

Athletics Track- Preliminary Ecological appraisal, March 2023

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 The City of London Environment department undertook a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) to establish the ecological value of the site and potential to support notable and/or legally protected species.

1.2 This report has been produced to accompany a planning application for the site.

1.3 Proposals include the replacement the track surface and an upgrading of the lighting columns.

1.4 The assessed site comprised of an athletics track facility positioned on Hampstead Heath.

1.5 Details from a desk top study and site walkover have confirmed the site:

- Has low value for roosting bats. However, this is limited to the building areas to the west of the site which are not impacted by the proposed works.
- Has low value for nesting birds and this is limited to areas outside of the proposed scope of the works.
- Has negligible value for reptile species.
- Has low value for common toad (*Bufo bufo*) and this is limited to areas outside of the proposed scope of the works.

1.6 Proposals should be considerate of the value for foraging bats in the wider area and best construction environmental practice should be followed to minimise indirect impacts to the wider Heath.

1.7 No further surveys are recommended.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The City of London Ecologist for Hampstead Heath undertook a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of a site known as the Parliament Hill Athletics Track on Hampstead Heath in the London Borough of Camden.

2.2 The PEA was undertaken by Adrian Brooker, Senior Ecologist for the Open Spaces division of the City of London Environment department. Adrian has a BSc 1st class honours in Biodiversity and Conservation and a University Certificate in Biological Recording and Species Identification. Adrian has 15 years' experience of practical conservation techniques, species monitoring, management planning and application, as well as a further 10 years working in the field of ecology, the last 5 as senior ecologist.

2.3 The PEA was undertaken to establish the ecological value of the site and its potential to support notable and/or legally protected species.

2.4 The PEA was undertaken in accordance with guidance in the Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (2017) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal¹. The assessment consisted of:

- Site specific biological and species information from Greenspace Information for Greater London² (GiGL) received from GiGL on 27th Jan 2023

- Site specific biological and species information from locally held records.
- A site walkover and ecological survey.

2.5 The athletics track area and summary of the proposed works are shown in figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Parliament Hill Athletics Track

2.6 The City of London ecologist undertook a site walkover on 22nd March and 29th March 2023. It should also be noted that the ecologist has visited this site on numerous occasions in preceding years. Features within the site boundary as well as features immediately bordering it were recorded. Any fauna using the area were noted as well as habitats suitable for statutory protected species were identified where present.

3.0 Site description

3.1 The site surveyed as part of the appraisal was the Parliament Hill Athletics Track located within Hampstead Heath, a large area of open green space covering 320 hectares of North London.

3.2 Parliament Hill Athletics Track:

- The site comprises of a formal athletics facility enclosed within a metal fence. The site within the boundary fence covers an area of approximately 2 hectares. The Parliament Hill Athletics track is an area purposed for athletics training and events with changing facilities, toilets, and equipment storage. It is a heavily used amenity space. Grid Reference TQ2784 8579
- Flora species on site was largely restricted to sports turf and amenity grassland with short mown turf throughout, apart from some formal shrub areas to the west. The formal shrubberies consist of ornamental introduced species such as snowberry

(*Symphoricarpos albus*), *Forsythia* sp., and *Elaeagnus* sp., as well as plantings of native yew, ash and gorse. Figures 2 and 3.

The site is bounded to the south by a children's play facilities which borders onto a treelined railway line. To the north and east a tarmac path exists with a larger areas of amenity grassland beyond this. A block of young native trees is present just beyond the track boundary fence to the east.

The site surveyed included anything within the boundary of the metal fence although the buildings and shrubbery areas to the west are not impacted by the proposed works.

3.3 Proposed development. The replacement of the athletic track surface and the replacement of the floodlights. It is proposed to reduce the number of lights on site from 14 to 10.



Figure 2: Athletics track amenity grassland



Figure 3: Parliament Hill Athletics Track shrubbery.

4.0 Methodology

Desk Top Review

4.1 A review of ecological information was undertaken for the sites including species data held locally by the City of London Corporation.

4.2 A biological records search of data held by the Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) received from GiGL on 27th January 2023 was undertaken.

On site surveys

Flora

4.3 The extent of different habitats on site were identified including the dominant botanical species and other valuable or interesting features using standard JNCC Phase 1 methodologies³.

Fauna- Protected Species

4.4 The PEA included surveys to identify the likely presence of protected species on site including identifying potential habitats such as refugia, breeding and foraging areas.

4.5 The likelihood of occurrence is ranked as follows and relies on the current survey and evaluation of existing data through the desk top study.

- Negligible - While presence cannot be absolutely discounted, the site includes very limited or poor-quality habitat for a particular species. The site may also be outside the known national range for a species.
- Low - On-site habitat is poor to moderate quality for a given species, with few or no information about their presence from desk top study. However, presence cannot be discounted due to the national distribution of the species or the nature of on-site and surrounding habitats.
- Moderate - The on-site habitats are of moderate quality, providing most or all of the key requirements for a species. Several factors may limit the likelihood of occurrence, habitat severance, habitat disturbance and small habitat area.
- High - On-site habitat of high quality for given species. Site is within a regional or national stronghold for that species with good quality surroundings and good connectivity; and
- Present - Presence confirmed for the survey itself or recent, confirmed records from information gathered through desk top study.

4.6 The species surveyed for in the site surveys included:

4.7 **Bat species (Chiroptera).** The site visits were undertaken in daylight and the evaluation of bat potential comprised an assessment of natural features on site that aimed to identify characteristics suitable for bat roosts, foraging and commuting. Consideration was also given to the availability of access to roosts, and signs of bat activity or presence. Additionally, linear natural features such as tree lines, hedgerows and river corridors are often considered valuable for foraging and commuting. Consideration was given to the presence of these features both immediately within and adjacent to the assessment area.

4.8 **Badger (*Meles meles*).** The potential for badger to inhabit or forage within the area was established as well as desktop information of species records.

4.9 **Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*).** During the walkover survey the potential for dormouse to be present on site was assessed including observations for suitable habitat.

4.10 **Water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*).** Water vole potential was assessed by the presence of ditches, lakes with holes and runs along the banks.

4.8 **Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*).** An assessment was carried out to identify habitats that may support great crested newts and other native amphibians.

4.9 **Reptiles.** The potential for reptile species on site was assessed during the walkover survey

4.10 **Birds.** The potential for the sites to support breeding birds including trees and shrubs that could support nests of common or notable birds.

4.11 **Notable invertebrates.** The quality of the invertebrate habitat and the potential for notable species was considered.

4.12 **Other Fauna.** The likely presence of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species was considered.

No significant constraints presented themselves in preparation of this report.

5.0 Baseline Conditions

Designations

5.1 The sites are located within Hampstead Heath, a large greenspace covering 320 hectares of North London. Hampstead Heath has a rich mosaic of habitats and is important site for a wide range of rare, notable, and protected species of plant and animal. Hampstead Heath is managed by the City of London Corporation apart from the Kenwood Estate managed by English Heritage.

5.2 Hampstead Heath is a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC M072) as has within its boundaries a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It is also an area of Metropolitan Open Land.

5.3 Hampstead Heath contains within it, habitats and species previously listed as priority species and habitats in the UK Biodiversity Action Plans⁴ (UKBAP) including Heathland, Acid Grassland, Hedgerows, Bat species and Common Toad.

Site Ecology

Habitats

5.4 Information from Greenspace Information for London (GiGL) suggests that there are no protected habitats present on the planned development site. No protected habitats or flora were found on the site surveys and although the surrounding area has areas of priority habitats these will not be affected by the works.

Fauna- Protected Species

5.5 Bat species (Chiroptera)- Foraging

- The site is likely to be of low value for foraging and commuting bats with little suitable habitat present within the site boundary.
- A single bat record has been recorded within 150m of the site on the GiGL database. However, the trees outside of the site boundary to the south and east are suitable to support foraging bats and it is likely that foraging is under recorded in this area. The size and scale of the proposed development is not believed to impact on any bat species ability to continue to forage.
- No further surveys are recommended however proposals should consider the moderate to high value for foraging bats in the adjacent areas and any proposals should not result in any increased light spill. Proposals have indicated that there will be less light spill from the new lighting system than the existing one as they can be better directed to the track and infield downwards.

5.6 Bat species (Chiroptera)- Roosting

- There is a low value for roosting bats within the site surveyed but this is restricted to the building areas to the west, which is not impacted by the proposed works, and as such the proposals do not stand to impact any potential roost.

5.7 Birds

- Nesting value on the site was limited to the small areas of shrubbery and buildings to the west of the area surveyed and is considered low value. These areas are also beyond the proposed zone of works and as such will not be impacted by any works.
- Proposals should be considerate of possible nesting habitat in areas adjacent to the proposed site but are not believed to directly impact any nesting habitat.

5.8 Other Protected Species

- Species such as dormice, water vole, and otter have not been recorded on Hampstead Heath within the last 25 years.
- Badgers- There have been 4 records of badger sightings across Hampstead Heath in the last 15 years, but no setts have been found.
- Reptiles- The City of London and volunteer group Heath Hands have been surveying reptiles across Hampstead Heath since 2009 and no records of reptiles have been recorded from within 500m of proposed development site. On site habitats are of negligible value and are unlikely to provide any significant refuge to grass snakes.
- Great Crested Newt- There are no records of great crested newts from Hampstead Heath in the last 20 years and amphibian surveys have been conducted yearly over this time.

5.9 Other Fauna

- West European Hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) a UKBAP priority species have been recorded from the adjacent areas and may use the site for feeding. However, the proposals do not impact this feeding potential.
- Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*) a UKBAP priority species have been recorded from the adjacent areas and the site may be of low value for foraging and overwintering toads.

6.0 Discussion and analysis

6.1 Overall the site is of low ecological value.

6.2 The assessed sites and their immediate vicinity have the potential to support the following ecological receptors, which could potentially be impacted by any future development.

Table 1: Baseline Summary

Receptor	Presence/Potential Presence	Comments
Designated sites	Present	The site is located within the Hampstead Heath SINC but proposals are not considered to have a significant impact on the Heath. Best construction environmental practices should be followed.
Habitats	Present nearby	No protected or rare habitats were found within the site boundary. However, the adjacent areas support a range of priority habitats and protected species, and

		proposals should be sensitive to their presence.
Roosting bats	Low	The buildings to the west of the surveyed site have a low potential to support roosting bats, but these are not impacted by the proposed works, and as such the proposals do not stand to impact any potential roost.
Foraging bats	Present nearby	Bats have been recorded as present adjacent to the site. However, the size and scale of the proposed developments are not believed to be impact on the bat species ability to continue to forage.
Birds	Low	There is low value for nesting birds within the athletics track boundary and these areas are also beyond the proposed zone of works and as such will not be impacted by any works
Reptiles	Present nearby	Grass snakes have been recorded within the wider site of Hampstead Heath but the site itself is of negligible value to this species.
Common Toad	Present nearby	The site is of low value for foraging or overwintering common toad, but this is limited to areas outside the proposed scope of works.

7.0 Recommendations

Mitigation

7.1 Proposals should be considerate to the sites positioning in an area of importance for nature conservation and best industry practice should be followed to ensure that construction activities avoid direct or indirect impacts to the notable habitats and species surrounding the sites.

7.2 Proposals should not result in increased light spill across the wider area. Lighting should be designed following industry best practice.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The site is of low ecological value.
- 8.2 There is expected to be no impact on protected habitats or species on the site.
- 8.3 Proposals should be considerate of the potential value for bats in the wider area and not increase light spill across the wider Heath.
- 8.4 Best environmental construction practice should be followed.

Relevant Environmental Legislation

Current key legislation relating to ecology includes the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)⁶; The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 ('Habitats & Species Regulations')⁷, The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act)⁸, The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006⁹ and the Environment Act 2021¹⁰

References

- ¹ Chartered Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (2017) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal¹, 2nd edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester
- ² Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC (GiGL) <https://www.gigl.org.uk/our-data-holdings/>
- ³ Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010), Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: A Technique for Environmental Audit. JNCC, Peterborough.
- ⁴ UK Biodiversity Action Plan (2007). UKBAP Priority Species and Habitats. <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/newprioritylist.aspx>
- ⁵ The Biodiversity Metric 3.1 (JP039).
- ⁶ HM Government, (1981); Part I and Part II of Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). HMSO
- ⁷ HM Government, (2010); The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Statutory Instrument 2010 no. 490 Wildlife Countryside. OPSI
- ⁸ HM Government, (2000); The Countryside and Rights of Way Act. HMSO
- ⁹ HM Government, (2006); Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. HMSO
- ¹⁰ *The Environment Act 2021*; Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>.