BACTON LOW RISE REDEVELOPMENT

Camden

Greengage

ECOLOGICAL EXTENDED PHASE 1 HABITAT & PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

NOVEMBER 2012

QA

Bacton Low Rise, Ecological Extended Phase 1 Habitat & Protected Species Survey

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Greengage Environmental LLP were commissioned to undertake an Ecological Extended Phase 1 Survey (hereafter 'Phase 1 Survey') by EC Harris LLP, on a site known as Bacton Low Rise in Camden, London in order to establish the ecological value of this site and its potential to support notable and/or legally protected species.

1.2 The overall assessment consisted of:

- Site specific biological information gained from statutory and non-statutory consultation; and
- A site walkover and ecological survey.

1.3 The site-specific consultation provided the ecological context for the Phase 1 Survey carried out on the 5th July 2012. Site photographs are shown in Appendix 1.0.

1.4 The survey boundary and existing site is shown at Figure 1.0.

1.5 Greengage undertook the site walkover during mild and overcast weather conditions. Features within the site boundary and accessible features immediately bordering it were evaluated and the extent and distribution of habitats and plant communities were recorded, supplemented with target notes on areas or species requiring further commentary. Fauna using the area were recorded and areas of habitat suitable for statutorily protected species were identified where present, with an active search carried out for evidence of such use.

1.6 It has been assumed that all areas of the site and associated habitats will be affected by any future plans, and as such this report, identifies potential ecological constraints relating to the entire site.

1.7 The recommendations and opinions expressed in this report are based on the combination of information stated, site observations and feedback from the consultation exercise.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 The assessment site covers an area of approximately 1.46 hectares (ha) and is approximately centred on National Grid Reference TQ280852, OS Co-ordinates 528084, 185243.

2.2 The site can be split into two areas; the definition between each area is clear in the site plan of Figure 1.0. The northern area (0.53 ha) contains some now derelict commercial buildings and an associated works yard. The remaining buildings in this area are associated with the District Housing Office and Bacton TRA Hall. The southern area (0.93 ha) solely consists of the residential buildings of the low rise housing estate and associated landscaping, parking and hardstanding. There are very few green areas directly on site, with the majority of space consisting of buildings or hardstanding.

2.3 The Thameslink railway line runs east to west directly bordering the north of the site with areas of residential housing extending beyond this. The railway line runs under Lismore Circus; a small area of amenity grassland and scattered London Plane and Ash trees to the north of the estate. Between the low rise estate and Lismore Circus sits Bacton Tower. The low rise estate extends to the west of the site. A small open amenity grassland area with a number of tennis courts can be found to the south east with further areas of residential flats and housing, with associated gardens, extending further south, south east and east. The Kentish Town Church also sits to the east and is surrounded with associated scattered trees and grassland. Further north (approximately 0.8km) lie the open space and naturalised areas of Parliament Hill and Hampstead Heath, with a number of bathing and swimming ponds.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

DESK TOP REVIEW

3.1 A review of readily available ecological information and other relevant environmental databases was undertaken for the site and its vicinity. This provided the overall ecological context for the site and to better inform the Phase 1 Survey.

ON SITE SURVEYS

Flora

3.2 The extent and distribution of different habitats on site were identified and mapped according to the standard Phase 1 Survey methodology[1], supplemented with target notes describing the dominate botanical species and any valuable or interesting features. A habitat map has been produced to illustrate the results, as shown on Figure 2.0.

3.3 As stated above, the survey was carried out in July 2012 and it should be noted that this is within the optimal time period for botanical identification which is generally considered to be from April – October.

Fauna - Protected Species

3.4 The Phase 1 Survey specifically includes surveys to identify the potential for protected species to be present, and to ascertain the likelihood of species protected by statute inhabiting the site. This involved identifying potential habitats in terms of refugia, breeding sites and foraging areas.

3.5 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 particular 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.

3.6 The species surveyed for included:

Badgers (Meles meles)

3.7 The potential for badgers to inhabit or forage within the study area was established during the site walkover. Evidence of badger activity includes the identification of setts (a system of underground tunnels and nesting chambers), grubbed up grassland (caused by the animals digging for earthworms, slugs, beetles etc.), badger hairs, paths, latrines and paw prints.

Great Crested Newts (Triturus cristatus)

3.8 During the site walkover, an assessment was carried out to identify any potential habitats that may support great crested newts (GCN) and other native amphibians. The aquatic and terrestrial habitats required generally include small, still ponds or water bodies suitable for breeding; and woodland or grassland areas where there is optimal invertebrate prey potential.

Bat species (Chiroptera)

3.9 The site visit was 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. In accordance with the guidelines and methods given in English Nature's (now Natural England) *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*[2] consideration was given to:

- The availability of access to roosts for bats;
- The presence and suitability of crevices and other places as roosts; and
- Signs of bat activity or presence.

3.10 Definite signs of bat activity were taken to be:

- The bats themselves;
- Droppings;
- Grease marks;
- Scratch marks; and
- Urine spatter.

3.11 Signs of possible bat presence were taken to be:

- Stains; and
- Moth and butterfly wings.

3.12 Features with potential as roost sites include mature trees with holes, crevices or splits (the most utilised trees being oak, ash, beech, willow and Scots pine), caves, bridges, tunnels and buildings with cracks or crevices serving as entrance or exit holes.

3.13 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.

3.14 The availability of access to roosts was assessed based upon the presence of holes large enough to allow entry of bats.

3.15 The exterior and interior of the buildings were checked for gaps, cavities, access points and crevices, and any signs of bat droppings, in accordance with English Nature (now Natural England) guidelines.

Reptiles

3.16 The potential for reptile species on site was assessed during the walkover survey. Possible species include the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*), smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*), adder (*Vipera berus*), common and sand lizards (*Lacerta vivipara* and *L. agilis*) and the slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*). These native reptile species generally require open areas with low, mixed-height vegetation, such as heathland, rough grassland, and open scrub or, in the case of grass snake, waterbody margins. Suitable well drained and frost free areas are needed so they can survive the winter.

Dormice (Muscardinus avellanarius)

3.17 During the walkover survey the potential for dormice to be present on site was assessed. This included observations for suitable habitat such as well-layered woodland, scrub and linking hedgerows, particularly those species offering suitable food sources such as honeysuckle and hazel, in addition to direct evidence such as characteristically gnawed hazelnuts, chewed ash keys and honeysuckle flowers, or nests.

Water voles (Arvicola terrestris)

3.18 Water vole potential was assessed during the walkover survey. The potential is identified by the presence of ditches, rivers, dykes and lakes with holes and runs along the banks. Latrines, footprints or piles of food can also be noted.

Otters (Lutra lutra)

3.19 Where desk-top review or consultation indicates the presence of otters in a river catchment, the presence of water bodies with good cover and potential holt (den) sites would be noted.

Birds

3.20 During the walkover survey, the potential for breeding birds was assessed. In particular, this includes areas of trees, scrub, heathland and wetlands that could support nests for common or notable birds.

Notable Invertebrates

3.21 As part of the walkover survey the quality of invertebrate habitat and the potential for notable invertebrate species was considered. There is a wide variety of habitats suitable for invertebrates including wetland areas, heathland, areas of bare sandy soil, ephemeral brownfield vegetation and meadows.

Other Fauna

Biodiversity Action Plan priority species

3.22 Where consultation and desk-study indicates the presence of BAP priority species not protected by statute, effort was made to establish the potential for the site to support these species.

4.0 BASELINE CONDITIONS

DESK TOP REVIEW

Designations

4.1 The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) dataset[3] has confirmed that there are no statutory designations of national or international importance within the boundary of the site, or within a 1km radius.

Biodiversity Action Plans

4.2 UK Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) have been developed which set priorities for nationally important habitats and species. To support the BAPs, Species Statements have been produced that provide an overview of the status of the species and set out the broad policies that can be developed to conserve them.

4.3 Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) ensure that national action plans are translated into effective action at the local level, and establish targets and actions for locally characteristic species and habitats.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE ECOLOGY

Detailed Description of Site: Habitats

4.4 Photographs 1-4 refer to some of the habitats present across the site and can be found at Appendix 1.0. The habitats presented across the site consist of the following JNCC Phase 1 Habitat categories, as mapped at Figure 2.0:

- Buildings and hard-standing (J3.6);
- Bare ground (J3.4);
- Introduced shrub (J1.4);
- Amenity Grassland (J1.2); and
- Parkland/Scattered Trees (Broad-leaved) (A3.3).

Target Note 1

4.5 Target note 1 refers to the area in the northern part of the site that directly borders the railway line. The majority of this area consists of interconnected buildings and associated hardstanding. A number of weed species exist in the hardstanding yard that lies between the buildings and the railway line. There is a small line of London Plane (*Platanus* × *acerifolia*) and Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) trees to the east of this area; these trees and the aforementioned weeds represent the only floral/faunal aspects of this part of the site.

Target Note 2

4.6 Target note 2 refers to a small area of poor quality amenity grassland and scattered London Plane (*P. acerifolia*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) trees in the north east corner of the low rise estate area.

Target Note 3

4.7 This target note refers to the landscaped areas within the low rise estate itself. There are three areas, all enclosed by surrounding buildings. Within each generally exists an area of hardstanding, poor quality amenity grassland, some scattered trees and some small areas of introduced shrub planting in raised beds. Tree species include Silver Birch (*B. pendula*), London Plane (*P. acerfolia*), Common Lime (*Tilia* × *europaea*) and Sycamore (*A. pseudoplatanus*). Any planting is seemingly ecologically poor and seems to primarily provide basic amenity value.

Target Note 4

4.8 This target note refers to the low rise estate buildings themselves. All buildings are in good structural condition.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SITE: PROTECTED SPECIES POTENTIAL

Badger

4.9 No direct evidence of badgers was identified during the site visit. The site itself and much of the surrounding area has negligible potential for foraging badgers.

Great Crested Newt

4.10 There are no watercourses or waterbodies directly present on the application site and terrestrial habitats on site were considered largely unsuitable, with the site covered almost exclusively by urban hard-standing. Therefore it is concluded that the land does not support habitat suitable for GCN and the potential is negligible.

Bats

Roosting

4.11 Generally, the habitat for bat roosting is limited, with no trees on site presenting opportunities. No field signs were noted and as such, it is considered the potential for bats roosting on the estate is negligible.

Foraging

4.12 The habitats surroundings of the site provide some limited opportunities for bat foraging. Areas of scrub and planting running parallel to the train line north of the site may support insects communities that bats could feed on, however on the site itself there are few, if any, opportunities for bats to forage; any bat activity potentially present will likely be a function of the close proximity of foraging habitat and the green corridor connections via the train line and roads to Parliament Hill and Hampstead Heath. Overall it is considered the potential for foraging bats on site is low-medium.

Reptiles

4.13 No reptiles were identified during the site visit. General habitats across the site were not suitable as there were no open areas with low height vegetation, such as heathland, rough grassland and open scrub. Overall, potential is therefore considered negligible.

Dormice

4.14 No direct evidence of dormouse activity or suitable habitat was identified during the site visit. As such, the potential for the site to support dormice is considered negligible.

Water Voles

4.15 No direct evidence of water vole activity or suitable habitat was identified during the site visit. No latrines, footprints or piles of food were noted. Therefore we can consider the potential for water voles on site to be negligible.

Otters

4.16 There are no water bodies on site to provide habitat for otters. Overall the potential is considered to be negligible.

Invertebrates

4.17 There are no areas on site that provide good habitat opportunities for invertebrates. The potential can be considered as low. There are areas directly adjacent to site however with medium potential.

Birds

4.18 Potential nesting habitat for small birds was identified in some trees (however limited); breeding birds may use some of the vegetation, such as the London Plane, to nest. There is no requirement for further ecological surveys before the commencement of proposed development. However, it is recommended that due to the potential for

nesting birds any clearance works of the tree therefore should be undertaken out of the breeding season (generally outside the months of March – October). Overall the potential can be considered as low.

Other BAP Species

4.19 None were observed during the site walkover.

BASELINE SUMMARY

4.20 The site and surroundings have potential to support the following ecological receptors of note, which could therefore, be impacted upon by any future prospective development proposals, as indicated in Table 4.2 below:

Table 4.2 Baseline Summary

Receptor	Presence/Potential Presence	Comments
Badgers	Negligible	Local habitat is limited. No direct evidence of badgers on site.
Great crested newts	Negligible	Local habitat is limited. No direct evidence of great crested newts on site.
Foraging bats	Low - Medium	Local habitat is limited. No direct evidence of the potential for foraging bats on site. Some potential in areas directly adjacent to site. Limited activity may be present as a function of this.
Roosting bats	Negligible	No potential for roosting bats in any of the buildings or trees on site.
Reptiles	Negligible	No open areas with low height vegetation, such as heathland, rough grassland and open scrub.
Water voles	Negligible	Local habitat is limited. No direct evidence of water voles on site.
Dormice	Negligible	Local habitat is limited. No direct evidence of dormice on site.

Otters	Negligible	Local habitat is limited. No direct evidence of otters on site.
Invertebrates	Low	Limited habitat for invertebrates on site.
Birds	Low	Some suitable tree for small birds to use for nesting onsite.

CONSERVATION VALUE – RATCLIFFE CRITERIA

4.21 The nature conservation value of the site was assessed using the Ratcliffe Criteria , currently accepted as being the most effective method for assessing the nature conservation value of sites.

4.22 The results of the use of Ratcliffe Criteria are indicated below in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Ratcliffe Criteria and Site Conservation Value Assessment.

Size – A habitat's importance for nature conservation generally increases with its size.
The site is approximately 1.46ha of which almost 85% is covered with urban hard-standing or buildings.
VALUE: **Low**

Naturalness – Sites which have remained relatively unaltered by man tend to be the most valuable. Further, the sites which are considered most natural are generally those which are hardest to recreate. NB throughout the UK there is probably no site that can be considered completely natural and therefore an assessment must be made related to degrees of naturalness
All areas of the site show that they have been altered by previous development and usage on site. Other than the small areas of scattered trees and amenity grassland there is no green or 'natural' space.
VALUE: **Low**

Diversity – Variety is better than uniformity, species or habitat richness is

generally better than a poor species or habitat complement. It should be noted that certain habitats are intrinsically poor in species diversity and that this should be borne in mind when making any assessment.
All areas on site are urban hard-standing or buildings, with the small exception of small patches of species poor amenity grassland and scattered trees. This does not represent a diverse habitat.
VALUE: **Low**

Fragility – A habitat that is fragile is one that is sensitive to changing influences. Habitats that are liable to such influences are likely to be of higher value than those that are not.
Habitats associated with the site are generally common across the UK and therefore, not considered fragile and are less sensitive to potential future redevelopment or changes in land use.
VALUE: **Negligible**

Typicalness – Those habitats, which are representative or typical of good examples of their type, are considered of higher value than those which are not.
The site is typical of the area, with the LB Camden very much dominated by urban development.
VALUE: **Moderate**

Rarity – A site where rare or protected species or habitats exist is considered of higher value.
All protected species potential is considered to be low or negligible. There is a low potential for nesting birds, invertebrates and bats foraging on the site.
VALUE: **Low**

Position in an ecological or geographical unit – Sites, and their associated habitats, which are contiguous with other similar sites, tend to be more valuable than those sites which are situated in isolation.
The site is situated in Camden, North London within an area that is very much dominated by urban development. The site is similar to contiguous areas but these areas are of very low ecological importance.
VALUE: **Low**

Intrinsic Value – This criterion is based upon the value humans place on a feature of ecology as opposed to its actual nature conservation value.
The site shows limited intrinsic value from an ecological perspective.
VALUE: **Low**

Potential Value – Habitats that, through an adjustment of current influences, have the potential to be of higher nature conservation value than they are currently.
There are opportunities to increase the ecological value of the site. Green space can be improved and increased in size through enhancement in design.
VALUE: **Moderate**

Re-creatibility – A site that is difficult to recreate, generally because of its more natural development, is deemed to be of higher nature conservation value than one which can be recreated reasonably simply (additional assessment criterion from Ratcliffe).
The site is lacking in mature habitats, with the entire site easily reproducible, with perhaps the exception of a few of the larger London Plane trees.
VALUE: **Low**

4.23 Using the Ratcliffe Criteria it is determined that overall the site has a **LOW** conservation interest.

5.0 POLICY & LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

5.1 This section includes the legislative context of those protected species or other notable species that are recorded on site, or have the potential to be present on site. Details on specific legislation for other protected or notable species that have not been identified as being present, or having the potential to be present, are not included below.

NATIONAL POLICY

5.2 The introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied in the presumption in favour of sustainable development. It sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system only to the extent that it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so and is a material consideration for local planning authorities in determining applications.

5.3 Planning Policy Statements have been revoked although they are still considered as guidance now that the NPPF has been published. Therefore features of ecological value should be considered in the context of:

- Planning Policy Statement on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9); and
- The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP).

5.4 The Governments objectives for planning are to promote sustainable development, to conserve enhance and restore the diversity of England's wildlife and geology and to contribute to rural renewal and urban renaissance.

WILDLIFE & COUNTRYSIDE ACT (1981)

5.5 This policy strengthened the protection for SSSIs, providing additional safeguards for particular types of area and restricting the killing, taking from the wild and disturbance of various species. All of the UK's wild bird species are protected under the 1981 Act. Extra protection is given to birds listed in Schedule 1 of the 1981 Act.

NESTING BIRDS

5.6 All birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law and it is thus an offence, with certain exceptions intentionally to:

- Kill, injure or take any wild bird;

- Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built; and
- Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

6.0 SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

6.1 A site survey was carried out on the 5th July 2012 in order to establish the ecological value of this site and its potential to support notable and/or legally protected species. Along with a review of readily available ecological information an assessment of the sites ecological value was made.

6.2 The land mainly consists of building and hard standing with some small patches of amenity grassland and scattered trees.

6.3 Details received from the consultation process and the site walkover have confirmed the site:

- Has negligible potential to provide habitat for badgers;
- Has negligible potential to provide roosting for bats, and low-medium foraging habitat potential for bats;
- Has negligible potential to provide habitat for reptiles;
- Has negligible potential to provide habitat for great crested newts;
- Has negligible potential to provide habitat for otters;
- Has negligible potential to provide habitat for dormice;
- Has negligible potential to provide habitat for water voles;
- Has low invertebrate potential;
- Has low potential to provide habitat for nesting birds; and
- Using the Ratcliffe Criteria it was determined the site has an overall LOW conservation value.

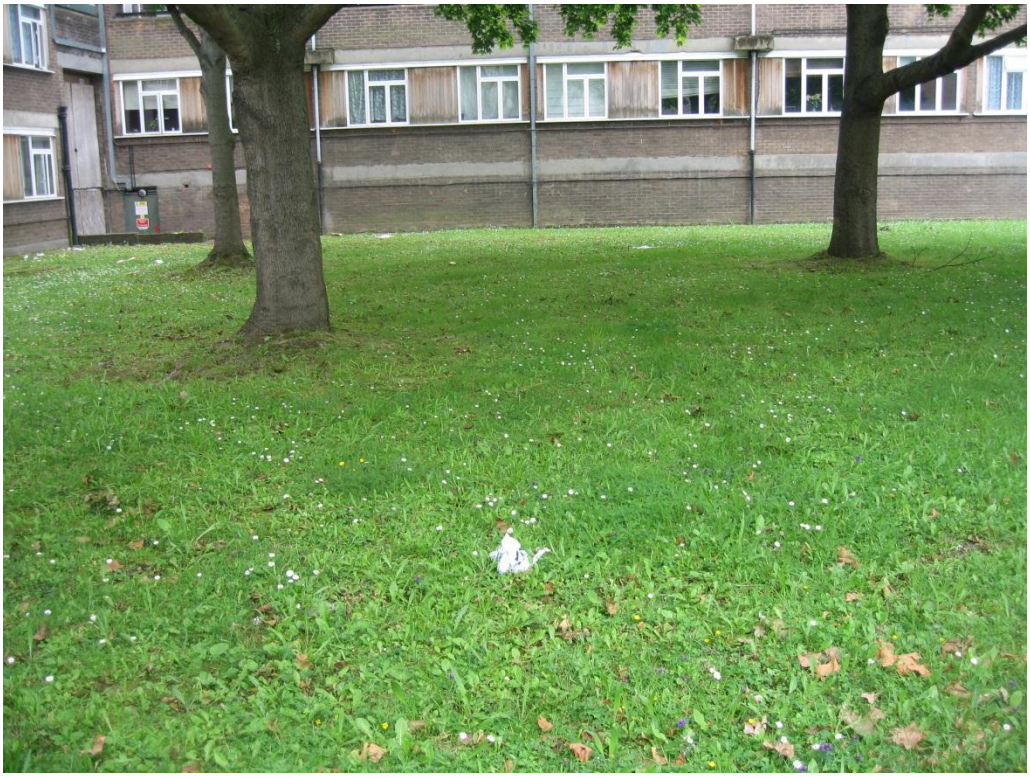
6.4 Due to the potential for nesting birds, any clearance works therefore should be undertaken out of the breeding season (generally outside the months of March – October).

6.5 It is recommended to include ecological enhancement in the final scheme. The following measures should be incorporated where possible:

- Maintain/develop a green link around and within the site using planting with wildlife value i.e. wide range of flowering plants and plants with berries as food source in these locations;
- Look to include bat and bird boxes on trees towards the south of the site, or at positions furthest away from human activity; and
- Maintain piles of deadwood on site to provide habitat for invertebrates.

APPENDIX 1.0: SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

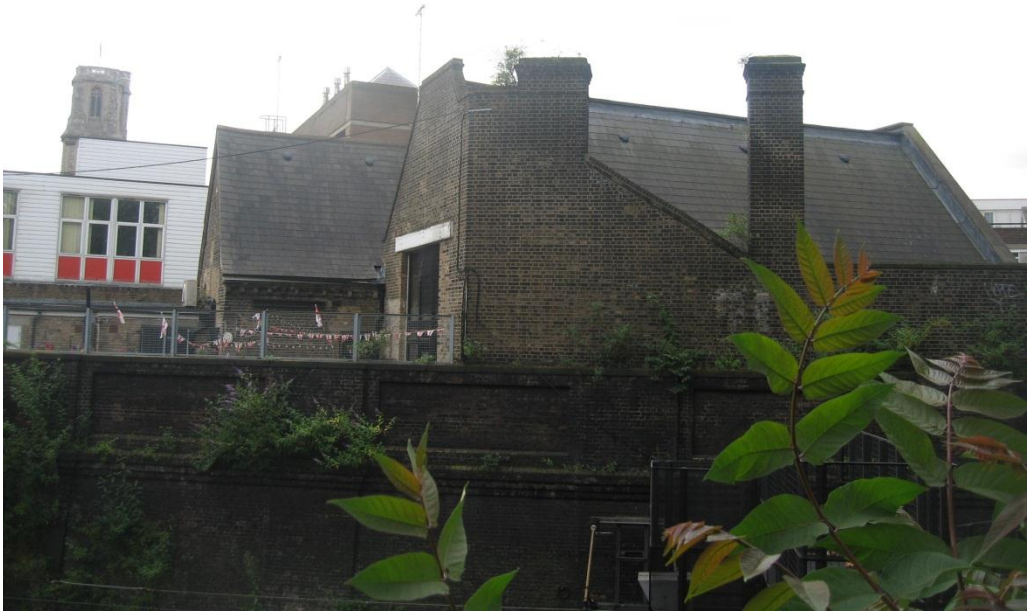
Photograph 1 – Area of amenity grassland and scattered trees described in target note



Photograph 2 - The low rise estate buildings with court yards containing introduced shrub, scattered trees, hardstanding and amenity grassland beyond wall and fence.

Photograph 3 – Lismore Circus to the north of the site.

Photograph 4 – The housing association buildings in the northern area viewed from across the railway line to the north.



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[1] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (1993). Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: A Technique for Environmental Audit. JNCC, Peterborough.

[2] English Nature, (2004); *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature.

[3] MAGIC, (2007); *Interactive Map*. (Partnership project involving six government organisations: Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs); English Heritage; Natural England; Environment Agency; Forestry Commission; Department for Communities and Local Government). www.magic.gov.uk.