

Reference EN-8585-01

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Produced by Josh Birchall BSc (Hons) MCIEEM, Principal Ecologist

Introduction

Brooks Ecological have been commissioned to provide a more detailed botanical assessment, as advised in Arbtech preliminary ecological appraisal 'North Manchester Golf Club, Rhodes House, Manchester Old Road, Middleton, Manchester, M24 4PE' (no survey reference number apparent) undertaken during late March 2025.

The arbtech survey states that 'A Phase 2 botanical survey will be required to fully characterise the on-site woodland and determine the level of its importance and thus the magnitude of the impacts as part of the proposed works'. It also stipulates survey work should be carried out between March and May. Brooks Ecological were only commissioned to carry out the survey in June and this should be seen as a constraint increasing the risk of missing early flowering woodland plants, however as the Arbtech survey was carried out in March, given the nature of the woodland present and the experience of the surveyor it is considered a representative assessment of the woodland can be made. Whilst the majority of the Site was accessible, at least 10% of the Site was inaccessible due to very dense vegetation, which could not be closely inspected. This could have concealed invasive species or protected species evidence.

Figure 1 The Site - Red-line boundary and woodland canopy survey area/ quadrat shown by blue line (c.40mx40m) and field layer survey area shown by yellow line (c.10m x 10m)



Unit A, 1 Station Road, Guiseley, LEEDS LS20 8BX

Phone **01943 884451**

Email: rhw@brooks-ecological.co.uk

www.brooks-ecological.co.uk

Registered in England Number 5351418

Habitat overview

Given the small size of the application site red line boundary a survey area (c. 40m x 40m) was inspected to more accurately assess woodland vegetation in relation to the Site, this is represented by the blue line area as shown in figure 1.

Within the blue line canopy a hybrid balsam type poplar is dominant, with a row of Lombardy poplar against the northern boundary and lesser cover of aspen. Still more occasional were younger pedunculate oak and turkey oak forming a lower canopy along the golf course edge, whilst occasional younger crack willow and ash were noted elsewhere.

The understory is varied and consists most abundantly of hawthorn with holly also frequent. Most species are only found occasionally and include sycamore, goat willow, Norway maple, privet, silver birch and hazel. Whilst more rarely noted are young ash, *Cotoneaster bullatus*, cherry laurel, wild cherry, guelder rose, rowan, ash, honeysuckle, snowberry and elder.

The field layer was patchy, often sparse, or otherwise supporting of one locally dominant species primarily ivy or bramble being the most abundant species. Occasionally male fern, goosegrass and nettle were noted. Whilst more rarely wood avens, *Politrichum commune*, ground ivy and two individual specimens of broad leaved helleborine noted. Himalayan balsam is locally abundant, forming monotypic stands. There was no remnant evidence, such as skeletal remains, of widespread ancient woodland indicator species which are usually more evident in spring such as; bluebell, lords and ladies, wild garlic or dog's mercury.

Additional species noted within the broader woodland in the arbtech report include; lesser celandine and bracken, though this was not observed during the survey, in this survey area.

The woodland has been subject to rubbish dumping along the northern boundary with houses, possibly facilitating the establishment of the various invasive or negative indicator species listed above. There is both standing and fallen deadwood noted. A varied understory is developing, though the field layer appears species poor.

Overall, the woodland appears to be primarily comprised of well-established plantation/ shelter belt poplar planting, alongside a more ornamental type planting arrangement of oaks along the golf course fairway. The entire woodland block is mapped as priority deciduous woodland on Magic maps though is mostly comprised of non-native tree species, it also supports invasive species Himalayan balsam and cotoneaster, as well as supporting several species indicative of poor condition such as cherry laurel.

NVC Quadrat Information

Canopy quadrat, c.40x40m, blue line area		
Scientific	English	DOMIN
<i>Populus sp.</i>	Hybrid poplar	9
<i>Populus nigra 'italica'</i>	Lombardy poplar	5
<i>Populus tremula</i>	Aspen	3
<i>Salix fragilis</i>	Crack willow	3

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<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Alder	1
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	2
<i>Salix caprea</i>	Goat willow	1
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Rowan	1
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver birch	2
<i>Quercus</i>	Turkey oak	1
<i>Quercus robur</i>	English oak	1
<i>Acer platanoides</i>	Norway maple	3
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Wild cherry	3
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	7
<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>	Cherry laurel	1
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly	8
<i>Sorbus intermedia</i>	Swedish whitebeam	1
<i>Ligustrum sp.</i>	Privet	1
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	2
<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	Guelder rose	1
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel	4
<i>Cotoneaster bullatus</i>	Hollyberry Cotoneaster	1
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder	1
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	Bramble	8
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Goosegrass	4
<i>Symphoricarpos alba</i>	Snowberry	1
<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	Honeysuckle	1
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy	8
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood avens	3
<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>	Ground ivy	1
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Nettle	6
<i>Impatiens glandulifera</i>	Himalayan balsam	5
<i>Polytrichum commune</i>	Starmoss	1
<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	Male fern	3
<i>Epipactis helleborine</i>	Broad leaved helleborine	1

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Field layer quadrat, c.10x10m, yellow line area		
Scientific	English	DOMIN
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy	9
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood avens	2
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Nettle	2
<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	Male fern	2
<i>Epipactis helleborine</i>	Broad leaved helleborine	1
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	Bramble	3
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Wild cherry saplings	1
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn saplings	5
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly saplings	6
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore saplings	1

Conclusions

The JNCC lowland mixed deciduous woodland priority habitats lists several of the most likely NVC categories: 'In terms of the National Vegetation Classification the bulk of this type falls into W8 (mainly sub-communities a - c in ancient or recent woods; in the lowlands W8d mostly occurs in secondary woodland) and W10 (sub-communities a to d) with lesser amounts of W16 (mainly W16a).' as the most likely woodland habitat types. The survey area is not considered to clearly align with any of these categories due to the limited presence of native canopy trees and very sparse field layer. The understory is diverse but has been populated by locally abundant species from nearby gardens such as cherry laurel and cotoneaster, which again makes the woodland difficult to categorise.

The JNCC also adds the following descriptive details for lowland woodland; 'full range of soil conditions, from very acidic to base-rich, and takes in most semi-natural woodland in southern and eastern England, and in parts of lowland Wales and Scotland' and 'Many are ancient woods'. Once again these descriptions do not appear particularly relevant to the Site. The nearest mapped ancient woodland is just over 2km north of the Site, whilst the plantation style of much of the woodland, although well established, would not be described as 'semi-natural'.

Despite the constraints of the survey it is concluded the woodland most closely lines with that of 'other broadleaved woodland' within the UKHabs. The UKHabs includes within its definition of other broadleaved woodlands as 'stands of non-native broadleaved species' which aligns closely with that found on site. Impacts during planning should be considered in line with this habitat. A condition assessment has been undertaken to further assist in the assessment process.

Although it should be recognised the woodland has some intrinsic value given the time it takes any woodland to establish. The woodland is not considered to be a high value example and as such removal of a small parcel to facilitate construction of a telecoms tower would only be considered to have impacts at a small, site level scale only. Furthermore, impacts on the surrounding retained woodland outside the boundary are likely to be insignificant given some standard protection measures.

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To further mitigate impacts precautionary tree protective fencing should be erected around the site boundary prior to construction to prevent unnecessary damage to surrounding habitat and trees. Given the site is already disturbed via dumping of litter and to a lesser extent the golf course, the risk of meaningful additional long term disturbance appears low however it is advised that additional lighting should be avoided and if security lighting is required it should be direct downwards, on a timer and motion activated.

To offset the loss of woodland the client should seek to improve the condition of adjacent retained woodland, such as via the management of invasive species, introduction of native woodland field layer species, removal of litter, thinning of non-native canopy species and introduction of additional native canopy species. Alternatively the creation of new native species rich woodland could be considered.

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Photo 1 Overview of the woodland/ survey area from the south looking north



Photo 2 Understory in red line area



Photo 3 Understory in blue line area



Photo 4 Northern boundary and litter



Photo 5 Himalayan balsam patch



Photo 6 Understory in red line area



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Habitat Condition Assessment

Condition Assessment Criteria						
Indicator		Good (3 points)	Moderate (2 points)	Poor (1 point)	Score per indicator	Notes (such as justification)
A	Age distribution of trees	Three age-classes ¹ present.	Two age-classes ¹ present.	One age-class ¹ present.	3	Well established poplars, with intermediate age and younger native species coming through.
B	Wild, domestic and feral herbivore damage	No significant browsing damage evident in woodland ² .	Evidence of significant browsing pressure is present in less than 40% of whole woodland ² .	Evidence of significant browsing pressure is present in 40% or more of whole woodland ² .	3	No notable evidence of browsing, or other signs of deer activity
C	Invasive plant species	No invasive species ³ present in woodland.	Rhododendron <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> or cherry laurel <i>Prunus laurocerasus</i> not present, and other invasive species ³ <10% cover.	Rhododendron or cherry laurel present, or other invasive species ³ ≥10% cover.	1	Total cover of cherry laurel, cotoneaster, snowberry and himalayan balsam is likely over 10%
D	Number of native tree species	Five or more native tree or shrub species ⁴ found across woodland parcel.	Three to four native tree or shrub species ⁴ found across woodland parcel.	Two or less native tree or shrub species ⁴ across woodland parcel.	3	Diverse assemblage of native trees including; willows, aspen, oak, silver birch,

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						ash and rowan amongst others
E	Cover of native tree and shrub species	>80% of canopy trees and >80% of understory shrubs are native ⁵ .	50 - 80% of canopy trees and 50 - 80% of understory shrubs are native ⁵ .	<50% of canopy trees and <50% of understory shrubs are native ⁵ .	1	Most of the canopy is occupied by hybrid and lombardy poplars
F	Open space within woodland	10 - 20% of woodland has areas of temporary open space ⁶ . Unless woodland is <10ha, in which case 0 - 20% temporary open space is permitted ⁷ .	21 - 40% of woodland has areas of temporary open space ⁶ .	<10% or >40% of woodland has areas of temporary open space ⁶ . But if woodland <10ha has <10% temporary open space, please see Good category ⁷ .	3	n/a, automatically scores 3 due to small area
G	Woodland regeneration	All three classes present in woodland ⁸ ; trees 4 - 7 cm Diameter at Breast Height (DBH), saplings and seedlings or advanced coppice regrowth.	One or two classes only present in woodland ⁸ .	No classes or coppice regrowth present in woodland ⁸ .	3	Seedlings, saplings and young trees are present.
H	Tree health	Tree mortality 10% or less, no pests or diseases and no crown dieback ⁹ .	11% to 25% tree mortality and or crown dieback or low-risk pest or disease present ⁹ .	Greater than 25% tree mortality and or any high-risk pest or disease present ⁹ .	2	Crown dieback observed in many poplars

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I	Vegetation and ground flora	Recognisable NVC plant community ¹⁰ at ground layer present, strongly characterised by ancient woodland flora specialists.	Recognisable woodland NVC plant community ¹⁰ at ground layer present.	No recognisable woodland NVC plant community ¹⁰ at ground layer present.	1	No strong correlation with woodland NVC communities. Ancient woodland indicators very limited to individual specimens of broad leaved helleborine.
J	Woodland vertical structure	Three or more storeys across all survey plots, or a complex woodland ¹¹ .	Two storeys across all survey plots ¹¹ .	One or less storey across all survey plots ¹¹ .	3	There are clear canopy and understory layers.
K	Veteran trees	Two or more veteran trees ¹² per hectare.	One veteran tree ¹² per hectare.	No veteran trees ¹² present in woodland.	1	None noted
L	Amount of deadwood	50% of all survey plots within the woodland parcel have deadwood, such as standing and fallen deadwood, large dead branches and or stems, branch stubs and stumps, or an abundance of small cavities ¹³ .	Between 25% and 50% of all survey plots within the woodland parcel have deadwood, such as standing and fallen deadwood, large dead branches and or stems, stubs and stumps, or an abundance of small cavities ¹³ .	Less than 25% of all survey plots within the woodland parcel have deadwood, such as standing and fallen deadwood, large dead branches and or stems, stubs and stumps, or an abundance of small cavities ¹³ .	2	Several standing dead trees and fallen dead wood noted.

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M	Woodland disturbance	No nutrient enrichment or damaged ground evident ¹⁴ .	Less than 1 hectare in total of nutrient enrichment across woodland area, and or less than 20% of woodland area has damaged ground ¹⁴ .	1 hectare or more of nutrient enrichment, and or 20% or more of woodland area has damaged ground ¹⁴ .	2	Disturbance is evident due to enrichment from golf course and dumping of waste from adjacent housing.
Total Score (out of a possible 39)					28	
Condition Assessment Result				Condition Assessment Score	Result Achieved	
Total score >32 (33 to 39)				Good (3)	Moderate	
Total score 26 to 32				Moderate (2)		
Total score <26 (13 to 25)				Poor (1)		

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