

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Clarendon House, Queen's Road, Reading, RG1 4BN (1005468)

August 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Aspect Ecology was commissioned by Reading Heights Ltd. in August 2018 to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal in respect of re-development of land at Clarendon House, Queens Road, Reading, centred at grid reference SU 7218 7329 (see Plan 5468/SL1).
- 1.2. The following report provides a summary of the ecology work carried out and identifies the potential ecological constraints and opportunities at the site, and the scope of ecological mitigation works required. This appraisal is based on the desktop study, Phase 1 habitat survey of the site and preliminary roost assessment and nesting bird assessment of the on-site building, undertaken by Aspect Ecology in August 2018.

2. Local Policy

- 2.1. Relevant policy pertaining to ecology from the 'Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008' is reproduced below:
- 2.2. **Policy CS8: Waterspaces** – *"Reading's waterspaces will be protected, so that they can continue to contribute to local and regional biodiversity and ecology, local character and visual amenity, and the provision of accessible leisure and recreational opportunities."*

Where development in the vicinity of waterways is acceptable, it will provide:

- *Appropriate, attractive uses and buildings that enhance the relationship of buildings, spaces and routes and creates a high quality public realm;*
- *Positive contributions to the distinct character, appearance, landscape and amenity of the waterways;*
- *A strengthened role for waterways as important landscape features, wildlife corridors and recreation opportunities;*
- *Good, level access to the waterways for all those who want to use them; and*
- *Improved quality of waterway environment through protecting habitats and ensuring that habitat creation is balanced with access and urban uses."*

- 2.3. **Policy CS34: Pollution and Water Resources** – *"Development will only be permitted where it would not be damaging to the environment through air, land, noise or light pollution; where it would preserve or ideally enhance ground and surface water quality; and where existing water resources, sewerage and wastewater treatment infrastructure are adequate to support the proposed development..."*

- 2.4. **Policy CS36: Biodiversity and Geology** – "

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 minimisation, 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."*

3. Overview of the Ecological Status of the Site

Ecological Designations	
Constraint	Low
Notes	No statutory or non-statutory designations of nature conservation interest are present within or adjacent to the site. The nearest statutory designations are Highwood Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Maiden Eriegh Park LNR located approximately 2.6km east and 3.2km south-east of the site, respectively. The site is not located within any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zones. The nearest non-statutory designation is The Coal, Kennetmouth and Kings Meadow East Local Wildlife Site (LWS) located approximately 0.8km north-east of the site.

Habitats	
Constraint	Low
Notes	The site is dominated by a building and associated hardstanding in the form of access and car parking. A very small area of amenity grassland is present and limited ornamental planting is located along the southern boundary and along the western edge of the access road. The building and hardstanding are largely devoid of vegetation aside from a low diversity of colonising species within cracks, and are of ecological value at the site level only. The amenity grassland has not been recently managed and the sward height has therefore increased to approximately 20cm, with a low diversity of common and widespread species present. The total area of amenity grassland is very small (<3m²). The amenity planting is dominated by non-native ornamental species, with occasional common native shrubs. As such the amenity grassland and planting are of value at the site level only. The River Kennet is located approximately 10m north of the site, beyond the Kennet Side road which bounds the site. The river provides a wildlife corridor through the town, albeit at this location it is canalised with hard engineered banks, therefore no emergent vegetation is present and its ecological value is limited.

Fauna	
Constraint	Low
Notes	A single building dominates the site. This is a five storey red brick building, attached to the adjacent property to the west. The building has windows throughout and a flat roof with a parapet, clad with bitumen felt. On the roof level is an enclosed space (approximately 10m x 4m) with breezeblock walls and a flat roof clad with bitumen felt. This plant room contains the lift mechanisms, reached from the main building space via a loft hatch and with a door providing access to the roof. Ventilation slats on the external door provide potential access points into the plant room. No evidence of roosting bats was recorded and the building is in good condition and does not provide suitable crevice roosting opportunities. The building is currently under refurbishment and therefore is subject to considerable disturbance during the day. Weep holes are present within the external brickwork, however the majority of these are well cobwebbed and no evidence of roosting bats was recorded. Occasional holes are present in the brickwork which appear to have been recently created and no wall cavity is apparent. The building is well lit from the surrounding urban landscape. Overall, it is considered that the building provides negligible suitability for roosting bats. No trees are present on site and therefore no alternative bat roosting opportunities are present. As such, roosting bats do not pose a constraint to the re-development of the site. The desk study has identified that a number of bats have been recorded in the local area and are likely to utilise the nearby River Kennet for foraging and commuting. However, the site provides negligible foraging / commuting habitat for bats, being dominated by the building and hardstanding. Badgers, other mammals, amphibians and reptiles are unlikely to be present on-site as the majority of the site (building and hardstanding) is unsuitable. These species are highly unlikely to utilise the amenity grassland and planting as they are so small in extent and the site is surrounded by roads and urban development, isolating it from nearby green space. A small number of common bird species were recorded within the site. The building provides very limited opportunities for nesting birds, albeit there is the potential for some species to nest within the plant room (although no signs of nesting were recorded). There is also limited potential for birds to nest within the ornamental shrub planting.

4. Constraints and Mitigation Requirements

Statutory Designations

- 4.1. The designations within the area surrounding the site are unlikely to be significantly affected by the re-development of the site and therefore do not represent a significant constraint to the development, which would therefore accord with Policy CS36.

Habitats

- 4.2. The habitats within the site do not represent a significant constraint to the re-development of the site, thereby according with Policy CS36. The River Kennet is located approximately 10m north of the site. The river will not be directly impacted by the proposals, however, in accordance with Policies CS8 and CS34 standard pollution prevention measures will need to be implemented during site preparation and construction to safeguard against any potential run-off or pollution events impacting the watercourse. This will include storing chemicals and fuels, and washing vehicles, well away from the watercourse.

Birds

- 4.3. The on-site building and amenity shrub planting have very limited potential to support nesting birds. As a precaution, any clearance of shrubs or work to the plant room will be subject to the implementation of appropriate safeguards, involving the careful timing of works outside of the bird nesting season (i.e. outside March-August inclusive). If this is not practicable, any potential nesting habitat to be removed should first be checked by a competent ecologist in order to determine the location of any active nests. Any active nests identified would then need to be cordoned off (minimum 5m buffer) and protected until the end of the nesting season or until the birds have fledged. These checking surveys would need to be carried out no more than three days in advance of clearance/ any works impacting the plant room and amenity planting.
- 4.4. Subject to these recommendations being implemented, birds are highly unlikely to be a significant constraint to the re-development of the site.

Other Fauna

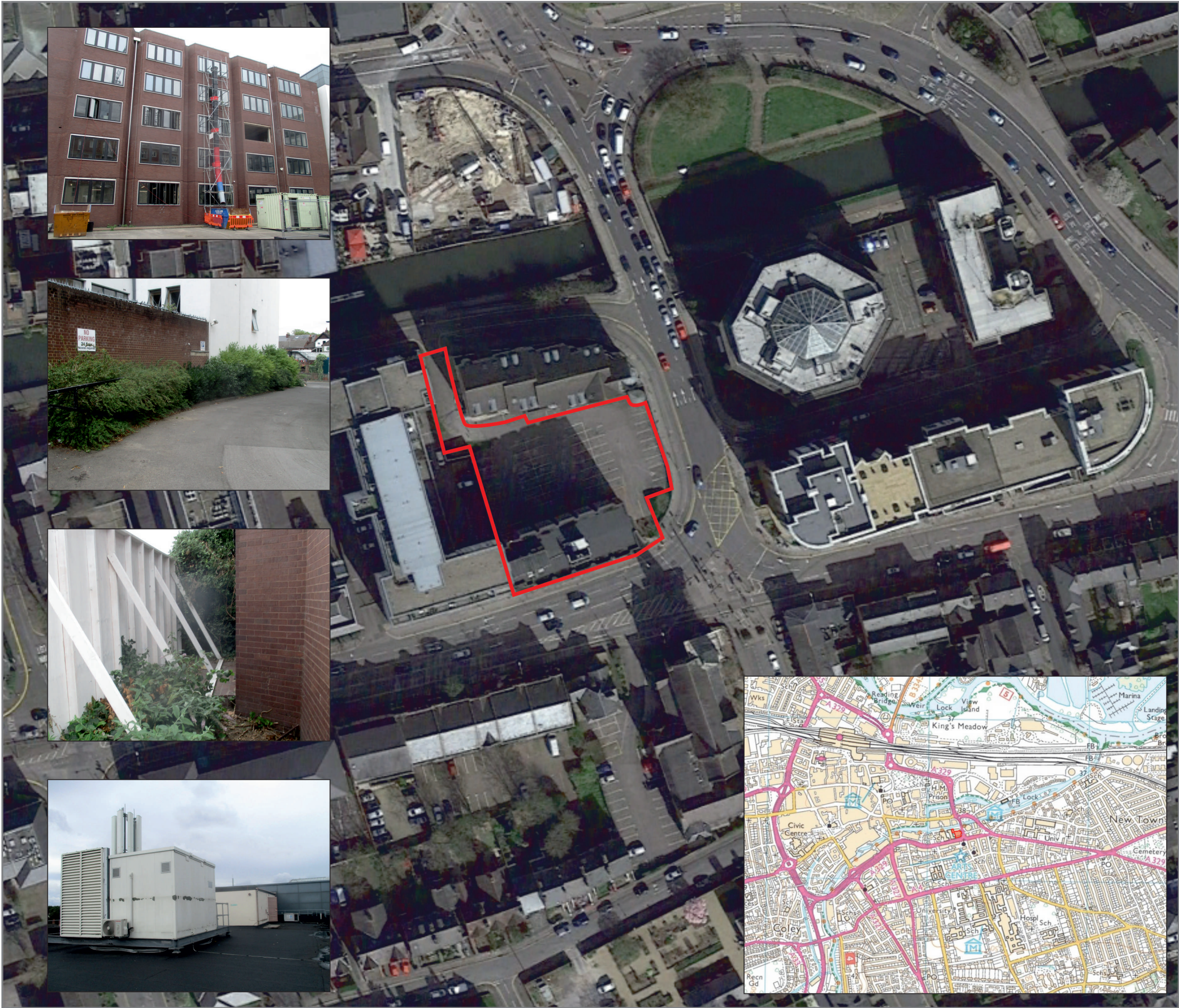
- 4.5. The on-site building has negligible suitability to support roosting bats and the vast majority of the site does not provide suitable bat foraging habitat. Therefore, although bats may sporadically pass through the site and forage around the amenity planting, this species group is highly unlikely to be a constraint to the re-development. Other protected species, such as Badger, reptiles and amphibians are unlikely to utilise the site as it is dominated by a building and hardstanding and is isolated from any green space, and recorded occurrences of these species, within the local area. As such, other protected species are highly unlikely to be a constraint to re-development of the site and no specific mitigation measures will be required.

5. Opportunities & Enhancements

- 5.1. The site provides limited opportunities for ecological enhancement, however the following opportunities are available:
 - New landscape planting could include native species or species of known value to wildlife;
 - Bat and bird boxes could be installed on the building to provide new roosting and nesting opportunities;
 - Insect houses could be erected on the building to enhance potential habitat opportunities for a range of invertebrates;

6. Summary

- 6.1. The site, which comprises a building and hardstanding with small areas of amenity grassland and planting, is considered to be of limited ecological value at the site level. There are therefore no overriding ecological constraints to the future re-development of the site.



Key:
 Site Boundary

aspect ecology

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Noral Way - Banbury - Oxfordshire - OX16 2AF
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Clarendon House, Queen's Road,
Reading

Site Location

5468/SL1

- REV.

August 2018

PROJECT

TITLE

DRAWING
NO.

REV.

DATE

