

Summary

Whilst the ecological assessment does not fully cover the application site, I am satisfied that potential ecological issues, relating to otter, nesting birds, invasive species and proximity to a watercourse can be dealt with via condition and or informative.

Otter

Otter are known to be present along the River Irwell, with the section to the north known to be a core area for this species with numerous records including photographic evidence, less than 800m up river collected the last year. No evidence of otter was however found, as part of the ecological assessment which covered part of this site and the river bank will not be directly impacted upon by the development. The earth bank is also located along the boundary of a busy main road that provides no potential cover for otter. I am therefore satisfied that risks are limited to otter investigating the workings at night during the construction phase. These risks can be mitigated through a reasonable avoidance measures method statement in line with previous protocols for other phases of the development. ***The details can be conditioned.***

Nesting Birds

The only potential nesting habitat that may be impacted upon, is one tree at the southern end of the proposed embankment. It is unclear from the plans provided whether this tree is to be retained or removed. ***If the tree is to be removed the standard bird nesting condition should be applied.***

Invasive Species

Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed are located along this section of the River Irwell. It is unclear whether any of these species will be impacted upon by this phase of the development as whilst none appear to be present within the footprint of the embankment, it is likely that the wider site where machinery will be located will be infested/contaminated by one or more of these species. I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines be applied to any permission.

Prior to any earthworks a method statement detailing eradication and/or control and/or avoidance measures for Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed should be supplied to and agreed in writing to the LPA. The agreed method statement shall be adhered to and implemented in full unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.

Proximity to River Irwell and Hutchinsons Goit

The red edge abuts the River Irwell and direct impacts are proposed to Hutchinsons Goit. There are therefore risks of negative impacts on water quality from sediment and pollutants. The risks appear however to be low with the works area well away from the River Irwell and the works to Hutchinson Goit restricted to measures to the culvert inflow. I am satisfied that negative impacts are avoidable. The details can be conditioned as part of a CEMP or a standalone condition along the following lines.

No development, site clearance, earth moving shall take place or material or machinery brought on site until a method statement to protect the River Irwell and Hutchinsons Goit from accidental spillages, dust and debris has been supplied to and agreed by the LPA. All measure will be implemented and maintained for the duration of the construction period in accordance with the approved details.

Contributing to and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Section 170 of the NPPF 2019 states that the planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The development will replace what currently appears to be species poor grassland and ruderal vegetation with an earth bank as well as causing temporary disturbance to the land between the proposed embankment, the River Irwell and Hutchinson Goit. Mitigation and enhancement should be relatively simple through reseeding areas disturbed during construction and suitable seeding of the new embankment. As enhancement, I would recommend planting of one or two native trees behind the embankment. ***The details can be conditioned.***

Ecologist
GM Ecology Unit