Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Land at Catherine Road

Manchester

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Prepared for: Ascot Ltd

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- **The Statutory Biodiversity Metric – Catherine Road excel sheet**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On 19th April 2024 a site visit was undertaken on land at Catherine Road, Manchester to inform the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment.
- The site comprises an area of artificially unvegetated unsealed surface with Japanese knotweed, vegetated garden and tall forb with boundary trees.
- As part of the proposals 0.019ha of vegetated garden will be created and four small native trees will be planted.
- The Statutory Biodiversity Metric shows that following development there will be loss of -0.55 Habitat Units.
- Units will be purchased from Environment Bank in order to meet Biodiversity Net Gain Requirements.

1. Introduction

1.1 Application Site

1.1.1 This report details a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment of land at Catherine Road, Manchester, M8 4HE. Ordnance Survey grid reference (centre of site): SD 83490227.

1.1.2 Ascot Limited commissioned Verity Webster Ltd to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment in order to inform the proposals for the site.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 The objectives of the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment are to determine:

- Potential for enhancement or compensation (offsetting) on the site for protected species, habitats of conservation interest and overall biodiversity with the aim of achieving 10% net gain in biodiversity.

1.3 Proposals

1.3.1 The proposals for the site comprise the construction of a four-storey apartment block with associated planting and landscape.

1.4 Ecologist

1.4.1 The Ecological Assessment was undertaken by Verity Webster. Verity is a Chartered Ecologist and a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

1.4.2 Verity has worked as an ecological consultant since 2007. She has undertaken Ecological Assessments and protected species surveys for a large variety of projects and schemes, producing the required impact assessment and subsequent mitigation schemes and method statements when necessary.

2. Site Location and Description

2.1 Site Location

2.1.1 The survey site is located in a built-up residential area of Manchester between Crumpsall and Broughton Park. The A576 Middleton Road runs north to south approximately 70m east of the survey site and The A665 Bury Old Road runs northwest to southeast approximately 30m to the south of the site.

2.1.2 Although the surrounding landscape is largely built-up there are scattered areas of open green space and the numerous trees along the streets and in gardens allow the landscape to be 'green'. Broughton Park lies approximately 400m to the southwest, encompassing grassland, trees and a large waterbody. A strip of woodland along Singleton Brook that connects to Kersal Moor lies approximately 600m to the west.

2.1.3 The River Irwell weaves through Kersal Dale approximately 1.3km to the southwest of the survey site. The River Irk weaves northwest to southeast approximately 1km to the north.

Figure 1: Ordnance survey map showing the location of the proposed development site.



Figure 2: Aerial image showing the proposed development site and immediate surroundings



2.2 Site Description

2.2.1 The survey site comprises unutilised land to the rear of some properties. A former garden space, the land has been cleared for management of Japanese knotweed and supports grassland and tall forb vegetation. Standard trees are still present.

2.2.2 See UKHab Habitat Plan, Figure 3.

2.2.3 The UK Habitat codes for the site are:

- U1 16 518 524 Vegetated garden; tall forb; neglected; invasive non-native species
- U1c 524 Artificial unvegetated with invasive non-native species
- U1 200 Urban trees
- U1b6 Developed Land; Sealed Surface

U1 518 524 Vegetated garden

2.2.4 This habitat covers the area each side of the footpath and likely covered the main body of the site prior to clearance and treatment of Japanese knotweed.

2.2.5 There is rubble within the stand from prior clearance work. Species comprise those typical of shaded habitat, including wood avens (*Geum urbanum*), herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) and foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*). Sparse bramble (*Rubus* fruticosus) is present throughout. Common nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is frequent with occasional broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*). Dandelion (*Taraxacum* agg.), shepherd's purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) and willowherb species (*Epilobium* sp.) have colonised in the disturbance. Grasses present include Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), fescue (*Festuca* sp.) and cock's-foot grass (*Dactylus glomerata*). Spanish bluebell (*Hyacinthodies hispanica*) has been previously planted. Scattered buddleia (*Buddlia davidii*), sycamore (*Acer psudoplatanus*) and cherry (*Prunus sp.*) saplings are present and there is a single semi-mature cherry tree. Cherry laurel shrubs are scattered throughout the site.

2.2.6 This habitat was previously (2024) categorised as 'other neutral grassland' as a 'best fit' for the calculation as it does not fit modified grassland, with a combination of ruderal vegetation and species associated with woodland, with some scrub and sparse grasses. However, the habitat does not meet the criteria of other neutral grassland which necessitates at least 20% cover of broadleaved herbs and sedges, over 8 species per m^2, and more than one grass that is not sown for agricultural production.

2.2.7 The species present are varied, but do not reflect other neutral grassland. The species include non-native species such as Spanish bluebell, typical of garden space, as well as ruderal species which have colonised the area. There is a small area of Japanese knotweed.

2.2.8 The habitat is considered unlikely to be of moderate distinctiveness and upon reflection, better meets the criteria for vegetated garden, which reflects the nature of the sites. Vegetated garden is considered of low distinctiveness, the same distinctiveness value as modified grassland is more reflective of the habitat type.

2.2.9 There are areas of tall forb comprising willowherb, common nettle and broad-leaved dock with occasional shepherd's purse. Tall forb is categorised as low distinctiveness so for the purpose of the metric has been included as 'vegetated garden'.

Urban trees

2.2.10 The urban trees encompass three small trees (pear, ash and sycamore) and three medium trees (sycamore).



Looking south from Catherine Road; showing unkempt vegetated garden with Japanese knotweed



Looking north toward Catherine Road; showing the artificially unvegetated unsealed surface

Figure 3: UK Habitat Plan



3. Legislation

3.1 Planning Policy and Legislation

3.1.1 In England, biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). This is referred to as biodiversity net gain in Planning Practice Guidance to distinguish it from other or more general biodiversity gains.

3.1.2 Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to a general biodiversity gain condition to secure the biodiversity gain objective. This objective is to deliver at least a 10% increase in relation to the pre-development biodiversity value of the development granted permission. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits (Gov.Uk Biodiversity Net Gain, 2023).

3.1.3 Under the NERC Act 2006, planning authorities are obliged to make sure that they have all the information on the presence of protected species on site before they make a decision on the planning permission.

3.1.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) encourages Local Planning Authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Chapter 15, Para 180 of NPPF states: *''The planning system 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….*

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***".

Para 181 states: "*Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.''*

Para 185 identifies that plans should do the following to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity:

a) "***Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and***

b) ***Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and peruse opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.***"

Para 186 states that "*when determining planning applications, local authorities should apply the following principles:*

a) ***if significant harm to biodiversity from a development cannot be avoided…,adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort compensated for, then planning permission should be refused''***

3.1.5 The local planning authority has a responsibility, therefore, to obtain all information regarding the potential for protected species on a site prior to making a decision about a proposal.

4. Methodology

4.1 Site Survey

4.1.1 A site visit was undertaken on 19th April 2024 to inform the Biodiversity Net Gain Metric and Assessment. Habitats on site were assessed and described in accordance with UK Habitat Classification (UK Hab Ltd, 2023) and a list of conspicuous species recorded. Condition of the habitats on site was assessed using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Condition Assessment sheets appropriate for each habitat type (DEFRA, 2023).

4.2 Mapping

4.2.1 Habitats on site were mapped in accordance with UK Hab Classification (UK Hab Ltd, 2023). The minimum mapping unit adopted is 25m^2.

4.3 Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

4.3.1 Biodiversity Offsetting was developed by Defra. The pilots of the study were first published in 2012.

4.3.2 The Biodiversity Calculator is a system created by Defra to quantify change in biodiversity of a site in biodiversity units.

4.3.3 *The Biodiversity Offsetting Pilots: Guidance for Developers* (Defra, 2012) details the original metric for calculating biodiversity loss or gain as a result of development proposal.

4.3.4 *The Statutory Biodiversity Metric* (DEFRA, 2023), Condition Assessments (DEFRA, 2023), The Statutory Metric Use Guide (DEFRA, 2024) and associated biodiversity metric principles were used to inform the assessment and the habitat condition and calculate potential change in biodiversity within the survey site.

4.3.5 For inclusion in the Statutory Metric, habitats below 25m^2 have been grouped where appropriate, that is, where they have the same distinctiveness level.

4.3.6 To determine strategic significance of the habitats at baseline and post-development, the relevant documentation was considered including Local and Neighbourhood Plans, Priority Habitats, Local Biodiversity Action Plans and Local Ecological Networks. When available the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be utilised for this purpose.

4.3.7 The Mitigation. Hierarchy and the Biodiversity Net Hierarchy and was used to inform recommendations about habitat retention, loss, enhancement and creation as per the Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice principles for development (CIRIA C776a, 2019).

Biodiversity Net Gain Principles (Table 4, p. 19, The Statutory Metric User Guide, 2024)

Principle 1 – The metric assessment should be completed by a competent person.

Principle 2 – The use of this biodiversity metric does not override existing biodiversity protections, statutory obligations, policy requirements, ecological mitigation hierarchy or any other requirements. This includes consenting or licencing processes, for example woodlands.

Principle 3 – This biodiversity metric should be used in accordance with established good practice guidance and professional codes.

Principle 4 – This biodiversity metric is not a complex or comprehensive ecological model and is not a substitute for expert ecological advice.

Principle 5 – Biodiversity units are a proxy for biodiversity and should be treated as relative values.

Principle 6 – This biodiversity metric is designed to inform decisions in conjunction with locally relevant evidence, expert input, or guidance.

Principle 7 – Habitat interventions need to be realistic and deliverable within a relevant project timeframe.

Principle 8 – Created and enhanced habitats should be, where practical and reasonable, local to any impact and deliver strategically important outcomes for nature conservation.

Principle 9 – This biodiversity metric does not enforce a minimum habitat size ration for compensation of losses. Proposals should aim to:

- Maintain habitat extent – supporting more, bigger, better and more joined up ecological networks.
- Ensure that proposed or retained habitat parcels are of sufficient size for ecological function.

4.4 Limitations

4.4.1 The survey work was undertaken in April 2024. At this time of year, the majority of higher plants are visible, but some species are more conspicuous or only present at some times of the year, and some species may have been missed. The species list constructed is not comprehensive. The survey of the habitat types on site at this time of year is, however, considered sufficient to inform the condition assessment in this case.

4.4.2 An updated site visit in January 2026 was not undertaken as it is an inappropriate time of year to conduct botanical survey; the data from April 2024 is more reliable and reflective of the site.

5. Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

5.1 Baseline condition and potential impacts on Biodiversity

Offsetting and the Biodiversity Calculator

5.1.1 The baseline condition of the habitat and the predicted change as a result of the proposals has been assessed with the use of the Biodiversity Offset principals.

5.1.2 Biodiversity offsetting principal: What is it?

> "Using the biodiversity offsetting approach means than an offset provider delivers quantifiable amount of biodiversity benefit to offset the loss of the biodiversity resulting from the development. The losses and gains are measured in the same way, even if the habitats concerned are different. In the biodiversity offsetting pilot, the measurement is done in **'biodiversity units'**, which are the product of the **size of an area**, **the distinctiveness** and **the condition** of the habitat it comprises. The assessment of biodiversity units lost and gained can be calculated" (Defra, 2012).

5.1.3 The Biodiversity Calculator is a system created by Defra to quantify change in biodiversity of a site in biodiversity units. The current calculator is known as the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Gov.UK Statutory Biodiversity Metric Tool, 2023).

5.1.4 This quantitative assessment will be considered in relation to the other qualitative ecological functions of the site in order to assess the impact (i.e. functionality for protected species), but is a useful tool to show predicted or potential loss of habitat, change in condition and enhancement (net gain).

Distinctiveness of the Habitat

5.1.5 Under the Biodiversity Calculator principals each habitat is categorised into a distinctiveness band.

5.1.6 The distinctiveness of the habitat is based upon parameters such as species richness, diversity, rarity (at local, regional, national and international scales) and the degree to which a habitat supports species rarely found in other habitats (Treweek *et al*, 2010)

- **Vegetated garden is considered to be of low distinctiveness.**
- **Urban trees have moderate distinctiveness** as they provide habitat for a variety of species.
- **Developed land; sealed surface has VERY LOW distinctiveness**.
- **Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface has VERY LOW distinctiveness** due to the poor functionality for wildlife.

Habitat Condition Assessment

5.1.7 The condition the habitat on site can be categorised as low, moderate or good and is based upon the Habitat Condition Assessment Sheets within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric.

5.1.8 Vegetated garden and artificial unvegetated unsealed surface does not require a condition assessment.

5.1.9 The majority of the trees trees on site are considered to be of moderate condition as they are non-native, but are mature with full canopies oversailing vegetation. The small ash with ash dieback and poor canopy is considered to be of poor condition. Refer to arborist report: Rowbottom's Tree Services Ltd. RTS/22042024.

5.2 Achieving Biodiversity Net Gain (Biodiversity Offsetting)

5.2.1 The EU is committed to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services by 2020. The Biodiversity Strategy sets out 6 targets and 20 specific actions geared towards this overall objective. Action 7 is to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

5.2.2 The 'mitigation hierarchy' is included with current planning policy, aiming to halt the loss of biodiversity. The National Planning Policy Framework, consolidating planning guidance states that '*if significant harm cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or as a last resort, compensated for, planning permission should be refused*'.

5.2.3 Defra's biodiversity offsetting pilot was developed to address this requirement and ensure development, economic growth and biodiversity conservation are compatible (British Ecological Society, 2013)

5.2.4 Biodiversity net gain, as a good practice principal, has been developed by Ciria, CIEEM and IEMA (2016). At the very least developments should aim for no net loss as part of the proposals.

5.2.5 The Statutory Biodiversity Metric shows the distinctiveness and condition of the habitats on site at baseline (prior to development), with associated Biodiversity Units for area habitat and linear hedgerow.

5.2.6 The area habitats on site will be lost as a result of the proposals. The non-native privet hedge will be retained. New area habitats will be created.

5.2.7 The Headline Results in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Tool shows the overall net change in Biodiversity Units as a result of the development and creation of new habitat.

Habitat Lost and Trading Rules

5.2.8 All habitat on site will be lost as a result of the proposals. Due to the fact that the trees on site are of medium distinctiveness, the same broad habitat or a habitat of higher distinctiveness is required to offset the loss.

Area Habitats created

5.2.9 The following habitats are to be created on site:

- **4 small urban trees**
- **0.019ha of vegetated garden.**

5.2.10 Four small native trees will be planted on site.

Figure 4: Proposed Habitat Creation



5.3 Habitat Creation

Broadleaved Trees

5.3.1 Four small native trees, pendulous birch (*Betula pendula*) will be planted on site.

5.3.2 To achieve moderate condition, these trees must be cared for, and not pruned unless necessary.

5.3.3 Trees that die in the first couple of years must be replaced.

5.4 Biodiversity Net Gain Conclusion

5.4.1 The proposals will result in a net loss in biodiversity at Catherine Road, Manchester.

5.4.2 Habitat Units will be purchased from a habitat bank in order to meet Biodiversity Net Gain Requirements.

5.4.3 The new habitats (trees) will take up to 30 years to establish, and so it will be necessary for the areas to be appropriately managed during this time.

6. References

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