



NORTH EAST GATEWAY CYCLEWAY BRIDGE

Ashton Canal, New Islington

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report

Date: 20/5/21

By: Dominic Rigby MCIEEM

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Client: Manchester City Council

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Any future readers should note that both the physical state of the site and the relevant environmental legislation may have changed since this report.

Revision Schedule				
Version	Date	Prepared by	For Comment	Checked by
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Ashton Canal Bridge, New Islington

Preliminary Ecological Assessment Report

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20th May 2021

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Abbreviations and Glossary

BAP Biodiversity Action Plan

BCT Bat Conservation Trust

BHS Biological Heritage Site (Biological Heritage Sites Partnership: Lancashire County Council, Lancashire Wildlife Trust and Natural England)

BoCC Birds of Conservation Concern

CCNW Conservation Contracts North West

CIEEM Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management

DDA Disability Discrimination Act 1995

EclA Ecological Impact Assessment

EPS European Protected Species

GMLRC Greater Manchester Local Records Centre

ha Hectare

km Kilometres

LBAP Local Biodiversity Action Plan

m Metres

MCIEEM Full member, Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management

NERC Natural Environment and Rural Communities (Act 2006)

NGR National Grid Reference

prf Potential roost feature (for bats)

SAC Special Areas of Conservation

SBI Site of Biological Importance (county wildlife site)

> / < more than / less than

1. Summary

In 2021 Conservations Contracts Northwest Ltd. (CCNW) were contracted by Manchester City Council to undertake a preliminary ecological assessment of land to be impacted by the construction of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the Ashton Canal at New Islington, Ancoats, Manchester. The appraisal was to identify any ecological constraints and opportunities arising from proposed works.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was undertaken following industry guidelines, and this was reported using the standard report template.

Following a desk study and wildlife data trawl, a half-day was spent examining the site noting land use and habitat and assessing habitat suitability for protected species.

The desk study revealed that a planning application for a large development neighbouring the site had been granted. The associated works would include the removal of most of the bird-nesting habitat and potential priority-species habitat. Should those work have proceeded prior to the start of the pedestrian and cycle bridge project several of the actions below would no longer be relevant.

The following conclusions and recommendations emerged, assuming no neighbouring works:

- Bat emergence/re-entry surveys were required.
- The status of black redstart on site required confirmation.
- A nesting birds Method Statement would be required.
- More information was required on invasive non-native species, particularly regarding Himalayan balsam which was thought to possibly occur at the site. If present a Method Statement would be required.
- Method Statements for any shrub removal, incorporating ground checks for slow worm and hedgehog, would be necessary.
- The presence of the red-listed floating water plantain should be checked before works commenced, and if present a Method Statement for avoidance composed accordingly.

2. Introduction

2.1 Principal Author

This report was compiled by Dominic Rigby MCIEEM, Senior Ecologist at CCNW. He had over 30 years' professional experience in the ecology sector and held survey/disturbance licences in England and Wales for great crested newts, bats and barn owls.

The author was up to date with the latest industry-standards for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, biodiversity net gain and UK habitat classification.

2.2 Survey Guidelines and Report Structure

- The Report followed Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management Guidelines on Ecological Report Writing (CIEEM 2017a; Dean, 2021) where a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report was defined as “a report that aims to provide general advice on ecological constraints associated with any site/development and includes recommendations for further survey.”
- The process followed during this Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was that set out in the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (CIEEM 2017b).

2.3 Client

Highways Services, Manchester City Council,
Northern/Eastern Gateway Cycle Scheme Project 210098H

2.4 Project Description

2.4.1 Location

The survey site was an approximately 140m² covering the likely construction imprint of a new bridge over the current footbridge along the Ashton Canal at New Islington, SJ85479830, by Ashton Canal lock 2. More detail regarding the location was detailed in Section 2.6, p9.

City: Manchester

Ward: Ancoats and Beswick

Local Area: New Islington

Figures One and Two (p9, p10) mapped the location.

2.4.2 Landscape Description

The site was a city canal, with a lit tow path, bridge, adjacent lock and pockets of grass and tall herb vegetation, with a recently planted hedgerow with fruit trees on the south eastern side. Beyond the canal the north-western side was dominated by buildings and the south east side by amenity grassland. The latter leading to New Islington tram stop.

2.4.3 Ownership

Site owners: The potential construction imprint included land owned by Manchester City Council and Canal and River Trust.

2.5 Purpose and Scope of Report

2.5.1 Purpose of a PEA

The key objectives of a PEA were defined (CIEEM, 2017a) as:

- Identification of the likely ecological constraints associated with a project;
- Identification of any mitigation measures likely to be required;
- Identification of any additional surveys that may be required to inform an Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA); and,
- Identification of opportunities to offer ecological enhancement.

A PEA was produced to inform the client of any detailed further surveys required to inform any potential Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) and, within the context of the proposed project, should reference relevant legislation and planning policies.

2.5.2 Constraints and Deviations from PEA Guidelines

- *COVID-19*

The PEA took place before a full relaxation of restrictions and concerns over Covid-19. However, this did not affect the undertaking of the PEA.

- *Weather*

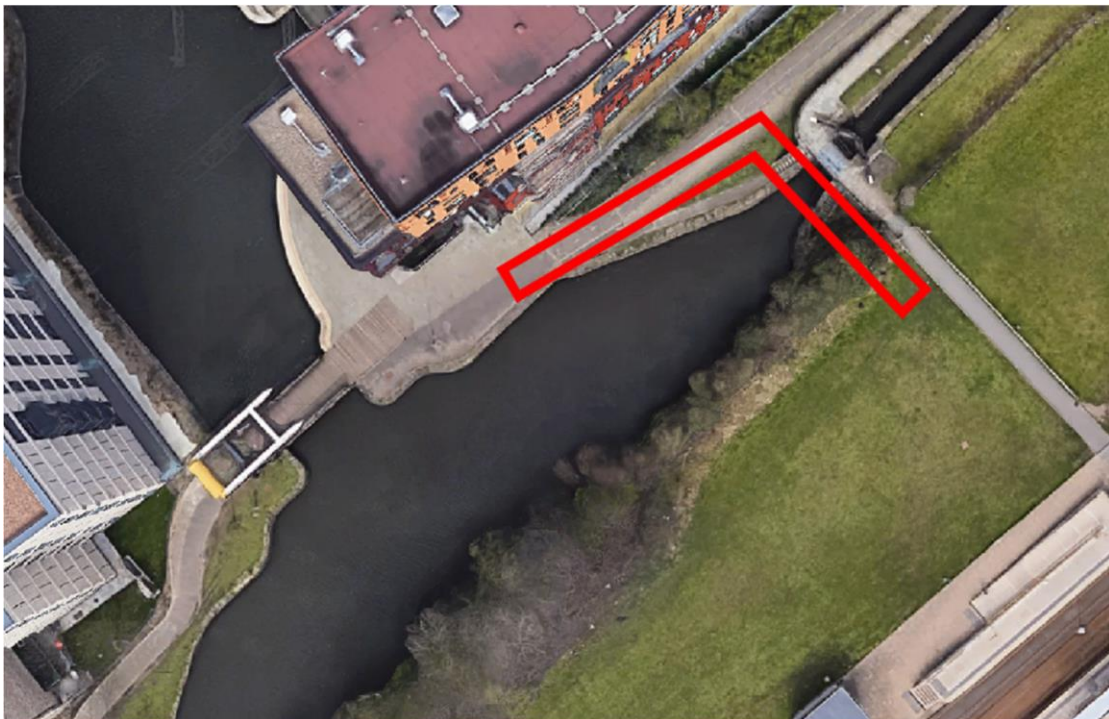
The weather was dry and overcast on the survey day. Ideal conditions for surveying habitats.

2.6 Project Background

The canal crossing (Location A, Figure One, below) had been identified by MCC as a missing link in the proposed continuous east-west walking and cycling route, linking neighbourhoods in the north and east of the city centre fringe. The existing crossing across Lock 2 was narrow and restrictive to many potential users and not DDA compliant.

A feasibility report compiled by Wilde Consultants Ltd for MCC in February 2021 described the proposed structure as follows:

“Location A is just to the north of the New Islington Marina



A footbridge installed at this location will have the shortest span due to the narrowing of the canal width. The shorter span will likely be a more cost-effective solution.

.....

This crossing point is adjacent to an existing canal lock which is currently used also used as a pedestrian crossing, however this crossing is narrow and non- DDA compliant. The mooring point for the lock is on the western side of the canal, but if the bridge is adjacent to the lock, this will not affect the mooring area.

Location A has a sufficient length available to install a DDA compliant ramp with a shallow gradient. This location has the shortest route to the New Islington Metrolink station which would benefit users with reduced mobility.

There is an existing level difference along the towpath at this location. The towpath rises towards the northeast above the lock. The lowest point is towards the open space around the entrance to New Islington Marina. It may be possible to utilise this level difference to minimise the impact of the bridge on the surrounding area as the ramp would follow the same level change as the existing towpath.” (Wilde Consultants, 2021)

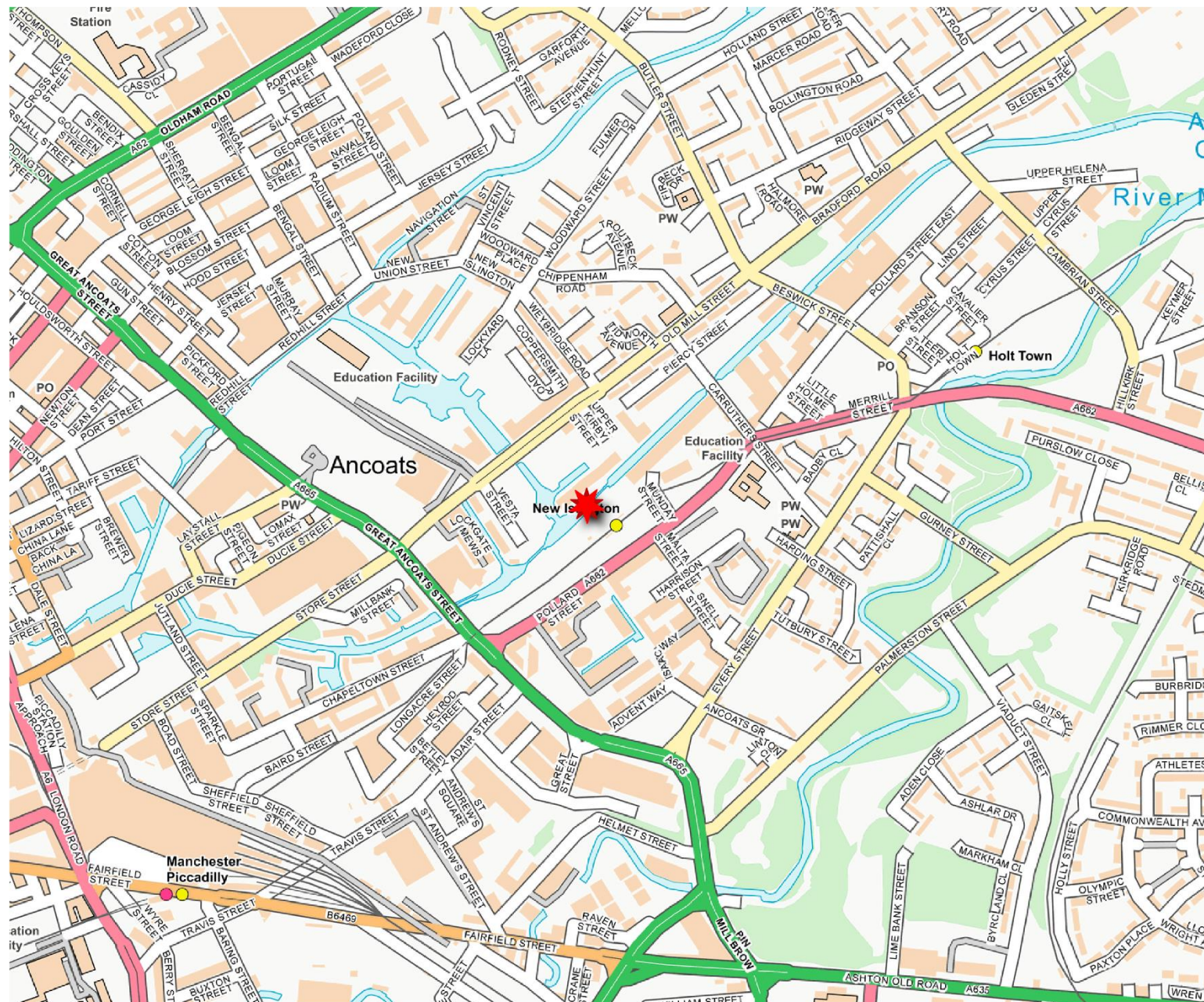


Figure Two:
Location Map of
Proposed Canal
Crossing



North



Bridge Crossing

ccnw
conservation contracts northwest

Map created DR,
17/05/2021

0 100 200 m

Contains OS data © Crown copyright [and database right] [2021].

3. Legislation and Planning Policy

Following a desk-based assessment of the route, the following were considered potentially relevant to the site:

3.1 Legislation

The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Formerly The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, these provided safeguards for European Protected Sites and Species (as listed in the Habitats Directive). This had recently been amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 which continued the same provision for European protected species, licensing requirements, and protected areas after Brexit.

During the implementation period the 2017 Regulations would continue to be in force unamended. At the end of the implementation period the 2017 Regulations would continue to be in force but will be amended to make certain areas of the 2017 Regulations operate.

These regulations provided legal protection for European Protected Species (those listed under Annex IV of the EU Habitats Directive - Council Directive 92/43/EEC). With regards to European Protected Species, this made it an offence to:

Deliberately capture, injure or kill an EPS.

Deliberately disturb an EPS in a way that would affect its ability to survive, breed or rear young, hibernate or significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species.

Damage or destroy a roost/resting place [this is an 'absolute' offence and need not be deliberate or intentional].

Possess, control, transport, sell, exchange or offer for sale/exchange any live or dead, or any part of an EPS.

On this site potential EPS were:

Bats.

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

The following parts of this Act could be relevant to this site:

Part One: **ALL** Birds

It was an offence to “Intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built”.

Schedule 1

All birds were protected in some form, but some species had additional protection during the breeding season as did their nests, eggs and dependent young. To disturb these a special licence would be required in advance.

This Schedule covered the following species potentially relevant to this site:

- **Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, Peregrine *Falco peregrinus***

Section 9 (Protected Species):

“9 (1) Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person intentionally kills, injures or takes any wild animal included in Schedule 5, he shall be guilty of an offence. [No longer applies to EPS – see below]

9 (2) Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person has in his possession or control any live or dead wild animal included in Schedule 5 or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal, he shall be guilty of an offence. [No longer applies to EPS – see below]

9 (4) Subject to the provisions of this Part, a person is guilty of an offence if intentionally or recklessly—

(a) he damages or destroys any structure or place which any wild animal specified in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection; [No longer applies to EPS – see below]

(b) he disturbs any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; or

(c) he obstructs access to any structure or place which any such animal uses for shelter or protection.”

“9 (5) Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person—

(a) sells, offers or exposes for sale, or has in his possession or transports for the purpose of sale, any live or dead wild animal included in Schedule 5, or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal; or

(b) publishes or causes to be published any advertisement likely to be understood as conveying that he buys or sells, or intends to buy or sell, any of those things, he shall be guilty of an offence.”

Former (post-Brexit) EPS are covered by 9 (4) b, c, and 5 only.

This Act covered the following species potentially relevant to this site:

- **all bats, water vole *Arvicola amphibious*, slow worm *Anguis fragilis***

Section 13

Schedule 8 listed plant species that are protected under Section 13. Section 13 protects plants from picking and sale of plants or parts of plants listed in Schedule 8.

Floating water plantain *Luronium natans*

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

Seven species of bat are listed as species of principal importance for nature conservation in England in Section 41 of The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Section 40 of the same Act requires that local and regional authorities have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.

Other species listed as species of principal importance for nature conservation in England in Section 41, potentially relevant to this site were:

Common toad *Bufo bufo*

Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

Birds of Conservation Concern

The list was used in the ecological consultancy industry to inform ecological valuation as part of the impact assessment process. All species on the red and amber lists would be considered in the same way as those on the s41 list (see NERC Act above). The 4th edition of this publication was published in 2015 (Eaton *et al*, 2015).

The following species whose status on site (for example “breeding”) could coincide with the criteria for inclusion on the red or amber list (for example long-term UK breeding decline) could be present on the site:

Red list:

Herring gull, starling, song thrush, mistle thrush, house sparrow and grey wagtail.

Amber list:

Swift, house martin, dunnock.

A Vascular Plant Red List for England

Stohl (2014) listed floating water plantain as “Near Threatened” on the red list of England’s plants.

The Environment Protection Act 1990

This classifies as controlled waste any soil and waste containing propagules of a plant species listed in Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Potentially relevant to this site were:

- Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*)
- Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*)
- Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)
- Variegated yellow archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon* subsp. *argentatum*)
- *Cotoneaster* spp.
- *Rhododendron ponticum*
- Montbretia (*Crocasmia* × *crocasmiflora*)

The Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019

(“The Order”), which came into force on October 1st 2019 and applied in England and Wales, was part of the UK’s implementation of EU Regulation 1143/2014. The core of these regulations was the EU’s list of [Invasive Alien Species of Union Concern](#) (the Union List).

The Union List currently included thirty-six plant species, plants potentially relevant to the project site were: Giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam (listed as “Indian balsam).

The provisions of the Order prohibited causing or allowing listed species to grow or spread in the wild. The Order specifically stated that “A person who plants or otherwise causes to grow in the wild [any plant on the Union List] is guilty of an offence.”

As Regulations, these transposed the EU Directive, and as such, fell under the changes brought about by the EU (Withdrawal) Act and all European law (i.e. Regulations) which was copied-across into UK legislation to ensure legal continuity was retained after BREXIT.

3.2 Planning Policy

3.2.1 Manchester City Council Manchester Core Strategy 2012 to 2027

The Manchester Core Strategy was the local planning policy document relevant to the project area at the time of the PEA.

Objective 6: Environment, Green Infrastructure and Environmental Protection contained the relevant policies: Policy EN 9 Green Infrastructure and Policy EN 15 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

Of relevance to this project was Policy EN15. Here the Strategy stated:

“The Council will seek to maintain or enhance sites of biodiversity and geological value throughout the City. Particular consideration will be given to: protected and priority species, as listed in the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy and included in the Greater Manchester Biodiversity Action Plan.....

the Council’s objective {is} to protect and conserve the City’s existing trees and woodlands and the aim for a net increase in trees across the City.”

The Strategy detailed further that:

“Developers will be expected to identify and implement reasonable opportunities to enhance, restore or create new biodiversity, either on-site or adjacent to the site, contributing to linkages between valuable or potentially valuable habitat areas where appropriate.

Any adverse impacts on biodiversity will need to be justified against the wider benefits of the proposal, assessed against other LDF policies. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, developers will be required to provide appropriate mitigation and/or compensation.

Developers will need to demonstrate how they have assessed and taken full account of the potential effect of their proposed development on biodiversity or geodiversity. When considering the potential impact of a development, the construction phase should be included in this consideration. It is important to recognise that brownfield sites often contain diverse and valuable biodiversity.

Priority habitats found within Manchester, as listed in the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy and included in the Greater Manchester Biodiversity Action Plan (GM BAP), include various types of grassland, ancient/species-rich hedgerows, woodlands, lowland heath, managed greenspace, reedbeds, rivers, canals and ponds.

In addition to the priority species protected through European or national legislation, local priority species are identified by the Greater Manchester Biodiversity Action Plan (GM BAP); the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy lists those that occur in the City of Manchester, including (those potentially relevant here:) water vole, pipistrelle bats and 8 protected bird species.

3.2.2 Greater Manchester Spatial Framework

The Greater Manchester Spatial Framework was due to be adopted in 2022. Should this project be delayed until after this date it may need to align to any changes to planning policy driven by that document.

3.2.3 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (Gov.uk, 2019) section: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment (2/2019 revision) set out the framework for planning decisions regarding ecological considerations.

3.2.4 Spring Statement, 2019; Environment Bill, 2020

Biodiversity Net Gain

In the 2019 Spring Statement the Chancellor delivered the following statement: “to ensure that wildlife isn’t compromised in delivering necessary infrastructure and housing, the government will Mandate net gains for biodiversity on new developments in England to deliver an overall increase in biodiversity”. This concept of biodiversity net gain was then incorporated into the Environment Bill, which was chosen for ascent in the 2020 Government programme.

4. Methodology

4.1 Desk Study

The Manchester City Council Planning Portal was interrogated to check for recent (last three years) ecological surveys and species reviews within 250m of the project site. The following were relevant:

- In 2020 a PEA and bat surveys were undertaken on land bounded by Ashton Canal, Great Ancoats Street, Munday Street and Pollard Street Manchester M4 7DS, with reference to Planning Application 128191/FO/2020;
- In 2020 bat surveys were undertaken at Wellington Mill Pollard Street East Manchester M40 7FS, with reference to 127505/FO/2020; and,
- In 2020 bat and bird surveys were undertaken at Ancoats Dispensary Old Mill Street Manchester M4 6EB, with reference to 130356/FO/2021.

The Greater Manchester Local Records Centre data sets were searched within a 1km radius (species/habitats) and 5km radius (designated sites).

Natural England's mapping services were referenced to check for protected species licences granted within 1km of the site.

4.2 Field Survey

An ecological survey/assessment of the site was undertaken on 7th May 2021 by Dominic Rigby (see Section 2.1, p7).

The survey was undertaken during early May because this gave the best balance between comprehensive botanical recording, nesting birds and visibility before vegetation became too lush to detect nests efficiently without disturbance.

4.2.1 Habitat Survey/Assessment Method

The site/imprint was small (< 150m²). Phase 1 Habitat Survey definitions and codes http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/PDF/pub10_handbookforphase1habitatsurvey.pdf were used to describe habitats, alongside comprehensive botanical lists for each habitat. The habitats were mapped using the newer, UK Habitats Classification (UKHab, 2020).

A search was undertaken for any non-native invasive species, including any species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended).

Habitats were assessed to determine whether they qualified as Habitats of Principal Importance (NERC Act, 2006).

Likely impacts on habitats and flora and appropriate measures to avoid such impacts were assessed. Opportunities to off-set any unavoidable impacts and to deliver overall habitat enhancement were considered.

4.2.2 Protected and Priority Species Assessment Method

Habitats within each section and the overall combination of habitats were inspected and assessed in terms of their potential to support protected species and or Species of Principal Importance (NERC Act, 2006).

A wider area up to 30 metres from the proposed bridge/lock was inspected for the presence of any evidence of protected species, or the presence of habitats likely to support such species, including breeding birds, roosting or foraging bats, otters, water vole amphibians or reptiles.

This included searches for any evidence of otters, water voles and badgers within areas likely to be disturbed by the proposed works, such as footprints, burrows/setts/holts, feeding evidence/feeding remains and latrines / spraints.

Likely impacts on protected and priority species as well as appropriate measures to avoid such impacts were assessed and the need for further survey examined. Opportunities to off-set any unavoidable impacts and to deliver overall habitat enhancement were considered.

5. Baseline Ecological Conditions

5.1 Designated Sites

The site has no statutory designation for nature conservation.

5.1.1 Rochdale Canal SSSI and SAC

The site was 4.3 kilometres south-west of Rochdale Canal Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). That site was designated for its important aquatic habitats of submerged and emergent vegetation, including the nationally scarce SAC/Red-list species Floating Water-plantain (*Luronium natans*).

The project site was within a SSSI Impact Risk Zone for the Rochdale Canal SSSI. The SSSI Impact Risk Zone required the Local Planning Authority to consult with Natural England on likely risks from certain development categories.

The proposals at the project site did not meet any of these criteria.

5.1.2 Clayton Vale Local Nature Reserve

The LNR was 2km east of the site and was separated from the site by extensive urban development.

5.1.3 Sites of Biological Importance

- Rochdale Canal (Stott's Lane – Ducie Street Basin), 400m west
- Ashton Canal (West) – despite its urban setting parts of the canal within the project site was covered by this designation.

Both SBIs were important for aquatic flora, including internationally important populations of floating Water-plantain (*Luronium natans*).

5.2 Habitats

The maximum potential imprint of the works was assessed. This was the area between the bridge and to the north east. To the west of the bridge 30m buffer around the area likely to be covered by the ramps was included. The study area was made up of modified, intensively managed grassland and open water/canal. The remainder was largely canal structures, such as retaining walls and lock gate materials. A hedgerow ran along the south east boundary and pockets of scrub and ruderals were present on the western side of the existing footbridge.

The habitats below were described in area order, largest to smallest, using the Phase One descriptions and codes where suitable. A UKHab-based habitat map was composed from the habitat information gathered, and presented on p26).

5.2.1 Improved Grassland (J.1.2)

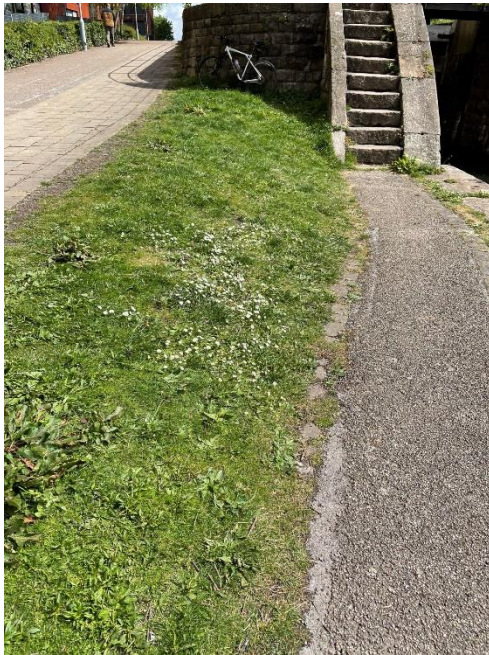
Strips of regularly mown lowland, neutral modified grassland bounded the lock channel on either side.

Photograph One: Modified grassland and hedgerow, looking SW from the northern lock gate.



The grass was largely composed of red fescue *Festuca rubra* and perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, present in smaller numbers/area were annual meadow-grass *Poa annua*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg., and daisy *Bellis perennis*.

Photograph Two: View north to footbridge.



There was a wedge of amenity grass on the western side of the existing footbridge, on the western bank.

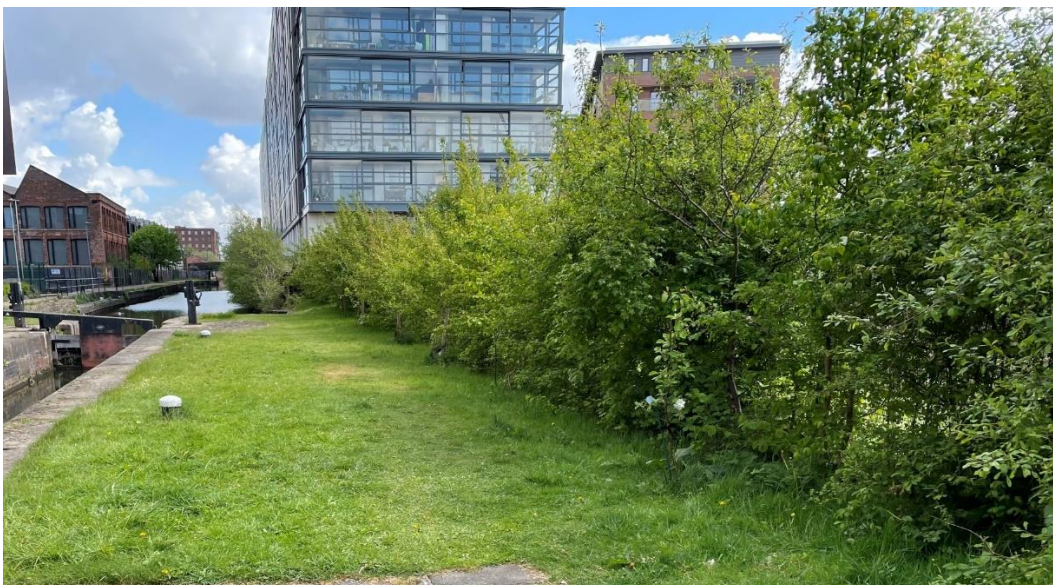
5.2.1 Standing Water (G.1.1.5)

The site was characterised by the canal that ran through it, (e.g., Photograph One, p20). The canal narrowed at the lock where the footbridge was situated. The regular disturbance to the water between the lock gates here, meant there was no vegetation apparent at the time of the survey.

5.2.3 Hedgerow (J.2.1)

A planted hedgerow ran along the south eastern boundary of the site. Composed of largely *Prunus* spp and wild rose *Rosa* spp. With cultivated apple and pear saplings recently planted in front of the northern side.

Photograph Three: Hedge (same features visible in Photograph One)



5.2.4 Scrub (A.2.1)

On the western side of the existing footbridge, on the southern boundary, the hedgerow was replaced by less managed scrub. *Buddleia* was the dominant woody vegetation, with bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. forming a short scrub layer and a patch of disturbed ground composed of creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, herb robert *Geranium robertianum*, nettle *Urtica dioica*, rosebay willow-herb *Chamerion angustifolium* and creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*.

Photograph Four: Scrub immediately south west of the footbridge



This vegetation had “spilled over” to the open vegetation below the retaining wall to create a shelf of sparse vegetation, included in the category below (see 5.2.5.1, p23).

5.2.5 Other Habitats

Photograph Five: Lock, retaining walls and paths (looking NE)



5.2.5.1 Bare Ground (J.4)

On the western side of the existing footbridge, on the southern bank, a patch of formerly bare ground around the base of defunct stone steps was a patch of sparsely vegetated land comprised of creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, herb robert *Geranium robertianum*, and nettle *Urtica dioica*.

Photograph Six: Former bare ground dominated by creeping cinquefoil.



5.2.5.2 Retaining Walls and Steps (J.2.5)

The retaining walls of the canal and canal sides contained vegetation. Maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes*, creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, *Buddleia davidii* and ivy-leaved toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis* grew from the mortar and cracks in the structures.

Photograph Seven: Vegetation growing within the retaining walls.



5.2.5.3 Lock structures (J.5)

The lock closest to the existing footbridge contained occasional vegetation growing among it: *Buddleia davidii*, and small-flowered hairy willowherb *Epilobium parviflorum* (not yet in flower).

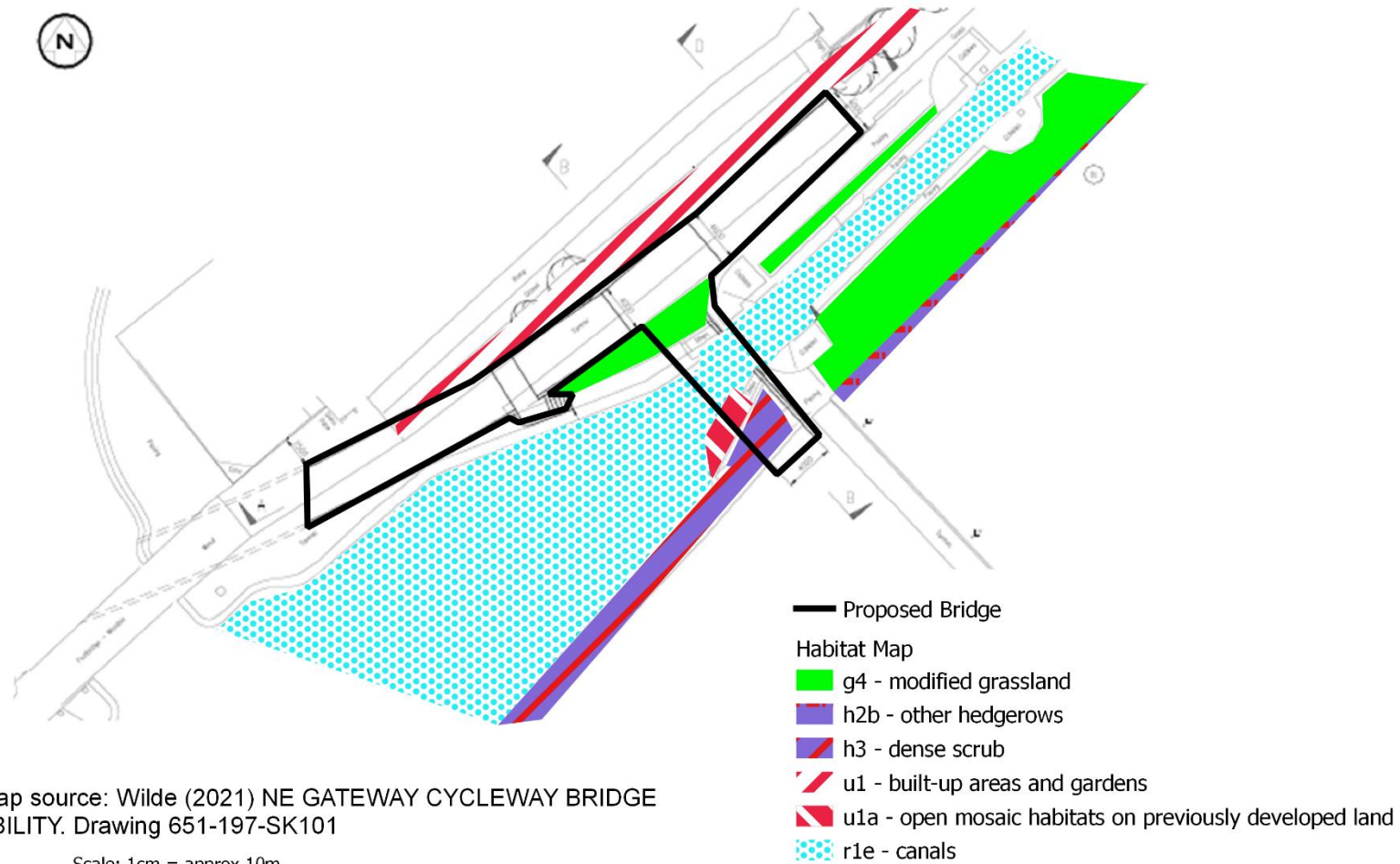
Photograph Eight: Lock structure hosting vegetation



5.2.5.3 Bare Ground: Paths (J.4)

The towpath and connecting paths were variously cobbled, tarmacked or cement paved. The tow path, which ran along the north side of the canal and footbridge, was street lit and accompanied by occasional planting of buddleia, grey alder *Alnus incarna* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*.

Figure Three:
Habitats (UKHab) overlaid with proposed bridge



5.3 Species

5.3.1 Plants

Most plants on site were described in the habitat section. No plants of legislative or policy importance were recorded. Most significantly no floating water plantain was noted.

5.3.2 Invertebrates

There were no database records of significant invertebrates recorded. The frequency of *Buddleia davidii* at the site would attract many common nectar-seeking invertebrates.

5.2.3 Amphibians

The steep sides to the water structures and the disturbance caused by lock features meant this area was not suited to amphibians. Amphibians would not be referred to again in this report.

5.2.4 Reptiles

The closest reptile record (slow worm *Anguis fragilis*) was 2.5km away, with unsuitable habitat in between. It was unlikely, but not impossible, that they would occur on site.

5.2.5 Birds

Blackbird and goldfinch were nesting in the *prunus* hedgerow (see Photograph Three, p21) that ran along the southern boundary of the site. This habitat and the buddleia/scrub to its SW (Photograph Four, p22) provided suitable nesting habitat for several common species of bird.

5.2.6 Bats

The closest granted European Protected Species (EPS) licence application (from Natural England) for bats was approximately 450m east of site for destruction of a small common pipistrelle roost. Four other EPS licenses were within 1km, all for bat species.

Bat activity surveys in 2020, on the land abutting to the south (as part of planning application 128191/FO/2020) reported several bats using the canal section. The bat reports relating to the other neighbouring applications (see section 4.1, p17) all recorded bats, most of which were favouring the canal.

Potential roost features were noted at the site (see Photographs Nine to Twelve, below). The locks, the cobbled-set retaining walls and the brick retaining walls all provided suitable roosting areas for crevice-dwelling bats. These features were at a low level and would be subject to slight water level fluctuations. The structures were assessed as having low but not negligible bat roost potential.

Photographs Nine to Twelve: Bat roost features in cracks, services and joins



5.2.7 Badgers

The site did not provide habitat suitable for badger setts. Badgers would not be referred to again in this report.

5.2.8 Otter/Water Vole

The site was deemed unsuitable for these aquatic mammals, given the location, disturbance and site-structure. These species would not be referred to again in this report.

5.2.9 Hedgehog

The extensive grassland between the canal and tram line at New Islington, combined with the small patch of dense scrub and the hedgerow within the project site (Photographs Three and Four, p21, p22) provided habitat suitable for hedgehog foraging, nesting and hibernation.

5.2.10 INNS

No invasive non-native species were recorded.

6. Ecological Constraints and Opportunities

6.1 Constraints

6.1.1 Protected Sites

The aquatic plants meeting the criteria for the designation of the local SBIs were absent from the project site and thus the footprint of the development would not affect these sites.

6.1.2 Habitats

6.1.2.1 Priority Habitat: Hedgerows

The hedgerow running SW to NE from the current footbridge, which marked the eastern boundary of the site would not be altered by this development.

However, it was already marked for removal as part of large development already granted planning permission (ref: 128191/FO/2020). See also 6.1.3.3 Birds, p31.

6.1.2.2 Other Habitats

- An area of approximately 12m² of mixed scrub, including non-native - but nectar rich - buddleia, would need to be removed immediately SW of the existing footbridge. However, it was already marked for removal as part of a large development already granted planning permission (ref: 128191/FO/2020). See also 6.1.3.3 Birds, p31.
- A small patch (<5m²) of Improved/modified grassland area would be reduced by the ramp leading from the NW aspect. Moreover, the existing grassed area underneath the proposed crossing was unlikely to survive in the shade of the new bridge ramp.

6.1.3 Species

6.1.3.1 Plants

The presence of the nationally-rare floating water plantain in the locality was a consideration. Although unlikely to occur immediately within the development/project footprint (see 5.2.1, p21; 5.3.1, p26) a check for the species' characteristic stolons should be made by a suitably experienced ecologist immediately before works started. If present, a Method Statement would need to be produced recommending protection/avoidance measures.

6.1.3.2 Reptiles

Although the closest known slow worm record was 2.5km from the site, suitable habitat existed within the project's footprint. Any vegetation removal would need to proceed under a Scrub Removal Method Statement, with species specific procedures.

6.1.3.3 Birds

Nesting birds could be affected by scrub vegetation clearance (see 6.2.1.2, p30) and potential disturbance to the hedgerow (NE of footbridge) and scrub line (SW) by construction activities. Both these habitats were already marked for removal under a permitted adjacent development 128191/FO/2020. However, should the current project proceed the possibility of destroying active birds' nests was high. Such works would need to take place between October and February, to ensure no legal offence was committed: a Nesting Birds Method Statement/seasonal avoidance mitigation would be necessary.

More information was required as to the possible presence of black redstart, a Schedule 1 species (see 3.1, p12) and the potential of the site as a feeding area for the species when nesting locally.

6.1.3.4 Bats

Bats were known to use the canal as a foraging and commuting route and that roosts existed within 450m of the site (see 5.2.5, p27). The existing features were assessed as having low bat roost potential, thus triggering the need for a single bat emergence/re-entry survey.

Any bat survey would also need to consider the impact of lighting potentially cast by the permitted, planned construction along the southern aspect of the site between the site and New Islington tram stop.

6.1.3.5 Hedgehog

Hedgehog-suitable habitat occurred on site. Scrub vegetation clearance activities could affect the species. This habitat compartment was already marked for removal under a permitted adjacent development 128191/FO/2020.

Should any scrub of the vegetation flagged for removal remain on site when work was about to proceed, a Scrub Removal Method Statement, with species-specific procedures would be required.

6.1.3.6 INNS

No INNS were recorded during the May site-visit. However, further checks should be undertaken later in the season, for example during the bat/bird surveys during the summer, and an update provided. Should INNS be discovered within the project footprint an INNS Method Statement would be required to ensure the works did not cause their spread.

6.2 Opportunities

There was an opportunity for biodiversity enhancement with this project.

The removal of scrub from the SW corner was the only *habitat* impact that would result in biodiversity loss. However, this had already received planning permission through another development (128191/FO/2020), which had been accompanied by an assessment for biodiversity net gain.

Any replacement/compensatory planting relating to the current project would be an enhancement. There were opportunities for new planting of nectar-rich forbs and shrubs adjacent to the ramp structure.

Figure Four: Visualisation of New Bridge and Access (from Wilde, 2020)



6.3 Further Surveys

6.3.1 Bats

At least one bat emergence or re-entry surveys was required.

6.3.2 Birds

Further investigation into the possible use of the site by Schedule One, black redstart was required.

6.3.2 INNS

It was recommended that presence INNS, and particularly Himalayan balsam was monitored during any further visits to the site over the summer.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The desk study had revealed that a planning application for a large development had been granted, that neighboured the site to the south. The associated works would include the removal of most of the bird-nesting habitat and potential hedgehog/slow worm habitat on the new bridge project site. Should those work have proceeded prior to the start of the pedestrian and cycle bridge project the actions below relating to slow worm/hedgehog may no longer be relevant. Also, the likelihood of encountering nesting birds within the construction-impact footprint would be greatly reduced.

- **Bats**

At least one dusk emergence or pre-dawn re-entry survey was required on the existing canal structures/footbridge. Confirmed presence of a bat roost would trigger the need for minimum of three surveys to characterise the roost.

- **Nesting Birds**

- Nesting birds were present within the project footprint. Any vegetation clearances or works close to nesting habitat would require nesting checks. Avoidance of nesting season by undertaking clearance works between September/October and February would minimise the risk of causing a legal offence.
- Black redstart nesting presence/absence needed to be determined.

- **INNS**

More information was required on INNS, particularly regarding Himalayan balsam. If present an INNS Method Statement would be required to prevent the spread of Schedule Nine species.

- **Floating water plantain**

A check for this red-listed species prior to works starting was required. If confirmed, a Methods Statement would be required implementing avoidance measures.

- **Slow worm and Hedgehog**

Method Statements including site checks by a suitably qualified ecologist (Ecological Clerk of Works-ECOW) would be required *if* suitable habitat were still present at the time of the works.

The actions and timetable for the works above was summarised in Table One below.

Table One: Potential Further Ecological Actions Required

Species	Further Survey	Time	Action
INNS	Observation at time of bird/bat surveys	June-Aug	Method Statement - if present
Slow worm/Hedgehog	N/A	Sept/Oct and Feb optimum time for vegetation clearance	Method Statement/ECow for any vegetation clearance
Bats	One (minimum) emergence/re-entry survey	May-Aug	Survey; Report/Recommendations If present: protected species licence incorporating mitigation, AFTER planning permission granted.
Nesting birds	Black redstart	March -Aug	If present: Avoidance of vegetation clearance (March - August); Method Statement (general and species-specific depending on survey results)

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