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Paul Chester & Associates Ltd

HARDY FARM SPORTS CENTRE RESTORATION PROPOSALS

ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

PCAJ99/V4/FINAL

On behalf of:
West Didsbury and Chorlton AFC

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Paul Chester & Associates Ltd. (PCA) was commissioned by West Didsbury and Chorlton Association Football Club (AFC) via Planit IE to undertake an Ecological Survey and Appraisal of the proposed restoration of the former Manchester University Hardy Farm Sports Centre. The proposals will include the reinstatement of former sports pitches not requiring planning permission as well as a planning application which will involve the erection of, extension and remodelling of the existing pavilion including a new roof to form dressing rooms and ancillary accommodation, together with the creation of one grass football pitch and one artificial football pitch with associated floodlighting and landscaping boundary treatment. The proposal will provide facilities for West Didsbury and Chorlton AFC and Oswald Road Junior Football Club as well as facilities for the wider community.

2.0 GENERAL SITE DESCRIPTION

The site comprises of the former Hardy Farm Sports Centre which was previously owned and utilised by the University of Manchester. This comprises the former sports pitches as well as the main sports centre building and associated facilities including parking areas as well as peripheral lawns and landscaping.

The site is located in Chorlton cum Hardy, Manchester (SJ 815927) and is bordered to to the north-east by residential properties; to the south by university accommodation; and to the north-west and south-west by areas of open grassland, scrub and woodland. With regard to the adjacent areas of open grassland, scrub and woodland, these form part of the Hardy Farm designated Site of Biological Interest (SBI).

A site location plan is provided as Figure 1. Likewise, a series of illustrative photographs are provided in Appendix 2.

3.0 SCOPE OF THE SURVEY

3.1 Scope and Personnel

The scope of the survey was defined on the basis of an initial assessment of the general characteristics of the site and existing knowledge of the local area as follows:

- Habitat Survey to include mapping, descriptions and species lists
- Birds
- Badger
- Consideration of other key rare of legally protected species such as amphibians, reptiles etc.

The survey was undertaken on 30th September 2009 by Mr Paul Chester, Managing Director of PCA Ltd. Mr Chester is an ecologist with some eighteen years professional experience. He has been a member of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management since 1994. He has extensive experience in the

ecological survey and assessment of sites such as this and of the survey and assessment of a comprehensive range of habitats and species. With regard to other species, a separate bat survey and assessment was completed by a specialist consultant, Mr Michael Freeman. No specific consideration is therefore given to this group of species in this report.

3.2 Survey Area

Whilst the planning application is related only to part of the wider sports complex, for completeness the appraisal considers the entire former sports facility which includes the other former sports pitches that will be reinstated. In order to properly consider the potential impacts of the development on part of the designated SBI, consideration has also been given to the wider Hardy Farm SBI.

3.3 Survey Constraints

The survey was completed outside of the optimum survey period for botanical and certain fauna surveys. This constraint does, however, have to be viewed in the context of the site, much of which is essentially related to the reinstatement of abandoned sports pitches. The surveyor is likewise experienced in the identification of plants from vegetative characteristics and in completing habitat-based appraisals for the majority of UK fauna. In all habitat-based assessment elements of the survey, a precautionary approach was followed throughout.

4.0 LEGISLATIVE & POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Legislation

The majority of the species considered in the ecological assessment have been included on the basis of some form of legal protection. Key pieces of legislation include the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended) which provides protection for a wide variety of key plants and animals. These are listed on various schedules of the Act. Specific to species considered in the survey, all birds are protected whilst breeding with special protection afforded to species listed under Schedule 1 of the Act. All bats, great crested newt and reptiles are likewise all afforded protection under Schedule 5 of the act. Specific to other national legislation, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) underpins the Government's commitment to the long term conservation of biodiversity in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity. More recently, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 was implemented primarily to implement key aspects of the Government's Rural Strategy published in July 2004. Specific to biodiversity conservation, sections 40, 41 and 42 replace section 74 of the CROW Act. Section 40 extends to all public authorities the existing section 74 duty to have regard to biodiversity as far is consistent with the proper exercise of their functions. Section 41 places a duty on the Secretary of State to publish, review and revise lists of living organisms and types of habitat in England that are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving English biodiversity.

In relation to European legislation, the European Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (92/43/EEC) which is translated into UK law under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations, 1994 represents the key piece of legislation. Annex II lists individual species

that are considered to be of European importance, whilst Annex IVa lists animal species of community interest in need of strict protection. Species relevant to this legislation include all bat species which are listed under Annexe II and great crested newt which is listed under Annexes II and IV (a).

4.2 Planning Policy

With regard to national policy, Planning Policy Statement 9 – Nature Conservation, together with its accompanying circular covering statutory requirements and a good practice guide, provides guidance to planning authorities in the way they carry out their statutory duties under planning legislation. In particular, the PPS seeks to ensure that policies in regional spatial strategies and local development documents and development control decisions properly reflect the Government's broader policy objectives for biodiversity and geological conservation.

At the regional level, Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG 13) sets out planning guidance at the regional level. A major aspect of the guidance is to ensure that planning authorities and other agencies ensure that the overall nature conservation resource of the North West is protected and enriched through conservation, restoration and re-establishment of key resources. Also relevant at the regional level is the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West, 2006 (Draft DSS) and the accompanying Panel Report. The aims of increasing the region's biodiversity resources, by contributing to the delivery of national, regional and local biodiversity objectives and targets are central to environmental policy within the Draft DSS and in the published recommendations from the EiP (Examination in Public) Panel.

At the local level, the Manchester Plan is the Statutory Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester. Specific to nature conservation, relevant policies include E2.2 which protects statutory and non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest; E2.3 which protects important wildlife habitats; E2.4 which ensures that the effects upon wildlife are taken fully into account when considering development proposals; E2.6 which seeks to prevent tree loss and encourages appropriate replanting schemes; E3.1 which encourages the protection of features of ecological interest and the use of native species in landscaping schemes; and E3.4 which encourages the protection and enhancement of wildlife corridors.

4.3 Conservation of Biodiversity

The conservation of biodiversity is a fundamental consideration of any development proposal. In 1994, the Government published the UK Action Plan on biodiversity which sets out the broad strategy and targets for conserving and enhancing wild species and habitats over the next twenty years. A further report published in December 1995 and endorsed by government in May 1996, provides detailed proposals for a large number of species and habitats which require urgent conservation action. The UK plan together with the individual action plans therefore provides the framework for the effective delivery of biodiversity conservation at the national level and provides the UK commitment to the Biodiversity Convention signed at Rio in 1992.

At the regional level, Appendix 1 of RPG13 "Biodiversity Targets for the North West Region" provides a summarised table of UK BAP priority habitats which are of greatest importance in the North West Region and sets targets for their maintenance, restoration and expansion. These regional biodiversity targets form a natural link between the UK BAP targets and the Local BAP (see below) which forms the primary mechanism for implementing these.

With regard to local biodiversity, the core document relevant to this site is the Greater Manchester Biodiversity Action Plan. Of potential relevance to this site and its immediate surrounds are the local habitat BAP's for neutral grassland; marsh/marshy grassland and urban-managed greenspace. Potentially relevant local Species Action Plans (SAP's) include bats and song thrush.

5.0 BASELINE DESCRIPTION

5.1 Statutory & Non-statutory Sites of Nature Conservation Interest

Whilst the former sports pitches are not subject to any form of statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designation, the site borders Hardy Farm Grade B SBI. The Grade B SBI status is typically afforded sites which provide a habitat that is a good representative of the type in the sub-region and district level and/or a site which supports one or more species of rarity. The Hardy Farm SBI extends over an area of of 16.2 hectares on the north bank of the River Mersey and is an area of low-lying grassland and scrub which supports several distinct vegetation types and plant species of local importance. More detailed descriptions of the impacted section of SBI and wider habitat are provided within the habitat description.

5.2 Habitats/Plants

5.2.1 Survey Methodology

A detailed walkover survey of the entire planning application site, other former sports pitches and immediate surrounds was undertaken. The site was divided into distinctive habitat types which are described. Specific habitat compartments/features referred to are shown on Figure 1 as Target Notes, with illustrative photographs provided in Appendix 2. In addition, a botanical species list is included as Appendix 1A.

5.2.2 Survey Results

General

Virtually the entire site comprises of an extensive area of abandoned former sports pitches. Other habitats include areas of lawn and planted trees/shrubs associated with the main former sports centre building. Mature planted trees are likewise a feature of the site periphery, particularly the eastern side, whilst patchy scrub and ruderals are also locally prominent adjacent to the site boundary. A small section of natural grassland associated with Hardy Farm SBI is present in the south-western corner and provides an example of relatively species-rich and largely unimproved damp neutral grassland.

Target Note Area 1 (see Photographs 1 & 2)

This area comprises of the majority of the site and is represented by the former sports pitches. Historically, these would have been intensively managed pitches. Whilst historically, this entire area would have been a species-poor grassland habitat supporting a limited range of species typical of amenity sports pitches, since regular usage has ceased, a number of additional species have colonised the grassland. Notwithstanding this, they remain a species-poor habitat dominated by a limited range of species. As such, dominant grass species are associated with perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, with more occasional common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra sens. Lat.*, rough meadow-grass *Poa trivialis* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. Other species occurring relatively frequently include creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, dandelion *Taraxacum* agg., red clover *Trifolium pratense* and white clover *Trifolium repens*. Species which are present more rarely include broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, common nettle *Urtica dioica*, common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, common ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and timothy *Phleum pratense*. Very rarely occurring clumps of soft rush *Juncus effusus* are indicative of localised waterlogging. Several footpaths are present through the grassland and additional species found on and adjacent to such paths include annual meadow-grass *Poa annua*, greater plantain *Plantago major* and knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare*.

Target Note Area 2 (see Photographs 3 & 4)

Target Note area 2 refers to an extensive linear habitat which extends along the majority of the eastern boundary of the site. Scattered mature trees are present throughout this area and include examples of crack-willow *Salix fragilis*, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, cultivated pear *Pyrus communis*, poplar *Populus* sp., silver birch *Betula pendula* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*. The mature trees are typically scattered and nowhere form a true woodland habitat. Other habitats found within this area include locally dominant patches of bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.* scrub, particularly on the boundary with adjacent residential properties. Occasional other shrubs species are present rarely and includes examples of elder *Sambucus nigra*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*. Other habitats found within this boundary include locally dominant patches of common nettle with cleavers *Galium aparine*. Grassland sections in this part of the site are typical of abandoned habitats and include patchy cock's-foot, false oat-grass and Yorkshire-fog. Other gound flora species are rare and include species such as broad-leaved dock, cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, dandelion and wood avens *Geum urbanum*.

Target Note Area 3 (see Photograph 5)

This area comprises of an area of poor neutral grassland on a narrow bank between the former sports pitches and the West Didsbury and Chorlton football ground. The habitat includes sections of species-poor neutral grassland dominated by false oat-grass and more locally, cock's-foot. Patchy bramble scrub is also present along with locally dominant stands of common nettle and ground elder *Aegopodium*

podararia. Other species found in this habitat include occasional broad-leaved dock, common ragwort, creeping thistle, dandelion, hogweed, large bindweed *Calystegia sylvatica* and rosebay willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium*. Trees and shrubs include three elder and a single semi-mature sycamore. Several patches of the invasive species Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* are present along the boundary.

Target Note Area 4 (see Photograph 6)

This area is represented by the current West Didsbury and Chorlton football ground. Whilst the majority of this area comprises of the exisiting football pitches and adjacent mown lawns, access road, car parking and club house, the north-western part of the site includes an area of plantation woodland. Mature trees include planted elm *Ulmus* sp., horse-chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*, poplar and sycamore. Species in the shrub layer include cherry Prunus sp., elder, hawthorn and holly. The ground flora is poor and includes locally dominant ivy *Hedera helix* in more shaded section. In more open areas, the habitat is characterised by locally dominant patches of bramble scrub and common nettle. Other species include occasional or rarely occurring common comfrey *Symphytum officinallis*, cow parsley, creeping thistle, dandelion, herb-robert *Geranium robertianum*, mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris* and wood avens.

Target Note Area 5 (see Photographs 7 & 8)

This area comprises of the main former Hardy Farm sports complex building and associated areas of lawns, landscaping, car parking and access road. Old landscaping included a range of ornamental and native trees and shrubs including species such as cherry, goat willow *Salix caprea*, grey willow *Salix cinerea*, cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*, Leyland cypress *Cupressus lleylandii*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and silver birch. Lawns have been maintained as a regularly mown habitat and support a limited range of associated species including clover, creeping buttercup, daisy *Bellis perennis*, dandelion and the moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*. A range of other species have colonised areas of bare ground, particularly adjacent to the main car park (Target Note 5A) and include American willowherb *Epilobium ciliatum*, black medick *Medicago lupulina*, Canadian fleabane *Conyza canadensis*, common mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*, common ragwort, daisy, dandelion, groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*, herb-robert, Oxford ragwort *Senecio squalidus*, red fescue, ribwort plantain, rosebay willohwerb, rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, thale cress *Arabidopsis thaliana* and Yorkshire-fog.

Target Note Area 6 (see Photograph 9)

Located in the south-west corner of the site, this represents an area of preodminantly damp neutral grassland which forms part of the wider Hardy Farm SBI. A public footpath and other informal paths used by dog walkers forms the northern boundary of this habitat and adjacent to this is an initial strip of poor habitat dominated by species such as broad-leaved dock, cock's-foot, common nettle and creeping thistle along with more occaisonal or rarely occurring common ragwort, dandelion, perennial rye-grass, red fescue and reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. Within approxmiantely 2m of the path, the habitat becomes less-disturbed and is a relatively species-rich damp neutral grassland which includes abundant red fescue, frequent creeping buttercup and more occasional dandelion, red clover, ribwort

plantain, rough meadow-grass and Yorkshire-fog. Locally damper sections include locally frequent soft rush along with occasional hard rush *Juncus inflexus* and rarely occurring compact rush *Juncus compactus*. The moss *Eurhyncium praelongum* is locally frequent. More rarely occurring species include common ragwort, common vetch *Vicia sativa*, creeping thistle, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, hairy sedge *Carex hirsuta*, jointed rush *Juncus aritculatus*, ribbed melilot *Melilotus officinalis*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and tufted vetch *Vicia cracca*. Of particular note was the presence of several orchid spikes. Although difficult to identify at this time of year, the size/form of the plants would suggest that these were representative of a marsh-orchid hybrid, most probably a hybrid between northern-marsh orchid and southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza purpurella* x *Dactylorhiza praertemissa*.

Adjacent Habitats – Hardy Farm SBI (see Photographs 10)

As detailed, Hardy Farm SBI is located to the west of the site and extends to the River Mersey. The SBI comprises of a number of distinctive habitats. Specific to this, Section A (see photograph 10) borders the southern part of the application site and is essentially an extension of the habitat described in Target Note 6 above. As such, it is an open relatively species-rich damp neutral grassland supporting a similar range of species to those described above. Locally other plant communites are present and are associated with the relative ground level. As such other habitats include small areas of reed canary-grass swamp; a small area dominated by common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris* with associated marsh horsetail *Equisetum palustre*; and small areas supporting abundant hard and soft rush. Scattered shrubs are also present and include examples of ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, oak, rowan and whitebeam *Sorbus* sp. Locally, in the absence of management, the habitat becomes overwhelmingly dominated by a thick thatch of grasses (see Photograph 11). Likewise, locally dominant patches of common nettle and creeping thistle are present occasionally.

Section B (see Photograph 12) is located to the north of a footpath which crosses the SBI. Within this part of the SBI, the habitat appears drier and is characterised by a mosaic of neutral grassland, scrub and occasional patches of dominant ruderals. The grassland is often relatively species-poor and includes locally dominant areas of cock's-foot and false oat-grass. Scrub species include ash, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, guilder-rose *Viburnum opulus*, hawthorn, oak, silver birch and sycamore. Patches of bramble scrub are also present locally. Areas dominated by ruderals including locally dominant patches of species such as common nettle, creeping thistle and rosebay willowherb.

Section C (see Photograph 13). is represented by a lower lying area to the south of Section A. It comprises of more extensive semi-mature woodland and scrub with abundant sycamore. Bramble scrub is likewise extensive as are areas dominated by species such Indian balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* and reed canary-grass. The western boundary of the SBI is represented by the River Mersey (see Photograph 14).

Other Considerations – Invasive Species

As detailed, the invasive species Japanese knotweed is present as several individual stands along the north-eastern boundary of the site. The location of these stands is provided on Figure 2.

5.3 Breeding Birds

5.3.1 Survey Methodology

A walkover survey of the site was undertaken and all species either seen or noted by call were recorded. In being undertaken outside of the breeding season, the survey was a habitat-based assessment only. Notwithstanding this, the majority of species recorded are resident species likely to utilise the habitat for breeding. A list of birds seen or heard at or adjacent to the site during the survey is included in Appendix 1B.

5.3.2 Survey Results

The study area provides a very poor habitat for breeding birds with very little potential habitat present. Specific to this, potential habitat is essentially restricted to the peripheral trees and shrubs as well as sections of bramble scrub and tall ruderals.

With regard to ground nesting species such as skylark *Alauda arvensis*, the open fields are considered to be subject to too high a level of public disturbance to be utilised by this species. The sports centre building provides a further potential habitat. This is, however, a relatively modern building in good conditions and has very few potential openings for birds to establish nest sites.

With regard to species recorded from the site and its immediate surrounds, these were limited to a relatively small number of typically common species, the majority of which are likely to nest locally. As such, species recorded during the walkover survey included blackbird *Turdus merula*, blue tit *Parus caeruleus*, chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, great tit *Parus major*, greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*, hedge sparrow *Prunella modularis*, jay *Garrulus glandarius*, magpie *Pica pica*, robin *Erithacus rubecula*, pied wagtail *Motacilla alba*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, wood pigeon *Columba palumbus* and wren *Troglodytes troglodyte*.

In terms of the wider local area, the optimum habitat locally is considered to be associated with the adjacent Hardy Farm SBI and particularly the woodland and scrub associated with Sections B. The habitat-based assessment would suggest that this area is likely to support a good range of breeding species which in addition to resident species is likely to also include summer visitors such as blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, garden warbler *Sylvia borin*, sedge warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. The habitat would likewise appear suitable for a range of rare and/or delining species including linnet *Carduelis cannabina*, lesser whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* and song thrush *Turdus philomelos*. The habitat also appears potentially suitable for grasshopper warbler *Locustella naevia.* This species is, however, rapidly declining nationally and now very rare in Greater Manchester.

5.4 Badger

5.4.1 Survey Methodology

A standard badger survey was undertaken involving a detailed walkover survey of the entire site to record evidence of setts as well as field signs such as paths, hairs, latrines etc. The survey was likewise extended into the wider local area to the west of the site.

5.4.2 Survey Results

No evidence of badger was found from either the site or surrounding area. On the basis of the negative survey results, no further consideration is given to this species.

5.5 Other Species

During the course of the walkover surveys and through desk study, consideration was given to the potential for other species to occur on the site and immediate surrounds. These included amphibians, reptiles and other mammals.

With regard to amphibians, a desk study of large-scale plans revealed no ponds in close proximity to the site. Likewise a desk search indicated no evidence of populations of key rare or legally protected species such as great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*. On a precautionary basis, any refugia, for example, fallen branches, dead wood etc. along the eastern site boundary were searched for evidence of amphibians. No such evidence was, however, found. With regard to reptiles, this group of species is generally absent from the city and urban fringe parts of Greater Manchester.

Specific to other mammals, consideration was given to other species such as for example, water vole *Arvicola terrestris* and hedgehog *Erinaceous europaeus*. Specific to water vole, there is no suitable habitat for this species within the study area. With regard to hedgehog, whilst the habitat is generally poor for this species, it is likely to be present locally in small numbers, particularly in close proximity to the adjacent residential gardens. In terms of other mammals, evidence of fox *Vulpes vulpes* was noted from Section B of the adjacent Hardy Farm SBI in the form of the strong smell indicative of an animal having crossed the habitat although with no evidence of any regular or permanent occupation.

6.0 EVALUATION

6.1 Introduction

In order to assess the significance of the ecological characteristics of the site, it is necessary to evaluate the habitats and species present. The ecological value of the site can be considered at the local, regional, national and where appropriate, international level. For the purpose of this evaluation, local interest is defined as the application site and immediate surrounds, regional interest is defined as Greater Manchester and national interest as the UK.

A number of criteria may be used in making this evaluation. Those that can be quantified more readily include size, naturalness, species diversity and species rarity. Likewise, legal protection provides a further indication of the importance of a particular species or habitat.

6.2 Habitats/Plants

The site supports a very limited range of habitats typical of a former sports centre facility. This is particularly in relation to the former sports pitches which comprise virtually the entire site. Whilst since abandonment, some additional species have established in the sward, they remain a species-poor habitat of low ecological value. Within this area, individual mature trees add diversity to the site and provide a habitat for associated fauna. Although common species, typical of amenity plantings, they are regarded as being of high value in the site context.

Peripheral habitats including areas of species-poor neutral grassland, bramble scrub and ruderal dominated sections are ubiquitous habitats common in suitable habitat throughout the UK and of low ecological value.

With regard to the lawns, planted borders and re-colonising bare ground communities found adjacent to the main former sports complex building, these are all limited typical habitats of low ecological value.

Of higher value is the small section of Hardy Farm SBI in the south-western corner of the application site. This is an area of relatively species-rich damp neutral grassland. Although representing only a small part of the wider SBI, it is a habitat of high local value.

In the wider local area, the Grade B status of Hardy Farm SBI is indicative of a habitat of moderate to high regional/County significance.

In terms of individual species, no nationally rare or scarce plants were encountered during the surveys. In the Greater Manchester context, the hybrid marsh-orchids noted in the south-western corner of the site represent an uncommon species of high local and moderate regional significance.

6.3 Breeding Birds

A limited range of common bird species were recorded on or in the vicinity of the site during the course of the survey. The presence of hedge sparrow and blackbird are of some local significance as both species are included on the Amber List of species of medium conservation concern. Starling was likewise noted foraging on site and is included on the Red List of species of high conservation concern. Potential breeding bird habitat on the site is, however, very limited and largely restricted to the mature trees and peripeheral bramble, shrubs and tall ruderals. Whilst, due to the timing of the survey, it was not possible to absolutely determine the level and importance of breeding bird usage of these habitats, given the habitat-based assessment of the quality of the habitats both within the site and in the adjacent SBI, a relatively robust evaluation may be given that the restoration site itself is of low local importance to a range of typically common breeding birds.

6.4 Other Species

There was no evidence to suggest that the site is of any value to other key species of nature conservation concern.

7.0 IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

7.1 Introduction

The proposed restoration of the site is based upon the reinstatement of the former sports pitches. This is something which is not subject to planning permission although is considered in the assessment for completeness. In terms of those parts of sports centre restoration which are subject to planning permission, these are related to the extension and remodelling of the existing pavilion including a new roof to form dressing rooms and ancillary accommodation, together with the creation of one grass football pitch and one artificial football pitch with associated floodlighting and landscaping boundary treatment. The planning application also includes a landscaping scheme, the details of which are considered in the assessment.

7.2 Identification of Potential Impacts

7.2.1 Pre and Mid-term Impacts

Impacts during the pre and mid-term may result from preliminary ground investigation work, drainage works and the construction activities themselves. Impacts associated with such activities are likely to be temporary and of a less significant nature than the longer-term impacts of the development. They may include risks such as disturbance to local birds and other animals using the site at this time, or may come from pollution incidents or similar. Temporary habitats may also be created during this stage of development.

7.2.2 Long-term Impacts

Potential long-term and permanent impacts are associated with the loss, fragmentation or modification of habitats currently found on or around the site. Individual species of flora and fauna could be impacted to differing degrees and in various ways by this loss or alteration of habitat.

7.2.3 Post-development Interference Impacts

Potentially permanent impacts on wildlife adjacent to the development zones may occur due to human interference in one form or another. Physical disturbance may result from the presence of people walking, noise created by people or vehicular disturbance.

7.3 Assessment of Ecological Impacts

7.3.1 Introduction

Following on from the identification of the ecological impacts, it is possible to assess the significance of these impacts. Impacts are considered under the following categories:

- Adverse – Detrimental or negative ecological impact
- Beneficial – Advantageous or positive ecological impact
- Negligible – No significant ecological impact

Where adverse or beneficial impacts are identified, these are assessed against the following scale:

- Minor – Slight impact
- Moderate – Limited impact
- Substantial – Considerable impact

7.3.2 Pre and Mid-term Impacts

Impacts related to this proposed development are primarily related to the re-establishment of the former sports pitches and the construction activities associated with the artificial pitch and building refurbishment. These works are entirely within open habitats and there would be no direct loss of associated habitat features such as mature trees. In its existing largely open state and with the refurbished building footprint located virtually entirely within that of the existing facility, such impacts should be relatively minor in nature. Some localised disturbance could be expected to species utilising adjacent habitats although given that these species already survive within an urban fringe environment, this is likely to represent a negligible or minor adverse impact.

7.3.3 Permanent Impacts

Habitats

With regard to the majority of the site, habitat losses are associated only with the reinstatement of the former sports pitches. Peripheral habitats to these areas which includes mature trees are not impacted by the proposals. The reinstatement of these former sports pitches and the loss of grassland to the all weather sports pitch is therefore entirely within an existing low value habitat, the loss of which is considered to represent a negligible or minor adverse impact. With regard to the peripheral habitats, the landscaping scheme for the site includes for habitat enhancement in these areas. This will include the planting of sections of native species-rich hedgerow; additional planting of native trees and shrubs; and an area of managed wildflower grassland which connects with the adjacent SBI. These elements of the proposal are considered to represent a substantially beneficial impact in the local context.

With regard to the SBI, part of the proposal includes the upgrade of the current informal path to provide a connection with the existing public footpath. This is located on the edge of the SBI and the upgrade of this path will not therefore result in any direct adverse impact to the designated site.

Breeding Birds

Given that virtually the entire restoration proposal is located within open habitats of no value to breeding birds, direct habitat losses are regarded as negligible. Some minor disturbance may occur to peripheral habitats although, given the existing urban fringe nature of the local area, this is likely to represent also represesent a negligible impact. In the longer-term, the new native hedgerow and tree/shrub planting should increase the availability of nesting habitat locally.

Other Species

There are not considered to be any significant or potentially significant adverse impacts on any other species.

8.0 MITIGATION/RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The term mitigation is frequently used to refer to all works required to comply with the relevant legislation when developing land occupied by legally protected species. There are essentially two elements to this process. Firstly, mitigation in its strictest sense relates to work or practices which reduce or remove impacts, for example, a capture programme to remove reptiles or amphibians from a construction area in advance of construction. Secondly, compensation refers to works which offset the damage or impact of a development, for example, additional habitat creation or restoration to offset the impact of direct habitat loss. Development projects can likewise provide opportunities for positive biodiversity enhancement measures to be incorporated at the design stage. Specific to this project, given the very low ecological value of the site, strict mitigation requirements are minimal.

8.2 Advanced Mitigation Requirements

8.2.1 Breeding Birds

Given that all birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) whilst nesting, any actual or potential breeding bird habitat (which is effectively limited to occasional bramble scrub/shrubs) should be removed outside of the breeding bird season (approximately March to end-July).

8.2.2 Invasive Species

Given the presence of Japanese knotweed at several locations along the north-western boundary, it is recommended that these stands are subject to a programme of eradication.

8.3 Other Recommendations/Enhancement

8.3.1 Landscape Planting

Positive enhancements will be achieved through the landscaping proposals and particularly the establishment of sections of native species-rich hedgerow; native tree and shrub planting; and section of species-rich wildflower meadow. With regard to the latter, it is recommended that the seed mix reflects species-rich grasslands in the wider area. Specific to the final detail of this element of the proposal, it is recommended that planting and seed mixes are agreed in advance in discussion with the Greater Manchester Ecology Unity (GMEU). Such native plantings and seed mixes should be of local provenance stock/seed wherever possible.

8.3.2 Hardy Farm SBI

Whilst the SBI is clearly a habitat of existing ecological value, parts of the habitat have unbdoubtedly deteriorated as a result of the absence of management. A sensitive management regime which is likely to include annual cutting and removal of grassland sections would provide significant enhancement to parts of the site and would enhance species-diversity. Such grassland management, particular in Section A of the SBI described above would undoubtedly provide significant benefits to the SBI. It is therefore recommended that the management of this area in the future is considered. Any such management should be agreed in advance in discussion with the GMEU and the Mersey Valley Warden Service.

8.3.3 Species Considerations

Species-specific opportunities undoubtedly exist which could provide locally significant enhancements. This could include additional provisions for breeding birds and bats through the establishment of a number of artificial bird nesting boxes and bat roost boxes on retained trees.

9.0 SUMMARY /CONCLUSION

In summary, the ecological survey and assessment has shown that the restoration proposals and planning application are located within an area of typically low ecological value and would result in impacts of typically negligible or low significance. With regard to the upgrade of the footpath along the edge of the SBI, this does not directly impact upon this site and indirect effects are likely to be minor in nature. Strict mitigation is related only to the requirement to remove potential breeding bird habitat outside of the bird breeding season and in relation to the eradication of Japanese knotweed. Enhancement measures have been developed within the landscaping scheme in relation to the establishement of an area of species-rich meadow, sections of native species-rich hedgerow and native tree/shrub plantings. Further opportunities for providing enhanced nesting/roosting for birds/bats have also been identified. The implementation of the various measures included within the landscaping scheme would undoubtedly provide local biodiversity enhancement.

FIGURE 1 – SITE LOCATION

FIGURE 1

HARDY FARM SPORTS CENTRE
RESTORATION PROPOSALS

SITE LOCATION

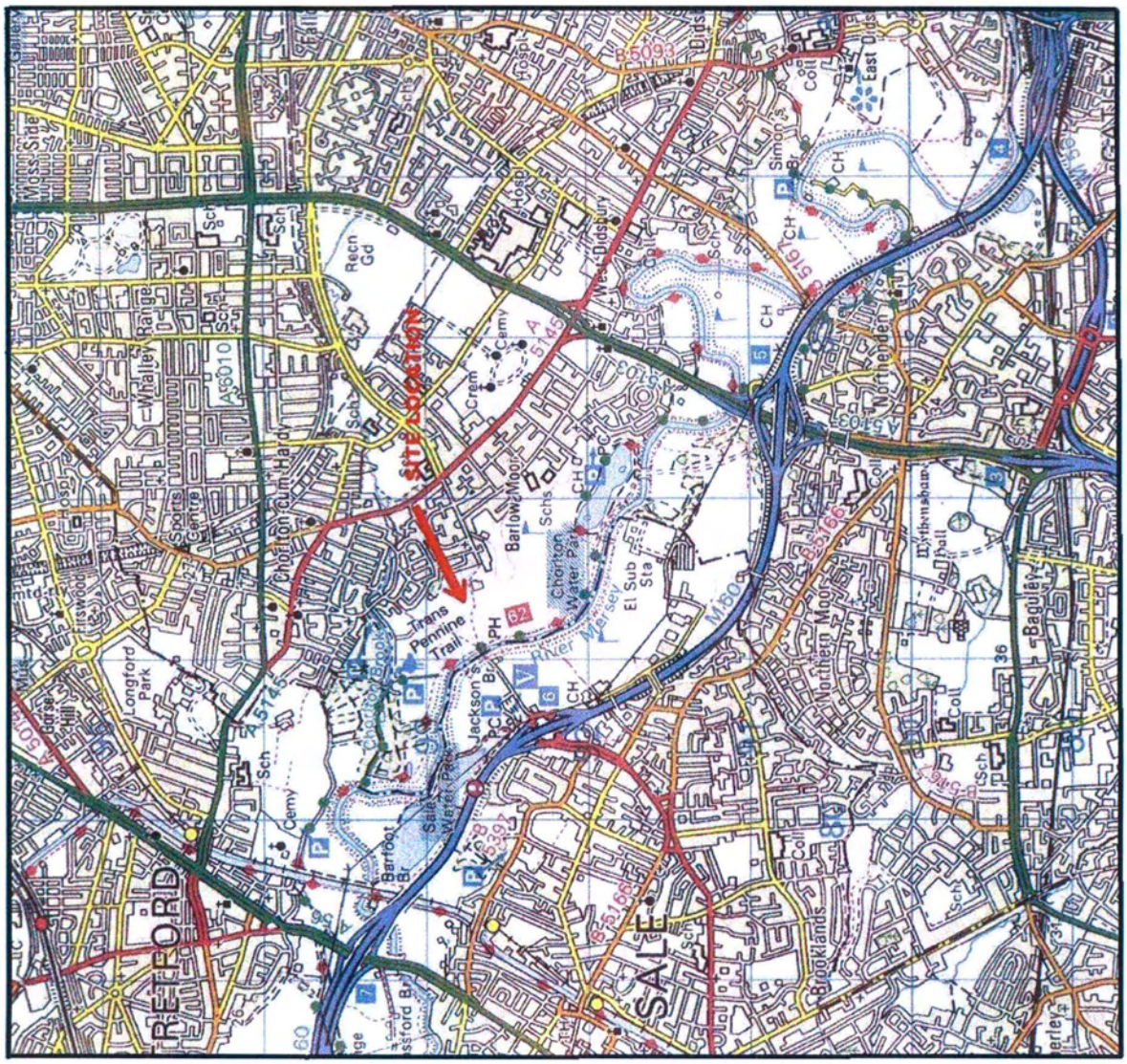
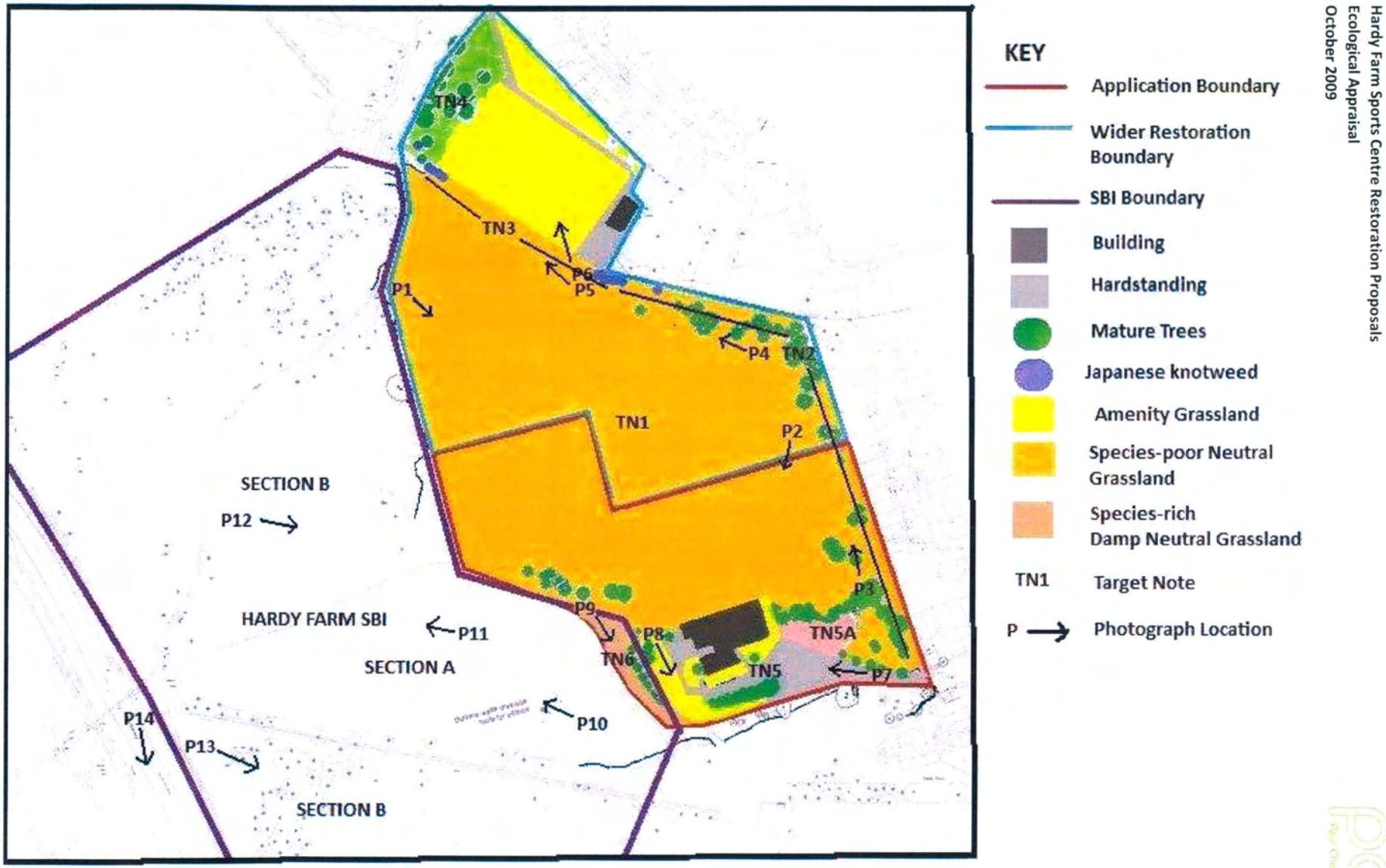


FIGURE 2 – HABITAT PLAN



Hardy Farm Sports Centre Restoration Proposals
Ecological Appraisal
October 2009

FIGURE 2 - HARDY SPORTS CENTRE RESTORATION PROPOSALS - HABITAT PLAN

APPENDIX 1 – SPECIES LIST

NB. The botanical species list refers only to species recorded within the area covered by the resptoration proposals and does not include the wider SBI

Appendix 1 - Plants

Latin Name	Common Name	Status
Acer pseudoplantanus	sycamore	R
Achillea millefolium	yarrow	VR
Aesculus hippocastanum	horse-chestnut	VR
Agrostis capillaris	common bent	O
Agrostis stolonifera	creeping bent	R/LA
Anagallis arvensis	scarlet pimpernel	VR
Anthoxanthum odoratum	sweet vernal-grass	VR
Anthriscus sylvestris	cow parsley	VR
Arabidopsis thaliana	thale cress	VR
Arrhenatherum elatius	false oat-grass	O/LD
Artemisia vulgaris	mugwort	VR
Bellis perennis	daisy	O
Betula pendula	silver birch	O
Calystegia sylvatica	large bindweed	R
Cardamine hirsuta	hairy bittercress	VR
Carex hirsuta	hairy sedge	VR
Cerastium fontanum	common mouse-ear	R
Chamaerion angustifolium	rosebay willowherb	O/LF
Cirsium arvense	creeping thistle	O/LF
Cirsium vulgare	spear thistle	VR
Conyza canadensis	Canadian fleabane	R
Crataegus monogyna	hawthorn	VR
Cupressus lleylandii	Leyland cypress	VR
Cynosurus cristatus	Crested dog's-tail	VR
Dactylis glomerata	cock's-foot	O
Dactylorhiza purpurella x praertermissa	northen marsh-orchid x southern marsh-orchid	VR
Deschampsia cespitosa	tufted hair-grass	VR
Epilobium ciliatum	American willowherb	VR
Epilobium hirsutum	great willowherb	R/LF
Elytrigia repens	couch grass	VR
Eurhyncium praelongum	A moss	VR/LA
Fallopia japonica	Japanese knotweed	R/LD
Festuca rubra	red fescue	O/LD
Fraxinus excelsior	ash	VR
Galium aparine	cleavers	O
Geranium robertianum	herb-robert	VR

Geum urbanum	wood avens	R
Hedera helix	ivy	VR/LD
Heracleum sphondylium	hogweed	VR
Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire-fog	F
Ilex aquifolium	holly	VR
Juncus conglomeratus	jointed rush	VR
Juncus compactus	compact rush	VR
Juncus effusus	soft rush	VR/LF
Juncus inflexus	hard rush	VR
Leontodon hispidus	rough hawkbit	VR
Lolium perenne	perennial rye-grass	A
Medicago lupulina	black medick	R
Melilotus officinalis	ribbed melilot	VR
Phleum pratense	timothy	VR
Poa annua	annual meadow-grass	O
Poa pratensis	smooth meadow-grass	R
Poa trivialis	rough meadow-grass	O
Plantago lanceolata	ribwort plantain	O
Plantago major	greater plantain	R
Populus sp.	poplar sp.	O
Prunus laurocerasus	cherry laurel	VR
Prunus spinosa	blackthorn	VR
Pyrus communis	cultivated pear	VR
Quercus robur	pedunculate oak	VR
Ranunculs acris	Meadow buttercup	VR
Ranunculus repens	creeping buttercup	O
Rhytididelphus squarrous	A moss	R/LD
Rosa canina	dog- rose	VR
Rubus fruiticosus	bramble	O/LD
Rumex acetosa	common sorrel	VR
Rumex crispus	curled dock	VR
Rumex obtusifolius	broad-leaved dock	O/LF
Salix caprea	goat willow	VR
Salix cinerea	grey willow	VR
Salix fragilis	crack willow	VR
Sambucus nigra	elder	VR
Senecio jacobaea	common ragwort	R
Senecio sqaulidus	Oxford ragwort	VR
Senecio vulgaris	groundsel	R
Sorbus aucuparia	rowan	
Stellaria media	common chickweed	VR
Symphytum officinallis	common comfrey	VR
Taraxacum agg.	dandelion	O

Trifolium pratense	red clover	R
Trifolium repens	white clover	R
Ulmus sp.	elm	VR
Urtica dioica	common nettle	VR
Veronica chamaedrys	germander speedwell	VR
Viburnum opulus	guelder-rose	VR
Vicia cracca	tufted vetch	VR
Vicia sativa	common vetch	VR
Vicia sepium	bush vetch	VR

D = Dominant, A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional, R = Rare (Prefix L = Local)

Appendix 1B - Fauna

Birds

Latin Name	**Common Name**
Carduelis chloris	greenfinch
Columba palumbus	wood pigeon
Corvus monedula	jackdaw
Erithacus rubecula	robin
Fringilla coelebs	chaffinch
Garrulus glandarius	jay
Motacilla alba	pied wagtail
Parus caeruleus	blue tit
Parus major	great tit
Pica pica	magpie
Prunella modularis	hedge sparrow
Sturnus vulgaris	starling
Troglodytes troglodytes	wren
Turdus merula	blackbird

Mammals

Vulpes vulpes	fox

APPENDIX 2 – PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD



Photograph 1 – Target Note Area 1, Former Sports Pitches



Photograph 2 – Target Note Area 1, Former Sports Pitches



Photograph 3 – Target Note Area 2



Photograph 4 – Target Note Area 2



Photograph 5 – Target Note Area 3



Photograph 6 – Target Note Area 4



Photograph 7 – Target Note Area 5 (Eastern Section)



Photograph 8 – Target Note Area 5 (Western Section)



Photograph 9 – Target Note Area 6



Photograph 10 - Hardy Farm SBI (Section A)



Photograph 11 – Hardy Farm SBI (Section A)



Photograph 12 - Hardy Farm SBI (Section B)



Photograph 13 – Hardy Farm SBI (Section C)



Photograph 14 - River Mersey