

'Phase 3' Site, New Islington, Manchester

Extended Phase 1 Habitats Survey

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1. Introduction

Sensible Ecological Survey Solutions was commissioned to complete an extended Phase I Habitat Survey at site referred to as:

"New Islington Phase 3, New Islington, Manchester, M4 6HF"

(to be subsequently referred to as '**NI3**' or '**the site**'). The site (**Figures A & Photograph 1**) comprises of a roughly rectangular plot of recently disturbed urban wasteland approximately 75 x 40m in area. The plot forms part of the larger 'New Islington' redevelopment area, much of which has already been developed to new residential usage. Part of the NI2 plot to the immediate north of NI3 however remains undeveloped as urban wasteland.

The Phase 1 Ecology Survey identified no valued habitats within the site or within its immediate surrounds. The site is not considered to be important for protected wildlife species other than small numbers of breeding birds during the summer period only. There are no designated wildlife sites in proximity to the site and none are considered under threat from the proposed development of the site, either directly or indirectly.

Figure A: Aerial view of Site and surrounds.

Note: The aerial photograph was taken in March 2017 before recent development to the immediate south of the site. The approximate boundary to the site is indicated by red lines.



Photograph 1: General view across site, taken at time of survey.

Note: The ground has been previously stripped across the whole site leaving bare earth which is now re-vegetating with grasses, tall ruderals, and rush (in wetter areas).



Figure B: Plan showing red line boundary to Phase 3 (N13) development site'

Note: The adjoining 'Manchester Life Old Mill Street Scheme (not shown on plan) to the immediate south of N13 is already subject to construction works to create a multi storey apartments structure (Photograph 13), and does not form part of the current Phase 1 Ecology survey area.



1.1 Scope of Survey & Appraisal

The ecological assessment reviewed in this report comprises of three key elements:

1. An evaluation of the conservation status of the site based on a desktop review of collated data for the site and surrounds, including protected species records and nature conservation designations for the area;
2. An assessment of the site's habitat composition and floristic abundance, which is derived from a walkover survey.
3. A protected species audit that evaluates the likelihood of protected or otherwise notable species occurring on the site based on appraisal of the sites habitats and features.

1.2 Acting Consultant Qualifications

The ecological appraisal was completed by Dr David Bell, Director, Sensible Ecological Survey Solutions Ltd (SESS). Dr Bell has almost 40 years' experience as a professional ecologist. He was a Local Planning Authority Principal Ecologist for fourteen years before moving into private sector consultancy. He has led on ecological appraisals at sites across the UK, prepared Environmental Impact Assessments and served as an ecology expert witness at Public Inquiries. Dr Bell is a long standing member of the 'Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management' (MCIEEM). He has considerable experience in the completion of protected species surveys and assessments, and the development of species mitigation schemes associated with development proposals.

2. Methodology

The extended Phase I habitat survey was undertaken with reference to the Institute of Environmental Assessment's 'Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment' (IEMA, 1997). In accordance with these guidelines the survey comprises of both a desk based data trawl and field study, as described below.

2.1 Phase 1 Habitats Desk Study

The desk study component of the ecological appraisal comprises reference to statutory and non-statutory nature conservation agency data bases. The aim of this exercise is to supplement the field survey results by collating and reviewing existing ecological information relevant to the site and the local area. Records of legally protected species and sites of importance for nature conservation, e.g. 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSI) are obtained in order that potential impacts from the development proposals can be assessed.

Species information was obtained for a **10 km square search area** around the site from the '**National Biodiversity Network**' (NBN) web site, in line with standard guidelines (IEMA, 1997). Statutory wildlife sites data was obtained from the DEFRA's '**Magic**' **Interactive Mapping** web site.

2.2 Phase 1 Habitats Field Survey

The Phase 1 field survey of the site was undertaken on the 19th July 2018. Weather conditions were sunny spells with broken cloud cover throughout the survey period. Full access was available to all parts of the site and immediate surrounds.

Phase I Habitats Survey

An extended Phase I Habitat Survey was undertaken for the whole site and land and features up to 250m radius out from the site, following the guidelines recommended by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (IEA). The Phase I survey aims to identify habitat types and species present at the time of survey, and also assess the potential of the habitats and features present to support other protected or notable species.

According to IEMA 1997, Phase I surveys can be undertaken all year round to support and verify the findings of the desk study. Although certain protected species surveys need to be undertaken during particular seasons it is possible through a Phase I habitat survey to identify any potential habitats on

site where protected species may be present. In the event that suitable habitats are identified, it will be necessary to undertake further seasonal surveys to investigate the potential for protected species fully. However, in the event that no suitable habitats for protected species are identified on site, a Phase I habitat survey is sufficient to determine the potential impacts associated with a proposed development. The dominant plant species were recorded and habitats classified according to their vegetation types. These are presented in the standard Phase I habitat survey format with habitat descriptions and plan (see **Appendix A**).

The presence of noxious and invasive species, such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), if encountered during the field survey was also recorded.

3. Results

3.1 Desk Study

Designated Wildlife Sites

No part of the application site has been designated for its nature conservation interest including any statutory designation such as **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** or **Local Nature Reserve (LNR)**. The nearest statutory designated site is '**Clayton Vale LNR**' located 2.2 km to the east (**Table 1 & Figure B**). The nearest SSSI is the '**Rochdale Canal SSSI**' located 4.7 km to the north east at its closest point. The site just falls within the outer limit of the Natural England defined **Rochdale Canal SSSI Natural England 'Impact Risk Zone'**.

Table 1: Statutory Designated Sites within 10km radius of site

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>
Rochdale Canal	4.7 km NE (at nearest point)

Local Nature Reserves (LNR's)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>
Clayton Vale	2.2 km E
Boggart Hole Clough	4.1 km NE
The Cliff Kersal Dale	4.4 km NW
Kersal Moor	4.9 km NW
Blackley Forest	4.9 km N
Highfield Country Park	5.4 km SE
Trafford Ecology Park	6.1 km W
Chorlton Ess & Ivy Green	6.7 km SW
Three Sister	7.6 km W

The nearest 'Priority Habitats Register' site is for woodland located 800m to the south east of the site.

The nearest Site of Biological Importance (SBI) is the '**Ashton Canal (West) SBI**' whose Islington Branch flows to the immediate south west of the site.

Figure B: Plan showing distribution of Statutory Wildlife Sites around the site.

Note: The approximate site location is indicated by a red circle. The purple rings radiating out from SSSIs indicate Natural England alert 'SSSI Impact Risk Areas' (data from 'Magic' Interactive mapping)



Protected Species Records

A **National Biodiversity Network (NBN)** data search for the **10.0 km grid square (SJ89)** in which the site is situated generated records for the following species which **have the potential to be present at the site given the habitats present**:

Amphibians

Common toad (*Bufo bufo*)

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)

Birds

House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Pied wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Mammals

Common Pipistrelle bat (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*)

Soprano Pipistrelle bat (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*)

European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)

Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentonii*)

Noctule bat (*Nyctalus noctula*)

3.2 Field Survey

Phase 1 Habitats Survey

A Phase I Ecology Survey was undertaken in order to identify the habitats present within the site and any habitats or features of ecological importance, which may be directly or indirectly affected by any proposed development.

Habitat Descriptions

During the field survey, all habitats present at the site were mapped using the standard methodology (JNCC, 1993). Findings are presented as a Phase 1 Habitats Plan (**Appendix A**).

The Phase I survey identified the following habitats within or in close proximity to the site (listed in approximate order of decreasing area:

ON SITE

- Semi improved neutral grassland
- Bare ground
- Tall ruderal
- Scattered Scrub

ADJOINING LAND

- Bare ground
- Hard standing
- Buildings
- Open water
- Amenity grassland
- Scattered trees
- Marginal vegetation

Descriptions of Key Habitats recorded at the Site

Semi Improved Neutral grassland

The majority of the site is covered in semi improved neutral grassland (**Appendix B: Photographs 2 & 3**). In wetter areas stands of rush have established (**Photograph 5**) This habitat was once widespread across the wider site but now largely lost to site clearance and development. The grassland supports a good mix of herbs and flowers (**Photograph 4**), however the habitat is now so isolated and restricted in area to have little remaining value.

The semi improved neutral grassland is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Bare Ground

Areas of recently disturbed bare ground (**Photograph 7**) are found to the centre and northern end of the site associated with plant movements. The bare ground has in places been colonised by scattered stands of low perennial plants.

The bare ground is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Tall Ruderal

Scattered small stands of tall ruderal communities are found largely to the site perimeters. The largest stand of tall ruderals covers an earth mound to the centre of the site (**Photograph 6**). The ruderals will have some limited forage value to the local birds, however it restricted area scored down its overall value.

The tall ruderals plants are assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Scattered Scrub

To the margins of the site, small stands of scrub remain (**Photograph 5**). The scrub is dominated by self seeded Buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). The very restricted area and isolation of the scrub means that nature conservation value is low.

The scattered scrub is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Invasive Plants

No evidence of invasive plant species was recorded.

Descriptions of Key Habitats recorded in proximity to the Site

Bare Ground

The NI2 site to the immediate west of the target site (**Figure B**) has been recently cleared of vegetation leaving bare ground (**Photograph 8**). Although invasive ground level plants are starting to colonise the bare ground the habitat is of low wildlife interest.

The bare ground is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Hard-standing

The site is surrounded by extensive areas of hard-standing, ranging from roads, canal side paths (**Photograph 10**), and vehicle parking provision.

The hard-standing represents a hostile environment to most forms of wildlife, although it may offer some foraging opportunities to insect eating passerines such as pied wagtails (*Motacilla alba*).

The areas of hard-standing are assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Buildings

The site is surrounded by new residential buildings (**Photographs 6,7, 8, 9 & 13**) and then moving further afield by long established residential and commercial buildings.

None of the buildings in close proximity to the site are considered to have potential to support roosting bats, and no evidence of former bird breeding activity was recorded.

The buildings are assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Open water

To the immediate south of the site is found a length of canal and former locks (**Photograph 10**). The canal sides have been restored as an amenity/landscape feature, however, the canal water still represent a largely sterile aquatic environment with very limited marginal habitats. The aquatic nature conservation interest is therefore low.

The open water is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Amenity grassland

A small area of amenity grassland is found to the south of the site (**Photograph 12**). The grassland is species poor and other than providing grazing and roosting for Canada geese, has little nature conservation interest..

The amenity grassland is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Scattered Trees

Trees are currently absent from the site, however small numbers of juvenile trees have been planted as landscape features just outside the site boundary. The trees are too small at the current time to have any nature conservation value.

The scattered trees are assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Marginal vegetation

Although the margins of the canal to the south of the site are generally sterile with no marginal vegetation; a small stand of vegetation just a few square metres in area is present on the canal side and close to the site boundary (**Photograph 11**). Unfortunately the very restricted area and isolation of the vegetation means that it has little nature conservation value.

The marginal vegetation is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

3.3. Protected Species

Protected species are those with statutory protection measures, as:

- Listed on Schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
- Covered under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, and;
- Listed on Annexes of the European Communities Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (implemented by the Conservation Regulations 1994 (as amended)).

Notable species are those that are not specifically protected by the statutes mentioned above, but are nevertheless important in a regional or local context. This includes species covered within BAPs and those that are regionally or locally scarce or rare.

Given the nature of the site and its location, the following species or animal groups are considered to require special reference.

Bats

There are no buildings or features, such as trees, within or located in close proximity to the considered to have potential to support bat roosts. The site does not contain habitats or features which might indicate value to the local bat population as a foraging area. The adjoining canal waterways would be expected to be used as bat flight corridors, however, the site itself is unlikely to be important.

The impact on bats is assessed as negligible.

Birds

No evidence of notable species of bird, such as barn owl (*Tyto alba*) was recorded during the site walkover, and the site is considered to be generally to have low potential to support specially protected species.

A range of common passerine species would be expected to be foraging within the grassland and scrub habitats on site. Opportunities for nesting are generally poor, however the small stands of scrub and Reed (*Phragmites*) could support small numbers of nests. The presence of ground nesting species such as skylark and meadow pipit cannot be totally ruled out, however the relatively small area of the site's grassland combined with high levels of disturbance around the site scores down the site's potential importance.

It is recommended that any vegetation clearance works should be completed outside the bird breeding season (March to August inclusive). Alternatively checks should be completed by a suitably qualified person immediately prior to commencement of works.

The impact on bird species is assessed as low, however avoidance of vegetation clearance during the bird breeding season is recommended.

4. Evaluation and Recommendations

Species poor semi improved grassland is the dominant habitat across the site. Restricted stands of tall ruderal communities are found scattered through the grassland, and small patches of scrub are present largely restricted to the site's margins. There are no trees, hedgerows, ponds, buildings or other noteworthy features present within the site.

The site is surrounded by extensive areas of hard-standing, both new and established residential buildings, and a length of canal wetland of largely sterile margins with negligible aquatic interest. Trees have been planted as landscape features around the site; although currently of limited ecological value, the trees will mature in time and develop local nature conservation interest.

The site is currently assessed to be generally of low nature conservation value.

No part of the application site has been designated for its nature conservation interest. The nearest statutory designated site is '**Clayton Vale LNR**' located 2.2 km to the east (**Table 1 & Figure B**). The nearest SSSI is the '**Rochdale Canal SSSI**' located 4.7 km to the north east at its closest point. The site just falls within the outer limit of the Rochdale Canal SSSI Natural England '**Impact Risk Zone**', however, between the site and the SSSI is found established urban infrastructure, so it is hard to see how development on this site could impact on the SSSI, either in isolation or in combination with other developments.

No statutory or local wildlife sites are considered under threat from the proposed redevelopment.

No evidence of protected wildlife species was recorded on the site, and the site is considered to have negligible potential to support protected species other than for a small number of breeding birds during the summer months.

No legally protected or biodiversity target species are considered under threat provided appropriate 'Reasonable Avoidance Measures' are taken to protect breeding birds.

5. References

Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report (1995). UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

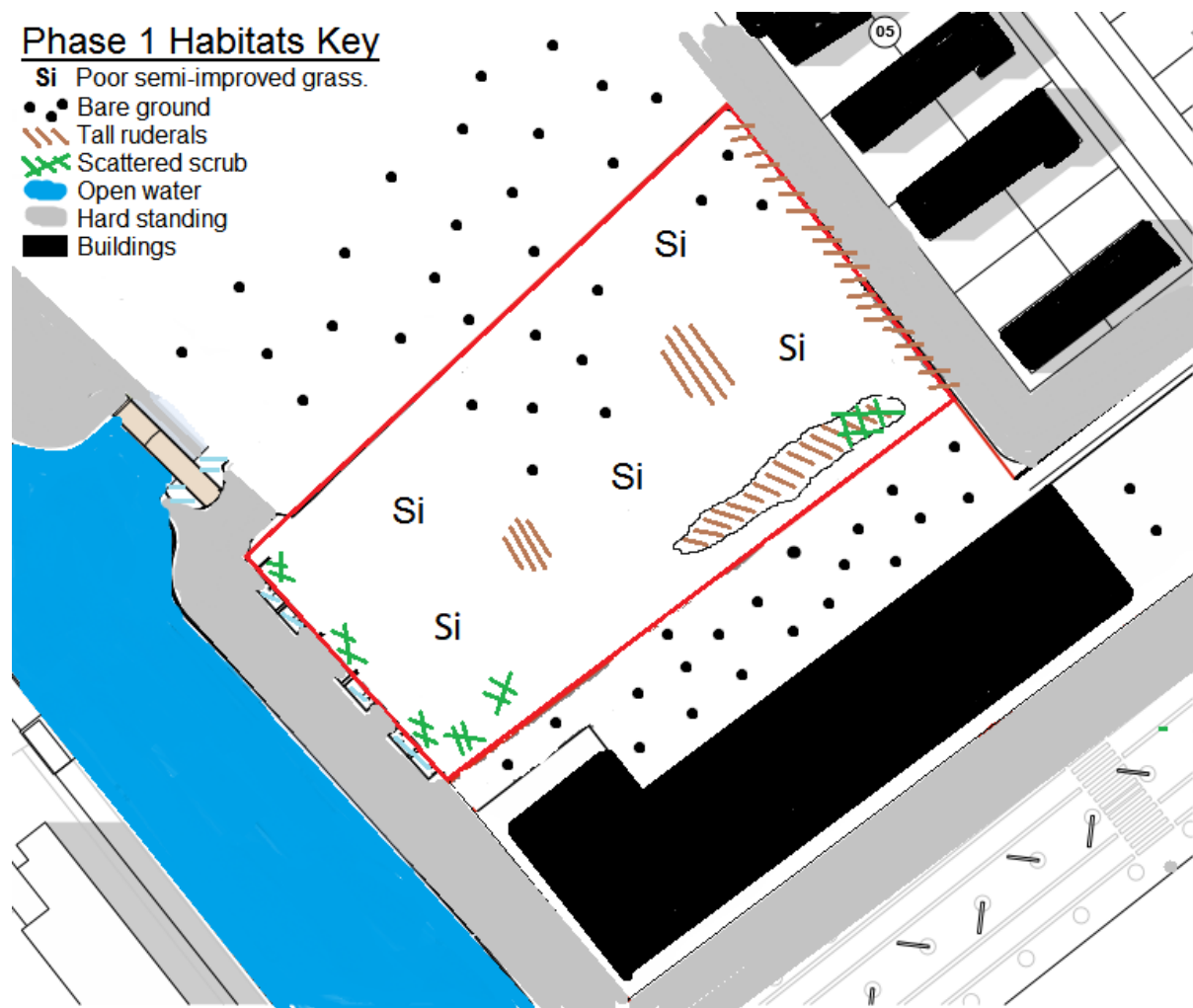
Institute of Environmental Assessment (1997) Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (1990) Handbook for Phase1 habitat survey: A Technique for Environmental Audit

The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

Appendix A : Phase 1 Habitats Plan



Appendix B: Photographs

Photograph 2: View of strip of semi improved grassland to site margin. *Note: The grassland was widespread across the site before it was cleared to bare earth .*



Photograph 3: View of semi improved grassland within the heart of the site. *Note: Widespread rush establishment indicating generally wet substrate.*



Photograph 4: Typical close up view of flowers and herbs in grassland.



Photograph5: View of typical small stand of scrub to site margins with small stand of reed to the fore.



Photograph 6: View of stand of tall ruderals on mount to centre of site.



Photograph 7: View of disturbed bare ground to centre of the site.



Photograph 8: General view across undeveloped part of NI 2 to the immediate north of the NI 3.



Photograph 9: View of road side tall ruderals to northern site boundary with new residential development to east of site to rear.



Photograph 10: View of open water canal to west of site boundary.



Photograph 11: View of small stand of marginal vegetation to north west of site.



Photograph 12: View of small area of amenity grassland to north west of site.



Photograph 13: View of small area of amenity grassland to north west of site.

