

United Environmental Services Ltd

1 Booths Park,
Chelford Road,
Knutsford,
Cheshire
WA16 8QZ

www.ues.org.uk

enquiries@ues.org.uk

01565 757788



BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN - BIODIVERSITY STATEMENT

At

Unicorn House
Cheetham Road
Middleton
Manchester
M24 4DG

NGR: SD 86559 05625

Prepared for: Signature Estates (NW) Ltd
Written by: Robert Mooney, UES Ecologist
Approved by: Toby Hart, UES Managing Director

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	2
1 INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Author and qualifications	3
1.2 Proposed development.....	3
1.3 Survey objectives	3
2 PLANNING POLICY	4
3 METHODOLOGY	5
4 RESULTS.....	6
4.1 Baseline assessment.....	6
4.2 Post-development assessment.....	6
5 EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	7
5.1 Biodiversity net gain requirements	7
5.2 Recommendations.....	7
6 CONCLUSION.....	9
APPENDICES.....	10
Appendix 1 – Phase 1 habitat plan	10
Appendix 2 – Photographs	11
Appendix 3 – Proposed site layout	12

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Author and qualifications

This report is compiled and written by Robert Mooney MSc, Ecologist for United Environmental Services Ltd (UES). Robert holds a level 3 Botanical Society for Britain and Ireland (BSBI) field identification skills certificate (FISC), which certifies him as competent to undertake phase 1 habitat and UKHab surveys.

1.2 Proposed development

The current development plans submitted to UES include the conversion of the office building on site into residential flats and the creation of new parking & amenity planting.

1.3 Survey objectives

This biodiversity statement has been produced for the proposed development Unicorn House, Middleton. UES was commissioned in August 2024 to prepare the Biodiversity Statement as part of a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment of the proposed development. This was completed in order to:

- Establish the baseline value of the site by calculating the number of habitat, hedgerow and watercourse units at the site of the proposed development.
- If detailed or indicative plans are available, establish the post development value of the development by calculating the number of habitat, hedgerow and watercourse units which will be created, retained and / or enhanced as part of the proposals.
- Provide guidance on habitat retention, creation and enhancement measures to inform proposed site layout and landscaping proposals and to maximize potential gains in biodiversity.
- Provide details of how offsite compensation will be used when a 10% biodiversity net gain cannot be achieved on site.

2 PLANNING POLICY

Paragraphs 180(d), 185(b) and 186(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) set out requirements for the delivery of BNG. In England, BNG is mandatory under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

Under the statutory framework, subject to some exceptions, every grant of planning permission is granted subject to the condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met ("the biodiversity gain condition"). This objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitats.

Mandatory BNG only applies for planning permission applications made on or after 12th February 2024. Permissions granted for applications made before this date are not subject to BNG. A temporary exclusion applies for non-major developments whereby mandatory BNG only applies for planning permission applications made on or after 2nd April 2024.

The Environment Act 2021 sets out the following key components to mandatory BNG:

- Minimum 10% gain required calculated using DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric & approval of net gain plan
- Habitat secured for at least 30 years via obligations / conservation covenant
- Habitat can be delivered on site, off site or via statutory biodiversity credits
- There is a national register for net gain delivery sites
- The mitigation hierarchy still applies of avoidance, mitigation and compensation for biodiversity loss
- Also applies to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)
- Does not apply to marine development
- Does not change existing legal environmental and wildlife protections



3 METHODOLOGY

The BNG assessment has been undertaken using the DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric. The metric was used to calculate baseline habitat, hedgerow and watercourse units. An extended UK Habitats Classification methodology (UKHab) survey was undertaken as part of a preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) of the site. This was undertaken on 3rd September 2024 by Robert Mooney

Habitats recorded within the proposed development site were mapped on a UKHab habitat plan provided at Appendix 1.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Baseline assessment

The proposed development site has an area of approximately 0.095ha and is made up of Unicorn House, a two-storey building, along with areas of hardstanding, sparsely vegetated urban land & grassland featuring significant growth of ruderal vegetation & bramble. Additionally, a number of scattered trees are present around the peripheries of the site. A recently cleared hedgerow was present along the south-eastern site boundary, which has been classified as a native hedgerow based on aerial photographs and the presence of hawthorn & holly among the remaining brash (see Appendix 2 – Photographs, Photograph 11).

The baseline value of the site has been calculated as 0.98 habitat units, 0.06 hedgerow units and 0 watercourse units using DEFRA's Statutory Biodiversity Metric.

The DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric used to calculate the baseline value of the site has been submitted with this report and provides full details of the calculations.

4.2 Post-development assessment

At present, no detailed landscaping proposals are available. To that end, a post-development assessment is not possible. However, based on the provisional proposed layouts available at the time of writing, it is likely that the individual trees which provide the majority of baseline habitat units will be retained.

No irreplaceable habitat types are present. The other neutral grassland & individual trees present are of medium distinctiveness, while the remaining habitats on site are of low or very low distinctiveness.

Once provisional landscaping plans are available, a calculation of the post-development value of the site using the DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric is possible. However, at present only a pre-development assessment of the baseline habitats on site is possible.

5 EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Biodiversity net gain requirements

The baseline value of the site has been calculated as 0.98 habitat units and 0.06 hedgerow units.

In order to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity, the post development value would need to be 1.08 habitat units and 0.07 hedgerow units; no gain in watercourse units is required due to the baseline value of 0.

In addition to providing the 10% net gain in habitat units required to adhere to national planning policy, the metric's trading rules must also be met to provide an acceptable net gain. This is a function of the metric that has been designed to ensure habitats are compensated for sufficiently.

To adhere to the metric's trading rules, losses must be replaced by habitat, hedgerow and watercourse units of the same broad habitat type and distinctiveness, or by units from any habitat with a higher distinctiveness regardless of the broad habitat type. No landscaping plans are available at present so no further information can be provided at this stage relating to the trading rules.

5.2 Recommendations

Where possible, onsite habitat creation and enhancement will be prioritised to maximise net gain within the proposed development site. Without reviewing provisional landscaping plans, it is not possible to ascertain with certainty whether a net gain is achievable within the site boundary. As previously discussed, based on the provisional layout, much of the development is occurring within low or very low distinctiveness habitats but there is not enough information at this time to confirm if offsite compensation is required. Regardless, if onsite habitat retention, creation and / or enhancement is not sufficient to achieve a 10% net gain and satisfy the trading rules of the Statutory Metric, any deficit in units will be provided through offsite compensation. This will either be secured on land within the developer's ownership, or through a payment to a third-party landowner acting as a habitat bank.

All compensatory offsite habitat units secured will need to be registered on the Biodiversity Gain Site Register.

As a last resort and where offsite compensation cannot be secured in the local area, statutory credits will be purchased as compensation.

The information contained within this Biodiversity Statement is considered to be sufficient to allow the local planning authority to grant planning permission, with regards to statutory biodiversity net gain requirements. Following approval of planning permission, the biodiversity gain condition will be applied to the permission, which must be discharged prior to the commencement of works.

A Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP) must be prepared to discharge this condition. The BGP must include baseline and post-development Statutory Metric calculations based on the finalised site layout and landscaping proposals. It must also contain full details of secured offsite compensation (where necessary) and a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP),



detailing the proposed establishment, management and monitoring of all offsite compensation and any significant enhancements onsite.

All retained, creation or enhanced habitats that constitute offsite compensation or onsite significant enhancements will need to be managed and monitored for a period of at least 30 years. This can be secured through a section 106 agreement or a conservation covenant.

Following submission of the Biodiversity Gain Plan, the local planning authority will have up to eight weeks to discharge the biodiversity gain condition.

6 CONCLUSION

The proposed development site has an area of approximately 0.095ha and is dominated by the building & adjacent hardstanding while other habitats include sparsely vegetated urban land, scattered trees, other neutral grassland, and a recently cleared hedgerow.

The baseline value of the site has been calculated as 0.98 habitat units and 0.06 hedgerow units. In order to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity, the post development value would need to be 1.08 habitat units and 0.07 hedgerow units; no gain in watercourse units is required due to the baseline value of 0.

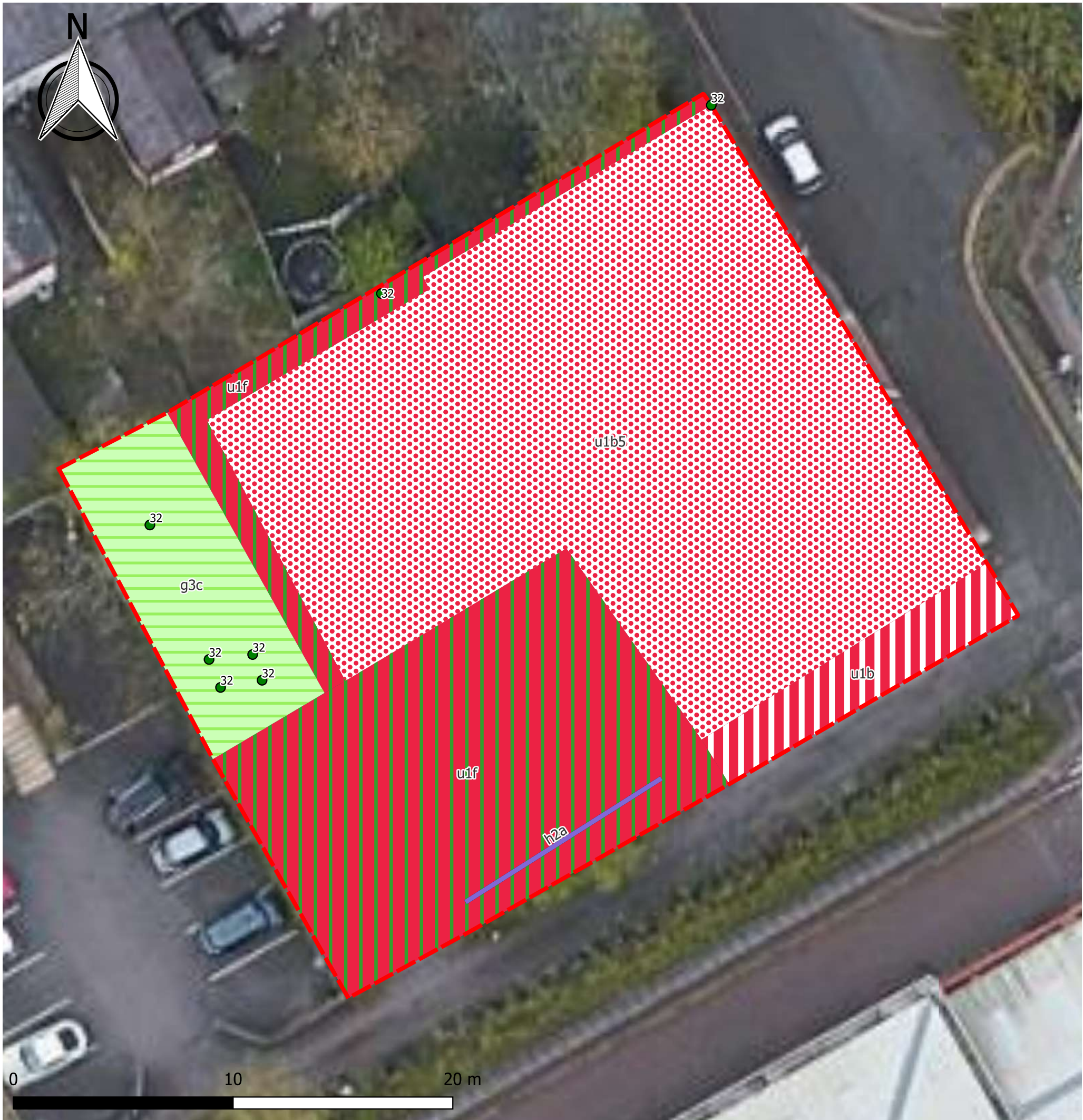
To satisfy the trading rules within the metric, any habitats that are to be lost as part of the proposed development must be compensated for with habitats of the same distinctiveness and same broad habitat type, or any habitat of higher distinctiveness.

Where possible, onsite habitat creation and enhancement should be prioritised to maximise net gain within the proposed development site. It is not currently known whether onsite habitat retention, creation and / or enhancement will be sufficient to satisfy the trading rules of the metric and achieve a 10% net gain whilst facilitating the proposed development. A BGP and HMMP will be required when more detailed landscaping proposals are available. Any deficit in units (either those that fall short of providing a 10% net gain or satisfying the trading rules of the metric) will need to be provided through offsite compensation.



APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Phase 1 habitat plan



UKHab Habitat Plan

**Site: Unicorn House,
Middleton**
NGR: SD 86559 05625
Author: Robert Mooney
Date: 07/10/2024



Key

- g3c - other neutral grassland
- h2a - native hedgerow
- u1b - developed land. sealed surface
- u1b5 - buildings
- u1f - sparsely vegetated urban land
- Survey boundary
- 32 - scattered trees

Map data © 2024 Google, Imagery © 2024 Google

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Appendix 2 – Photographs



Photograph 1 – Eastern aspect of the building on site.



Photograph 2 – Hardstanding to the south-east of the building.



Photograph 3 – Sparsely vegetated bare ground in the south of the site.



Photograph 4 – More vegetated section of bare ground in the south-west of the site.



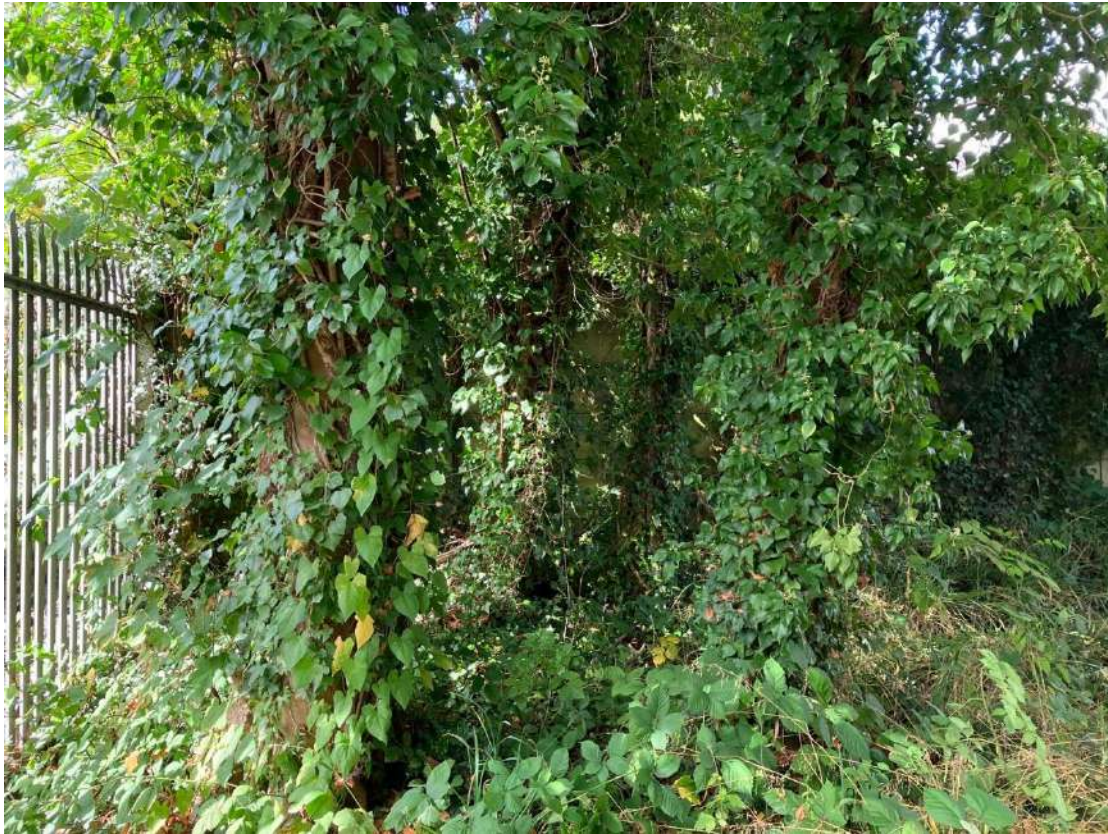
Photograph 5 – strip of bare ground on the north-western site boundary (the patch of bramble scrub present is behind the stone wall on the left).



Photograph 6 – Poor-quality other neutral grassland in the west of the site.



Photograph 7 – Mature sycamore in the west of the site.



Photograph 8 – Cluster of 4 immature sycamores in the west of the site.



Photograph 9 – Small sycamore by the north-western site boundary.



Photograph 10 – Small ash at the site's northern corner



Photograph 11 – Felled hawthorn from the cleared hedge by the site's south-eastern boundary.



Appendix 3 – Proposed site layout



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revisions

client	date	
SHR property management ltd	09/08/2024	
project	scale	drawn by
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title	drawing no	checked by
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status	job no	revision
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