



# Land to the North East of KGV Playing Fields, Cuffley

Addendum to Ecological Appraisal  
June 2015

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Lands Improvement

## **LAND TO THE NORTH EAST OF KING GEORGE V PLAYING FIELDS**

**Addendum to the 2014 Ecological Appraisal to provide a review of additional land subject to change of use**

Rev A

**Prepared for Lands Improvement**

**by**

**Hankinson Duckett Associates**

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**hankinson duckett associates**

† 01491 838175 † 01491 838997 e [consult@hda-enviro.co.uk](mailto:consult@hda-enviro.co.uk) w [www.hda-enviro.co.uk](http://www.hda-enviro.co.uk)

The Stables, Howbery Park, Benson Lane, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 8BA

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Author	Alex Leishman GradCIEEM/ Adrian Meurer MCIEEM	Assistant Ecologist
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides an addendum to the 2014 Ecological Appraisal which relates to proposed residential development within approximately 4.89ha (Area 1) of land at Cuffley, Hertfordshire, in order to provide an assessment of the proposed change of use of approximately 0.63ha farmland located to the south-west of the King George V Playing Fields.

The area of land affected by the change of use is dominated by agriculturally improved grassland of negligible nature conservation interest. Features of limited local interest occur around the margins in the form of hedgerows and tree lines. These form a small part of a wider network of habitat corridors including the Hemphill Brook located approximately 140m to the south.

The change of use is not expected to result in loss of habitats of local value. It is recommended that any future activities within this area seek to retain the integrity of the existing treeline and its value for nocturnal wildlife through protection of tree rooting areas and sensitive use of lighting.

Precautionary measures are recommended in Section 4 to ensure any activities associated with the change of use comply with nature conservation legislation relating to common and widespread protected species (breeding birds and reptiles). It is concluded that, beyond the normal requirements to avoid impacts on common and widespread protected species, there appear to be no overriding nature conservation constraints that would preclude the proposed change of use.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This addendum provides an ecological appraisal carried out to inform the proposed change of use of approximately 0.63ha farmland located to the south-west of the King George V Playing Fields, Cuffley, hereinafter referred to as 'the Site'. The study was commissioned by Lands Improvement in August 2014.

1.2 This appraisal has been informed by an ecological desk study carried out in support of the Ecological Appraisal (HDA, 2014a) for proposed development to the north and an extended Phase 1 habitat survey of the Site. It identifies habitats and features of ecological value within the Site and its surrounds and where necessary identifies measures to avoid or mitigate the potential effects of the proposed change of use.

## **2 DESK STUDY**

2.1 The desk study carried out in support of the Ecological Appraisal (HDA, 2014a) of land to the north included a search for statutory and non-statutory designated sites and records of protected and notable species within and in the vicinity of the Site from sources including the Magic online database and Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC).

2.2 The results of the desk study showed that no statutory or non-statutory designated areas are present within or adjacent to the Site. In addition no records of protected or notable species were supplied for the Site.

## **3 FIELD SURVEY**

3.1 An extended Phase 1 habitat survey (JNCC, 2007), Phase 1 Bat Survey and a Badger survey of the Site was carried out by Alex Leishman GradCIEEM on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014 to assess the main habitat types present, to check for Badger setts within and in the vicinity of the Site, and to identify any features suitable for roosting bats within or adjacent to the Site (BCT, 2012).

### **3.2 Phase 1 Habitat Survey**

3.2.1 The Site comprises a section of a previously cultivated arable field and at the time of survey comprised improved grassland. The north-western boundary comprises an outgrown mature hedgerow with abundant early-mature and mature trees, the north-eastern boundary comprises a fenceline, the south-eastern boundary comprises a species-poor hedgerow and fenceline, and the south-western boundary is open with cultivated arable land beyond.

#### *Improved grassland*

3.2.2 The arable field forming the Site had been sown with grass seed and at the time of survey comprised improved grassland dominated by Perennial Ryegrass with a low diversity of

herbs. The grassland had not been recently cut resulting in a long sward and supported ruderal vegetation including Creeping Thistle and Broad-leaved Dock amongst others.

#### *Hedgerows and trees*

3.2.3 The north-western boundary of the Site comprises a mature outgrown hedgerow with abundant trees including few large Oak trees and early-mature Common Lime and Horse Chestnut occur within the hedgerow. Scrub species present within the hedgerow include Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Elder, Ash, Pedunculate Oak and Hazel. The hedgerow was outgrown on top with the side facing into the Site being managed by flail cutting.

3.2.4 The hedgerow on the south-eastern boundary was mostly intact, dominated by Hawthorn and appears to be intensively managed through regular cutting to a height of around 1.5m.

#### *Other habitats*

3.2.5 The north-eastern boundary comprises a wire stock fence beyond which lies a hardstanding car park.

### **3.3 Badger Survey**

3.3.1 No Badger setts or any other evidence of Badger activity was recorded within 30m of the Site during the walkover survey and Badgers are considered to have been absent from the area at the time of survey. The hedgerow bases and improved grassland provide moderate-good quality foraging habitat and potential sett building habitat for Badgers. However due to their limited extent, the abundance of suitable habitat in the wider area, and the lack of evidence of Badger recorded during the surveys of the Site in 2014 and the proposed development area to the north in 2012 (HDA, 2014a), it is considered unlikely that these areas are important to the local Badger population.

### **3.4 Phase 1 Bat survey**

3.4.1 Three Category 2 trees were recorded within hedgerow trees along the north-western Site boundary. No confirmed bat roosts, Category 1\* or 1 trees were recorded within or adjacent to the Site.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BCT Tree Category descriptions as follows:

- trees with multiple, highly suitable features capable of supporting larger roosts (BCT Category 1\*);
- trees with definite bat potential, supporting fewer suitable features than Category 1\* trees or with potential for use by single bats (BCT Category 1);
- trees with no obvious potential although the tree is of size and age that elevated surveys may result in cracks or crevices being found, or the tree supports some features that have some limited potential to support bats (BCT Category 2);
- trees with no potential to support bats (BCT Category 3).

## **4 EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 Habitats**

4.1.1 The habitats of highest nature conservation interest are the hedgerows/ treeline on the north-western and south-eastern boundaries. Although these linear features are likely to be of only **site** value in their own right as they are limited in extent and similar features are widespread in the surrounding area, they appreciably enhance the overall value of the Site by providing opportunities for a range of species and contribute to a network of semi-natural habitats facilitating the movement of wildlife across the Site and the surrounding area, and are considered in combination to be of **low local** value.

4.1.2 The agriculturally improved grassland dominating the Site is considered to be of **negligible value** for wildlife in a local context.

4.1.3 Hemphill Brook, located approximately 140m south-west of the Site, is considered to be of **moderate local** value as it provides habitat for a range of species and contributes to a continuous corridor of semi-natural habitat facilitating the movement of wildlife across the wider area.

4.1.4 The remainder of habitats associated the Site and its immediate surrounds, including the improved grassland, arable land and hardstanding are considered of **negligible** nature conservation interest in their own right.

4.1.5 Any proposed activities under the proposed change of use should seek to maintain the hedgerows/ treeline on the north-western and south-eastern boundaries through protection of hedgerow and tree rooting zones and maintain opportunities for nocturnal wildlife through sensitive use of lighting. Consideration should also be given to planting of new boundary features such as hedgerows, scrub belts or treelines.

### **4.2 Protected and notable species**

#### *Badgers*

4.2.1 No evidence of Badgers was recorded during the Badger survey and the Site is unlikely to be of importance to the local Badger population. No impact on Badgers is therefore likely to arise as a result of the proposed change of use

4.2.2 Badgers are very mobile animals and occasionally setts may be abandoned and new setts created elsewhere. In the event that earthworks are proposed and more than 12 months has elapsed since the survey was carried out then it is recommended that the Site be re-surveyed prior to commencement of works to ensure that the status of Badgers has not changed.



### *Bats*

- 4.2.3 Subject to the retention of the treeline on the north-western Site boundary no impact on bats is expected to occur as a result of the proposed change of use. In the event that any of the Category 2 trees require felling as part of ongoing maintenance (e.g. for safety) then these should be subject to further survey or soft felled in accordance with the BCT guidance (BCT, 2012).
- 4.2.4 Any subsequent proposals for lighting in this area should be sensitively designed to avoid light spill on to the boundary features through use of hooded and directional lighting; narrow spectrum and/ or low UV bulbs; restrictions on timing of use (e.g. curfews on late night usage); and planting of screening vegetation.

### *Reptiles*

- 4.2.5 The improved grassland dominating the Site generally provides suboptimal habitat for reptiles being relatively homogenous in structure and recent in origin. Although higher quality habitat is provided where hedgerow bases occur on the boundaries these are very limited in extent and are unlikely to support locally important numbers of reptiles. This is supported by the findings of the reptile surveys of similar habitat for the proposed development area to the north carried out in 2008 (HDA, 2009) and updated in 2013 (HDA, 2014b) where no reptiles were recorded. It is therefore considered highly unlikely that locally significant populations of reptiles are present within the Site and no further survey for this group is recommended.
- 4.2.6 Notwithstanding the above, in the absence of specific survey data for the Site it is recommended that any clearance of the potential reptile habitat follows a precautionary approach in order to avoid contravention of the nature conservation legislation afforded to common and widespread reptile species. This would involve the displacement of any reptiles present into areas of retained habitat within and adjacent to the Site through the following approach:
- Progressive removal of suitable low-lying vegetation, including long grass, scrub and ruderals, using hand-held tools. The final stages of clearance to ground level should take place during suitable climatic conditions at a time of year when reptiles are active (generally April to September inclusive).
  - Dismantling of any potential hibernacula or refugia by hand.
  - Where appropriate, ground level clearance work should be carried out under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist who would relocate any reptiles encountered to an area of suitable retained habitat within the Site.
  - Following the clearance of vegetation, the vegetation should be maintained at ground level to prevent recolonisation prior to works commencing.

### *Great Crested Newts*

4.2.7 No suitable breeding habitat for Great Crested Newts occurs within the Site. Although the improved grassland within the Site was uncut at the time of survey it is recently established and is likely to be subject to regular disturbance by agricultural activities making it highly suboptimal for Great Crested Newts during terrestrial phases. Hedgerow/ treeline bases on the margins of the Site provide better quality terrestrial habitat for newts, although these are very limited in extent.

4.2.8 A review of the 1:10,000 OS Map for the area suggests that there are two ponds within 500m of the Site, the closest of which is located within a residential garden approximately 100m to the west on the other side of Northaw Road East. A search of online sources revealed a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment and Great Crested Newt survey of these ponds and other waterbodies located within the wider area to the north-west carried out by Aspect Ecology in 2014 (Aspect Ecology, 2014). The HSI survey suggests that the closest two ponds to Area 2, located approximately 100m and 160m to the west, provide breeding habitat of 'poor' suitability for Great Crested Newts due to being ephemeral in nature or being majorly impacted by wildfowl with few submerged plants for egg laying. The closest pond to the Site which was found to support Great Crested Newts during the Aspect Ecology survey is located approximately 690m north-west of the Site which is well beyond the typical migratory distance of Great Crested Newts from their breeding ponds during terrestrial periods (Cresswell and Whitworth, 2004). It is therefore considered highly unlikely that Great Crested Newts are present at the Site.

### *Birds*

4.2.9 The Site is considered highly unlikely to support a locally important assemblage of breeding birds and no further survey for this group is recommended. Notwithstanding this, breeding birds are likely to use the hedgerows, scrub and trees bordering the area and therefore the legislation relating to this group will apply. It is recommended that if any tree, scrub or hedgerow clearance is required, this should be carried out outside of the bird breeding season (March to September inclusive), as wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Where this is not possible it is recommended that an ecologist carries out a check for nesting birds to confirm that no nesting birds are present immediately prior to the commencement of these works. If an active nest is identified within vegetation to be removed during these works, then vegetation removal in the area must pause and a suitable stand-off maintained until the young have fledged after which vegetation can then be removed.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

5.1 Subject to the implementation of the recommended measures outlined in Section 4 to avoid adverse effects on common and widespread protected species and to maintain current

opportunities for wildlife provided by hedgerows and treelines adjacent to the Site, no significant loss of ecological interest is likely to arise as a result of the proposed change of use.

5.2 It is therefore concluded that, beyond the normal requirements to avoid impacts on common and widespread protected species, there appear to be no overriding nature conservation constraints that would preclude the proposed change of use.

## 6 REFERENCES

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