

PROJECT: The Abbey Astro Pavilion (The Abbey School)
CLIENT: Elsa Quinton
DATE: 13/05/2021

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL: INITIAL FEEDBACK

Further to the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) Survey undertaken on 6th May 2021, please find set out below an interim summary of our findings and recommendations.

The purpose of the PEA survey was to identify the potential ecological constraints and opportunities presented by the site to inform a Section 73 variation of a condition at the Abbey Astro Pavilion (hereafter referred to as 'the site').

Proposed Development

The proposed Section 73 variation of condition is associated with granted planning permission (reference 12/01629/FUL) for the development of an all-weather playing field with floodlights and fencing. The condition 6 relates to the maintenance of the hedgerow running along the eastern boundary, adjacent to Kendrick Road. The new proposals involve the removal of parts of this hedgerow for safeguarding purposes (it currently obscures and segregates the astro pavilion from the rest of the school).

Site Context

The site (Central Grid Ref: SU 72054 72574) is located on the west side of Kendrick Road, immediately south-west of the main Abbey School complex, Reading.

The site is situated in a landscape comprising predominantly residential and commercial properties with associated gardens and access roads. A number of playing fields are present within the immediate surroundings, most notably those belonging to the Abbey School 80 m east of the site, and that belonging to Reading Bowling club 40 m south of the site. Whilst no clear pockets of woodland exist in close proximity to the site, the locality contains numerous scattered trees, including an avenue of London plane (*Platanus x hispanica*) trees spanning much of the length of Kendrick Road (adjacent to the site's east boundary). Kennet and Avon Canal runs approximately 600m west of the site. The Local Planning Authority is Reading Borough Council (RBC).

Data Search

An online data search using Magic (www.magic.gov.uk) confirmed that the nearest statutory designated site is Highwood Local Nature Reserve (located, approximately 2.7km east).

Due to the scale and nature of development, no impacts on statutory sites are anticipated.

We have requested a data search from the Local Records Centre (Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre - TVERC) and will review the results upon receipt.

Habitats

The survey area predominantly comprises hard standing in the form of a multi-purpose AstroTurf pitch and associated access path. The remainder of the site is comprised of short-mown amenity grassland with some limited areas of tall ruderal vegetation. A number of scattered broadleaved trees are present distributed to the south, west and north of the AstroTurf pitch, all within the amenity grassland. The site's boundaries are defined by fencing on the north and south, a wall on the west boundary, and a species poor intact hedgerow on the east boundary. At the time of survey, the hedgerow was neatly maintained with signs of regular management.

Phase 1 habitats present in the surveyed area along with their habitat classification (JNCC, 2010): were:

- Scattered broadleaved trees (A3.1);
- Tall ruderal (C3.1);
- Amenity grassland (J1.2);
- Intact species poor hedge (J2.1.2);
- Other Habitat – AstroTurf Pitch (J5); and
- Buildings & Hardstanding (J.5).

Much of the site is of *low ecological value*, being dominated by the existing AstroTurf pitch with associated hardstanding and short-trimmed amenity grassland. Trees on site are generally young/semi-mature, offering limited value to protected species. Two mature trees (offering greater value to wildlife) are present, however, close to the western boundary.

Additionally, the site contains some limited stands of tall ruderal vegetation, small marginal areas of rougher grassland, a hedgerow with notable areas of brash, leaf litter and piled grass clippings at its base: these are all of higher ecological value, offering shelter, nesting and foraging opportunities for a range of species.

Hedgerows are listed as a Habitat of Principal Importance (HPI) and are a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat as they provide key semi-natural habitat and habitat connectivity for a broad range of species. It will therefore be necessary to mitigate for losses incurred through current proposals (removal of parts of the hedgerow). It is likely that any losses can be offset through mitigation planting of a new hedgerow along the western site boundary.

Under current proposals, only the eastern hedgerow will be affected. Other habitats on-site are not scheduled to be removed or altered.

Protected Species

A summary of the protected species assessment is provided within **Table 1** below. An indication of the potential requirement for any Phase 2 surveys has also been provided within this table however this may be subject to change following receipt of the data search).

Table 1: Protected Species Assessment Summary

Species / Sp. group	Suitability of habitats for this species	Evidence	Potential to occur / Assessment	Further consideration required/ survey works required.
MAMMALS				
Badgers (<i>Meles meles</i>)	<u>Setts:</u> No Setts present on-site. Sub-optimal sett-building habitat present in south west of site (banked grassland with stands of tall ruderal vegetation), though this will not be impacted under current proposals. <u>Foraging:</u> Suitable foraging habitat for badgers exists in the form of tall ruderal vegetation, hedgerow and areas of leaf litter/brash/grass clippings. The habitats mentioned above are, however, limited in extent with relatively poor connectivity to badger habitat in the wider landscape. Sub-optimal foraging habitat also exists on-site in the form of amenity grassland.	<u>Field survey</u> 2x badger latrines: found at the southern end of the long-jump runway and within woodchip in north-east corner of site.	YES - Confirmed present. Site has some foraging value to badger; it is likely that badgers are occasionally using/passing through site.	<u>Survey requirement:</u> None. Precautionary measures to be employed to safeguard badger and other species during vegetation removal phase. <u>Design measures:</u> Compensatory planting of new hedgerow and /or native fruit/nut bearing trees and cultivation of rougher grassland and/or wildflower areas will create additional foraging opportunities for badger and other species.
Bats	<u>Foraging/Commuting:</u> Scattered trees, hedgerow and tall ruderal vegetation habitats all provide good foraging habitat for bats; amenity grassland provides sub-optimal foraging habitat. The hedgerow on the eastern boundary represents a linear	<u>Field survey</u> No field evidence identified.	<u>Foraging/Commuting</u> Low <u>Roosting</u> N/A Two trees on site have low potential	<u>Survey requirement:</u> None. Current proposals will result in the removal of a small quantity of potential foraging habitat. Habitat of similar or better quality is present in the broader landscape. <u>Design measures:</u> Planting of a new hedgerow along the western boundary, cultivation of rougher areas of grassland

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	feature, commonly used by commuting bats. This feature, however, can be considered part of the broader linear feature of the tree avenue running along Kendrick Road (immediately adjacent to site). Removal of the hedgerow is not likely to impact commuting bats as the tree avenue will remain in place. <u>Roosting:</u> Trees on-site were generally of very young age and were assessed as unsuitable to support roosting bats. Two mature trees with low potential to support roosting bats exist on-site close to the western site boundary. These will not be impacted under current proposals. Structures on-site were limited to two storage containers close to the east boundary. These were assessed as having negligible suitability to support roosting bats.		to support roosting bats but will not be impacted under current proposals.	and/or wildflower planting will offset any foraging habitat losses as well as providing additional new habitat. Installation of bat boxes on the mature trees close to the eastern boundary, will provide additional roosting opportunities on site for bats.
Dormouse (<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>)	The eastern hedgerow provides suitable habitat for dormouse. This however shares no connectivity to suitable dormouse habitat in the wider landscape.	<u>Field survey</u> No evidence identified.	NO: Considered likely absent	<u>Survey requirement:</u> None

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Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) and Water vole (<i>Arvicola amphibius</i>)	No suitable habitat present.	<u>Field survey</u> No field evidence identified	NO: Considered to be absent	– N/A
Hedgehog (<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>)	Hedgerow, amenity grassland, brash/leaf litter/grass clippings on-site offer potential foraging habitat for hedgehog. Brash/heaped vegetation also offer places of potential refuge for hedgehog.	<u>Field survey</u> 8x hedgehog scat distributed throughout amenity grassland area.	YES: Confirmed to be present	<u>Survey requirement:</u> No surveys required. <u>Design/construction measures:</u> - Sensitive clearance of habitats, including pre-commencement check carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist. - Integration of 'hedgehog friendly' measures into the scheme (e.g. hedgehog domes). Compensatory planting elsewhere on site, (inc. new hedgerow, cultivation of rougher grassland areas and/or wildflower plating) will create additional hedgehog foraging / refuge areas.
BIRDS				
Breeding birds	Hedgerow, scattered broad-leaved trees, storage containers on-site offer potential nesting sites for a range of bird species.	<u>Field survey</u> No field evidence identified	YES: Current status unknown, further consideration required.	<u>Survey requirement:</u> No surveys required. <u>Design/construction measures:</u> – Timing constraints for works with regard to habitat removal (i.e. the eastern hedgerow), ideally to be completed outside of nesting bird season: March to August. If this is not possible, a nesting bird check will need to be performed by a suitably qualified ecologist prior to commencement of works.

Species / Sp. group	Suitability of habitats for this species	Evidence	Potential to occur / Assessment	Further consideration required/ survey works required.
				– Installation of bird boxes on existing suitable trees to mitigate any loss in nesting opportunities. – Compensatory planting of hedgerow or additional trees along north, west and/or south boundary to create additional nesting and foraging habitat.
Wintering birds	No appreciable suitable habitat	<u>Field survey</u> No field evidence identified.	NO: Considered to be absent	– N/A.
AMPHIBIANS				
Great crested newts (<i>Triturus cristatus</i>)	Suitable terrestrial habitat is present in the form of hedgerow, tall ruderal vegetation, brash/leaf litter/piled grass clippings. No suitable waterbodies (breeding sites for GCN) were present on-site, nor apparent in maps or aerial photographs within 500m of the site.	<u>Field survey</u> No Evidence identified	NO: Considered likely to be absent.	- N/A.
Other amphibians	Suitable terrestrial habitat for common toad (<i>Bufo bufo</i>) and common frog (<i>Rana temporaria</i>) in the form of scrub and short perennial vegetation. Small rubble and brash piles may provide refuge areas. No waterbodies suitable for other amphibians exist on-site.	<u>Field survey</u> No field evidence identified.	YES: Limited potential to be present.	<u>Survey requirement:</u> None. <u>Design/construction measures:</u> Compensatory planting elsewhere on-site will offset any potential habitat loss from hedgerow removal for amphibians and other species. Cultivation of areas of rougher grassland and or new wildflower planting will benefit amphibians if present.

Species / Sp. group	Suitability of habitats for this species	Evidence	Potential to occur / Assessment	Further consideration required/ survey works required.
				Retention of existing hibernacula where possible. Institution of new hibernacula (may be created using material from hedge removal) close to areas of suitable terrestrial amphibian habitat.
REPTILES				
Reptiles	Some suitable habitat in the form of hedgerow, tall ruderal vegetation and brash/leaf litter/piled grass clippings (which may also serve as potential hibernacula).	<u>Field survey</u> No field evidence identified.	YES: Potentially present - Could be killed / injured during vegetation removal.	<u>Survey requirement:</u> As the proposals only involve removing part of the eastern hedgerow, it may be possible to scope out surveys for reptiles if sensitive vegetation clearance methods can be applied (graded clearance works, directional towards retained vegetation, restricted to spring/summer months). <u>Design/construction measures:</u> – Sensitive vegetation clearance methods are recommended. – Compensatory planting elsewhere on-site to create additional reptile habitat – Cultivation of rougher grassland areas elsewhere on-site to enhance the site for reptiles. – Retention of existing reptile habitat and hibernacula (rubble/brash piles) where possible. – Inclusion of additional hibernacula on-site post-works (could be created using brash etc. from hedgerow removal).
INVASIVE SPECIES				
Invasive flora	Suitable habitat for invasive flora.	<u>Field survey</u> No field evidence identified.	No: Considered absent.	N/A

Conclusion

The proposals will impact part of the eastern boundary hedgerow only (including the leaf-litter, brash piles and piles of grass clippings along much of its base).

Whilst on its own merits the hedgerow is not of high quality with respect to its value to wildlife (species-poor, heavily managed), it does have some potential to support protected species. Furthermore, hedgerow habitat is listed as a Habitat of Principal Importance and a UK BAP Priority Habitat. Mitigation for loss of this habitat will therefore be required.

Losses incurred through its removal may be offset by compensatory planting elsewhere on-site. Potential areas to consider for planting include a new hedgerow and/or trees along the north, west, and south boundaries. Consultation with the LPA is recommended to seek agreement on the proposed mitigation measures.