Residential Development at the Former Ambulance Depot, Gorton

Ecological Assessment

On behalf of **Homes and Communities Agency**

Project Ref: 30061 | Rev: AA | Date: March 2014

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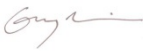
Reviewed by:	Guy Miller	Principal Ecologist		06/03/14
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For and on behalf of Peter Brett Associates LLP				

Revision	Date	Description	Prepared	Reviewed	Approved

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1 Executive Summary

1.1.1 This report presents the results of survey work undertaken to support an outline planning application for residential development at the former Ambulance Depot in Gorton.

1.1.2 The survey identified that potential ecological constraints associated with the proposed development were related to bats and bird species only.

1.1.3 With regards to bats, no evidence of previous use by bats of the former Ambulance Depot building was identified, but roosting features suitable for bats have been inadvertently created within the main roof in the last three months by vandalism. Given that bats have been in hibernation since the creation of these features they would not have had the opportunity to find or use these features. However, the presence of suitable features for roosting bats means that the roof has potential to support bats in the future and therefore appropriate measures are suggested to avoid impacts on bats.

1.1.4 If the building is demolished in spring 2014 (up and until the end of April), then a precautionary approach to the demolition is likely to be sufficient to avoid any adverse impact on roosting bats. An appropriate precautionary approach is set out as a Working Method Statement for Bats in section 5.3 of this report. If, however, demolition of the building is likely to be delayed until or beyond summer 2014 (from May 2014), it is recommended that further survey work is carried out, prior to demolition, to confirm the absence of roosting bats. This would take the form of close re-inspection of the identified potential roosting features along with evening and/or dawn survey(s) of bat activity using bat detectors by experienced ecologists.

1.1.5 If bats or evidence of bats are found at any point, the ecologist will advise on whether it is appropriate to continue and will contact Natural England for advice, if necessary. It is possible in this situation that works may only be allowed to continue once a Natural England European Protected Species (EPS) Licence has been secured. However, given the structure of the roof and the timing of the recent vandalism, the potential for bats to begin using the building, and therefore the need for an EPS licence, is considered to be low providing the demolition work is carried out as soon as possible in 2014.

1.1.6 With regards to birds, the building provides the only suitable bird-nesting habitat within the site and its suitability to support nesting birds is considered to be low. As a precaution, it is recommended that a pre-demolition survey of the building is made for signs of bird-nesting activity within and on top of the building. If any nesting activity is identified then work affecting these areas would have to be stopped and delayed until nesting activity ceases.

1.1.7 No further survey work is required to provide certainty with regards to determining ecological impacts of the proposed development as the features suitable for roosting bats and birds have only recently been created inadvertently through acts of vandalism on the building and it is understood the demolition is to be carried out as soon as possible. Given the findings of the survey and as long as the mitigation summarised above is implemented as described in this report, the proposed scheme will be in compliance with planning policy and legislation.

2 Introduction

2.1 Site Description

2.1.1 The Ambulance Depot (hereafter referred to as 'the site'), is located on Belle Vue Street in Gorton, Manchester (Ordnance Survey grid reference SJ 87479 96629). The site consists of one building, the disused Ambulance Depot, and associated car parking. Tall security fencing encloses most of the site. No trees or vegetation are present within the site.

2.2 Description of Project and Background to Commission

2.2.1 This Ecology Report has been prepared by Peter Brett Associates (PBA), with BSG Ecology, on behalf of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to support an outline planning application for residential development at the site. The application proposal involves demolition of the existing building and development of the site for residential housing, with associated car parking and landscaping (see Drawing SP(20)02 in Section 7).

2.3 Aims of Study

2.3.1 The objectives of the desk study and survey were as follows:

- Identify the existing habitats within the site;
- Check for evidence of, or potential for, protected or priority species within the site; and
- Identify any potential ecological constraints relating to the proposed development.

2.3.2 This report sets out the results of the survey and, in the context of any known ecological interest of the site identified as a result of the desk study, sets out the approach necessary to ensure that effects on any identified ecologically sensitive receptors are avoided or ameliorated. This will ensure that the proposed development will be acceptable with reference to the planning and legal framework relating to ecological resources.

2.4 Planning Policy Context

2.4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) came into effect on the 27th March 2012. It states that the planning system should seek to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity.

2.4.2 The Government launched new Planning Practice Guidance to support the NPPF on 6th March 2014. This new Guidance supersedes many of the previous pieces of guidance on planning practice. The new Guidance on the Natural Environment (ID:8) states that information on biodiversity impacts and opportunities should inform all stages of development; it refers to guidance given in the Government Circular 06/2005 (ODPM, 2005) with regards to advice on protected species. Paragraph 99 of the Circular states "It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision."

2.4.3 The new Planning Practice Guidance reiterates section 40 of the NERC Act 2006, which places a duty on all public authorities in England and Wales to have regard, in the exercise of their functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Paragraph 117 of the NPPF also states that local authorities should seek to promote the preservation, restoration and re-

creation of priority habitats and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, through planning policies. Priority habitats and species referred to in the NPPF relate to species and habitats of principle importance listed in accordance with section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

3 Methods

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 A data search was carried out for an adjacent HCA site in 2013 (WYG Planning & Environment, 2013) by Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU). The results from this data search contain information on:

- The presence of designated conservation sites such as statutory Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) on or within 5 km of the centre of the adjacent site or non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) on or within 2 km of the centre of the adjacent site; and
- The presence of any known protected or notable species or habitats on or within 2 km of the centre of the adjacent site.

3.1.2 Given the close proximity of the two sites, the data supplied has been reviewed to inform this report.

3.2 Site Survey

3.2.1 Principal Ecologist Guy Miller (MCIEEM) and Ecologist Rachel Hall (Grad CIEEM), of BSG Ecology, undertook the field survey on 5 March 2014 between 12:45 and 14:15 hours. The weather was dry, still and partially cloudy. The site was walked over and the habitats were described using the standard Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC, 2010).

3.2.2 The extended component of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey included making searches for any signs indicating the presence of protected species. The building was inspected from the ground to assess its potential to support roosting bats. A ladder was used to inspect weep holes on the front of the building. An internal inspection of the building was also undertaken to look for evidence of roosting bats such as droppings, feeding remains and characteristic staining associated with active roosts. Evidence of potential nesting habitats for breeding birds within the building were searched for, along with any signs of, or potential for, other protected or priority species. The site was also searched for the presence of invasive non-native plants, such as Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica*.

3.3 Limitations to Methods

3.3.1 The exterior main pitched roof could not be surveyed thoroughly because the central pitched sections of the roof were not visible from ground level and these areas were not considered safe to access directly to carry out a more detailed check. However, it was possible to closely examine the external structure and character of the roof from the fire escape at the north-west corner of the roof. This section of the roof is representative of the rest of the roof structure and this inspection enabled an assessment of the likely suitability of other parts of the roof for roosting bats to be made.

4 Results and Interpretation

4.1.1 This section sets out the findings of the desk study and survey work and determines which of these have significance with reference to ecological planning policy and legislation for the proposed development. Summaries of relevant legislation and planning policy are included where this is relevant to provide context to our reasoning.

4.2 Protected Sites

4.2.1 The Ashton Canal, a non-statutory designated Site of Biological Importance (SBI) is located approximately 1.7km north, at its nearest point. This SBI supports one record of floating water plantain *Luronium natans* and grasswrack pondweed *Potamogeton compressus*. Both of these species are identified as Species of Principal Importance (in response to the NERC Act, 2006). Floating water plantain also receives additional protection under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as amended).

4.3 Habitat Description

4.3.1 The results of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey are shown in Figure 1. Photographs of the features described are included at Appendix B.

4.3.2 The majority of the site supports a large building, the former Ambulance Depot. Surrounding the building on all four sides are areas of hard-standing; to the north and west of the building are areas that were used for car parking.

Buildings

4.3.3 The former Ambulance Depot is brick-built and has a mixture of both pitched and flat roofs (Photograph 1). The main part of the building, which includes the central garage area and several offices, has a tiled, pitched roof with north-lighting. The roof tiles are covered in a glass-fibre sealant (Photograph 2). Given the presence of the glass-fibre sealant, it is assumed that this roof would have been well sealed. However, David McNichol (pers. comm., 5 March 2014) advised that over the last three months lead from the roof has been removed by thieves. As a result, some tiles are missing and access points into the roof have been created, particularly under hip tiles (Photograph 3). No roof voids are present under this roof (Photograph 4); however, sarking boards are present on the underside of the tiles within the interior of the roof.

4.3.4 The western side of the building, facing the road (Photograph 5), has two storeys and a gently-sloping roof that meets the main roof at its lowest point. The roof is not visible from below but is known to be steel clad (David McNichol, pers. comm., 5 March 2014) and insulating boards are present on the underside of the metal roof void (Photograph 6). A small, apparently well-sealed void is present between suspended ceiling tiles and the insulating boards.

4.3.5 An annex at the south-eastern corner of the building also has a well-sealed sloping roof formed of corrugated metal, with a suspended ceiling hung below (Photograph 7).

4.3.6 The north-western corner of the building is formed of a one-storey, flat-roofed extension, which has barge-boarding to the east and west, with a boxed-eave on its northern face (Photograph 8).

4.3.7 The habitats within the site are limited to buildings and hard-standing, neither of which constitute a resource of ecological interest in their own right. Therefore the habitats are only

considered subsequently in this report with reference to the species that they support, rather than for their intrinsic ecological value.

4.4 Protected Species

4.4.1 The desk study and site surveys combined have allowed determination of the species that are likely to be affected by the proposed development. A description of the suitability of the site for these ecological receptors, and any evidence of their presence, is set out below. Target Notes (TN) shown on Figure 1 are referred to in the text below.

Bats

4.4.2 Review of the information provided by GMEU as part of the desk study identified thirty-six records of bats, none of which relates directly to the site. The nearest bat roost, a species unspecified pipistrelle *Pipistrellus* sp. roost, is located approximately 600m to the north-east of the site.

4.4.3 On the western elevation of the building, twenty-two weep holes are present between the bricks above the first storey windows (TN1; for example see Photograph 9), most of which are shallow and superficial. One weep hole extends further back into a cavity and one further cavity within this wall is located between brick work (TN2; Photograph 10). However, both cavities contain debris and cobwebs, which indicate that no movement in and/or out of the cavity has recently occurred; in addition, no signs of use by bats (droppings etc) were identified. It is therefore considered that the likelihood that roosting bats use these features is currently negligible.

4.4.4 At the north-west corner of the building, a narrow gap is present behind barge-boarding on the western face. This joins a cavity, which extends into the boxed-eave on the northern face of the building (TN3; Photograph 8). However, cobwebs and debris are present, both in the gap behind the barge-boarding and the cavity leading into the boxed-eave. No evidence or signs suggesting the presence of roosting bats were identified. Given the lack of evidence of bat use and the presence of debris and cobwebs, which indicate no movement into/out of the feature has recently occurred, it is considered that the likelihood of roosting bats using this feature is currently negligible.

4.4.5 The brickwork of the building is generally in a very good state of repair; very few gaps are present in the masonry. There is some missing mortar under the gutter on the north elevation although these gaps are superficial and do not lead to any substantial cavities and therefore are not considered to provide potential roosting habitat for bats.

4.4.6 The stripping of lead from the roof, which has occurred within the last three months, has opened up cavities underneath the tiling, for example hip tiles (see Photograph 3), which now have the potential to support roosting bats (TN4). The roof appears to have previously been well sealed and in good condition before the lead was removed, and is therefore unlikely to have possessed possible roosting opportunities for bats previously. Given that these new roosting opportunities have been created during winter 2013/14 whilst bats are in hibernation, they are unlikely to have yet identified, or begun to use them.

4.4.7 Bats and their habitats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. In summary, these make it an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct any place used by bats for breeding and shelter, disturb a bat, or kill, injure or take any bat. Several species of bat, including soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* are Species of Principal Importance, listed in response to Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

4.4.8 Whilst it appears that previously the building presented few opportunities for roosting bats and there is no current evidence of use of this building by bats, the recent vandalism that has

taken place in the last three months provides new opportunities for roosting bats within the building fabric and their presence in the future cannot be ruled out. Given this, and the legislative and policy framework that protects bats, the potential impacts of development and the mitigation and compensation that will be implemented to ameliorate such impacts are considered in the subsequent sections of this report.

Nesting Birds

4.4.9 Review of the information provided by GMEU as part of the desk study did not identify any bird records relating directly to the site.

4.4.10 Two records of Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* (protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended) were returned for the search area, the nearest of which is situated approximately 720 m to the north-west of the site. However, the site does not support habitat suitable for this species. In addition, two records of dunnock *Prunella modularis* and house sparrow *Passer domesticus* and one record of starling *Sturnus vulgaris* were returned for the area of search; all three are Species of Principal Importance (listed in response to NERC Act, 2006). The nearest record is for house sparrow, located approximately 420 m to the north-west of the site.

4.4.11 No birds were seen during the field survey, nor was any evidence of nesting activity identified within the building. No scrub or trees are present directly within the site that could support nesting birds. The recent removal of the lead flashing from the main roof may have created suitable nesting opportunities for birds, which were previously inaccessible but could be used by breeding birds in the future. One bird's nest was identified within a tree directly to the north-west, outside of the site boundary. Trees adjacent, but just outside, the east site boundary fence may have the potential to support nesting birds.

4.4.12 Nesting birds are protected under 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 its nest whilst in use or being built, or take or destroy its eggs. In addition to this, for some rarer species (listed on Schedule 1 of the Act), it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb them while they are nest building or at or near a nest with eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

4.4.13 Given the potential presence of this species' group within the site, and the legislative and policy framework that protects them, the potential impacts of development and the mitigation and compensation that will be implemented to ameliorate such impacts are considered in the subsequent sections of this Appraisal.

Other Protected Species

4.4.14 No signs or evidence of any other protected species were identified during the field survey and the habitats within the site are not assessed as being suitable to support any other protected species identified as being present in the surrounding area as a result of review of the information from GMEU.

5 Impacts and Mitigation

5.1.1 The presence of features suitable to support bats and breeding birds described in the preceding sections of this report and the legislation and planning policies relating to them make them a material consideration in the planning application for the proposed development. Therefore, the likely impacts of the proposed development on those species identified as being present, or likely to be present, within the site are discussed below along with the appropriate mitigation and compensation that will be required to ensure that the proposed development is in compliance with planning policy and legislation. Where further survey work is required to provide certainty with regards to determining the ecological impacts of the proposed development, and the appropriate mitigation and compensation required to ameliorate those impacts, this is also set out below along with any timing constraints associated with such surveys and implications for project programme.

5.2 Protected Sites

5.2.1 The Ashton Canal, designated as a non-statutory SBI, is located c. 1.7km to the north of the site. Given the distance of the site from the SBI, the absence of any connecting watercourse between the two, and the existing urban development between the site and the SBI, no adverse impacts on the Ashton Canal SBI are anticipated from the proposed development at the disused Ambulance Depot site.

5.3 Protected Species

Bats

5.3.1 There is no current evidence of use of the buildings by bats. However the building still supports features suitable for use by bats. The majority of these have been recently (in the last three months) inadvertently created as a result of the action of vandals stripping lead from the roof.

5.3.2 If the building is demolished in spring 2014 (up and until the end of April), then a precautionary approach to the demolition is likely to be sufficient to avoid any adverse impact on roosting bats. This approach is detailed in "Working Method Statement for Bats" below.

5.3.3 If, however, demolition of the building is likely to be delayed until or beyond summer 2014 (from May 2014), it is recommended that further survey work is carried out, prior to demolition, to confirm the absence of roosting bats. This would take the form of close re-inspection of the identified potential roosting features along with evening and/or dawn survey(s) of bat activity using bat detectors.

Working Method Statement for Bats

5.3.4 Prior to any works on site, a bat box (e.g. a Schwegler 1WQ) will be installed in a suitable location (e.g. in Gorton Park if access can be agreed).

5.3.5 Prior to any roof stripping a "tool box talk" will be provided to contractors which will brief all personnel on the methods of working that will ensure bat safety and what they should do in the unlikely event that they find a bat.

5.3.6 An ecologist will be present to maintain a watching brief during the stripping of ridge/hip tiles and slates from the main roof. It is recommended that stripping of the main roof is done before other parts of the roof (which will not require an ecological watching brief).

5.3.7 Slates will be carefully removed by hand from the ridge downwards. This will allow any bats that may be present to be rescued or disperse naturally and will make the roof unsuitable for use by bats. This work will only be undertaken in dry weather in order to reduce the risk to bats should they become exposed.

5.3.8 In the unlikely event that a bat is found, the ecologist will attempt to capture it and transfer it to a place of safety (i.e. the bat box installed in Gorton Park, or other agreed suitable location) or release it at an appropriate time and place.

5.3.9 In the unlikely event that evidence of bats is found then this evidence will be assessed and the ecologist will consider whether it is appropriate to continue with the roof stripping. If it is not considered appropriate to continue (for example an abundance of bat droppings has been discovered) then the ecologist will contact Natural England for advice and work to the roof will cease whilst a suitable course of action is agreed.

5.3.10 If bats or evidence of bats are found when the ecologist is not present on site then works should stop and the ecologist should be notified immediately. The ecologist will advise on whether it is appropriate to continue and will contact Natural England for advice, if necessary. It is possible in this situation that works may only be allowed to continue once a Natural England European Protected Species (EPS) Licence has been secured. However, given the structure of the roof and the timing of the recent vandalism, the potential for bats to begin using the building, and therefore the need for an EPS licence, is considered to be a low risk providing the work is carried out as soon as possible in 2014.

Nesting Birds

5.3.11 No nests or bird-nesting activity was observed directly within the site boundary. A bird nest was identified in a tree directly adjacent to the north-west corner, just outside of the site boundary. The building provides the only potentially suitable bird-nesting habitat within the site, although its potential to support nesting birds is considered to be low.

5.3.12 Given the presence of potentially suitable features for nesting birds, the demolition of the building during the bird-nesting season has the potential to give rise to an impact on nesting birds, although this is considered to be a low risk given the identified potential. As a guide, the bird nesting season is between February and August inclusive; dates vary by species and can be affected by prevailing weather conditions. The majority of species do not start nesting until March and April. As a precaution, it is recommended that a pre-demolition survey of the building is made for signs of bird-nesting activity within and on top of the building. If any nesting activity is identified then work affecting these areas would have to be stopped and delayed until nesting activity ceases.

6 References

JNCC (2010) Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey. Peterborough

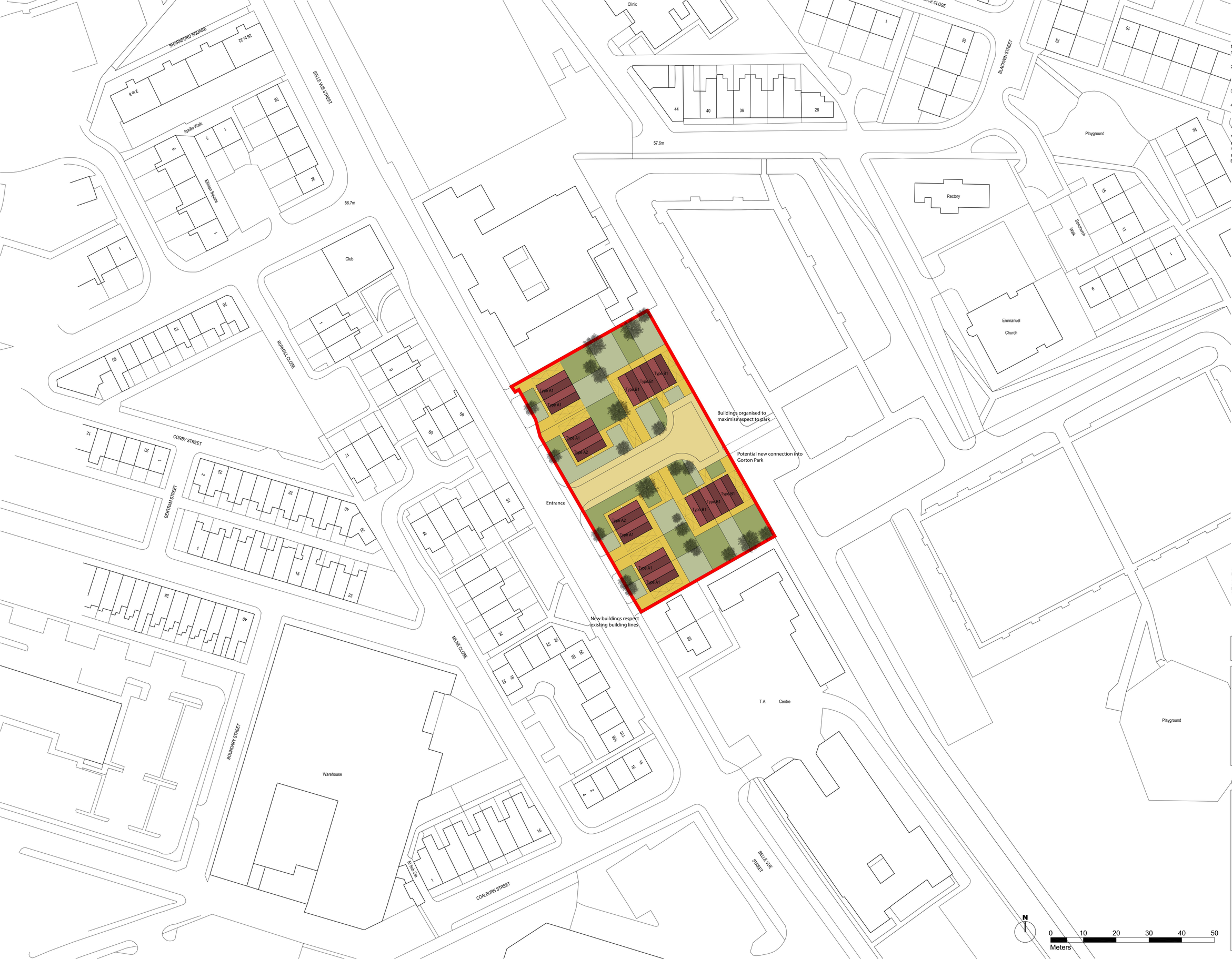
WYG Planning & Environment (2013) Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey, All Saints Primary School. Manchester

7 Figures

Drawing SP(20)02

Figure 1. Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey Results

(overleaf)



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drawing originated by: SL — date: 19/02/2014

revisions	drawn/reviewed	date
REV A 4no. units omitted	SL/JF	17/03/14
REV B Extent of road and footpath clarified	SL/JF	31/03/14

Schedule of accommodation

House type	Number
A1 (3B/5P)	6
A2 (3B/5P)	2
B1 (2B/4P)	6
Total	**14**

PRELIMINARY

All Saints, Gorton

Ambulance Site Plan

Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Reviewed by : JF

job	drawing	rev
6596	SP(20)02	B

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PROJECT TITLE
AMBULANCE DEPOT, GORTON

DRAWING TITLE
Figure 1. Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey Results

DATE: 06.03.2014 CHECKED: GM SCALE: NTS
DRAWN: RH APPROVED: GM STATUS: FINAL

LEGEND

- Building
- Hard-standing
- Fence
- 1 — Target Note (TN) number
- Site Boundary

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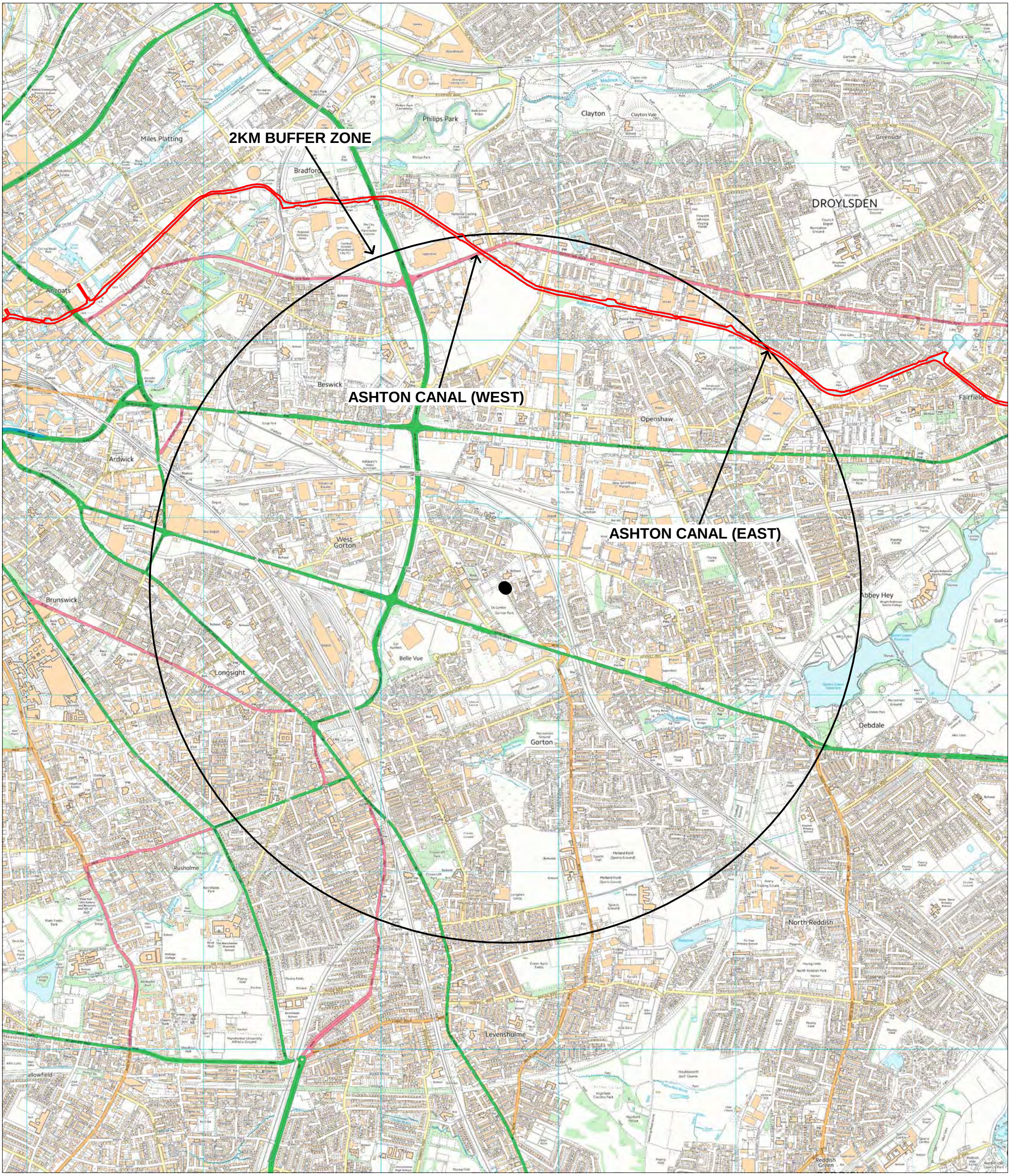
Appendix A Desk Study Information

(overleaf)



KEY

SITE OF BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

SBI BOUNDARY

GREATER MANCHESTER ECOLOGY UNIT
ECOLOGICAL SEARCH - ENDCOTT CLOSE
GRID REF SJ 877 966 - MAP 1

SCALE 1:20,000

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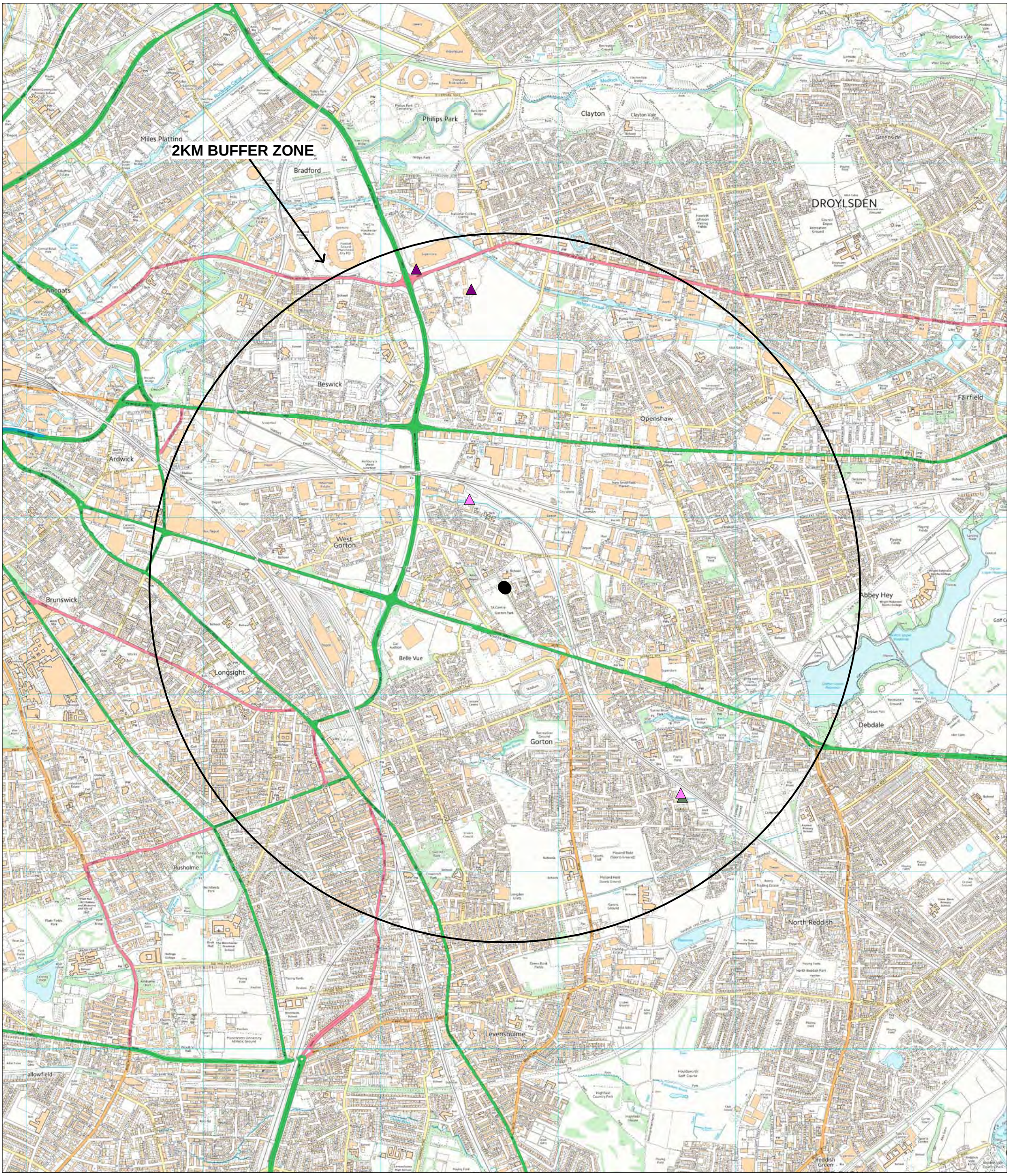
Date Produced: 14/06/2013



KEY
SECTION 41 SPECIES

- ▲ DUNNOCK
- △ HOUSE SPARROW
- ▲ STARLING

GREATER MANCHESTER ECOLOGY UNIT
ECOLOGICAL SEARCH - ENDCOTT CLOSE
GRID REFERENCE SJ877966 - MAP 5

SCALE 1:20,000

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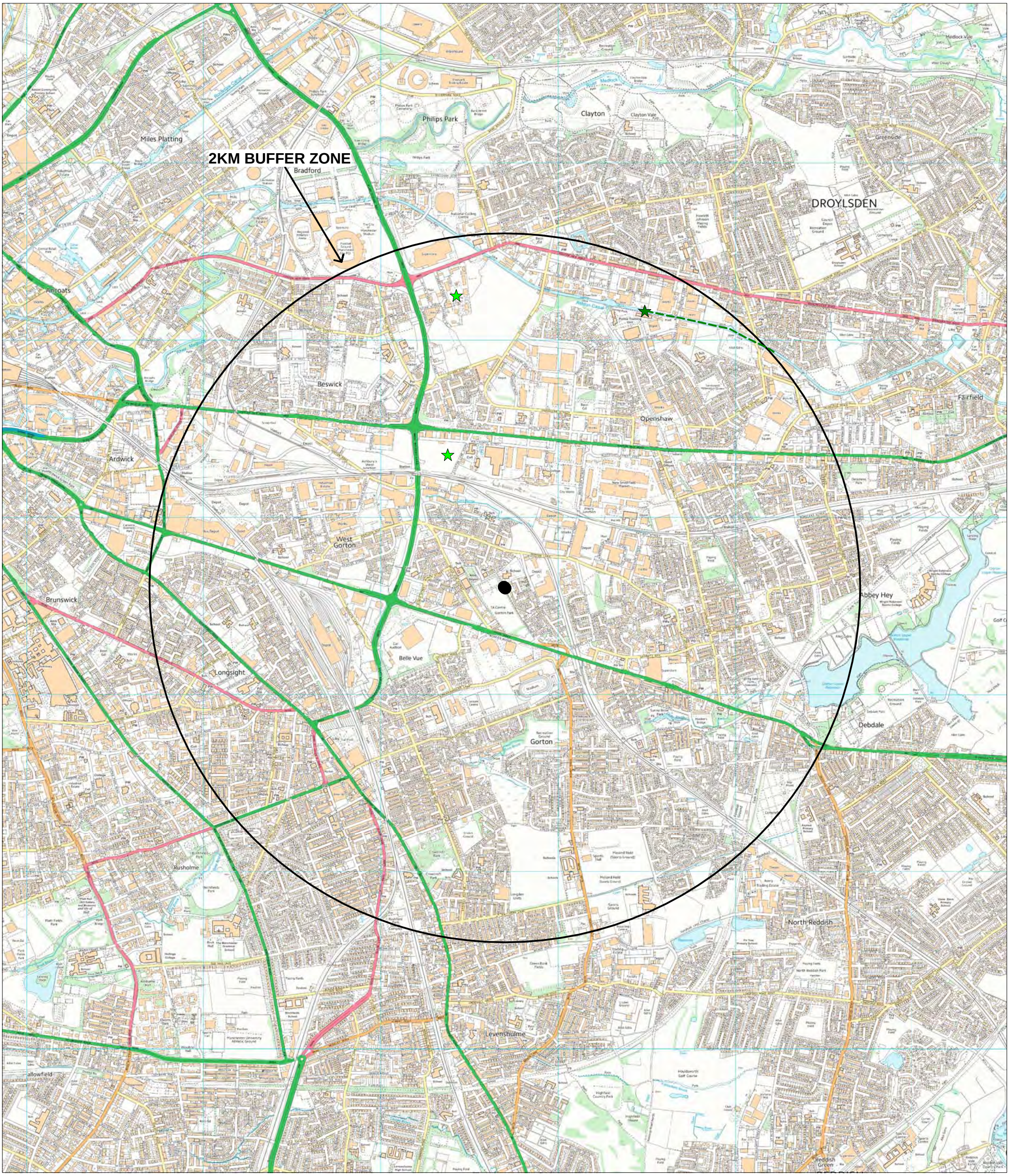

KEY

PROTECTED SPECIES

- ★ Grasswrack Pondweed
- ★ Litttle Ringed Plover
- ----- Grasswrack Pondweed -Extent of Signs

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ECOLOGICAL SEARCH - ENDCOTT CLOSE
GRID REF SJ 877 966 - MAP 3

SCALE 1:20,000

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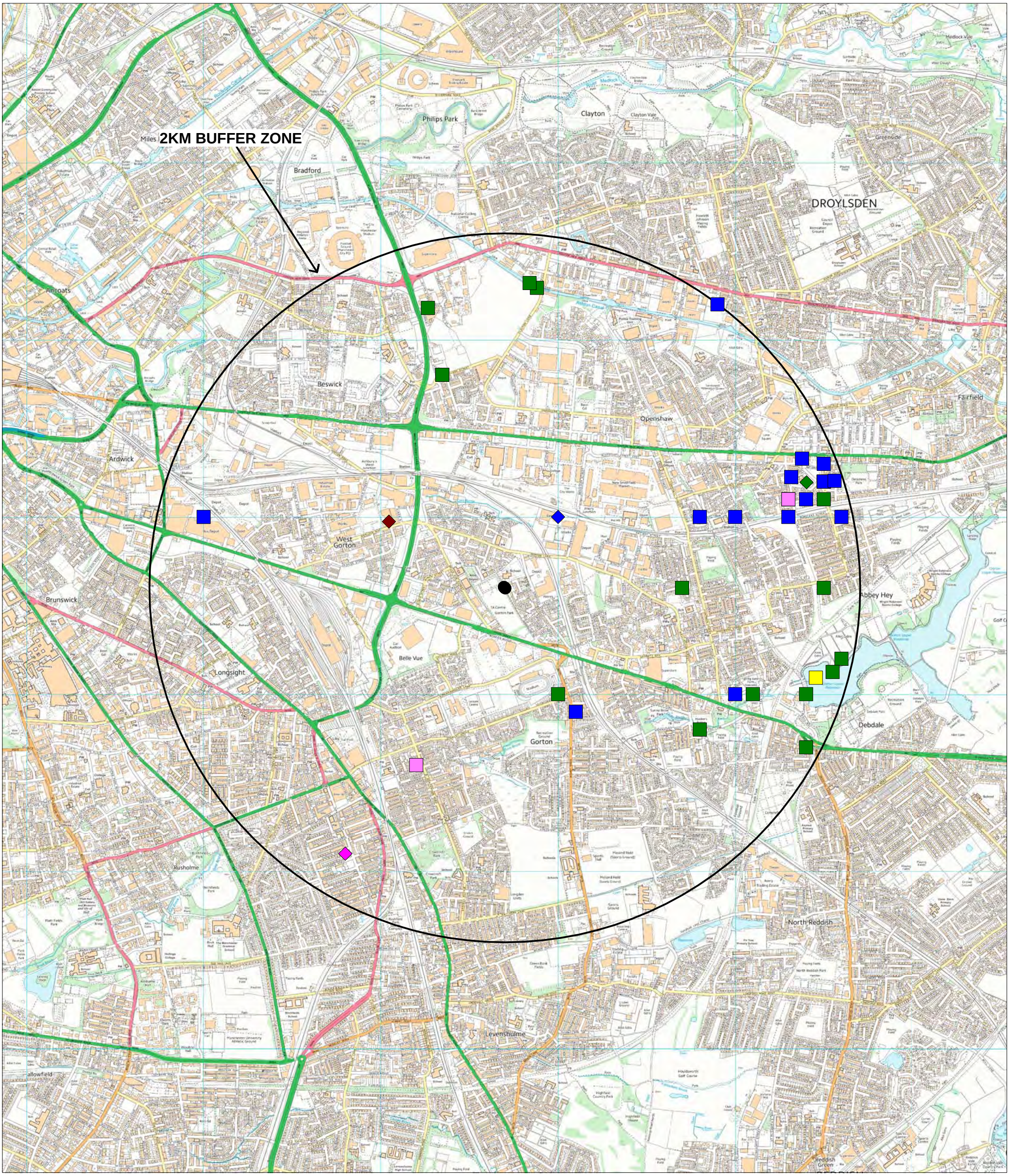

KEY

BAT ROOSTS

- BROWN LONG-EARED
- COMMON PIPISTRELLE
- DAUBENTON'S BAT
- PIPISTRELLE SP

BATS OTHER SIGNS

- COMMON PIPISTRELLE
- PIPISTRELLE SP
- SOPRANO PIPISTRELLE
- WHISKERED BAT

GREATER MANCHESTER ECOLOGY UNIT
ECOLOGICAL SEARCH - ENDCOTT CLOSE
GRID REFERENCE SJ877966 - MAP 4

SCALE 1:20,000

BAT DATA COURTESY OF SOUTH LANCS BAT GROUP

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Appendix B Photographs

(overleaf)

Photograph 1: The disused building has a mixture of pitched, sloped and flat roofs across its length and width.



Photograph 2: The main roof is pitched, tiled and covered in a glass-fibre sealant. North-lighting is also present.



Photograph 3: Stripping of lead from the roof in the last three months has created cavities underneath tiles, particularly under hip tiles.



Photograph 4: The interior space below the main roof has no voids. The undersides of tiles are lined with wooden sarking boards.



Photograph 5: The western elevation of the building, looking south. The northern corner of this wall is out of shot.



Photograph 6: The interior of western sloping roof is steel clad and compressed straw, with insulating material present in the void.



Photograph 7: The south-eastern annex has a well-sealed, steel, sloping roof with a suspended ceiling below.



Photograph 8: The north-west section of the building has a flat roof, with barge-boarding on the west wall and a boxed-eave on the north. A gap is present beneath the barge-boarding and a cavity leads from it into the boxed-eave. This cavity supports cobwebs and debris.



Photograph 9: Weep holes present between the bricks, above the first storey windows on the western wall face.



Photograph 10: Additional cavity on the western wall (between wires).

