



Leigh Ecology Ltd

Protected Species and Habitat Surveys

254 Abbey Hey Lane,

Manchester.

M18 8RP.

On behalf of Futurebuild MCR LTD

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

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Important Information to Readers

This report has been prepared for Futurebuild MCR Ltd, in accordance with the terms and conditions of appointment for a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. Leigh Ecology Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for the use of or reliance on the content of this report by any third party.

The advice contained in this report is based on the information available and/or collected during the period of study. We cannot eliminate the possibility of important ecological features being found through further investigation and/or by survey at different times of the year or in different years.

Surveys and assessments are undertaken on the understanding that nothing in our reports will be omitted, amended or misrepresented by the client or any other interested party.

Please be aware the information contained within this report is valid for a period not exceeding two years. After this time, data contained within will require updating.

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1. Executive Summary

Leigh Ecology Ltd was commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Assessment of a parcel of land located at 254 Abbey Hey Lane, Manchester. The site previously housed the Abbey Hey Hotel, which was demolished in 2010. Since then, no further development has occurred, resulting in a derelict area that has naturally regenerated with ruderal vegetation and early successional species.

The site comprises a small area of urban land along Abbey Hey Lane, situated in the residential district of Abbey Hey within Gorton, on the eastern side of Manchester. It includes a small section of concrete driveway, while the remainder is dominated by dense vegetation, primarily stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*), and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.). Additional species observed in flower during the site visit on 15th May 2025 included creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) and low-growing creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*).

The surrounding environment is densely urban, bordered by rows of housing and associated infrastructure. The site is enclosed by hard boundaries on all sides: brick walls and buildings form the northern, western, and eastern limits, while a steel fence defines the southern boundary.

Notable ecological sites in the wider landscape include Clayton Vale Local Nature Reserve (LNR), approximately 2.8 km to the northwest, and Highfield Country Park LNR, located about 3.2 km to the southwest. The nearest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is the Hollingwood Branch Canal, situated roughly 3.5 km to the northwest.

The proposed development includes the construction of an apartment complex with associated parking and infrastructure. Plans also include elements of soft landscaping and tree planting to complement the new urban layout.

Ecologically, the site is small in scale and largely comprises hardstanding and bramble

scrub interspersed with tall ruderal vegetation, invasive species, and occasional grass species. Given its context and current condition, the site supports limited biodiversity value, though appropriate consideration will be given to any ecological constraints and enhancement opportunities as part of the development process.

The site has dotted features which remain from previous development work, including building material piles which may offer suitable hibernacula for reptiles, amphibians.

2. Introduction

Background

Leigh Ecology Ltd was commissioned by Futurebuild MCR Ltd to undertake an Ecological Appraisal of a parcel of land identified for a proposed residential development. The site is located at approximate National Grid Reference (NGR) SJ897967, with the site boundary *shown in red on Figure 2.1 below*.



Figure 2.1; Site Location and Extent

Red line shows site boundary. (Google Satellite, 2025).
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This report presents baseline ecological information derived from the diurnal appraisal survey. It also provides recommendations for any additional surveys or works required to deliver a comprehensive ecological impact assessment.

The Applicant should be aware that if, during the appraisal:

- The site is found to be suitable habitat for any European Protected Species (EPS), other protected species, or priority habitats/species, or
- Evidence of use by protected species is observed or suspected, or
- Seasonal constraints limit the ability to gather sufficient ecological data for a robust assessment,

then further detailed surveys may be recommended to enable a conclusive assessment of potential ecological impacts.

If protected species are subsequently confirmed during these additional surveys and may be affected by the development, it is likely that a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence (EPSML) will be required to proceed with development works.

Certain protected or priority species have been omitted from this report, as they were discounted based on factors such as absence or isolation of suitable habitat, known species distribution, or because the proposed works are unlikely to negatively impact these species or their habitats.

2.1 Legislation & Policy

This report considers the following key legislation and policy relevant to ecological assessment and protection:

Legislation

- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (incorporating EU Exit changes, 2019)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Hedgerow Regulations 1997
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990
- Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996

These laws protect both native and invasive species, with varying levels of protection depending on the species or group. For example, some species receive protection only during specific life stages (such as breeding birds during nesting), while others have full protection across their lifecycle under national or European law (e.g., otters). Some species are protected solely under UK law (e.g., grass snake).

Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, revised July 2021) provides key guidance on biodiversity and planning decisions. Paragraph 180 states:

- **a)** Planning permission should be refused if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided, mitigated, or—only as a last resort—compensated for.

- **b)** Development likely to have an adverse effect on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), individually or in combination with other developments, should not normally be permitted unless the benefits clearly outweigh the impacts on the site and the wider network of SSSIs.
- **c)** Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (e.g., ancient woodland or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists.
- **d)** Developments whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported, and opportunities to improve biodiversity within and around developments should be integrated into design, especially where measurable net gains or public access improvements can be secured.

This national policy is reflected and supported within the relevant local planning policy framework.

Scope of Study

This report includes:

- A preliminary ecological baseline assessment for the site
- An assessment of protected mammals on site
- A desk study including data search via Magic Map and local ecological records
- Identification of potential ecological constraints to development
- Recommendations for any further ecological work required to support a planning application

All work was conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's (CIEEM) Code of Professional Conduct and Good Practice Guidelines.

3. Methodology

A daytime Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was conducted on the 15th of May 2025 under dry and sunny conditions by Christian Leigh, a Natural England licensed bat surveyor and a qualifying member of CIEEM.

Floristic Assessment

The survey employed the UK Habitat Classification Version 1.1 (Butcher et al., 2020), aligning with the Biodiversity Net Gain framework, and referred to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC, 2010). The approach also followed guidance from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, 2nd Edition (CIEEM, 2017).

During the walkover, botanical assemblages were recorded, focusing on the presence of red-listed species (Stroh et al., 2014; Hodgetts, 2011), Section 41 species of the NERC Act, Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) species, and specially protected species listed under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 5 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2019, post-EU Exit). Species nomenclature follows Stace (2019) for vascular plants, Smith (2004) for mosses, and Dobson (2018) for lichens.

The site was also assessed for invasive non-native species (INNS), as listed under Schedule 9 (Part II) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended).

Faunal Assessment

Fauna presence and evidence were documented alongside an assessment of the site's suitability for priority species. The walkover also included searching for ephemeral pools or unmapped waterbodies that could be ecologically significant.

Bats

The site was surveyed for bats, including inspection of buildings (where present) for potential roosting features (PRFs) and signs of use such as droppings, incidental sightings, or prey remains. The inspection utilised a high-powered torch to examine internal and external features, including roofs, eaves, and crevices.

All trees were also assessed for bat roost potential using close-focus binoculars and torches. Potential roost features include woodpecker holes, rot holes, cracks or splits, lifted bark, knot holes, cavities, ivy cover on stems >50mm diameter, and bat or bird boxes.

The assessment criteria followed the Bat Conservation Trust's Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 4th Edition (2023).

Landscape Assessment for Bats

Linear features such as hedgerows and watercourses, which often serve as bat commuting and foraging routes, were identified and evaluated for potential impacts from development activities.

Breeding Birds

The survey checked buildings, trees, hedgerows, and scrub for nesting birds and nesting suitability. Bird species observed and heard were recorded, along with searches for nests or nesting materials. Special attention was given to species protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended), including priority species such as Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*).

Other Mammals

The walkover included a search for signs of Badger (*Meles meles*), such as setts, runs, digging, latrines, and snuffle holes. Evidence of habitat suitability for European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) was also recorded.

Amphibians and Reptiles

A 250m radius desktop search from the site's central grid reference identified nearby ponds, ditches, or waterbodies potentially supporting Great Crested Newts (GCN). This informed recommendations for any further detailed surveys.

The site was evaluated for reptile suitability by examining features such as south-facing slopes (basking), hibernation sites (e.g., banks, walls, rubble piles), and foraging habitat (e.g., rough grassland and scrub).

Professional Judgement

The conclusions and recommendations in this report are based on the surveyor's skills, experience, and knowledge of the site's flora and fauna within the local and regional ecological context.

4. Results

Site Survey

Habitats within the survey area

The results of the Phase 1 Habitat survey are detailed in **Appendix 1**, with supporting photographs integrated within the text. Habitat descriptions are provided using English plant names for clarity.

Site Overview

The survey area encompasses the entire parcel of land shown in Figure 2.1. The proposed development entails the construction of an apartment complex, along with associated infrastructure and landscaping.

Currently, the site consists entirely of overgrown, derelict land. The lack of management has allowed for natural succession, resulting in dense overgrowth dominated by bramble, stinging nettle, buddleia, creeping thistle, curled dock, and crow's foot. This vegetation offers limited ecological value, providing some habitat opportunities primarily for invertebrates.

The site is enclosed by intact brick walls and fencing on all sides, contributing to its physical isolation from surrounding habitats. It is situated within a densely built-up urban environment, surrounded by residential housing and areas of hardstanding.

Approximately 400 metres to the south lies Gorton Upper Reservoir, with Dodge Leach Brook located just beyond. No other significant water bodies were identified within the immediate vicinity of the site, based on Ordnance Survey mapping. Scattered remnants of previous development remain on-site, including bags of bricks, roof tiles, and several wooden pallets. These materials are now partially overgrown with ground vegetation, particularly brambles and nettles.

Site Boundaries

The site is enclosed on all sides by hard boundaries. Brick walls form the northern, eastern, and western perimeters, while the southern boundary consists of a fixed steel fence.

Surrounding Habitats

The site is located within the densely urbanised area of Gorton, in Manchester. Gorton Upper Reservoir lies approximately 400 metres to the south of the site boundary. Beyond the reservoir, Dodge Leach Brook runs through the landscape, alongside Fairfield Golf Club and Debdale Park. Together, these features form a connected green corridor in the eastern part of Manchester.



Photograph 1, A view from the front of site, showing the bramble and stinging nettle dominance of the majority of site.



Photograph 2, View of the existing concrete hard standing on site, with some areas showing no signs of emerging flora growth.



Photograph 3, A view of some remaining building materials which are present on site. The materials sit atop wooden pallets. As seen also is the brick walled northern and western boundaries.



Photograph 4, The density of the ground flora varies across site, with the central section's offering 7/8 species per m², with overriding dominance by bramble and stinging nettle.

Protected and notable species

Invertebrates. The site is predominately ruderal, forb and scrub species accompanied with hard standing land, therefore flowering vegetation is present on site offering ideal habitat for invertebrate usage. Given the site is a derelict site/vacant land, natural succession growth has occurred to dominate the site. No invertebrate species were identified on site during the site survey, but it is likely they are often present.

Amphibians

Great crested newts (GCN) are protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). These regulations afford protection to both individual newts and the habitats they utilise for shelter, rest, or breeding. GCN are also listed as a priority species under both the UK and local (LBAP) Biodiversity Action

Plans.

The site is set within dense urban infrastructure, with no notable water bodies identified within 250m of site. A series of Allotments is noted around 160m northeast from proposal site, but no mapped ponds or cultivated water bodies were identified within. As aforementioned, Gorton Upper reservoir is around 400m south of site. The site is also bounded by hard boundaries.

Breeding Birds

The site features a habitat comprising of mainly grouped stemmed plants, creating an open mosaic within most sections of the flora. This was found to be unsuitable for bird nesting within and urban features on/surrounding the site offered no signs of bird nesting ancient or active.

Mammals

The site offers limited suitability as mammal habitat, primarily due to the hard-standing boundaries on all sides. Most of the ground surface is concrete or other artificial material, with vegetation growing over it. However, the surrounding urban environment provides more favourable conditions for hedgehog foraging and hibernation. Within the site, some rubble piles and construction materials may offer potential shelter. The southern boundary is marked by a standard steel fence with gaps at its base, which could allow hedgehogs to pass through.

5. Constraints And Recommendations

The proposed development (within the red line site boundary as shown in *Figure 2.1*) will consist of the erection of a residential development with associated infrastructure.

Positioning, construction and post construction impacts are therefore likely upon both the habitats and species within and immediately adjacent to the site. Ecological constraints and recommendations regarding any development of the site are discussed below.

Non-native invasive species

Invasive Plants

Buddleia was identified on site, particularly scattered along the eastern hard-standing boundary and adjacent to the building next door. To prevent regrowth, this invasive species should be thoroughly removed. As such, an Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) management plan should be implemented.

Flora

The site is relatively small, occupying the footprint of a former hotel building and associated hard standing. As a result, it has undergone natural successional growth, with bramble and stinging nettle emerging as the dominant vegetation. Additional plant species identified on site include curled dock, broad-leaved dock, dandelion, crow's foot, evening primrose, creeping buttercup, creeping thistle, and buddleia.

Protected Species

Bats

The site supports very limited suitability for bat species.

Birds

It is likely that common garden bird species use the site for foraging, given the available vegetation. However, the features present were assessed as unsuitable for nesting or breeding. To ensure compliance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), vegetation clearance and construction should ideally take place outside the bird nesting season (March to September, inclusive). If works must proceed during this period, a nesting bird survey should be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to commencement.

Amphibians

No suitable water bodies for GCN were identified within 150m of site, but the large water body of Gorton Upper Reservoir was identified within proximity, south of site. Therefore, following good practice guidance, amphibian RAMS should be followed, particularly when removing and disturbing the rubble piles and building materials on site, which may offer an urban hibernaculum for amphibians.

Badgers

No suitable badger habitat was identified on site.

Other Mammals

The site offers suitability for hedgehog, due to possible access along the southern border of site below the steel fence, and the suitable sheltered foraging space

beneath elevated flora and building materials. Therefore, hedgehog RAMS should be followed across all development stages.

Ecological Enhancements

A comprehensive Ecological Enhancement Plan should be developed to deliver net gains for biodiversity in accordance with the NPPF (2021) and Environment Act 2021.

The plan could include:

- Installation of bat boxes on retained trees or new buildings.
- Bird nesting boxes.
- Hedgehog highways and hibernacula.
- Amphibian hibernacula (e.g. log piles) in the ecological enhancement area.
- Invertebrate features such as insect hotels and bee bricks.

6. REFERENCES

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Phase 1 Habitat Map



Appendices

Appendix 2 – Amphibian Safeguard Method Statement

Amphibian Safeguarding Method Statement

This method statement should be followed for the initial phase of works within the site, which may affect the surrounding terrestrial habitat. Minor or short term destructive or disturbance works will also follow this Method Statement to ensure legal compliance and to ensure the favourable conservation status of the species is not compromised.

The following measures will be adopted throughout the construction period of the proposed development.

- A toolbox talk covering the following points will be presented to the developer undertaking the construction activities;
- A fingertip search by a licensed ecologist of the proposed construction area immediately prior to any turf removal;
- Should any trenches or excavations be required, an escape route for animals that enter the trench must be provided, especially if left open overnight. Ramps should be no greater than of 45 degrees in angle. Ideally, any holes should be securely covered;

- All excavations left open overnight or longer should be checked for animals prior to the continuation of works or infilling;
- There will be no impacts on surrounding hedgerows. All hedgerows will be maintained throughout the construction programme;
- Any excavated material should be placed on boards or sheeting to reduced damage to the grass sward(if present). If left overnight this material should be searched prior to being used as infill;
- Back filling should be completed immediately after any excavations, ideally back filling as an ongoing process to the work in hand;
- If a GCN is found during the construction activities, work must stop immediately and contact should be made with a licensed, qualified ecologist, who will liaise with Natural England.

Hedgehog Safeguarding Method Statement

The proposed RAMS to avoid impacts to hedgehogs and the triggering of the legislation protecting them is as follows and will be implemented prior to the start of any site clearance affecting suitable habitat for hedgehogs in each development phase:

- Works which could potentially affect hedgehogs, should they be present, such as the removal of tall ruderal, scrub (both dense and scattered) and broadleaved woodland, as well as any brash piles that may be present, will be undertaken under supervision of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) outside of their hibernation season (October to March/April, inclusive), dependant on weather conditions (dry and warm - night-time temperatures above 5°C);
- Immediately prior to work commencing, a walkover of the site will be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist (SQE) to identify the most important areas of habitat. This would be combined with a preliminary check for hedgehogs.

- Prior to work commencing, a toolbox talk will be provided by a SQE to all contractors working on the site. This will inform them of all ecological constraints and considerations relevant to the construction and will include identification of the species, their legal protection and necessary mitigation measures, including what to do if the species is encountered on the site during site works.
- Particularly sensitive areas, such as brash piles and within the woodland, will be carefully cleared by hand, prior to commencement of works on site.
- Once cleared of vegetation, the area will be maintained as bare earth to avoid hedgehogs recolonising the area prior to commencement of development.

Hedgehogs are anticipated to continue to be able to use the site following completion of the development, likely within the retained section of scrub and trees.

It is also proposed that Hedgehog highways are developed between gardens by incorporating 13cm x 23cm gaps in fences or hedges (please see below).



13cm

13cm