



Reading Link Retail Park Habitat Enhancement Scheme (HES)

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LIABILITIES:

Whilst every effort has been made to guarantee the accuracy of this report, it should be noted that living animals and plants are capable of migration/establishing and whilst such species may not have been located during the survey duration, their presence may be found on a site at a later date.

This report provides a snap shot of the species that were present at the time of the survey only and does not consider seasonal variation. Furthermore, where access is limited or the site supports habitats which are densely vegetated only dominant species maybe recorded.

The recommendations contained within this document are based on a reasonable timeframe between the completion of the survey and the commencement of any works. If there is any delay between the commencement of works that may conflict with timeframes laid out within this document, or have the potential to allow the ingress of protected species, a suitably qualified ecologist should be consulted.

It is the duty of care of the landowner/developer to act responsibly and comply with current environmental legislation if protected species are suspected or found prior to or during works.

1.0 Introduction

Background

1.1 The Ecology Partnership was commissioned by Sorbon Estates to produce a Habitat Enhancement Scheme in order to fulfil the planning condition 11:

- *No development shall commence on site (including demolition or preparatory works) until details of a habitat enhancement scheme are submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme is to include a programme for implementation and ongoing maintenance. The habitat enhancement scheme shall thereafter be implemented and adhered to in accordance with agreed programme*

1.2 The site (SU7112072131) is located in an urban environment, west of the A33 in Coley, south of Reading. The site comprises a car park with commercial buildings in the immediate surroundings. North of the red line boundary lies the river Holy Brook, which is linked with the site via a ditch to the southwest of the site. Northwest and east of the redline boundary comprises residential dwellings, associated gardens and an industrial estate with tracts of arable land to the southwest. Figure 1 below shows the site and the wider surroundings.



*Figure 1: The approximate redline boundary of the site and wider surroundings.
(captured from Google Earth Pro, September 2024).*

- 1.3 David Archer Associates undertook an ecological assessment north of the site on 7th May 2019. Concerning the site, Reading Borough Council (RBC) Ecology Consultations reported that as the development is centred on the existing hardstanding and separated from priority habitats by roads, it was considered that negative impacts on protected species and priority habitats as a result of development are unlikely. However, 62.5m of existing non-native hedgerow is expected to be replaced by native hedgerow and four small areas of non-native introduced shrub are also to be removed.
- 1.4 As there is potential for some bird species to use existing vegetation for nesting, this species group needs to be considered before works take place. It is therefore, recommended that any vegetation removal is undertaken outside of the breeding bird season (March-September inclusive) or immediately after a nesting bird check by a suitably qualified ecologist. If active nests are identified, works in the vicinity of the nest must cease until the birds have fledged the nest.
- 1.5 As the development is situated in an urban context and is centred on artificial sealed surface, the onsite potential for other species is considered to be negligible, and no further mitigation or survey work is required.
- 1.6 The proposed development includes the erection of 1780 sqm unit for use as a gym with mezzanine level, replacing the existing car park. Soft landscaping proposed includes ornamental planting on the east side of the new development with the addition of three new trees species including Ornamental Pear *Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer', Field Maple *Acer campestre* 'Elsrik' and Silver Birch *Betula pendula*. A native hedgerow will also be planted along the southwestern boarder of the site, extending along a northwestern section of the new development. The landscaping plan is seen below, Figure 2.



Figure 2: Landscaping Plan: RLRPRKL_PLN GM_010 from Sorbon Estates

2.0 Landscape Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)

2.1 This LEMP covers the management of the following ecological features:

- Native hedge planting
- Bat boxes
- Bird boxes
- Individual Trees
- Ornamental Planting

2.2 Full details for each feature are presented in Table 1 below, and a work schedule for management and monitoring is presented in Table 2.

2.3 This will act as a guide for the Management Company who will be responsible for the long-term maintenance of the landscape areas and sets out the long-term design objectives and scope of management tasks over a 5 year period.

Table1: Management Prescriptions

	Native hedgerow, Tree and Ornamental Shrub Planting	Bat/bird boxes
Description and evaluation of features to be managed;	Along the western boarder of the site, a native hedgerow mix will be planted as whips. This will include hazel <i>corylus avellana</i>, hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i>, field maple <i>Acer campestre</i>, guelder rose <i>Viburnum opulus</i>, hornbeam <i>Carpinus betulus</i>, wild privet <i>Ligustrum ovalifolium</i> and dogwood <i>Cornus sanguinea</i>. The mix of native shrubs will provide a valuable commuting and foraging habitat for wildlife moving through the site as well as nesting opportunities for birds, and nectar resources for pollinating insects. Three trees will be planted northeast of the new development. They will include non-native Ornamental Pear <i>Pyrus calleryana</i> 'Chanticleer' and native Field Maple <i>Acer campestre</i> 'Elsrik' and Silver Birch <i>Betula pendula</i>. This will provide valuable perches, fruits and berries for birds, as well as additional nectar sources for pollinators, particularly in the spring. Ornamental Pear is non-native species but supports biodiversity and is good for pollinators. It grows to medium size in an upright and compact form, ideal in urban environments. Ornamental shrub planting will be on the southwest, southeast and northeast of the new development. The planting will comprise a variety of species which are of known value to wildlife, as listed on RHS plants for pollinators list. This will increase species diversity and have a net positive impact for insects. Species will include field maple <i>Acer campestre</i>, Japanese barberry <i>Berberis thunbergia</i>, Hebe sp. <i>hebe</i>, wild privet <i>Ligustrum ovalifolium</i>, Oregon grape <i>Mahonia</i> sp., Shrubby Cinquefoil <i>Potentilla</i> sp., Bird Cherry <i>Prunus padas</i>, Woody Willow <i>Salix lanata</i>, Sweet Box <i>Sarcococca hookeriana</i>, common wayfaring tree <i>Viburnum lantana</i> and guelder rose <i>Viburnum opulus</i>.	The following bird boxes will be hung onto to new development in the southwest and southeast aspects of the building, just below roof level (Figure 3): 1x Vivara Pro WoodStone House Sparrow Double Chamber Nest Box; and, 1 x Vivara Prop Barcelona Open Nest box 1 x 1N Schwelger Deep Nest Box The following bat boxes will be hung onto the southwest of the new development, avoiding artificial light from the car park (Figure 3): 1 x Large Multi Chamber WoodStone Bat Box 1 x Vivara Pro WoodStone Bat Box. The following invertebrate boxes will be hung onto to new development in the southwest and southeast aspects of the building: 1 x Pinta Apex Insect House This will provide additional habitat for invertebrates as well as nesting/roosting opportunities for birds/bats in the local area.
Ecological trends and constraints on site that might influence management	The nesting bird season (March-August) must be avoided for any management involving cutting tools on the hedge.	Any maintenance would need to be carried out in the winter months when birds will be absent from the boxes (November-February). Due to the protected status of bat roosts, even when not in use, bat boxes must not be interfered with. If maintenance is required, an ecologist must be contacted for advice.
Aims and objectives of management	Aim: To provide an additional source of nectar and berries for wildlife. Objective: Protect planted hedgerows, trees and shrubs and ensure they can become established.	Aim: Provide additional roosting/nesting opportunities for birds/bats Objective: Confirm occupancy of at least one bird box.

Prescriptions for appropriate management options to achieving aims and objectives;	(S1) – Water hedge, tree and shrubs to soil saturation immediately after planting, then as required. (S2) - Monitor health of hedge, remove failed individuals and replace as appropriate. Monitor at least monthly for first six months, then twice annually in the early and late summer. (S3) – Remove undesirable plants on a weekly basis between March and October. (S4) – Trim hedge to a height and width of at least 2m (if required) on a two-year basis in the autumn. This will be done on a rotational basis with half the hedge cut each year.	(BB1) - Annual maintenance checks of bird boxes, to include: - Check of screw/fixtures to ensure boxes are secure, re-affixing if necessary. - Check for old nests to confirm previous occupancy. - Clean out old nests and other material from bird boxes with stiff brush, to remove potential parasites. Invertebrate boxes require no maintenance.
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Table 2 – Five year work schedule

Management actions	Five year work schedule																			
	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Year 4				Year 5			
	Jan-Feb	Mar-Jul	Aug-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Jul	Aug-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Jul	Aug-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Jul	Aug-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Jul	Aug-Oct	Nov-Dec
<i>S1– Water hedge, tree and ornamental scrub</i>		As required				As required				As required				As required				As required		
<i>S2– Monitor health of hedge, tree and shrubs</i>		Monthly				Once	Once			Once	Once			Once	Once			Once	Once	
<i>BB1 – Bird/ bat box maintenance/ monitoring</i>				Once				Once				Once				Once				Once
<i>S3 – Remove undesirable plants</i>		Weekly				Weekly				Weekly				Weekly				Weekly		
<i>S4 - Trim hedge height and width</i>							Once								Once					



Figure 3: Proposed Landscape Plan and Position of Bat, Bird and Invertebrate Boxes

Management Responsibilities

- 2.4 The LEMP will be reviewed during the life of the management plan with reviews undertaken before the end of each five year period. The revised LEMP would include similar provisions for the long-term management of the biodiversity enhancement areas.
- 2.5 Maintenance operations would also be refined to suit:
- The needs of users;
 - The conservation of ecological interests;
 - Improvements in equipment and horticultural aids;
 - Changing legislation and sustainability requirements; and,
 - The completed scheme when soft landscaping including species have been confirmed.

Monitoring and Review

- 2.6 The effectiveness of the proposed management will be assessed after 5 years (covering the initial defects liability) against the management objectives set out in section 2 and adjusted accordingly.
- 2.7 The various tasks contained within the LEMP will, subsequently, be reviewed and revised as deemed necessary every 5 years within the overall 15-year period, informed by visual inspections. All areas of the landscape scheme will be closely monitored throughout a 5-year aftercare period by a suitably competent professional so that the most appropriate management regime can be defined on an area-by-area basis. This process will identify where the existing management regime requires modification to meet management objectives, both annually and in the long-term.

3.0 Wildlife Boxes

3.1 Nest boxes will be installed in order to provide new nesting opportunities for birds and to achieve ecological enhancements in line with policies set out by the Local Planning Authority. Three Bird Nest Boxes will be incorporated into the new development.

3.2 Hardwearing woodcrete boxes, or similar, such as the Vivara Pro Barcelona WoodStone Open Nest Box are recommended. The structure of the building is not suitable to support integrated boxes as the brickwork only extends to 2.1m in height, and it is considered that this height would not be safe for nesting birds, as it would be in easy reach of members of the public. These boxes will therefore be affixed to the exterior of the new development using strong screws and positioned as high as possible. Recommended models include:

- Vivaro Pro Barcelona WoodStone Open Nest Box, which caters for species such as wrens, robins, spotted flycatchers, pied and grey wagtails, song thrushes and blackbirds.
- Vivara Pro WoodStone House Sparrow Nest Box, has a double chamber and is ideal for house sparrows.
- 1N Schwelger Deep Nest Box which is ideal for black redstart, pied wagtail, spotted flycatcher, robins and wrens.

3.3 Examples of the recommended models are displayed in Figure 4 below.

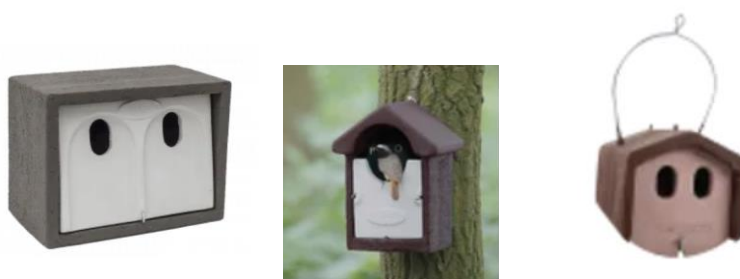


Figure 4: 1N Schwelger Deep Nest Box (right) Vivara Pro Barcelona WoodStone Open Nest Box (centre) Vivara Pro WoodStone House Sparrow Nest Box (left)

3.4 To enhance the local bat population and provide roosting opportunities within the site, bat boxes will be affixed to the new building. The structure of the building is not suitable to support integrated boxes as the brickwork only extends to 2.1m in height, and it is

considered that this height would not be safe for roosting bat, as it would be in easy reach of members of the public. Woodcrete boxes are recommended as they are breathable and long-lasting. These will be hung along the southwest of the building, where they will receive sun and warmth, are away from artificial light and where they are easily connected to ideal habitats in the wider surroundings. Recommended boxes include:

- Large Multi Chamber WoodStone Bat Box – This is a multipurpose box designed for larger colonies and a range of bat species including pipistrelles, noctules and brown long-eared bats (Figure 5).
- Vivara Pro WoodStone Bat Box – A general purpose bat box that supports a range of species (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Vivara Pro WoodStone Bat Box (left) and Large Multi Chamber WoodStone Bat Box (right)

3.5 Invertebrate boxes or insect houses will also be hung on the new development to support the invertebrates and bees attracted to the site by the surrounding the new ornamental planting and hedgerow. They will be placed in a warm sunny spot on the southeast and southwest aspect of the new development. The Pinta Apex Insect House is an example an invertebrate box that can be installed (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Pinta Apex Insect House

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 The site has been assessed to ensure that protected species and local wildlife have been considered as part of the scheme.
- 4.2 Any loss of the existing ornamental shrub planting on site will be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season (March-September inclusive) or immediately after a nesting bird check by a suitably qualified ecologist. If active nests are identified, works in the vicinity of the nest must cease until the birds have fledged the nest
- 4.3 Management plans have been included for each ecological feature and the management matrix is provided to break down the management across the year.

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