



THE
ENVIRONMENT
PARTNERSHIP



HOLY TRINITY CHURCH MIDDLETON ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

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Document Title	Ecological Assessment Report
Prepared for	Buttress Architects
Prepared by	TEP - Warrington
Document Ref	9536.002

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Date	August 2022
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Executive Summary

1. An ecological assessment was undertaken on the site of Holy Trinity Church. The assessment included a desk study, extended Phase 1 habitat survey, daytime bat scoping assessment of buildings and trees and an invasive non-native plant survey.
2. No designated sites, UK Priority Habitats or invasive plant species are present within or adjacent to the site.
3. Data search records provided show that a common pipistrelle bat roost has been recorded in the church and the daytime scoping assessment identified multiple potential roosting features for bats. Trees on site were found to have low potential to support roosting bats. UK Priority Species have been recorded immediately adjacent to the site including several bird species, hedgehog and a moth species.
4. The site provides habitat for bats, nesting birds, common invertebrates and hedgehogs. Recommendations include the retention of scrub and mature trees or replacement with high-quality planting where this cannot be achieved. Sensitive site clearance, precautionary measures for bats in respect of trees and careful timing of works is proposed to avoid impacts on nesting birds and hedgehogs is recommended.
5. Finally, it is recommended that bat emergence surveys are undertaken to categorise the use of the church by bats as a roosting site and identify future mitigation requirements should bats be affected.

1.0 Introduction

Terms of Reference

- 1.1 Ecology Consulting Ltd was instructed by The Environment Partnership (TEP) Ltd to undertake an extended Phase 1 habitat survey of the site of Holy Trinity Church, located off Archer Park, Middleton. The survey was required to provide baseline ecological information such that ecological constraints to future development of the site could be identified. Furthermore, the survey was required to include a daytime bat scoping assessment of the church and trees on site and identify any locations of invasive species present.

Objectives

- 1.2 The objectives of this study are to:
- Report the current ecological baseline of the site.
 - Identify the presence of priority habitats present.
 - Identify the presence or potential presence of protected or notable species.
 - Identify the presence of invasive non-native species (INNS).
 - Identify potential constraints to future development or change in land use.

2.0 Method

Ecology Desk Study

- 2.1 Records of protected or otherwise notable habitats and species within a 1km radius of the project site were obtained from Greater Manchester Local Records Centre (GMLRC). The records were analysed to determine their relevance to the site and any future development, taking into consideration the dates and locations of each record and the sensitivity of the recorded feature to likely impacts. It should be noted that a lack of species records within an area may not reflect an actual absence of that species but could simply be a function of limited recording/survey effort in that area.
- 2.2 Furthermore, a desk study search of sites designated for nature conservation importance was undertaken on the MAGIC website (<http://magic.defra.gov.uk>). The search comprised statutory designated sites (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest, SSSIs). A search within 1km of the site was undertaken on the basis that any sites beyond 1km would be highly unlikely to be affected by any development at Holy Trinity Church.

Habitats and Flora

Extended Phase 1

- 2.3 An extended Phase 1 survey was undertaken on 20 July 2022. Phase 1 survey is a standardised method of recording habitat types and characteristic vegetation, as set out in the Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey – a technique for Environmental Audit. This habitat survey method is “extended” through the additional recording of specific features indicating the presence, or likely presence, of protected species. Descriptive “target notes” (TN), are made for characteristic habitats, features of ecological interest, or any other features which require note to aid ecologically sensitive design or mitigation.
- 2.4 The survey was undertaken by Lee Bagnall, a Full Member of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management, a Chartered Ecologist (CEcol) and Chartered Environmentalist (CEnv). Weather conditions were warm and sunny, and the survey was undertaken in the optimal period for identifying habitats and plant species.

Fauna

Bat Scoping Assessment – Buildings

- 2.5 A preliminary bat roost assessment was undertaken on 20 July 2022, in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust guidance. The survey was conducted by Lee Bagnall (Class licence 2022-10320-CL18-BAT). The assessment was carried out during daylight hours to identify Potential Roost Features (PRFs) that could require further investigation. Features were classified on a categorical scale, from negligible to high roost suitability, based on the presence of PRFs.

- 2.6 The exterior of the church was inspected from ground level paying particular attention to potential points of ingress and egress, searching for signs of bats, their droppings, urine stains and marks caused by their fur rubbing against material at a roost entrance. Binoculars were used to view areas not visible from ground level and torches were used to aid surveying potential internal and external features. Notes were taken on the presence of features that offer potential for roosting.
- 2.7 The interior of the church was examined for any bat evidence, including droppings, insect wings and signs associated with roost entrances.

Bat Scoping Assessment – Trees

- 2.8 Trees within the site were assessed from ground level for the presence of PRFs. Features which present PRFs include split limbs, cracks, cavities, wounds, knot holes, woodpecker holes, tear outs, hazard beams, butt rot and lifted bark. Evidence of bats was also searched for including staining around possible roost entrances, feeding remains and droppings. Trees were categorised in terms of their overall potential to support bats with trees assigned a rating of Negligible, Low, Moderate, High potential or Confirmed Roost in accordance with BCT guidance¹.

Invasive Non-Native Species

- 2.9 The site was searched for the presence of invasive non-native plants which are listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Limitations

- 2.10 An ecological survey is a snapshot in time and presence or absence of protected/notable species may vary across seasons and in response to change in habitats and site conditions. Furthermore, whilst biological records can provide information on the presence of protected/notable species, an absence of records does not necessarily mean a species is absent from the site, it may be that surveys have not been undertaken locally for this species.
- 2.11 Whilst most areas of the site were accessed, not all areas of the south eastern boundary could be accessed due to the presence of a steep slope with dense bramble scrub, however this is not considered to present a significant limitation.

¹ Collins, J. (ed.)(2016) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd Edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

3.0 Results

Desk Study

Designated Sites

- 3.1 The site is not located within or immediately adjacent to a statutory designated site. However, the site is located within impact risk zone for Rochdale Canal Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), located 2.2 km to the east. At this distance, no impacts are predicted on this designated site from the potential development of the church site which is likely to be small scale. Therefore, this designated site is not considered further in this report.
- 3.2 Alkington Woods Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is located approximately 480 m to the south of the site. The site is designated for its mosaic of habitats present including large areas of broadleaved and plantation woodland, scrub and ponds. The site is also designated as Alkington Woods and Rhodes Lodges Site of Biological Importance (SBI), which forms a similar boundary and is designated as it supports a number of UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitats including lowland broadleaved woodland and ponds and lodges. Alkington Woods is located south of a major barrier, the A576 and at 480 m distant from the proposed small scale development site no impacts are predicted on the LNR or SBI. Therefore, this site is not considered further in this report.

Habitats

- 3.3 There are no records of UK or Greater Manchester priority habitats present within the site boundary.

Protected & Notable Species

- 3.4 There are multiple records of protected and notable species within 1km of the site. Records are reproduced due to data sharing restrictions and the volume of records available, but a full copy of the records can be made available upon request.
- 3.5 The records include species protected by European and UK legislation including the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 and Species of Principal Importance (SPI) for the purpose of conserving biodiversity in England covered under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Please note that records prior to the year 2000 are excluded on the basis that records prior to this time are unlikely to be reflective of the current status of the site.

Amphibians

- 3.6 There are no records of amphibians within a 1 km radius of the site.

Bats

- 3.7 The records provided by GMLRC include a bat roost in Parkfield Church which is assumed, based on the location provided, to relate to Holy Trinity Church from the grid reference provided. The records shows a bat day roost (with a maximum of three common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* bats) was recorded in 2016 through emergence surveys. There are several other records of common pipistrelle roosts and common pipistrelle activity in the wider urban area and soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* and Myotis species bats within 1km of the site.

Badger

- 3.8 There are no records of badgers within or immediately adjacent to the site. The nearest records of badgers are distant from the site, located over 500 m to the west.

Birds

- 3.9 There are several records of bird species within 1 km, the closest records are located immediately west of the site and include several SPI including; spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, dunnoek *Prunella modularis*, herring gull *Larus argentatus*, song thrush *Turdus philomelos*, bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* and ring ouzel *Turdus torquatus*. The SPI reed bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* was also recorded within 1km of the site. Other species recorded include The Wildlife and Countryside Act Schedule 1 protected kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and this species has been recorded 500 m to the south west and east of the site. Herring gull, house sparrow, lapwing, starling, spotted flycatcher and ring ouzel are also red listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC). Other red listed BoCC recorded within 1km of the site include redpoll *Acanthis flammea*, linnet *Linaria cannabina* and yellow wagtail *Motacilla flava*.

Hedgehog

- 3.10 Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* has been recorded immediately to the west of the site.

Reptiles

- 3.11 There are no records of reptiles within 1 km of the site.

Other species

- 3.12 White letter hairstreak butterfly, which is partially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, has been recorded approximately 700 m to the west and the east of the site. The SPI plant species, yellow bird's nest *Hypopitys monotropa* has been recorded 750 m west of the site whilst the SPI moth species, shaded broad-bar *Scotopteryx chenopodiata* has been recorded 850 m to the west of the site,

Habitats and Flora

Phase 1 Habitat Survey

- 3.13 The following habitats (shown on Figure 1) were recorded on or adjacent to the site during the extended Phase 1 habitat survey:

- Poor semi-improved grassland;
- Dense scrub;
- Individual broad-leaved trees;
- Hardstanding;
- Buildings;

Poor Semi-improved Grassland

- 3.14 Poor semi-improved grassland is present on the south, western and northern sides of the church. The largest area of this habitat is present to the south east of the church at TN3. The grassland is rank and species poor, dominated by false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* with frequent common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, occasional cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, frequent hedge bindweed *Calystegia sepium*, occasional white clover *Trifolium repens*, wood avens *Geum urbanum*, ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*, curled dock *Rumex crispus*, and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Ornamental hydrangea and fuschia shrubs are present along the southern church wall alongside common grasses, nettle *Urtica dioica*, bramble and tree saplings. Along the northern boundary at TN7, vegetation comprises poor semi-improved grassland between the church and boundary fence to the north. Along the church wall there is occasional lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, ash saplings, bramble, American willow herb *Epilobum ciliatum*, cleavers *Galium aparine*, Yorkshire fog, common bent and meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*. There are patches of holly *Ilex aquifolium* and green forsythia *Forsythia* species on the boundary with the adjacent land.

Dense scrub

- 3.15 Dense scrub forms the south and south eastern boundary at TN1 and TN5. TN1 comprises a narrow strip of dense bramble scrub interspersed with hedge bindweed, cleavers, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* saplings. Further east, towards the south eastern boundary the extent of scrub increases and dense bramble scrub sprawls over a steep slope which includes several common elm *Ulmus procera* trees.

Individual broadleaved trees

- 3.16 There are several individual mature trees as shown on Figure 2. These comprise dead elm trees to the south and west of the site, an American elm along the southern boundary and a group of common elm at the south east boundary which includes several dead individuals. At the western boundary of the site at TN2 and TN6 there is a row of scrubby immature trees including wych elm *Ulmus glabra*, sycamore, ash, wild cherry *Prunus avium* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. At the north east corner of the site there is a mature, pollarded ash tree.

Hardstanding

- 3.17 The access track along the western boundary of the site comprises crushed stone with sparse vegetation coverage.

Buildings

- 3.18 The only building present on site is Holy Trinity Church (TN9), the church is currently disused and has not been occupied for several years. It is of stone construction with stained glass windows and a complex, pitched roof comprised of slate tiles.

Invasive non-native species (INNS)

- 3.19 No INNS were found during the extended Phase 1 habitat survey and no records of INNS were provided within 1 km of the site.

Fauna

Amphibians

- 3.20 The site offers good terrestrial habitat for amphibians in the form of rank grassland and scrub. However, the site is isolated in an urban environment, no ponds are present in close proximity and there are no records of amphibians within 1 km of the site. On this basis, amphibians, in particular the European protected great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* is considered unlikely to be present.

Badgers

- 3.21 No evidence of badgers was found during the extended Phase 1 survey although a designated badger survey was not undertaken and the south eastern boundary could not be fully inspected due to the steep slope and dense scrub. However, due to the lack of field signs, badgers are considered unlikely to use the site for anything more than occasional foraging.

Bats

Roosting potential of buildings on site

- 3.22 The external bat scoping assessment of Holy Trinity church identified multiple PRFs with 17 locations/areas recorded as PRFs which are shown on Figure 2. PRFs include:
- Gaps formed where mortar is missing between brickwork;
 - Missing brickwork;
 - Cracks in brickwork or gaps between brickwork;
 - Gaps under slate tiles; and
 - Gaps under edge stones.
- 3.23 Internally, it was evident that the church has been disused for several years and there are several areas in disrepair. No evidence of roosting bats was identified although due to the large extent of cobwebs and dead invertebrates present made looking for bat droppings difficult. However no bats, bat droppings or feeding remains were found during the survey.
- 3.24 Due to the number of features identified, this building is assessed to have High potential to support roosting bats and a confirmed pipistrelle roost was recorded in 2016.

Roosting potential of structures and trees on site

- 3.25 None of the trees on site are considered to have high potential to support roosting bats. All trees were found to have Negligible or Low potential to support bats, scoping assessment forms are provided in Appendix C but a summary is provided in the table below and locations are shown on Figure 2.

Table 1: Summary of Bat Roost Potential in Trees on Site

Tree ID	Description	Potential to Support Bats
T1	Dead elm with lifted bark forming a PRF.	Low
T2	Dead elm with lifted bark forming a PRF.	Low
T3	Dead elm with lifted bark forming a PRF.	Low
T4	Dead elm with lifted bark forming a PRF.	Low
T5	American elm, good condition with no obvious PRFs.	Negligible
T6	Ash, a couple of holes on the south side. These do not appear to extend in sufficiently to form a PRF but as half of the tree is hidden from view to its location against the boundary fence a low rating is assigned on a precautionary basis.	Low
G1	Group of common elm on steep slope, no obvious features but due to the number of trees and large size a low rating is assigned on a precautionary basis.	Low
G2	Group of dead elm on steep slope with lifted bark, cannot be assessed up close due to the steep, scrub covered embankment but lifted bark noted.	Low

Habitat assessment

- 3.26 The grassland, scrub and individual trees provide suitable foraging habitat for bats in the form of invertebrate prey.

Breeding birds

- 3.27 The trees and scrub on site provide nesting sites and a feeding resource for a range of wild birds, potentially including SPI for conservation and/or UK BAP Priority species.

Hedgehogs

- 3.28 The areas of scrub on site which feature deadwood provide cover and a potential foraging resource for this declining species, hedgehog species has been recorded locally and therefore is potentially present.

Invertebrates

- 3.29 The grassland, scrub and individual trees on site provide habitat for a range of common species whilst the church may support a range on invertebrates and provide nesting opportunities.

Reptiles

- 3.30 Whilst the site provides some reptile habitat, in the form of poor semi-improved grassland and scrub edge habitats, it is considered to be suboptimal due to the limited range and extent of habitat available. Furthermore, the site is isolated in a highly urban environment, and it is unlikely to be linked to reptile populations in the wider areas. On this basis, reptiles are considered unlikely to pose a constraint to any future development.

4.0 Conclusions

Designated Sites

- 4.1 No impacts are predicted on statutory or non-statutory designated sites.

Habitats and Flora

- 4.2 No UK Priority Habitats are present on the site.

INNS

- 4.3 No INNS of plant are present on site.

Fauna

Amphibians

- 4.4 Although the site contains suitable terrestrial habitat for amphibians, no records of amphibians within the site boundary or a 250 m buffer were found, furthermore no ponds were identified within 250 m of the site. On this basis, amphibians are not considered to present a constraint to future development. Therefore, there are currently no implications for the development with regards to amphibians.

Badgers

- 4.5 No records of badgers were provided in or adjacent to the site boundary and no badger setts or signs of badgers were found during the extended Phase 1 survey. On this basis, badgers are unlikely to pose a significant constraint to future development.

Bats

- 4.6 The records provided by GMLRC include a bat roost in Parkfield Church which is assumed to relate to Holy Trinity Church. The records shows a bat day roost (with a maximum of three common pipistrelle bats) was recorded in 2016 and the roost was detected through emergence surveys. The external bat scoping assessment identified numerous PRFs on the exterior of the church. Therefore, bats pose a potential constraint to future development of the site that includes works to demolish or renovate the church.
- 4.7 None of the trees on site were found to have moderate or high potential to support bats. On this basis, no further surveys are required for trees but precautionary measures should be adopted during felling of these trees, should it be required, to protect bats in the unlikely event that they are present.

Birds

- 4.8 The site is likely to be used by a range of species during the nesting season. Within a highly urban setting the areas of scrub and mature provide a local resource for breeding, feeding and refuge. Therefore, should site clearance (if required) be undertaken between March and August, breeding birds are likely to pose a constraint and this period should be avoided if possible.

Hedgehogs

- 4.9 Whilst hedgehogs are not legally protected, they are a declining species and UK Priority Species. Whilst this species does not pose a direct constraint to future development, any future development should include measures to protect hedgehogs during site clearance and create suitable habitats.

Invertebrates

- 4.10 Whilst no records of terrestrial invertebrates were provided for the site itself, the grassland, scrub and mature trees habitats may be of importance for common terrestrial invertebrates and whilst not a direct constraint to future development, any future development should seek to maintain existing habitats where possible and compensate for their loss with high-quality habitats including species-rich, flower-rich habitats where habitats cannot be retained.

5.0 Recommendations

Bats

- 5.1 It is recommended that bat emergence surveys are undertaken to obtain further information on the use of Holy Trinity Church by bats. This will provide important information on the potential impacts of any future development and identify mitigation requirements. The surveys should comprise at least three surveys, two weeks apart during the active bat season of May to August.
- 5.2 None of the trees on site were found to have moderate or high potential to support bats. On this basis, no further surveys are required but precautionary measures should be adopted during felling of these trees, should it be required, to protect bats in the unlikely event that they are present.
- 5.3 Any future development should include a sensitive lighting scheme for bats is incorporated so that they can continue to use the site. Should the church be renovated or converted into another use, proposals should be discussed with an ecologist to ensure the design will not negatively impact bats and continue to provide opportunities for them to roost.

Birds

- 5.4 Clearance of trees, scrub and grassland should be undertaken outside of the period March – September to avoid the bird nesting season. If this is not feasible, a nesting bird check will need to be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to the works commencing, to establish that no active bird nests are present.

Hedgehogs

- 5.5 Site clearance should be undertaken sensitively with regards to hedgehogs. Clearance of scrub, log piles, and deadwood should be undertaken carefully to ensure hedgehogs are not accidentally harmed and ideally these features should be removed in late September to early October to avoid the bird nesting season and hedgehog hibernation period.

Biodiversity Enhancement

- 5.6 Any future development should seek to maintain existing habitats where possible and compensate for their loss with species-rich, flower-rich habitats where habitats cannot be retained and provide suitable habitats for invertebrates and bats.

APPENDIX A: Target Notes

Target Note 1

Three dead, mature elm *Ulmus* species trees at the south west corner of the site. Below the canopy inside the site there is a patch of bramble scrub interspersed with sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* saplings with hedge bindweed *Calystegia sepium* and cleavers *Galium aparine*.



Figure 1: Target Note 1

Target Note 2

Row of sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, common elm *Ulmus procera* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* saplings along western boundary.



Figure 2: Target Note 2

Target Note 3

Poor semi-improved grassland on the south side of the church, dead elm present within the grassland. Grassland dominated by false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* with frequent common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, occasional cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, frequent hedge bindweed, occasional white clover *Trifolium repens*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, tree saplings, ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* and curled dock *Rumex crispus*.

Ornamental hydrangea and fuschia plants are present along the southern church wall alongside common grasses, nettle *Urtica dioica*, bramble and tree saplings. Wood avens *Geum urbanum* also noted.



Figure 3: Target Note 3

Target Note 4

Southern boundary comprises bramble scrub with bindweed and tree saplings. Mature American elm *Ulmus americana* present near southern boundary within scrub.



Figure 4: Target Note 4

Target Note 5

South eastern boundary comprises several mature common elm in good condition with no bat potential features. The habitat alongside the church comprises common nettle, bramble and elm saplings. Beyond the healthy elm trees towards the boundary there are several dead elms which are also set amongst bramble scrub and cleavers. Nearer the church there are hawthorn saplings and wych elm *Ulmus glabra*.



Figure 5: Target Note 5

Target Note 6

Row of sycamore, ash, wych elm, ash, hawthorn saplings along western boundary.



Figure 6: Target Note 6

Target Note 7

Northern boundary comprises poor semi-improved grassland, along the church wall there is lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, ash saplings, bramble, American willow herb *Epilobium ciliatum*, cleavers, Yorkshire fog, common bent, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*. There are patches of holly *Ilex aquifolium* and green forsythia *Forsythia* species on the boundary with the adjacent land. There is a patch of buddleia in the north eastern corner.



Figure 7: Target Note 7

Target Note 8

Old, mature ash in the north east corner, previously pollarded and new growth at the top. A few cracks and fissures are present but cannot view entire tree due to scrub and boundary location.



Figure 8: Target Note 8

Target Note 9

Holy Trinity Church, the church is currently disused and has not been occupied for several years. It is of stone construction with stained glass windows and a complex, pitched roof comprised of slate tiles.

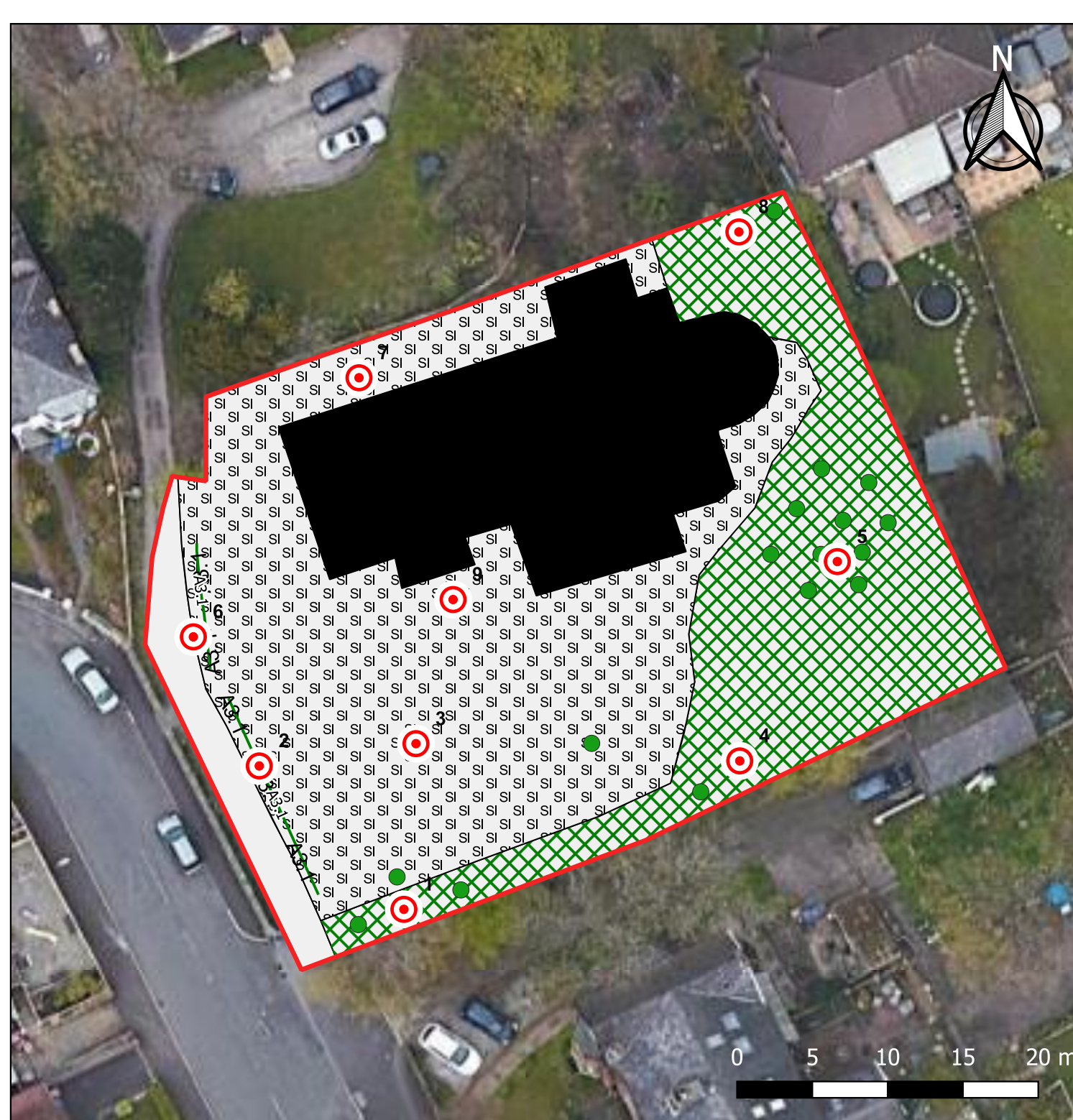


Figure 9: Target Note 9

DRAWINGS

Drawing 1 - Phase 1 Habitat Map

Drawing 2 - Location Plan for Bat Roosting Features



Site Boundary

Habitats

A2.1 - Scrub - dense/continuous

A3.1 - Broadleaved Parkland/scattered trees

B6 - Poor semi-improved grassland

J3.6 - Buildings

J5 - Other habitat

Boundaries

A3.1 - Broadleaved Parkland/scattered trees

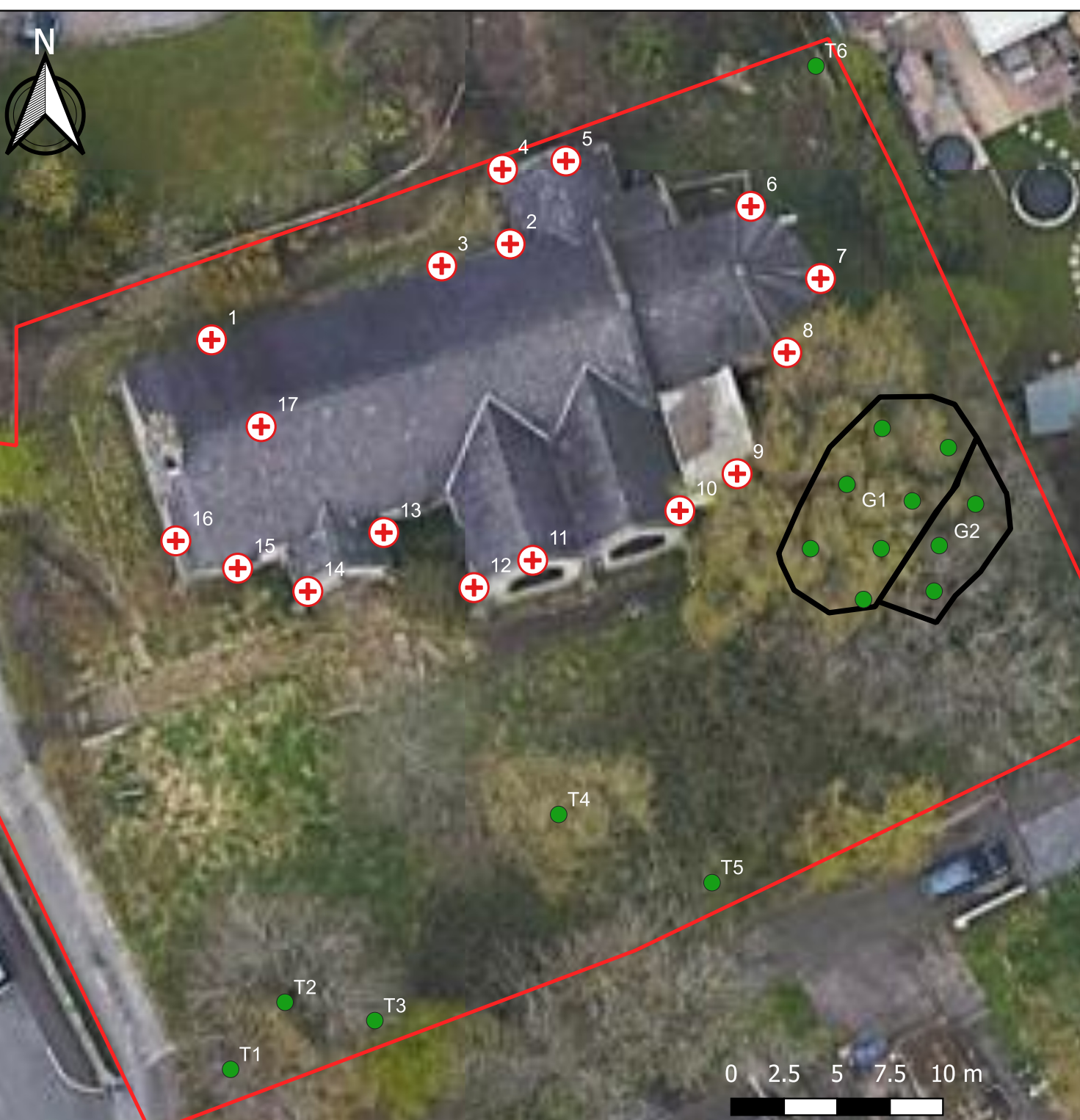
Target Note

Figure 1 - Phase 1 Habitat Map

Holy Trinity Church

Produced by: LB

10/08/2022



 Site Boundary

 PRFs

 Tree ID

 Tree group

PRFs

1. Minor gap in brickwork near drainpipe
2. Minor gaps in brickwork near drainpipe
3. Gap at top of brickwork
4. Missing mortar at eaves
5. Gap in mortar east side of chimney
6. Gaps in brickwork
7. Missing mortar
8. Broken stone leaves gap above window
9. Missing mortar
10. Gaps in mortar and brickwork in poor condition
11. Partially missing tile at apex
12. Large cracks caused by missing mortar
13. Missing mortar by drainpipe
14. Gap between brick and apex
15. Gap in brickwork
16. Gap under edge stones
17. Lifted slate tiles

Figure 2: Location Plan for Potential Bat Roosting Features

Drawn by: LB

10/08/2022



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