

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

**Barn on land adjacent to Miles Hill,
Moor Lane,
Billington,
BB7 9JH**

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**Report prepared by:
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Summary

In May 2024 Batworker Ecological Consultancy was commissioned to undertake a preliminary ecological appraisal of a barn on land adjacent to Miles Hill, Moor Lane, Billington, BB7 9JH to support an application for a proposed residential development including landscaping and access.

A daytime walkover survey was carried out on 30th May 2024 in order to assess the ecological, biodiversity and nature conservation status of the land.

This report presents the results of a desktop study and extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey.

The scope of the survey is appropriate to identify potential ecological constraints, mitigation required, and opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.

The site is assessed as low conservation value, no affected habitats within the site are Priority Habitat, and no protected species were observed.

No significant ecological constraints as a result of development proposals have been detected at the site.

The proposed development will result in the loss of a small area of improved grassland, being predominately located on an area of concrete plinth and hardstanding.

The development offers considerable potential to create enhancements for biodiversity via a post development biodiversity enhancement and management scheme.

Introduction

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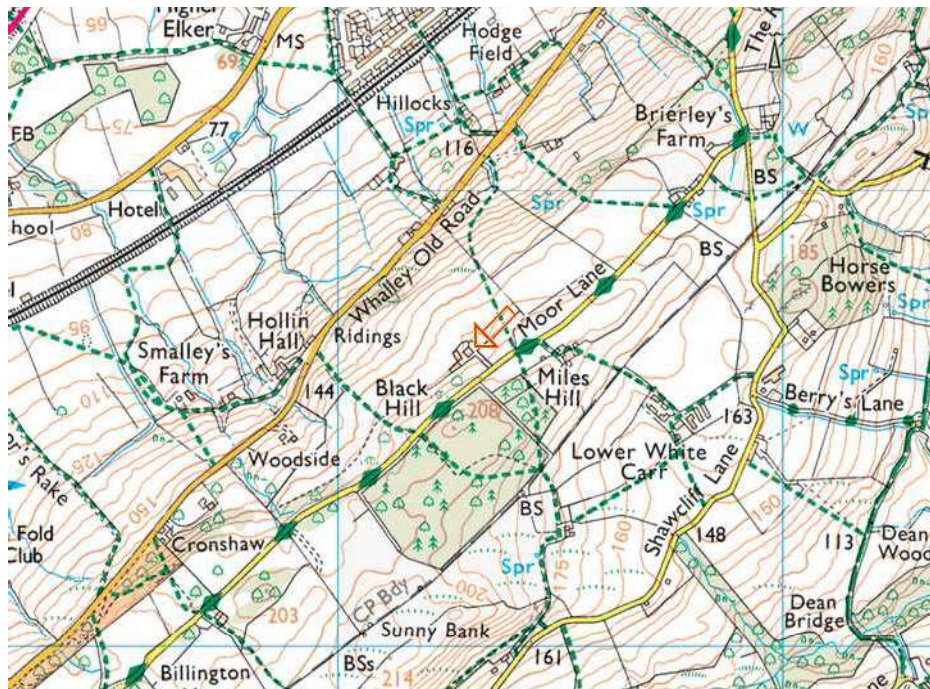
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Survey and Site Assessment

Objectives of the survey

The purpose of the survey was to identify and map all habitats occurring within the survey area, and identify the presence of species present with particular reference to the need for further surveys and legal requirements, and provide an ecological assessment identifying potential impacts.

Survey site location



A central grid reference for the site is SD7230534653

Scope of Assessment

The scope of ecological surveys undertaken comprised of :

- ! A desktop study for known ecological information at the site and the local area.
- ! An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and assessment.
- ! Assessment of the ecological value of the habitats within the site with the use of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC).
- ! Survey and assessment of all habitats for statutorily protected species and other wildlife including badger (*Meles meles*), great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*), bats, bird species, invertebrates and reptiles.
- ! The identification of any potential ecological constraints on the proposals and the potential for biodiversity enhancement required in accordance with planning policy guidance, wildlife legislation, and best practice.
- ! The identification of any further surveys or precautionary actions that may be required prior to the commencement of any development activities.

Field Survey Methodology

The ecological value of the survey area has been assessed based on the Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment (CIEEM, 2018). The biodiversity value of any habitat types and associated species assemblages has been assessed.

The plant species within the site boundary were recorded with estimates of the distribution, ground cover, abundance and constancy of individual species.

Stands of vegetation and habitats were described and evaluated using the National Vegetation Classification (NVC).

A survey of the site and surrounding habitat was carried out to assess potential for the presence of protected species (*Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, the Wildlife & Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended), including those protected under the NERC Act 2006 and Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000*) in line with published guidelines. This included a search for field signs, and assessment of pond habitat where applicable.

The potential of the proposed development to impact upon any great crested newt population(s) breeding ponds within 250 metres has been considered.

Bird species observed and heard during the survey were recorded. Habitats throughout the site and in the immediate surrounding area were assessed for their value to nesting birds.

Invasive species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981 as amended 1996) were also searched for and recorded throughout the survey area.

Pre Existing data on local species

The desktop study involved conducting database searches for statutory and non-statutory designated sites and European Protected Species (EPS) licensing applications within a 2km radius of the site. The baseline conditions are based on a review of existing available information including:

- ! MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside) website (to identify statutory designated sites and EPS licences).
- ! Ordnance Survey mapping (to identify potentially notable habitats including ponds).
- ! Aerial photography (to identify potentially notable habitats).

The site lies within an Impact Risk Zone for Cock Wood Gorge Site of Special Scientific Interest (2.3km to the east) and Harper Clough and Smalley Delph Quarries (2.6km to the south), however the development does not fall within a relevant impact risk category.

Development	Impact Risk
All Planning Applications	
Infrastructure	Airports, helipads and other aviation proposals.
Wind & Solar Energy	
Minerals, Oil & Gas	Planning applications for quarries, including: new proposals, Review of Minerals Permissions (ROMP), extensions, variations to conditions etc. Oil & gas exploration/extraction.
Rural Non Residential	
Residential	
Rural Residential	
Air Pollution	
Combustion	
Waste	
Discharges	
Water Supply	

A search of the MAGIC website revealed no EPS licence applications within a 1km radius.

Natural England Great Crested Newt (GCN) Pond Surveys 2017 – 2019 dataset has no pond records within 500m of the site.

Natural England Great Crested Newt Class Survey Licence Returns (England) 2017 – 2019 dataset has no records within 500m of the site

Given the nature of the site, and limited natural habitats within it was no considered that a data search with the Greater Manchester Local Record Centre was necessary.

Survey Summary

Survey	Date	Timings
Daytime Walkover	30.05.2024	2 hours.

Personnel

All surveys were conducted by Dave Anderson MSc, Natural England Science, Education and Conservation bat licence holder (2015-15784-CLS-CLS), a bat surveyor and ecologist with 20+ years experience, having formerly managed the East Lancashire Biological Records Centre.

Survey constraints

Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the presence of plants and animals such as the time of year, migration patterns and behaviour. Therefore the survey of the study area should not be considered to have produced a complete list of plants and animals present.

Desk study data should not be treated as a definitive list of species present within a search area. Many species are under-recorded and low numbers of records can reflect a lack of survey effort in some areas, rather than confirm the absence of a species.

The entire site was accessible and habitats present on site are commonly occurring and of limited ecological value. Therefore the survey timing is not considered to be a major limiting factor on the assessment of the habitats present and their potential to support legally protected species.

Results



Survey site (red outline) context in relation to surrounding habitat.

The site is located in a rural position with surrounding habitat a mosaic of improved and semi improved grassland with some hedgerow and scattered deciduous tree cover along field boundaries, Billington Moor Plantation, an area of semi natural deciduous woodland is located to the south of the site.

Habitat survey



Habitat Map with target noted features

Target Note 1 – Buildings on site are predominately focussed within an area of concrete plinth and hardstanding. The main barn is a steel framed portal style building with single skin timber walls. Roof panels are unlined and exposed to the interior.



Target Note 2 – The middle barn is a steel framed portal style single skin timber building with double pitched corrugated metal roof. Roof panels are unlined and exposed to the interior.



Target Note 3 – A single skin timber lean to store with single pitched corrugated metal roof is present on the south western boundary. Roof panels are unlined and exposed to the interior.



Target Note 4 – The north western section of the site consists of colonising improved grassland with Himalayan Balsam present along the site boundary fence



Target Note 5 – The northern boundary is dominated by a dung heap with colonising Himalayan Balsam



Target Note 6 – A passing place is proposed on the existing access track which is bordered by gappy predominately hawthorn and holly hedgerow. Positioning will result in a small area of semi improved grassland.

Common name	Scientific name	DAFOR
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Creeping Bent	<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	F
Meadow Foxtail	<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>	F
Common Mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	A
Creeping Thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	O
Spear Thistle	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	O
Cocks Foot	<i>Dactylus glomerata</i>	A
Common Couch	<i>Elytrigia repens</i>	A
Herb Robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	O
Yorkshire Fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	O
Himalayan balsam	<i>Impatiens glandulifera</i>	F
Perennial Rye-grass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>	A
Timothy	<i>Phleum pratense</i>	F
Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	O
Annual Meadow-grass	<i>Poa annua</i>	A
Rough Meadow Grass	<i>Poa trivialis</i>	A
Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	O
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	O
White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	O
Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	O
Brooklime	<i>Veronica beccabunga</i>	O
Common field speedwell	<i>Veronica persica</i>	O
DAFOR scale: D = Dominant; A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional, R = Rare.		

Breeding birds

No nesting birds were observed during the survey, however, suitable nesting and foraging resources for common woodland and urban fringe bird species are present on site. Nesting potential is available within taller vegetation, trees and shrubs on the site boundary

No evidence to suggest use of the site by Barn Owls was observed.

Badgers

No evidence to suggest badgers were present on the site or using the site to forage, and no evidence was recorded within 100m of the site. It is considered that reasonable avoidance measures are an appropriate approach to managing risk on site given proximity to woodland.

Amphibians

The site has limited habitat and refugia features suitable for amphibians such as common toad and common frogs, reasonable avoidance measures are recommended as an appropriate mitigation measure.

Great Crested Newt

No water bodies are located within 250m of the site, it is considered that general amphibian reasonable avoidance measures are an appropriate mitigation measure.

Other fauna.

The site is likely to support small populations of other priority species such as hedgehog.

Preliminary bat roost assessment.

A daytime visual survey of buildings on site was carried out focussing on presence of physical evidence such as droppings, feeding remains, grease marking and urea splashing. The buildings were searched to confirm presence/absence of cracks, gaps cavities and crevices suitable for roosting bats.

The buildings on site were assessed as offering negligible bat roosting potential.

Invasive non native plant species.



Areas with Himalayan Balsam marked in red.

Evidence of developing stands of Himalayan Balsam were observed along site boundaries.

Evaluation of the results

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Mitigation and Biodiversity Enhancement Measures.

These measures ensure that the development is implemented in accordance with the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), all relevant wildlife legislation, Natural England guidance, local planning policy and best practice.

The recommendations are reasonable and proportionate in order to address potential impacts identified during the survey. They offer an opportunity to ensure continued ecological connectivity, protect nearby habitats and species, and provide a level of biodiversity net gain.

Nesting Bird Mitigation Strategy

Vegetation clearance works where necessary will be carried out outside the bird nesting season (i.e. outwith March to August inclusive)

or

Following a nesting bird survey carried out by a suitably experienced ecologist no more than 48 hours in advance of works to ensure that no nesting birds will be harmed/disturbed during works.

If an active bird nest is detected at any point, works in that sector will immediately cease and an area of 5m radius around the nest will be cordoned off and clearly marked using hi-visibility tape and appropriate signage to prevent disturbance to nesting birds.

Any noisy machinery, or activity, will be moved at least 10m away from the location of the nest.

Works within the cordoned off area where active bird nests have been detected will only proceed once an experienced ecologist has confirmed the nests are no longer active.

Lighting Mitigation with regard to foraging bats

Any lighting to be used at the site during construction should be directional and screened where possible, lighting should be in accordance with guidance provided within *Guidance Note 8 Bats and artificial lighting, ILP/BCT 2018 and* included within a Construction Environment Management Plan.

Post development lighting should be directional and focussed to ensure dark corridors along the site boundaries ensuring no light spillage in order to maintain foraging and commuting potential for bats.

Hand searches within dense vegetation will take into account common amphibians, hedgehog and other small mammals.

Any hedgehogs or small mammals caught will be allowed to disperse, or if caught will be released into the adjacent habitat on the northern boundary of the site, away from the development site.

Any toads or common amphibians that are caught during hand searching will be released into adjacent terrestrial habitat, away from the development site.

Once the hand searches have taken place for both amphibians and small mammals the areas of improved grassland and ruderal vegetation will be strimmed to 100mm to remove amphibian foraging habitat from site and discourage amphibians, hedgehogs and other small mammals from using the site.

In areas likely to support reptiles/amphibians there may be a need for a two phased cut, one to ankle level (c.150mm), with a second cut to ground level following at least 24hrs later to allow amphibians/reptiles to escape. The ECoW will advise on such requirements according to the length and density of the vegetation.

The clearance of vegetation and destructive searching in areas likely to support reptiles will only take place when temperatures are greater than 10°C.

All excavations on site should be covered at night or a ramp should be provided to allow amphibians to exit excavations. All excavations should be checked for amphibians and small mammals each morning prior to the re-commencement of any works.

All exposed new pipework and drains should be capped at night so as to avoid trapping amphibians and small mammals.

All excavated materials/waste should be stored in skips or similar and not on the ground where it could be used as a refuge/resting area by amphibians and small mammals. Alternatively all waste should be removed from site daily.

Scaffold footings will be placed on sand to prevent creating temporary refugia underneath the footings.

Materials will be delivered and stored in an area of the site which is already hard standing.

Stored items will be raised off the ground (whether stored on amenity grass or hard standing) on pallets to remove any refuge potential.

Aggregates such as gravel and sand will be delivered in bulk bags and stored on pallets to remove any refuge potential.

Management of Himalayan Balsam.

The site/works manager and key workers to be informed of the presence of Himalayan Balsam within working areas as part of the Toolbox Talk.

Stands of Himalayan Balsam will be identified and marked as part of a pre works survey by the EcoW.

Equipment and machinery entering working areas should be clean and free from plant material or soil from other locations in order to minimise risk of introduction of invasive species.

Measures should be put in place to ensure machinery/equipment leaving the site is checked and cleaned to ensure it is clear of contamination.

Contaminated areas will be marked and targetted for vegetation control measures.

Himalayan Balsam will be controlled via herbicide, cutting, either by hand, mower or strimmer.

The plants will be cut below the lowest node close to soil level. Repeated cutting/mowing will be undertaken to prevent regrowth. Smaller stands can be hand pulled.

Cutting must take place prior to the plants producing seed. If hand pulling after this time, bag plant tops to prevent seed spread.

Cut or pulled plants to be left on site in the open to allow stems and roots to dry out and die quickly.

Large volumes will be left in piles to compost and covered in tarpaulins to prevent regrowth.

Recommended Biodiversity Enhancement



The proposed development includes considerable habitat and biodiversity enhancement including tree and hedgerow planting along the western, northern and eastern boundaries.

Boundary Hedgerow

The south eastern boundary offers opportunities for hedgerow planting in order to provide biodiversity net gain with a native species mix to provide foraging potential for insects and birds will follow the following recommendations.

Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	50%
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	20%
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	20%
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	10%

Tree species for landscaping.

Tree species for proposed landscaping should be a mix of native species which offer habitat for insects and autumn foraging for birds.

Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Silver Birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus montana</i>
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Bird Cherry	<i>Prunus padus</i>
Common Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>