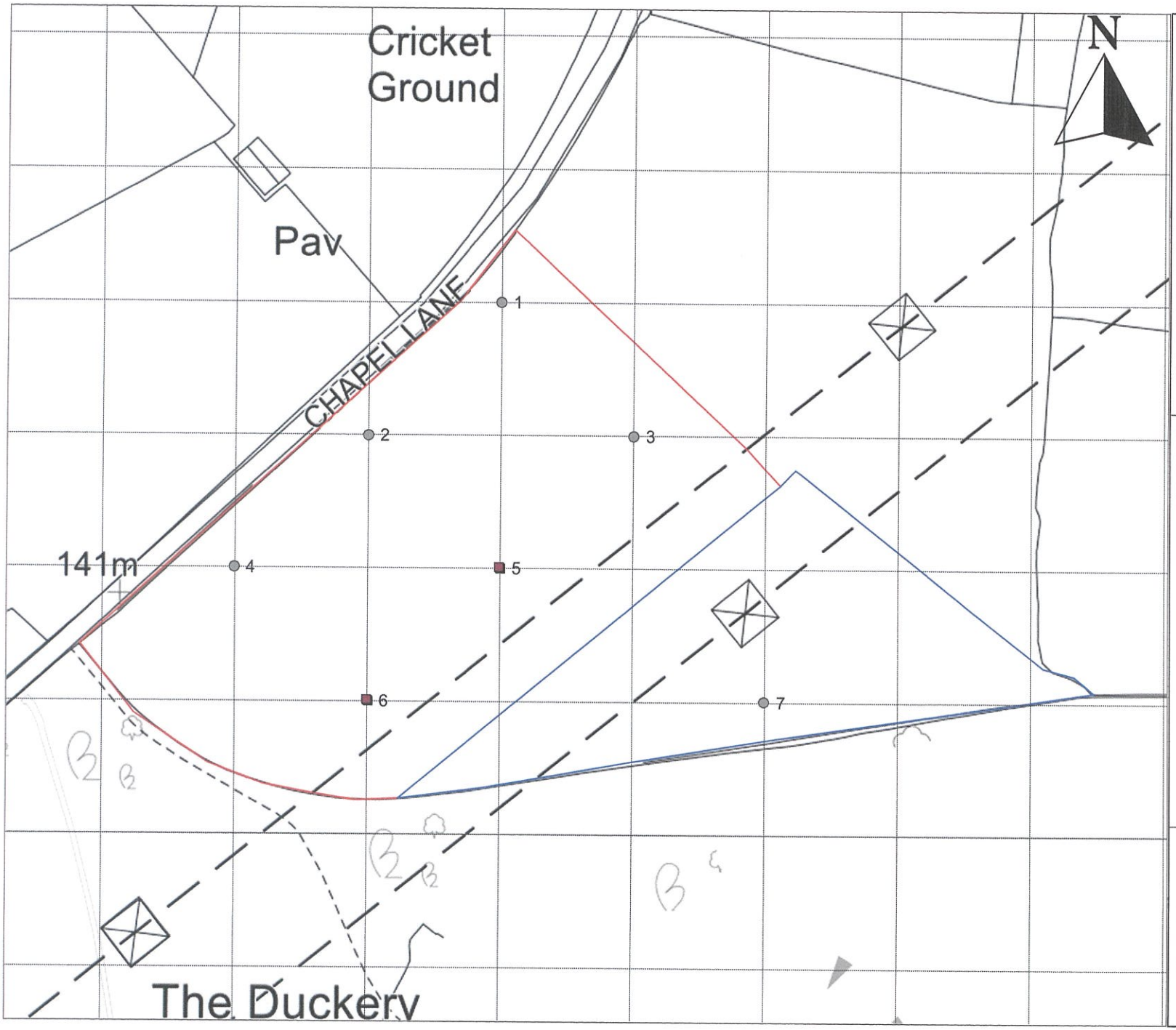
Other abbreviations

fmn - ferri-manganiferous concentrations
dist - disturbed soil layer;
R – bedrock (CH – chalk, SST – sandstone
LST – limestone, MST – Mudstone)

[1]Gley indicators in accordance with Hodgson, J.M., 1997. Soil Survey Field Handbook (third edition). Soil survey technical monograph No. 5

[2]Texture in accordance with particle size classes in Hodgson (1997)

[3] Occasionally recorded in the texture box



KEY

- Auger observation
- Soil/land grade description pit
- Survey area
- Associated landscaping

Site:

Land off Chapel Lane, Great Barr

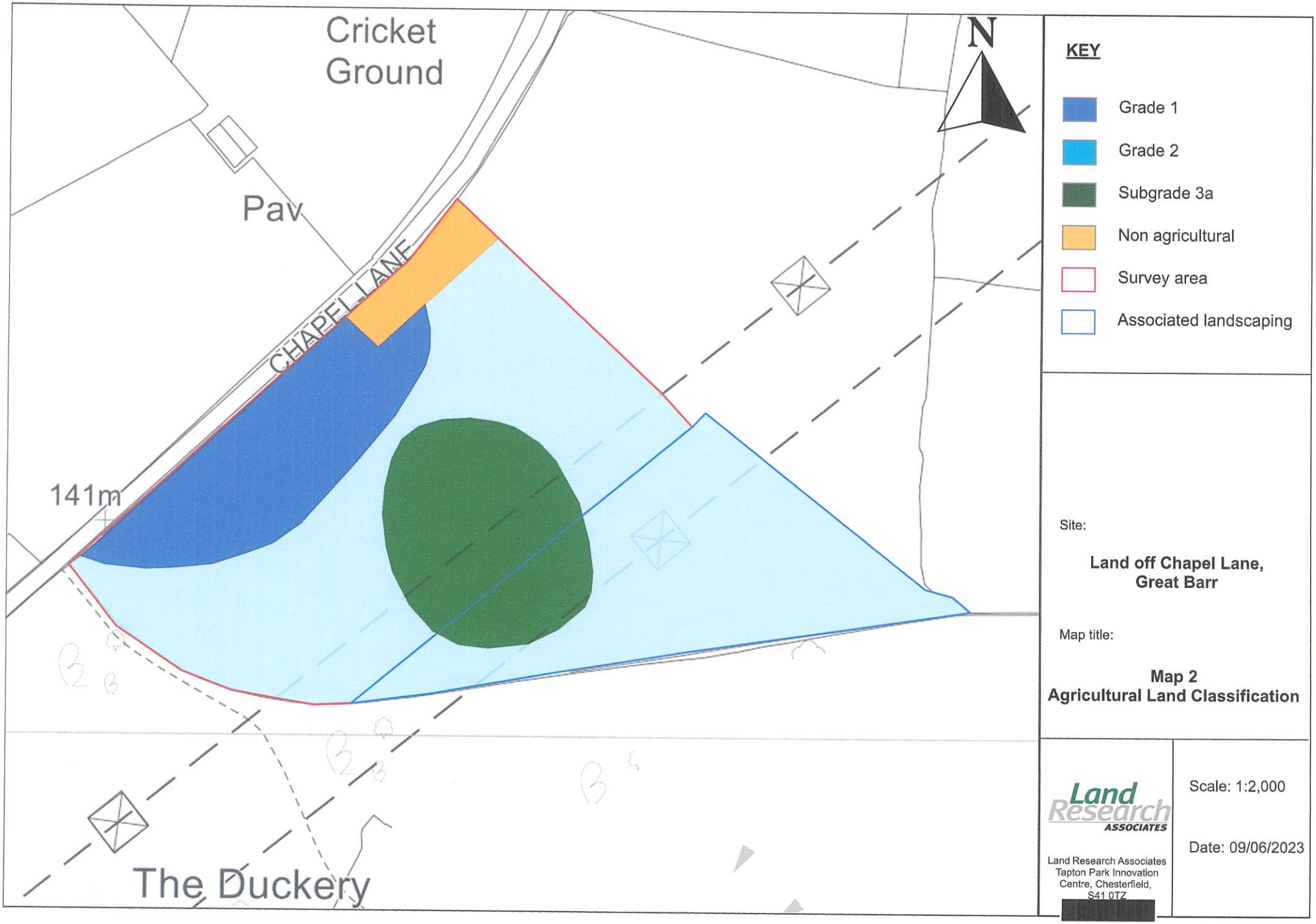
Map title:

Map 1
Survey observations

Land Research Associates
Tapton Park Innovation Centre, Chesterfield, S41 0TZ

Scale: 1:2,000

Date: 09/06/2023


Cricket Ground
Pav
CHAPEL LANE
141m
The Duckery
N
KEY
Grade 1
Grade 2
Subgrade 3a
Non agricultural
Survey area
Associated landscaping
Site:
Land off Chapel Lane, Great Barr
Map title:
Map 2
Agricultural Land Classification
Land Research Associates
Land Research Associates Tapton Park Innovation Centre, Chesterfield, S41 0TZ
[redacted]
Scale: 1:2,000
Date: 09/06/2023