

Kintore Hydrogen Plant Bird Study



July 2024



CONTROL SHEET

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EnviroCentre Ltd. were commissioned by Kintore Hydrogen Limited to undertake a bird study within the site known as Kintore Hydrogen Plant, in land south of Kintore. The study was required to compile all data pertaining to birds throughout the 2023-2024 survey season to inform development of a Hydrogen electrolysis plant. The aim of the study was to inform the future development works in regard to ecological constraints pertaining to birds.

The site offers a range of suitable habitats for nesting, loafing and foraging birds via the woodland, scrub, treelines, agricultural fields and grassland habitats within the site.

A range of bird species were encountered during the 2022-2024. Of importance to note, a Barn Owl nest was identified in a tree in the north west of the site and a raptor nest was identified within the woodland in the north west of the site. Sand Martin nests were present in the left hand bank of the River Don upstream of the site and remnant nests cups of either House Martin or Swallow were present in the old sheds associated with the horse stables/ livery in the north west of the site.

The following positive and negative impacts could reasonably be predicted:

- The loss or fragmentation of foraging, nesting and commuting habitat for nesting birds (including barn owl and raptors) as a result of habitat removal/alteration.
- Potential for destruction of nests, and death or injury to chicks, if site works commence during the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive).
- Disturbance to Schedule 1 species (Barn Owl).
- New habitat creation within a focussed plan aiming to increase ecosystem services and provide resources for key fauna attributed to the site.
- Provide wildlife sheltering provisions through the development such as bird nest/ roost boxes.

Further survey works may include:

- More detailed surveys in the lead up to works, to inform a Species Protection Plan, for Barn Owl in order to outline any detailed mitigation and compensatory measures.
- Raptor surveys will likely be required to determine status of the nest in the lead up to works commencing on the site to ensure appropriate buffers are implemented.

No licenses from NatureScot are currently required, however this will likely be reviewed upon the completion of further works and the provision of detailed development design.

Mitigation actions have been recommended to avoid and reduce impacts to birds on site and include:

- Woodland habitat should be retained where possible to ensure the continued provision of supporting habitat for nesting birds.
- 30m standoff buffers from Barn Owl and Raptor nests should be factored into the design.
- Contractors should be made aware of the presence of nesting birds, Barn Owl and raptors in the locale during works via a toolbox talk provided by the project ecologist.
- The project ecologist should undertake a pre-works check of any trees and buildings ahead of felling or demolition to confirm an absence of nesting birds (maximum 48hrs prior).

Compensation/ enhancement actions have been recommended and include:

- 4 Barn Owl boxes installed on suitable trees throughout the site, ahead of works commencing.
- A range (minimum 20) of bird nesting boxes will be installed throughout the site to provide compensatory nesting opportunities for birds in the locale.
- New and replacement areas of landscaping on site.
- Creating habitat connectivity through and/or around the site to suitable habitat (woodland) in the surrounding landscape.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Terms of Reference

EnviroCentre Ltd. were commissioned by Kintore Hydrogen Limited to undertake a bird study within the site known as Kintore Hydrogen Plant, in land south of Kintore. The study was required to compile all data pertaining to birds throughout the 2023-2024 survey seasons to inform development of a Hydrogen electrolysis plant. The site boundary was updated in 2024 which included a reroute of the pipeline route, additional access routes, compensatory area and temporary compounds.

The 'site' is defined as the area demarcated by the red line boundary as shown in Appendix A.

1.2 Scope of Report

The aim of the study was to inform future development works in regard to ecological constraints pertaining to birds. The main objectives were as follows:

- Undertake a desk study to identify existing ecological information applicable to the site
 including designated and non-designated sites in reference to birds, as well as review previous
 surveys conducted on the site for information on bird species;
- Record species identified during site visits during July 2023-July 2024;
- Make an assessment of site use and identify potential impacts to birds in the absence of mitigation; and
- Make recommendations for any further survey and/or species licensing requirements and outline appropriate mitigation, compensation and enhancement methods.

1.3 Site Description

The site is located south of Kintore, centred at National Grid reference: NJ 78276 14343, 91m above sea level. The site consists of a mosaic of agricultural land, grassland, scrub, trees, heathland, woodland, residential cottage, ruined building and horse steading. The site also includes parts of several watercourses including the River Don, Park Burn, Dewsford Burn, Tuach Burn and Silver Burn and a pond in the central region.

The site comprises three main areas and a series of thin corridors between and to the south of the three main areas. The site is bounded to the north by the B977, the Harthills plantation and agricultural fields, to the east by the River Don, and to the south and west by agricultural fields. The site is crossed by the B977 in the west and the A96 and the Rushlach (a named road) in the east.

In the wider landscape, a mostly industrial area is found east of the site, the town of Kintore to the northeast and the remaining surrounding landscape is dominated by woodland, pastures and agricultural land. Kintore substation is located north of the site, approximately 340m from the nearest site boundary.

1.4 Project Description

The main elements of the development are the electrolysis plant, located west of Kintore 400 kV substation; a short underground electrical connection into the substation; an underground hydrogen export pipeline to a connection point on the existing high-pressure natural gas pipeline west of the

A96; and underground water intake and discharge pipelines to the River Don. At the River Don, there will be intake and outfall structures on the south bank and a pumping station.

1.5 Report Usage

The information and recommendations contained within this report have been prepared in the specific context stated above and should not be utilised in any other context without prior written permission from EnviroCentre Limited.

If this report is to be submitted for regulatory approval more than 12 months following the report date, it is recommended that it is referred to EnviroCentre Limited for review to ensure that any relevant changes in data, best practice, guidance or legislation in the intervening period are integrated into an updated version of the report.

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2 METHODS

2.1 Desk study

Prior to field work being undertaken, a desk study of the site and surrounds was undertaken in May 2023. The following sources were checked:

- NatureScot Sitelink¹ for information (in relation to birds) on:
 - Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar sites up to 5km of the Site (including possible/proposed sites); and
 - National Nature Reserves (NNR) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR) up to 2km of the Site;
- North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) records of birds up to 2km from the site, obtained in 2022;
- Existing surveys of the site for any information pertaining to birds^{2 3}.

2.2 Field Survey

During July 2023 – July 2024, a range of surveys were undertaken in relation to the Kintore Hydrogen Plant site, during which any evidence of birds was recorded as well as any sightings of bird species. In addition, habitats within the survey area were assessed for their suitability to support breeding and overwintering birds.

2.3 Disclaimer

Faunal species are transient and can move between favoured habitats regularly throughout and between years. This study provides a snapshot of field signs and bird species present in the survey area between July 2023 and July 2024.

¹ NatureScot. (2022). Sitelink. [Online] Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/map (Accessed May 2023)

 $^{^{\}rm 2}$ ECRPT 10271 Kintore, Aberdeenshire - PEA - Final

³ Winter breeding bird surveys undertaken of the central region of the site previously in 2022-2023 by EnviroCentre

3 RESULTS AND ASSESSMENT

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 Statutory Designated Sites

No statutory designated sites are present within the site boundary.

Loch of Skene SSSI⁴, RAMSAR⁵ and SPA⁶ is located approximately 5km south of site. The designated features of this area refer to the presence of wintering wildfowl and gull populations, namely Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*), Common Gull (*Larus canus*) and Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*).

3.1.2 Non-Statutory Designated Sites

No non-statutory designated sites with birds as important features were found within the site boundary or within 2km.

3.1.3 Previous Survey Findings

PEA Survey 2022

A fallen owl box was identified in the woodland in the centre of the site during the 2022 PEA survey and contained raptor pellets.

An inactive Woodpecker hole was present in standing deadwood in the centre of the site during 2022 PEA.

Winter Breeding Bird Survey 2022-23

The landscape including the site is known to contribute to the overwintering of geese in the North East of Scotland. Previous surveys undertaken on the site for wintering birds identified three goose species to be present within and adjacent to the site, including Greylag Goose, Pink-footed Goose and White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*).

NESBReC Records

Other relevant bird species returned from NESBReC, associated with the site include:

Table 3-1: Records of Birds from Desk Study

Species	Designation ⁷
Barn Owl (Tyto alba)	BoCC - Green list ⁸
Barnacle Goose (Branta leucopsis)	BoCC – Amber list ⁹
Black-headed Gull (Chroicocephalus ridibundus)	BoCC – Amber list

⁴ Loch of Skene SSSI designation available at: https://apps.snh.gov.uk/sitelink-api/v1/sites/1038/documents/1 (Accessed May 2023)

⁵ Loch of Skene RAMSAR designation available at: https://apps.snh.gov.uk/sitelink-api/v1/sites/8442/documents/20 (Accessed May 2023)

⁶ Loch of Skene SPA available at: https://apps.snh.gov.uk/sitelink-api/v1/sites/8536/documents/16 (Accessed May 2023)

⁷ Birds of Conservation Concern information available at: https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/publications/bocc-5-a5-4pp-single-pages.pdf (Accessed April 2023)

⁸ Green list criteria: naturally occurring species with self-sustaining populations meeting none of the criteria for BOCC Amber or Red list species.

⁹ Amber-list criteria - Threatened in Europe, historical decline – recovery, moderate breeding population decline over 25 years/longer term, moderate non-breeding population decline over 25 years/longer term, moderate breeding range decline over 25 years/longer term, moderate non-breeding range decline over 25 years, breeding/non-breeding rarity, breeding/non-breeding localisation, breeding/non-breeding international importance.

Species	Designation ⁷
Bullfinch (Pyrrhula pyrrhula)	BoCC – Amber list
Curlew (Numenius arquata)	BoCC – Red list ¹⁰
Dunnock (Prunella modularis)	BoCC – Amber list
Golden Plover (Pluvialis apricaria)	BoCC – Green list
Goldeneye (Bucephala clangula)	BoCC – Red list
Green Sandpiper (Tringa ochropus)	BoCC – Amber list
Greylag Goose (Answer anser)	BoCC – Amber list
Herring Gull (Larus argentatus)	BoCC – Red list
Hooded Crow (Corvus cornix)	BoCC – Green list
House Sparrow (Passer domesticus)	BoCC – Red list
Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus)	BoCC – Amber list
Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis)	BoCC – Green list
Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus)	BoCC – Red list
Linnet (Linaria cannabina)	BoCC – Red list
Osprey (Pandion haliaetus)	BoCC – Amber list
Peregrine (Falco peregrinus)	BoCC – Green list
Pink-footed Goose (Anser brachyrhynchus)	BoCC – Amber list
Red Kite (Milvus milvus)	BoCC – Green list
Redshank (Tringa totanus)	BoCC – Amber list
Redwing (Turdus iliacus)	BoCC - Amber list
Short-eared Owl (Asio flammeus)	BoCC - Amber list
Siskin (Spinus spinus)	BoCC – Green list
Skylark (Alauda arvensis)	BoCC – Red list
Snipe (Gallinago gallinago)	BoCC – Amber list
Song Thrush (Turdus philomelos)	BoCC – Amber list
Swift (Apus apus)	BoCC – Red list
Tree Sparrow (Passer montanus)	BoCC – Red list
Yellowhammer (Emberiza citrinella)	BoCC – Red list

3.2 Field Surveys

The site offers a range of suitable habitats for nesting, loafing and foraging birds via the woodland, scrub, treelines, agricultural fields and grassland habitats within the site.

Bird species encountered during the 2023-2024 survey seasons include:

Table 3-2: Bird Species Identified During Surveys

Species	Designation
Magpie (Pica pica)	BoCC – Green list
Robin (Erithacus rubecula)	BoCC – Green list
Wren (Troglodytes troglodytes)	BoCC – Amber list
Woodpigeon (Columba palumbus)	BoCC – Amber list
Blackbird (Turdus merula)	BoCC – Green list
Buzzard (Buteo buteo)	BoCC – Green list
Blue tit (Cyanistes caeruleus)	BoCC – Green list
Goldfinch (Carduelis carduelis)	BoCC – Green list
Dunnock	BoCC – Amber list
Meadow pipit (Anthus pratensis)	BoCC – Amber list
Yellowhammer	BoCC – Red list
Snipe	BoCC – Amber list
Swallow (Hirundo rustica)	BoCC – Green list
Greenfinch (Chloris chloris)	BoCC – Red list
Herring Gull	BoCC – Red list
House Sparrow	BoCC – Red list
Hooded Crow	BoCC – Green list
Carrion Crow (Corvus Corone)	BoCC – Green list
Kestrel	BoCC – Amber list
Starling (Sturnus vulgaris)	BoCC -Red list
Great Spotted Woodpecker (Dendrocopos major)	BoCC – Green list
Pheasant (Phasianus colchicus)	Introduced

Red-list criteria - Globally threatened, historical decline in the breeding population, severe breeding population decline over 25 years/longer term, severe non-breeding population decline over 25 years/longer term, severe breeding range decline over 25 years/longer term, severe non-breeding range decline over 25 years.

Species	Designation	
Black-headed Gull	BoCC – Amber list	
Skylark	BoCC – Red list	
Swift	BoCC – Red list	
Barn Owl	BoCC – Red list	
Mute Swan (Cygnus olor)	BoCC – Green list	
Little Grebe (Tachybaptus ruficollis)	BoCC – Green list	
Sand Martin (<i>Riparia riparia</i>)	BoCC – Green list	
Reed Bunting (Emberiza schoeniclus)	BoCC - Not assessed	
Great Tit (Parus major)	BoCC - Green list	
Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos)	BoCC - Not assessed	
Linnet	BoCC – Red list	
Feral Pigeon (Columba livia)	BoCC – Green list	
Jackdaw (Coloeus monedula)	BoCC – Green list	
Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus)	BoCC - Not assessed	
Common Sandpiper (Actitis hypoleucos)	BoCC – Amber list	
Garden Warbler (Sylvia borin)	BoCC – Green list	
Chiffchaff (Phylloscopus collybita)	BoCC – Green list	
Willow Warbler (Phylloscopus trochilus)	BoCC – Amber list	
Chaffinch (Fringilla coelebs)	BoCC – Green list	
House Martin (Delichon urbicum)	BoCC – Red list	
Bullfinch (Pyrrhula pyrrhula)	BoCC – Amber list	
Whitethroat (Curruca communis)	BoCC – Amber list	
Long-tailed Tit (Aegithalos caudatus)	BoCC – Green list	
Siskin	BoCC – Green list	
Blackcap (Sylvia atricapilla)	BoCC – Green list	
Song Thrush	BoCC – Amber list	
Treecreeper (Certhia familiaris)	BoCC – Green list	
Coal Tit (Periparus ater)	BoCC – Green list	
Mistle Thrush (Turdus viscivorus)	BoCC – Red list	
Tree Pipit (Anthus trivialis)	BoCC – Red list	
Red Kite	BoCC – Green list	
Jay (Garrulus glandarius)	BoCC – Green list	
Pied Wagtail (Motacilla alba)	BoCC – Green list	
Oystercatcher (Haematopus ostralegus)	Not Assessed	
Rook (Corvus frugilegus)	Not Assessed	
Goldcrest (Regulus regulus)	BoCC – Green list	
Common Gull (Larus canus)	BoCC – Amber list	
Red-legged Partridge (Alectoris rufa)	Not Assessed	
Grey Heron (Ardea cinerea)	BoCC – Green list	

During the surveys undertaken on site, the following additional field evidence of birds was identified.

- A starling was observed nesting in a tree with a woodpecker hole to the north east of the site
 in 2023. Trees with woodpecker holes were identified throughout the site and a number of
 trees with current and remnant nests were identified throughout the site during the survey
 period.
- A Barn Owl nest was identified in a tree in the north west of the site. A large amount of droppings and pellets were identified below the cavity in the tree (Photograph 1). Barn Owl pairs were also observed in the west and central regions of the site during bat transect surveys in July and August 2023 and June and July 2024. The remains of a Barn Owl were also identified on a track adjacent to the railway line in 2024.
- A raptor nest was identified within the woodland north west of the site and a raptor plucking
 post was located 75m south east in the same woodland (Photograph 2 and 3) in 2023.
 Additional raptor foraging remains were identified in the east of the site in 2023.
- Sand Martin colonies were present along the left hand bank of the River Don upstream of the main site, within the compensatory area throughout the survey period (Photograph 4).

• Remnant nests cups of either House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) or Swallow were present within old sheds associated with the horse stables/ livery north east of the site in 2023 (Photograph 5).

Birds on the red list are of national importance, those on the amber list are of regional importance and green listed birds are of local importance in line with Birds of Conservation Concern.

All wild bird species are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

4 POTENTIAL IMPACTS, FURTHER SURVEY AND LICENSING

4.1 Potential Impacts

It is understood that the proposed development will include measures for avoiding impacts, or for the mitigation or compensation of them, within future project design. The following impacts could reasonably be predicted should **no** avoidance, mitigation or compensation be included within design:

- The loss or fragmentation of foraging, nesting and commuting habitat for nesting birds (including barn owl and raptors) as a result of habitat removal/alteration.
- Potential for destruction of nests, and death or injury to chicks, if site works commence during the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive).
- Disturbance to Schedule 1 species (Barn Owl).

The following positive options may be available within the scope of the project:

- New habitat creation within a focussed plan aiming to increase ecosystem services and provide resources for key fauna attributed to the site.
- Provide wildlife sheltering provisions through the development such as bird nest/ roost boxes.

4.2 Additional Survey Work

General Breeding Birds

No further surveys are required for general breeding birds, other than regular updates to maintain baseline. Nesting bird checks would be required where vegetation works are to be carried out during the breeding bird season (March-August).

Barn Owl

So long as the tree with a confirmed barn owl nest in the north west of the site and woodlands adjacent to the site in the central region are to be retained and protected in the development design, no further surveys are required at this current stage, other than regular updates to maintain baseline.

More detailed surveys may be required, in the lead up to works, to inform a Species Protection Plan for Barn Owl in order to outline any detailed mitigation (buffers, timing constraints for works, etc.) and compensatory measures to avoid disturbing Barn Owl.

Barn Owl is listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Schedule 1 species are protected by special penalties at all times. Under this legislation it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb any Schedule 1 species while they are nest building, at a nest containing eggs or young, or disturb the dependent young of such birds.

Where an offence is committed, the individual (as well as the body corporate, Scottish partnership or, as the case may be, unincorporated association) is guilty of the offence and is liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

Raptors

So long as the woodland in the north west of the site is to be retained and protected in the development design, no further surveys are required at this current stage, other than regular updates to maintain baseline.

Raptor surveys will likely be required to determine status of the nest in the lead up to works commencing on the site to ensure appropriate buffers are implemented during any works undertaken throughout the nesting bird season.

4.3 Licensing

No licenses from NatureScot are currently required, however this will likely be reviewed upon the completion of further works and the provision of detailed development design.

5 MITIGATION, COMPENSATION AND ENHANCEMENTS

The below mitigation and compensation actions have been recommended to avoid and reduce impacts to birds on site.

5.1 Mitigation

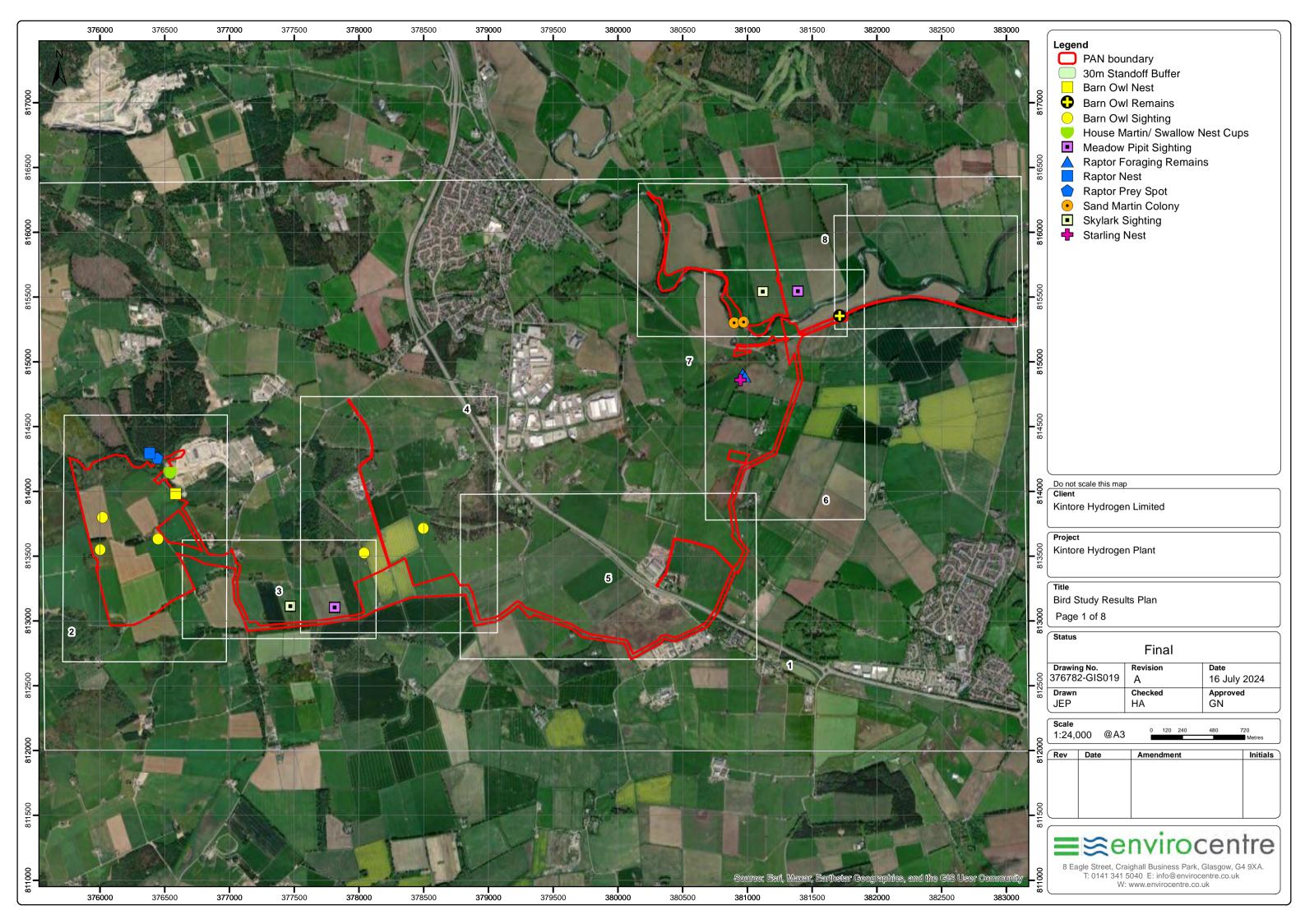
- Woodland habitat should be retained where possible to ensure the continued provision of supporting habitat for nesting birds.
- 30m standoff buffers from Barn Owl and Raptor nests should be factored into the development design.
- The demolition / site clearance works should be completed between October and February near the Barn Owl and raptor nests to avoid disturbance to nesting birds or dependent young.
- Vegetation clearance/ building demolition should be scheduled October-February throughout
 the remainder of the site, where possible, to avoid disturbance to other nesting birds. Where
 vegetation clearance cannot be scheduled outside this time, nesting bird checks will be
 required maximum 48hrs in advance of works.
- Contractors should be made aware of the presence of nesting birds, Barn Owl and raptors in the locale during works via a toolbox talk provided by the project ecologist.
- The project ecologist should undertake a pre-works check of any trees and buildings ahead of felling or demolition to confirm an absence of nesting birds (maximum 48hrs prior).
- Temporary lighting used during construction, and permanent exterior lighting positioned upon or around the finished development, should not illuminate open green space, trees or woodland within or adjacent to the site (or in proximity to any artificial nest or roost provisions post-development) which birds may use for nesting, foraging and commuting. Screening techniques and dark buffer zones are advised to reduce the impact on these habitats for Barn Owl. Low or high pressure sodium lamps instead of mercury and metal halide lamps are preferred for their UV filtering properties, reducing light spillage and pollution. 'Warm white' lighting also reduces impacts of lighting on crepuscular or nocturnal species.
- Noise and vibration caused through the use of machinery, or by the movement of construction traffic, should be kept to a minimum at times when Barn Owl are active in the landscape *i.e.* between dusk and dawn during the nesting bird season (March-August).

5.2 Compensation and Enhancement

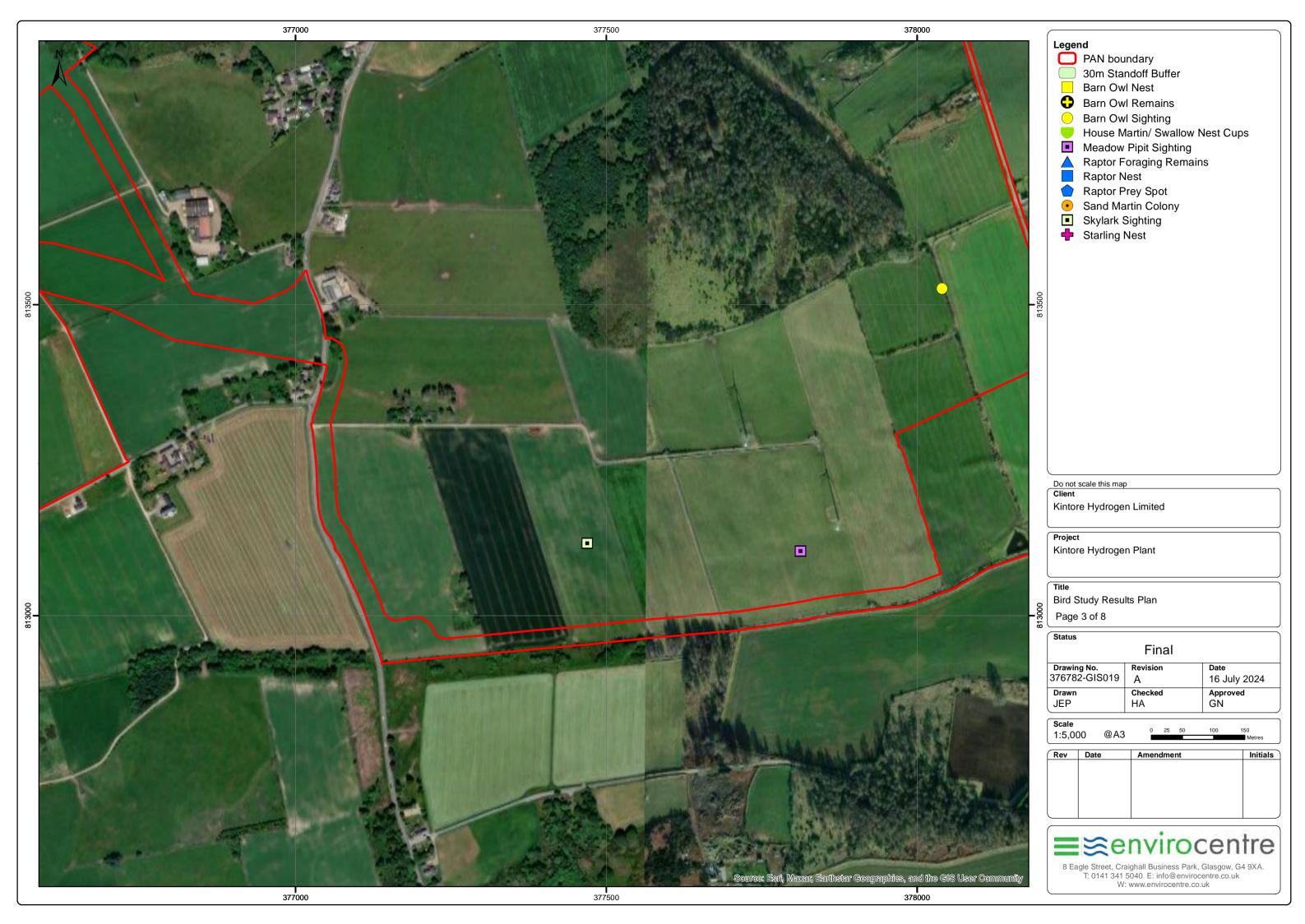
- 4 Barn Owl boxes <u>Barn Owl box for trees Outdoor Nestbox direct from the Barn Owl Trust</u> will be installed on suitable trees throughout the site, ahead of works commencing.
- A range (minimum 20 nest boxes for a range of species, including Swifts, Swallows and House Martin) of bird nesting boxes will be installed throughout the site to provide compensatory nesting opportunities for birds in the locale. A range of nest boxes are available from https://www.nestbox.co.uk/collections/bird-boxes
- New and replacement areas of landscaping on site should include wildflower grassland areas/ strips with a light mowing/ management regime commencing either once in late March or early April and then leave it until August or September before mowing once or twice until the end of the autumn growing season for summer meadows and planting of areas of scrub and trees.
- Creating habitat connectivity through and/or around the site to suitable habitat (woodland) in the surrounding landscape, by increasing tree cover or inclusion of hedgerows along boundaries where possible.

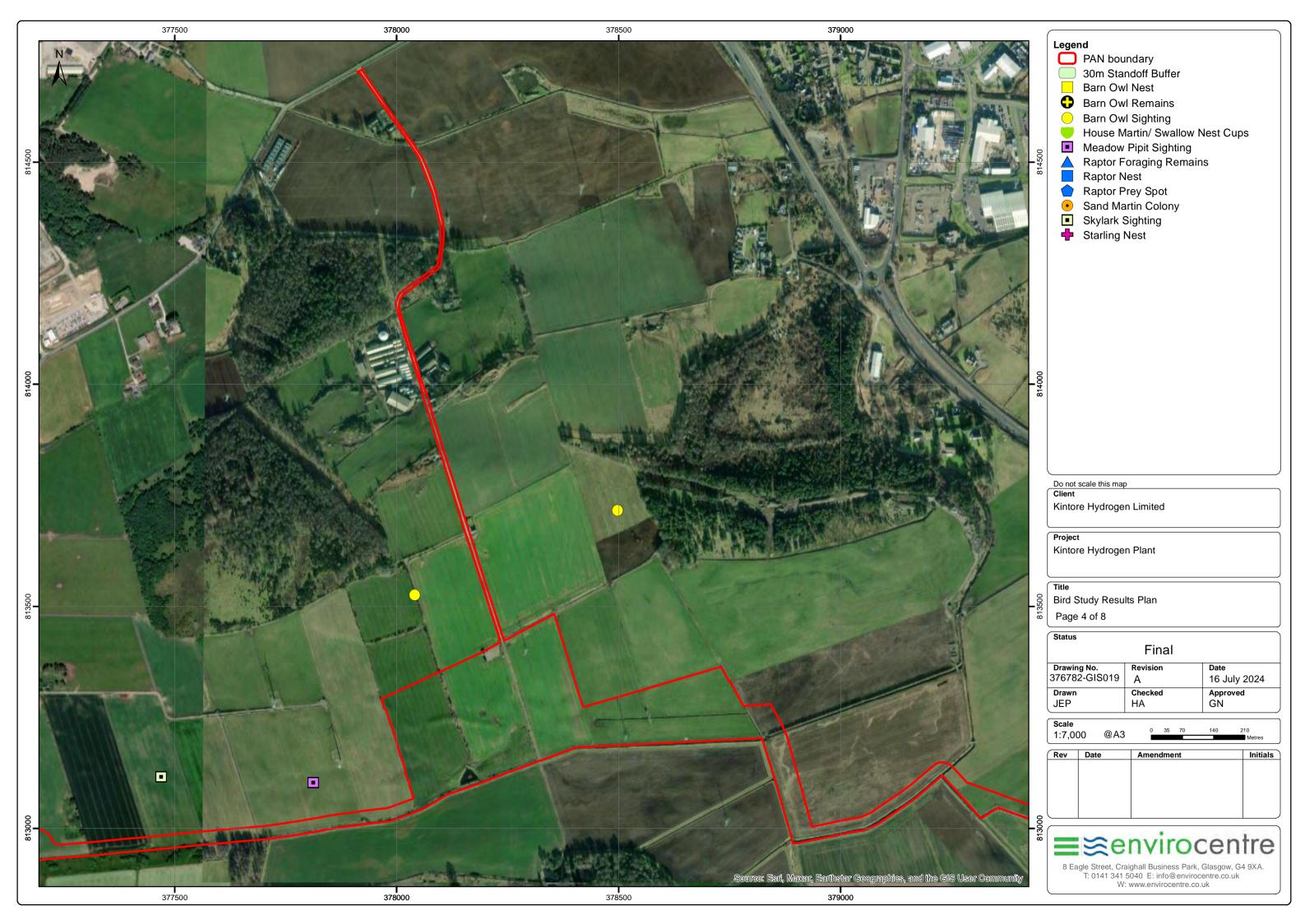
APPENDICES

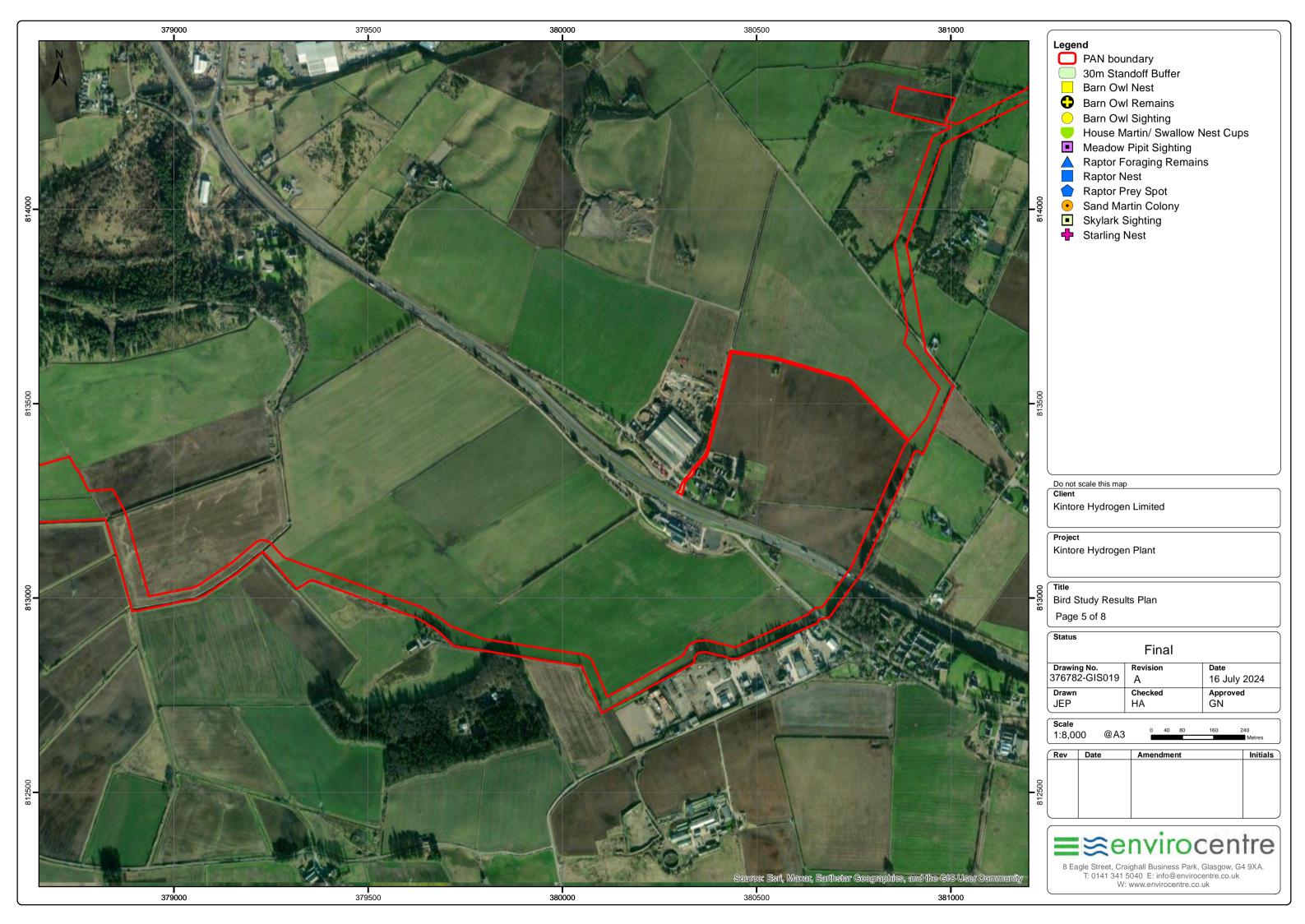
A BIRD STUDY RESULTS PLAN

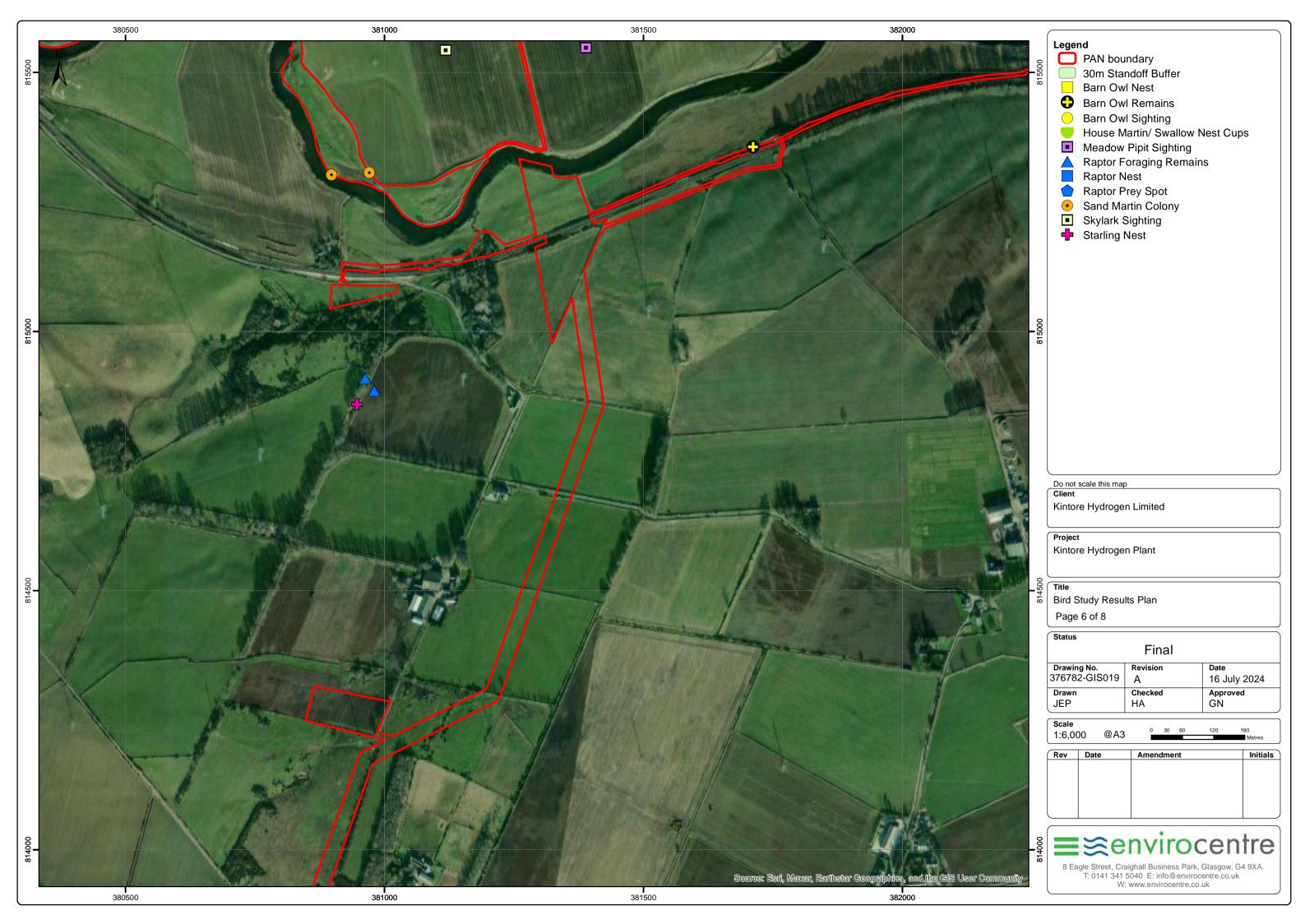


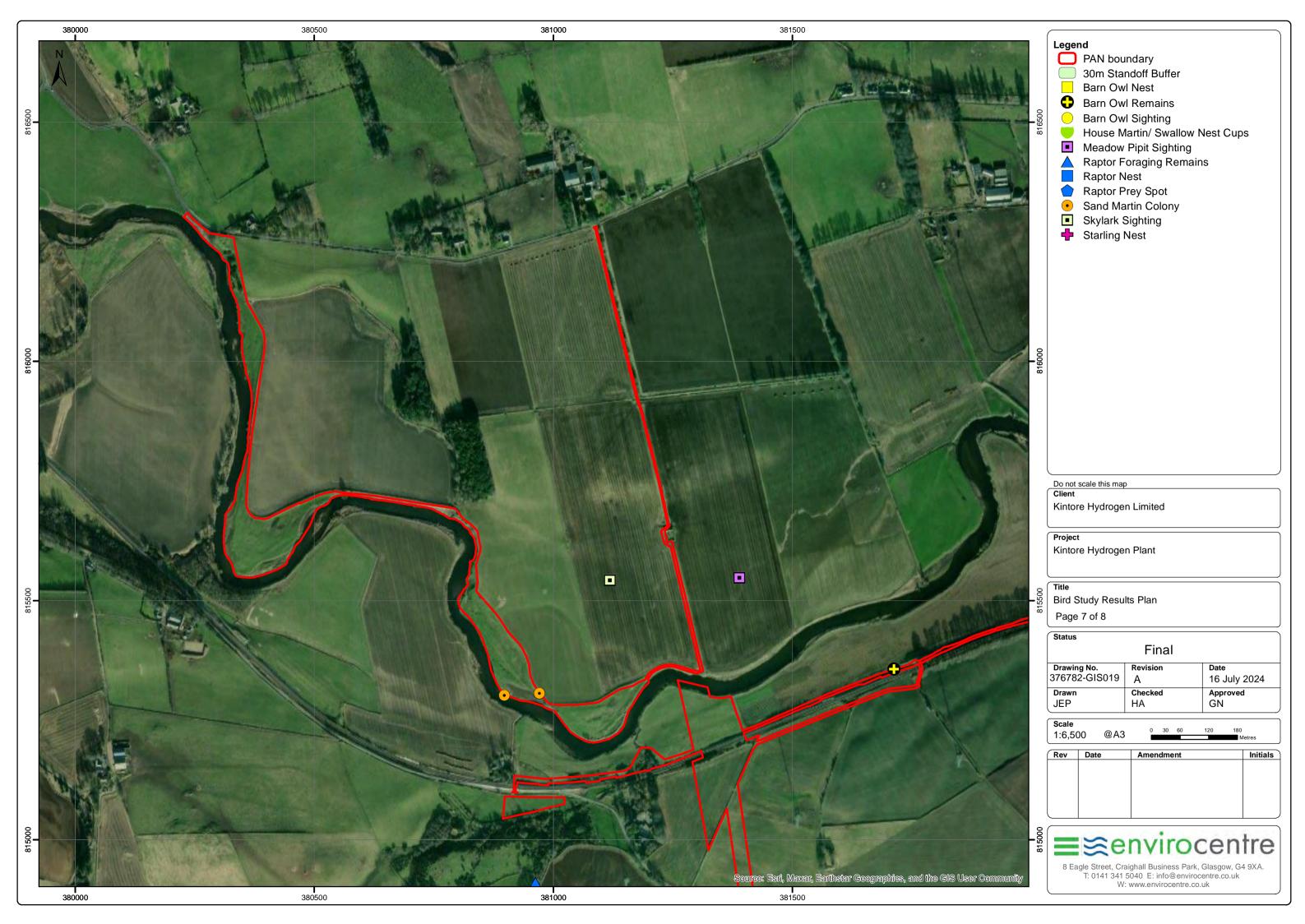














B PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD



Photograph 1: Barn owl nest in tree in the north of the western region of the site



Photograph 3: Raptor plucking post in the coniferous woodland in the north of the western region of the site



Photograph 5: Remnant nest cups in sheds in north west of the site



Photograph 2: Raptor nest in the coniferous woodland in the north of the western region of the site



Photograph 4: Sand martin colony in the bank of the River Don, upstream of the site