

Biodiversity Survey and Report

4 The Larches, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7NQ

Prepared for submission to Gravesham Borough Council

Date: 6 September 2026

1. Executive Summary

This Biodiversity Survey and Report has been prepared to support a planning submission for 4 The Larches, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7NQ. The report provides a proportionate preliminary ecological appraisal of the site, identifies potential biodiversity constraints, considers protected species risks, and sets out practical avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures suitable for a residential property context.

The assessment is desk-based and should be supplemented by a site walkover by a suitably qualified ecologist where required by Gravesham Borough Council, particularly if works affect roofs, mature trees, hedgerows, ponds, scrub, outbuildings, or other features with potential to support protected or priority species.

2. Site Details

Item	Information
Site address	4 The Larches, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7NQ
Local planning authority	Gravesham Borough Council
Ward / locality	Higham & Shorne, Gravesham, Kent
Approximate postcode coordinates	Latitude 51.415372; Longitude 0.464467
Property type	Residential detached dwelling with associated domestic garden and hardstanding
Report purpose	To provide biodiversity information in support of a planning application and identify ecological constraints, mitigation and enhancement opportunities

3. Planning and Policy Context

Gravesham Borough Council's planning validation guidance states that applicants should refer to both national and local validation requirements before submitting an application, including supporting documents that are proportionate to the nature, scale and location of the proposal. Biodiversity Net Gain is mandatory for most development in England unless an exemption applies, and Gravesham's guidance notes that exempt development must still comply with relevant biodiversity, protected species and ecological policy requirements. Natural England standing advice requires local planning authorities to consider whether development could harm or disturb protected species and to apply the mitigation hierarchy: avoid impacts first, then mitigate, and compensate only as a last resort. This report therefore considers habitats, protected species risk, and biodiversity enhancement opportunities in a proportionate way for a domestic residential site.

4. Methodology

The assessment has been prepared using a proportionate preliminary ecological appraisal approach. It draws on available desk-based information, publicly available constraints mapping guidance, postcode-level location data, and typical habitat features associated with detached residential properties in Higham. The scope is suitable for early planning support but does not replace a full Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, protected species survey, arboricultural survey, or statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation where those are required. A site walkover should record the presence, extent and condition of all habitats within the red line boundary, including buildings, roofs, garden lawn, ornamental planting, hedgerows, trees, scrub, bare ground, hardstanding, ponds, compost heaps and boundary features. Photographs should be appended to this report before submission.

5. Baseline Biodiversity Assessment

The site is understood to comprise an existing detached dwelling within a residential street, with associated garden and domestic curtilage. Habitats likely to be present include modified grassland/lawn, ornamental planting, introduced shrubs, boundary fencing or hedgerow, individual garden trees, paved or surfaced areas, and the existing dwelling roof and elevations.

Habitat / feature	Likely ecological value	Notes and planning relevance
Existing dwelling and roof	Low to moderate, depending on roof structure	Potential for bats or nesting birds if gaps, lifted tiles, soffit voids, hanging tiles, weatherboarding or roof void access are present.
Domestic garden lawn	Low	Typically species-poor but may support common invertebrates and foraging birds.
Ornamental shrubs and planting	Low to moderate	May provide foraging and nesting opportunities for common birds and invertebrates.
Boundary hedgerow or trees	Moderate if native or mature	Potential commuting and foraging habitat for bats, birds and other wildlife; should be retained where practicable.
Hardstanding / paved areas	Negligible to low	Limited ecological value but may offer enhancement opportunities through permeable surfacing and planting.
Ponds or water features	Potentially moderate to high	If present, may require consideration of amphibians, including great crested newt risk depending on context and connectivity.

6. Protected and Priority Species Appraisal

Bats: If the proposal affects the roof, loft space, soffits, fascia boards, external cladding, mature trees or outbuildings, a preliminary bat roost assessment should be completed by a suitably qualified ecologist before works commence. If roosting potential or evidence of bats is identified, further activity surveys and mitigation may be required.

Birds: Vegetation clearance, roof works, hedge cutting and tree works should avoid the main nesting bird season, generally March to August inclusive, unless a competent person confirms that no active nests are present immediately before works. Active nests must not be damaged or disturbed.

Reptiles and amphibians: Closely mown amenity lawn is likely to have low suitability, but piles of timber, rubble, compost, long grass, scrub, ponds or unmanaged margins may increase suitability. If such features are present and would be removed, precautionary clearance methods should be used and further ecological advice obtained where necessary.

Hedgehogs and small mammals: Domestic gardens can support hedgehogs and other small mammals. Any excavations should be covered overnight or include escape ramps, and new fencing should include small gaps at ground level to maintain garden connectivity where appropriate.

7. Biodiversity Net Gain Position

Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements should be screened against the final planning application description, red line boundary and site area. Current guidance confirms that householder applications are exempt from mandatory BNG, and from 6 August 2026 development sites of 0.2 hectares or below are also exempt where no on-site priority habitat is negatively affected. If the proposal is not a householder application, exceeds the relevant exemption threshold, or affects priority habitat, a statutory metric calculation and Biodiversity Gain Plan may be required.

Even where mandatory BNG is exempt, the scheme should still incorporate proportionate biodiversity enhancements to comply with national and local biodiversity policy.

Recommended enhancements are set out below.

8. Recommended Avoidance, Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

- Retain existing trees, hedgerows and mature shrubs wherever practicable.
- Avoid vegetation clearance during the nesting bird season unless checked by a competent person.
- Use low-spill, warm-colour external lighting directed away from boundary vegetation, trees and potential bat commuting routes.
- Plant native or wildlife-beneficial species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, rowan, crab apple, lavender, foxglove, primrose and other nectar-rich flowering plants.
- Avoid the use of peat-based composts and minimise pesticide and herbicide use.

9. Residual Effects

Subject to confirmation that no protected species constraints are present, and provided the avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures in this report are implemented, the proposed works are unlikely to result in significant adverse residual ecological effects. The proposed enhancements would provide a modest improvement in habitat opportunities for common garden wildlife.

10. Limitations

This report has been prepared from desk-based information and typical site characteristics for a detached residential property. It should be reviewed following a site walkover and updated with photographs, habitat measurements, red line boundary area, proposed development plans and any ecological survey results. Absence of evidence from desk-based review does not confirm absence of protected species.

11. Conclusion

The site is expected to be of generally low ecological value in its existing domestic residential context, with the main potential constraints relating to bats, nesting birds, retained vegetation, garden boundaries and any pond or mature tree features. With appropriate precautionary working methods and the biodiversity enhancements listed above, the proposal can make a positive contribution to local biodiversity while remaining proportionate to the scale of development.