



Land at Dob Brook Close Failsworth

Ecological Assessment Report

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CONTENTS

1	Introduction.....	2
1.1	Background	2
1.2	Purpose of Report.....	2
1.3	Relevant Legislation	3
1.3.1	Birds.....	3
1.3.2	Japanese Knotweed	3
2	Field Survey Methods.....	4
2.1	Survey Aims and Objectives	4
2.2	Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey	4
3	Survey Results	5
3.1	Site Description	5
3.1.1	Habitats and Protected Species	5
4	Evaluation and Recommendations	8
4.1	Habitats	8
4.1.1	Habitats	8
4.1.2	Japanese Knotweed	9
4.1.3	Protected Species	9
4.2	Ecological Enhancements	9
5	Appendix.....	11

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Kingdom Ecology have carried out an Ecological Assessment of an approximately 0.4ha area of disused land located on Dob Brook Close, Failsworth, Manchester, M40 1EL (National Grid Reference SD 8833 0067).

Survey has been carried out as part of a proposed planning application to redevelop the site. The location of the study site is shown on Figure 1 in the Appendix.

The purpose of the assessment was to identify any potential ecological constraints to the proposed development. Field survey was undertaken on 12th June 2019. Surveys were carried out by Richard Roe (BSc, MSc, MIEEM, CEnv). Richard has extensive experience of undertaking protected species, habitat and botanical surveys as a professional ecological consultant with over eighteen years' experience.

1.2 Purpose of Report

This report provides and outlines the findings of the field survey undertaken in June 2019.

Surveys aimed to identify habitats and species which are either of importance in terms of their conservation value or are afforded statutory legal protection. The presence of such habitats or species would form a material consideration during the planning process and could pose a constraint to the redevelopment of the site.

The field surveys comprised of an ecological walkover survey with a search for habitats that could support any protected species.

Following a description of the survey findings and an evaluation of habitats at the site, the report goes on to make recommendations for further works, mitigation and ecological enhancement measures where relevant.

1.3 Relevant Legislation

1.3.1 Birds

All wild birds in England and Wales are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird, or take, damage or destroy the nest (whilst being built or in use) or its eggs.

1.3.2 Japanese Knotweed

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides the primary control on the release of non-native species into the wild in Great Britain. It is an offence under section 14(2) of the Act to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' any plant listed in Schedule 9, Part II. Schedule 9 of the act includes Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

2 Field Survey Methods

2.1 Survey Aims and Objectives

The survey aim was to assess the site as to its ecological importance by assessing the value of habitats and their suitability to support any protected or notable species. The purpose of this was to highlight any ecological constraints associated with future development proposals.

Field survey comprised of an ecological walkover survey, this included an assessment of habitats at the site in terms of their suitability to support any other protected species including bats and breeding birds.

Species that are considered unlikely to be significantly affected by the proposed development, even if known to be present in the general vicinity, were 'scoped out' of the assessment.

2.2 Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the proposed development area was undertaken on the 12th June 2019. Survey was carried out following standard methodologies as described in the '*Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey - a technique for environmental audit*' (JNCC, 2004¹).

The aims of the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey were to:

- identify and map all areas of semi-natural habitat within the study area;
- provide a botanical description of the semi-natural habitats surveyed;
- identify areas or habitats that are of particular ecological interest for nature conservation and which require more detailed investigation;
- provide additional information regarding incidental observations of protected species and the potential of habitats to support such species.

A habitat map was produced and lists of dominant or notable vascular plant species were recorded in each of the major habitat types where relevant.

• ¹ JNCC (2004) '*Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey - a technique for environmental audit*'

3 Survey Results

3.1 Site Description

The study area measures approximately 0.4ha in area and comprises of a roughly rectangular area of scrubby woodland and rough grassland located between Dob Brook Close and the Rochdale Canal.

Immediate surrounding habitats are highly urbanised and comprise principally of residential housing with associated gardens to the north and east. A scrap yard is located to the west. The Rochdale Canal is located immediately to the south of the site.

Approximately 750m to the east of the site, the canal is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). However, the canal section next to the site has no statutory nature conservation designation.

The SSSI/SAC section of the canal has been awarded these designations on account of nationally and internationally important aquatic and submerged plant communities including extensive colonies of the nationally scarce SAC species, floating water-plantain (*Luronium natans*).

The site location and recorded habitats are shown on Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix. Habitats identified at the site are shown in Photographs in the Appendix. Habitat descriptions are provided below.

3.1.1 Habitats and Protected Species

The site itself comprises of an area of disused, unmanaged land which has developed into areas of young, scrubby poplar woodland, bramble scrub and semi-improved neutral grassland with patches of tall herb community and further scattered woody scrub. The site is enclosed in tall security fencing and so is relatively undisturbed.

A large stand of Japanese knotweed has previously been located at the western end of the site. The knotweed has been treated and so the extent and vigour of the knotweed stand has been greatly reduced. However, the knotweed has not been completely eradicated and there are small scattered patches of knotweed still present within the western part of the site (see Target Note 1 and Figure 1 for the broad extent of Japanese knotweed).

Japanese knotweed is an invasive, non-native plant and listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (See Section 1.3.2).

It is an offence under section 14(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act to plant or otherwise cause Japanese knotweed to grow in the wild.

The majority of the eastern half of the site comprises of young scrubby woodland (Target Note 2). The woodland principally comprises of self-seeded/suckering white poplar that has been spreading across the site since the late '90's/early 2000's. Other trees present include occasional young willow, cherry and silver birch.

The woodland understorey principally comprises of bramble with cleavers plus patches of grassland including creeping soft-grass, red fescue, rough meadow-grass with meadow buttercup and wood avens. There are several old corvid nests located within the tree canopy.

An assumed fox earth was identified within the woodland (Target Note 3). The earth has three entrances within a large spoil mound near the eastern edge of the woodland. The fox earth entrances appear disused as they were observed to be partly cobwebbed over and had accumulated leaf litter within their entrances. A mammal path leads from the fox earth to a gap in the perimeter fence at the southeast corner of the site. The gap provides potential access for mammals onto the adjacent canal bank. Fox scat was identified on the canal bank. Local residents at Dob Brook Close reported having regularly seen foxes within the study site in the recent past.

The bramble underscrub extends out from the edges of the woodland into the adjacent grassland habitats.

The grassland areas (Target Note 4) extend around the remainder of the site and comprises principally of coarse grasses with frequent false oat-grass and cock's-foot plus occasional rough meadow-grass, red fescue, Yorkshire fog, crested dog's-tail, reed canary-grass and meadow foxtail. Also present are occasional hard rush, soft rush, field horsetail and hairy sedge. Herbs present within the grassland include occasional hairy tare, silverweed, meadow vetchling, common vetch, tufted vetch, wood avens, creeping thistle, ribwort plantain, smooth sow thistle, prickly sow thistle, creeping buttercup, cleavers, curled dock, herb Robert and red clover. There are occasional patches of tall herb community comprising of great willow-herb and rosebay willowherb. As stated previously there are scattered patches of regenerating Japanese knotweed located through habitats at the western end of the site (Target Note 1).

Similar semi-improved grassland habitat extends along the north bank of the adjacent canal.

There are further patches of scattered scrub, saplings and young trees within the grassland areas including willow, silver birch, white poplar, ash, young oak and sycamore.

None of the trees on site are considered to support suitable features for roosting bats. This is principally on account of their young age (trees present are generally all less than 20 years old).

Scrub and young trees could support nesting birds during the bird breeding season.

The site may provide suitable refuge and foraging habitat for hedgehogs.

No other protected species are considered likely to be present at the site.

4 Evaluation and Recommendations

4.1 Habitats

4.1.1 Habitats

The site itself comprises of an area of disused, unmanaged land which has developed into areas of young, scrubby poplar woodland, bramble scrub and semi-improved neutral grassland with patches of tall herb community and further scattered woody scrub.

No habitats of any significant biodiversity value were identified within the study area. The woodland habitats present are considered to be of limited botanical value having recently originated from suckering white poplar which is unlikely to be of natural origin. The grassland habitats present are typical of similar areas of neglected grassland that can be found on roadsides, on waste grounds and derelict sites throughout the UK.

If left unmanaged it is likely that the remnant patches of Japanese knotweed would re-establish within the western half of the site whilst the stand of white poplar and bramble would continue to spread across the remainder of the site.

Nevertheless, the site is likely to be of minor ecological value as it is likely to provide refuge and foraging habitat for various urban wildlife including foxes, hedgehogs, bats and birds.

The site is located in an ecologically valuable strategic location along the Rochdale Canal corridor. The study site provides a small patch of semi-natural grassland and woodland habitat located within the otherwise heavily built-up surroundings of inner-city Manchester. The study site potentially represents a valuable green habitat fragment and could provide a 'stepping-stone' for plant life and wildlife moving through the city along the Canal.

The Rochdale Canal is located immediately to the south of the site. The section of the canal designated a SSSI and SAC is located approximately 750m to the east of the site. This designated section of the canal is located upstream of the site and isolated from the site by various lock gates consequently it is very unlikely that any development proposals could impact upon any of the valuable ecological features associated with the SSSI/SAC.

Nevertheless, the canal itself represents a feature of biodiversity value and it is recommended that a pollution control method statement is devised to remove the risk of any sedimentation or pollution of the adjacent section of the canal during any construction works.

4.1.2 Japanese Knotweed

There are scattered patches of regenerating Japanese knotweed located through habitats at the western end of the site (see Figure 2).

It is an offence under section 14(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act to plant or otherwise cause Japanese knotweed to grow in the wild. The movement and use of soil contaminated by fragments of Japanese knotweed rhizomes is the main method of spread between sites, however, the plant is also able to spread by transfer of cut stem material.

It is therefore recommended that a method statement is produced prior to the start of works providing methods by which Japanese knotweed will be treated, controlled and any contaminated soils appropriately disposed of. It is recommended that a Japanese knotweed specialist is appointed to produce the method statement and oversee knotweed removal/control works.

4.1.3 Protected Species

Any works to remove tall scrub or the trees at the site should avoid taking place during the breeding bird season (March-September inclusive).

Where this is not possible, a check for breeding birds should be carried out immediately prior to the start of works by an appropriately qualified ecologist.

If during works any nesting birds are found, works should immediately stop and further advice should be sought from an appropriately qualified ecologist.

The ecologist would mark out a buffer zone around the nest, the size of the buffer zone would be determined depending upon the species encountered and the nest site location. No works would be allowed to take place within the buffer area until all young birds had fledged. Fledging of young birds would need to be confirmed by the appropriately qualified ecologist.

Prior to the clearance of any scrub habitats, these should be checked first for the presence of hedgehogs. Any encountered hedgehogs should be moved across to a suitable area of habitat.

4.2 Ecological Enhancements

Opportunities to enhance the biodiversity value of the site should be taken. It is therefore recommended that a bat and bird box scheme is produced by an appropriately qualified ecologist.

Bat and bird boxes should be built into the south facing gable ends of new housing and should direct onto the canal.

Suitable models of bat box include the Habibat 003 or 005 which can be built into the brickwork of the new houses.

Bird boxes should provide suitable nesting habitat for house sparrows and swifts. Integral bird boxes should be used which can be built in below the eaves of any proposed new housing at the site.

Lighting proposals will need to ensure that bat box locations and the canal itself are not illuminated of an evening.

5 Appendix

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 - Bramble and grassland habitats looking southwest



Photograph 2 - Grassland habitats looking north



Photograph 3 – Regenerating Japanese knotweed



Photograph 4 – Woodland at Target Note 2



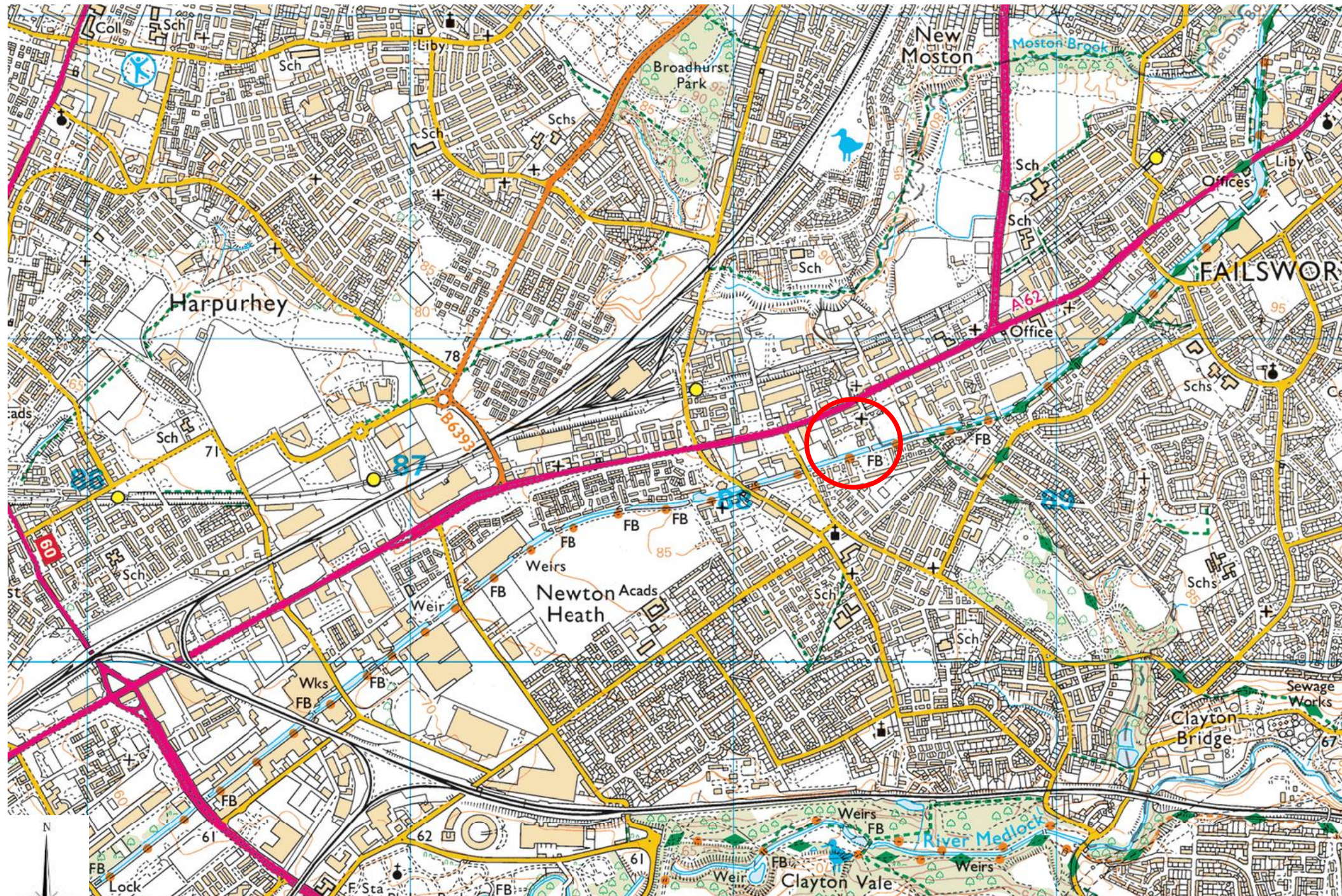
Photograph 5 - North bank of canal adjacent to site



Photograph 6 - Fox earth at Target Note 3



FIGURE 1- Site Location



Key



Study Area



FIGURE 2- Habitat Map



Key

- Woodland
- Tall herb
- HS Hard standing
- Dense scrub
- Canal
- Semi-Improved grassland
- Wall
- Scattered scrub
- Tree
- Fence
- JKW extent
- Study area
- Target Note

