

Land at University of Manchester
Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey
2024



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Client RECOM Solutions

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Executive Summary

Development Details

The client is proposing an educational development on land at the University of Manchester, hereafter referred to as the 'site'.

This report describes the ecological features of the site and its surroundings and assesses the potential impacts of the development on the ecological interest. Recommendations are provided so that the development is compliant with biodiversity policy and legislation.

Ecological Interest

The site has a low level of ecological interest. Ecological features of interest include amenity grassland and nearby offsite trees.

Outcomes

The proposed development is unlikely to cause any adverse impacts past the site level. No mitigation measures are required. Appropriate enhancement opportunities have been outlined within the report.



1. Introduction

1.1 Project Brief

- 1.1.1 Rachel Hacking Ecology Limited was commissioned in 2023 by RECOM Solutions to carry out an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the site. The site is located at O.S. grid reference: SJ 84478 96722 (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Map showing the location of the site courtesy of © Google Maps

- 1.1.2 The site is a patch of amenity grassland adjacent the Arthur Lewis Building. The site is in an urban location, surrounded by educational, residential, and commercial buildings. Manchester Oxford Road lies approximately 50 metres east of the site. Scattered urban parks including Brunswick Park and Gartside Gardens are located within 500 metres of the site.

Description of Development

- 1.1.3 The site will be the subject of a planning application for a commercial development, involving the partial clearance of the site, and the construction of a new modular site.

Relevant Planning History

- 1.1.4 There is no previous relevant planning history.

1.2 Scope of Work

- 1.2.1 The Client commissioned Rachel Hacking Ecology to carry out the following works:
- Desk-based study to obtain details of designated sites, protected and notable species within a specified search area.
 - Record the extent, type, and condition of habitats within the site.
 - Search for signs of protected species and assess the potential of habitats and features to support protected and notable species.

1.3 Site Visit Information

Surveyor Details

- 1.3.1 Samuel Adshead (Junior Ecologist) and Ben Crossthwaite (Senior Ecologist) visited the site on 7th of February 2024. Ben is an experienced ecologist with 8 years of experience undertaking similar surveys.

Weather

- 1.3.2 The weather at the time of the survey was cold and overcast, with an average temperature of 4°C.



2. Methods

2.1 Desk Study

- 2.1.1 The Magic (Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside) was interrogated for the presence of any statutory designated sites (and European Protected Species licences) within a 2km radius of the site.
- 2.1.2 The Impact Risk Zones for any SSSI within 2km of the site was checked to determine whether the Local Planning Authority will need to consult with Natural England.

2.2 Field Survey

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

- 2.2.1 In accordance with JNCC guidelines¹ the site was walked over, and the habitats and features of ecological interest were mapped and described. Habitats and features of particular interest were target noted.
- 2.2.2 During the walkover habitat and features were assessed for their suitability to support of protected and notable species in accordance with CIEEM guidelines². Field signs of protected, notable, and invasive non-native species, if encountered, were mapped, and described.
- 2.2.3 Any trees on the site that are to be affected by the proposals were given a ground-level assessment, searching for Potential Roosting Features (PRFs), such as flaking bark, woodpecker holes, knot holes and limb splits.

¹ JNCC (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: A Technique for Environmental Audit*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

² CIEEM (2017). *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

3. Results

3.1 Constraints

- 3.1.1 Field survey results are valid for a limited duration and no investigation can provide a complete description and characterisation of a site. The composition of habitats and species can change depending on environmental variables and the mobility of species, so the results of a study become less reliable over time. In some cases, surveys that are 3 years old may be acceptable for a project assuming that habitats have not significantly changed in the intervening period, but for protected species it is likely that survey data will need to be no more than 18 months old.

3.2 Designated Sites

- 3.2.1 No statutory designated sites are present within the study area.
- 3.2.2 No non-statutory designated sites are present within the study area.
- 3.2.3 The desk study identified that the site is located within the Impact Risk Zone of Rochdale Canal Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (6.2km northeast). The proposed development will not require the Local Planning Authority to consult with Natural England.

3.3 Habitats

- 3.3.1 The habitats survey plan is provided in Appendix 2.

Amenity Grassland

- 3.3.2 The development site consists solely of amenity grassland (see Photograph 1). Dominant species include Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua*, and White Clover *Trifolium repens*. Common herbaceous species include Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Daisy *Bellis perennis*, Common Ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris*. Less frequently occurring herbaceous species include Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*, Common Chickweed *Stellaria media*, and Common Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*.



Photograph 1 showing the amenity grassland

Trees

- 3.3.3 No trees are present within the site boundary. However, 10 trees surrounding the site boundary are undergoing a separate arboricultural survey to determine root impact risk zones.
- 3.3.4 The offsite trees are of mixed species, size, and age. Species include London Plane *Platanus x hispanica*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Beech *Fagus sylvatica* and ornamental *Magnolia*.

3.4 Species

Bats

- 3.4.1 None of the trees being assessed for root impact risk zones possess any potential roosting features. Whilst trees can provide suitable foraging and commuting habitat for bats, their central metropolitan location and intensity of surrounding disturbance/lighting means that these trees are very unlikely to be used by bats.

Badger

- 3.4.2 The urban location of the site mean it is suboptimal for badger *Meles meles* sett creation and foraging. No impacts to badgers or their setts are anticipated. Badgers are not considered further in this report.

Great Crested Newt

- 3.4.3 No ponds are located within 250m of the site boundary. The amenity grassland on site and immediate surroundings are not suitable terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newt, and they are not considered further in this report.

Nesting Birds

- 3.4.4 The off-site trees undergoing a separate assessment provide suitable nesting habitat for birds.
- 3.4.5 An old bird's nest is present on the mature Beech tree, which is just off site, southwest of the boundary (see Photograph 2).



Photograph 2 showing the bird nest

Invasive, Non-native Species

- 3.4.6 No invasive non-native species were recorded during the survey.

4. Assessment

4.1 Development Context

- 4.1.1 The following assessment assumes that the development proposals will involve the loss of a majority of amenity grassland which makes up the site.

4.2 Impacts on Designated Sites

- 4.2.1 The site is in the impact risk zone of one SSSI. However, due to the small scale of the development, the distance of the site to Rochdale Canal SSSI and the buffer habitats between the site and the SSSI, deleterious impacts as a result of the proposed scheme are very unlikely.

4.3 Impacts on Habitats

Amenity Grassland

- 4.3.1 This habitat is common and widespread throughout rural and urban environments in the UK and the impact caused by its partial loss will be significant at the site level only.

4.4 Impacts on Species

Bats

- 4.4.1 No impacts to bats or their roosts are anticipated as a result of this development.

Nesting Birds

- 4.4.2 No impact to nesting birds is anticipated as a result of this development.



5. Recommendations

5.1 Enhancement Measures

Planting

- 5.1.1 Areas where amenity grassland is proposed to be retained could be planted with introduced shrub and/or a wildflower mix to enhance habitat for invertebrates and to provide nectar sources for pollinators.

Insect Houses

- 5.1.2 Insect houses could be incorporated into/along the proposed building to provide habitat for a wide range of invertebrate species.



Appendix 1: Planning Policy & Legislation

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2023) describes the Government's planning policy for England and how it should be applied. Within this framework, the requirements in relation to biodiversity are included within several policies. The two most relevant to individual planning decisions are Paragraphs 174 and 180, shown below:

- 174. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
 - a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
 - b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
 - c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
 - d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures; etc...

- 180. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:
 - a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
 - b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
 - c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and

- d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Legislation

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000) includes the notification and confirmation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). SSSIs can be notified for their floral, faunal, geological, or physiographical features. Protection against damaging operations and management of SSSIs is also included within the Act. Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) are zones around an SSSI account for the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified and identify development proposal which could have adverse impacts.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000) protects native animals, plants and habitats. Under the Act it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal listed on Schedule 5 and it is an offence to interfere with places used for shelter or protection, or intentionally disturb animals occupying such places. The Act prohibits picking, uprooting or destroy any wild plant (or any attached seed or spore) listed in Schedule 8.

European Protected Species (EPS) such as bats, Hazel Dormouse, Otter, Natterjack Toad, Smooth Snake, Sand Lizard and Great Crested Newt are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The Acts make it an offence to:

- a) Deliberately capture, injure or kill an EPS;
- b) Deliberately impair an EPS's ability to survive, breed, reproduce, rear or nurture young; to hibernate or migrate; or significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the EPS.
- c) Possess or control live or dead EPS or any part of, or anything derived from a EPS;
- d) Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of an EPS;
- e) Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place that is used for shelter or protection by an EPS;
- f) Intentionally or recklessly disturb a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection that is occupied by an EPS.

All common herptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000). Grass Snake, Slow Worm, Common Lizard, Adder are protected against intentional killing or injury.



Common Frog, Common Toad, Smooth Newt and Palmate Newt is protected against sale. In addition, all British reptiles, Common toad and Great Crested Newt are listed as Species of Principal Importance.

All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is 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. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act while they are nest building or at or near a nest with eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it an offence to wilfully, or to attempt to kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a Badger, or intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett. Interference of a sett includes disturbing badgers during occupation of a sett, or damaging or destroying a sett, or obstructing access to the sett.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a duty on every public authority to have regard to conserving biodiversity. Section 41 of the same Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitats that are of 'Principal Importance' for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The Secretary of State must take steps, as appear reasonably practicable, to further the conservation of those living organisms and habitats in any list published under this section. The list of species and habitats of principal importance currently includes 943 species and 56 habitats. These are the species and habitats found in England which are regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework

Appendix 2: Habitat Map

