

**Land at Prospect Park
Liebenrood Road
Reading
Berkshire
RG30 2ND**

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

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1	SUMMARY	3
2	INTRODUCTION	5
2.1	Overview	5
2.2	Site Location and Context	5
2.3	Report format	5
3	PLANNING POLICY BACKGROUND	7
3.1	National Planning Policy	7
3.2	Local Planning Policy	8
4	LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND – PROTECTED SPECIES	10
4.1	Amphibians	10
4.2	Reptiles	10
4.3	Birds	11
4.4	Bats	11
4.5	Badgers	11
4.6	Otters	12
4.7	Hazel Dormice	12
4.8	Water Voles	13
4.9	Invasive Non-Native Plants	14
4.10	Injurious Weeds	14
4.11	Wild Mammals	14
5	SURVEY METHODS	15
5.1	Phase 1 Habitat Survey	15
5.2	Background Data Search	15
5.3	Survey Constraints	15
6	BACKGROUND DATA SEARCH FINDINGS	16
6.1	Designated Sites	16
6.2	Protected/Notable Species	16
7	SURVEY FINDINGS	19
7.1	Phase 1 Habitat Survey Findings	19
8	DISCUSSION	21
8.1	Assessment of Existing Ecological Value	21
8.2	Impact of Proposals	23
9	RECOMMENDATIONS	26
9.1	Habitat protection	26
9.2	Bats	26
9.3	Ecological Enhancement Opportunities	26
10	REFERENCES	28
	APPENDIX 1 - SITE PHOTOGRAPHS	29
	APPENDIX 2 - PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY PLAN	31
	APPENDIX 3 - PLANT SPECIES LIST RECORDED ON SITE	33

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was commissioned by Reading Borough Council to carry out a preliminary ecological appraisal of an area of grassland towards the north-eastern corner of Prospect Park, adjacent to the Pavilion in Prospect Park, in connection with proposals to seek planning consent for the demolition of the existing play area and the building of a new play area within the survey site.
- 1.1.2** A Phase 1 walkover survey completed in February 2021 has shown that the site comprises of mostly amenity grassland with scattered broadleaved trees and a tarmac path across the southern side of the survey site.
- 1.1.3** A search of pre-existing data held by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) shows that the site falls within the Prospect Park Local Wildlife Site (LWS). There are records of protected and notable species for Prospect Park, which the site falls within, including several birds, and a few invertebrates and flowering plants.
- 1.1.4** The survey has shown that overall, the site supports species poor amenity grassland habitat with occasional scattered broadleaved trees of no conservation importance beyond the site or to the wider Prospect Park LWS. The mature oak trees on the boundaries are of local conservation importance.
- 1.1.5** The proposals are unlikely to have an impact on bat roosts or a significant impact on bat foraging habitat. Lighting should be avoided, but if essential, the lighting should be designed to avoid impacts on bats and other nocturnal wildlife.
- 1.1.6** The survey shows that the survey site is unlikely to support notable amphibians, badgers, hazel dormice or notable assemblages of birds or invertebrates; however, the nearby woodland and wider area of parkland with mature and veteran scattered trees connected to the site could mean the survey site is used as a corridor for some species.

- 1.1.7** Habitat protection and enhancement measures comprising protection of retained trees and opportunities to increase habitat and species diversity are set out.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was commissioned by Reading Borough Council to undertake preliminary ecological appraisal of an area of land at Prospect Park in Reading, Berkshire.

2.1.2 The survey was commissioned to support a planning application to be lodged with Reading Borough Council seeking consent proposals including the demolition of the existing play area and the building of a new play area within the survey site.

2.2 Site Location and Context

2.2.1 The survey site is situated within Prospect Park, in Reading, Berkshire (OS grid reference: SU 69158 72878).

2.2.2 The survey site is a small area of approximately 0.4 hectares, situated towards the north-eastern corner of Prospect Park, and is a part of a wider green space, with open grassland and scattered trees to the west, east and north of the site. To the south of the site there was an access road, with the Prospect Park Pavilion and a large car park to the east of the building. There were several multi-use games areas and tennis courts to the west of the site, with scattered mature trees to the east and west, that connected to a larger area of broadleaved woodland approximately 230 metres to the west of the site. There was a pond within Prospect Park, that was situated approximately 190 metres to the south-west of the survey site.

2.3 Report format

2.3.1 There follows: an overview of the planning policy background in Section 3 and of the protected species legislation in Section 4; details of the survey methods in Section 5; background data search findings in Section 6; Phase 1 habitat survey findings in Section 7; a discussion of the survey findings in Section 8; with recommendations being presented in Section 9. The appendices present: the site photographs (**Appendix 1**); a Phase 1 habitat survey plan with associated habitat descriptions and target notes

(**Appendix 2**) and a list of plant species recorded during the phase 1 habitat survey (**Appendix 3**).

3 PLANNING POLICY BACKGROUND

3.1 National Planning Policy

3.1.1 The ODPM Circular 06/2005 provides guidance on the application of the law relating to planning and nature conservation stating that *'the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat.'*

3.1.2 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 requires all public bodies, including local authorities, to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out their functions. This is commonly referred to as the 'Biodiversity Duty'

3.1.3 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in February 2019, sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. Section 15 of the NPPF sets out the approach local authorities should adopt to conserve and enhance the natural environment when preparing planning policy and when considering planning applications. Paragraph 175 sets out the principles local authorities should apply when determining planning applications as follows:

175. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

- a) 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;*
- b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;*
- c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable*

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habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and

- d) *development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.*

3.2 Local Planning Policy

3.2.1 Reading Borough Council makes planning decisions based on the policies within the Core Strategy (adopted January 2008) which sets out their overall planning strategy and important principles for development in Reading.

3.2.2 Policy CS36 within the Strategy sets out the Council's approach to biodiversity and geology when considering planning applications as follows:

- a) Development should retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity or geological interest (including protected species and their habitats) found within the application site into their schemes.

On sites with recognised biodiversity or geological value, development will not be permitted where there would be a direct or indirect adverse impact on the site, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that: -

i. The need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site; and

ii. Appropriate compensation, impact minimization, mitigation and compensation are provided.

- b) Local Nature Reserves and Wildlife Heritage Sites will be safeguarded and where possible, enhanced. Permission will not be granted for any development that would adversely affect a designated nature reserve or Wildlife Heritage Site.

c) Any development that would sever or threaten the integrity of an established wildlife link, as indicated on an adopted proposals map, will not be permitted. Where applicable, developments should be designed to protect, consolidate, extend and enhance the network of wildlife links and corridors in and adjoining the Borough, working with neighbouring authorities where appropriate.

4 LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND – PROTECTED SPECIES

4.1 Amphibians

4.1.1 The seven native species of amphibian receive protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The four widespread and common amphibians (common frog, toad, smooth and palmate newts) receive limited protection – making their sale illegal.

4.1.2 Great crested newt receives full protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 2017 ('Habitat Regulations') (as amended). These make it illegal to:

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a great crested newt;
- Possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a great crested newt;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a great crested newt;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb great crested newts; in particular, any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating animals, to hibernate or migrate.

4.1.3 The great crested newt and common toad are listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, (commonly referred to as a UKBAP Priority Species).

4.2 Reptiles

4.2.1 The four widespread reptiles most likely to be encountered (adder, grass snake, slow worm and viviparous lizard) are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The Act makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, possess or sell any of the species.

4.2.2 The four reptile species are listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, under Section 41 of the Natural

Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, (commonly referred to as a UKBAP Priority Species).

4.3 Birds

4.3.1 All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The Act makes it an offence to kill, injure or take a wild bird or to damage or destroy the nest of a wild bird whilst in use or being built.

4.3.2 Less common bird species of conservation concern, such as the barn owl and kingfisher, are listed on Schedule 1 of the Act, which makes it an offence to disturb the birds whilst nesting also.

4.4 Bats

4.4.1 All British bat species are fully protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 ('Habitat Regulations'). In summary, the legislation combined makes it an offence to:

- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a bat;
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb bats; in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of bats to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating bats, to hibernate or migrate; or to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species;
- Deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

4.5 Badgers

4.5.1 Badgers are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The Act makes activities such as development that would harm or disturb badgers or damage, obstruct or destroy their setts illegal. If badgers are to be affected by the proposed development, activities can be undertaken only under a licence issued by Natural England.

4.6 Otters

4.6.1 Otters are fully protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 ('Habitat Regulations'). In summary, the legislation combined makes it an offence to:

- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by an otter;
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb otters; in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of otters to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species;
- Deliberately kill, injure or take any otter.

4.7 Hazel Dormice

4.7.1 Hazel dormice receive full protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 2017 ('Habitat Regulations') (as amended). These make it illegal to

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a dormouse;
- Possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a dormouse;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a dormouse;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb dormice; in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating animals, to hibernate or migrate.

4.7.2 The government's statutory conservation advisory organisation, Natural England, is responsible for issuing European Protected Species licences that would permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of

the Habitat Regulations. A licence can be issued if the following three tests have been met:

- **Regulation 55(9)(a)** - there is “no satisfactory alternative” to the derogation, and;
- **Regulation 55(9)(b)** - the derogation “will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range” and;
- **Regulation 55(2)(e)** - the derogation is for the purposes of “preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment”.

4.7.3 Local authorities have a statutory duty under Regulation 7(3e) of the Habitat Regulations to have regard to requirements of the Habitats Directive in the exercise of their functions. The Council must therefore consider and determine whether these three tests are likely to be satisfied by an application affecting European protected species before granting planning permission. **N.B. the requirements set out in 4.7.2 and 4.7.3 apply to development that would affect bats, great crested newts and otters, which are European Protected Species also.**

4.8 Water Voles

4.8.1 Since April 2008, water voles have received full protection under Section 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take water voles or to possess or control live or dead water voles or derivatives. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection or intentionally or recklessly disturb water voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose.

4.8.2 The water vole is listed as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, (commonly referred to as a UKBAP Priority species).

4.9 Invasive Non-Native Plants

- 4.9.1** The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) provides the primary controls on the release of non-native species into the wild in Great Britain. It is an offence under section 14(2) of the Act to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' any plant listed in Schedule 9, Part II. The species listed in the Act includes Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) and himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

4.10 Injurious Weeds

- 4.10.1** Five native plants are listed as injurious weeds under the Weeds Act 1959: common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), creeping or field thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*) and curled dock (*Rumex Crispus*). The Act means it is not an offence to have these weeds growing on your land and species such as ragwort have significant conservation benefits. However, they must not be allowed to spread to agricultural land, particularly grazing areas or land which is used to produce conserved forage. Enforcement notices can be issued following complaints requiring landowners to take action to prevent the spread of these weeds.

4.11 Wild Mammals

- 4.11.1** Under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 it is an offence to intentionally inflict unnecessary suffering, as specified by the Act, on any wild mammal.

5 SURVEY METHODS

5.1 Phase 1 Habitat Survey

5.1.1 An ecological walkover survey was undertaken on the 23rd February 2021, by a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and an assistant ecologist. During the survey, the habitats present were noted and plotted on a site plan (**Appendix 2**) using definitions based on the standard Phase 1 Habitat survey definitions (JNCC 2010). Key features of the site were photographed (**Appendix 1**) and plotted on the site plan using target notes (**Appendix 2**).

5.1.2 Any features of ecological importance were recorded, and plant species observed during the survey noted (**Appendix 3**). Particular attention was given to any evidence of the presence of protected species and the site's potential to support such species and those of conservation importance (as defined under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006).

5.2 Background Data Search

5.2.1 The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre was commissioned to undertake a search of the data held on protected and notable species within a 1 km radius of the survey site. A 5 km radius search of the Multi-Agency Geographical Information Centre (MAGIC) website was carried out to look for statutorily designated areas of international and national importance within the wider area, and for habitats of principal importance for conservation (HPI) as defined under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

5.3 Survey Constraints

5.3.1 The survey was subject to seasonal constraints because not all plant and animal species are visible throughout the year and therefore the report represents a snapshot of the site at the time of the survey only. The plant species list presented should not be considered a comprehensive list of species present.

6 BACKGROUND DATA SEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 Designated Sites

- 6.1.1** The search of data held by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and on the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) shows that the survey site is part of Prospect Park (& the Rookery), a non-statutorily designated Berkshire Local Wildlife Site (LWS), for its wildlife importance within Berkshire.
- 6.1.2** There are two other Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) situated within a 1km radius of the site: Meadway Fringe and Louisehill Copse, both situated to the west of the site, and both a part of the West Reading Woodlands which is a Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA).
- 6.1.3** There are several statutorily designated wildlife sites within 5km of the survey site. The nearest to the survey site is Louisehill Copse, a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and LWS, approximately 605 metres to the north-west. The Copse is noted for its semi-ancient oak and hazel woodland. There were three further LNR's to the north-west of the site: Blundells Copse LNR, Round Copse LNR and McIlroy Park LNR. There are two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within 5 kilometres of the survey site: Pincents Kiln SSSI, and Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows SSSI, and as such the site falls within the SSSI Impact zone.

6.2 Protected/Notable Species

- 6.2.1** The TVERC database includes some records of protected and notable species for the survey site and surrounding area i.e. within 1km. The database includes contemporary (within the last 10 years) records as follows:
- 6.2.2** There are records of three amphibian species within the 1km search area: smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*), palmate newt (*Lissotriton helveticus*), and common frog (*Rana temporaria*). Common frog has been recorded historically (in 2007 and 2010) in the pond within Prospect Park approximately 190 metres from the survey site. Smooth newt and palmate newt have been recorded at a Louisehill Copse LWS just over 600m to the northwest, with records dating from 2018.

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- 6.2.3** There are numerous contemporary records (less than 10 years old) of protected and notable birds inside the 1 km search radius, including: barn owl (*Tyto alba*), fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*), Cetti's warbler (*Cettia cetti*), kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), firecrest (*Regulus ignicapilla*), redwing (*Turdus iliacus*) and red kite (*Milvus milvus*) – all species which are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Other notable species include cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), grasshopper warbler (*Locustella naevia*), grey wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), lesser redpoll (*Acanthis cabaret*), lesser spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*), marsh tit (*Poecile palustris*), mistle thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*), song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), spotted flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*), starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*) and yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*).
- 6.2.4** At least six bat species have been recorded widely within the last ten years in the 1km search area including: brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*) and serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*).
- 6.2.5** Notable terrestrial mammals recorded in the last ten years within the search area are: hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) – a UK Priority Species; and badger (*Meles meles*) – a species protected under the Badgers Act 1992. Hedgehog has been recorded between 2012 and 2019, with the closest record being from land just over 280m to the north. Badger have been recorded (records dating from 2015) along the A4 approximately 440 metres to the south of the site, and to the west of the site in Louisehill Copse, with the most recent record of a sett dating from 2018.
- 6.2.6** Botanical records within the search area are restricted to records of bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), a protected species, recorded in 2008 in a grid square to the south-west, within the area of Prospect Park.
- 6.2.7** The database includes records of two notable invertebrates recorded within the last ten years: stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) – a UK Priority Species and listed on Annex 2 of the European Habitats Directive – has

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been recorded at several sites within the search area, with the most recent and closest record approximately 185m to the east in 2018.

7 SURVEY FINDINGS

7.1 Phase 1 Habitat Survey Findings

7.1.1 The survey site was an area within a larger open green space, comprising of amenity grassland with scattered broadleaved trees throughout and a tarmac path to the southern side of the site, with a grassy bank and scattered young trees on the southern boundary of the survey site.

7.1.2 The following Phase 1 habitat types were observed during the survey: amenity grassland, scattered broadleaved trees and hard standing.

7.1.3 The habitat types are detailed below; the site photographs are in **Appendix 1**, their distribution is shown on the site plan with associated target notes with detailed species compositions are described in **Appendix 2**, and a list of species recorded in **Appendix 3**.

Amenity Grassland (AM1 & AM2)

7.1.4 Most of the survey site comprised of amenity grassland (**AM1; Photograph 1**). The grassland was closely cut and was species poor, with a dominating cover of perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), and occasional tussocks of creeping bent (*Agrostis tenuis*) and cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*). There were infrequent forbs characteristic of nutrient rich grasslands, including; daisy (*Bellis perennis*), clover (*Trifolium repens*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), with very rare occurrences of crocus (*Crocus tommasinianus*).

7.1.5 The southern boundary of the survey site featured a raised grassy bank, running the full width (east to west), between the tarmac pathway (OH1) and the access road that was offsite (**AM2; Photograph 2**). The grassland was longer than in AM1, and was still relatively species poor, with a dominating cover of cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), with occasional areas of perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*) and creeping bent (*Agrostis tenuis*). There were infrequent forbs characteristic of low-lying grasslands, including; daisy (*Bellis perennis*), clover (*Trifolium repens*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), buttercup

(*Ranunculus acris*), dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), with rare occurrences of crocus (*Crocus tommasinianus*).

Scattered broadleaved trees (TN1, 2, 4, 5, 6 & 7; SBW1)

7.1.6 Mature and semi-mature trees were growing throughout the survey site (**Photograph 3**). There were two semi-mature oak trees (*Quercus robur*) towards the south-western corner of the site and one chestnut leaf oak tree (*Quercus castaneifolia*) towards the south-eastern corner of the site (**TN 1, 2 & 3; Photographs 4, 5 & 6**). There were two mature ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees within the survey site: one had a circular metal bench surrounding the base and was situated towards the southern side of the site and the other was adjacent to the tarmac path on the eastern boundary, and both had negligible bat potential with no suitable features visible (**TN 4 & 5; Photographs 7 & 8**). There were two young beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) trees towards the eastern side of the survey site, of negligible bat potential (**TN 6 & 7; Photographs 9 & 10**).

7.1.7 There were four scattered young chestnut leaf oak trees (*Quercus castaneifolia*) along the base of the bank towards the southern boundary of the site (**SBW1; Photograph 10**).

Other Habitat (OH1)

7.1.8 A tarmac pathway ran across the southern end of the survey site (**OH1; Photograph 11**).

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Assessment of Existing Ecological Value

Habitats

- 8.1.1** The pre-existing data has shown that the survey site is within an area that is non-statutorily designated for its wildlife interest as part of a Local Wildlife Site.
- 8.1.2** The site was primarily amenity grassland that was species poor, dominated by grasses and occasional forbs of low ecological value, and of no importance beyond the scale of the site. The grassland communities present are considered not to be examples of UK Priority Habitats.
- 8.1.3** The mature and semi-mature broadleaved trees on and close to the site boundaries included some with features suitable for roosting bats and may support nesting birds also. They are a resource for a range of invertebrates and insectivorous species such as bats and birds, and as such, are of ecological value within the context of the site and as part of a wider network of mature trees locally.

Bats

- 8.1.4** Six bat species have been recorded within the surrounding 1km radius area and these include records of common pipistrelle, noctule, serotine, soprano pipistrelle and *Myotis* bats roosting within a building 500 metres to the southeast of the site. There were occasional features suitable for roosting bats in the semi-mature oak trees on site. Furthermore, the semi-mature trees on the site are likely to be utilised by bats for foraging and the site is likely to be of value to bats at a local level as a small part of a wider network of foraging habitat within Prospect Park. The survey site is unlikely to be of value to bats in a wider context i.e. at a district, county, regional or national scale.

Hazel Dormice

- 8.1.5** There are no records of hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) within a 1km radius of the site and very few isolated records within the wider county

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of Berkshire and the site does provide suitable habitat for this species. Therefore, the likelihood of their presence on the survey site is considered to be negligible and this species is not considered further.

Amphibians

- 8.1.6** There were no permanent waterbodies on the survey site. Typically, great crested newt – a European protected species – uses key terrestrial habitat within 250 metres of a breeding pond, and newts may range up to 500 metres (Langton *et al.* 2001). The terrestrial habitat on the survey site would be unsuitable for foraging great crested newts and other amphibians. Ordnance Survey (OS) base mapping shows that in the surrounding area there is a single pond within a 250m radius of the site – a pond about 190 metres to the south-west of the survey site. There are pre-existing records of common frog for the pond dating from 2010, but there are no pre-existing records of notable or protected amphibians i.e. great crested newt or common toad within the search area. Furthermore, the site provides poor terrestrial habitat for amphibians. As such, it is considered highly unlikely that great crested newts and other notable amphibian species i.e., common toad, will be found on the survey site and therefore these species are not considered further in this report.

Reptiles

- 8.1.7** The amenity grassland and scattered trees on the survey site does not offer the structural diversity required for reptiles to forage, take cover and traverse the site. Additionally, the TVERC database includes no records of protected reptile species within the local area, and therefore it is considered highly unlikely that reptiles would be found on site and are therefore not considered further in this report.

Breeding birds

- 8.1.8** The scattered broadleaved trees on site provide nesting opportunities for common and widespread birds, which could support some notable species typical of such habitats, such as redwing or song thrush. The semi-mature oak trees lacked large cavities suitable for use by notable species often

associated with mature trees such as barn owl (*Tyto alba*) and no evidence of their presence was found during the site walkover (i.e. pellets).

Badgers and other mammals

- 8.1.9** No badger (*Meles meles*) sett entrances or evidence of badger activity have been found on site and therefore it is believed that the site does not support badgers currently.
- 8.1.10** The survey site is unlikely to support commonly occurring small mammals as the habitat was very open with poor structural diversity, but the site could make up a small part of a wider foraging corridor for mammals, such as hedgehog.

Invertebrates

- 8.1.11** The site's amenity grassland and scattered broadleaved tree habitats are likely to support assemblages of widespread invertebrates, which may include notable species such as the stag beetle recorded locally but is unlikely to include a diverse assemblage of conservation importance beyond the site.

8.2 Impact of Proposals

Overview

- 8.2.1** The proposals are for the demolition of the existing play area (**Photograph 12**), and the erection of a new play area, with safe ground installed, with connective pathways. The existing trees within the survey site will be retained and the area surrounding them will be avoided within the design of the new play area.

Designated sites

- 8.2.2** The site is designated for its wildlife interest, as a small part of the wider Prospect Park LWS and falls inside of SSSI impact zones. However, the area to be impacted by the works makes up a small part of the wider open grassland, scattered trees and woodland available within the park and lacks the features of ecological importance within the LWS i.e. mature and

veteran trees or areas of species rich grassland, and therefore will have little to no impact on statutorily or non-statutorily designated wildlife sites. The works fall outside of the categories listed for the SSSI impact zone.

Habitats

8.2.3 The construction of the new play area would result in re-surfacing and loss of only amenity grassland. The grassland overall was relatively species poor and not of conservation importance as part of the wider Prospect Park LWS.

8.2.4 The scattered trees, which are of ecological value within the site are to be retained and should be protected as part of the proposals (refer to recommendations in **Section 9.1**).

Bats

8.2.5 No mature trees on site are to be directly affected by the proposals. The scattered semi-mature oak and ash trees had negligible to low bat roost potential and therefore some precautions should be in place to ensure the trees are not affected by the proposals (refer to recommendations in **Section 9.1**). The existing play area has structures of negligible bat potential, and as such, the removal of these structures will have no impact on roosting bats.

8.2.6 Artificial lighting has been shown to alter the activity of nocturnal species and certain bat species have been found to be especially averse to lighting and actively avoid lit areas. Bats that emerge later in the evening, such as *Plecotus* and *Myotis* species, have a reduced tolerance to lighting. As the intensity of light increases, even species that are relatively light tolerant, such as *Pipistrellus* species, are delayed in their emergence from their roosts (Fure 2006). Pipistrelle bats can cope with light levels above 14 lux whilst light-sensitive species such as Daubenton's bat struggle with light levels above 1 lux (Fure 2006). If the proposals include any lighting this could have an adverse impact on bats foraging and commuting over the site. To avoid disturbance to bats using the site as a foraging and commuting resource, lighting should be avoided. If essential, it should be kept to a minimum e.g. by using lighting controlled by passive infra-red

motion-sensors, and/or low-level and low intensity lighting with low UV output e.g. warm white LEDs, wherever possible (refer to recommendations in **Section 9.2**).

Breeding birds

- 8.2.7** The scattered broadleaved trees could support small numbers of nesting birds; however, these are to be retained in the proposals and as such they are unlikely to be affected by the works.

Badgers and other mammals

- 8.2.8** There was no evidence of badgers on site and there are unlikely to be present and affected by the proposals. The site may serve as part of a wider foraging corridor for small mammals but the location and size of the development site in the context of the wider area is considered unlikely that the works will have an impact on mammals.

Invertebrates

- 8.2.9** The site is unlikely to support assemblages of conservation importance, but notable species are most likely to be associated with the scattered broadleaved trees and these should be protected (refer to recommendations in **Section 9.1**).

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Habitat protection

9.1.1 The retained scattered semi-mature trees on site and mature trees to the west of the survey site should be protected during the demolition of the existing play area and during construction of the new one to prevent direct or indirect impacts on the habitats and species dependent on them. The following protection measures are recommended:

- Erection of Heras fencing around the mature trees in advance of site clearance, enclosing the tree root protection areas;
- Prohibition of construction activities, material storage, use of vehicles, fires etc. within the fenced area to prevent damage to tree roots and compaction of the soil; and
- Maintenance of an adequate water supply to the trees both during and after construction.

9.2 Bats

9.2.1 Lighting should be avoided, but if essential, must be kept to a minimum. Any lighting should be operated only when essential e.g. through control by passive infra-red motion-sensors and there must be no light spillage on to any existing linear features likely used by bats, such as existing hedgerows and mature trees. The lighting design should minimize impacts on wildlife by reducing column height, carefully considering lighting direction, reducing light output and UV content. Lighting should be low intensity and have low UV output such as warm LED lights instead of mercury and metal halide lamps (BCT and ILE, 2008). Turning off lighting at night using timers should be employed to avoid extended periods of time when areas would be lit.

9.3 Ecological Enhancement Opportunities

9.3.1 The development proposals provide opportunities for the enhancement of the site's biodiversity value. The inclusion of the following recommendations would be of ecological benefit and be in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

- Replanting the site of the old play area with native plants of UK provenance sourced from suppliers following the Flora Locale Code of Practice;
- Creation of stacked and partially buried log piles to provide shelter for amphibians, reptiles and small mammals and breeding habitat for dead wood species such as stag beetle;

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APPENDIX 1 - SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



1. The amenity grassland (AM1) covering the majority of the site.



2. Amenity grassland covered bank along the southern boundary of the site (AM2).



3. Scattered broadleaved trees throughout the site.



4. Semi-mature oak tree towards the south-western corner of the site (TN1).



5. Semi-mature oak tree towards the south-western corner of the site (TN2).



6. A mature chestnut oak towards the southern side of AM1 (TN3).



7. Mature ash tree with circular metal bench around the base (TN4).



8. A mature ash on the eastern boundary of the survey site (TN5).



9. Young beech tree in south-eastern corner of the site (TN6).



10. Young chestnut oak beside tarmac path at the southern side of the site (SBW1).



11. Tarmac path along the full width of the survey site, on the southern boundary (OH1).



12. Existing play area to be removed.

APPENDIX 2 - PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY PLAN



 Target note  Site boundary  Other Habitat  Amenity grassland  Scattered tree

Drawn by:	Date	Scale:	Prospect Park, Reading, RG30 2ND	
MP	March 2021	Not to scale	Phase 1 Habitat Survey	

John Wenman Ecological Consultancy

PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY NOTES

Habitat code	Habitat Description
AM1	Amenity grassland – Photographs 1 and 3. The grassland was cut short and was species poor, with a dominating cover of perennial rye-grass (<i>Lolium perenne</i>), with occasional areas of creeping bent (<i>Agrostis tenuis</i>) and cock's-foot (<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>). There were infrequent forbs characteristic of low-lying grasslands, including; daisy (<i>Bellis perennis</i>), clover (<i>Trifolium repens</i>), dandelion (<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>), yarrow (<i>Achillea millefolium</i>), meadow buttercup (<i>Ranunculus acris</i>), with very rare occurrences of crocus (<i>Crocus tommasinianus</i>).
AM2	Amenity grassland – Photographs 2 and 11 - A raised grassy bank, running the full width (east to west), between the tarmac pathway (OH1) and the access road that was off-site. The grassland was longer than in AM1, and was still relatively species poor, with a dominating cover of cock's-foot (<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>), with occasional areas of perennial rye-grass (<i>Lolium perenne</i>) and creeping bent (<i>Agrostis tenuis</i>). There were infrequent forbes characteristic of low-lying grasslands, including; daisy (<i>Bellis perennis</i>), clover (<i>Trifolium repens</i>), dandelion (<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>), yarrow (<i>Achillea millefolium</i>), meadow buttercup (<i>Ranunculus acris</i>), dock (<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>), ribwort plantain (<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>), with rare occurrences of crocus (<i>Crocus tommasinianus</i>).
OH1	Other Habitat – Photograph 11. Tarmac footpath running east to west across the width of the survey site.
SBW1	Scattered broadleaved trees – Photograph 10. There were 4 scattered young chestnut leaf oak trees (<i>Quercus castaneifolia</i>) along the base of the bank towards the southern boundary of the site, all with – negligible bat potential.
Target notes	Target Note Description
TN1	Semi-mature oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) tree towards the south-western corner of the site – negligible bat potential.
TN2	Semi-mature oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) tree towards the south-western corner of the site – negligible bat potential.
TN3	A mature chestnut leaf oak (<i>Quercus castaneifolia</i>) tree towards the southern side AM1 – negligible bat potential.
TN4	Mature ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>) tree with circular metal bench around the base – negligible bat potential.
TN5	A mature ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>) on the eastern boundary of the survey site – negligible bat potential.
TN6	Young beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>) tree in south-eastern corner of the site – negligible bat potential.
TN7	Young chestnut leaf oak (<i>Quercus castaneifolia</i>) beside tarmac path at the southern side of the site– negligible bat potential.

APPENDIX 3 - PLANT SPECIES LIST RECORDED ON SITE

Plant common name	Scientific name
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Chestnut leaf oak	<i>Quercus castaneifolia</i>
Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>
Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>
Creeping bent	<i>Agrostis tenuis</i>
Crocus	<i>Crocus tommasinianus</i>
Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>
Dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>
Hoary plantain	<i>Plantago media</i>
Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Perennial rye-grass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>
Meadow buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>
Ribwort plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>