

Technical Note

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Reference	Land to the east of Clitheroe Road (Lawsonstead), Whalley
Report title	Technical Note: Ecology Update
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Background

Many thanks for your recent request for an ecological update for the new proposed locations for the balancing pond at the site to the east of Clitheroe Road, Whalley. It is understood that the approved location is no longer considered to be suitable due to potential major damage to existing aqueducts. Therefore, it has been proposed to reduce the area of the pond in this location (Pond A) and create a new balancing pond further to the east (Pond B).

This technical note reviews the information for the new ponds and assesses the ecological impacts as well as recommending suitable mitigation measures to reduce any impact identified.

Habitats

The ponds are situated within areas that were originally improved grassland, adjacent to riparian woodland and stream (referred to as TN1 in the Ecological Appraisal, Baker Consultants, dated 2013). The woodland and stream habitat was noted to be of ecological value and as such is to be retained as part of the development. No additional adverse impact towards this area of habitat has been identified.

There will be loss of alder trees (referenced T9 and G5 on the updated tree survey) at Pond B. These trees are considered to be of low value and can be mitigated for in the medium to long term. However, they do hold value for other species groups and this is discussed further in the next section below.

A landscape management plan for the new ponds has been proposed, which includes proposals that will be of benefit to wildlife along this area of open space. Proposals include planting the area with wildflowers and new trees and shrubs.

Protected species

Breeding birds

The proposed new balancing pond locations do not change the impact and recommendations stated within the ecological appraisal (2013). Vegetation clearance and the felling of trees and shrubs, if undertaken during the bird breeding season, could potentially damage or disturb active nests and result in an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This can be avoided by timing works to remove vegetation in the autumn/winter months outside the bird breeding season, which is generally March to August.

The stream and woodland to the south (TN1) are considered to be of value for the local bird population and, as this is to be retained, no impact to breeding bird habitat is anticipated. In addition, the landscape proposals for the new balancing ponds provide additional habitat for bird species.

Bats

The southern stream and woodland (TN1) were identified to be an important commuting route for bats travelling from Whalley to Spring Woods to the east of the site. The proposed new balancing ponds are unlikely to have any adverse impact towards this bat population. Further to this, the ponds and the landscape proposals will provide suitable additional foraging features for bats.

As part of the original survey, a bat roost assessment of the trees was carried out. One of the alder trees to be removed (T9) was shown to support bat roosting features with two large cavities fronted by deadwood, leaving a dry cavity to the rear with good access for bats. Although no evidence of bats was recorded, it was recommended that “should this tree require any major pruning or if it is to be removed as a result of the development, then the tree should be re-climbed prior to works being undertaken, and taken down under the supervision of a licensed ecologist”.

Bats and their habitats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). There could be the potential to disturb and destroy bat roosts. In addition, if bats are present at the time of the works then it is likely that bats would be disturbed and/or potentially killed and injured. Such an impact is likely to give rise to an offence under the legislation set out above.

Summary of Recommendations

The landscape proposals for the new balancing ponds, such as the wildflower seed and tree planting, along with the proposed maintenance of the area, are welcomed and it is likely that this will enhance the riparian woodland and stream open space for local wildlife.

Additional recommendations in response to the new balancing pond locations include the following:

- To avoid committing an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act it will be necessary to programme all construction works that might directly impact upon breeding birds to the September-February period.
- The alder trees, particularly T9, should be assessed for the presence of bats prior to felling. This will be achieved by carrying out a tree climb to check for signs of bats, or by way of a dawn re-entry survey on the morning of the felling. The tree should then be felled under the supervision of an ecologist. Please note, if bats are found then a mitigation licence from Natural England will need to be sought prior to the commencement of the proposed felling. Mitigation measures will need to be submitted as part of the application, including proposals for replacing the roost (suitable bat boxes, or the section of the tree supporting the roost to be attached to a retained tree within the woodland), and timing of works to avoid killing or injuring individual bats.

