

**Extended Preliminary Ecological Assessment
for a garden plot at Lister Road,
Rhodes, Middleton, Rochdale District
Greater Manchester**

By

**Dave Bentley
Entomology and Ecology Services**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A garden plot at Lister Road, Rhodes, Middleton, Rochdale District (SD 8475 0499) was surveyed to the CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals Second Edition 2017 and for Biodiversity Net Gain by Dave Bentley Entomology and Ecology Services on 18th June 2024. Number 1 Lister Road, a dilapidated end-terrace, is empty and is currently being gutted and refurbished by builders. The large end-terrace garden plot is being considered for a planning application to construct an additional detached house. This is a “small site” in BNG terms. The plot for the new house measures 215m square metres and this is all bare earth at the moment. The proposal is to create a house and hard areas of 111 square metres, with a front lawn of 16 square metres, a rear lawn of 56 square metres and a linear block of native shrubs on the south and east boundary (where space allows) amounting to 32 square metres.
- 1.3 David Bentley conducted the survey. He has been in conservation since 1983 and has been a professional ecologist since 1993.
- 1.2 The CIEEM Guidelines are explicit in what is required to be assessed and provided:
- * A Habitat Survey Map.
 - * A desk study. In this case the NBN Atlas and iRecord were consulted.
 - * An assessment of the possible presence and likely importance of the following:
 - Plants
 - Fungi
 - Terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates
 - Fish (where relevant, based on an assessment of any watercourses and water bodies present);
 - Amphibians (including both breeding and terrestrial habitat)
 - Reptiles
 - Breeding, wintering and migratory birds
 - Bats (including potential roost sites, and foraging and commuting habitats/features)
 - Other protected or priority mammal species, as relevant.
 - * Mapping of any stands of non-native invasive plant species
 - * Recording of any incidental sightings of priority or protected species, or field signs of such species.
 - * Box 1 of the PEA Guidelines discusses Protected and Priority Species information and this is stated to include Protected and Section 41 Priority Species and Priority Habitats and also Red Data listed taxa and indeed Nationally Scarce taxa, as well as Birds of Conservation Concern Red (most declining) and Amber listed taxa. The JNCC Taxon List names the plethora of higher plants, bryophytes, fungi and wild animals, including invertebrates that are considered scarce.

2 METHODS

- 2.1 The survey morning was on 18th June 2024. All PPE was cleaned beforehand to meet biosecurity needs. The site is ringed by security fencing and a screen. The site had been cleared by machine and other methods to remove the huge amount of items in the garden (which can be seen on online satellite images) and to facilitate the work on the refurbishment.
- 2.2 It was a still and sunny summer morning.
- 2.3 Plants and moss fringing the bare earth were examined and noted to DAFOR rating. The treeline beyond the site boundary was examined for tree and shrub species
- 2.4 A paving slab was lifted to look beneath and examine.
- 2.5 There was no call for an invertebrate assessment of this empty bare soil habitat.
- 2.6 The River Irk lies 80m to the south from the southern boundary and there is a cut-off section of the river which remains as a free standing linear pond (the river was diverted when the motorway was built). This necessitated a visit to check if the habitat was suitable for amphibians, notably Great Crested Newts (legally Protected) and Common Toad (a Priority Species). A very long handled pond net was used given the satellite image showed a tall stone revetted bank on its southern edge. The cut-off section lies adjacent the modern weir on the river. Amphibians breeding in these waterbodies live on the surrounding land.

3 DESK STUDY

- 3.1 Online satellite images show this garden was derelict in the 2020s with vehicles and a boat occupying the street frontage area and with bramble scrub immediately behind the rear door of Number 1, and scrub and secondary woodland colonising the rest and enveloping the boat and vehicle storage area. The old OS maps on National Library of Scotland website show the whole of the adjacent river valley has been a developed area within living memory. MAGIC map was consulted.
- 3.2 A search of NBN Atlas and iRecord revealed no records for the site itself. A lot of records on NBN appeared to be placed nearby in eastern Rhodes on the River Irk until it is worked out that the centre of OS80 square is in that spot. Ergo apart from those records transferred to NBN from iRecord there are only SD80 10Km square records available, which is unhelpful to list.
- 3.3 There is no data for the cut-off river section.
- 3.4 The Desk Study provided:

The only relevant bird is the House Sparrow (Red List Priority Species), whilst the other birds listed are waterside species found along the River Irk. IRecord lists some common Butterflies and Dragonflies and Damselflies.

4 RESULTS OF FIELD SURVEY

4.1 A Habitat Survey Map is appended below.

4.2 15 higher plant species and 2 moss were recorded along the inner edges of the shuttered building site, alongside the fencelines. Most of these were outside the actual ownership area. All of the species are common in England and Greater Manchester. None of the species inside the shutter fencing are alien species - none are Schedule 9 Alien Invasives. As the ground has been machine-scraped it is not possible to say what may be in the seed bank. The species lists are given below (D = Dominant, A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional, R = Rare, V = Very, L = Locally):

Ivy	O
Stinging Nettle	O
Cow Parsley	R
Herb Robert	O
Broad Buckler Fern	R
Common Male Fern	R
Bindweed (non-flowering)	O
Field Horsetail	O
Bramble	O
Cleavers	R
Common Hogweed	R
Holly sapling	R
Hawthorn sapling	R
Sycamore sapling	VO
Privet sapling	R
<i>Brachythecium rutabulum</i>	O
<i>Kindbergia praelonga</i>	VLF

The treeline/hedge outside the site has:

Sycamore (large tree at south west corner of site which may or may not be in site).
Sycamore (several)
Ash (large multi-stemmed) and another
Elder (c2)
Holly
Garden Privet
Hawthorn (c2)
Rhododendron ponticum (Schedule 9 Invasive Alien)
Hornbeam sapling
Ivy
Bramble
Raspberry
Stinging Nettle

- 4.3 The site does not contain any Priority Habitats. The adjacent treeline/hedge could be classed as a Priority Habitat hedgerow. The presence of a Schedule 9 Alien Invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* shows the condition of this habitat is compromised. As the tree/line hedge is outside the site and not on the actual site boundary it should not be affected adversely by the development of this derelict garden plot for a house.
- 4.4 Watercourses and Ponds are Priority Habitats and the River Irk and its cut-off section lie just over 100m to the south of the site. The development of this derelict garden for a house will not adversely affect these Priority Habitats.
- 4.5 Fungi – none were found and the bare soil will not be of interest for grassland or woodland fungi.
- 4.6 Invertebrates – Whilst this site lies adjacent a wildlife corridor and might readily be colonised by a multitude of invertebrate species, the totally bare soil site and regular disturbance show the site is currently of minimal value to invertebrates. There were some common soil invertebrates such as centipedes and woodlice under a broken paving slab.
- 4.7 1) Fish and amphibians – There are no waterbodies on site and no amphibians were found under debris. However site staff report a Common Frog was seen in the garden when clearing and carried carefully to the site edge. The nearest Great Crested Newt record is 479m away to the north across the village and main roads in the Baguley Brow area.
- 2) The cut-off section of river lies 107m from the site boundary to the south west. This was surveyed and found to be 95% covered in emergent Crack Willow. The southern tip remains open near the modern weir and here a Palmate Newt male and a Common Frog tadpole were caught, along with Three-spined Sticklebacks. The water was about 30cm deep over deep silt and the banks about 1.3m tall. The only vegetation in the pool was Marsh yellow-cress, growing on a dumped tyre, and fringing Nettle. Great Pond Snail and Lake Orb Mussel recorded.
- 3) The river valley location, the presence of fish, the young age of the habitat as standing water, and the near total domination by emergent Crack Willow show this is not, and cannot be, a Great Crested Newt habitat. We expect to find Frog tadpoles in most waterbodies and Palmate Newts are often found in river valleys. The habitat did not support Common Toad tadpoles and looks too eutrophic for them. Great Crested Newts are creatures of the plains and pond clusters to the north in the open countryside but not this area.
- 4) As for other area is noted that 90m to the south west of the site boundary is the remains of a drained and somewhat landfilled reservoir. But the area ceased to be shown as a waterbody on OS maps decades ago. If the area has wet hollows they may part of the Palmate Newt and Common Frog habitat mosaic. But a look at online satellite images that every bit of open land between the site and the hollow of the former reservoir has been thoroughly bulldozed in recent years, this being a former industrial estate.
- 5) There are some reservoirs 875m and more away from the site on the east side of Rhodes and these are likely to be Common Toad breeding sites. Toads wander far outside the breeding season and may turn up anywhere in the wildlife corridor or in gardens adjacent. Some might

even have successful breeding in the River Irk above the weir but there is a strong flow there, as can be seen from the stretched out growth of Fennel Pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*) (examined under microscope) above the weir (108m due south of the site).

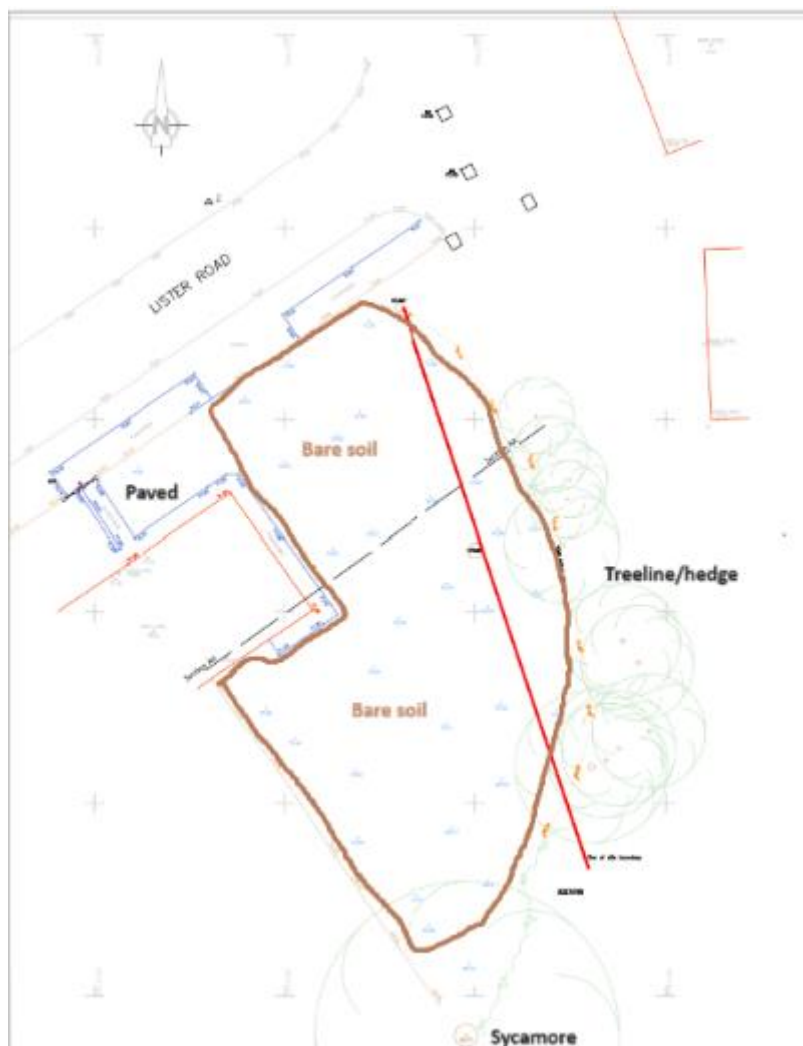
- 4.8 Reptiles – Nothing seen under debris and the habitat structure needed is not present. This is in an old suburban garden and though the adjacent valley is green today, it has been completely developed in the past with mills, sewage works and reservoirs (as can be seen on old OS maps). Reptiles (other than dumped Terrapins) are virtually unknown in this part of Greater Manchester's lowlands (and are unconfirmed where such vague records exist).
- 4.9 Breeding, wintering and migratory birds. As there is no vegetation on site and it is an active building site then the value to breeding birds and roosting birds is nil. The mixed tree line outside the site will provide some opportunities for bird nesting, roosting and feeding.
- 4.10 Bats. There are no trees or structures on site that could be used by hibernating or roosting Bats. The insects that rise above the treeline bordering just outside the site of an evening will be part of the local Bat population's feeding resource. The plot is part of the local feeding mosaic available to Bats although the wildlife corridor along the Irk is an extensive potential bat feeding resource.
- 4.11 Mammals. The NBN Atlas has records of Hedgehogs in the wider area. Hedgehogs are a Red Data Near Threatened Section 41 Priority Species of Principal Importance and the Local Planning authority has a legal Biodiversity Duty to seek to conserve the species. Wood Mouse, Voles, Shrews and Brown Rat may occur locally. Fox seems likely in the adjacent Valley
- 4.12 There were no Schedule 9 alien invasive plants in the site to be found. That said wildlife corridors along rivers could host numerous alien invasive species so the advice is to herbicide the garden area before laying it out as a new garden.

5 DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS

- 5.1 If the site is to be developed then the Small Sites Matrix calculation needs to be applied. This site is 510 Bare Ground in poor condition.
- 5.2 No planning condition relating to breeding birds is needed.
- 5.3 There needs to be a duty of care relating to Protected and Priority animals that may enter the site. Thus for example trenches dug for foundations and services need to have one sloping sides to ensure any animal (Hedgehogs, amphibians notably Toads) falling in can get out.
- 5.4 Boltonandburyswifts@outlook.com are happy to advise regarding the new British Standard BS42021 which recommends 1 Swift Brick (universal brick to be used by Sparrows too) per 1 residential property (north facing walls). Some local planning authorities seek new builds to install these via planning conditions.
- 5.5 It is suggested that the developers cut down and dig out the Rhododendron from the adjacent treeline/hedge as it is an alien invasive. It should be burned on site.

- 5.6 The new house plot already has large Sycamore and Ash trees just outside the boundary. The key for the landscaping on this site is to provide a measure of native mixed shrub habitat and some attractive small trees. The suitable small and attractive trees are Wild Cherry *Prunus avium*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, Holly *Ilex aquilinum*, Aspen *Populus tremula* and Silver Birch *Betula pendula*. A belt of shrub habitat can be provided around the garden margins and this can be maintained at a low height or allowed to grow to provide a screen. Suitable species are Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Holly *Ilex aquilinum*, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Common Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus* and Native Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. The planting can be supplemented with Black Currant *Ribes nigrum* Red Currant *Ribes rubrum* etc. Such a landscaping scheme will in time become a place where wild birds and Hedgehogs might find shelter and food and will attract native invertebrates.
- 5.7 Any new fencing constructed on the south and west sides should incorporate a hedgehog passage. If timber fencing is planned this is simply removing a small piece of wood from the fence base about the size of CD box. For concrete based fencing this company (and others) offer a solution <https://www.garden-fence-panels.co.uk/concrete-posts-bases/concrete-gravel-boards/hedgehog-friendly-concrete-base-panel-plain/>

Habitat Survey Map:





Planning Proposal (above)

Below is a photograph of the bare site in relation to the house refurbishment and photographs of the river cut-off section and the pool above the weir on the River Irk



The site (above)



River Irk Cut-off section (above)



River Irk Cut-off section (above)



River Irk pool above modern weir



River Irk modern weir

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