59-61 OAK GROVE,
LONDON

ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

Prepared by
ACD Ecology

for

POCKET LIVING

ACD

Ecology

Arboriculture

Landscape Architecture

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Contents

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 In January 2014, ACD Ecology was commissioned by Pocket Living to carry out an ecological appraisal of a parcel of land at 59-61 Oak Grove, London, NW2 3LR (OS Grid Reference TQ 24110 85660), hereinafter referred to as the 'site'.

1.2 Plans are being drawn up to re-develop the site for housing.

1.3 An extended Phase 1 survey was carried out in January 2014.

1.4 The site consists of hardstanding and rough grassland with small strips of scrub vegetation along parts of the site boundary.

1.5 There are opportunities for birds within the site.

1.6 To mitigate for impacts the following recommendations have been made;

- Any scrub vegetation clearance to be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season: and
- Incorporate the planting of wildlife-friendly shrubs and trees within the development.

1.7 Implementing these recommendations will ensure that there are no significant impacts upon protected species and that the proposals will be in conformity with relevant legislation and planning policy.

2.0 INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Introduction

2.1 In January 2014, ACD Ecology was commissioned by Pocket Living to carry out an ecological appraisal of a parcel of land at 59-61 Oak Grove, London, NW2 3LR (OS Grid Reference TQ 24110 85660), hereinafter referred to as the 'site'.

2.2 The site comprises largely of hardstanding with rough grassland and small strips of scrub vegetation along parts of the boundary. It is bordered by a railway to the east, a garage to the north and housing to the west and south.

Figure 1: Aerial image showing approximate site boundary

Context

2.3 Plans are being drawn up to re-develop the site for housing.

Purpose

2.4 The purpose of this assessment is to:

- Ascertain the general ecological value of the site by;
    - Identifying and assessing the main habitats and plant communities;
    - Assessing the wildlife use of the site;
    - To feed into refinements of the masterplan; and
- Assess any ecological impacts of the proposed scheme.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Background Data Search

3.1 Whilst field survey is invaluable and provides a "snap-shot" of the species and habitats present on a site, it is also important to research existing ecological knowledge of the site, such as biological records, and any relevant ecological information from the surrounding area.

3.2 The Government's Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside website (http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx) was accessed for information on the location of statutory designated nature conservation sites within a 5km radius of the Site.

Habitat Survey

3.3 The site was surveyed in January 2014 using a technique based upon Phase I survey methodology[1]. This 'extended' Phase I technique provides an inventory of the basic habitat types present and allows identification of areas of greater potential which require further survey. Any such areas identified can then be examined in more detail. The vegetation present was clearly visible and allowed an accurate assessment to be made.

3.4 Although the survey falls outside the recommended seasonal period for botanical work and could, therefore, have some limitations, ACD believe that the evaluation and habitat descriptions, and hence the impacts and their significance are fully accurate for the following reasons:

- Given the type of vegetation and habitats present, the valuation of the intrinsic interest is very unlikely to change;

3.5 Using the above method, the site was classified into areas of similar botanical community types with a representative sample of those species present at the time of the survey being described.

3.6 Additionally, incidental records of fauna were also made during the survey and the habitats identified were evaluated for their potential to support legally protected

[1] JNCC, (2010), *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit.* JNCC, Peterborough.

species and other species of conservation concern, including Biodiversity Action Plan Priority species.

Habitats and Species Evaluation and Impact Assessment

3.7 The habitats and species evaluations are made with reference to the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's (CIEEM) guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment.

3.8 These guidelines aim to give a degree of consistency in approach to evaluating the importance of the ecological features within the site and any effects or impacts a scheme will have upon them.

3.9 The value of specific ecological receptors (sites, habitats or species) is assigned according to their level of importance using the following terms:

- International value;
- UK value;
- National value (i.e. England/Northern Ireland/Scotland/Wales);
- Regional value;
- County value;
- District value (or Unitary Authority, City, or Borough);
- Local or Parish value; and/or
- Of value within the context of the project site or a larger defined area.

4.0 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

4.1 Set out below are the results of the background data searches and field surveys.

Data Search Results

Designated Sites

4.2 The nearest statutory designated nature conservation sites are as follows:

- Brent Reservoir Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which lies c.2.3km to the north-west of the site and is designated for its breeding populations of wetland birds, overwintering waterfowl and its botanical interest;
- Hampstead Heath Woods SSSI which lies c.3km to the north-east of the site and is designated for its woodland and associated botanical interest;
- Westbere Copse Local Nature Reserve (LNR) which lies c.0.4km to the south-east of the site and is designated for its woodland and meadow interest;
- Brent Reservoir LNR which lies c.2.3km to the north-west of the site and is designated for its diversity of habitats;
- Big Wood & Little Wood LNR which lies c.3.2 km to the north-east of the site and is designated for its woodland interest;
- Belsize Wood LNR which lies c.3.3km to the east of the site;
- Wormwood Scrubs LNR which lies c.3.8km to the south-west of the site and is designated for its woodland and grassland interest;
- St John's Wood Church Grounds LNR which lies c.3.9km to the south-east of the site and is designated for its diversity of habitats; and
- Fryent Country Park LNR which lies c.4.4km to the north-west of the site and is designated for its diversity of habitats.

4.3 LNRs are notified under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by local authorities. They are not necessarily of great ecological value, and are intended for public appreciation and enjoyment of

wildlife. The LNR designation does not afford special protection, although LNRs are protected under legislation and planning policy.

4.4 SSSIs are of **National value** and LNRs are of **Local value**.

4.5 Approximately a 1/3 of the site is incorporated within West Hampstead Railsides Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) of Borough Importance Grade II (BII).

4.6 SNCI BII sites are non-statutory designated nature conservation sites of **county value.**

Survey Results

Habitats

4.7 The site supports the following habitats:

- Hardstanding;
- Rough Grassland; and
- Scrub.

4.8 For ease of reference, habitat types have been described alphabetically, below.

Hardstanding

Photograph 1: area of hardstanding.

4.9 The majority of the site consists of hardstanding which is of **negligible value** and therefore not discussed any further.

Photograph 2: area of rough grassland.

Rough grassland

4.10 There is a small pocket of rough grassland within the south-eastern corner of the site.

4.11 Species noted within the grassland include annual meadow-grass *Poa annua,* cleavers *Galium aparine,* cocks-foot *Dactylis glomerata,* creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense,* dandelion *Taraxacum officinale,* perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne,* red fescue *Festuca rubra,* red clover *Trifolium pratense,* ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata,* rosebay willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium,* white clover *Trifolium repens* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus.*

4.12 The rough grassland is assessed as being of **value within the site**.

Scrub

4.13 There are small strips of scrub vegetation, including bramble *Rubus fruticosus,* buddleia, ivy *Hedera helix* and willow *Salix* sp. along parts of the site boundary.

4.14 These areas are assessed as being of **value within the site**.

Photograph 3: area of scrub along the site boundary

Fauna

4.15 For ease of reference, descriptions of the fauna have been described alphabetically, below.

Amphibians

4.16 There are no habitats within the site suitable for amphibians and therefore the site is assessed as being of **negligible** value for amphibians.

Badgers

4.17 No evidence of badgers (i.e. setts, runs, push-throughs, latrines or hairs) was identified during the survey and the site is assessed as being of **negligible** value for badgers.

Bats

4.18 There are no buildings or mature trees within the site and therefore the site has **negligible** potential for roosting bats. However, bats may use the adjacent railway corridor for commuting/foraging.

Birds

4.19 All wild birds, their eggs and nests are afforded protection under the Wildlife and

Countryside Act 1981, as amended.

4.20 The on-site scrub vegetation would be expected to provide suitable nesting habitat for common birds and is therefore assessed as being of **value within the site** for birds.

Reptiles

4.21 The area of rough grassland within the south-eastern corner of the site is immediately surrounded by hard landscape (i.e. wall and artificial bank). It is isolated from reptile suitable habitats and contains no features suitable for supporting hibernating reptiles. Therefore the site is assessed as having **negligible** potential for reptiles.

Other protected species

4.22 Opportunities for other protected species are **negligible**.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Designated Sites

5.1 Given the nature of the development it is considered unlikely that there will be any significant adverse direct or indirect impacts upon the integrity of statutory designated sites.

SNCI

5.2 Approximately a 1/3 of the site is incorporated within the West Hampstead Railsides SNCI. According to preliminary plans for the site the proposed building will encroach upon a small area of hardstanding within the SNCI.

5.3 Given that the areas of hardstanding within the SNCI are of **negligible** ecological value, the encroachment of the building is likely to have a **negligible** residual impact upon the SNCI.

5.4 In order to enhance the ecological value of the site it is recommended that wildlife-friendly planting (e.g. species-rich grassland, native trees and shrubs) is incorporated into the SNCI.

5.5 With the above enhancement the overall residual impacts upon the SNCI are likely to be **negligible** to **non-significant positive**.

Habitats

Rough grassland

5.6 The area of rough grassland falls within the SNCI which, according to preliminary plans, will be retained within the development. Should the removal of this area of grassland prove necessary it should be replaced with species-rich grassland.

5.7 With the above mitigation the overall residual impacts are likely to be **negligible** to **non-significant positive**.

Scrub

5.8 Some areas of scrub vegetation will be lost to the development and therefore it is recommended that the planting of wildlife-friendly shrubs and trees is incorporated

into the development.

5.9 With the above mitigation the overall residual impacts are likely to be **negligible**.

Fauna

Birds

5.10 Some areas of scrub vegetation will be lost to the development and therefore it is recommended that the planting of wildlife-friendly shrubs is incorporated into the development.

5.11 Vegetation clearance should ideally be undertaken between October and February inclusive (i.e. outside of the bird nesting season). Should it prove necessary to remove vegetation during the bird nesting season, the area must be checked in advance for the presence of bird nests. If there is no evidence of breeding birds the clearance work should be completed within 48 hours of inspection. If any active nests are identified, vegetation clearance must cease and an appropriate buffer zone established around the nest. The buffer must remain intact until it has been confirmed that the young have fledged and the nest is no longer in use.

5.12 With the above mitigation the overall residual impacts to birds are likely to be **negligible**.

Enhancements

5.13 The National Planning Policy Framework encourages development to provide net gains in biodiversity where possible. These measures will also count towards ecology credits under a Code for Sustainable Homes assessment.

- Incorporate wildlife-friendly planting within the development;
- Source a collection of cut logs and create an invertebrate loggery in order to provide valuable dead wood habitat for insects (e.g. stag beetles); and
- Install bird boxes onto the new building in order to increase nesting opportunities for birds within the site.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Within the site there are opportunities for birds.

6.2 Measures to mitigate for impacts have been set out along with recommendations for the enhancement of the sites ecological value.

6.3 Implementing the mitigation and enhancement recommendations will ensure that there are no significant impacts upon protected species and that the proposals will be in conformity with relevant legislation and planning policy.

7.0 REFERENCES

Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2006). *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the United Kingdom (version 7 July 2006)*. http://www.ieem.org.uk/ecia/index.html. Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010). *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit*. JNCC, Peterborough.

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