

Ascerta has been instructed by Kellen Homes to advise on ecological matters relating to a hybrid planning application comprising a full planning application for 191 residential dwellings with associated access roads, landscaping and public open space provision, together with the erection of a substation and foul water pump station. Outline planning permission with all matters reserved is sought for operational works to facilitate the East Lancashire Railway (ELR) extension. The application has been given the reference: 23.00431/HYBR.

This note provides a response to comments made by Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) on the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) submitted with the application. The comments were made on 2 August 2023.

The comments made are numbered below with our responses under each heading.

Since the feedback, an updated site walkover was carried out on 7 September 2023 by Liz Kenyon and Lizzie Atkinson. Weather conditions during the survey on 7th September 2023 were warm (21°C) with (1/8 cloud cover) with a F0 (Beaufort Scale) calm air, therefore appropriate for this type of survey.

- 1. Although the site is considered suitable for supporting reptiles, no up-to-date surveys for reptiles have been carried out.***

#### **Reptiles**

Reptile surveys were carried out by E3P in 2021 (E3P report, 80-464-R4-1 Reptile Survey Report, Castleton, Rochdale). No reptiles were recorded during the surveys carried out by E3P in 2021. Updated reptile surveys have been undertaken by Ascerta in 2023, and the findings can be viewed in report P.17332.22 Report on Reptiles.

The suitability recorded in the PEA remains unchanged.

- 2. Although the site is considered suitable for supporting amphibians, no up-to-date surveys for amphibians appear to have been carried out.***

GCN eDNA surveys at five ponds within 250m of the site have been carried out by E3P in 2021 (E3P report, Great Crested Newt Surveys, Castleton Sidings, Rochdale) which previously confirmed GCN as absent from the waterbodies assessed.

Following an updated Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment during the site walkovers on 16th March 2023 and 27th September 2023, the ditch D1 within the site and the pond within the golf course returned a score of poor for GCN breeding and the ditch network within the golf course returned a score of poor, therefore no further survey for GCN will be required at the ditch. See Appendix 2,

The site provides terrestrial habitat within the scrub, ruderal/ephemeral and semi-natural broadleaved woodland areas. Amphibians may also use water bodies that have scored below average or below. The terrestrial habitats do provide refuge areas and connectivity corridors for amphibians. These habitats are likely to be impacted by the proposals and therefore, it is recommended as the areas to be lost and are small in size that an Amphibian Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) Method Statement is produced and implemented during the works to avoid harm to this species.

## Limitations

The initial site visit was undertaken in March. Although this within the sub-optimal time of year for phase1 habitat surveys, sufficient vegetation was present to enable habitat identification. It is not considered a limit to the conclusions of the report based on the habitats found within the site and the works proposed. An updated site walkover was undertaken in early September.

A pond lies offsite to the south of the site, due to access limitations the pond was not fully assessed for GCN, it was noted throughout the visits for reptile surveys that water fowl were using the pond. It could also be noted from site that the pond was heavily poached by cattle and cattle were noted wading within the pond. The pond is also separated from the site via a busy, active rail line, limiting the connectivity for GCN to the site and therefore the pond has not been considered any further in the report. GCN eDNA surveys at five ponds within 250m of the site have been carried out by E3P in 2021 (E3P report, Great Crested Newt Surveys, Castleton Sidings, Rochdale

## Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index (GCN HSI)

| Standing water description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Photograph                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ditch 1 (D1):</b> runs adjacent to the northern site boundary. The ditch is approximately 1m in width, with shallow banks (<45°) and is surrounded by scrub and scattered trees. Ditch D1 was holding water approximately <10cm deep during the inspection with dry sections noted throughout. The HSI score was 0.48 meaning it has <b>Poor</b> suitability for use by great crested newt for breeding.                                                                                                                  |   |
| <b>Ditch network within the golf course:</b> The ditches form the drainage features for the gold course. The ditches lie within the fairways and the banks comprise the amenity grassland of the course that has encroached to watercourse. Plastic pipework is also present throughout. The ditches were wet in places from previous rainwater runoff, but they were not holding more than 1cm of water. The HSI score was 0.50 Meaning it has <b>Below Average</b> suitability for use by great crested newt for breeding. |  |

**Pond within the golf course:** a large pond is located to the west of the golf course and is fed by the fairways. Vegetation and water fowl were noted within the pond and the banks have been encroached by the grass on the golf course. The HSI score was 0.30 Meaning it has **Poor** suitability for use by great crested newt for breeding.



- 3. Sites with similar substrates to this one have sometimes been found to support notable plant communities. Plant and habitat surveys to inform the application were undertaken in March, too early in the year to identify some notable plant species.**

In the recent walkover, Cotoneaster (TN1) and Himalayan Balsam (TN5) was identified within the centre of the site. The location of the invasive species can be viewed on drawing P.1733.22.05C in Appendix 1. No other invasive non-native species were identified during the site walkover.

In the submitted PEA, an invasive method statement was recommended to avoid the spread of cotoneaster (TN1), this should also include Himalayan Balsam (TN5).

- 4. The Habitats Regulations Assessment does not seem to have assessed the possibility of the development causing water pollution of the Canal.**

An updated Habitats Regulations Assessment has been prepared which considers water pollution.

**Enclosures:**

***Report on Reptiles (P.1733.22)***

***Habitat Regulation Assessment (P.1733.22B)***

**Appendices:**

- 1. Phase One Habitat Survey**
- 2. Species List and Target Notes**
- 3. Photographs**
- 4. Great Crested Newt (GCN) Habitat Suitability Index Assessment**

# Appendix 1



- Site boundary
- A1.1.1 - Semi natural broadleaved woodland
- J4 - Hardstanding
- A2.1 - Scrub
- B6 - Semi-improved grassland
- J2.1.2 Species poor hedge
- G2 - Wet ditch
- Low BRP
- Snuffle hole (SH)
- Mammal path
- Target note

TN1 - Cotoneaster  
TN2 - Stone and rubble piles  
TN3 - Badger track  
TN4 - Horsetail  
TN5 - Himalyan Balsam

DO NOT SCALE.  
ALL COORDINATES RELATED TO LOCAL GRID.  
LOCATED TO NG BY BEST FIT TO DETAIL.  
EXTRACTED FROM OS DIGITAL DATA.

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|                                            |                 |                             |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| CLIENT:<br>Kellen Homes                    |                 |                             |
| PROJECT:<br>Castleton Sidings              |                 |                             |
| DRAWING TITLE:<br>Phase One Habitat Survey |                 |                             |
| SCALE:<br>NTS@A3                           | DRAWN BY:<br>LK | DRAWING No:<br>P.1733.22.05 |
| DATE:<br>19/10/2023                        | CHKD BY:<br>LA  | REV:<br>C                   |

## Appendix 2

## Appendix 2: Species Lists and Target Notes

**Table 1: Flora Species**

| English Name           | Scientific Name               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Alder                  | <i>Alnus glutinosa</i>        |
| Beech                  | <i>Fagus sylvatica</i>        |
| Bracken                | <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>    |
| Black knapweed         | <i>Centaurea nigra</i>        |
| Black medic            | <i>Medicago lupulina</i>      |
| Black pine             | <i>Pinus nigra</i>            |
| Bramble                | <i>Rubus fruticosus agg</i>   |
| Broadleaved dock       | <i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>     |
| Broadleaved plantain   | <i>Plantago major</i>         |
| Broom                  | <i>Cytisus scoparius</i>      |
| Buddleja               | <i>Buddleja</i>               |
| Cherry                 | <i>Prunus sp.</i>             |
| Clover                 | <i>Trifolium repens</i>       |
| Cock's-foot            | <i>Dactylis glomerata</i>     |
| Common daisy           | <i>Bellis perennis</i>        |
| Common field speedwell | <i>Veronica persica</i>       |
| Common toadflax        | <i>Linaria vulgaris</i>       |
| Compact rush           | <i>Juncus conglomeratus</i>   |
| Cotoneaster *          | <i>Cotoneaster sp.</i>        |
| Cow parsley            | <i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>  |
| Creeping bent-grass    | <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>   |
| Creeping buttercup     | <i>Ranunculus repens</i>      |
| Creeping thistle       | <i>Cirsium arvense</i>        |
| Curled dock            | <i>Rumex crispus</i>          |
| Cypress                | <i>Cupressus sp.</i>          |
| Dandelion              | <i>Taraxacum officinale</i>   |
| False oat grass        | <i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>  |
| Field horsetail        | <i>Equisetum arvense</i>      |
| Field maple            | <i>Acer campestre</i>         |
| Goat willow            | <i>Salix caprea</i>           |
| Greater willowherb     | <i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>     |
| Hawthorn               | <i>Crataegus monogyna</i>     |
| Herb robert            | <i>Geranium robertianum</i>   |
| Himalayan balsam *     | <i>Impatiens glandulifera</i> |
| Holly                  | <i>Ilex aquifolium</i>        |
| Horse chestnut         | <i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i> |
| Horseweed              | <i>Erigeron canadensis</i>    |
| Ivy                    | <i>Hedera helix</i>           |
| Leyland cyprus         | <i>Cupressus × leylandii</i>  |
| Maple                  | <i>Acer sp.</i>               |
| Meadow grass           | <i>Poa sp.</i>                |
| Moss                   | <i>Bryophyta sp.</i>          |
| Mullein                | <i>Verbascum thapsus</i>      |
| Perennial ryegrass     | <i>Lolium perenne</i>         |
| Primrose               | <i>Primula vulgaris</i>       |
| Red clover             | <i>Trifolium pratense</i>     |
| Red fescue             | <i>Festuca rubra</i>          |
| Reed canary grass      | <i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>   |
| Ribwort plantain       | <i>Plantago lanceolata</i>    |
| Rose                   | <i>Rosa sp.</i>               |

| English Name       | Scientific Name            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Silver birch       | <i>Betula pendula</i>      |
| Smooth sow thistle | <i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>   |
| Soft rush          | <i>Juncus effusus</i>      |
| Stinging nettle    | <i>Urtica dioica</i>       |
| Sycamore           | <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> |
| Wild carrot        | <i>Daucus carota</i>       |
| Wild strawberry    | <i>Fragaria vesca</i>      |
| Willowherb         | <i>Epilobium sp.</i>       |
| Yorkshire fog      | <i>Holcus lanatus</i>      |

\* **invasive species**

**Table 2: Target Notes**

| Target Note Number | Description            |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| TN1                | Cotoneaster            |
| TN2                | Stone and rubble piles |
| TN3                | Badger track           |
| TN4                | Horsetail              |
| TN5                | Himalayan balsam       |

## Appendix 3

## Appendix 3: Photographs

**Table 3: Photographs of the site**

|                                                                                    |                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|   |               |
| Photograph 1: Hardstanding                                                         | Photograph 2: Railway tracks and gravel areas                                                   |
|  |              |
| Photograph 3: Semi-natural broadleaved woodland                                    | Photograph 4: Goat willow tree in semi-natural broadleaved woodland with large crevice in trunk |



Photograph 5: Semi-improved grassland with strands of ruderal/ephemeral vegetation



Photograph 6: Mixed species scrub which dominates the site



Photograph 7: Species poor hedgerow



Photograph 8: Self-seeded scattered trees



Photograph 9: Wet ditch (D1)



Photograph 10: Areas of bare ground within the site



Photograph 11: Southern site boundary



Photograph 12: Self-seeded scattered trees

## Appendix 4

## Great Crested Newt (GCN) Habitat Suitability Index Assessment

### Ditch D1

| SI <sub>1</sub><br>Location |   | SI <sub>2</sub><br>Pond Area |     | SI <sub>3</sub><br>Pond Drying |     | SI <sub>4</sub><br>Water Quality |      | SI <sub>5</sub><br>Shade |   | SI <sub>6</sub><br>Fowl |   | SI <sub>7</sub><br>Fish |   | SI <sub>8</sub><br>Ponds |      | SI <sub>9</sub><br>Terrestrial Habitat |      | SI <sub>10</sub><br>Macrophytes |      | Product | HSI    | Suitability |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------|------|--------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|--------------------------|------|----------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|---------|--------|-------------|
| Zone A                      | 1 | 50-100m <sup>2</sup>         | 0.1 | Dries Annually                 | 0.1 | Poor                             | 0.33 | 0-60%                    | 1 | Absent                  | 1 | Absent                  | 1 | 8                        | 0.89 | Moderate                               | 0.67 | 1-5%                            | 0.35 | 0.00069 | 0.4828 | Poor        |

### Ditch network within the golf course

|     | SI <sub>3</sub> |     | SI <sub>4</sub> |      | SI <sub>5</sub> |     | SI <sub>6</sub> |      | SI <sub>7</sub> |   | SI <sub>8</sub> |      | SI <sub>9</sub>     |      | SI <sub>10</sub> |      | Product | HSI    | Suitability   |
|-----|-----------------|-----|-----------------|------|-----------------|-----|-----------------|------|-----------------|---|-----------------|------|---------------------|------|------------------|------|---------|--------|---------------|
|     | Pond Drying     |     | Water Quality   |      | Shade           |     | Fowl            |      | Fish            |   | Ponds           |      | Terrestrial Habitat |      | Macrophytes      |      |         |        |               |
| 0.8 | Dries Annually  | 0.1 | Poor            | 0.33 | 76-80%          | 0.6 | Minor           | 0.67 | Absent          | 1 | 8               | 0.89 | Poor                | 0.33 | 1-5%             | 0.35 | 0.00109 | 0.5056 | Below Average |

### Pond within the golf course

| SI <sub>3</sub> |     | SI <sub>4</sub> |      | SI <sub>5</sub> |     | SI <sub>6</sub> |      | SI <sub>7</sub> |      | SI <sub>8</sub> |      | SI <sub>9</sub>     |      | SI <sub>10</sub> |      | Product | HSI    | Suitability |
|-----------------|-----|-----------------|------|-----------------|-----|-----------------|------|-----------------|------|-----------------|------|---------------------|------|------------------|------|---------|--------|-------------|
| Pond Drying     |     | Water Quality   |      | Shade           |     | Fowl            |      | Fish            |      | Ponds           |      | Terrestrial Habitat |      | Macrophytes      |      |         |        |             |
| Never Dries     | 0.9 | Poor            | 0.33 | 86-90%          | 0.4 | Major           | 0.01 | Possible        | 0.67 | 8               | 0.89 | Poor                | 0.33 | 1-5%             | 0.35 | 8.2E-06 | 0.3099 | Poor        |