



PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

**LAND AT SACRED HEART FOOTBALL CLUB,
FIRGROVE GARDENS, ROCHDALE**

JANUARY 2025

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

**Land at Sacred Heart Football Club,
Firgrove Gardens, Rochdale**

A report for

Northern Design
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On behalf of their client

Sacred Heart Football Club

Report by



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 REASON FOR SURVEY

PENNINE ecological have been commissioned by Northern Design, to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the land at Sacred Heart Football Club, Rochdale. The assessment is required due to an outline application for a new dwelling with associated parking.

A biodiversity survey and report has been completed to provide a baseline of the site conditions and to determine whether the proposals would result in significant impacts to protected habitats or species.

This report addresses potential ecological impacts which may arise from the proposals. This includes;

- Habitat assessment (UKHabs survey).
- Badger survey.
- Preliminary bat roost assessment of buildings and trees.
- Potential breeding bird issues associated with the site.
- Great Crested Newt (GCN) assessment
- Riparian mammal assessment
- Any other protected or notable species issues associated with the site.

1.2 SITE LOCATION

The site is Sacred Heart Football Club, Firgrove Gardens, Rochdale, OL16 2UB. The sites central National Grid Reference is SD 91629 13751. An aerial image of the area subject to survey is shown below.

Figure 1.1: Aerial image of Sacred Heart Football Club, Rochdale, with red line survey area



2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 DESK SURVEY

A desk-based data search using freely available information was undertaken.

The Multi Agency Geographical Information Centre www.magic.gov.uk was also referred to in respect of statutory sites, GCN licence returns, and European Protected Species Licences (EPSL) issued in respect of GCN and bats. Greater Manchester Local Record Centre 'Map app' was referred to in respect of non-statutory sites.

A review of the Rochdale Borough Council planning portal was undertaken in relation to historic planning applications within the vicinity of the site.

In addition, Pennine Ecological's dataset was referenced which contains extensive records of species and habitats generated from surveys undertaken since the company's formation in 1996.

It should be noted that species records over 500m of the site are not reproduced here as they are considered to have no association with the site and are beyond the sphere of influence for this proposal.

2.2 HABITAT SURVEY

A UK Habitat Classification (UKHabs) survey (UKHab Ltd, 2020) of the habitats within the red line boundary was undertaken on 29/11/2024. The site's habitats were mapped, and vascular plant species were recorded and given a DAFOR ((Dominant (D), Abundant (A), Frequent (F), Occasional (O), Rare (R)) score. Each habitat was given a distinctiveness and habitat condition score (Natural England, 2023). Secondary codes have been applied where required to describe the primary habitats. Habitats have been mapped using the fine-scale minimum mapping unit.

2.3 PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEYS

2.3.1 Badger Survey

A badger survey was undertaken of the site and up to 50m from the site boundary (where access permitted) and followed standard survey guidance (Harris et al., 1989, and Roper, 2010). The badger survey used standard techniques for establishing the use of the site by badger, and includes searches for evidence of badgers including:

- Setts.
- Pathways.
- Footprints.
- Latrines.
- Foraging areas.
- Scratching posts.
- Boundary searches for runs, pathways, and latrines.

2.3.2 Breeding Bird Assessment

The site was assessed for its potential to support breeding birds. This included identifying any evidence of historic nesting within the site.

Any bird activity within the site was recorded whilst undertaking the site survey.

2.3.3 Riparian Mammal Assessment

The site is located approximately 30m west of Rochdale Canal. The site was assessed for its potential to support riparian mammals, specifically otter and water vole.

The site and nearby canal was searched for evidence of both species.

2.3.4 Other Protected and Notable Species

Consideration was given to other protected and notable species potentially present. The following species / species groups have been scoped out for further assessment, with brief reasoning provided below:

- Bats – The existing building in the south west corner of the site will not be affected by the proposals. There are no trees on site. Therefore there is no risk of impact to roosting bats from this proposal. The site is very small and of very limited value for foraging bats. Potential impacts on bats can be discounted.
- Great Crested Newts (GCN) – There are no ponds within a 250m radii of the proposed site. The closest pond is 260m west of the site and is on the opposite side of residential buildings and a railway. There are no GCN licence returns within 500m of the site. Great crested newts are considered likely absent from the site and locally.
- Reptiles – There are no records of reptiles within 500m of the site. The site is a modified grassland area which is maintained to a reasonable level. Given the sub-optimal habitat on site and the lack of known reptile populations within the area, reptiles are considered likely absent from the site and locally.
- Invertebrates – There are no notable invertebrate records within 500m of the site. The site is primarily modified grassland. The site does not have the capabilities of supporting a notable assemblage of invertebrates (Buglife, 2015). It is considered highly unlikely that the site will support a notable assemblage of invertebrates.

These species are not discussed further within this report.

2.4 SURVEY CONSTRAINTS

The site survey was conducted on 29/11/2024. It is acknowledged that the survey was taken outside of the optimal botanical season, however, the habitats on site were modified grassland and vegetated garden which were easily identifiable and could be appropriately condition assessed (as required).

Access to the private property (south western area of the site) was not possible during the survey. However, the proposals will not impact on the property and associated vegetated garden. There are no constraints arising from this.

2.5 SURVEYOR EXPERIENCE

The surveyor and author of this report, Patrick Leatham, is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (MCIEEM) and has over 13 years' experience in ecological survey and evaluation. Key skills include the following.

- Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey/UKHabs Survey.
- Proficient field botanist.
- Breeding bird survey.
- Mammal surveys including surveys for badger and preliminary bat roost assessments.
- Riparian mammal surveys.

- Extensive experience in great crested newt (GCN) survey, evaluation, licensing, and mitigation. Natural England Class Licence WML-CL08 held.
- Ecological Evaluation and Impact Assessments in association with large scale infrastructure projects for Environment Agency, United Utilities and Highways England.
- Experienced Habitats Regulations Assessment author for various projects across the north-west of England.

3. RESULTS

3.1 DESK STUDY

3.1.1 Statutory Sites

There is one internationally or nationally designated statutory site located within 2km of the site.

Rochdale canal is located approximately 30m east of the site and is listed as a Special Area of conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The canal contains important habitats for submerged aquatic plants and emergent vegetation, including extensive colonies of the nationally scarce floating water-plantain.

3.1.2 Non-Statutory Sites

There are no known non-statutory sites within 500m of the site.

3.1.3 Protected / Notable Habitats and Species

There are no protected or notable habitats or species within the site.

The canal and associated submerged aquatic plant assemblages are likely to qualify as a Priority Habitat.

3.2 HABITAT SURVEY

3.2.1 Habitats Present

- g4 Modified grassland
- g (828) Vegetated garden
- u1b5 Buildings

3.2.2 General Description

The site is a triangular plot made up of modified grassland with a terrace dwelling in the south west corner. The site is located within the grounds of Sacred Heart Football Club, adjacent to the football pitch. Rochdale Canal is located east of the site and a residential estate is located to the south of the site.

3.2.3 Target Notes

(i) Target Note 1 – g4 Modified grassland

The triangular parcel appears to be managed regularly by the football club. There is evidence of ground disturbance, and the species assemblage is indicative of nutrient enriched substrate. Species recorded included: Yorkshire fog (A), common bent (F), cock's-foot (LF), broadleaved dock (LA), common nettle (LA), dandelion (F), creeping thistle (LF), creeping buttercup (LF).

The grassland is assessed as being in poor habitat condition (Pennine Ecological, 2024).

(ii) Photographs: Habitats



Photograph 1: Overview of triangular area of modified grassland (Target note 1). Poor condition.



Photograph 2: Overview of modified grassland and adjacent football pitch.

3.3 PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEYS

3.3.1 Badger Survey

(i) Setts

The survey found no setts on site or within 50m of the site.

(i) Foraging Signs and Pathways

No sign of badger activity was found on site or within 50m of the site.

(ii) Boundary Search

All of the boundaries of the site were walked and examined for potential runs, pathways, and latrines. The search found no evidence to suggest badger activity along any of the site boundaries.

The absence of any activity signs indicates that badgers are not entering the site. The absence of latrines indicates a lack of territorial activity in the near vicinity of the site.

3.3.2 Bird Assessment

No evidence of current or historic bird nesting evidence was recorded within the site's vegetation. There is no evidence of any barn owl use (current or historic).

Bird activity during the survey was low, with a number of common and widespread garden birds observed / heard. This included: blue tit (1no.), wood pigeon (1no.).

Habitat associated with the site is considered to be of '**Low**' suitability for breeding birds.

3.3.3 Riparian Mammal Assessment

Rochdale Canal is located approximately 30m east of the site. No evidence of otter and water vole was recorded 50m upstream and downstream of the site. However, the canal is considered to provide suitable habitat for both species.

The site comprises modified grassland which is of limited value for both otter and water vole. Between the site and the canal is a large walled slope and a wooden fence on top of the slope. The canal towpath (which was in frequent use during the survey) is also located between the canal and the site. Due to the lie of the land and barriers in place, there is considered to be very limited ecological connectivity between the canal and site for riparian mammals.

(i) Photographs: Riparian Mammals



Photograph 3: Overview of the Rochdale Canal east of the proposed site.



Photograph 4: Closer view at the Rochdale canal.



Photograph 5: The canal tow path, a retaining wall, slope and secure wooden fence along the top of the slope separates the canal from the proposal site. Very limited ecological connectivity for riparian mammals.

4. EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 DESK STUDY

4.1.1 Statutory Designated Sites

There is one statutory site within the site or within 2km of the site. Rochdale Canal SAC and SSSI is located 30m east of the site.

The Natural England (NE) Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) tool¹ has been reviewed and states that NE should be consulted (see extract below from MAGIC).



Impact Risk Zones for Sites of Special Scientific Interest

For local planning authorities to determine if a proposed development is likely to affect a terrestrial Site of Special Scientific Interest and when to consult Natural England.

You should consult Natural England on the proposed development at this location.

Send your consultation to: consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

The Impact Risk Zones for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI IRZs) indicate that at the location selected, there is potential for the proposed development to have a harmful effect on terrestrial Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and those Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites that they underpin.

Therefore, you should consult Natural England for advice on the nature of the potential impacts and how these might be avoided or mitigated.

As this report is associated with an Outline application only, full details of the proposal (including drainage and construction methods) are not and will not be available to allow a comprehensive assessment of impacts on the canal.

However, a number of assumptions have been made and along with the information collected during the survey, have been used to provide a shadow Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA).

- 1) The canal is located 30m east of the site. Between the site is a retaining wall, slope and fence. This is the highest point of the site. The site gradually slopes towards the football pitch and to the west, away from the canal. Surface water will be managed by soakaways which will lead away from the canal.
- 2) The foul drainage of the proposal site will drain to a manhole located at No. 17 Firgrove Garden, in the west of the site.
- 3) All machinery and construction materials would be stored to the west of the site within an existing sit compound area and around the football pitch. General good working practices (covered within a Construction Environment Management Plan) would avoid any pollutant run-off during construction.
- 4) It is anticipated that there would be an imperceivable change in the canals water quality as a result of the proposal. It is considered highly unlikely that there would be a significant effect on the aquatic plants supported by the canal resulting from this proposal.

(i) Recommendations: Statutory Designated Sites

¹ GIS tool developed by Natural England to make a rapid initial assessment of the potential risks posed by development proposals to statutorily designated sites

Due to the scale and nature of this proposal consultation with Natural England would be required at full planning stage.

Whilst the high level Shadow HRA concludes that it is highly unlikely that significant effects will occur, it is recommended that a Stage 1 HRA is undertaken at full planning application stage. The Stage 1 HRA will draw upon the detailed drainage and surface water strategies to provide a comprehensive assessment.

4.1.2 Non-statutory Designated Sites

There are no known non-statutory sites within the site. Rochdale Canal SBI is located 30m east of the site.

Potential impacts associated with the SBI are captured within Section 4.1.1 above.

(i) Recommendations: Non-statutory Designated Sites

Potential impacts to the SBI would be considered and addressed within the HRA. No additional assessment is required.

4.2 HABITATS

The existing habitats on site are of low distinctiveness. Habitats present within the site were assessed as being in poor habitat condition.

Due to the size and condition of the habitats on site, the value of the current site's habitats cannot exceed 'site' ecological value, with impacts not extending beyond the land directly affected by the proposals.

(i) Recommendations: Habitats

There are no further surveys or assessments required. Pennine ecological are informed that the application was submitted and validated prior to mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain and no assessment has been requested.

4.3 BADGERS

No evidence of badger activity was found within the site or the wider area during the survey.

It is concluded that badgers are absent on site and locally.

(i) Recommendations: Badgers

There are no requirements for further surveys or assessment.

4.4 BIRDS

All breeding birds (with only minor exceptions) are offered various levels of protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended.

No evidence of current or historic bird nesting was recorded during the survey.

More suitable nesting provisions are provided through woodland to the east of the site, along the canal.

The site is capable of supporting a bird assemblage of up to 'site' ecological value.

(i) Recommendations: Birds

There are no requirements for further surveys or assessment.

4.5 RIPARIAN MAMMALS

Otter are a European Protected Species (Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019) and water vole are listed as Section 41 species (Section 41 of the NERC Act, 2006).

The surveys concluded that whilst the canal does provide suitable habitat for both otter and water vole, the site is highly unlikely to be utilised by both species.

The presence of physical barriers (retaining walls and wooden fencing) and the lack of suitable habitat for riparian mammals on site, means that both species can be considered absent from the site.

(i) Recommendations: Riparian Mammals

There are no requirements for further survey or assessment.

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Rochdale Borough Council – Planning and Application portal - Latest access 16/12/2024 <https://publicaccess.rochdale.gov.uk/online-applications/spatialDisplay.do?action=display&searchType=Application>

Appendix A: Figure

