

Land off Pitsford Road, Manchester

Ecological Appraisal

2023



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Client Bellway Homes Ltd (Manchester)

Project Title Land off Pitsford Road, Manchester

Project Reference RHE.3991

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Executive Summary

Development Details

The client is proposing residential development of land off Pitsford Road, 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 moderate level of ecological interest. Ecological features of interest include secondary broadleaved woodland. Trees in the woodland have the potential to support roosting bats, provides nesting habitat for birds and foraging habitat for bats and birds. Japanese Knotweed (a Schedule 9 Invasive Species) is widespread on site.

Outcomes

There is a requirement for further bat survey work to inspect trees with potential bat roosting features via an aerial tree assessment. This has subsequently been carried out¹. Impacts to nesting birds can be avoided by timing clearance to avoid the nesting period (March to August) or undertaking a nesting birds survey to inform mitigation requirements.

Compensation will be required for any loss of woodland. Measures to eradicate and avoid the risk of spreading Japanese Knotweed should be included in a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP).

¹ Rachel Hacking Ecology, 2024 - Land off Pitsford Road, Manchester – Aerial Tree Assessment.



1. Introduction

1.1 Project Brief

- 1.1.1 Rachel Hacking Ecology Limited was commissioned in 2023 by Bellway Homes Limited (Manchester) to carry out an Ecological Appraisal of the site (O.S. grid reference: SD 86161 00165– see Figure 1).



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

- 1.1.2 The proposed development site comprises broadleaved woodland. A live railway line is located directly adjacent to the southern boundary. Residential and commercial development surrounds the site in all directions.

Description of Development

- 1.1.3 The site will be the subject of a planning application for residential development and associated infrastructure.

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 and habitats.
 - Record the extent, type, and condition of habitats within and next to the site.

- Search for signs of protected species and assessment of the potential of habitats and features to support protected and notable species.

1.3 Site Visit Information

Surveyor Details

- 1.3.1 Ben Crossthwaite (Senior Ecologist), who has over 7 years of professional experience, visited the site on 17th November 2023. Ben has carried out Ecological Appraisals of a wide variety of sites throughout England.

Weather

- 1.3.2 The weather was dry and cold with light cloud.



2. Methods

2.1 Desk Study

- 2.1.1 The Magic Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside was interrogated for the presence of 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 guidelines² 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 guidelines³. Field signs of protected, notable, and invasive non-native species, if encountered, were mapped, and described, such as Badger, Great Crested Newt and nesting birds.

2.3 Mitigation Hierarchy

- 2.3.1 Mitigation measures should be embedded within the masterplan design and planning application process. Measures during the construction phases should be included in a Construction Environmental Management Plan: Biodiversity (CEMP). This process from proposal to implementation needs to consider the 'mitigation hierarchy' of avoid, reduce, compensate, and enhance:
- Aim to avoid negative effects through the design process.
 - Mitigate if negative effects cannot be avoided.

² JNCC (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: A Technique for Environmental Audit*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough

³ CIEEM (2017). *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

- Use compensation measures to offset residual impacts.
- Identify and implement opportunities to enhance biodiversity.



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 three 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.
- 3.1.2 The site was fully accessible and searched throughout and the timing of the survey was suitable to classify habitats, identify vegetation and to search for signs of protected species.

3.2 Designated Sites

- 3.2.1 The desk study provided information on the designated sites. No statutory designated sites exist within 2km of the site. Three non-statutory designated sites exist within 2km and these are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1. Designated Sites			
Name	Status	Location/distance	Interest
Clayton Vale	Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	1.61km southeast	Riverine habitat
Boggart Hole Clough	LWS	1.97km north	Woodland and Grassland
Rochdale Canal, Stott's Lane – Ducie street Basin	Site of Biological Importance (SBI)	0.54km south	Canal

- 3.2.2 The desk study identified that the site was located within the Impact Risk Zone of Rochdale Canal SSSI. The proposed development will not require the Local Planning Authority to consult with Natural England.

3.3 Habitats

- 3.3.1 Target Notes and photographs are contained in Appendix 2 and the botanical species list is contained in Appendix 3. The habitat survey plan is provided in Appendix 4.

Bare Ground

- 3.3.2 Bare ground, comprising a compact crush-and-run access track is located along the eastern site boundary.

Broadleaved Woodland

- 3.3.3 The site comprises juvenile, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, which has generated over disturbed ground. The woodland lacks a diverse structure, with a dense canopy layer and ground layer only. More mature specimen trees are located along the northern site boundary, along Pitsford Road.

3.4 Species

Great Crested Newt

- 3.4.1 No ponds exist on site. A review of maps and aerial images shows that no ponds are located within 250 metres of the site boundary. Though the woodland provides suitable terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* and other amphibious species, the site is isolated from any potential connectivity to suitable breeding habitat in the locality. Great Crested Newt is not considered further in this report.

Reptiles

- 3.4.2 Habitats on site are sub-optimal for reptiles due to the absence of suitable basking sites (e.g. south-facing slopes). Given the very sparse distribution of reptiles in Manchester, it is considered unlikely that reptiles will be present on site. Reptiles are not considered further in this report.

Birds

- 3.4.3 No evidence of nesting birds was found during the site survey. The woodland on site offers suitable nesting and foraging habitat for a range of bird species.

Bats

- 3.4.4 No buildings exist on site. Many of the trees in the woodland, particularly the more mature specimens along the northern site boundary, have potential roost features (PRFs). The woodland and fringe habitats provide foraging opportunities for bat species.

Badger

- 3.4.5 No evidence of Badger *Meles meles* was recorded during the site survey. Active mammal holes were noted within the woodland. Trail cameras were set up on the active mammal holes on site on the 17th



November and collected on the 24th November 2023. Multiple images and videos of Fox *Vulpes vulpes* were captured.

3.5 Invasive Species

- 3.5.1 Japanese Knotweed *Reynoutria japonica* is located in large patches along the northern and western parts of the site. These areas have been recorded as polygon areas on the Phase 1 Habitat Map.



4. Assessment

4.1 Development Context

- 4.1.1 The following assessment assumes that all the habitats on site will be lost to the development.

4.2 Impacts on Designated Sites

- 4.2.1 No impacts are anticipated to affect any designated sites due to the distance between the site and protected sites and the absence of impact pathways.

4.3 Impacts on Habitats

Woodland

- 4.3.1 The woodland on site is included in the Priority Habitat Inventory (Deciduous Woodland – unique ID PHID38617370_040016552). However, the survey appears to show that the woodland does not satisfy the criteria for Priority Deciduous Woodland, due to poor structure and botanical diversity. There is no indication of maturity with the woodland (e.g. no Ancient Woodland Indicator Species were found). However, the survey was undertaken at a sub-optimal time of year to record woodland ground flora (see Section 5).
- 4.3.2 The woodland has habitat connectivity to the west only. Further woodland and grassland habitat is located on the opposite side of Queens Road within Village Park. The loss of woodland will not reduce habitat connectivity, however, would be significant at the local level.

4.4 Impacts on Species

Birds

- 4.4.1 The site does support suitable nesting habitat for birds. If any work to the broadleaved woodland will proceed within the bird nesting season (which is generally March-August), then a nesting bird check will be required immediately prior to any work. It is recommended that as much of the woodland habitat is retained where possible.

Bats

- 4.4.2 The felling of trees has the potential to result in impacts to bats and their roosts, should these be present. Without mitigation, impacts could include disturbance, killing or injuring of individual bats and damage, obstruction or destruction of roosts.
- 4.4.3 The broadleaved woodland offers suitable foraging habitat for bats as well as commuting pathways.
- 4.4.4 Without mitigation, the proposals have the potential to result in changes to illumination levels to the adjacent habitats and could have an adverse impact on foraging and commuting bats.

Badger

- 4.4.5 No evidence of Badger was found during the site survey or captured on the trail cameras. The site is isolated within a metropolitan environment restricted terrestrial habitat for Badger and reducing the likelihood Badger to be present. Therefore, Badger is not considered further in this report.

Fox

- 4.4.6 Fox dens are located across the eastern half of the site. Without mitigation, the proposed development has the potential to causing harm or killing of Fox and general animal welfare legislation needs to be taken into account (see Section 5).



5. Recommendations

5.1 Further Surveys

Bats

- 5.1.1 It is recommended that any mature trees to be affected are surveyed in further detail for the presence/likely absence of a bat roost via an aerial tree assessment with the use of rope and harness.
- 5.1.2 The above surveys have subsequently been undertaken on the 13th March 2024⁴

5.2 Mitigation Measures

- 5.2.1 Protection of ecological features (habitats and species) during the construction phase will be described in a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). Mitigation measures to protect, maintain and enhance ecological features during the operational phase of development will be described in a Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP). Management Plans will contain Operational Aims and Objectives, Rationale for management, Prescriptions and schedules detailing the timing and responsibility for delivering the prescriptions. It is anticipated that the CEMP and BMP will be provided as a planning condition in advance of the commencement of the proposed development.

Habitats

- 5.2.2 Efforts should be made to retain better quality woodland where possible. Off-site compensation will be required for the loss of woodland habitats.

Bats

- 5.2.3 Any external lighting should be directed away from areas of woodland if retained.
- 5.2.4 Bat boxes should be installed on new buildings or retained trees to enhance roosting opportunities on site.

Fox

- 5.2.5 The Fox dens located on site are to be destroyed in a humane manner, with the methodology detailed in the CEMP.

Hedgehog

- 5.2.6 Gaps in garden fences of 0.15m x 0.15m will enable Hedgehogs to disperse throughout the development and take advantage of landscaped areas for foraging and cover.

⁴ Rachel Hacking Ecology, 2024 - Land off Pitsford Road, Manchester – Aerial Tree Assessment.

Nesting Birds

- 5.2.7 Impacts on nesting birds should be avoided by carrying out site clearance and similar operations outside of the bird breeding season (March- August). If vegetation has to be cleared during the bird breeding season checks immediately before clearance by a suitably qualified ecologist will be required. If nesting activity is detected work in that area will need to stop until the ecologist considers that nesting activity is finished.
- 5.2.8 Nest boxes should be included on new buildings or retained trees to enhance nesting opportunities on site.

5.3 Invasive Species

- 5.3.1 Measures to eradicate and avoid the spread of Japanese Knotweed during the clearance phase should be included in a CEMP.



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

The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 protect 'important' hedgerows from destruction or damage. A hedgerow is 'important' if it (a) has existed for 30 years or more; and (b) satisfies at least one of the criteria listed in Part II of Schedule 1 of the Regulations. Under the Regulations, it is against the law to remove or destroy 'important' hedgerows unless permitted by the local planning authority.



Appendix 2: Target Notes

Reference No.	Habitat	Photograph
	Broadleaved Woodland	  

	Japanese Knotweed	
	Bare Ground	
	Fox Den	
	Fox captured on a trail camera	



Appendix 3: Species Lists

Latin Name	Common Name	DAFOR
Broadleaved Woodland		
<i>Salix caprea</i>	Goat Willow	D
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	R
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver Birch	D
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	R
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel	O
<i>Ulmus sp.</i>	Elm	R
<i>Willow sp.</i>	Willow species	O
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly	R
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Wild Cherry	R
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Beech	R
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	R
<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	Male-fern	O
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle	F
<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>	Bramble	A
<i>Epilobium sp.</i>	Willowherb species	O
<i>Reynoutria japonica</i>	Japanese Knotweed	R
<i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Hedge Bindweed	O
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Cleavers	R
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent	R
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Oak Sapling	R
<i>Equisetum sp.</i>	Horsetail species	R
<i>Rosa sp.</i>	Rose species	R
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup	O
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed	R
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot	R
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy	O
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Herb-Robert	F
	Mosses	F
<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	Raspberry	O
<i>Fragaria sp.</i>	Strawberry	O
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	Dogwood	R
<i>Buddleja davidii</i>	Butterfly Bush	R
<i>Cotoneaster var.</i>	Cotoneaster Variety	R



Appendix 4: Phase 1 Habitat Survey Plan

