

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal – Updated Report

Site: Hough End Leisure Facility, Princess Road,
Manchester, M20 1NA

Ref: 20343/E2

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SUMMARY

At Hough End Leisure Facility in Manchester, planning permission is being sought for an extension to the existing leisure centre, extensions to the car park, including a 'Grasscrete' overspill, the creation of two 3G artificial grass pitches, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements. The works will require the demolition of the existing changing room block and the removal of approximately 20 trees and ornamental shrubs.

In March 2021, Indigo Surveys Ltd was instructed to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site. This was undertaken to determine the presence of any important habitats or species which might be impacted on by the proposed works.

A search of ecological data revealed a number of records of Protected, UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) species and designated sites within a 2.0 km radius of the site.

Within the 2.0 km search area there were no statutory sites, and the nearest Site of Biological Interest (SBI) was Chorlton Water Park, which lay 1.9 km to the southwest beyond an extensive residential area. As such the SBI will not be affected by the proposed works.

No records of protected species came from the application site itself, but there were a number of records within close proximity. These included observations of a pipistrelle bat species *Pipistrellus* sp, Soprano Pipistrelle *P. pygmaeus* and Brown Long-eared Bat *Plecotus auritus*, all noted at the southwestern side of the playing fields. There were also numerous records of Common Pipistrelle *P. pipistrellus* from the surrounding residential areas, in particular just north of Mauldeth Road West where large numbers of pipistrelles are regularly seen. A roost also used to be present in the railway bridge under Princess Road, but it is not known if this is still present following the Metro works at Withington Station.

There were several records of Badgers *Meles meles* within the 2.0 km search area, but none within 750 m. Hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus* are also known to be present.

Bird records included Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*.

There were no records of Great Crested Newts *Triturus cristatus*, other amphibians or reptiles, and no Otters *Lutra lutra* or Water Voles *Arvicola amphibius*.

Given the nature of the site, its current and proposed use, it is considered that none of the species noted in the data search will be affected detrimentally by the scheme – reasoning is given.

The initial Phase 1 visit took place on 19th March 2021, in mild and overcast, with no wind.

At the time there were two main survey areas. The first comprised part of the current car park, the disused changing room block and the surrounding area where the proposed overspill car park and 3G football pitches will go.

The second survey area was to the north of the site, and currently comprises a rugby pitch, although in the proposed works it will be retained as public open space with no formalising of pitches.

Finally, two small areas were surveyed for proposed non-turf cricket wickets. The proposed area for these wickets is currently amenity grass sports pitch.

It should also be noted that the sports pitches area also used by the Hough End Model Aircraft Club for flying their planes.

No rare vascular plants were found, and all species recorded were common and widespread. There were no invasive or notifiable species on the application site, but a Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* plant was found along the watercourse to the northwest of the leisure centre.

A total of ten species of birds were observed, all of which were Species of Low Conservation Concern (RSPB Green list).

Two old Woodpigeons' *Columba palumbus* nests were found within a group of Sycamores *Acer pseudoplatanus* in the first survey area, along with two tit boxes. However, these will not be affected by the proposed works.

Nevertheless, since all in-use bird's nests and their contents are protected from damage or destruction, any tree or scrub removal which may affect a nest should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to 31st August inclusive. If this time frame cannot be avoided, a close inspection of the trees and scrub to be removed will be undertaken prior to clearance. Work will not be carried out within a minimum of 5.0 metres of any in-use nest, although this distance could be more depending on the sensitivity of the species. Any in-use nest will be allowed to fledge before it is disturbed.

None of the trees contained features such as decay cavities, woodpecker holes, fissures and exfoliating bark, that would be considered suitable for bat roosting and/or hibernation.

The changing room block was also assessed for bat roosting suitability. This was considered to be negligible, as there were no bat roosting features present on the building.

No evidence of Badgers was found, and the site was unsuitable for Otters and Water Voles, with no signs of either species in a small watercourse separating the two survey areas. There were no signs of Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* activity.

There was no standing water on the application site for breeding amphibians, with limited foraging opportunities and no suitable refugia or hibernacula.

As such the site was considered unsuitable for them, although common amphibians could be present in the wider area. It should also be noted the sport pitches area still in use for sports as well as dog walking.

The site was also considered to be unsuitable for reptiles for the same reason, and they are considered to be absent.

Despite the presumed absence of reptiles and amphibians, at all times care will be taken when carrying out earthworks, as small mammals and Hedgehogs could be present. Any small mammals disturbed or uncovered will either be caught by hand and relocated to a safe area, or left to vacate the work site in their own time.

Since much of the site was dominated by mown amenity grass, it was concluded that there was low potential for significant invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

If excavations are to be undertaken, it should be noted that open trenches could potentially trap wildlife, especially if these fill up with water. Escape routes will therefore be provided if trenches cannot be infilled immediately. These can be in the form of branches or boards placed on the bottom of the trench, with their upper ends above ground level and touching the sides, or sloping ends left in trenches.

On 18th May, 2nd October, 29th November and 4th December 2021, further surveys of the site and the wider area were undertaken to assess the potential impact of the re-development on species and habitats outside the application site, and to determine the potential for biodiversity enhancements.

The May and October visits were carried out in warm, cloudy conditions with no wind or precipitation. The November and December visits were undertaken in overcast, cool conditions with some light rain at times.

Other than the seasonal changes in vegetation, the ecological features noted on the application site in March 2021 remained the same during the later visits.

Moving north away from the leisure centre, a soil mound on the edge of the playing fields has become overgrown with rank grasses and tall ruderal vegetation, with a few scattered Broom *Cytisus scoparius* and Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and wildflowers including Black Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and Heath Bedstraw *Galium mollugo*.

A report of animal digging at the northern end of the mound was identified as being by a dog, and not a Badger sett.

The mound provides an ideal opportunity for new native tree and shrub planting, and this will compliment the block of recent tree planting on the eastern side of the mound.

The woodland to the north and east of the mound running up to Mauldeth Road West contains some areas of regeneration, but also patches of open ground. These patches lend themselves to understorey planting with native shrubs such as Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Bird Cherry *Prunus padus*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Yew *Taxus baccata*, Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, and Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus*.

Similarly, these species can be planted along each side of the path running north through the woodland, as the woodland edge is currently high forest, with no gradation down to the grassland. The latter is currently closely mown, so areas of unmown, longer grass, will diversify the habitat and potentially the species in the sward.

The watercourse (Red Lion Brook) is canalized where it runs between the playing fields, and the woodland on each side of the brook is open in places, with little or no regeneration.

Towards Hough End Clough the stream does begin to meander, and the woodland on each side is much more diverse, containing many of the species listed above, plus Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Norway Maple *Acer platanoides*, Sycamore, Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, Goat Willow *Salix caprea*, Wild Cherry *Prunus avium*, Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare* and Snowberry *Symphoricarpos rivularis*.

This diversity can be replicated along the canalized section through understorey planting and spreading of a woodland wildflower seed mix, whilst the edge of the stream could be scalloped to encourage the formation of meanders, with rocks placed in the channel to form riffles.

The stream culvert under Hough End Crescent (off Mauldeth Road West) is obstructed with woody debris, so once cleared from the culvert this can be used to make log piles in the woodland for invertebrates, small mammals and amphibians.

On the west side of the Crescent lies Hough End Clough. This is an area set aside as a nature reserve and managed by the Friends of Hough End Clough. The proposed biodiversity enhancements on the wider site are aimed at extending the features of the Clough, thereby improving the connectivity for wildlife.

It is noted that the Fallowfield Loop lies just north of the junction of Hough End Crescent and Mauldeth Road West. This walking and cycling route follows a former railway line and provides a green corridor running from Chorlton-cum-Hardy to Fairfield Station. Wildlife using the loop is able to access Hough End and vice versa.

Moving to the southwestern side of the playing fields, between Broughton Park Rugby Football Club and Withington Station, there are several gaps in the planting along the railway boundary. Again these will be ideal for in-fill planting with native trees and shrubs.

Returning back towards the leisure centre from the station, there is much regeneration in the roadside woodland.

Planted in 1996, the woodland forms part of the Red Rose Forest and celebrates the links between Manchester and Wuhan in China. Native species include Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, Holly, Wild Cherry, and Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, whilst non-natives are represented by Chinese Maple (Paperbark Maple) *Acer griseum*, Dawn Redwood *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, Maidenhair Tree *Ginkgo biloba*, Amur Cork Tree *Phellodendron amurense*, Chinese White Birch *Betula pendula*, Dove Tree (Handkerchief Tree) *Davidia involucrata*, White Mulberry *Morus alba*, Tree of Heaven *Ailanthus altissima*, and Rowan 'Joseph Rock'. Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, Wood Avens *Geum urbanum* and Ivy *Hedera helix* form a dense ground flora, and no additional planting is necessary here.

A further 16 species of birds were observed during the extra visits, including Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus*, Common Gull *L. canus*, Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*, Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameria*, Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Coal Tit *Parus ater*, Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*, Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*, Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* and Jay *Garrulus glandarius*.

Finally, infrequently used mammal trails were noted in the belt of young woodland at the southwestern end of the rugby club leading away from railway. These appeared to be from Fox *Vulpes vulpes* and possibly Badger, and the presence of the latter was confirmed when a Badger guard hair was found caught on a Bramble.

It is known that Badgers occupy a sett on the other side of the railway to the playing fields, and outlier holes were subsequently found between the railway and CHS South. No sett entrances were found across the wider site, but it is evident that an animal ventures north from time-to-time, although it is doubtful it would commute as far as the leisure centre given the use of the site.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and survey objectives

At Hough End Leisure Facility in Manchester, planning permission is being sought for an extension to the existing leisure centre, extensions to the car park, including a 'Grasscrete' overspill, the creation of two 3G artificial grass pitches, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements. The works will require the demolition of the existing changing room block and the removal of approximately 20 trees and ornamental shrubs.

In March 2021, Indigo Surveys Ltd was instructed to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site. This was undertaken to determine the presence of any important habitats or species which might be impacted on by the proposed works.

A search of ecological data revealed a number of records of Protected, UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) species and designated sites within a 2.0 km radius of the site.

Further surveys of the site and the wider area were undertaken in May, October, November and December 2021 to assess the potential impact of the re-development on species and habitats outside the application site, and to determine the potential for biodiversity enhancements.

1.2 Site description

There were initially two main survey areas. The first comprised part of the current car park, which had strips of amenity grass with some introduced shrubs and small trees separating the car parking bays. The introduced shrubs included Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster spp.*, Honeysuckle Privet *Lonicera pileata*, Mahonia *Mahonia aquifolium*, and Dogwood.

The disused changing room block was also included within this survey area. It was a single storey brick building, with a flat felt roof. It was considered to have negligible suitability for roosting bats.

Between the changing room block and the leisure centre itself was a small area of amenity grassland, on which there were some scattered trees. Species comprised Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Silver Birch, London Plane *Platanus x acerifolia*, and Sycamore. There were six Sycamore trees together in another small group which will not be affected by the proposed works.

The remaining area of this survey site was for the proposed overspill car park and 3G pitches. This was mostly amenity grassland where the current sports pitches are. Grasses consisted of Perennial Ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, Meadow-grass species *Poa spp.*, False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, and Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*.

Flora consisted of Ivy *Hedera helix*, Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Greater Plantain *Plantago major*, Daisy *Bellis perennis*, and Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*.

Access to the overspill car park currently comprises some more introduced shrubs, as well as Wild Cherry and Lime *Tilia cordata* trees.

The other survey area was on the northern boundary of the site, which will now be retained as public open space for informal recreation. It currently forms a rugby pitch and is mostly amenity grassland.

Separating the two area is planted mixed woodland. The trees noted here include Scot's Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, Larch *Larix decidua*, Pedunculate Oak, Hazel, Beech, Holly, Silver Birch, and Ash.

The understorey was mostly bare ground, although the few species recorded were Wood Avens, Meadow Cranesbill *Geranium pratense*, Herb Robert *G. robertianum*, Comfrey *Symphytum officinale*, and Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*.

Finally, there were two small areas for the proposed non-turf cricket wickets included in the survey. These entirely comprised close mown amenity grassland on the existing sports pitches.

No rare vascular plants were found, and all species recorded were common and widespread. There were no invasive or notifiable species on the application site itself, but a Giant Hogweed stem was noted alongside the small watercourse to the northwest of the leisure centre.

The Ordnance Survey Grid Reference is SJ 83694 93226 centred on the existing car park.

1.3 Proposed works

The proposed works are for an extension to the existing leisure centre, extensions to the car park, including a 'Grasscrete' overspill, the creation of two 3G artificial grass pitches, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

The works will require the demolition of the existing changing room block and the removal of approximately 20 trees and ornamental shrubs. Trees will be replaced at a ratio of three new trees for every one removed.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk study

A detailed desk study was undertaken to determine the nature conservation designations and protected species that had been recorded within a 2.0 km radius of the site. This involved contacting statutory and non-statutory organisations, and then assimilating and reviewing the data provided.

The consultees for the desk study were:

- ❑ Multi Agency Geographic Information (MAGIC) website www.magic.gov.uk;
- ❑ Greater Manchester Ecology Unit;
- ❑ Data.gov.uk website;
- ❑ Local residents and other interest parties during public consultations.

2.2 Habitat survey

A initial Phase 1 Habitat Survey was carried out across the whole of the survey site. It was conducted using standard JNCC (2003) techniques and methodologies.

The Phase 1 visit took place on 19th March 2021, in mild and overcast, with no wind.

On 18th May, 2nd October, 29th November and 4th December 2021, further surveys of the site and the wider area were undertaken to assess the potential impact of the re-development on species and habitats outside the application site, and to determine the potential for biodiversity enhancements.

The May and October visits were carried out in warm, cloudy conditions with no wind or precipitation. The November and December visits were undertaken in overcast, cool conditions with some light rain at times.

2.3 Badgers

Badgers are generally nocturnal and evidence of their presence in an area often comes from field signs rather than sightings of the animals.

Useful field signs include:

- ❑ Setts (main, outlying, annex or subsidiary)
- ❑ Tufts of hair caught on barbed wire fences;
- ❑ Conspicuous Badger paths;
- ❑ Footprints;
- ❑ Latrines – small excavated pits in which droppings are deposited;

- ❑ 'Snuffle holes' – small scrapes where Badgers have searched for insects and plant tubers;
- ❑ Day nests – bundles of grass and other vegetation where Badgers may sleep above ground;
- ❑ Scratch marks on trees (usually near the sett).

Daytime surveys looking for field signs can be carried out at any time of the year, and should be non-intrusive, but nocturnal surveys of setts (if required), are only likely to be effective from April to November, when Badgers are most active, and any cubs present will have emerged.

A search for Badger presence and the field signs listed above was carried out as part of the ecological appraisal on 19th March 2021. The search area included the application site and a 30 m buffer around the boundaries (where this could be accessed or viewed).

A survey of the wider area was carried out on 2nd October, 29th November and 4th December 2021, this encompassing the whole open space from Princess Road in the east, to Mauldeth Road West in the north, CHS South and the rugby club in the west and the Metro line boundary to the south. A check of the woodland and residential area at the end of Pheasant Drive south of the Metro line was also undertaken.

2.4 Bats

In order to fully assess bat occupation of a particular site, the Bat Conservation Trust (2016) recommends that information gathered from a desk study of known bat records, and a daytime site walkover, is used to inform the type and extent of future bat survey work, potentially including nocturnal surveys.

The diurnal walkover provides an opportunity to check for signs of occupancy, such as droppings, scratch marks, feeding remains, carcasses, or even animals in residence, whilst nocturnal surveys (if required) allow numbers and species of bats to be confirmed.

The latter are also used to determine the presence or absence of bats, where signs of bat activity are indeterminate or absent but the suitability for bat roosting is considered to be low, medium or high.

Roosting places vary depending on the species. Pipistrelles usually inhabit narrow cracks or cavities around the outside of buildings, but they will roost in similar niches inside larger barns. Typical sites include soffit spaces, gaps behind fascia boards and end rafters, crevices around the ends of projecting purlins, under warped or lifted roof and ridge tiles, or in gaps in stone and brickwork where mortar has dropped out.

Larger species such as Brown Long-eared Bats *Plecotus auritus*, Myotis bats (Natterer's and Whiskered/Brandt's *Myotis mystacinus*/*M. brandtii*), and Lesser Horseshoes *Rhinolophus hipposideros*, like to roost in the roof voids of buildings, and can often be found hanging singly or in small groups from ridge boards or roof timbers, especially where these butt up against gable walls or chimney breasts. They especially favour older structures with timber frames. Here they squeeze into tight crevices making them difficult to observe.

Diurnal walkovers can be carried out at any time of the year, but nocturnal surveys should only be undertaken when bats are out of hibernation and in their summer roosts. The recommended period is from May to September inclusive, with May to August optimum and September sub-optimum. The season can be extended into October, although particularly cold weather will render this inadvisable. Indeed, the air temperature at the start of each survey must be at least 10°C or above.

Visits will be a minimum of two weeks apart, and the number of surveys is dependent on the evidence found or the suitability of the site to bats.

Where bats are found, or there is evidence of bat occupation or activity, i.e. that bat use is confirmed, the number and timing of visits will be decided by the ecologist, and will be appropriate for the type of roost. In general at least two nocturnal surveys will be carried out, both of which can be emergence surveys, or one emergence and one dawn re-entry.

Where there is no evidence of bat presence, and no or negligible suitability for roosting, no nocturnal surveys will be needed.

For a site with no evidence but low suitability, just one nocturnal emergence survey is required, this to be in the optimum period.

For medium suitability a minimum of two visits are needed, of which one must be in the optimum period, and one must be a dawn re-entry survey. With high suitability, three visits will be necessary, of which two must be in the optimum period.

At least one of these must be a dawn re-entry survey, with the third visit either an emergence or a dawn re-entry.

For sites < 5 ha in size, and/or regularly shaped structures, at least two surveyors must be present, with more surveyors at larger sites and more complex buildings, e.g. those with multiple elevations and/or roof structures.

On 19th March 2021, Andy Warren (Natural England bat licence No. 2015-16489-CLS-CLS) made a thorough inspection (from the ground) of the trees on site, including any gaps in the bark, patches of exfoliating bark, fissures, splits, cracks and cavities, including woodpecker holes.

The redundant changing rooms were also inspected.

2.5 Birds

Most resident and migrant birds breed in the spring and summer, although Woodpigeons and Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* nest throughout the year, and as a result could be on eggs in almost any month.

In season, signs of breeding include singing males, display and copulation, birds gathering nesting materials, adults carrying food, calling chicks, etc.

In winter none of these activities may be occurring, so a survey for old nests and/or nest holes is the most reliable method of determining the presence or absence of breeding birds.

A search for signs of nesting birds was carried out as part of the ecological appraisal on 19th March and 18th May 2021. This included the various trees, shrubs and other vegetation.

2.6 Reptiles

Commoner reptiles which may be encountered in urban areas include Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, and Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*.

During the winter months, from mid-October to late February or early March, they are in hibernation, usually deep in underground hibernacula, such as holes and cracks in the ground, among rocks or the roots of large trees, down animal burrows, or in piles of rubble or stone.

In the spring and summer they live above ground in well-vegetated places, with Grass Snakes often near or in water. Being cold-blooded all reptiles like to bask, and can often be found in open places.

There are very few signs of reptile presence, but these include:

- ❑ Shedded skin (snakes);
- ❑ Eggs (but not Common Lizard which gives birth to live young).

A search for signs of reptile presence was carried out during the ecological appraisal, along with a check for basking animals.

A survey for Great Crested Newts may be indicated when background information on distribution suggests that they may be present. More detailed indicators are:

- ❑ *Any historical records of Great Crested Newts on the site or in the general area;*
- ❑ *A pond on or near the site (within around 500 m), even if it holds water only seasonally;*
- ❑ *Sites with refuges (such as piles of logs or rubble), grassland, scrub, woodland or hedgerows within 500 m of a pond.*

There are several field survey methods which can be employed depending on the time of year:

- ❑ *Bottle or funnel trapping – adults ideally February to May, with June and July sub-optimal, and August to September for detection of larvae (i.e. young);*
- ❑ *Egg search – April to June ideally, with March and July sub-optimal;*
- ❑ *Torch survey – March to May for adults, with February and June to July sub-optimal, and August to September for larvae;*
- ❑ *Netting – March to May for adults, with February and June to July sub-optimal, and August to September for larvae;*

- ❑ *Pitfall trapping – March to May and September for adults, with February, June to August and October sub-optimal;*
- ❑ *Refuge search – April to September ideally, with March and October sub-optimal.*

The latter two methods involve terrestrial habitats, the others aquatic habitats, for which a minimum of 4 visits per year are recommended, with at least 2 visits between mid-April and mid-May to record peak numbers (English Nature, 2001).

Outside the optimum survey period, a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) for a particular water body can be calculated. This is a scoring system developed as a means of evaluating habitat quality and quantity. The HSI for Great Crested Newts incorporates ten indices, all of which are thought to affect the species.

None of these techniques were used at the site, as there was nothing to suggest that newts would be present or nearby.

2.7 Otter

Otters are nocturnal and are active all year round. They are large with an adult male reaching up to 1.2 m from nose to tail, and weighing about 10 kg.

Feeding mainly on fish and amphibians, Otters live by undisturbed waters where there is plenty of cover, mostly by freshwater lakes, rivers and quiet small streams as well as some coasts.

An Otter may use over 40 km of river and needs many resting places throughout this range. A female otter will give birth to 1 to 3 cubs in a natal holt, which is often away from the main river and must be completely undisturbed.

Field signs include:

- ❑ Prints in soft mud;
- ❑ Spraints (faeces);
- ❑ Holts.

A search for evidence of Otter presence on site was undertaken as part of the Ecological Appraisal.

2.8 Water Vole

The Water Vole is the largest of the British voles. It lives in a series of holes or burrows at the water's edge and can be found along the banks of ditches, streams, rivers, lakes and canals. Although Water Voles live in colonies, the breeding females are territorial, each defining their contiguous territory with latrines during the breeding season. This lasts from March to October.

The Water Vole is herbivorous, feeding primarily on the lush aerial stems and leaves of waterside plants.

Its activity is normally confined to the area within two metres of the watercourse, the bankside vegetation in this area not only essential for food, but also for cover from predators.

Water Vole activity can be assessed by looking for the following signs:

- ☐ Burrows;
- ☐ Faeces and latrines;
- ☐ Feeding stations;
- ☐ Runs;
- ☐ Paw prints in areas of soft mud;
- ☐ Feeding 'lawns';
- ☐ Predator field signs.

A search for evidence of Water Vole presence on site was undertaken as part of the Ecological Appraisal.

The results of the species and habitat survey are detailed in Section 3.

2.9 Constraints

Although the initial survey was carried out before the start of the optimum period (considered to be April to August inclusive), the limited habitats on site meant timing was not considered to be a constraint to identifying the wildlife interest on the application site.

The May 2021 visit was carried out during the optimum period, with the October, November and December visits timed to assess autumnal and wintering species.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Desk study

3.1.1 Designated sites

Within the 2.0 km search area there were no statutory sites, and the nearest Site of Biological Interest (SBI) was Chorlton Water Park, which lay 1.9 km to the southwest beyond an extensive residential area. As such the SBI will not be affected by the proposed works.

3.1.2 Protected species

No records of protected species came from the application site itself, but there were a number of records within close proximity. These included observations of a pipistrelle bat species, Soprano Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared Bat, all noted at the southwestern side of the playing fields. There were also numerous records of Common Pipistrelle from the surrounding residential areas, in particular just north of Mauldeth Road West where large numbers of pipistrelles are regularly seen. A roost also used to be present in the railway bridge under Princess Road, but it is not known if this is still present following the Metro works at Withington Station.

There were several records of Badgers within the 2.0 km search area, but none within 750 m. Hedgehogs are also known to be present.

Bird records included Hobby, Barn Owl and Kingfisher.

There were no records of Great Crested Newts, other amphibians or reptiles, and no Otters or Water Voles.

Given the nature of the site, its current and proposed use, it is considered that none of the species noted in the data search will be affected detrimentally by the scheme.

3.2 Habitat survey

3.2.1 Habitat descriptions

The following habitats were recorded across the site:

- ❑ Amenity grassland;
- ❑ Introduced shrubs;
- ❑ Scattered trees;
- ❑ Planted woodland;
- ❑ Hardstanding;
- ❑ Buildings.

These are shown on the Phase 1 Habitat Survey map in Appendix 1.

Amenity grassland

The majority of the survey areas comprised amenity grassland where the current sports pitches are located. In the first survey area the amenity grassland is where the overflow car park and 3G pitches will go (Figs. 1 and 2), whilst in the second survey area there is a rugby pitch and open grassland for informal recreation (Figs. 3 and 4).



Figs. 1 & 2 Amenity grassland



Figs. 3 & 4 Amenity grassland

Introduced shrubs

There were numerous introduced shrubs around the car park and changing room block (Figs. 5 and 6). Species included Cotoneaster, Honeysuckle Privet, Mahonia, and Dogwood, amongst others.



Figs. 5 & 6 Introduced shrubs

Scattered trees

There were some scattered trees between the changing room block and the leisure centre. Most will be removed in the proposed works, apart from a group of six Sycamore trees (Fig. 7). There were also some young, scattered trees planted around the car park (Fig. 8).



Figs. 7 & 8 Scattered trees

Planted woodland

Between the leisure centre and the grassland south of Mauldeth Road West is planted mixed woodland, this comprising some mature trees, young trees and a sparse understorey (Figs. 9 and 10).



Figs. 9 & 10 Planted woodland

The trees noted here include Scot's Pine, Larch, Pedunculate Oak, Hazel, Beech, Holly, Silver Birch, and Ash.

The understorey was mostly bare ground, although the few species recorded were Wood Avens, Meadow Cranesbill, Herb Robert, Comfrey, and Common Nettle.

Hardstanding

There was hardstanding for the car park and surrounding the changing room block (Figs. 11 and 12).



Figs. 11 & 12 Hardstanding

Buildings

The changing room block is to be renovated in the proposed works; it is currently abandoned and slowly deteriorating (Figs. 13 and 14 overleaf).



Figs. 13 & 14 Changing room block

3.2.2 *Flora*

The botanical composition of each habitat was typical, and all species recorded were common and widespread.

No rare vascular plants were found, and there were no invasive species or notifiable weeds on the application site, although a Giant Hogweed stem was noted along the watercourse to the northwest of the leisure centre.

3.3 **Protected species survey**

3.3.1 *Bats*

The changing room block consisted of a single storey brick building based around a central courtyard. It had a flat felt lined roof, this all tightly sealed down (Figs. 15 and 16).



Figs. 15 & 16 Flat felt roof

The timber fascias around the outside were all tight to the brickwork (Figs. 17 and 18 overleaf).

There was a central 2-3 storey brick structure, presumably used as a water tower for the showers. The brickwork throughout this and the rest of the building was sound, and the window and door frames were all tightly sealed.



Figs. 17 & 18 Tight timber fascias

Inside the courtyard there was a metre or so of roof overhang, this tightly sealed to the brickwork with no gaps into any of the rooms (Figs. 19 and 20).



Figs. 19 & 20 Roof overhang

Inside the courtyard there were some metal containers, these not suitable for bat roosting (Figs. 21 and 22).



Figs. 21 & 22 Metal containers

Overall, the building was considered to have negligible suitability for bat roosting as there were no typical bat roosting features present.

None of the trees contained features such as decay cavities, woodpecker holes, fissures and exfoliating bark, that would be considered suitable for bat roosting and/or hibernation.

The site itself was of little value to foraging bats, as it was very open and botanically poor.

3.3.2 Badgers

There were no signs of Badger activity on the application site, although there is evidence of Badger presence in the wider area (Ref. 3.3.10).

3.3.3 Otters

There were no signs of Otter activity.

3.3.4 Water Voles

No evidence of Water Vole presence was found.

3.3.5 Birds

A total of ten species of birds were observed, of which all were Species of Low Conservation Concern (RSPB Green list).

In the group of six Sycamore trees there were two old Woodpigeons' nests (Fig. 23) and two tit boxes (Fig. 24).



Fig. 23 Woodpigeon nest



Fig. 24 Tit box

A full list of species observed is given in Appendix 2.

3.3.6 *Reptiles*

The site was considered to be unsuitable for reptiles due to limited foraging opportunities and no suitable refugia or hibernacula. It should also be noted the sport pitches area still in use for sports as well as dog walking.

3.3.7 *Great Crested Newts*

The site was considered unsuitable for amphibians for the same reasons as reptiles, with the added fact that there was no standing water. The small watercourse (Red Lion Brook) separating the two survey areas was very shallow and quite fast flowing, and was not suitable for amphibians.

3.3.8 *Invertebrates*

Since the site was dominated by amenity grassland, it was concluded that there was low potential for significant invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

3.3.9 *Other species*

No other protected or LBAP species were observed during the site visit.

3.3.10 *Wider site*

On 18th May, 2nd October, 29th November and 4th December 2021, further surveys of the site and the wider area were undertaken to assess the potential impact of the re-development on species and habitats outside the application site. Other than the seasonal changes in vegetation, the ecological features noted on the application site in March 2021 remained the same during the later visits.

Moving north away from the leisure centre, a soil mound on the edge of the playing fields has become overgrown with rank grasses and tall ruderal vegetation, with a few scattered Broom and Gorse and wildflowers including Black Knapweed and Heath Bedstraw (Figs. 25 & 26).



Figs. 25 & 26 Soil mound

A report of animal digging at the northern end of the mound was identified as being by a dog, and not a Badger sett (Fig. 27).



Fig. 27 Dog digging

The woodland to the north and east of the mound running up to Mauldeth Road West contains some areas of regeneration, but also patches of open ground (Figs. 28 and 29).



Fig. 28 Regeneration in woodland



Fig. 29 Open area in woodland

The path running north through the woodland is currently high forest at the edge, with no gradation down to the grassland (Fig. 30). The latter is currently closely mown.



Fig. 30 Path through woodland

The watercourse (Red Lion Brook) is canalized where it runs between the playing fields (Fig. 31), and the woodland on each side of the brook is open in places, with little or no regeneration.

Towards Hough End Clough the stream does begin to meander, and the woodland on each side is much more diverse (Fig. 32). Species include Pedunculate Oak, Norway Maple, Sycamore, Beech, Ash, Goat Willow, Hazel, Holly, Wild Cherry, Elder, Wild Privet and Snowberry.



Figs. 31 & 32 Red Lion Brook

This diversity can be replicated along the canalized section through understorey planting and spreading of a woodland wildflower seed mix, whilst the edge of the stream could be scalloped to encourage the formation of meanders, with rocks placed in the channel to form riffles.

The stream culvert under Hough End Crescent (off Mauldeth Road West) is obstructed with woody debris (Fig. 33), so once cleared from the culvert this can be used to make log piles in the woodland for invertebrates, small mammals and amphibians.



Fig. 33 Culvert under Hough End Crescent Fig. 34 Gap in planting along railway

Moving to the southwestern side of the playing fields, between Broughton Park Rugby Football Club and Withington Station, there are several gaps in the planting along the railway boundary (Fig. 34). Again these will be ideal for in-fill planting with native trees and shrubs.

Returning back towards the leisure centre from the station, there is much regeneration in the roadside woodland (Fig. 35).



Fig. 35 Roadside woodland ('Wuhan Wood') near Withington Station

Planted in 1996, the woodland forms part of the Red Rose Forest and celebrates the links between Manchester and Wuhan in China. Native species include Hornbeam, Holly, Wild Cherry, and Rowan, whilst non-natives are represented by Chinese Maple (Paperbark Maple), Dawn Redwood, Maidenhair Tree, Amur Cork Tree, Chinese White Birch, Dove Tree (Handkerchief Tree), White Mulberry, Tree of Heaven, and Rowan 'Joseph Rock'. Bramble, Wood Avens and Ivy form a dense ground flora, and no additional planting is necessary here.

A further 16 species of birds were observed during the extra visits, including Grey Heron, Sparrowhawk, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Common Gull, Black-headed Gull, Ring-necked Parakeet, Kingfisher, Blackbird, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Starling, Jackdaw and Jay.

Finally, infrequently used mammal trails were noted in the belt of young woodland at the southwestern end of the rugby club leading away from railway (Fig. 36 – ref. dashed white line). These appeared to be from Fox and possibly Badger, and the presence of the latter was confirmed when a Badger guard hair was found caught on a Bramble (Fig. 37).



Figs. 36 & 37 Mammal path (L) and Badger guard hair (R)

It is known that Badgers occupy a sett on the other side of the railway to the playing fields, and outlier holes were subsequently found between the railway and CHS South. No sett entrances were found across the wider site, but it is evident that an animal ventures north from time-to-time, although it is doubtful it would commute as far as the leisure centre given the use of the site by the public.

3.3.11 Relationship with other areas

On the west side of Hough End Crescent lies Hough End Clough. This is an area set aside as a nature reserve and managed by the Friends of Hough End Clough (Figs. 38 and 39 overleaf). The proposed biodiversity enhancements on the wider site are aimed at extending the features of the Clough, thereby improving the connectivity for wildlife.



Fig. 38 Hough End Clough interpretation board

It is noted that the Fallowfield Loop lies just north of the junction of Hough End Crescent and Mauldeth Road West (Fig. 40 overleaf). This walking and cycling route follows a former railway line and provides a green corridor running from Chorlton-cum-Hardy to Fairfield Station. Wildlife using the loop is able to access Hough End and vice versa.



Figs. 39 & 40 Hough End Clough Nature Reserve (L) and Fallowfield Loop (R)

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Site evaluation

The application site was concluded to be of limited value to wildlife, although the wider playing fields and woodland areas were of much greater biodiversity interest.

Excluding the leisure centre and car park, the application site was dominated by amenity grassland in constant use by sports teams, dog walkers and model aircraft flyers. All species recorded were common and widespread.

There were no invasive or notifiable species, although it is noted that Giant Hogweed is growing along Red Lion Brook to the northwest of the leisure centre.

A total of 26 species of birds were observed, these either foraging in the trees and playing fields or passing through. There was some potential for nesting birds within the shrubs and trees, and old Woodpigeon's nests were noted, along with two tit nest boxes. Another tit box was observed in the woodland next to Hough End Crescent. These won't be affected by the proposed works.

The changing room block was considered to have negligible suitability for roosting bats.

None of the trees contained features such as decay cavities, woodpecker holes, fissures and exfoliating bark, that would be considered suitable for bat roosting and/or hibernation, whilst the application site itself was of little value to foraging bats.

However, it is noted that commuting pipistrelles have been seen flying along the woodland edge between the Metro line and the Fallowfield Loop.

No evidence of Badgers was found on site, and the application site was unsuitable for Otters and Water Voles. Badgers are present to the west, beyond the rugby club, and Hedgehogs have been seen in the past.

There was no standing water on the site for breeding amphibians, and with limited foraging opportunities and no suitable refugia or hibernacula, the land was considered unsuitable for them.

The site was also considered to be unsuitable for reptiles for the same reason, and they are considered to be absent. It should also be noted the sport pitches area still in use for sports as well as dog walking.

Since much of the site was dominated amenity grassland, it was concluded that there was low potential for significant invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Given the nature of the site, its current and proposed use, it is considered that none of the species noted in the data search will be affected detrimentally by the scheme. The SBI (Chorlton Water Park) will not be impacted by the proposed works.

It is noted that the Fallowfield Loop lies just north of the junction of Hough End Crescent and Mauldeth Road West. Wildlife using the loop is able to access Hough End and vice versa.

4.2 Possible impacts of proposed work and recommendations

Since all in-use bird's nests and their contents are protected from damage or destruction, any tree or scrub removal which may affect a nest should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to 31st August inclusive. If this time frame cannot be avoided, a close inspection of the trees and scrub to be removed will be undertaken prior to clearance. Work will not be carried out within a minimum of 5.0 metres of any in-use nest, although this distance could be more depending on the sensitivity of the species. Any in-use nest will be allowed to fledge before it is disturbed.

Given the previous observations of commuting pipistrelles, there is potential for the extra light associated with the 3G sports pitches to cause some disruption to the flight lines. As such, lighting will not be on all night, and lamps will be heavily cowled to ensure there is no light spillage out into the wider environment.

It may also be possible to plant some trees and shrubs around the outside of the pitches to provide some extra screening and break up the illumination.

Despite the presumed absence of breeding amphibians and reptiles on the site, at all times care will be taken when carrying out earthworks, as small mammals and Hedgehogs could be present. Any small mammals disturbed or uncovered will either be caught by hand and relocated to a safe area, or left to vacate the work site in their own time.

If excavations are to be undertaken, it should be noted that open trenches could potentially trap wildlife, especially if these fill up with water. Escape routes will therefore be provided if trenches cannot be infilled immediately.

These can be in the form of branches or boards placed on the bottom of the trench, with their upper ends above ground level and touching the sides, or sloping ends left in trenches.

4.3 Further surveys

If any tree or scrub removal which may affect a nest cannot be timed appropriately to avoid the bird nesting period (considered to be February to August inclusive, then further surveys for nesting birds will be required.

No other surveys are considered necessary.

4.4 Biodiversity enhancements

The mound provides an ideal opportunity for new native tree and shrub planting, and this will compliment the block of recent tree planting on the eastern side of the mound.

The open patches in the woodland to the north and east of the mound running up to Mauldeth Road West lend themselves to understorey planting with native shrubs such as Hazel, Dogwood, Bird Cherry, Holly, Yew, Spindle, Buckthorn, and Guelder Rose.

Similarly, these species can be planted along each side of the path running north through the woodland, as the woodland edge is currently high forest, with no gradation down to the grassland. The latter is currently closely mown, so areas of unmown, longer grass, will diversify the habitat and potentially the species in the sward.

The habitat diversity can be replicated along the canalized section of Red Lion Brook through understorey planting and spreading of a woodland wildflower seed mix, whilst the edge of the stream could be scalloped to encourage the formation of meanders.

Once cleared from the culvert under Hough End Crescent, the woody debris can be used to make log piles in the woodland for invertebrates, small mammals and amphibians. These enhancements are aimed at extending the features of the Clough, thereby improving the connectivity for wildlife.

The gaps along the Metro line boundary will be ideal for in-fill planting with native trees and shrubs.

In addition, a wide variety of bird and bat boxes could be installed on mature trees across the whole area, as there are currently very few potential nesting or roosting places.

Hedgehog domes/boxes could be provided in some of the scrub areas, especially alongside the Metro line and in the woodland areas alongside Princess Road.

The areas for biodiversity enhancement planting are shown in Fig. 41 overleaf.



Fig. 41 Potential native tree and shrub planting areas 

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Phase 1 Habitat Survey

Appendix 2: Bird species list

Appendix 3: Relevant legislation

Appendix 1: Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map



Legend

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
|  Survey boundary |  Amenity grass |  Buildings |
|  Scattered trees |  Hardstanding | Not to scale |
|  Introduced shrubs | | |

Appendix 2: Bird species list

Common name	Latin name
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Ring-necked Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>

Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>

Appendix 3: Relevant legislation

3.1 *Badgers*

Badgers are protected in Britain by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The purpose of this Act is to protect the animals from deliberate cruelty and from the incidental effects of lawful activities which could cause them harm. Under this legislation it is an offence to:

- ❑ Wilfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a Badger, or attempt to do so;
- ❑ Interfere with a sett by damaging or destroying it;
- ❑ Obstruct access to, or any entrance of, a Badger sett;
- ❑ Disturb a Badger when it is occupying a sett.

Note that if any of the above resulted from a person being reckless, even if they had no intention of committing the offence, their action would still be considered an offence.

A person is not guilty of an offence if it can be shown that the act was 'the incidental result of a lawful operation and could not have been reasonably avoided'; only a court can decide what is 'reasonable' in any set of circumstances. Penalties for offences under this legislation can be up to six months in prison and a fine of up to £5,000 for each offence.

A Badger sett is defined in the Act as 'any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a Badger'. This can include culverts, pipes and holes under sheds, piles of boulders, old mines and quarries, etc.

'Current use' does not simply mean 'current occupation' and for licensing purposes it is defined as 'any sett within an occupied Badger territory regardless of when it may have last been used'.

A sett therefore, in an occupied territory, is classified as in current use even if it is only used seasonally or occasionally by Badgers, and is afforded the same protection in law.

3.2 *Bats*

In England, Scotland and Wales, all bat species are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) (as amended), through inclusion in Schedule 5. In England and Wales this Act has been amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), which adds an extra offence, makes species offences arrestable, increases the time limits for some prosecutions, and increases penalties.

All bats are also included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 1994, (or Northern Ireland 1995) (the Habitats Regulations), which defines 'European protected species of animals'.

The above legislation can be summarised thus (Mitchell-Jones and McLeish, 2004):

- ❑ *Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture (or take) bats;*
- ❑ *Deliberately disturb bats (whether in a roost or not);*
- ❑ *Recklessly disturb roosting bats or obstruct access to their roosts;*
- ❑ *Damage or destroy roosts;*
- ❑ *Possess or transport a bat or any part of a part of a bat, unless acquired legally;*
- ❑ *Sell (or offer for sale) or exchange bats, or parts of bats.*

The word 'roost' is not used in the legislation, but is used here for simplicity. The actual wording is 'any structure or place which any wild animal...uses for shelter or protection' (WCA), or 'breeding site or resting place' (Habitats Regulations).

As bats generally have both a winter and a summer roost, the legislation is clear that all roosts are protected whether bats are in residence at the time or not.

3.3 Birds

In Britain, all wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. There are penalties for:

- ❑ *Killing, injuring or capturing them, or attempting any of these;*
- ❑ *Taking or damaging the nest whilst in use;*
- ❑ *Taking or destroying the eggs.*

3.4 Great Crested Newts

Great Crested Newts are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) as amended, and Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. As a result of their rarity across Europe, they are also protected under Annexes IIa and IVa of the Habitats and Species Directive, and under the Berne Convention (the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats).

The above legislation can be summarised thus (Langton *et al*, 2001):

- ❑ *Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill, or intentionally injure Great Crested Newts;*
- ❑ *Deliberately disturb Great Crested Newts or intentionally or recklessly disturb them in a place used for shelter or protection;*
- ❑ *Damage or destroy a breeding or resting place;*
- ❑ *Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection;*
- ❑ *Possess a Great Crested Newt, or any part of it, unless acquired lawfully;*
- ❑ *Sell, barter, exchange or offer for sale Great Crested Newts or parts of them.*

3.5 *Reptiles*

All common reptiles (Common Lizard, Grass Snake, Slow-worm and Adder *Vipera berus*) are afforded legal protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) largely as a consequence of a national decline in numbers associated with persecution and habitat loss.

Under the terms of the Act it is illegal to intentionally kill or injure a reptile.

3.6 *Otters*

Otters are protected under Sections 9.1 and 9.4, Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), Annex 2 and 4 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 as amended, and are a priority species under the UK BAP. Actions that are prohibited include intentional killing, injuring or taking; and intentional or reckless damage, destruction or obstruction of any structure or place used for shelter or protection.

3.7 *Water Voles*

As of 12 August 2008, Water Voles have been given full protection under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Offences under Section 9 carry a maximum penalty of a fine up to £5000, imprisonment for up to six months, or both, for each animal in respect of which an offence is committed. It is now an offence to:

- ❑ Intentionally kill, injure or take (capture) a Water Vole;
- ❑ Possess or control a live or dead Water Vole, or any part of a Water Vole or anything derived from a Water Vole;
- ❑ Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which a Water Vole uses for shelter or protection;
- ❑ Intentionally or recklessly disturb a Water Vole while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection.