



JAMES BLAKE ASSOCIATES

Our Ref: JBA 18-351 ECO29 BFH

25th March 2022

Persimmon Homes (Suffolk)

RE: Updated Ecological Walkover Survey of Phases 2-6 and the relief road at Haverhill, Suffolk.

Introduction and Background

James Blake Associates Ltd. (JBA) was instructed by Persimmon Homes (Suffolk) to undertake an updated ecological walkover survey of land at Haverhill, Suffolk to assess the potential for protected species and invasive & non-native species and provide a report to summarise the findings of the walkover survey, highlighting any significant constraints for the site since the previous surveys in 2018 and 2019 and previous species-specific reports (2019-2020).

The site is approximately 34.1 hectares in size and located northwest of Haverhill Road (A143) on the western outskirts of the town of Haverhill, Suffolk. Arable fields border the site with residential housing to the south. Norney Plantation County Wildlife Site (CWS), an area of ancient, replanted woodland, is approximately 65m north of the site boundary. The wider landscape includes mainly arable fields with scattered woodland. The river Stour lay approximately 1.8km east of the site, and the Stour Brook lay approximately 300m south, along with a series of drainage ditches (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Site Location (Reproduced from Magic maps data licence number 100059700)



A previous phase 1 habitat survey for the relief road was undertaken in 2018, which noted the site as a series of arable and tall ruderal fields with managed hedgerows, scattered boundary trees, and wet and dry ditches. Additionally, in 2019, a preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) for phases 2-6 was undertaken which described the site as fields of poor semi-improved grassland and tall ruderal

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vegetation, with amenity grassland margins and defunct species-poor hedgerow. Other habitats recorded on site included:

- Intact species-rich hedgerow
- Defunct species-rich hedgerow
- Dense scrub
- Mixed plantation

The updated ecological walkover survey was undertaken on the 22nd March 2022 by Bethan Feeney-Howells BSc (Hons) and Sarah Jarrett MSc. This report is intended to give an overview of the site habitat(s) and condition at the time of the survey and should be read in conjunction with the previous phase 1 habitat survey (JBA, 2018) and preliminary ecological appraisal (JBA, 2019a).

The survey methodology followed the standard Phase 1 methodology of Joint Nature Conservation Committee Guidelines (JNCC, 2010). An extension of this basic methodology was also undertaken to provide further details in relation to notable or protected habitats present within the survey area, or in relation to habitats present that have the potential to support notable or protected species (CIEEM, 2013).

The baseline conditions reported in this document represent those identified at the time of the survey on 22nd March 2022. Although a reasonable assessment of habitats present can be made during a single walkover survey, seasonal variations are not observed.

The relevant wildlife legislations and planning policies are listed below:

- Conservation of Habitats and Species 2019 (Amendment) (EU Exit) 2019, ('The Habitats Regulations'). The Habitats Regulations implement The Habitats Directive 1992 (92/43/EEC) into English Law. (Amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) Regulations 2012 S.I. 2012/1927).

- Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended) (WCA). [Amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)].

- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006 (NERC).

- The Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (The Badgers Act).

- The Wild Mammals (Protection) Act, 1996.

- The Hedgerows Regulations, 2007.

- National Planning Policy Framework, 2021 (NPPF).

Results and Evaluation

The site itself has seen some change since the previous reports in 2018 and 2019. Consequently, the validity of results within previous species-specific reports has also been discussed within this report. Majority of changes on site have occurred due to ongoing construction works of the planned housing development on site. However, as stated in the previous PEA (JBA, 2019), the site is still considered suitable for [REDACTED] breeding birds, wintering birds, foraging and commuting bats, hedgehog and potentially reptiles [REDACTED] way from areas of active construction.

Construction works has commenced on Phases 2A/B and clearance works has commenced on Phase 3A and 6, with protection fences in place.

Further changes recorded include partial removal of species-rich hedgerow towards the northeast (G37 and G43) as per the tree removal plans (JBA, 2020a), clearance of the majority of scrub towards the southern boundary although the mixed plantation on the south boundary has been retained, and several ditches which were previously recorded as dry in the PEA (JBA, 2019a), are now wet due to recent clearance works to open up these habitats (See Appendix 1 for updated Habitat Map).



Bats

The previous PEA and phase 1 habitat surveys identified one 'moderate' bat roost potential (BRP) tree, and two 'low' BRP trees, all of which remain present on site and unchanged in their BRP. If any of these trees with BRP are to be impacted in any way by the proposed development, bat emergence and return to roost surveys will be required. The bat activity report (JBA, 2019c) found several bat species using majority of the hedgerow on site for foraging and commuting. The updated walkover survey noted that habitats on site, despite the loss of some semi-improved grassland and hedgerow towards the east of the site due to construction, still remain 'moderate' in their potential to support foraging and commuting bats.

Therefore, the recommendations as well as the compensation and avoidance measures within the bat activity report remain valid and should be followed to avoid long-term disturbances to this species.

Hedgehog

Habitats on site still provide moderate suitability for hedgehogs due to hedgerows, scrub, field margins and undisturbed semi-improved grassland away from areas of active construction.

No evidence of activity was recorded at the time of the survey. However, precautionary clearance should be followed where vegetation is cut to 20cm and checked for the species prior to removal.

Water vole

The previous PEA (JBA, 2019a) recorded no wet ditches onsite; however, at the time of the updated survey several ditches, particularly to the north, west and along the central hedgerow furthest west, were recorded as wet. The previous phase 1 habitat survey (JBA, 2018) also recorded these ditches as wet. Majority of these wet ditches were slow flowing and shallow and therefore are still considered unsuitable for water vole.

A habitat assessment for water vole was undertaken in October 2020 which concluded '*majority of the watercourse at the western boundary of the site is considered suitable or sub-optimal for water vole*' and that '*the proposed relief road development is unlikely to come within 10m of the suitable water vole habitat; however, works within 10m of the suitable habitats (if required) will be undertaken under the supervision of an ecologist*'. These observations remain unchanged, and the recommendations are still valid.

Dormice

A previous survey for hazel dormice, conducted in 2019 (JBA, 2019d), found no evidence of activity within hedgerow habitat on site, despite species-rich, continuous hedgerow being highlighted in the previous PEA report. Results from the updated walkover survey show hedgerow have not increased in their suitability for dormice, with the previously mentioned species-rich hedgerow (G37 and G43) having

been cleared, and therefore results from the hazel dormice report remain valid and recommendations for post-construction habitat enhancement have been provided.

Birds

Hedgerow and trees on site still provide good nesting and foraging opportunities for birds, with undisturbed semi-improved and tall ruderal fields away from construction in the east, also still considered suitable for ground nesting birds, with skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*), a Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) red listed species (RSPB, 2021), recorded at the time of the updated survey towards the northwest of the site, and also within the previous phase 1 habitat survey and breeding bird survey (JBA, 2018, 2019e). Skylarks were not recorded within the red line boundary of the infrastructure phase, at the time of the survey. The breeding bird survey highlighted the need for compensation for 7 pairs of skylarks, and this is currently in progress. Furthermore, the wintering bird survey carried out in 2020 (JBA, 2020), confirmed several species wintering on site including skylark, with mitigation recommendations and enhancements provided. Bird species recorded on site at the time of the updated survey included buzzard (*Buteo Buteo*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), blackbird (*Turdus merula*), dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), and great tit (*Parus major*). A population of starlings, a BoCC red listed species, was also recorded at the time of the survey within the southern scrub boundary. Therefore, the mitigation recommendations and enhancements highlighted within the breeding bird and wintering bird reports should be followed.

Reptiles

The previous PEA and phase 1 habitat survey (JBA, 2019a, 2018) stated the semi-improved grassland and tall ruderal vegetation on site provided moderate quality habitat for reptiles. A reptile survey was carried out in 2019, which found no reptiles present on site (JBA, 2019f); however, a grass snake (*Natrix natrix*) was recorded during clearance work on Phase 2b in August 2021 under ecological supervision. Furthermore, two log piles and one brash pile was recorded at the time of the updated survey towards the western boundary, which provides suitable habitat. Any vegetation clearance or ground striping will need to be done under supervision of a licenced ecologist and following the provided reptile method statements.

Amphibians

In the previous PEA (JBA, 2019a) four ponds were identified within 500m of the site boundaries. Pond 2 has been filled in, Pond 3 was inaccessible, Pond 4 was mostly dry and therefore unsuitable, and Pond 1 was still present and intact. The previous [REDACTED] DNA survey (JBA, 2019g) calculated Pond 1 as having 'below average' habitat suitability index, and as no change has occurred in the interim. [REDACTED] they also found [REDACTED] any of the samples.

Hedgerow, scrub and semi-improved grassland was identified as potential sheltering and foraging opportunities [REDACTED] with log and brash piles recorded at the time of the updated survey offering further suitable habitat; however, due to the works undertaken in close proximity of Pond 1, [REDACTED] here in the interim. It is therefore considered unnecessary to update the eDNA survey.

Invertebrates

The previous report recorded the site as unlikely to support a diverse assemblage of invertebrates due to lack of plant diversity and poor semi-improved grassland. At the time of the updated survey, several butterfly and other insect pollinator species were recorded on site, as well as buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*) recorded across the site to the west - an important floral resource for these species. However, invertebrate surveys are deemed unnecessary as majority of the plant diversity remains limited.

Hedgerow

The previous hedgerow survey report (JBA, 2019h) highlighted majority of hedgerows on site as species-rich, with four categorised as 'important' according to the criteria set out in the Hedgerow Regulations (1997). Changes to this habitat were recorded in the updated walkover survey, with hedgerows G37 and G43 partially removed, as per the tree removal plans (JBA, 2020a). The previous species-specific surveys mentioned above, highlight the importance of hedgerow habitat on site and therefore enhancements within the hedgerow survey report should be followed. Replacement species-rich native hedgerows are to be provided within the site as a whole to mitigate for the loss of these habitats.

Flora

Sulphur clover (*Trifolium ochroleucum*), a nationally scarce species and listed as 'near-threatened' on the current red data list for vascular plants in Great Britain, has been identified within previous reports (JBA, 2018, 2019a). As a result, a sulphur clover translocation and working method statement has been issued (JBA, 2022), with the sulphur clover clump clearly delineated and awaiting translocation in April – May, under supervision of an ecologist. Post-location monitoring and management information has also been provided in this report. During supervised clearance works in relation to Phase 6, another small area of sulphur clover was identified and fenced off for protection. No other rare or protected species were observed on site at the time of the updated walkover survey.

Evaluation Conclusion

No additional evidence, from the previous surveys, of other protected species on, or using, the site was observed at the time of the survey. The site is [REDACTED] breeding birds, wintering birds, foraging bats, hedgehog and [REDACTED].

No changes to these species, in terms of their activity on site, were observed from the previous reports and repeated survey results are unlikely to differ from those undertaken in 2019/2020; therefore, it is considered that all survey data remains valid. If there is a delay of development by over 2 years, then another ecological walkover should be undertaken to note any changes in the interim and further species surveys may be required.

Enhancements

The recommendations and enhancements within the preliminary ecological appraisal (2019a) remain relevant and should be followed.

The following general principles for enhancement are recommended, in line with current planning practice and policy:

Where possible, trees and hedgerows at the boundaries of the site should be retained and enhanced to create corridors and shelter/foraging areas for wildlife including birds, bats, reptiles, [REDACTED] and hedgehogs. Planting of native hedgerow species in gaps and on boundaries without hedgerows, for example along the northern boundary, will provide further opportunities for these species.

Lighting should be designed so as to not shine directly into any boundary hedgerows with respect to potential bat habitat. Information on lighting is readily available from the Bat Conservation Trust (2018) (Guidance Note 08/18), Bats and the Built Environment series. It is recommended that a lighting strategy is agreed with the Local Planning Authority based upon this information.

The addition of bat and bird boxes on the proposed buildings or retained trees within the site would provide additional roosting and nesting opportunities. Recommendations of appropriate boxes will be provided once the recommended bat and breeding bird surveys are completed, to ensure boxes are tailored to the site.

Landscaping should incorporate native or wildlife attracting trees, shrubs, and wildflower areas as these would likely be of benefit to a variety of wildlife including, birds, bats and invertebrates. 'Hedgehog links' (i.e., 15cm diameter gaps at the base of fences) within the final design, will allow hedgehogs to move freely across gardens and public open space (POS) areas once construction has concluded.

Woodpiles should also be included within POS areas to provide hibernacula for hedgehogs on site.

Conclusion

An updated ecological walkover survey was undertaken on the 22nd March 2022 of land at Haverhill, Suffolk. Habitats on site have seen some change due to ongoing construction works towards the east of the site; however, remaining habitats have not significantly changed since the PEA (2019) and phase 1 habitat survey (2018).

No further surveys for protected species are considered necessary. However, precautionary measures for site clearance should be taken in relation to breeding birds, reptiles and hedgehogs, and the mitigation measures provided within the PEA (JBA, 2019) and subsequent species-specific reports, should be followed.

If works do not begin within 2 years of this survey, another walkover survey will be required to note any changes in the interim.

Yours sincerely,

Bethan Feeny-Howells
Field Ecologist
James Blake Associates

References

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- JBA (2018) *Phase 1 Habitat Survey of Relief Road, Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes (Essex)*
- JBA (2019a) *Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of Haverhill Phases 2-6, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes (Suffolk)*
- JBA (2019b) *Badger Survey of Phases 2-6 and Relief Road, Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes (Suffolk)*
- JBA (2019c) *Bat Activity Survey Report of Phases 2-6 and Relief Road, Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes (Suffolk)*
- JBA (2019d) *Hazel Dormouse Survey Report of Phases 2-6, Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes (Suffolk)*
- JBA (2019e) *Breeding Bird Survey of Phases 2-6 and Relief Road, Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes Suffolk*
- JBA (2019f) *Reptile Survey of Phases 2-6 and Relief Road, Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes (Suffolk)*
- JBA (2019g) *Great Crested Newt eDNA Survey of Phases 2-6, Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes (Suffolk)*
- JBA (2019h) *Hedgerow Survey of Phases 2-6 and Relief Road Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes Suffolk*
- JBA (2020a) *Tree Removal Plan AMS Infrastructure Rev J-TR03*
- JBA (2020b) *Wintering Bird Survey of Phases 2-6 and Relief Road, Haverhill, Suffolk on behalf of Persimmon Homes Suffolk*
- RSPB (2021) *Royal Society for the Protection of Birds 'BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN 5 – SUMMARY'*

Appendix

Appendix 1: Updated Habitat Map

