

Appendix I.12 Update Site Walkover August 2018

TECHNICAL NOTE

Job Name: East Reading Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Scheme
Job No: 28791
Note No: Technical Note - Appendix I.12
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Prepared By: Ed Austin MCIEEM
Subject: Update Ecology Site Walkover Survey – August 2018

Introduction

This technical note provides details of a walkover survey undertaken in August 2018 for the land within which the proposed East Reading Mass Rapid Transit Scheme is located (the 'Application Site').

The Application Site comprises a narrow swathe of land, the majority of which lies between the River Thames to the north and the Great Western Main Line Railway to the south, with the latter forming an embankment that abuts the southern boundary. The western end of the Application Site is located south of a retail superstore and associated car park. The eastern end is located immediately to the west of the Thames Valley Business Park.

Background Information

An extended Phase 1 habitat survey of the route was completed by Peter Brett Associates (PBA) in April 2016 as part of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) (PBA, 2017¹). This found the Application Site to contain a mixture of habitats including:

- Broad-leaved Semi-Natural Woodland;
- Dense Scrub;
- Scattered Scrub;
- Scattered Broad-Leaved Trees;
- Poor Semi-Improved Grassland;
- Tall Ruderal;
- Running Water (part of the River Thames);
- Marginal Vegetation (along the River Thames);
- Amenity Grassland;
- Ephemeral/ Short Perennial Habitat;
- Introduced Shrub;
- Defunct Species-poor Hedgerow;
- Fences; and
- Hardstanding.

Part of the eastern extent of the Application Site is located within the same footprint as the permitted Thames Valley Park, Park and Ride Scheme (the 'TVP P&R Site'). This area had been cleared to facilitate construction of the TVP P&R Site after the 2016 extended Phase 1 habitat survey had been completed. Details of this are provided in a technical note based on an update walkover survey of the Combined Site (including both the Application Site and the TVP P&R Site) in March 2018 (PBA, 2018²).

¹ East Reading MRT Scheme: Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (as contained within Appendix I.2 of the East Reading MRT Environmental Statement)

² East Reading MRT Scheme: Update Site Walkover Survey (as contained within Appendix I.11 of the East Reading MRT Environmental Statement)

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To inform the current assessment, an updated ecological information for the Combined Site was undertaken in August 2018; the purpose of which was to gather information on the current status and extent of habitats within the Combined Site and to provide details of any substantive changes compared to the original habitat data collected in 2016 (as reported by PBA in 2017) and the update walkover in March 2018 (PBA, 2018).

Methods

The update walkover survey was completed by Ed Austin MCIEEM and Stephen Foot MCIEEM on 1st August 2018. Weather conditions were warm (up to 25°C) and dry with largely clear skies (2/8 cloud cover) and a light breeze (Beaufort scale force 2).

Habitats within the Combined Site were identified and mapped following standard JNCC Phase 1 habitat survey methodology as detailed in the Phase 1 Habitat Survey Handbook (JNCC, 2010³). This uses a system of codes to describe different habitat types based on the dominant vegetation present. As the Combined Site had previously been subject to a habitat survey, the walkover focussed on recording whether each area of habitat had been subject to substantive changes, or if it was in broadly similar status/condition to that recorded in 2016 / 2018.

Alongside the habitat survey, a list of birds incidentally encountered was also collected. It should be noted that this was not intended to comprise a comprehensive faunal survey.

Results

Habitats

The distribution and types of habitats within the Combined Site (and vegetation they support) was found to be broadly similar to that recorded in 2016, with the exception of the TVP P&R Site, which had been largely cleared and fenced with HERAS security fencing (as recorded in the March 2018 walkover survey; PBA, 2018 (Appendix I.11 of the Main ES)).

The habitats recorded in 2018 are summarised in Table 1 below together with a brief note on any changes since the 2016 survey. Note many areas have been classified as habitat mosaics where a mixture of habitat types occur in a small area (often due to succession or natural colonisation).

3 Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010): Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: A Technique for Environmental Audit



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Table 1: Habitats Recorded on-site in 2018

Habitat Type	Description/Notes on Distribution	Dominant/Characteristic Plant Species	Comparison with 2016 Survey Data (PBA, 2016)
Broadleaved semi-natural woodland	Concentrated in the central part of the Application / Combined Site to the west of the River Thames crossing. These are blocks of woodland linked to wider areas of woodland off-site to the north and west.	Silver birch <i>Betula pendula</i> Sycamore <i>Acer psedoplatanus</i> Norway maple <i>Acer platanoides</i> Ash <i>Fraxinus exclesior</i> Butterfly-bush <i>Buddleja davidii</i> Elder <i>Sambucus nigra</i> Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> Garlic mustard <i>Alliaria petiolata</i>	No material change. However, a small clearing within the easternmost block of woodkand was recorded in 2018 (as tall ruderal habitat; see below).
Broadleaved plantation woodland	Areas of planted woodland are most prevalent in the eastern extent of the Combined Site around the Wokingham Waterside area (largely outside of the Application Site). Planted trees also occur in a mosaic with introduced shrub around the supermarket car-park to the west (see below).	Sycamore <i>Acer psedoplatanus</i> Hazel <i>Corylus avellana</i> Field maple <i>Acer campestre</i> Wild privet <i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>	No material change.
Dense scrub	Dense scrub is present in numerous locations within the Application / Combined Site, particularly in the central area south of the woodland, at the western extent of the Application / Combined Site and toward the eastern extent around the margins of the now cleared TVP P&R Site.	Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> Butterfly-bush <i>Buddleja davidii</i> Dogwood <i>Cornus sanguinea</i> Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> Blackthorn <i>Prunus spinosa</i> Dog-rose <i>Rosa canina</i>	Areas of former scrub occurred within the TVP P&R Site (and as such, the eastern extent of the Application / Combined Site) which have now been cleared. Otherwise remaining dense scrub on-site is in a similar condition to that recorded in 2018 allowing for a small amount of continued colonisation of some of the marginal areas (i.e.slight increase in scrub area).

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Habitat Type	Description/Notes on Distribution	Dominant/Characteristic Plant Species	Comparison with 2016 Survey Data (PBA, 2016)
Scattered scrub	Scattered scrub occurs as individual bushes (e.g. on the edge of grassland to the east of the River Thames crossing) or in a mosaic with other habitats (see below).	Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> Butterfly-bush <i>Buddleja davidii</i> Elder <i>Sambucus nigra</i> Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	No material change.
Scattered broadleaved trees	Scattered trees are present in the eastern portion of the Application / Combined Site, largely in association with grassland areas, or in mosaic with other habitat types (see below).	Weeping willow <i>Salix</i> sp. Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> Crack willow <i>Salix fragilis</i>	No material change.
Poor semi-improved grassland	Poor semi-improved grassland occurs to the east of the River Thames crossing as a section of more open ground between the River Thames and the railway embankment.	Cock's-foot <i>Dactylis glomerata</i> Angelica <i>Angelica sylvestris</i> Common nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i> False oat-grass <i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	Largely similar although increasing invasion by ruderal species has occurred in places.
Running water	This comprises the section of the open River Thames along the northern extent of the Application / Combined Site and the River Kennet over which the Proposed Development crosses.	N/A (see marginal vegetation)	No material change.
Amenity grassland	Amenity grassland occurs as a mown area (with scattered trees above) in the eastern extent of the Combined Site (outside the Application Site).	Perennial rye-grass <i>Lolium perenne</i> Red fescue <i>Festuca rubra</i> Creeping cinquefoil <i>Potentilla reptans</i> Mosses	No material change.
Introduced shrub	This occurs as planted 'amenity' shrubberies in association with the supermarket car-park in the western extent of the Application / Combined Site as well as areas dominated by butterfly-bush.	Butterfly-bush <i>Buddleja davidii</i> Cotoneaster sp <i>Cotoneaster</i> spp. Bay laurel <i>Laurus nobilis</i> Shrubby honeysuckle <i>Lonicera</i> sp. Viburnum <i>Viburnum</i> sp.	No material change.

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Habitat Type	Description/Notes on Distribution	Dominant/Characteristic Plant Species	Comparison with 2016 Survey Data (PBA, 2016)
Defunct species-poor hedgerow	Not recorded in 2018.	N/A	This area was recorded in 2018 as some scattered scrub and ruderal vegetation as opposed to being a discrete hedgerow feature.
Fences	Low post and rail fencing and iron railings occur in parts of the Application / Combined Site, in particular the areas west of the Thames in association with the supermarket car-park boundary and along the River Thames path.	N/A	No material change.
Hardstanding	Areas of hardstanding include the car-parking in the west of the Application / Combined Site, associated access roads and surfaced paths along the River Thames and through the woodland.	N/A	No material change.
Building	A single building is located within the Combined Site, but outside the Application Site.	N/A	No material change.
Other habitat – recently cleared ground	This comprises the area cleared for the TVP P&R Site in the eastern extent of the Application / Combined Site. This area is now largely devoid of vegetation, although brash indicates a mosaic of scrub, small trees and ruderal vegetation formerly occurred here.	N/A	New habitat since 2016 – area was formerly a mosaic of scrub, ruderal vegetation and small trees.
Bare Ground	Small areas are located within the eastern extent of the Application / Combined Site.	N/A	No material change.

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Habitat Type	Description/Notes on Distribution	Dominant/Characteristic Plant Species	Comparison with 2016 Survey Data (PBA, 2016)
Broadleaved plantation woodland/introduced shrub mosaic	This habitat type occurs widely through the supermarket car-parking area in the western extent of the Application / Combined Site as 'amenity' landscape planting.	Common lime <i>Tilia × europaea</i> Field maple <i>Acer campestre</i> Cotoneaster sp <i>Cotoneaster</i> spp. Bay laurel <i>Laurus nobilis</i> Shrubby honeysuckle <i>Lonicera</i> sp. Viburnum <i>Viburnum</i> sp. Butterfly-bush <i>Buddleja davidii</i>	No material change.
Scattered scrub/poor semi-improved neutral grassland/ephemeral/short-perennial mosaic	This mosaic occurs in the western extent of the Application / Combined Site as an overgrown area (likely former grassland) with increasing colonisation by scrub and self-seeded species.	Wild mignonette <i>Reseda lutea</i> Great mullein <i>Verbascum thapsus</i> Creeping bent <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i> Perforate St John's-wort <i>Hypericum perforatum</i> Dark mullein <i>Verbascum nigrum</i> Creeping cinquefoil <i>Potentilla reptans</i> Butterfly-bush <i>Buddleja davidii</i> Common centaury <i>Centaurium erythraea</i> Teasel <i>Dipsacus fullonum</i> Stonecrop (dead) <i>Sedum</i> sp. Cypress spurge <i>Euphorbia cyparissias</i> False brome <i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>	Broadly similar although slight increase in the area of scrub through natural succession.
Scattered scrub/ephemeral/short-perennial/introduced shrub mosaic	This mosaic is present toward the western extent of the Application / Combined Site adjacent to the railway boundary and bordered by the supermarket access road to the north.	Dark mullein <i>Verbascum nigrum</i> Butterfly-bush <i>Buddleja davidii</i> Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> Perforate St John's-wort <i>Hypericum perforatum</i> Wild parsnip <i>Pastinaca sativa</i> Hemlock <i>Conium maculatum</i>	No material change (although classified as a mosaic in 2018).

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Habitat Type	Description/Notes on Distribution	Dominant/Characteristic Plant Species	Comparison with 2016 Survey Data (PBA, 2016)
Tall ruderal/ephemeral/short-perennial mosaic	A small clearing in the woodland toward the centre of the Application / Combined Site was classified as habitat mosaic due to the presence of short vegetation and colonising ruderal species.	Common nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i> Perforate St John's-wort <i>Hypericum perforatum</i> Great mullein <i>Verbascum thapsus</i> Comfrey <i>Symphytum officinale</i>	Formerly included within the woodland categorisation in 2016. Now shown on Figure 1.
Tall ruderal/marginal vegetation mosaic	Marginal vegetation along the banks of the River Thames occurs in places, particularly adjacent to the River Thames crossing in the central part of the Application / Combined Site.	Himalayan balsam <i>Impatiens glandulifera</i> Hemlock water-dropwort <i>Oenanthe crocata</i> Great willowherb <i>Epilobium hirsutum</i> Common nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i> Purple loosestrife <i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	No material change, although classified as a mosaic due to tall ruderal component (formerly classified as marginal vegetation only).
Scattered broadleaved trees/tall ruderal mosaic	This mosaic was recorded just east of the River Thames crossing as a dense stand of ruderal vegetation beneath scattered trees.	Weeping willow <i>Salix</i> sp. Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> Crack willow <i>Salix fragilis</i> Common nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i> Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	Formerly this area contained a greater proportion of poor semi-improved grassland which has now been invaded by dense tall ruderal vegetation.

Whilst unimproved calcareous grassland was not recorded during the August 2018 site walkover survey, it is anticipated that a strip of this was retained within the southern extent of the Application Site / Combined Site as part of the reptile receptor area.

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Incidental Bird Species Recorded

The list of bird species incidentally recorded during the walkover survey is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Incidental Bird Species List

Common Name	Species Name	Notes
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Using scrub habitats
Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Flying over only
Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Widespread in trees and scrub
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Using tree and scrub habitats
Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	On River Thames and margins only
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Using tree and scrub habitats
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	On River Thames only
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	On River Thames and flying over only
Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	Flying over only
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Using tree and scrub habitats
Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	On River Thames only
Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Using tree and scrub habitats
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Using tree and scrub habitats
Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Flying over only
Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Flying over River Thames only
Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Using tree and scrub habitats
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Widespread across site using mainly tree and scrub habitats
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	On River Thames and margins only
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	On River Thames and margins only
Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	On River Thames and margins only

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Common Name	Species Name	Notes
Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Flying over only
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Using tree and scrub habitats
Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Flying along River Thames only
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Using tree and scrub habitats

Conclusion

The 2018 walkover survey confirmed that habitat conditions within the Application Site had not materially changed since the 2016 survey, with the exception of the TVP P&R Site which has been largely cleared. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the remaining habitats within the Combined Site have the same overall value as those found in 2016 as well the same potential to support protected or notable species. No new ecological considerations associated with habitats present were identified in the 2018 walkover survey.

TECHNICAL NOTE

Site Photographs

Description	Photograph (taken 25-05-2016)
1. Example woodland habitat in the central part of the Application / Combined Site	
2. Example marginal and tall ruderal habitat on the River Thames	
3. Dense scrub along the railway boundary (note abundance of butterfly-bush)	
4. The River Thames / River Kennet from the bridge crossing in the central part of the Application / Combined Site	

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Description	Photograph (taken 25-05-2016)
5. Poor semi-improved grassland east of the Thames crossing – note invading ruderal vegetation	
6. Scrub and ruderal vegetation toward the east of the Application / Combined Site	
7. Cleared TVP P&R Site with brash piles remaining	
8. Amenity grassland and scattered trees in the eastern extent of the Combined Site (outside the Application Site)	

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Description	Photograph (taken 25-05-2016)
9. Car-parking (hardstanding) and planted trees and shrubs in the western part of the Application / Combined Site	
10. Scrub and short perennial vegetation adjacent to the railway boundary in the west of the Application / Combined Site	
11. Poor semi-improved grassland and short perennial vegetation with scattered scrub in the west of the Application / Combined Site	

DOCUMENT ISSUE RECORD

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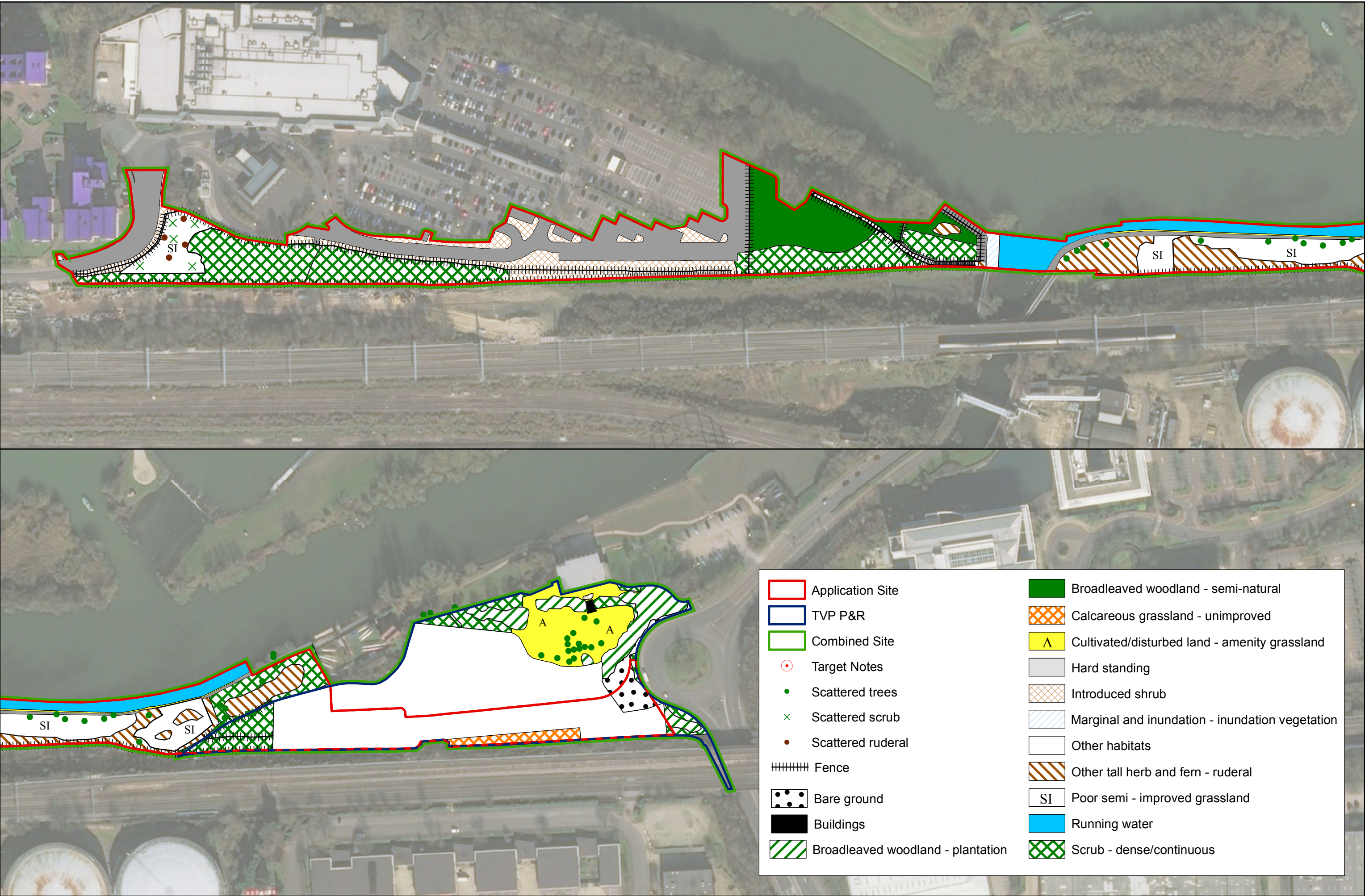
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TECHNICAL NOTE

Figure 1: Update Site Walkover Survey



East Reading Mass Rapid Transit Scheme

0 75 150 m

Service Layer Credits: Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community



Client

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02/10/18

Drawn: HG

Checked: JS

Update Site Walkover Survey