

BRITISH STANDARD 5837

TREE SURVEYS ARBORICULTURAL IMPLICATION STUDIES

TPO/PLANNING ADVICE/ PROJECT MANAGEMENT

TREE INVENTORIES AND RISK ASSESSMENTS

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLANS

TREE PLANTING SCHEMES

TPO RE-SURVEY



Ashbrook Business Park Heald Green

Ecological Assessment Report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Kingdom Ecology have carried out an Ecological Assessment of an approximately 0.33ha area of land located at Ashbrook Office Park, Woodhouse Park, Heald Green, Stockport. M22 5LB (National Grid Reference SJ 8421 8589). The location of the study area is shown on Figure 1 in the Appendix.

Survey has been carried out to identify potential ecological constraints to any future development of the site. The proposed development is to construct four commercial warehouse units with associated parking and an access from Longstone Road.

An Ecological Scoping Survey was undertaken on the 7th July 2021. Surveys were carried out by Richard Roe (BSc, MSc, MIEEM, CEnv). Richard has extensive experience of undertaking protected species, habitat and botanical surveys as a professional ecological consultant with over twenty years' experience.

1.2 Purpose of Report

This report provides and outlines the findings of the initial field surveys undertaken in July 2021.

Surveys aimed to identify habitats and species which are either of importance in terms of their conservation value or are afforded statutory legal protection. The presence of such habitats or species would form a material consideration during the planning process and could pose a constraint to the redevelopment of the site.

The field surveys comprised of an ecological walkover survey with a search for habitats that could support any protected species.

Following a description of the survey findings and an evaluation of habitats present, the report goes on to make broad recommendations for further works, mitigation and ecological enhancement measures where relevant.

1.3 Relevant Legislation

1.3.1 Birds

All wild birds in England and Wales are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird, or take, damage or destroy the nest (whilst being built or in use) or its eggs.

2 Field Survey Methods

2.1 Survey Aims and Objectives

The survey aim was to assess the site as to its ecological importance by assessing the value of habitats and their suitability to support any protected or notable species. The purpose of this was to highlight any ecological constraints associated with future development proposals.

Field survey comprised of an ecological walkover survey, this included an assessment of habitats at the site in terms of their suitability to support any protected species including bats, badger and breeding birds.

Species that are considered unlikely to be significantly affected by the proposed development, even if known to be present in the general vicinity, were 'scoped out' of the assessment.

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Walkover Survey

An Ecological walkover and Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the site was undertaken on the 7th July 2021. Survey was carried out following standard methodologies as described in the *'Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey - a technique for environmental audit'* (JNCC, 2004¹).

The walkover survey sought to highlight any ecological constraints associated with future works proposals and to inform further ecological survey of the site, where relevant.

The aims of the Habitat Assessment were to:

- identify and map all areas of semi-natural habitat within each study area;
- provide an initial botanical description of the semi-natural habitats surveyed;
- identify areas or habitats that are of particular ecological interest for nature conservation and which require more detailed investigation;

¹ JNCC (2004) 'Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey - a technique for environmental audit'

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Ecological Assessment***

- provide additional information regarding incidental observations of protected species and the potential of habitats to support such species.

A habitat map was produced and lists of dominant or notable vascular plant species were recorded in each of the major habitat types where relevant and possible.

A map of the habitats recorded within the study area is shown in Figure 2 in the Appendix. Typical habitats recorded at the site are also shown in photographs in the Appendix.

3 Field Survey Results

3.1 Site Description and Habitats

The study site comprises of a 0.33ha area of land located on the western edge of the suburb of Heald Green, Stockport.

From historic aerial imagery, the site previously comprised of agricultural grassland. In 2013 the area appears to have been cleared and used as a construction compound and carpark during the construction of the adjacent commercial building. Since 2013, the site appears to have been left unmanaged and abandoned up until April 2021 when the site appears to have been mown.

The site now mainly comprises of a moderately diverse, marshy grassland and tall herb habitat with areas of bramble scrub. The boundaries are marked by trees and scrub (including some scattered mature oak trees beyond the site boundary). A narrow watercourse runs along the southwestern and north-western boundaries of the site. A footpath runs beyond the site's southwestern boundary. No evidence of Schedule 9 non-native, invasive species were identified at the site.

Surrounding habitats are largely developed and include relatively recently constructed commercial buildings to the north, south and east. To the west there is a row of residential 19th century cottages with associated gardens. Wider surrounding habitats comprise of a mosaic of residential buildings, commercial buildings and large hardstanding carparks associated with the nearby airport. There are also occasional small pockets of undeveloped former areas of agricultural land.

Habitats at the study area are Target Noted and shown on Figure 2 in the Appendix. Target Note descriptions are provided in Table 1 below. Photographs of the habitats are provided in the Appendix.

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Table 1- Habitat Target Notes

Target Note	Description
1	Marshy Grassland. The site largely comprises of an area of rank, marshy grassland and tall herbaceous habitat. The sward comprises of tall grasses, rushes and tall herbs and is unmanaged. The grassland is moderately diverse and includes the following species:- frequent soft rush, hard rush, compact rush, reed canary-grass, meadow foxtail, rough meadow-grass, great willowherb, creeping thistle and broad leaved dock plus occasional Yorkshire fog, common couch, cock's foot, red fescue, false oat-grass, common bent, greater bird's-foot trefoil, hedge woundwort, creeping buttercup, hogweed, selfheal, perforate St. John's-wort, common bird's foot-trefoil, bramble, field horsetail, meadow vetchling, tufted vetch and rare black knapweed, meadow buttercup, hairy sedge, common ragwort, nettle, celery leaved-buttercup & yellow iris. The grassland grades into denser bramble scrub near the rear of the site.
2	Bramble scrub. The marshy grassland grades into a bramble dominated habitat near the north western boundary of the site. The bramble supports similar species to those described for Target Note 1 but with more reed canary-grass, cleavers, hogweed and docks plus a small patch of snowberry scrub.
3	Earth Bund with Ruderals. There is an earth bung running along the south-eastern boundary of the site dividing the site from an adjacent carpark. The bund supports tall ruderal vegetation comprising of frequent reed canary grass, common couch, cock's foot and false oat-grass plus creeping thistle, broadleaved dock, great willowherb, with occasional bramble, ragwort, broadleaved willowherb, meadow vetchling and hedge woundwort. The bund is of relatively recent origin (approximately 5-10 years old).
4	Boundary Trees. There is a row of trees running along the boundary of the site and an adjacent Premier Inn Hotel. The band of trees is located beyond the site boundary and so would be retained as part of the development. The line of trees includes 2 x copper beech trees and a mature ash tree. The remainder comprises of a band of young sycamore, ash, hawthorn, cherry and oak. There is also a small stand of young ash trees (less than 5m tall) extending into the site at this location. This small stand of young ash would likely be removed. The trees are considered to be unsuitable for roosting bats.
5	Boundary Trees. There is a further row of young and semi-mature trees and scrub running along the north-western boundary of the site on the opposite of the brook. The trees are located outside of the study site boundary. The trees comprise of a mix of species including sycamore, ash, hawthorn, cypress, willow and broom. A small stand of willow scrub extends into the site and is located on the south side of the brook.

Target Note	Description
6	Brook and Willow Scrub. A narrow watercourse runs along the southwestern and north-western boundaries of the site. The brook/drain is shallow (maximum of 20cm deep) with a sand and gravel substrate and is approximately 1m in width. The brook has bare earth banks with encroaching bramble. The brook is heavily shaded by surrounding trees and scrub. The brook supports no in-channel vegetation. The watercourse is considered to be unsuitable for water vole or otter. On the east side of the brook and encroaching onto the site is a stand of willow scrub.
7	Boundary Trees and Scrub. The western boundary of the site comprises of a former hawthorn hedgerow with oak and ash standard trees. In addition to the hawthorn, hazel and sycamore scrub is also present. Vegetation around the ditch comprises of bramble with hogweed, ivy, cleavers and reed canary-grass. This area is located outside of the study site and would have previously formed a field boundary when the site was in use as a pasture field. There is a footpath running between the brook and the carpark of an adjacent commercial building.

3.2 Protected Species

3.2.1 Breeding birds

The trees and scrub at the site could support nesting birds during the breeding season.

3.2.2 Badger

No field signs indicative of badger activity was found within the study site.

3.2.3 Otters and Water Vole

A narrow watercourse runs along the southwestern and north-western boundaries of the site. The brook/drain is shallow (maximum of 20cm deep) with a sand and gravel substrate and is approximately 1m in width. The brook has bare earth banks with encroaching bramble. The brook is heavily shaded by surrounding trees and scrub. The watercourse links up with Gatley Brook through a series of culverts.

The watercourse is shown as an isolated drain on on-line mapping of the wider site. The drain is likely heavily urbanised with numerous culverted sections and trash screens etc.

The drain is too shallow to support significant fish. The brook supports no in-channel vegetation.

Owing to the lack of suitable foraging opportunities and likely barriers associated with its urban location, lack of vegetation and heavy shading, the brook is considered to be unsuitable for both water vole and otter.

3.2.4 Bats

No significant trees would be removed as part of development proposals. Therefore, works are unlikely to affect any roosting bats.

3.2.5 Other Protected Species

It is considered to be unlikely that any other protected species would be present within the study site.

4 Evaluation and Recommendations

4.1 Summary

4.1.1 Habitats

Field survey has assessed the ecological value of an approximate 0.33ha area of land located at Ashbrook Business Park on the edge of Heald Green, Stockport.

Habitats principally comprise of rank, moderately diverse, marshy grassland with bramble scrub and tall herb which has developed on a patch of derelict agricultural grassland.

The site boundaries are marked by broadleaved trees and scrub. There are no mature trees within the site itself however there are some patches of willow and young ash trees present within the site boundary. A narrow watercourse runs along the southwestern and north-western boundaries of the site. The watercourse links up to Gatley Brook.

Habitats at the site, although unlikely to be of any significant botanical value are nevertheless considered to be of biodiversity value with the site likely to offer habitat to a variety of wildlife potentially including common birds, amphibians, small mammals, invertebrates and bats.

The mature trees located beyond the site's boundaries are considered to be the features of greatest ecological value. Mature trees, as well as being culturally and ecologically valuable in their own right, are also of importance to invertebrates, birds, mammals and other associated ecological groups through the provision of foraging resources and a variety of ecological niches.

The zone of influence of the development comprises of all habitats within the redline planning boundary plus immediate adjacent habitats including the brook plus the trees and scrub immediately beyond the site boundaries.

The proposed development would result in the loss of all bramble scrub, tall herb and marshy grassland habitats at the site. However, the development would seek to retain the trees and scrub habitats along the site boundaries.

4.1.2 Protected Species

The areas of bramble scrub, woody scrub and trees could support nesting birds during the breeding bird season.

It is considered unlikely that any other protected species would be directly impacted by development proposals.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Habitats

Development of the site will result in the loss of moderately diverse, marshy grassland habitat. Although not of significant botanical value this habitat offers a small but potentially valuable resource for local wildlife within a landscape that is largely developed. It will not be possible to retain areas of habitat at the site, it is therefore recommended that the developer contributes towards a local conservation project in order to offset this impact. The local Council may have some ongoing conservation projects in the area which could benefit from financial support.

An appropriate pollution prevention plan will need to be put in place during construction to ensure that no sediment, run-off or chemical pollutants impact upon the adjacent water course.

Where any new trees and areas of planting are proposed as part of landscaping proposals, it is recommended that new planting includes species which can provide nectar sources for insects and berries/fruits for invertebrates and birds.

The following small/medium sized tree species are recommended as they offer suitable foraging opportunities to various native wildlife (including birds and invertebrates): rowan, wild cherry, crab apple, silver birch, holly, and willow. These trees should be included in the planting mix.

Any areas of ornamental shrubbery should include suitable nectar sources for insects. The Royal Horticultural Society provides a list of suitable plants for invertebrates (see rhs.org.uk/plantsforpollinators). It is recommended that this list is consulted when producing detailed landscaping designs for the site.

4.2.2 Breeding Birds

All wild birds in England and Wales are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird, or take, damage or destroy the nest (whilst being built or in use) or its eggs.

It is therefore recommended that future development of the site including any scrub clearance or tree management avoid taking place during the breeding bird season (March-September inclusive).

Where this is not possible, a check for breeding birds should be carried out immediately prior to the start of works by an appropriately qualified ecologist.

If during works any nesting birds are found, works should immediately stop and further advice should be sought from an appropriately qualified ecologist. The ecologist would mark out a buffer zone around the nest, the size of the buffer zone would be determined depending upon the species encountered and the nest site location. No works would be allowed to take place within the buffer area until all young birds had fledged. Fledging of young birds would need to be confirmed by the appropriately qualified ecologist.

4.2.3 Further Site Enhancements

Opportunities to enhance the biodiversity value of the site should be designed into future development proposals.

Ecological opportunities should include the provision of bat and bird box scheme which should be designed by an appropriately qualified ecologist. The bat and bird boxes should be built into the structure of the new buildings.

Further bird boxes for common garden bird species can be installed on retained mature trees at the site's boundaries.

Lighting proposals will need to ensure that bat box locations are not illuminated of an evening.

5 Appendix

Photographs

Photograph 1 - Marshy grassland habitats at the site



Photograph 2 - Watercourse on western boundary



Photograph 3 - Tree line on eastern boundary



Photograph 4 - Bramble, scrub and trees on northern boundary



Photograph 5 - Scrub on western boundary



Photograph 6- Trees and footpath on western boundary



**FIGURE 1-
Site Location**



KEY

 Study Site

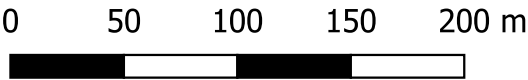
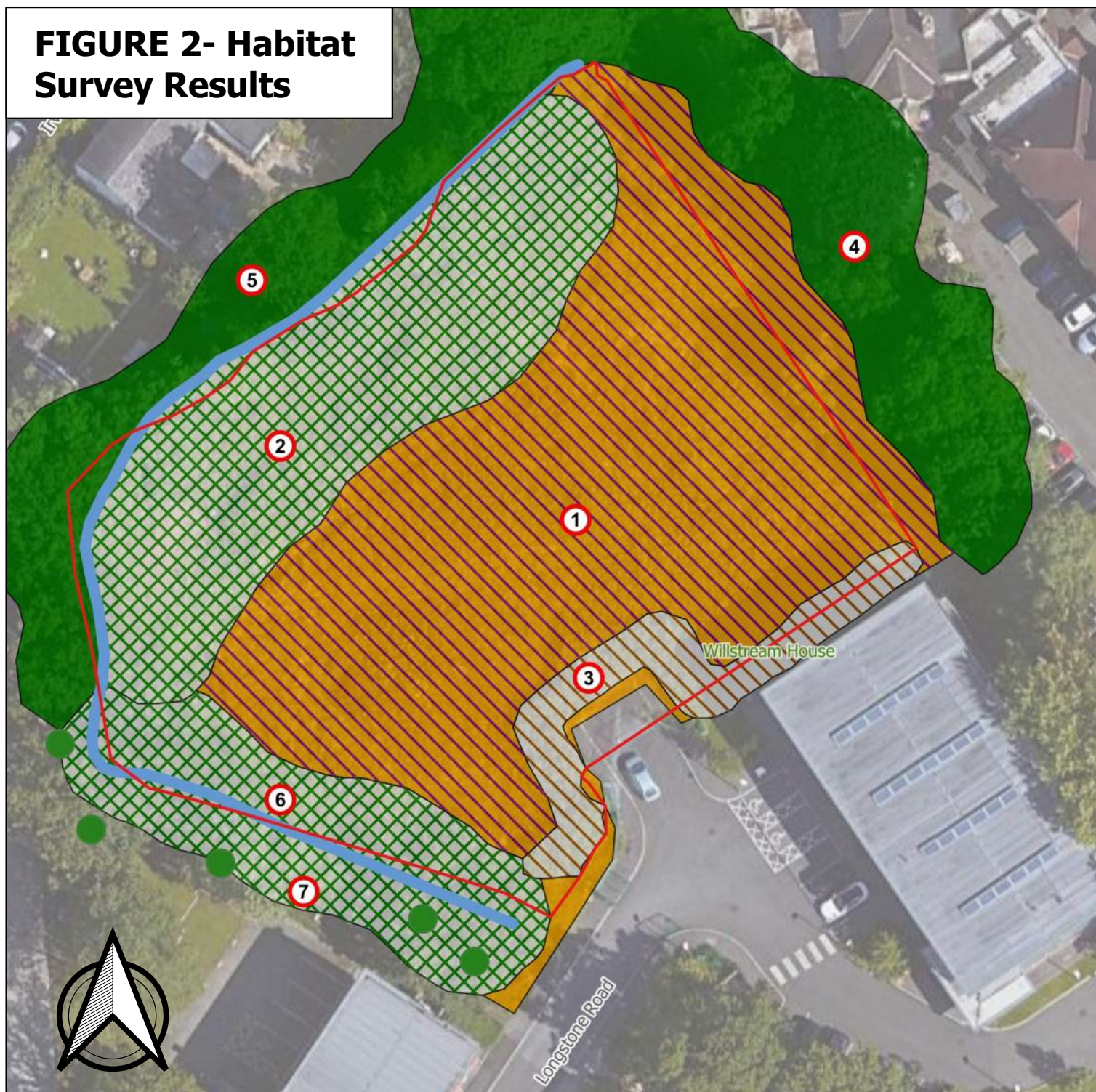


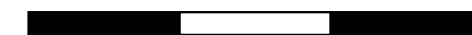
**FIGURE 2- Habitat
Survey Results**



KEY

-  Study Site
-  Target Note
-  Tree
-  Watercourse
-  Broadleaved woodland
-  Continuous scrub
-  Marshy grassland
-  Ruderal herb

0 10 20 30 m



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