



Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

WALKER ROAD BLACKLEY M9 6RE

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1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Treescapes was requested to undertake an Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of land at Walker Road, Blackley in Greater Manchester, M9 6RE. The assessment of this land included a tree assessment for roosting bat species, badger survey, breeding birds and habitat survey.
- 1.2 The aim of the report is to present the findings of the ecological surveys in and around the site. The report includes recommendations for the site following an assessment of the ability of this site to support protected habitats and species.
- 1.3 Following the introduction found in section 1 the methodology used to generate this report is found in section 2. Section 3 presents the results of the desktop and field surveys. Within section 4 are the discussions and implications of the site. The final section 5 concludes the report with recommendations.

Site Context and Status

- 1.4 The site is situated at the end of Walker Road in Blackley within the county of Greater Manchester. It is immediately North of Rochdale Road and South of Victoria Avenue in a mixed residential and commercial location. Residential properties are located to the South and West of the site. Commercial properties are to the North. East of the site is a Post Office. Immediately South is a tree and shrubbery lined footpath.
- 1.5 The OS grid reference for the site is SD 86163 03848.
- 1.6 The boundaries of the site are indicated in Figure 1. The map view for the site by OS grid reference is Figure 2.

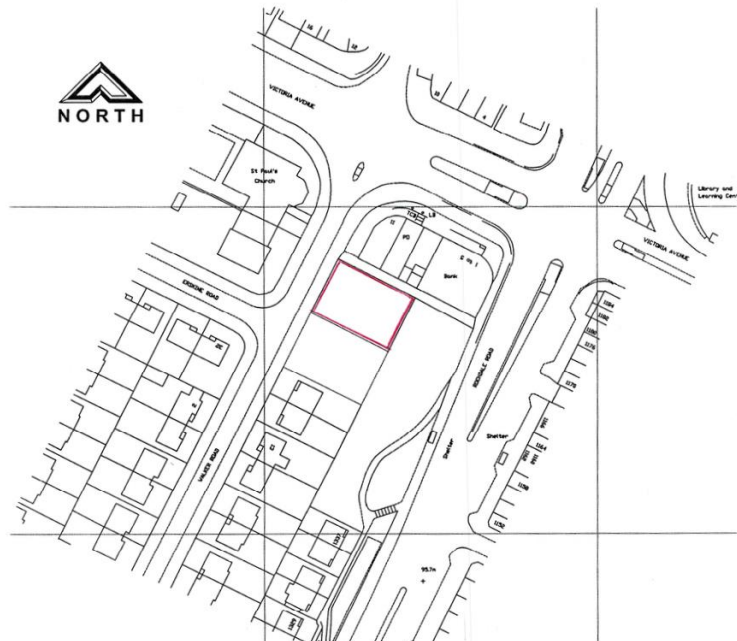


Figure 1: Red line boundary and approximate survey of the site

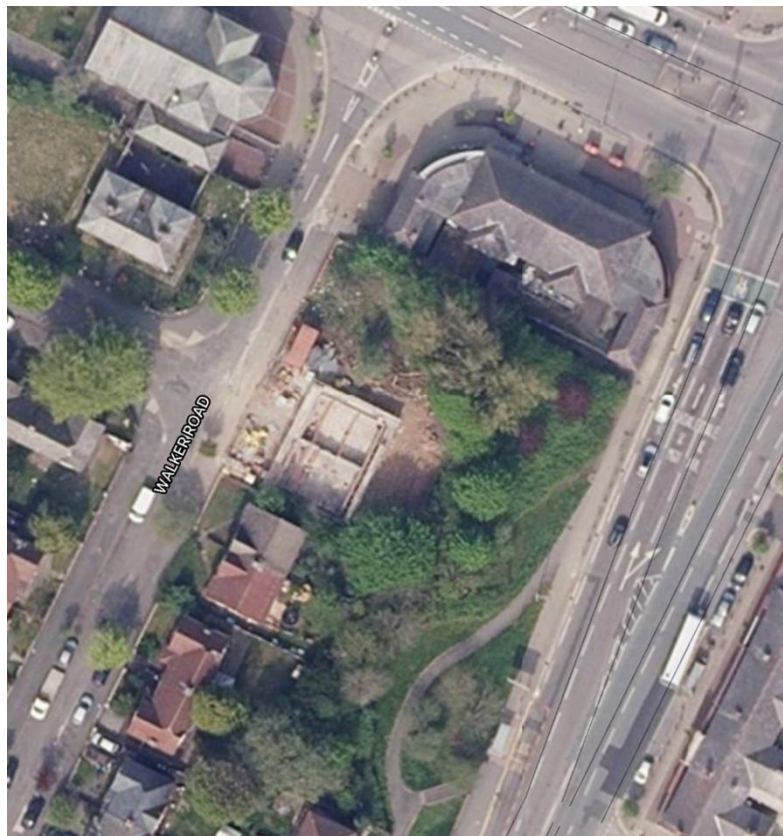


Figure 2: Map view of the proposed development site

Description of the Proposed Development

- 1.7 The master plan for floor plans and elevations for the site is in Figure 3. The proposed development within the boundaries of the site will be subject to the planning approval of the relevant Local Planning Authority.



Figure 3: Floor plans and Elevations

Planning Policies

- 1.8 The proposed site may be affected by both local and National planning policies. The following discuss these in context to the site.
- 1.9 NERC Act (2006): Under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006) a list of species and habitats were listed by the Secretary of State that were considered to be of principle importance for the conservation of biodiversity. These were known as BAP habitats and species. This list has been succeeded by the UK Post 2010 Biodiversity Framework, published 2012 by the JNCC & Defra. However the NERC Act (2006) remains a valuable guide to ensure that decision makers in planning Authorities have a structured guide to making decisions work with nature and the environment and not against it.
- 1.10 NPPF (2012): The National Planning Policy Framework contains guidance specifically on 'Conserving and enhancing the natural environment'. It requires the formation of planning policies which minimise the impact on biodiversity and promote and protect priority species.

- 1.11 The site comes under the jurisdiction of Manchester City Council. The Manchester Core Strategy (2012-2027) forms the main basis for considering planning applications and for the policy which will guide the decision making in terms of the proposed site. Specific aspects of the strategy relevant would be Housing H1, which relates to the provision of new housing in line with the availability and suitability of sites in the borough.
- 1.12 Section H 9.9 of the core strategy relates to accessibility of shops and other facilities. The Walker Road site is in close proximity to shops, commercial premises and sustainable transport networks.
- 1.13 Section EN 9 of the core strategy states the intention of the strategy to maintain green infrastructure. In the urban context of the proposed development specific accommodation for the retention of street trees will be considered.
- 1.14 Section EN 15 of the core strategy specifically communicates the intention of the local authority to maintain or enhance sites of biodiversity and geographical sites in the city.
- 1.15 The GM BAP aims to deliver biodiversity net gain to Greater Manchester. The impact of the proposed new housing on the biodiversity of the site must be considered.
- 1.16 This report has been developed with guidance from Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management 'Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing (Second Edition, 2017) and in accordance with British Standard 42020 (2013) Biodiversity – Code of Practice for Planning and Development.

2.0 Methodology

Desktop Study

- 2.1 To gain a better understanding of the site a desktop study search of the site and surrounding areas was undertaken. To facilitate this understanding an interactive mapping tool was used searching for statutory designated sites (www.magic.defra.gov.uk). To understand the wider landscape and both the habitat linkage and features such as waterways, ponds etc an aerial mapping interactive tool was used (maps.google.uk).
- 2.2 The Greater Manchester Environmental Plan and associated records were accessed which details protected species and habitats within 1km of the red boundary lined site.

Site Inspection

- 2.3 The Site Inspection was carried out by Lynsey Hamer BSc (Hons) PG Cert HE PG Dip CE MBA on 13th September 2021 undertaking an extended Phase 1 habitat survey. This included an assessment of the site and identifying the habitats following the JNCC standard auditing method for 'Phase 1 Habitat Survey'. Also surveyed was the potential for badgers, reptiles, bats and other protected species. The site was mapped with land use and habitats and additionally dominant plant species were recorded. Evidence of protected species and the potential for protected species was also documented.

Badger Survey

- 2.4 A badger survey was carried out at the site to assess for the presence of badgers in the area. The location of any setts within 30m of the area and on site was also sought.
- 2.5 The National Survey of Badgers (1990) gives a clear methodology for the evaluation of badger presence and activity in an area to meet the requirements of the Badger Act 1992.
- 2.6 During the course of the site visit all habitats suitable for badgers were assessed and systematically examined including searching for setts, latrine sites and badger dung, snuffle holes, hair, footprints and finally paths and runs.
- 2.7 Particular attention was paid to neighbouring embankment areas, especially to the immediate South of the site where the topography and vegetation offered potential sett sites.

Tree Survey and Habitat Suitability for Bat Species

- 2.8 BCT (2016) Bat Survey Guidelines were followed to assess the potential suitability of the proposed development site. The guidelines are below in Table 1.

Suitability	Description Roosting habitats	Commuting and foraging habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by commuting or foraging bats.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions^a and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation^b). A tree of sufficient size and age to contain PRFs but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.^c	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of commuting bats such as a gappy hedgerow or unvegetated stream, but isolated, i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat. Suitable, but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a lone tree (not in a parkland situation) or a patch of scrub.
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions ^a and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only – the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for commuting such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens. Habitat that is connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland or water.
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions ^a and surrounding habitat.	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by commuting bats such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge. High-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by foraging bats such as broadleaved woodland, tree-lined watercourses and grazed parkland. Site is close to and connected to known roosts.

Table 1: Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of development sites for bats

- 2.9 Veteran trees may often be seen as a high suitability for roosting bats.
- 2.10 The survey was carried out in September which is considered a sub-optimal time for ground level roost assessment in trees however year round is classified as optimal time for fieldwork for the purpose of this report and September is the mating season so roosts would potentially be more easily identified due to increased activity at possible sites.

Habitat Suitability for Reptiles

- 2.11 The potential of the site to hold populations of reptiles was assessed using habitat surveys. Features that would increase the suitability of sites for reptiles would include scrub and grassland across the site, potential

hibernation sites such as log piles, compost heaps, water bodies, grassland with tussocks or refugia on the ground.

Habitat Suitability for Great Crested Newts

- 2.12 The habitat was surveyed for the potential to host *triturus cristatus*, the great crested newt. The wider landscape was examined using google maps and nature maps to identify types of habitat. The presence of factors that could increase the suitability for great crested newts was assessed such as water bodies on site or within 500m of Walker Road, ponds and other connective features and the presence of fish in the ponds, agricultural land use nearby, types of habitat such as grassland, patches of woodland or hibernation features on the site such as log piles.

Dormice

- 2.13 Desk studies were carried out to assess for habitat connectivity for dormice. Woodland and hedgerow were assessed to judge their potential for supporting dormice. Factors such as food species and the structure and form of the habitat were assessed.

Limitations

- 2.14 The survey was carried out over the course of one site visit and as such although every effort has been made to complete a comprehensive survey seasonal variations will remain impossible to quantify. Potentially only a snapshot of the species that may occur within the site will be identified. This survey is not a definitive exhaustive list but is intended to provide a general assessment of the potential nature conservation value.
- 2.15 The protected species assessment is not a full and complete survey of every species that may inhabit the site. It is valid and comprehensive for the time at which it was undertaken. Should this report conclude protected species may be present additional surveys may be necessary to fully assess the potential.

3.0 Results

Desk Study

- 3.1 The proposed development site is not associated or situated within any sites designated for their nature conservation value. However, within the wider landscape there are several designated sites. They are listed in table 2 below.

Site Name	Designation	Findings
Plant Hill Park	LNR	Woodland
Blackley Forest Nature Reserve	LNR	Plantation & Lodges
Boggart Hole Brook	LNR	Ancient Woodlands
Alkrington Woods Nature Reserve	LNR	Habitat Mosaic
Heaton Park	LNR	Protected Species

Table 2: Designated Sites

- 3.2 The site is not situated within any conservation areas as designated by Manchester City Council.

Protected Species

- 3.3 Biological records shown no protected species within the boundaries of the site however local wildlife in the surrounding localities have included peregrines, black redstarts and bats.
- 3.4 Heaton Park has been identified as habitat to protected birds and bats.
- 3.5 Alkrington Woods contains habitat mosaic which is common habitat for great crested newts.

Phase 1 Habitat Survey

- 3.6 The majority of the site is unmanaged scattered scrub. This mainly consists of common nettle, dock, bramble, cleavers and common bent.
- 3.7 To the South of the site are a line of mature trees including sycamore and ash. Scattered throughout the site are young saplings, mainly ash and silver birch.

Badger Survey

- 3.8 No potential areas for badger activity were identified. The embankments on the footpath to the South of the site were potentially suitable however no evidence of badger activity was identified.

Tree Assessment for Roosting Bat Species

- 3.9 All trees within the boundary lines of the site were assessed to ascertain their potential for roosting bat species using the BCT (2016) guidelines.
- 3.10 There are three mature trees which have the potential to support roosting bats and would be a low rating on the BCT (2016) guidelines. There was no evidence of roosting bats.
- 3.11 The ground flora would not be considered to have the potential for foraging and commuting bat species due to the consideration the species are not good for foraging.
- 3.12 The tree line may have potential to house commuting bats.

Habitat Suitability for Reptiles

- 3.13 The unmanaged areas of scrub on the site would be considered high potential for supporting reptiles.
- 3.14 The footpath area to the South of the site houses mature hedgerow that are possible hibernation sites for reptiles.

Habitat Suitability for Great Crested Newts

- 3.15 There are no water bodies suitable on site to house great crested newts.
- 3.16 There are ponds within 500m of the site that would be unlikely to hold great crested newts due to containing fish.
- 3.17 There are several water bodies in local nature reserves that are considered likely to support great crested newts however due to the proximity of roads this would be a barrier to great crested newts travelling to the site.

Dormice

- 3.18 The species poor ground flora on the site would not be considered to have potential to host dormice.
- 3.19 No records of hazel dormice are found within 2km of the site and there are no areas of habitat with connectivity to support translocation of dormice.

Breeding Birds

- 3.20 The mature trees on site would be considered to have the potential to support breeding birds. The breeding season for most bird species in the UK is from March/September.
- 3.21 There is no evidence of recent activity within the mature tree canopies.

4.0 Discussion

Discussion

- 4.1 The Manchester Core Strategy 2012-2027 and the Greater Manchester Five Year Environment Plan demonstrates the framework which the local authority will act to preserve and enhance environmental assets within the community and maintain or increase the biodiversity net gain. The purpose of this report is to assess the potential of the proposed site to support protected species and provide key habitats within the boundaries of the site, in line with local and National policy.

Ecological Value of the Site

- 4.2 The NERC Act provided planning and development management guidance to local authorities from the Secretary of State who published a list of species and habitats that are considered to be of principal importance to the conservation of biodiversity in England. This list, published as S41 is all of the sites in England identified as conservation priorities in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 4.3 The area within the boundary lines of the proposed site are not considered priority habitats.
- 4.4 The boundary mature trees need surveying to assess their intrinsic value as some appear dead or diseased, specifically the mature ash. The sycamore trees look in good health but would benefit from canopy maintenance.
- 4.5 The scattered young trees are ground growers, classified as suckers and appear to be severely affected by black leaf spot. This should be surveyed to assess the benefit of attempting treatment of this young tree population against the loss on the site of the trees.
- 4.6 The site appears to have habitat that would support common and widespread species and is not of principle importance.

Protected Species

- 4.7 No potential areas for badger activity were identified.

- 4.8 Almost all of the trees on site are classified as having negligible potential for supporting roosting bat species. Three mature trees have low potential for supporting roosting bat species as they are not the preferred species and do not have dense ivy cover which would attract roosting bat species. As tree line specimens they could have potential for foraging bats. The connection to the wider landscape could facilitate easy movement for commuting bats and therefore unless dead or diseased the mature sycamore and ash should remain in place subject to the findings of an assessment of the trees. The ash trees appear to be diseased on first assessment.
- 4.9 The unmanaged areas of scrub on the site would be considered high potential for supporting reptiles. These would be common reptiles such as slowworms or the common lizard. This scrub area would benefit from clearance as most of it is contaminated with refuse.
- 4.10 There are no water bodies within the site that would house great crested newts. There is no connectivity between water bodies in local landscapes. It is considered highly unlikely great crested newts would use the site in their terrestrial stage.
- 4.11 The species poor ground flora on the site would not be considered to have potential to host dormice.
- 4.12 The mature trees on site would be considered to have the potential to support breeding birds. The breeding season for most bird species in the UK is from March/September. There is no evidence of recent activity within the mature tree canopies.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The site is situated at the end of Walker Road, North of Rochdale Road and South of Victoria Avenue. There are no priority habitats within the site boundaries.
- 5.2 There are no badger setts or evidence of badger activity in the site or surrounding areas. Only common reptiles would populate the site and there was no evidence of any at survey.
- 5.3 There is the potential for commuting bats to use the mature trees on the tree line and therefore if not diseased they should be retained within the site plans.
- 5.4 There is likely no possibility of great crested newts on the site. There is no evidence of hazel dormice on the site. The mature trees are likely to have provided birds with a location for nesting and should be retained unless diseased.
- 5.5 The mature trees should be assessed before plans to remove them are approved as they have value to the urban landscapes and provide an attractive visual amenity to the site from the South aspect on Rochdale Road. The young trees have black leaf spot and are of little value.
- 5.6 There is no ecological value to the flora or fauna present on the site.

6.0 References

Bat Conservation Trust (2016). Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines. Bat Conservation Trust, London

Bsi Group (2020) Smart Guide to Biodiversity in Planning and Development <https://www.bsigroup.com/LocalFiles/en-GB/biodiversity/BS-42020-Smart-Guide.pdf>

CIEEM (2017) Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing (Second Ed.) Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester

CIRIA C567 (2005) Working with wildlife – site guide. CIRIA, London

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2021) GMCA Biodiversity Net Gain: Guidance for Greater Manchester https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4244/gmca-bng-guidance-update_250221-final-edited.pdf

Greater Manchester Record Centre (2021) Greater Manchester Biodiversity Action Plan https://www.gmwildlife.org.uk/resources/downloads/gm_bap/introduction_gm_biodiversity_action_plan_2009.pdf

Manchester City Council (2012) Manchester's Local Development Framework: Core Strategy Development Plan Document file:///Users/lynseyhamer/Downloads/Core_Strategy.pdf

Natural England (2020) Great Crested Newts: Advice for Local Planning Authorities <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/great-crested-newts-surveys-and-mitigation-for-development-projects>

Internet Resources

<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/511/conervation_areas

<https://www.gmwildlife.org.uk/districts/>