

Biodiversity Report



Millwood SEN School School Street, Radcliffe M26 3BW

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1 Summary

This biodiversity assessment has been compiled from desk research and a site visit on 11 September 2023 carried out by an experienced ecologist and arboricultural consultant. It considers the biodiversity implications of developing the site.

- The area is dominated by amenity grassland with some trees mainly around the perimeter. There was **no evidence either that there were any protected or designated habitats on the development site** itself, or that **protected species** (such as bats, birds, amphibians, plants, etc.,) might be affected by development of the site. There are no UK Biodiversity Plan (BAP) priority habitats. The nearest designated site (Ashclough SSSI) is about 2km away and is not connected.
- The only feature of interest nearby is the **abandoned Manchester, Bolton, and Bury Canal** outside the school perimeter. This will almost certainly provide roosts and hunting grounds for bats, and also habitat for amphibians. It is not considered that the development will affect these, although it would be prudent to ensure any lighting is contained within the site and does not spill out onto the canal corridor.
- There are **no invasive species such as Japanese knotweed** on the site, and no special precautions are necessary. It would be prudent to take measures to prevent any invasive species being imported to the site through a construction environment management plan.
- A **Tree Survey to BS5837** has already been carried out and proposals for retention made. The only tree that is worthy of retention from a biodiversity point of view (but a problem from an arboricultural view) is a large Poplar almost on the boundary with the canal. This has significant heartwood decay (which has enhanced its biodiversity value).
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)** - the current vegetation has extremely low biodiversity value, is in poor condition and has little connection to other habitats. It will be possible to deliver BNG within the confines of the site including planned landscaping. Children at the school should be involved in measures to improve biodiversity.

2 Introduction and purpose of report

This report has been prepared by Peter Black to provide an assessment of biodiversity in advance of a development that would extend the school buildings and provide additional landscaping. This survey assessed the conservation value of the site and surrounding area, the likely presence of rare or protected species, looked for any features, habitats or species which could constitute potential development constraints and any invasive species. A survey of trees to BS5837 has already been carried out.

The author holds a degree in Botany, is a Chartered Town Planner (MRTPI), environmental manager and associate member of the Arboricultural Association with experience of over 35 years in planning, and habitat surveys. He has commissioned, reviewed, and acted as an expert witness on ecology and Environmental Impact Assessment and carries out tree assessments to BS5837.

A detailed site walkover survey was carried out on the morning of 11 September 2023. The weather was dry and sunny with a light breeze. This is a good time of year to carry out an ecological survey, although there was the potential to miss some animal and plant groups that are only active earlier in the year.

3 Site and development

The site is currently in educational use and is amenity grassland with scattered trees. The site is level, and the proposal is to extend the school buildings. A general view is shown on the title page.

The boundaries are the existing school buildings and play area, a road, and a high chain link fence beyond which is the former Manchester, Bolton, and Bury Canal (see appendix 3 photo 2) which is abandoned but still in water and has an active towpath on the school side.

4 Statutory designations

A search was made using the DEFRA MAGIC mapping tool. The site does not have any statutory wildlife or landscape designations or Tree Preservation Orders. There are several SSSI and Local Nature Reserves in the general area. The nearest is Ashclough SSSI (a site of geological interest), which is about 2 km away with Nob End SSSI (largely designated for the unique limestone flora on the former Leblanc waste tips) a little further at 2.5 km. There are no habitat corridors to link either of these to the site, and both sites are very different to the school and its immediate surroundings.

Around the development is the school grounds and residential properties which have negligible biodiversity value. To the northwest is a bank down to the former canal. This is heavily overgrown and has a typical impoverished nutrient-rich urban flora including Elder, Ash, Hawthorn, and Goat Willow. Understory includes rank vegetation and agricultural weed such as Hogweed and Dandelion.

5 Habitat survey

The site was visited on the morning of 11 September 2023. The weather was dry and sunny. The site is small and was surveyed using National Vegetation Classification (NVC) categories. The only habitat on the development site itself was:

- J1.2 Mown grassland - amenity grassland.

This is marked on the map in appendix two, and a species list is also provided in appendix three. The species found are all common in urban areas. There were no plant species of any interest.

There were several amenity trees in the grassland, mostly of negligible biodiversity value. The only exception was a Poplar near the boundary with the canal (appendix 3 photo 1). This had been heavily pruned and was showing exposed heartwood with decay. The tree will be home to a number of insects and is suitable for nesting birds but did not display features that were likely to provide bat roosts.

Poplar trees are often problematic in urban situations. While they grow quickly and are almost immune to vandalism, they are also relatively short lived, can shed limbs without warning and will exploit any cracks in drainage systems.

Given the wildlife potential of the Poplar, it would be preferable to retain if possible, and any work to prune or fell should not be carried out in the bird nesting season (February to August inclusive)

6 Protected Species

6.1 Bat

Bats are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010). It is an absolute criminal offence to disturb bats, and ignorance is not a defence. The surveyor (Peter Black) is trained in and is experienced in looking for potential roost sites in trees.

The trees on site are all too young (probably a maximum of 20 years) to develop the features that bats would use for roosts. The Poplar tree was examined, and it is considered it does not have the features that would be suitable to harbour bat roosts.

Bats (Pipistrelles) may roost in older trees along the disused canal, the eaves and bricks of houses that adjoin the site, and they will use the former canal corridor for commuting and foraging. Any use of the development site is likely to be very limited as the flora and therefore associated insects would be impoverished.

It is possible that lighting from the new development (particularly floodlighting) could disturb bats commuting and feeding along the canal corridor. Care should be exercised to ensure no light spills out of the site and that all lights are angled either inwards or downwards

Otherwise it is not considered that bats would be affected by the development, although bat boxes, or preferably bat bricks could be provided as part of the development.

6.2 Badger

Badgers are common in Greater Manchester and are present on the canal corridor. There are no known records for the development site itself. As closely mown amenity grassland, it is generally not favourable by badgers either for sett building or for foraging.

A survey in line with Government Guidance [Badgers: surveys and mitigation for development projects](#) was carried out including the embankment outside the site that adjoins it to the NW. None of the typical features (such as sett entrances and spoil heaps, bedding, footprints, or badger paths) were observed.

Given the sturdy fencing to the school and lack of potential food sources, it is unlikely that badgers visit the site.

It is not considered that badgers will be affected by the school extension. It is not recommended that any further survey is undertaken.

6.3 Birds

All wild bird species, their eggs and nests are protected by law. A limited range of common birds: Magpie, Pigeon, Blackbird, Great and Blue Tits, Crow were observed on or near the site. It is unlikely the site would be attractive to any species other than common garden birds at any time of year.

All nesting birds are protected, so it is recommended that all tree work is carried out between August and February. **If it is necessary for work during the nesting season (Feb-August), a search for nests and nesting activity by an experienced ecologist is recommended before work starts.**

6.4 Great Crested Newts and Voles

The site does not contain suitable habitat for either Great Crested Newts or Voles.

7 Invasive Species

There is no evidence of any invasive species on the site, although Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed are all common in the area outside the site.

Section 14(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 states that 'if any person plants or otherwise causes to grow in the wild any plant which is included in Part 2 of Schedule 9, he shall be guilty of an offence'.

It is not considered that any measures are needed for invasive species, although care should be taken to avoid bringing soil contaminated with Japanese Knotweed or other invasive species onto the site.

8 Biodiversity Net Gain and mitigation

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) was formally introduced by the Environment Act 2021 to ensure that development does not reduce biodiversity. Current biodiversity on the site is very low, and the extension will associated landscaping is likely to actually increase biodiversity overall.

It is recommended that:

- The school use biodiversity and nature studies as part of the curriculum – for instance pond dipping, placement of nest and bat boxes. Any activity of this sort will increase biodiversity.
- A full BNG calculation is not needed, although it would be for any subsequent planning application which would show how BNG could be achieved and maintained over 30 years.

End of main document, appendices follow

Appendix one - plants found on site 11 September 2023

- Note the site has a very impoverished flora –

Hawkweed sp (*Hieracium* spp)

Sow-thistle (*sonchus oleraceous*)

Willowherb (*Epilobium montanum*)

Dock (*Rumex* sp)

Pearlwort (*Sagina procumbens*)

Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)

Plantains (*Plantago lanceolata*, *major*)

Dandelion (*Taraxacum* spp)

Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*)

Meadow Grass (*Poa annua*)

On embankment (not part of site)

Common shrubs (Bramble, Hawthorn, Elder, Goat Willow, Ash, Sycamore)

Range of common grasses and ruderals

Appendix two – location plan and habitat survey



Appendix three – Photos



Figure 1 Poplar tree on boundary with canal



Figure 2 Manchester Bolton Bury Canal outside site