Land at Plymouth Grove, Manchester

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

RACHEL HACKING ECOLOGY

Client	Recom Solutions
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Report Contents

Executive Summary 3

1. Introduction 4

2. Methods 6

3. Results 8

4. Assessment 11

5. Recommendations 12

Appendix 1: Planning Policy & Legislation 13

Appendix 2 Habitat Survey Plan 16

Executive Summary

Development Details

The client is proposing development of 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 negligible level of ecological interest, but there are non-native invasive species, which could be spread by the proposed development. Scrub around the site boundaries could support nesting birds between March and August.

Outcomes

No further surveys are required. A method statement should be produced to demonstrate measures to avoid the spread of invasive species. Any scrub clearance should be undertaken outside the nesting bird season (March to August) or be informed by a nesting birds survey.

Planting small native trees on the perimeter of the site will provide enhancement for biodiversity, particularly birds. Bat and bird boxes could be incorporated within new buildings.

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 land at Plymouth Grove, Manchester; hereafter referred to as the 'site'. The site is located at grid reference: SJ 8510 9654 (see Figure 1).



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

1.1.2 The site is bordered by Plymouth Grove to the southwest, by Dryden Street to the northwest and amenity grassland and a building to the north and east.

Description of Development

1.1.3 The client is proposing redevelopment of the site for new purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA).

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 any designated sites within 2km.
- 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 Simon Holden *BSc (Hons), MCIEEM* (Associate Ecologist) visited the site on 5th May 2023.

Weather

1.3.2 The weather during the survey was dry and overcast with sunny spells.

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 2km radius of the site.

2.1.2 The Impact Risk Zones for any SSSI within 5km 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 guidelines[1] 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 guidelines[2]. Field signs of protected, notable, and invasive non-native species, if encountered, were mapped, and described.

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.
- Use compensation measures to offset residual impacts.

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[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.

- 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 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 The desk study confirmed that there are no statutory designated sites within 2km of the site.

3.2.2 The desk study identified that the site was located within the Impact Risk Zone of the Rochdale Canal and Huddersfield Canal Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The proposed development will not require the Local Planning Authority to consult with Natural England for either site.

3.3 Habitats

Bare Ground and Scattered Ephemeral

3.3.1 The site is mostly bare ground with scattered ephemeral vegetation (see Figure 2) such as Dandelion *Taraxacum* agg., Clovers *Trifolium* spp., Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*, Colt's-foot *Tussilago farfara*, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*.

3.3.2 At the northeast side of the site there was a recent rectangular excavation (see Figure 3) exposing bare ground with sparse vegetation and similar suite of species to that described in paragraph 3.3.1.

3.3.3 The bare ground habitats are in poor condition as they assessment criteria A and B (structural and species diversity).

Scattered Scrub

3.3.4 Scrub and young trees were recorded along the north and west boundaries (see Figures 4 and 5). Species included Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., Butterfly Bush *Buddleia davidii*, Goat willow *Salix caprea*, Wild Cherry *Prunus avium* and Silver Birch *Betula pendula*.

3.3.5 The scrub is in poor condition as it fails four out of the five condition criteria.



Figure 2. Sparsely vegetated ground



Figure 3 Recent excavation



Figure 4. North boundary scrub



Figure 5. West boundary scrub

3.4 Species

Bats

3.4.1 The site offers no roosting opportunities and there is limited vegetation so that foraging and dispersal opportunities are sub-optimal. Bat presence is not anticipated, and bats are not considered any further in this report.

Badger

3.4.2 No signs of badger were located on the site and suitable habitat for sett establishment and foraging are not present. Their presence is not anticipated, and they are not considered any further in this report.

Birds

3.4.3 The scrub habitat provides potential nesting and foraging habitat for garden bird species. The sparsely vegetated ground is of recent origin and is unlikely to support an abundant invertebrate assemblage or seed bank, so it is sub-optimal for foraging birds.

Herptiles

3.4.4 There are no local ponds, and the site is surrounded by urban development with heavily managed greenspace and is sub-optimal for herptiles. Their presence is not anticipated, and they are not considered any further in this report.

3.5 Invasive Species

3.5.1 Small stands of Japanese Knotweed *Reynoutria japonica* and Japanese Rose *Rosa japonica* are present on the perimeter of the site.

4. Assessment

4.1 Development Context

4.1.1 The following assessment assumes that there will be a loss of all existing habitats.

4.2 Impacts on Habitats

Sparsely Vegetated Ground

4.2.1 The loss of this habitat will be adverse, but insignificant because the species are common, the site is small and there is a lack of connectivity to similar sites.

Scattered Scrub and Trees

4.2.2 The loss of scrub and immature trees will be adverse, but insignificant because the loss will be small, the habitat is of recent origin and all of the species are common natives or invasive species.

4.3 Impacts on Species

Birds

4.3.1 Loss of habitat due to removal of vegetation and trees could have an adverse impact because of the loss of nesting habitat. Direct harm to nesting birds could occur as a consequence of vegetation clearance, should they be present.

Invasive Species

4.3.2 Japanese Knotweed and Japanese Rose are listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended); it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause such species to grow in the wild.

4.3.3 It is not an offence to have invasive species on your land, but it is an offence to allow the species to spread into neighbouring areas or to grow in the wild. Therefore, it will be necessary to ensure appropriate measures are in place to prevent development activities from causing further spread of these species to new areas.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Mitigation Measures

Habitats

5.1.1 To offset the loss of scrub, plant lines of small native trees on the perimeter of the site. Species such as Bird Cherry *Prunus padus*, Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, Whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, and Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* can provide nesting and foraging opportunities for a range of urban birds.

Nesting Birds

5.1.2 Impacts on nesting birds should be avoided in particular, by carrying out site clearance and similar operations outside of the bird breeding season (March- August). Construction activities that might directly impact upon breeding birds should hence be limited to the September-February period. 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.

Invasive species

5.1.3 A method statement should be submitted to the Local Authority showing the location of the invasive species, methods of control and a schedule for implementation of the control measures.

Enhancement Opportunities

5.1.4 Bat boxes and bird boxes could be incorporated within new buildings to enhance roosting and nesting opportunities on the site.

Appendix 1: Planning Policy & Legislation

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2021) 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 Habitat Survey Plan

