

Land off Earl Street, Prestwich Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

April 2021



Dunelm Ecology
consultant ecologists

Contents

1	Introduction	2
1.1	Background	2
1.2	Aims and Objectives	2
1.3	Legislative and Policy Context	2
2	Methods and Approach.....	4
2.1	Field Survey	4
2.2	Personnel	5
2.3	Survey Constraints	5
2.4	Ecological Evaluation	5
3	Results.....	6
3.1	Field Survey	6
4	Discussion and Recommendations.....	8
4.1	Evaluation	8
4.2	Assessment	8
4.3	Recommendations	8
5	References.....	10

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Dunelm Ecology Ltd was commissioned to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal of a 0.4 ha area of land off Earl Street, Prestwich. The survey was undertaken in support of a planning application to build 17 new dwellings with associated access and landscaping. The planning proposals would result in the loss of most existing semi-natural habitat within the site (although a small area in the north east corner of the site would be retained), while two buildings would be impacted.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

- 1.2.1 The main objective of the assessment was to identify the presence of any priority/protected species and habitats. This report provides an overview of the legislation and policies relevant to protected species and habitats within the UK. Also included are a description of the methods used and the results of the ecological appraisal. The implications of the survey findings are discussed, with an assessment of potential impacts provided and recommendations to prevent, reduce and/or offset any adverse ecological impacts.

1.3 Legislative and Policy Context

- 1.3.1 A range of legislation has been established in the UK to protect important nature conservation sites and species. This includes the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) (1981) (as amended), Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. Section 14 of the WCA 1981 also makes it an offence to spread or release into the wild certain plants and animals which may cause ecological, environmental, or socio-economic harm. These are listed under Schedule 9 of the Act.
- 1.3.2 The Hedgerows Regulations (1997) regulate hedgerow removal and affords increased protection to those meeting certain ecological, landscape, cultural or archaeological criteria.
- 1.3.3 The Protection of Badgers Act (1992) protects badgers and their setts from persecution. The purpose of this Act was, therefore, animal welfare as opposed to concern over the conservation status of this mammal, which is common and widespread across much of rural Britain. However, the Act also contains restrictions that apply more widely, and have relevance to developers.
- 1.3.4 The UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework published in 2012 and updated in 2018, is the government's response to the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992). It describes the UK's biological resources, commits a detailed plan for the protection of these resources within the UK's devolved framework across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The document identifies future priorities for nature conservation and adopts a more strategic approach, including ecosystem services and sustainability alongside biodiversity. Despite administrative changes following devolution, there is still an underlying objective of protecting and enhancing a range of priority species and habitats, often still

based on the objectives and classifications of the original UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Biodiversity 2020 is England's national biodiversity strategy. Building on the Natural Environment White Paper published in 2011, this provides a means of delivering the international and EU commitments to biodiversity. Under Biodiversity 2020, Priority Species and Habitats referred to are those of 'Principal Importance' for the conservation of biodiversity in England listed on Section 41 (England) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

- 1.3.5 Finally, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides guidance for local authorities on the content of the Local Plans and is a material consideration in determining planning applications. Briefly, with an overall focus on sustainable development, the NPPF states that developments should aim to engender positive outcomes for biodiversity, with a particular focus on the maintenance and creation of ecological networks. Furthermore, the NPPF also states that any planning proposals for which significant negative impacts on biodiversity cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated should be refused.
- 1.3.6 The NPPF states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural environment through a range of actions, including:
- Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological interests and soils;
 - Recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services; and
 - Minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

2 Methods and Approach

2.1 Field Survey

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

- 2.1.1 All habitats present within the site boundary and immediately adjacent were surveyed on 14 October 2020 following the Phase 1 habitat survey methodology which is the standard technique for classifying and mapping British habitats (JNCC 2010). The survey aimed to provide a record of habitats that are present and investigate further those that are likely to be ecologically important, with features of interest recorded as target notes.
- 2.1.2 The survey was 'extended' to include a general assessment for the presence or potential presence of protected species, noting any areas of suitable habitat and the location and type of any field signs recorded. Taking into consideration the development proposals and character/location of the site, the survey primarily focused on bats and badgers. Species such as great crested newts and reptiles have been scoped out of the assessment due to the site's urban location and an absence of ponds within 250 m of the site. Further information on the survey approach for bats and badgers is provided below.

Bats

- 2.1.3 An inspection survey of the buildings within the site was carried out during daylight hours following the methodology outlined in the *Bat Mitigation Guidelines* (Mitchell-Jones 2004) and *Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines* (Collins 2016). The survey involved systematically searching the exterior and interior of the building for bats and their field signs with the aid of ladders, endoscope (Snakevision), close-focusing binoculars (Opticron Countryman BGA 8x42) and a powerful torch (Clulite 1M candle-power). Such signs may include insect remains, droppings, grease marks, urine stains and smoothing or lack of cobwebs.
- 2.1.4 Additionally, an initial ground level roost assessment of trees affected by the proposals was undertaken. This involved an inspection of the exterior of trees from the ground to look for features that bats could use for roosting (PRFs). Buildings and trees were assigned to a roost potential category based on the criteria presented in Table 1 below (Collins 2016).

Table 1 Bat Roost Assessment Criteria

Roost Potential Category	Description of Roosting Habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.
Low	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation).
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only – the assessments in this table are made

Roost Potential Category	Description of Roosting Habitats
	irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.

Badger

- 2.1.5 The survey was undertaken following the standardised methodology given by Harris *et al.* 1989. This included a search for badger setts, badger paths (including footprints), latrine sites (or dung pits), trapped hair on fences and evidence of foraging

2.2 Personnel

- 2.2.1 The survey was undertaken by Jon Guarnaccio MCIEEM. Jon has 18 years experience as an ecological consultant and holds survey licenses for numerous protected species including bats.

2.3 Survey Constraints

- 2.3.1 The survey was undertaken in October which lies outside the optimal period for undertaking botanical surveys. As such, some some plant species may have gone un-recorded. It should be noted that the behaviour of animals can be unpredictable and may not conform to standard patterns recorded in scientific literature. Therefore, this report cannot predict with absolute certainty that animal species will occur in apparently suitable locations or habitats, or that they will not occur in locations or habitats that appear unsuitable.

2.4 Ecological Evaluation

- 2.4.1 Habitats within the site have been evaluated in terms of their ecological importance. The importance of an ecological feature should be considered within a defined geographical context. In accordance with CIEEM 2019 guidelines the following frame of reference has been used:

- International and European
- National (UK)
- Regional (North West)
- Metropolitan/County (Greater Manchester)
- Local (Prestwich)

3 Results

3.1 Field Survey

Habitats

- 3.1.1 Figure 1 shows the results of the phase 1 habitat survey while individual habitat types are described in detail below. In general, the site comprises a mixture of hard standing, rank grassland, tall ruderal, scrub, scattered trees and introduced shrub. The site is located in a residential area on the eastern fringes of Prestwich immediately adjacent the Manchester - Bury tramline.

Species poor semi-improved grassland

- 3.1.2 Several discrete areas of grassland exist within the site, one area appearing to have once been a child play area. The grassland is tall and tussocky comprising a limited number of herbs indicative of nutrient rich grassland. Grass species include dominant rough meadow grass with red fescue, bent spp., perennial rye, tufted hair grass and Yorkshire fog. Herbs are restricted to common dock, broadleaved plantain, creeping buttercup, dandelion and willowherb spp.

Tall Ruderal

- 3.1.3 This habitat is most common on the eastern edges of the site and comprises willowherb spp. and common nettle.

Introduced shrub

- 3.1.4 A small discrete patch of Japanese knotweed exists on the eastern edge of the site and appears to have been treated with a herbicide. Variegated yellow archangel also occurs on the southern boundary of the site.

Scrub

- 3.1.5 The central areas of the site are dominated by dense bramble scrub (with sycamore saplings) intermixed with tall ruderal species. Scattered bramble and goat willow scrub exist on the eastern edges of the site.

Scattered trees

- 3.1.6 Several semi-mature/mature beech and sycamore trees occur along the southern site boundary.

Semi-natural broadleaved woodland

- 3.1.7 Secondary semi-natural woodland occurs in the north east corner of the site and forms an extension to woodland along the tramline cuttings. The woodland comprises a mixture of semi-mature and mature specimens including ash, goat willow, cherry spp., with holly, dog rose, wood avens, herb Robert and fern spp in the understorey and ground layer.

Protected Species

Bats

- 3.1.8 The results of the bat inspection survey are shown in Table 2 below. In summary, no evidence of bats was recorded although B1 was assessed as having moderate roost potential due to the presence of several gaps around gable end verges and under ridge tiles. None of the trees support potential roosting features for bats and these have therefore not been included within Table 2 to avoid unnecessary repetition. Although the site has relatively urban surroundings, the adjacent tramline is flanked by strips of woodland which provides excellent connectivity to the wider landscape, while Heaton Park is located 100 m to the east. As such, bat roosts are likely to be present in the locality i.e. in residential houses.

Table 2 Bat inspection Survey Results

Building	Description	Roosting Opportunities & Signs of Bat Use	Roost Potential
B1	Dating from 1897, the building was until recently used as a nursery but is now unoccupied. Constructed from solid brick walls set under an unlined pitched slate roof with ornate clay ridge tiles. The roof void has a floor to apex height of approx. 1.5 m and was very dusty with numerous pigeons present.	No evidence of bats was recorded but the building supports potential roosting features in the form of gaps at gable end verges where mortar pointing has perished. Gaps also exist under the occasional ridge tile. It is considered very unlikely that bats would use the roof space of the building giving that it is occupied by pigeons and the low floor to apex height.	Moderate
B2	Former row of single storey brick garages constructed from solid brick walls. The building does not support a roof.	No evidence of bats recorded, and no potential roosting features identified	Negligible

Badgers

- 3.1.9 No evidence of badgers was recorded within or adjacent the site although two disused mammal burrows (probably fox) were recorded within the adjacent tramline cutting. Badgers are however likely to be present in the locality given the presence of woodland along the tramline.

Other species

- 3.1.10 Trees and scrub habitats provide suitable nesting habitat for common garden birds while hedgehogs may also be present.

4 Discussion and Recommendations

4.1 Evaluation

- 4.1.1 The site comprises small areas of semi-natural habitat, most of which are of limited ecological value and all are common throughout Greater Manchester. Semi-natural broadleaved woodland is however a UK priority habitat type and although the small area of woodland that exists within the site is demonstrably not long standing, it does support several typical woodland herbs. Relatively low numbers of common garden birds are likely to nest within woody vegetation while crevice dwelling species such as blue tit may also utilise B1 for nesting. Low numbers of non-breeding pipistrelle bats may also roost at the northern gable ends of B1 and/or under ridge tiles. However, further survey information in the form of nocturnal surveys would be required to confirm this tentative conclusion and give confidence in the initial negative survey result. Despite no signs of badgers being recorded, it is considered likely that the species is present in the area with the wooded tramline cuttings providing optimal sett building habitat.
- 4.1.2 Taking the above information into consideration the site does not meet any of the evaluation criteria specified by CIEEM although this could change if bats are confirmed to be roosting in B1.

4.2 Assessment

- 4.2.1 It is not possible to fully assess the impacts of the planning proposals on bats until further nocturnal survey work has been completed. Such surveys can only be undertaken between May and August during suitable weather conditions i.e. warm (>8°C), calm and dry while survey data is valid for approximately 18 months.
- 4.2.2 Breeding bird habitat in the form of trees, scrub and B1 would be lost which would constitute an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) if any active nests were present at the time of clearance. However, given the limited extent of suitable habitat present, any impacts are likely to be negligible in respect of affecting the local breeding bird population.
- 4.2.3 In terms of habitats, the scheme is not predicted to result in any significant adverse ecological impacts given the low ecological value of these and that most of the woodland in the north east corner of the site will be retained. There is however the potential to infringe the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) through the inadvertent spread of the Schedule 9 listed species: Japanese knotweed and variegated yellow archangel.
- 4.2.4 Badgers could become trapped in any deep sided excavations although the risk of this occurring is considered low.

4.3 Recommendations

- 4.3.1 It is recommended B1 is subject to two nocturnal bat surveys to comply with best practice guidance and to fully assess the impacts of the scheme on bats. This in turn will enable proportionate mitigation measures to be developed but assuming

the building supports low numbers of non-breeding pipistrelle bats, access to the new buildings would be acceptable mitigation (see below).

- 4.3.2 Works affecting suitable bird nesting habitat should ideally be undertaken outside the breeding bird season which lasts from March to August inclusive. If this is not possible that pre works nest checks should be completed shortly before works commence. If nesting was confirmed, works in the vicinity would need to be postponed until chicks had fledged the nest.
- 4.3.3 Care should be taken when clearing sections of scrub and tall vegetation to ensure that hedgehogs are not harmed. This can be achieved through the gradual clearance of small areas of vegetation with frequent checks for hedgehogs during the clearance process.
- 4.3.4 Japanese knotweed and variegated yellow archangel should be eradicated with a herbicide prior to earthworks commencing. Plant and machinery should be subject to regular cleaning and washing when entering/exiting site to ensure no Schedule 9 species are introduced or to the site or spread elsewhere.
- 4.3.5 Steep sided excavations left uncovered overnight during the construction phase should have mammal ramps positioned within these to allow any trapped animals such as badgers and hedgehogs to escape.
- 4.3.6 There are opportunities to enhance the biodiversity value of the development through relatively simple and inexpensive measures. This can be achieved by installing integral bird nesting units and bat roosting units within the new buildings. It is recommended that one bat and one bird (swift and sparrow) nesting unit is installed in each dwelling, these being positioned on separate gable ends close to apexes and/or under the eaves (>5 m from ground level). Such units can be faced with any material to ensure that they will blend in seamlessly and appear almost unnoticeable from ground level.
- 4.3.7 The landscaping proposals should include native species of local origin. For instance, a number of new trees are proposed, and these should include rowan, silver birch and fruit varieties. Fencing around the site boundaries should be substituted for native hedgerows comprising hawthorn, holly, elder, hazel, guelder rose and honeysuckle as these will provide shelter and a source of food for wildlife, while not representing physical barriers to species such as hedgehog. Additionally, a small retained area of tall ruderal habitat in the north east corner of the site should be planted with standard trees to compensate for the loss of a small area of semi-natural woodland. Species should include oak, field maple, hazel, holly and hawthorn.

5 References

Collins J (2016). *Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines*. Third Edition. BCT, London.

JNCC (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit*. JNCC, Peterborough.

Mitchell-Jones AJ (2004). *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature, Peterborough.

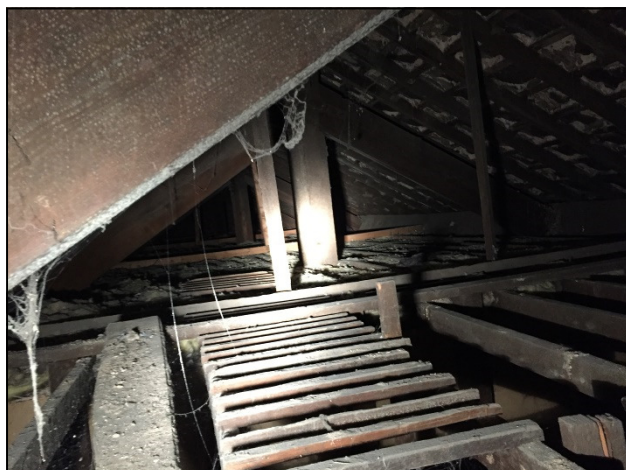


Plate 1 Roof void of B1)



Plate 2 Missing mortar at gable end of B1 provides potential roosting habitat for bats



Plate 3 B2



Plate 4 Grassland within site

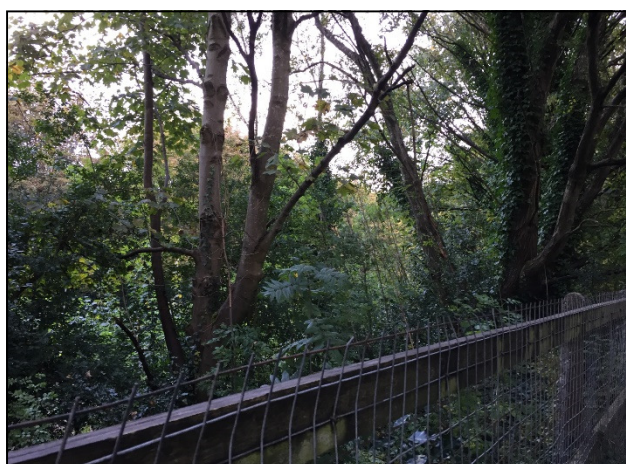
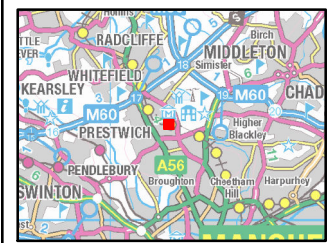


Plate 5 Woodland along tramline extends into site



Plate 6 Looking west, note Japanese knotweed in foreground

TARGET NOTES
 1. Japanese knotweed
 2. Variegated yellow archangel



Legend

- Application site
- Habitat**
- Semi-natural broadleaved woodland
- Dense/continuous scrub
- SI Poor semi-improved grassland
- Tall herb and fern - ruderal
- Introduced shrub
- Building
- Bare ground
- Hardstanding
- Fence
- Wall
- Broadleaved tree
- Scattered scrub
- Target note

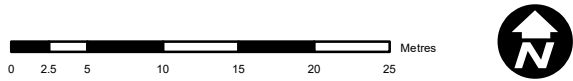
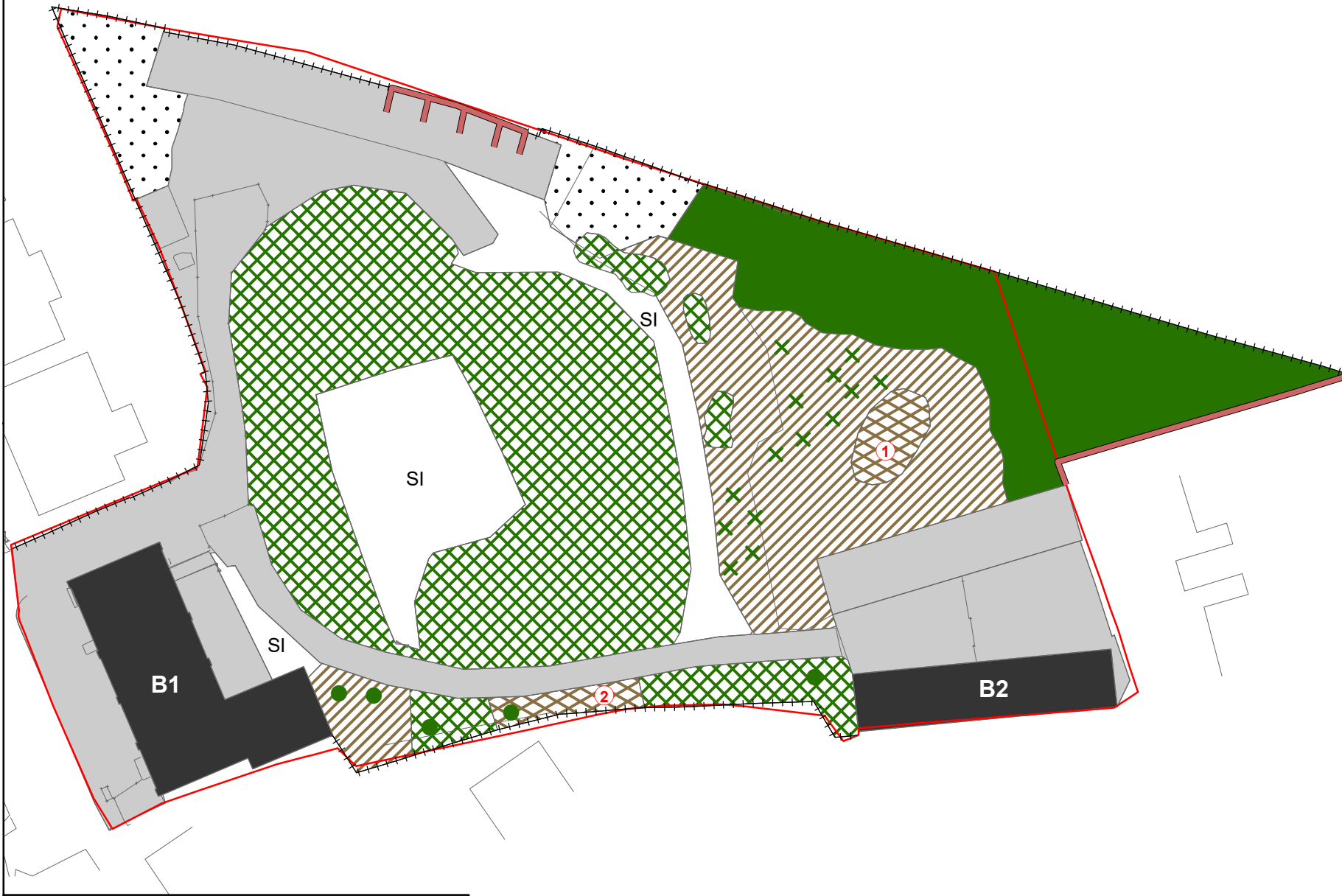


Figure 1
Phase 1 Habitat Survey

Earl Street, Prestwich

Scale 1:500 @ A4		Drawing No. Figure 1	
Drawn By CC	Originator JG	Date APR 2021	
Ref.		Revision A	