

**ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF  
LAND to the rear of SUTHERLAND HOUSE  
OVERSTRAND ROAD, CROMER  
NORTH NORFOLK**

**For**

**Sutherland Homes  
C/o Sheringham House  
Cremers Drift  
Sheringham  
Norfolk  
NR26 8HZ**

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**ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

**Land to the rear of Sutherland House, Overstrand Road, Cromer**

2nd September 2008

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## **ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

### **Land to the rear of Sutherland House, Overstrand Road, Cromer**

2nd September 2008

#### **1.0 Introduction**

The ERAs Consultancy was commissioned to survey a site situated on sloping land to the rear of Sutherland House, Overstrand Road, Cromer. It is proposed that a retirement home should be built on the site. Sutherland House was built as a private house in 1897 but has been used until recently as a girls school and the site was the hockey field.

The objective of the survey was to carry out a Phase 1 habitat and protected species assessment of the land and its immediate surroundings.

#### **2.0 Site Description**

2.1 The site consists of a single grass field on a slight (c.15 degree) SW facing slope bordered on two sides by woodland (un-named). A former asphalt tennis court is at the western end of the field at the base of the hill. The soil is light and sandy and low in nutrients. The site is accessed from a communal driveway off Overstrand Road, used by the residents of Sutherland Court Gardens, Barclay Mews and Swinton House. There are no permanent buildings on the survey site. The site is located at Ordnance Survey grid reference: TG 225416.

#### **3.0 Survey Methods and Constraints**

3.1 The survey took place on the afternoon of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2008.

3.2 The field survey involved walking over the study area to search for plants and animals and to assess the habitat types. The habitat survey followed the methodology set out in JNCC guidelines (1993).

3.3 The survey for the presence of animals with statutory protection followed best practice guidelines and involved looking for signs such as suitability of habitat, paths made, droppings and physical presence.

#### **4.0 Statutory Wildlife Designations**

There are no statutory wildlife designations within or immediately adjacent to the study site under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) (as amended). However, the Overstrand Cliffs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies on the further side of the woodland which borders the site. See attached details in Appendix 3. The SSSI has been notified for its soft-cliff habitat.

The Habitats Directive lists habitats plus plants and animals that may not have statutory protection but whose conservation is to be promoted. Appendix 2

contains lists of those identified by Norfolk County Council as being important in a county context.

## 5.0 Flora – Habitat Summary

The walk-over survey identified the broad characterisation of the habitats found within the study area. The following notes summarise the main habitat types. Plant identification follows Clapham, Tutin and Moore, 1987.

Plant lists are given in Appendix 1. No WCA (1981) Schedule 8 plant species are known to occur on this site. None of the plants listed in Appendix 2, as being key species in the Norfolk Biodiversity Action plan, occur on the site.

### 5.1 Boundaries

The boundaries are described below. None of the boundaries have hedgerows that would qualify for protection under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

Orientation	Description
North	Site partly bordered by a lawn beside Swinton House and partly by mixed woodland – oak, ash, sycamore, elm and beech.
East	Site bordered by mixed woodland (not named on OS map)
South	Fence-line with a patch of blackthorn scrub and occasional volunteer sycamore, elder, hawthorn and oak.
West	Trees and scrub on 2m high bank opposite Sutherland Court Gardens. Consisting of young sycamore, hawthorn, snowberry, elm suckers, holm oak and bramble. A single mature sycamore.

5.2 Scrub is limited to part of the south boundary which has a stand of blackthorn and the bank on the western boundary.

### 5.3 Grassland

The site is a former hockey field on a west facing slope. The slope is fairly gentle *circa* 15 degrees. The lower half of the slope has been spread with spare soil and re-seeded with ryegrass and white clover. The grassland on the upper part of the slope is species poor and dominated by Yorkshire fog, *Holcus lanatus*, suggesting the drainage is somewhat impeded. The field has been managed by cutting.

### 5.4 Wetland

There is no pond on the site and none was noted in the vicinity.

### 5.5 Land adjacent to the survey site.

On the northern and western boundaries is a woodland of mature oak, sycamore, ash, beech and elm suckers. The OS map does not have a name for it and it does not appear to be more than 100 years old. Ivy is locally dominant as a ground cover species and growing up trees. To the south there are two grass fields, one of which is used for a couple of caravans. To the west are recently built retirement apartments and houses.

## 6.0 Fauna

### 6.1 Mammals

Surveys were targeted at those mammal species having statutory protection under *The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994; Badger Protection Act 1992*; those listed in the *UK Biodiversity Action Plan*; and in national and local Red Data lists. The aim was to use survey techniques to identify the presence or likely occurrence of protected species.

#### 6.1.1 Bats

All species of bat and their roosts are protected under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Schedule 5). Roost sites are protected at all times irrespective of whether bats are present.

There is no previous information on bat species at the survey site. The fields and woodland form a rural pocket within a residential area. There are roost records for pipistrelle and flight records for natterers bats in this 10km square.

There are no buildings on the site and all the trees are on the boundaries and are not affected by the current proposals. There is no potential for bat roosts on the site.

#### 6.1.2 Badger

The badger is protected by the *Protection of Badger Act 1992* although it is the sett rather than the animal itself that carries the protection. The margins of the site were checked for evidence of badger activity. There were no signs of badger tracks, latrines or feeding activity.

### 6.2 Amphibians

Natural England (until recently called 'English Nature') advises that all water bodies within 500m of a development site be checked for great crested newts. Great crested newts are protected under European legislation because of their scarcity there. However, despite the population declining here they are still quite widespread in England. There are no current records for great crested newt in this 10 km square and there is no suitable habitat for it to breed on site and no ponds were noted in adjacent areas.

### 6.3 Reptiles

The commoner reptiles such as common lizard, slow-worm, grass-snake and adder are protected by law from being killed or injured. The site does not have potential for reptiles as it lacks suitable habitat on site such as rough grassland and areas of scrub.

### 6.4 Birds

Birds were seen and heard around the boundaries of the site but are not affected adversely by the proposals.

## 7.0 Discussion

The proposals for the study site have no potential impact on the nearby Overstrand Cliffs SSSI, which is on the far side of the woodland bordering the site. No plant or animal with statutory protection was recorded either on the site or making use of it. No plant or animal listed on the Norfolk Biodiversity Action Plan was found on the site or using it.

Currently the site lacks diversity of habitat due to its past use as a games field. The grassland is species poor and partly reseeded. The wildlife value of the site is minimal. Any decorative landscaping around the proposed building will provide cover and feeding sites for birds and nectar sources for insects and improve its potential for wildlife.

## 8.0 Recommendations

Shrub and tree planting should form part of the development to increase the wildlife potential of the site.

As the site is on a slight slope thought could be given to directing run-off to an area at the bottom of the slope where a pond and marsh could be created as a feature and as a way of improving the habitat for wildlife.

## 9.0 References

- Bat Conservation Trust 2007 *Bat Surveys. Good Practice Guidelines*
- Clapham, A R, Tutin, T G & Moore, D M (1987) *Flora of the British Isles*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Cambridge University Press
- English Nature 2001 Great crested newt mitigation guidelines.
- JNCC guidelines 1993
- JNCC 1995 Atlas of amphibians and reptiles in Britain. H R Arnold.
- HMSO 1981 *Wildlife and Countryside Act*
- HMSO 1992 *Protection of Badgers Act*
- HMSO 1997 *The Hedgerow Regulations SI no. 1160*
- Richardson, P 2000 *Distribution Atlas of Bats in Britain and Ireland*. BCT, London.



Photo 1: Looking east up the slope to the woodland



Photo 2: Looking west down the slope towards Barclay Mews

## APPENDIX 1 - Plant species

A= abundant, D = dominant, F = frequent, L = local/locally, O = occasional, R = rare

### Grassland

<u>Common name</u>	<u>Scientific name</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Ryegrass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>	LD
Timothy	<i>Phleum pratense</i>	O
Yorkshire fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	LD
Black medick	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	LF
Broad-leaved dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	O-LA
Common sow-thistle	<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	O
Greater plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>	O
Mugwort	<i>Artemisia campestris</i>	O
Ribwort plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	LA
Scentless mayweed	<i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i>	O
White clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	O-LF

### Un-named woodland on north and eastern sides

<u>Common name</u>	<u>Scientific name</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	O
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvestris</i>	O
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus agg</i>	LA
Elm	<i>Ulmus sp.</i>	LA
Oak	<i>Quercus/robur/pedunculatus</i>	A
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	F

**Appendix 2**  
**Biodiversity Action Plan for Norfolk June 2007**

**Habitats**

Ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows  
Aquifer-fed naturally fluctuating waterbodies  
Built-up areas and urban green space  
Cereal field margins  
Chalk rivers  
Churchyards and cemeteries  
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh  
Coastal sand dunes  
Eutrophic standing water  
Fens  
Littoral and sub-littoral chalk  
Lowland calcareous grassland  
Lowland heathland and dry acid grassland  
Lowland meadows and pastures  
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland  
Lowland wood-pasture and parkland  
Maritime cliff and slopes  
Mesotrophic lakes  
Reed beds  
Saline lagoons  
Sea-grass beds  
Traditional orchards  
Wet woodland

**Biodiversity Action Plan for Norfolk - Species**

**Mammals**

Bat species  
Brown hare  
Otter  
Water vole

**Birds**

Bittern  
Corn bunting  
Grey partridge  
Night jar  
Skylark  
Spotted flycatcher  
Stone curlew  
Tree sparrow  
Turtledove  
Woodlark

**Amphibians**

Great crested newt

**Butterflies**

Silver studded blue

**Crustacean**

White clawed crayfish

**Molluscs**

Depressed river mussel

Desmoulin's whorl snail

Little whirl-pool ram's-horn snail

Narrow-mouth whorl snail

Shining ram's-horn snail

Starlet sea anemone

**Beetles**

*Ophonus laticollis*

*Harpalus froelichii*

**Plants**

Fen orchid

Floating water-plantain

Greater water parsnip

Holly-leaved naiad

Native black poplar

Pillwort

Red-tipped cudweed

Ribbon-leaved water-plantain

Small-flowered catchfly

Tassel stonewort

Tower mustard

Nail fungus

Starry breck-lichen

Orange-fruited elm-lichen

**Liverwort**

Norfolk flapwort *Leiocolea rutheana*

**APPENDIX 3**  
**Overstrand Cliffs SSSI**