

Appendix 5146/1:

Walnut Tree, Highgate Over

Site Name: Walnut Tree, Highgate Over

Grid Reference: SP 89831 36755

Location Plan:



Ecological Features/Constraints

Designated Sites

Statutory Designations. The site itself is not subject to any statutory ecological designations and there are no international ecological designations within 15km of the site. The closest statutory designation is Wavendon Heath Ponds Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located approximately 4.2km south-east of the site. The site does not lie within any relevant SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZ).

Non-Statutory Designations. The site itself is not subject to any non-statutory ecological designations. The nearest non-statutory designation is Walton Lake Local Wildlife Site (LWS) located approximately 1.7km to the west of the site. The site is designated for its ancient woodland habitats. A number of Biological Notification Sites (BNS) are also located within the 2km search area, the closest of which is a pond at Kent's Hill Spinney located approximately 1.2km to the north of the site.

Ancient Woodland, Ancient, Veteran or Notable Trees. There is no ancient woodland or notable trees present within or in the vicinity of the site boundary.

Habitats

Background records. The desktop study returned no specific historical records of protected, rare or notable plants from within the site boundary. The closest record of a notable plant species was for Fringed Water Lily *Nymphoides peltata* recorded approximately 750m south of the site boundary.

Habitat descriptions. The site comprises poor semi-improved grassland with scattered mature and semi-mature trees and scrub. The site is bound to the south and east by an existing car park and amenity grass verges associated with adjacent development. To the north and west the site is bound by existing residential properties with associated roads and amenity grassland.

Poor Semi-improved Grassland

The site is mostly dominated by relatively species-poor semi-improved grassland. Species recorded within the grassland include Perennial Rye Grass *Lolium perenne*, Fescue *Festuca* sp., Cock's Foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, Cut-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium dissectum*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, Cleavers *Galium aparine*, Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, Ivy *Hedera helix* and Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*.

Scrub

Several areas of scrub are present throughout the site, the most extensive of which is a linear strip forming the southern boundary. Species recorded include Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., Dog-rose *Rosa canina*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. A small number of ornamental varieties of Laurel *Laurus* sp., Snowberry *Symphoricarpos* sp. and Rose *Rosa* sp. are also present.

Trees

A number of mature and semi-mature trees are present within the site. The majority of these are situated within the north and west of the site or associated with the area of scattered scrub to the south. Species recorded include Willow *Salix* sp., Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. Two dead English Elm *Ulmus minor* are also present within the scattered scrub to the south of the site.

Species

Badger

Background records. The desktop study returned no records of Badger within or adjacent to the site boundary. The closest record was located approximately 880m to the north-east of the site.

Survey results. The habitats within the site are suitable for Badger but the site is located adjacent to areas of high human disturbance including a health centre and a school. No evidence of Badger was recorded during the survey, and given the setting of the site and lack of nearby records Badger are unlikely to be present in the vicinity.

Bats

Background records. The desktop study returned no bat records within or adjacent to the site boundary. The closest record is of a Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* bat approximately 250m south-west of the site.

Survey results. No buildings are present on site. Two trees were recorded to have features which may provide opportunities for roosting bats.

Tree T1 (see photograph below). A mature Willow to the east of the site has a narrow crack in the main trunk which may lead to a crevice suitable for roosting bats. Overall T1 has low bat roost potential.

Tree T2 (see photograph below). A mature Willow located on the northern boundary of the site was recorded to have a small number of small rot holes which may lead to small crevices suitable for roosting bats. Overall T2 has low bat roost potential.

The site is small in size and set in a suburban area, and is therefore of limited value to bats but it is possible that the linear ditch/scrub feature may be used by common bat species (were they to be present in the area) as part of a wider foraging and commuting network.

Other Mammals

Background records. The desktop study returned no records of other mammals within or adjacent to the site boundary. The closest record returned was for a Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* located approximately 1km to the south-east of the site.

Survey results. Habitats within the site are suitable, however no evidence of other mammals such as Fox *Vulpes vulpes* or Hedgehog using the site was recorded during survey work.

Reptiles

Background records. The desktop study returned no records of reptiles within or adjacent to the site boundary. The closest record is of a Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* 1.6km west of the site.

Survey results. No reptiles were recorded within the site during the Phase 1 habitat survey. Although some limited areas of the site (such as the tussocks located within the grassland) may be suitable for reptiles, these areas are very small in extent and isolated from other suitable habitats by roads and existing development. Overall, it is considered unlikely that reptiles are present within the site.

Amphibians

Background records. The desktop study returned no records of Great Crested Newt within or adjacent to the site boundary. There are several Great Crested Newt records within 2km of the site, predominantly to the north and west, with the closest approximately 500m to the west.

Survey results. No ponds are present within the site or within 250m of the site boundary, and the site is isolated from larger areas of suitable habitat by roads and existing development. Therefore it is considered Great Crested Newts are unlikely to be present within the site.

Birds

Background records. The desktop study returned no specific historical records of protected bird species from within the site. The majority of records returned were associated with Caldecotte Lake to the south-west of the site. The nearest record of a Red Listed Bird of Conservation Concern (BoCC)³ is a record of Skylark *Alauda arvensis* approximately 400m east of the site.

Survey results. During the extended phase 1 survey a small number of common bird species were recorded within the site including Dunnock *Prunella modularis* which is an Amber Listed BoCC and a UK Priority Species. The trees and scrub within the site are suitable for nesting birds and therefore mitigation will be required for any removal of suitable vegetation during the nesting season (see below).

Invertebrates

Background records. The desktop study returned no specific historical records of notable invertebrate species from within or adjacent to the site. A small number of records of butterflies and moths were returned from the wider search area, the closest being a record of Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* butterfly located approximately 300m north of the site.

Survey results. No notable invertebrates were recorded within the site during the survey. The site is small in size and dominated by semi-improved grassland with areas of scrub which are likely to support a limited diversity of invertebrates. Therefore it is considered unlikely that protected or notable invertebrate populations are present within the site.

Outline Mitigation Framework

Further Survey/Assessment: Two trees with low potential to support roosting bats are present within the site. Under current guidance⁴ no further survey work is required for trees with low bat roosting potential. However it is recommended that these trees are re-assessed prior to submission of any planning application to ensure their suitability has not changed.

Mitigation: Based on the above appraisal, any future development of the site will require mitigation for nesting birds. All birds and their active nests are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended.

Accordingly, in order to prevent damage or destruction of nests and avoid a potential offence, any clearance of suitable habitats will be undertaken outside of the breeding season (i.e. outside of March to August inclusive) or following a negative result of a nesting bird check undertaken by an Ecologist. These checking surveys should be carried out no more than three days in advance of vegetation clearance. Should any actively used nests be found, these should be cordoned off within a suitable buffer and protected until the nest is no longer active.

If re-assessment of T1 and T2 concludes they still have low bat roosting potential then precautionary mitigation measures in the form of “soft-felling” is recommended. This will involve the sensitive removal of trees at a time of year considered less sensitive to roosting bats (March – May inclusive and September – November inclusive) by an experienced tree surgeon under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist. The tree will be sectioned either side of

³ Eaton MA, Aebischer NJ, Brown AF, Hearn RD, Lock L, Musgrove AJ, Noble DG, Stroud DA and Gregory RD (2015) ‘Birds of Conservation Concern 4: the population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man’ British Birds 108, pp.708-746

⁴ Bat Conservation Trust (2016) Bat Surveys For Professional Ecologists

features potentially suitable to roosting bats (such as splits, cracks, rot holes, cavities, etc.) with chocks used to keep any torsion splits / hazard beams open upon release of tension and the sections will be slowly lowered and cushioned from impact as they are brought to the ground.

Opportunities for Enhancement

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages new developments to maximise the opportunities for biodiversity through incorporation of enhancement measures.

Future development of the site presents the opportunity to deliver ecological enhancements such as bird and bat boxes, native planting, planting of pollen and nectar rich flowers to benefit invertebrates, Hedgehog domes, and living infrastructure such as green roofs and walls.

Photographs

Tree T1



Tree T2

