

Note on Vegetation Removal and Tree Work

Former Central Retail Park, Ancoats, Manchester

Introduction

Collington Winter Environmental Ltd has been instructed by Government Property Agency (GPA) to prepare this note to discharge planning conditions 4) and 5) in relation to planning consent number: 141607/FO/2024:

4) "No vegetation clearance as part of the Enabling Phase shall take place during the optimum period for bird nesting (March - September inclusive) unless nesting birds have been shown to be absent is agreed in writing by the City Council, Local Planning Authority. Any method statement shall then be implemented for the duration of the Enabling works."

5) All tree work should be carried out by a competent contractor in accordance with British Standard BS 3998 "Recommendations for Tree Work".

In preparing this statement Collington Winter Environmental Ltd has held regards to the recommendations set out in the Nesting Bird Method Statement completed by AtkinsRéalis on the 27th January 2024 and has undertaken a Nesting Bird Check of the site shown in Figure 1 and has followed industry best practice.

Figure 1: Site Area



Background

This note and method statement has been prepared to remove vegetation and complete the tree works during the bird nesting season without directly impacting any nesting birds to meet the Clients project programme.

Ecological Assessment

AtkinsRéalis completed an ecological walkover of the site on 10th April 2024 and no active nests were identified during the walkover survey, but it was noted that nests may have been obscured by dense vegetation. The scattered urban trees on the southern boundary and line of trees on the northern boundary were found to potentially provide suitable nesting opportunities for several species of widespread bird species associated with urban habitats. Due to the lack of suitable habitat onsite AtkinsRéalis determined that the site was not considered to provide suitable nesting habitat for any priority bird species (such as those listed on Schedule 1 of the WCA). Collington Winter Environmental Ltd support these conclusions.

Nesting Birds Inspection

A nesting bird inspection of the site was completed on the 28th February 2025 by Michael Boucher, Graduate Ecologist at Collington Winter Environmental Ltd. The check involved the use of binoculars to observe the area to check for any nests or nests in construction. The area was observed to locate any birds returning to nests or displaying territorial behaviour. Additionally, the site was checked for burrows and other mammalian presence in order to not disturb or alter any protected species habitats.

Birds were observed utilising the trees within the site during the check. However, there was no nesting behaviour identified within the line of trees to the north or south or the other areas of vegetation. Common ivy (*Hedera helix*) on the trees in the south caused visual limitations to the surveyor, however there were no active nests found. One nest was identified within the line of trees to the north and was monitored continuously for 20 minutes (located at SJ85162984444). There were no birds identified returning to the nest and no further nesting activity recorded within this line of trees. It was concluded that the nest was inactive, this is to be monitored during the updated nesting bird checks.

Bird nesting boxes were noted located offsite, approximately 10m away from the northern line of trees and nesting tits were identified within the boxes (see Figure 1 for location). This is to be retained along with a 10m buffer from the nest boxes. Historic bird boxes and several intact bird boxes were located along the fence on the north of site, most of these were found to be historic and not suitable for nesting bird use due to the damage. Some intact bird boxes were found to be suitable however no activity was noted. These are to be re-assessed during the updated nesting bird check prior to removal. See Figure 1 for locations.



Figure 1: Red- Trees and vegetation to be removed, Yellow- inactive bird nest, Blue – Bird Boxes outside of site

Relevant Legislation

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) Section 9

It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird; intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; intentionally take or destroy the nest or eggs of any wild bird. These offences apply to all species of wild bird including feral pigeons and wood pigeons, and corvid species (magpie, crow, rook and jackdaw).

There is special legal protection for birds on Schedule 1 (such as kingfisher, barn owl and birds of prey). It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a Schedule 1 species while it is building a nest or is in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; intentionally or recklessly disturb dependent young of such a species.

Proposed Mitigations to Allow the Vegetation Removal

To comply with the above legislation requirements in relation to nesting birds, ideally all vegetation clearance should be undertaken outside the nesting bird season (1st March until 31st August), which should include all vegetated habitats (such as ground level vegetation, vegetation within planters, scrub, climbers, ruderals, and trees) that are suitable for nesting birds. However, in this case it has not been possible to complete the vegetation removal prior to the start of the nesting bird season and in order to meet the project programme it is proposed to undertake the vegetation removal during March 2025 following a strict methodology to ensure no harm is caused to any nesting birds this includes an ecologist attending site and completing nesting bird checks every 24 hours.

The proposed methodology is to check all vegetated areas by undertaking a thorough walkover survey by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to any clearance or disturbance work being undertaken, this will be completed every 24 hours.

The vegetation clearance will be carried out in sections and only after the ecologist has undertaken a walkover survey of the relevant area and confirmed that such works can proceed due to the absence of nesting birds. Where no nests of any other bird matters are identified, a post survey period of 24 hours will stand within which time clearance of that section may proceed. A further survey will be required if the vegetation surveyed is not removed within the time period.

Where nests are located within a proposed vegetation clearance area, no vegetation removal should be carried out within a 2 - 4 m radius of the nest unless a different stand-off distance is specified by the ecologist. The buffer will be dependent on the species identified as well as the location of the nest to assess the effects of disturbance. The location of the buffer surrounding the nest will be demarcated with tape or appropriate fencing to ensure it remains protected until the nest becomes inactive. Only once the young have hatched, and have fully fledged, can the nest clearance works proceed in the safeguarded area. The nest would need to be monitored by an ecologist to confirm this, no works are to proceed on the nest without absence confirmed by an Ecologist. For most common passerine species, this period of time can range from approximately 14 to 24 days.

Once the vegetation has been cut back, it will not be allowed to grow back to provide nesting bird opportunities. The trees and vegetation which are cut back will be removed from site quickly.

Summary

Both the survey undertaken by AtkinsRealis in April 2024 and the recent survey undertaken by Collington Winter Environmental Ltd have confirmed there no active bird nests identified onsite, although nesting activity was recorded within the adjacent areas in the nesting boxes. To mitigate against potential harm caused to bird species, nesting bird checks will be completed every 24 hours during the vegetation removal works on site. Nesting bird checks will be undertaken every morning before trees are to be removed to ensure there are no nesting birds in the areas to be cut back. The historic nest found in the northern line of trees will be re-monitored when works are to commence to confirm the nest has remained inactive. Furthermore, if nesting birds are identified a suitable buffer will be recommended by the Ecologist onsite which will be retained until the nest is confirmed inactive by the Ecologist. There were no signs of any mammalian species identified within the site; this will be monitored throughout the work.

Table 1: Site Findings

Ref	Description
Adjacent Bird Boxes	

Intact bird boxes to be monitored	
Inactive bird nest to be monitored	

The vegetation removal and tree work will be undertaken by Westfield Tree Services Limited, a qualified firm of arborists. These contractors will be briefed by the ecologist on the proposed methodology prior to commencing the vegetation removal and should they spot any bird nests, will cease works in the area until such time as the ecologist has confirmed that the nest is inactive. The tree works will be undertaken in accordance with British Standard BS 3998 "Recommendations for Tree Work".

Yours sincerely

Katie Brewer BSc (Hons)

Consultant Ecologist