

WESSEX ECOLOGY



PHASE ONE ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

**SITE OF PROPOSED NEW GAS GOVERNOR
KINGS MEADOW, NORTH OF NAPIER RD
READING, BERKSHIRE, RG1 8AB**

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Surveyor: Iain Donald
File: Ecological Assessment, site of Proposed new Gas Governor, Kings Meadow,
North of Napier Rd, Reading, Berkshire RG1 8AB
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PHASE ONE ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

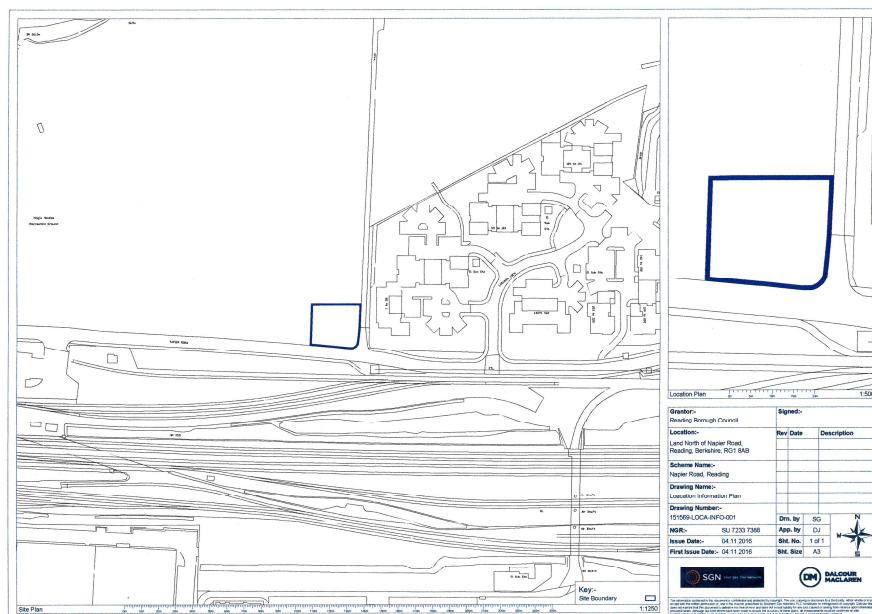
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1. Introduction

This Phase One Ecological Assessment was undertaken at the request of Southern Gas Networks (SGN), who have applied for planning permission to build a Gas Governor at the southeast corner of Kings Meadow, an area of (mainly) amenity grassland south of the River Thames and north of Napier Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 8AB. The proposal is for the construction of a gas governor, which is required to maintain public gas supply. The footprint of the proposed gas governor would cover an area of approximately 90m². This was the area focused on by the survey (as shown by Figure 2. Section 5. 'Site Description & Habitat Assessment' below), along with the wider area as shown by the blue in line Figure 1. (described as 'the site' by this report).

The Local Planning Authority asked SGN to carry out an Ecological Survey/Tree Survey at the location, as the footprint would be within an area of trees, citing the sensitivity of Kings Meadow, which is part of the Reading Green Network.

Figure 1. Site of Proposed Gas Governor within blue line (showing larger area than proposed footprint).



2. Executive Summary

- No badger setts or signs were found on or close to the site. No further survey for badgers was considered necessary.
- No potential bat roost habitat was identified at the site. No further survey for bats was considered necessary.
- Potential bird nesting habitat would be disturbed by the proposal. Precautionary recommendations to protect nesting birds/nesting habitat are given in section 6.-6.1 'Nesting Birds' in Conclusions and Recommendations below.
- Habitat at the site was considered to have a low potential to support reptiles. No further survey for reptiles was considered necessary.
- No ponds were identified on or close to the site, and no ponds were identified from maps within 250m of the site. No further survey for great crested newts was considered necessary.
- No habitats of ecological importance were identified at or near the site.
- Trees (mainly immature willow) growing on/close to the site would be impacted (removed/at risk of disturbance) by the proposal. Precautionary recommendations are given in section 6.-6.2 'Trees' Conclusions and Recommendations below to safeguard mature trees and their roots during construction works, and to replace immature willow that would be lost with new planting.

3. Objectives

- *Determine the presence or potential presence of protected and notable species at the site, and assess whether the proposal might potentially affect them.*
- *Record trees at the site, recommend measures to minimise the impact on trees during construction works and suggest mitigation measures to compensate the loss of any trees.*

4. Methodology

The site was surveyed by an experienced ecologist on the 22nd March 2017. A search was made for signs of protected & notable species and the site was assessed in terms of its suitability to support such species. Trees and other plant species were recorded within the proposed area of works.

4.1 Data Search

A data search was commissioned for protected species within 1km of the site by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC).

4.2 Limitations of Survey

This Ecological Assessment was undertaken at a time of year when some species are hibernating or less active, although this did not impair this Phase One Assessment.

The assessment was carried out at a time of year when plant growth is restricted making identification of some species more difficult, which is not considered significant as this was not a detailed botanical survey.

5. Results

5.1 Site Description & Habitat Assessment

The site is located in the southeast corner of Kings Meadow, an area of amenity land and recreation ground between the River Thames to the north and Napier Road to the south (please see Figure 2 below), with habitat consisting mainly of short amenity grassland (sports fields). Kings Meadow is part of the Reading Green Network, identified by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) as part of Reading Borough Council's 'Sites and Detailed Policies Planning Policy Document', which includes existing sites of importance for biodiversity, existing green links between existing sites, and between existing sites and the wider countryside.

The surveyed site was approximately 0.05 hectares in area and consisted mainly of multi-stemmed crack willow (please see section 4.1 limitations of survey above) along with bramble and some dogwood. Immediately after the proposed access route heads west from a tarmac path just east of the site (please see Figure 2. Below) there was a narrow band of short amenity grass after which there was an area of stinging nettle, with some docks and cleavers, along with the occasional small hawthorn bush. Close to the proposed access route on the edge of the site there was a mature willow (Sp) tree along with another mature willow growing on the northern edge of the area of shrubs & trees, and on the western side of this area there was a semi mature poplar tree with limbs overhanging / close to the proposed site footprint. There was a band of short amenity grass a few metres in width on the west side of the proposed site footprint, beyond which the boundary of Kings Meadow with Napier Road was demarked with a narrow band of trees and shrubs

including a number of mature willow trees. To the north and west of the site the habitat consisted of short mown amenity grass sports fields (please see Figure 3. and Photos 1-9 below). No ponds were identified on or close to the site during the assessment and no ponds were identified from OS maps within 0.5km of the site.

Figure 2. Showing proposed site footprint and access route.

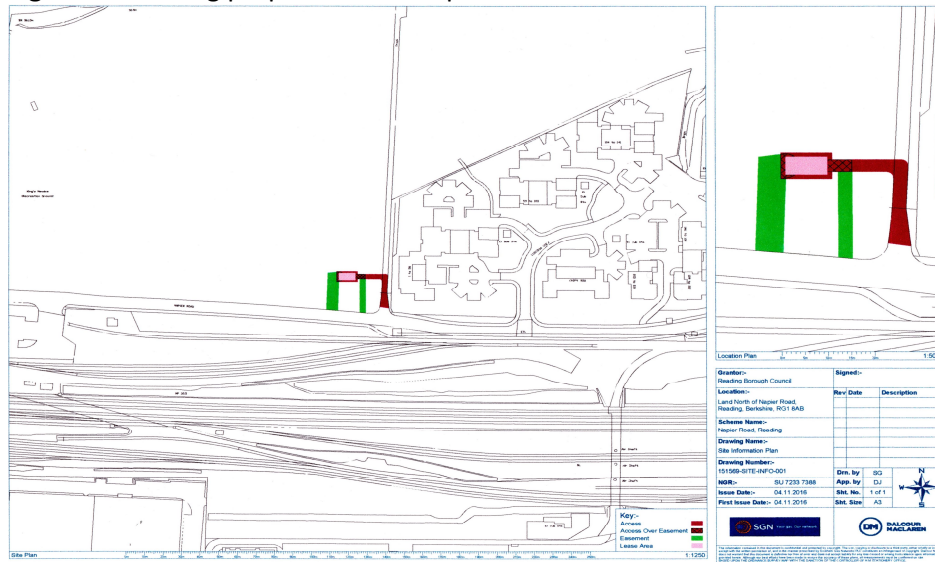


Figure 3. Showing habitats and trees in the vicinity of the proposed development

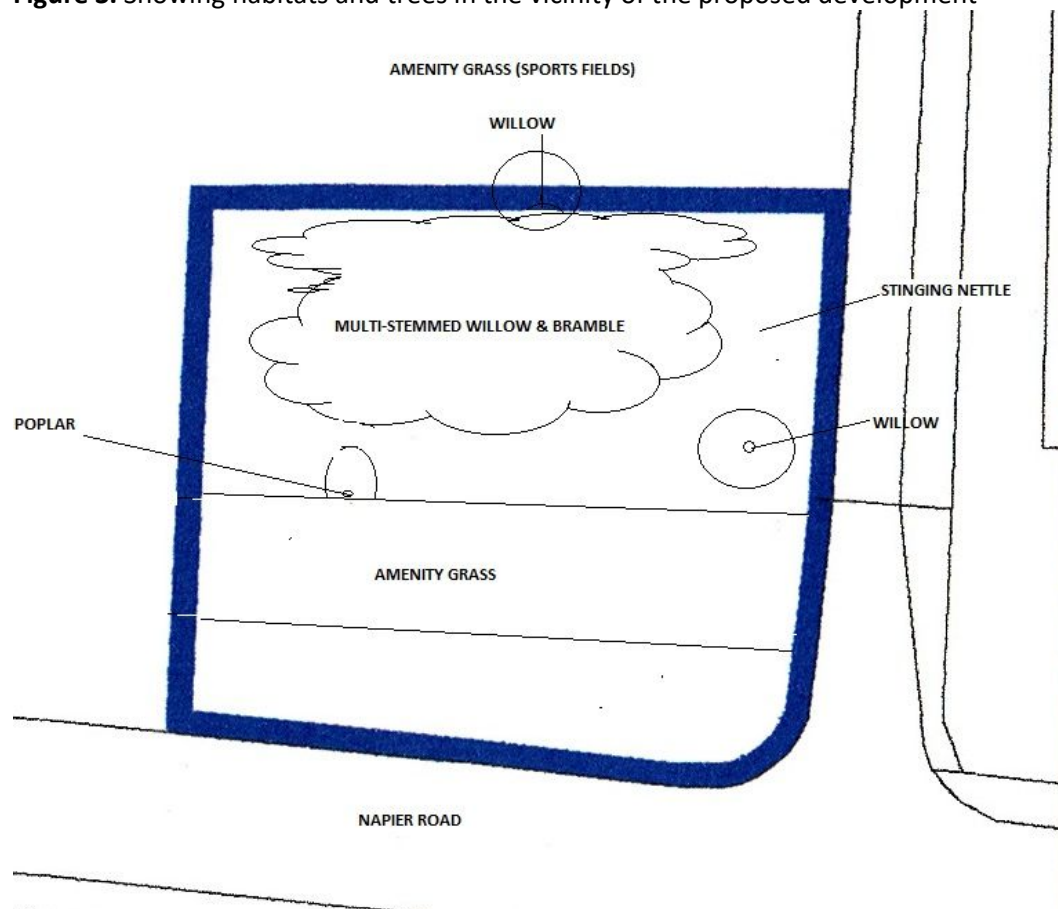


Photo 1. Showing site looking northwest from tarmac path.



Photo 2. Showing site looking west from tarmac path along proposed access route.



Photo 3. Showing site of proposed development footprint consisting mainly of multi-stemmed willow with bramble and stinging nettles.



Photo 4. Showing ground just east of area of multi-stemmed willow dominated by stinging nettle



Photo 5. Showing multi stemmed willow dominant on proposed site footprint.



Photo 6. Showing multi stemmed willow dominant on proposed site footprint.



Photo 7. Showing proposed area of development footprint looking south.



Photo 8. Showing strip of amenity grassland just south of proposed location of new gas governor.



Photo 9. Showing amenity grass of sports fields north of the site.



5.2 Protected & Notable Species

5.21 Badgers

No badger setts or signs were found within 20m of the proposed development site.

The Data Search found three records of badgers within 1km of the site (specific grid reference not given), one of a dead badger on the road from 2012 and two other records of a sett/s from 1991.

No further survey for badgers was considered necessary.

5.22 Bats

No potential bat roosting habitat was identified during the assessment. The proposed construction works are not considered likely to affect bats or bat roosting habitat.

The Data Search found a number of bat records from within 1 km of the site: common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, nathusius' pipistrelle, daubenton's and noctule.

No further survey for bats was considered necessary.

5.23 Nesting Birds

An inspection of vegetation in the location of the proposed development footprint identified no active bird nests, although a details search was not carried out. The dominant vegetation of multi-stemmed willow with bramble represented moderately good bird nesting habitat, therefore birds could potentially be disturbed by the proposed development.

Please see precautionary recommendations to protect nesting birds in section 6-6.1 Conclusions and Recommendations below.

5.24 Reptiles

The habitat on the site was not considered to have low potential to support reptiles. The site itself was vegetated with shrubs and trees (which is not optimal reptile habitat), and was surrounded by short amenity grassland which is would not support reptiles. However, it is possible that grass snake could use the habitat as part of a wider territory, although the likelihood of this is considered low.

The Data Search found two records of slow-worm (1980 & 1982), one from within 1km (no specific grid reference given) and one from around 350m south of the site in a garden beyond a railway line and retail park. One record of a grass snake was found (2008) from around 500m northeast of the site, on the north bank of the River Thames.

No further survey or mitigation for reptiles was considered necessary.

5.25 Great Crested Newts

No ponds were identified during the survey of the proposed route and no ponds were identified from maps within 500m of the route

The Data Search found no records of great crested newts from within 1km of the site.

No further survey for newts was considered necessary.

5.26 Other Species

No other protected or notable species were considered likely to be affected by this proposal.

5.3 Habitats of Ecological Importance

No habitats of ecological importance were identified at or close to the site.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

6.1 Nesting Birds

Conclusion

No nests were found during the assessment of the site. Trees and shrubs on the site had the potential to support nesting birds.

The following precautionary recommendations should be followed to protect nesting birds.

Recommendations

- **Trees and shrubs that would be removed or affected by this proposal should be removed outside of the bird nesting (which is March – August inclusive *although birds can sometimes nest outside of this period*). However, if this is not deemed possible then the trees and/or shrubs should be checked by the ecologist prior to the work. If an active nest or nests were to be found then the works would be delayed until the fledglings have left the nest.**
- **Mature trees will be protected from disturbance during works by the provision of protection fencing and immature willow that would be lost will be replaced by new planting (please see Tree Protection & Compensation Planting in Section 6.2 Trees below).**

6.2 Trees

Conclusions

The proposed development should not require the removal of any mature trees, although mature trees close to the footprint could potentially be damaged by construction activities, therefore the following precautionary recommendations should be followed to insure trees are protected from damage during the construction phase.

An area of immature multi-stemmed willow & shrubs would be lost as part of the proposed development, and although not of high ecological value, it is potential bird nesting habitat as well as habitat for other wildlife. Furthermore, this habitat has an aesthetic value as part of this public green space and would to some extent act to screen the new gas governor from public view.

Recommendations

Tree Protection

- All mature trees in the vicinity of (but outside) the proposed development footprint will be retained, and protected during works by the erection of a tree protection fence prior to the start of works to protect both the trees and their roots from damage. This tree protection fence would be in accordance with BS5837, encompassing an area as wide as the tree canopy (which will be roughly equal to the likely area of the roots).

Compensation Planting

- Post development an area of willow trees equal to the area of multi-stemmed willow that would be lost will be planted around the perimeter of the 'wooded' area on the amenity grassland surrounding it. This would replace the habitat that would be lost and act as a visual barrier helping to screen the new gas governor once established.
- All tree handling, planting and maintenance operations will be carried out by a competent contractor in accordance with the Horticultural Trades Association "Handling and Establishing Landscape Plants" protocol (Parts I-III).

7. Appendix

Legislation

Summary of legislation relating to nesting birds

It is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to damage or destroy the nests of breeding birds (with the exception of some pest species) and work should be done outside the months of March to August which is the usual nesting season.