

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

SITE LOCATION

Balderstone Playing Fields,
Rochdale, OL11 2HD

ISSUE DATE

27 March 2023

OUR REFERENCE

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PREPARED FOR

Rochdale Borough Council

PRINCIPAL AUTHOR

Abigail Wait



Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

VERSION: V1 DATE: March 2023
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Date		27 March 2023
Prepared by		Abigail Wait Seasonal Ecologist
Qualifications		BSc (Hons), MSc
Signature		
Review by		Morgan Hughes Principal Ecologist
Qualifications		MSc CEcol
Signature		
Authorised by		Pete Wharton
Position		Director
Project number		1649



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Summary	
Site surveyed	Balderstone Playing Fields, Rochdale, OL11 2HD National Grid reference SD 90307 11482
Purpose and brief	Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Commissioned by Rochdale Borough Council
Development proposals	The Proposed Development is comprised of two rugby playing pitches, a 26-space car park, and fencing.
Methods	Desk study UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) survey of the Site Assessment of likely significant effects as far as can be reasonably known.
Confirmed ecological constraints	None
Potential ecological constraints	Nesting Birds Hedgehogs
Recommendations/ Further survey works required	Precautionary measures for nesting birds and hedgehog Production of a wildlife sensitive lighting scheme
Opportunities for ecological enhancement	Bat boxes Bird boxes Hedgehog shelters/highways Native species planting



1. Introduction/Background

1.1 Author

- 1.1.1 The Principal Author of this report is Abigail Wait BSc (Hons), MSc (Seasonal Ecologist). The Principal Author has two years of professional experience in ecological consultancy and has worked on projects ranging from large national infrastructure developments to commercial and residential sites throughout the country.
- 1.1.2 The detail provided within this report is a true and accurate reflection of both the Site conditions at the time the survey was completed, as well as the professional opinion of the Principal Author.
- 1.1.3 The Reviewer of this report is Morgan Hughes MSc CEcol (Principal Ecologist). The Reviewer has over 20 years of professional experience in the ecological sector, and seven years in ecological consultancy, having worked on projects ranging in scale from small commercial and residential sites to large scale (road and rail) infrastructure. The Reviewer currently holds Class 3 and 4 survey licences from Natural England for bats (*Chiroptera*), a Class 1 survey licence for great crest newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and a survey licence for barn owl (*Tyto alba*). She has been a full member of CIEEM since 2008 and a Chartered Ecologist since 2017 and is therefore subject to CIEEM's Code of Professional Conduct.

1.2 Purpose and Brief

- 1.2.1 Rochdale Borough Council (the Client) commissioned Wharton Natural Infrastructure Consultants Ltd (Wharton) to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of an area of land known as Balderstone Playing Fields, Rochdale, OL11 2HD (see land within the red line boundary on Appendices 1 and 2), known herein as 'the Site').
- 1.2.2 The purpose of the PEA (as per CIEEM guidance (CIEEM, 2018)) is to inform the design of the Proposed Development. The key objectives of a PEA are to:
- Identify the likely ecological constraints associated with the Proposed Development;
 - Identify any mitigation measures likely to be required, following the 'Mitigation Hierarchy';
 - Identify any additional surveys that may be required to inform an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA); and,
 - Identify the opportunities offered by the Proposed Development to deliver ecological enhancement.
- 1.2.3 The PEA report is not intended to be submitted to accompany a planning application; it is intended to inform the design of the Proposed Development.

1.3 Description of Site and Local Area

- 1.3.1 The Site is located to the south of Queen Victoria Street and to the west of Platting Lane in Rochdale, Greater Manchester. It is centred approximately at National Grid reference SD 90307 11482.
- 1.3.2 The Site comprised one field of modified grassland bordered to the north and south by hedgerows with trees.
- 1.3.3 Land use in the immediate and wider area is urban, with a mix of residential and commercial properties, as well as some amenity grassland and small woodland fragments. The Site is relatively isolated from an ecological perspective due to access roads throughout the local area and fragmented semi-natural habitat with poor ecological connectivity to/from the Site.

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- 1.3.4 Wildlife corridors are present in the local area, such as the Rochdale Canal, c.460m north of the Site. However, the Site is not ecologically well connected to any wildlife corridors and does not contribute to their functionality.
- 1.3.5 The Site is bordered to the north, east, and west by access roads and buildings, which are likely to present a barrier to species movement into and out of the Site. Major roads are also present, such as the A664 c.290m to the north and M62 c.900m to the south, which may present barriers to species dispersal in the wider area.

1.4 The Proposed Development

- 1.4.1 The Proposed Development comprises two rugby playing pitches, a 26-space car park, and fencing.
- 1.4.2 The proposals detailed above will be referred to throughout this report as the 'Proposed Development' and can be seen in Appendix 3.



2. Relevant Planning Policy & Legislation

2.1 Relevant Legislation

2.1.1 National and international legislation relevant to the Proposed Development is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. *Legislation Relevant to the Proposed Development*

Legislation*	Relevance to the Proposed Development
The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (HMSO, 2017) <i>Amended by¹</i> The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (HMSO, 2019)	Affords protection to species listed under Schedules 2 and 5 and gives provision for the allocation and protection of European protected sites.
The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (HMSO, 1981)	Affords protection to species listed under Schedule 5 of the Act and gives provision for the allocation of statutory wildlife sites.
The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (HMSO, 2006)	Places a duty on planning authorities to consider habitats and species of principal importance in planning applications.
The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (HMSO, 1992)	Offences under the Act include damaging, destroying or obstructing access to a badger sett, disturbing a badger when it is occupying a badger sett, and killing or injuring a badger.

*Full legislative text should be referred to as table text is a summary only.

1 - The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 provides safeguards for European Protected Sites and Species (as listed in the Habitats Directive). This has recently been amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 which continue the same provision for European protected species, licensing requirements, and protected areas now the UK has left the European Union.



2.2 Relevant Planning Policy

2.2.1 Planning policies which are relevant to the Proposed Development are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Planning Policy Relevant to the Proposed Development

Planning Policy	Relevance to the Proposed Development
National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2021)	Section 180a and 180c (respectively) of the NPPF state: <i>"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".</i>

*Full policy text should be referred to as table text is a summary only.

2.2.2 The Rochdale Adopted Core Strategy (Rochdale Borough Council, 2016) has been reviewed, and an excerpt of the relevant ecological policies is provided in Appendix 4.



3. Methods & Methodology

3.1 Desk Study & Consultation

- 3.1.1 A desk study was carried out to gather background ecological data, and the following resources were used for the data search:
- Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) Interactive (DEFRA, 2023) map was used to determine the presence of granted European Protected Species Mitigation licences at and within 1km of the Site.
 - Google Earth Pro (Google Earth Pro, 2023) aerial and historic imagery were used to assess the ecological connectivity at the Site as well as its historic use to assess suitability of habitats locally for foraging and commuting wildlife.
 - Biological records have been obtained from Greater Manchester Local Records Centre (GMLRC, 2023) from a 1km radius of the central grid reference provided in paragraph 1.3.1, for statutory wildlife sites, non-statutory wildlife sites and legally protected and notable species.

3.2 Field Survey

- 3.2.1 A UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) survey (comprising the methods detailed below) was carried out on 23 February 2023 by the Principal Author and Byron Humphries BSc (Hons) ACIEEM (Ecologist).

- 3.2.2 Weather conditions at the time of survey were 6°C, dry, and sunny.

UKHab Survey

- 3.2.3 A UKHab Survey (Butcher, Carey, Edmonds, Norton, & Treweek, 2020) was carried out at the Site and provides a comprehensive habitat classification system for the UK. UKHab enables details in relation to the presence of notable (such as Habitats of Principal Importance) or protected habitats (such as Annex I habitats) to be obtained.
- 3.2.4 The UK Habitat Classification Version 1.1 was used for assessment of the Site, using the *Professional Edition Hierarchy*. Habitats were classified to Level 5 unless otherwise stated.
- 3.2.5 Based on the characteristics of the Site, the habitats it supports (as assessed from remote aerial imagery during the desk study), and other information from the desk study such as biological records, an assessment was made of the suitability of the Site to support protected or notable species. Those species for which the Site was deemed to be unsuitable or where impacts are unlikely to occur due to the Site location, a lack of nearby suitable habitat and/or a lack of biological records were scoped out. These species are listed in section 4.5.
- 3.2.6 Habitats at the Site were identified and mapped; they are illustrated on the UK Habitat Classification Plan in Appendix 2. Where appropriate, target notes have been used to identify areas on the plan that require further detail, and this has been included in the report.
- 3.2.7 Plant names (common and scientific) within this report follow 'New Flora of the British Isles' (Stace, 2010).

Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA)

- 3.2.8 The PRA and subsequent assessment of suitability of the trees at the Site for roosting bats followed current best practice guidance (Collins, 2016).



- 3.2.9 The trees were inspected from ground for potential bat roosting features, including; woodpecker holes, rot holes, cracks or splits in stems and branches, partially detached bark, gaps between overlapping stems and branches, bat and bird boxes, and any other hollows or cavities.
- 3.2.10 The trees were classified according to the criteria set out in Table 3 below in accordance with standard guidance (Collins, 2016). With respect to roost type, the assessments in this report are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed.

Table 3. Bat Roost Suitability Descriptions (based on Collins, 2016)

Suitability	Description of Roosting Habitats
Confirmed Presence	Presence of roosting bats within the building or tree confirmed by the survey
High	A building or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.
Moderate	A building or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.
Low	A building or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by a larger number of bats (i.e., unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation).
Negligible	Trees or buildings that appear unsuitable for roosting bats due to a clear lack of roosting spaces and/or absence of suitable access points, such as voids, small crevices etc, cracked limbs, rot holes, woodpecker holes, limb tear outs etc.

3.3 Limitations and Caveats

- 3.3.1 February is a suboptimal time of the year for botanical survey to be undertaken, however, due to the species present at the time of the survey, and the indicative nutrient enrichment of the soil (deduced from the prevalence of species such as perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*)), it is unlikely that important plant species requiring further detailed botanical survey are present at the Site. This limitation is therefore not considered to be significant.
- 3.3.2 Trees could only be assessed for potential roosting features for bats from ground-level during this survey, so it is possible some features may have been missed.
- 3.3.3 This report is based solely on the Site conditions on 23 February 2023 and provides a 'snapshot' of Site conditions currently only.



3.4 Evaluation of Ecological Features

- 3.4.1 The likelihood of the occurrence of any protected and/or invasive species at the Site relies on assessment of habitat suitability for the species at the Site as well as an evaluation, in parallel, of desk study data and published guidance/literature which is referenced accordingly:
- 3.4.2 The CIEEM EcIA guidelines (CIEEM, 2018) state that *"the importance of an ecological feature should be considered within a defined geographical context"*. The suggested frames of reference within the CIEEM EcIA guidelines have been adapted appropriate to the location of the Site and the nature of the Proposed Development. These frames of reference in this case are:
- International and European
 - National (England)
 - Regional (North West)
 - County (Greater Manchester)
 - Local (Rochdale)



4. Ecological Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

4.1 Zone of Influence

- 4.1.1 The Zone of Influence (Zol) for the Proposed Development is the area within which significant ecological impacts could occur to ecological features.
- 4.1.2 The Zol differs for each ecological feature, and the Zol has been clearly stated in the baseline assessment of each ecological feature below.
- 4.1.3 The Zol has been stated for every ecological feature except those where there is clearly a lack of suitable habitat at or adjacent to the Site, and therefore no pathways by which impacts could occur to the feature.
- 4.1.4 Where a Zol has been provided for a species that has subsequently been scoped out of further assessment, the Zol relates to the area considered as part of the initial scoping assessment for that ecological feature (i.e., the area within which potential impacts to the feature have been considered).

4.2 Statutory Wildlife Sites

Zol

- 4.2.1 The Zol for statutory wildlife sites is considered to be 500m from the Site boundary. This is due to the relative ecological isolation of the Site from the wider area and limited impacts from the occupational phase of the Site to the local area (such as for recreational purposes).

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.2.2 One statutory designated site lies within 500m the Site. Rochdale Canal, located c.460m north of the Site, is designated as both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), primarily for its diverse aquatic flora, including the nationally scarce floating water-plantain (*Luronium natans*).
- 4.2.3 While the Site is within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) of the above SSSI, the Proposed Development does not fall within one of the categories which require further consultation with Natural England.
- 4.2.4 Connectivity between the Site and the above SSSI is also limited, and they do not share similar habitats. Therefore, no direct or indirect impacts to statutory wildlife sites are considered likely to arise because of the Proposed Development.
- 4.2.5 No further survey or assessment regarding statutory wildlife sites is required and no significant effects to statutory wildlife sites are likely to arise as a result of the Proposed Development.

4.3 Non-statutory Wildlife Sites

Zol

- 4.3.1 The Zol for non-statutory wildlife sites is considered to be 500m from the Site boundary. This is due to the relative ecological isolation of the Site from the wider area and limited impacts from the occupational phase of the Site to the local area (such as for recreational purposes).

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.3.1 No non-statutory wildlife sites lie within 500m of the Site.
- 4.3.2 No direct or indirect impacts to non-statutory wildlife sites are considered likely to arise because of the Proposed Development.
- 4.3.3 No further survey or assessment regarding non statutory wildlife sites is required and no significant effects to non-statutory wildlife sites are likely to arise as a result of the Proposed Development.



4.4 Habitats

4.4.1 A plan of the habitats detailed below is provided in Appendix 2.

4.4.2 The assessment of importance within section 4.4 relates solely to the botanical importance of habitats at the Site. It does not take use or possible use by protected species into account as this is addressed within section 4.5

Zol

4.4.3 The Zol for habitats in relation to the Proposed Development is the habitats within the Site boundary only. This is because adjacent habitats are of limited ecological importance and impacts to adjacent habitats as a result of the Proposed Development are unlikely to occur.

Modified grassland – g4

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

4.4.4 Modified grassland was the dominant habitat at the Site. This habitat is likely subject to regular disturbance via foot traffic and mowing, as well as artificial nutrient input, due to its use as amenity grassland.

4.4.5 Perennial ryegrass is the dominant grass species present at the Site with occasional cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*). Forb species include creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), crane's-bill (*Geranium* sp.), ground elder (*Aegopodium podagraria*), chickweed (*Stellaria media*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* agg.), dock (*Rumex* sp.), crocus (*Crocus* sp.), and cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*). However, the overall abundance of forbs throughout the habitat is very low.

4.4.6 The modified grassland is not considered to be ecologically important due to the very limited botanical diversity and nutrient enrichment of the soils.

4.4.7 It is not clear at this stage how much of the modified grassland is to be lost as a result of the Proposed Development, however, loss of this habitat will not result in a significant ecological effect.

Hedgerow (Priority Habitat) – h2a

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

4.4.8 The northern and southern boundaries of the Site are lined with hedgerows occasional mature trees.

4.4.9 The woody species in this habitat are predominantly native, such as common hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), common dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), lime (*Tilia* sp.), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), and rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Some non-native species, including horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*), and Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), are also present.

4.4.10 The understory of the hedgerows comprise bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), ivy (*Hedera helix*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos* sp.), dock, ground elder, rosebay willowherb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*), stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), creeping buttercup, cleavers (*Galium aparine*), cow parsley, wood avens (*Geum urbanum*), and daffodil (*Narcissus* sp.).

4.4.11 The hedgerows are considered to have some ecological importance due to the moderate level of botanical diversity. However, the small extent of this habitat and lack of connectivity to other hedgerows limits its ecological importance.



- 4.4.12 Based on the design proposals, it is understood that the hedgerows and associated trees are to be retained as part of the Proposed Development, therefore, no significant ecological impacts to this habitat are expected as a result of the Proposed Development.

Mixed scrub – h3h

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.4.13 A small area of mixed scrub is present at the north-western corner of the Site, comprising saplings of willow (*Salix* sp.), birch (*Betula* sp.), and rowan. The understory here is species poor, and largely consists of the same species found in the modified grassland.
- 4.4.14 The mixed scrub is not considered to be ecologically important due to the small extent of the habitat on Site and its limited botanical diversity.
- 4.4.15 From the design proposals, it appears that this habitat is to be removed as part of the Proposed Development. Its removal will not have a significant ecological impact.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

- 4.4.16 To achieve a net gain for biodiversity, it is recommended that an area of the Site is set aside for habitat creation within any proposals. Habitat creation may involve hedgerows, wildflower areas, butterfly banks, urban tree planting, or a combination of these measures.

4.5 Species Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.5.1 Biological records have been provided by Greater Manchester Local Records Centre (GMLRC, 2023). The data will be licensed for use by Wharton and the Client for a 12-month period and are not owned by Wharton or the Client as ownership of the data remains with the data provider.
- 4.5.2 The Site was assessed for its suitability to support the following species during the Site survey:
- Badger (*Meles meles*);
 - Bats;
 - Great Crested Newt (GCN) and other amphibians;
 - Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*);
 - Invertebrates;
 - Reptiles;
 - Wild birds; and
 - Protected plants.
- 4.5.3 The following species/species groups have been scoped out of further assessment. No significant effects (adverse or otherwise) to this species are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Development, and no legislative breach in respect of the species legal protection is anticipated.
- Hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*);
 - Otter (*Lutra lutra*);
 - Water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*);
 - White-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*);
 - Freshwater fish; and
 - Marine flora & fauna.



Badger

Zol

- 4.5.4 The Zol for badger is considered to be the Site and 30m outside of the Site boundary only. No important habitats for badger are considered to be affected outside of this area by the Proposed Development.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.5.5 The search returned a single record of badger within 1km of the Site – an individual badger that was observed on a camera trap in 2017 at a location c.250m east of the Site.
- 4.5.6 No evidence of badger was identified at the Site or within 30m of the Site, and it is unlikely on the basis of adjacent habitat that badger will migrate into the Site.
- 4.5.7 The risk of a breach of legislation in respect of badger from the Proposed Development is considered to be negligible.

Bats

Zol

- 4.5.8 The Zol for bats is considered to be the Site only. No important habitats for bats are considered to be affected outside of the Site boundary by the Proposed Development.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects - Roosting Habitat

- 4.5.9 The search returned 11 records of roosting bats within 1km of the Site. Confirmed species are common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*), with additional records of unidentified bat species. The closest record is an unidentified pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus* sp.) maternity roost c.550m south of the Site, however this is a historic record from 1997. The closest record within the last 20 years is a common pipistrelle roost located c.720m north of the Site, which was recorded in 2007.
- 4.5.10 Two European Protected Species Licensing (EPSL) Applications with regards to bats are provided on MAGIC map (DEFRA, 2023) within 1km of the Site. The first of these licences is from 2012 and allowed for the destruction of a common pipistrelle roost located c.730m south-west of the Site. The other licence is from 2016 and allowed for the destruction of a common pipistrelle roost located c.860m south-west of the Site.
- 4.5.11 No buildings are present at the Site.
- 4.5.12 One of the mature trees on the southern boundary of the Site is covered in dense ivy, meaning that concealed potential roosting features for bats may have been missed during the ground-level assessment. However, from the current design proposals, it is understood that trees on the boundary are to be retained as part of the Proposed Development. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Proposed Development will have adverse impacts on roosting bats.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects - Commuting and Foraging Habitat

- 4.5.13 The search returned 22 records of foraging and commuting bats within 1km of the Site. Species comprise common pipistrelle and unspecified pipistrelle bats. The closest record is an injured common pipistrelle bat that was found c.230m north of the Site in 2006.
- 4.5.14 The hedgerows and trees at the Site have some suitability for foraging bats. However, connectivity to/from the Site is poor and botanical species diversity (which would suggest an abundance of invertebrate prey) is low throughout the Site.



- 4.5.15 Suitable foraging habitat is present at the Holy Family RC Churchyard c.450m south-west of the Site, and there is some connectivity to this area via tree lines connecting to the southern border of the Site. The Proposed Development will not adversely affect this tree line or the suitable foraging habitat; no fragmentation effect is considered likely to arise as a result of the Proposed Development.
- 4.5.16 The Site has some potential to support foraging and commuting bats via the hedgerow and trees on the Site perimeter, however it is understood that these trees are to be retained. There is potential for the Proposed Development to impact foraging and commuting bats through an increase in temporary or permanent lighting levels. Precautionary measures have been recommended to reduce the likelihood of potential impacts occurring to a negligible level.

GCN and Other Amphibians

Zol

- 4.5.17 The Zol for GCN is the Site and ponds within 250m of the Site; this is due to the isolated nature of the Site in the local area and poor associated ecological connectivity.
- 4.5.18 The Zol for other amphibians is the Site only.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.5.19 The search returned a single record of amphibians within 1km of the Site – a common toad (*Bufo bufo*) that was recorded c.670m south-east of the Site in 2021. No records of GCN were returned from within 1km of the Site.
- 4.5.20 No EPSML Applications with regards to GCN were provided on MAGIC map (DEFRA, 2023) within 1km of the Site.
- 4.5.21 No ponds were identified within 250m of the Site (DEFRA, 2023) (Google Earth Pro, 2023).
- 4.5.22 The habitats on Site have negligible suitability for amphibians and no ponds have been identified within 250m of the Site (DEFRA, 2023) (Google Earth Pro, 2023). It is therefore unlikely that amphibians, including GCN, will be adversely affected by the Proposed Development, and the Site is not likely to be ecologically important for amphibians.

Hedgehog

Zol

- 4.5.23 The Zol for hedgehog is considered to be the Site only as this is the only likely area where impacts to hedgehog may occur as a result of the Proposed Development.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.5.24 The search returned 21 records of hedgehog from within 1km of the Site. The closest records are from camera trap footage and other evidence from 2011-2021 at a location c.250m east of the Site.
- 4.5.25 The Site supports limited foraging and shelter habitat for hedgehog in the hedgerows and trees to the north and south of the Site. However, it is unlikely that important populations of hedgehog are present at the Site due to the relative isolation of the Site from the wider area by residential gardens (including close board fences) and access roads. The Site is therefore unlikely to be ecologically important for hedgehog.
- 4.5.26 The Proposed Development has the potential to adversely affect individual hedgehogs that may use the Site via direct impacts from machinery or becoming trapped in excavations. This effect is unlikely to be significant, however precautionary measures have been recommended to reduce the likelihood of potential impacts occurring to a negligible level.



Invertebrates

Zol

- 4.5.27 The Zol for invertebrates is considered to be the Site only as this is the only likely area where impacts to invertebrates may occur as a result of the Proposed Development.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.5.28 The search returned four records of cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*), a Section 41 Species of Principal Importance (HMSO, 2006), within 1km of the Site. These records are all from 2019-2020 at a location c.250m east of the Site. No other records of protected or notable invertebrate species were returned.
- 4.5.29 The Site supports very low botanical species diversity, and whilst common invertebrate species likely use the plant species present at the Site as food, larval and egg-laying plants, the likelihood of red data book species or other notable species being present at the Site is negligible.
- 4.5.30 The Site is therefore unlikely to be important for invertebrates.

Reptiles

Zol

- 4.5.31 The Zol for reptiles is considered to be the Site only as this is the only likely area where impacts to reptiles may occur as a result of the Proposed Development.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.5.32 The search returned no records of reptiles within 1km of the Site.
- 4.5.33 The habitats on Site have negligible suitability for reptiles, and the isolated urban location and regular disturbance by mowing suggests that the presence of reptiles at the Site is unlikely. It is therefore highly unlikely that the Site is ecologically important for reptiles.

Wild birds

Zol

- 4.5.34 The Zol for wild birds is the Site only, as this is the only area where impacts to wild birds may occur as a result of the Proposed Development.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.5.35 The search returned numerous records of protected bird species within 1km of the Site. Section 41 Species of Principal Importance (HMSO, 2006) comprise lesser redpoll (*Acanthis cabaret*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), reed bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*), herring gull (*Larus argentatus*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*), starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*). The closest of these are records of bullfinch c.250m east of the Site, from 2012-2021. Several records of kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), a Schedule 1 species (HMSO, 1981), were returned, which were recorded c.500m north-west of the Site in 2012.
- 4.5.36 The Site supports some suitable nesting habitat for wild birds via the hedgerows and trees to the north and south of the Site.
- 4.5.37 The Site is unlikely to support important populations of wintering, breeding or migratory bird species due to the type of habitats present, their location in a highly disturbed urban environment, and the relatively small size of the Site.



- 4.5.38 There is a risk of a breach of Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (HMSO, 1981) in relation to damage to/destruction of bird nests and their eggs if mixed scrub vegetation removal is undertaken during the nesting bird season. Mitigation measures have been proposed to reduce the risk of a breach of legislation to a negligible level.
- 4.5.39 It is unlikely that the Proposed Development will result in significant adverse ecological effects to wild birds, however the potential for a breach in legislation will require mitigation which is detailed within this report.

Protected plants

Zol

- 4.5.40 The Zol for protected plants is the Site only, as this is the only area where impacts to protected plants may occur as a result of the Proposed Development.

Baseline and Assessment of Impacts and Effects

- 4.5.41 The search returned four records of floating water-plantain, a protected and nationally scarce species, within 1km of the Site. These records are from 2003-2007 at a location on Rochdale Canal, c.750m north of the Site. No other records of protected or notable plant species were returned.
- 4.5.42 Due to the nutrient enriched nature of the Site, its management, and usage as amenity grassland, the Site is not likely to support protected or notable plant species. No protected or notable plant species were observed at the Site during the field survey, though the limitation on botanical survey season must be noted.

Invasive Species

- 4.5.43 The search returned no records of invasive species within 1km of the Site.
- 4.5.44 No invasive species were found on Site during the field survey.



5. Ecological Constraints and Opportunities

5.1 Key Constraints to Design

- 5.1.1 There are no anticipated significant ecological constraints associated with the Proposed Development.
- 5.1.2 No further surveys for protected species are considered to be necessary in respect of the Proposed Development.

5.2 Other Mitigation Requirements

Trees

- 5.2.1 The retained trees should be protected appropriately throughout the construction phase in accordance with BS5837 (BSI, 2012). An arboricultural consultant should be consulted regarding the protection of the trees to be retained on Site, during the construction phase of the development to ensure they remain in good health post-development.
- 5.2.2 Any trees that must be removed as part of the Proposed Development should be replaced like-for-like with native species as part of a landscaping scheme. Whilst the mature trees to the south of Site are not ecologically important, they do provide an element of structural diversity and maturity to the Site which would not be readily replaced with planting of smaller/younger trees.

Hedgehog

- 5.2.3 It is possible that individual hedgehogs may be impacted by Site clearance and excavation works (injury/death and trapping respectively). As a precautionary measure, should hedgerows require clearing at the Site, this must be checked for hedgehogs immediately prior to removal to reduce the likelihood of adverse effects to this species.
- 5.2.4 Any open excavations which cannot feasibly be infilled overnight must also be covered with a solid sheet material (e.g., plywood) to prevent fauna from falling into excavations and becoming trapped. Should this not be possible, a shallow slope must be dug into the excavation prior to it being left overnight to allow an escape route for any fauna that may fall in. All excavations must be checked for fauna in the morning prior to works commencing.

Wild Birds

- 5.2.5 No further surveys for breeding, migratory or wintering birds are required at the Site.
- 5.2.6 Birds and their nests are legally protected (HMSO, 1981), and many species are listed as Species of Principal Importance (HMSO, 2006). Priority bird species are also afforded protection in planning through national (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2021) and local planning policy.
- 5.2.7 If the removal of hedgerow or trees is required on Site to facilitate the Proposed Development, it should avoid the nesting bird season (March to September inclusive) or be checked by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to clearance to check for nesting birds if undertaken during the nesting season.
- 5.2.8 The netting of any suitable bird nesting habitat should be prohibited (CIEEM & RSPB, 2019).

5.3 Opportunities for Enhancement

- 5.3.1 The Proposed Development should include bat boxes installed onto the retained trees on Site. The bat boxes should be installed a minimum of 4m above ground level, preferably on south- or east-facing elevations.

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- 5.3.2 The Proposed Development should also include bird boxes. All of which must be positioned on north-facing aspects, out of direct sunlight (to avoid overheating eggs and chicks) and at a height of c.4m (to avoid predation by domestic cats).
- 5.3.3 Hedgehog shelters should be provided at the Site as part of the Proposed Development, to enhance the Site for sheltering hedgehogs. These should be placed within vegetation and away from roads. Additionally, 13cm x 13cm holes should be installed within garden fencing or any hard boundaries to allow hedgehog to migrate across the Site.
- 5.3.4 The landscaping design for the Proposed Development should include the planting of a wide-range of native species, including nectar and pollen-rich species, to attract invertebrate prey for a variety of animals in the local area, which will enhance the Sites biodiversity. These can be chosen from the RHS: Perfect for Pollinators List (RHS, 2019).
- 5.3.5 Specific details on the numbers of bat and bird boxes and hedgehog shelters will be provided once robust details of the Proposed Development are available, to ensure the enhancements suggested are appropriate.



6. Conclusion

- 6.1.1 No further surveys for protected species are considered necessary in respect of the Proposed Development and subsequent planning application.
- 6.1.2 Whilst the Site is unlikely to be important for foraging or commuting bats, any new lighting (permanent or temporary) as part of the Proposed Development must be kept to a minimum and directed away from the peripheries of the Site preclude the likelihood of disturbance to bats that may utilise the Site occasionally. A wildlife sensitive lighting scheme should be designed in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust and Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance (BCT, ILP &, 2018).
- 6.1.3 Avoidance and good practice construction measures for hedgehogs and nesting birds are necessary to prevent harm to these species and potential breach of legislation.
- 6.1.4 Enhancement measures have been provided for bats, birds, and hedgehogs, as well as planting recommendations, however, specific recommendations will be detailed once robust details of the Proposed Development are available.



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Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan (Google Earth Pro, 2023)





Appendix 2 – UK Habitat Classification Plan

Scale: 1:1200



Red Line Boundary

Habitats



g4 - modified grassland



h2a - hedgerow (priority habitat)



h3h - mixed scrub

Date: 08/03/2023

Client: Rochdale Borough Council

Project: Balderstone Playing Fields, Rochdale, OL11 2HD

Title: UK Habitat Classification Plan

Map file reference

Plan No.

230308 1649 ECO V1

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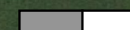
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E. info@wnic.co.uk

T. +44 (0)1789 459458

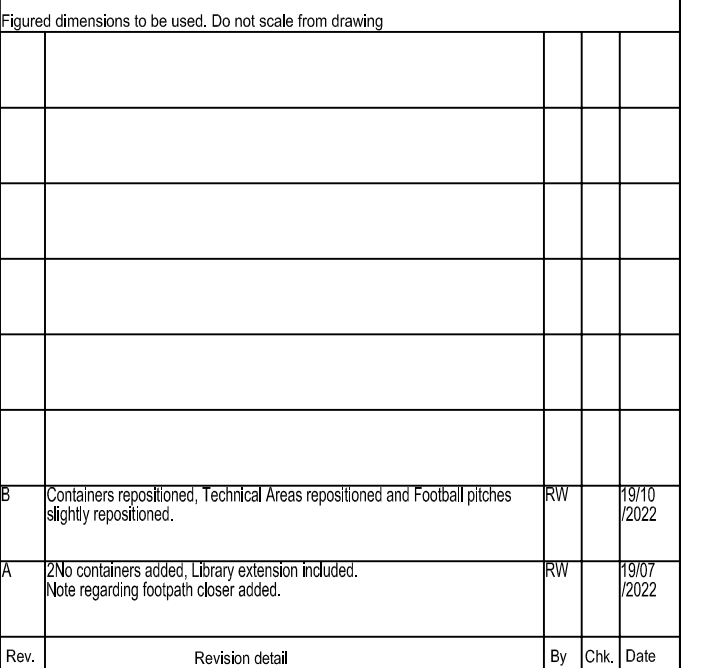
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Appendix 3 – The Proposed Development Layout (Rochdale Borough Council, 2022)





Appendix 4 - Local Planning Policy Excerpts (Rochdale Borough Council, 2016)

G7 - Increasing the value of biodiversity and geodiversity

We will ensure that sites and features of biodiversity and geodiversity importance are given full and appropriate recognition and protection. Opportunities for enhancing biodiversity and geodiversity, creating new sites and features of interest and improving opportunities for public enjoyment will be supported. No development should result in a net loss of biodiversity or geodiversity interest in the borough and overall development in the borough should result in a net gain.

Particular priorities for biodiversity and geodiversity are:

1. **The South Pennine Moors** - our focus is to maintain and enhance the peatland habitats of the moorland and to support development, land and water management activities which provide an opportunity to conserve and enhance the value of moorland for upland breeding birds of conservation significance and the habitats on which they depend, and which do not harm biodiversity value. Our focus is the designated Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation but also the wider moorland where such interest is present or could be supported through appropriate development or land management. We will also protect and support enhancement measures for areas of geodiversity value.
2. **The Rochdale Canal** - our focus is to ensure that the Rochdale Canal Special Area of Conservation and the wider biodiversity interest of the canal is given full and appropriate protection and ensure that development which delivers the economic and recreational value of the Rochdale Canal and its wider corridor supports and does not harm its biodiversity value.
3. **Upland farmland** - our focus is to ensure that the biodiversity interest of upland farmland including its value for birds, woodland and grassland is protected and opportunities for enhancement and the creation of new interest maximised through land management improvements and appropriate development activities.
4. **Countryside around towns** - our focus is to protect and enhance the biodiversity interest of river valleys, woodland, water and farmland including the reclamation of derelict and neglected land and flood risk management measures. We will also support actions which enhance public access and enjoyment of countryside close to urban areas including Local Nature Reserves and the wider countryside.
5. **Urban Areas** - our priority is to protect and enhance existing urban biodiversity and to support opportunities for new urban biodiversity corridors, sites and features including sustainable urban drainage schemes, new public realm provision, street trees and urban woodlands, ponds and lodges, green roofs and natural play areas.
6. **Designated sites of ecological importance** - will be given appropriate protection according to their European, national or local status and in accordance with policies in other development plan documents, supporting Supplementary Planning Documents and Biodiversity Action Plans.
7. **Protected Species:** Development proposals which would affect a species protected by law or its habitat will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that:
 - a) there is no adverse impact on the species concerned;
 - b) damage to habitats is minimal and alternative habitat provision is effective in maintaining those species.



Opportunities to protect, enhance and create features of biodiversity or geodiversity interest should be informed by the detail of any formal designation of a site or area and supporting plans and guidance such as Local Biodiversity Action Plans, Green Infrastructure Strategies and Action Plans and the Council's Biodiversity and Development SPD.

We will expect development proposals and improvements to:

- a) Protect and include existing biodiversity (including established biodiversity interest on brownfield land) within new developments, public realm and open spaces and meet the requirements of the Biodiversity and Development SPD, Greater Manchester and Local Biodiversity Action Plans;
- b) Protect and enhance existing features such as peatland, ponds, wetlands, reservoirs, mill lodges, trees, hedges, wooded areas, meadows, flora and fauna;
- c) Take opportunities to promote biodiversity and create new habitats through new development using landscaping and building and construction features wherever possible (e.g. ponds, species of vegetation, green roofs and walls, bat boxes, roof space, appropriate nest boxes and landscaping);
- d) Enhance strategic wildlife corridors and the most natural areas and ensure that habitats and corridors are not fragmented by development;
- e) Improve access where appropriate to new or existing biodiversity interest for public enjoyment; and
- f) Protect important geology and take opportunities to increase interest and accessibility.



Appendix 5 - Site Photographs



Figure 1. Modified grassland (viewed from the south)



Figure 2. Sward of the modified grassland



Figure 3. Hedgerow with trees to the south of Site



Figure 4. Hedgerow with trees to the north of Site



Figure 5. Hedgerow with trees to the north of Site



Figure 6. Mixed scrub to the north of Site



Figure 7. Tree with ivy on the southern border of Site

WHARTON NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSULTANTS

Head Office

The Coach House,
Birmingham Rd,
Coughton,
Alcester

T. 01789 459 458

E. hello@wnic.co.uk

WNIC.CO.UK

