

ECOLOGY TECHNICAL NOTE

<i>HCCET reference</i>	23.1118	<i>Client reference</i>	E05236
<i>Site</i>	Reading Civic Centre, Bridge Road, Reading	<i>Client</i>	HCC Property Services
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1. Introduction

This Ecology Technical Note report sets out the methods, findings and conclusions of the updating Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment work carried out to support the planning application for a proposed extension to Reading Civic Centre.

Initial ecology work for the Civic Centre development was carried out in August 2023. Further assessment work was then carried out in September 2023 to draw together a formal Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment using the DEFRA Metric 4.1. (23.1118 Reading Civic Centre – PEA and BNG Final 2023-10-05).

The BNG assessment identified that the development would result in a net loss of biodiversity and made recommendations for the planting of two new trees within the area directly impacted by the development, two new trees along the site boundary with Fobney Street, and six new trees off-site; under the original scheme, this would deliver a post-development net gain of 12.18%.

Following the initial BNG assessment, changes were required to the original scheme design in relation to existing services which have resulted in a reduced scope for landscaping. The Local Planning Authority has therefore requested a non-material amendment related to the BNG assessment to ensure that these changes will not result in a reduction of the 12.18% BNG calculated for the development.

2. Updated BNG assessment

A new Biodiversity Net Gain assessment was therefore carried out in September 2024. This followed the DEFRA Statutory Metric which replaced the DEFRA Metric 4.0 in February 2024. The pre-development habitat area figures and condition assessments

used in the original assessment were transferred to the DEFRA Statutory Metric; this did not result in any change to the value of the site's baseline Biodiversity Units.

The red line boundary for the development was initially limited to the south and east area of the Reading Civic Centre complex. This meant that the planting of six new trees to the north and west of the Civic Centre was, for the purposes of BNG, treated as off-site habitat creation. As the red line boundary has been extended to include the entire Civic Centre site, these new trees can be treated as on-site habitat creation.

The revised post-development BNG calculation included the planting of ten new trees as on-site habitat creation, and updated the area figures to reflect a decrease in the revised footprints for hard landscaping (developed land and buildings) footprint, and an increase in the area figure for soft landscaping (dense scrub). These changes to the scheme design result in a post-development BNG figure of 10.66%.

As the revised BNG calculation result in a decrease of the initial post-development net gain of 12.18%, it is recommended that a further new tree is added to the planting scheme. This will increase the total new trees planted to eleven and would result in a post-development BNG figure of 12.52%.

Details of the revised BNG assessment are included in the DEFRA Statutory Metric spreadsheet accompanying this Technical Note.

Habitats within the development's area of impact pre- and post-development are shown respectively in the updated habitat maps (which follow the UKHab classification) at Figure 1 and Figure 2, below.

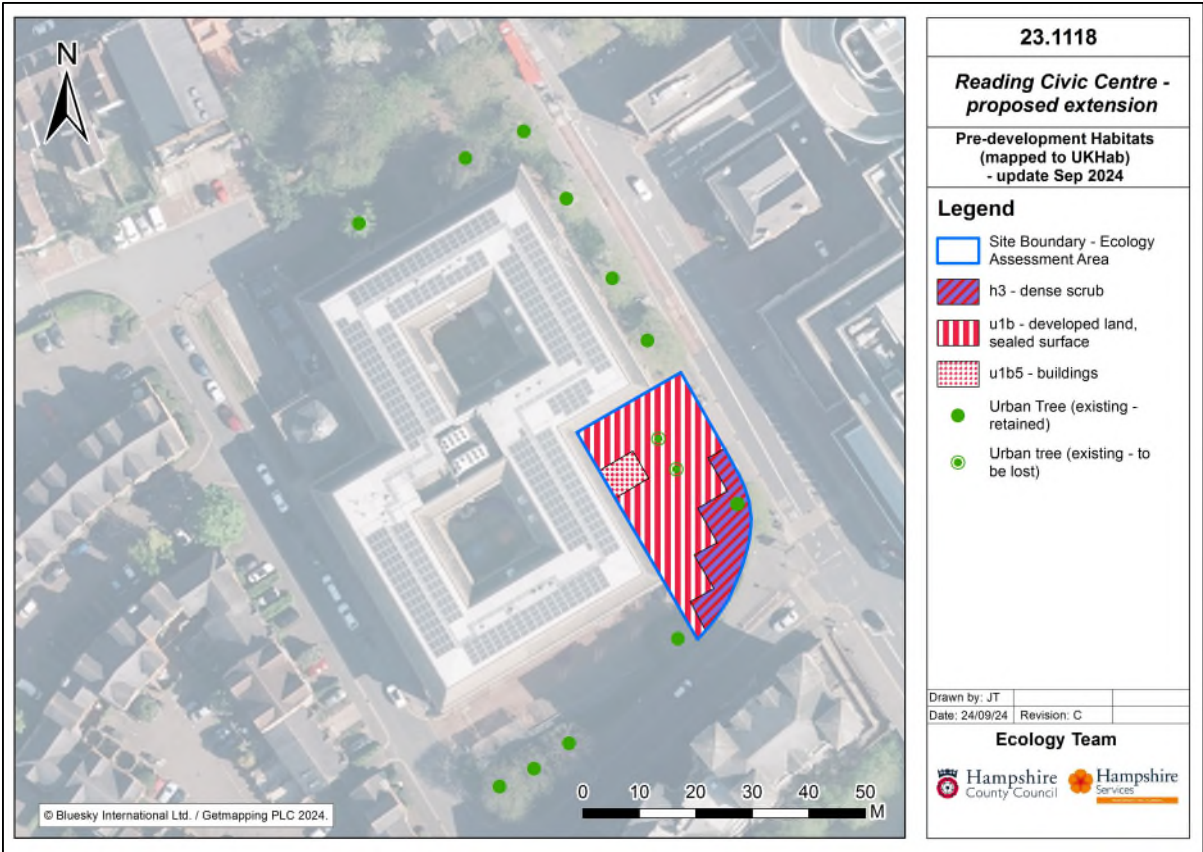


Figure 1 Pre-development habitats.

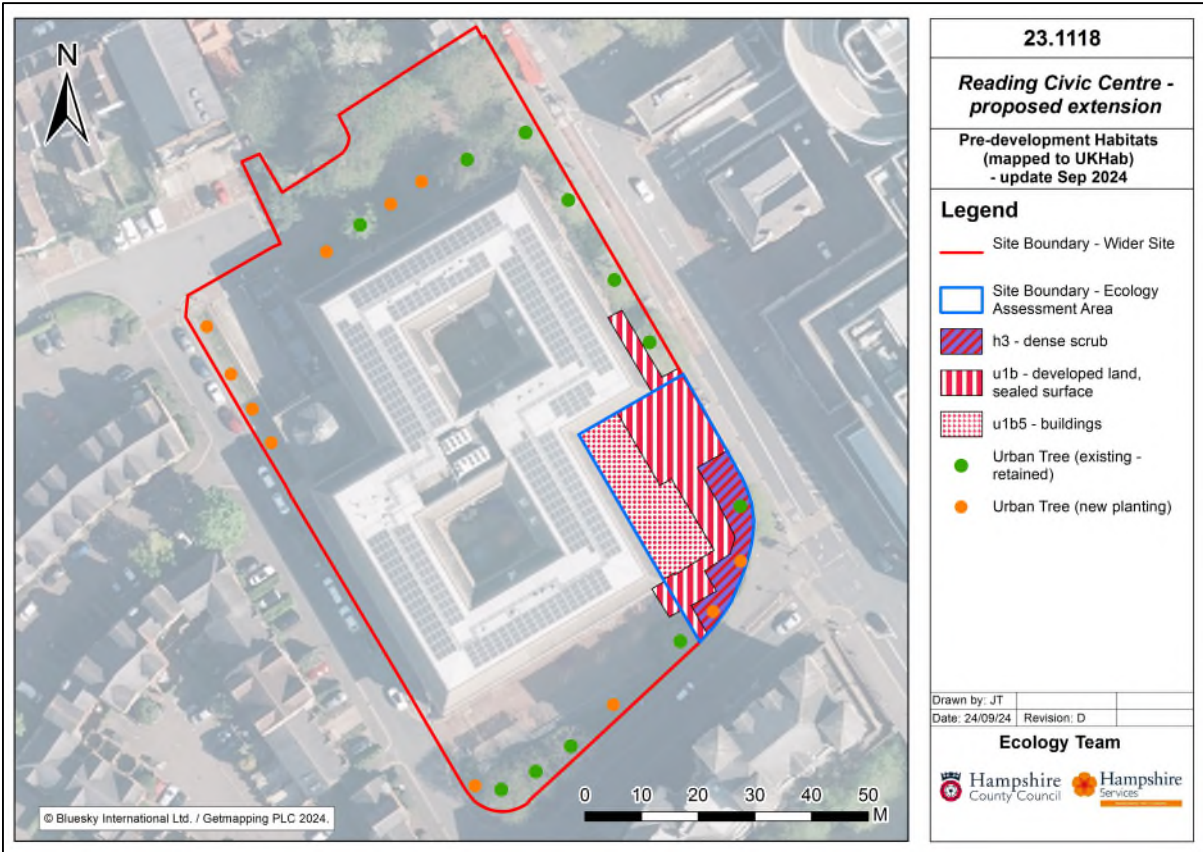


Figure 2 Post-development habitats.

3. Tree species

The planting scheme for the new trees required to achieve a post-development BNG figure of 13.59% will comprise the following horticultural variants of two native and one non-native species:

- Native species variants: Field Maple *Acer campestre* 'Streetwise', Beech *Fagus sylvatica* 'Dawyck Purple'
- Non-native species variant: Honey Locust *Gleditsia triacanthos* 'Sunburst'

4. Conclusion

The changes made to the development's design since the original BNG assessment was carried out in August 2023 have been incorporated into an updated BNG assessment carried out in September 2024.

The updated assessment found that the changes to the design would result in a reduction to the original post-development BNG figure from 12.18% to 10.66%.

However, by adding one extra tree to the new planting scheme, taking the total new trees to be planted to eleven, the revised post-development BNG figure is 12.52%.

Unless otherwise advised, the findings included in this Technical Note are based solely on the plans and brief provided to HCCET. Results and findings are valid for two years from the date of the initial field survey (August 2023). HCCET should be contacted if this report is to be used after this period to check if any updating work needs to be undertaken.