

**Robin Lodge Nursery,
Part Lane,
Swallowfield,
Reading,
RG7 1TB**

**PROVISIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT
(including Phase 1 bat survey)**

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Prepared by

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SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a Phase 1 Habitat survey and preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) of site of former Robin Lodge Nursery, Part Lane, Swallowfield, Reading RG7 1TB (grid ref: SU592693) and provides recommendations to ensure that the works can reasonably avoid or mitigate for any such effects.

The survey was carried out on 13th October 2021. A background data search was also undertaken to obtain information of protected species and habitats in the area.

The site has no potential to support roosting bats.

The site has potential for common reptiles and a presence/absence survey will be required to confirm which species (if any) are present.

There is a large population of Himalayan balsam across the site.

INTRODUCTION

Site Proposals

The proposals for the site would entail the division of the plot and construction of new dwelling

METHODS

Background Data Search

A desk-based assessment was carried out using the DEFRA MagicMap website <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx> to identify all designated sites within 5km of the site and all other designated sites and protected species within 2km.

A search was made for information on statutory designated sites (often internationally and nationally important sites for ecology) and non-statutory designated sites (often important in a local context) within 1 km of the site boundary.

Field Assessment

An extended phase 1 Ecological Survey was carried out on the 13th October 2021.

The site was examined using appropriate methods generally following NCC (1990)¹ for Phase 1 habitat survey, with procedures appropriately selected from Institute of Environmental Assessment (1995) and Jermy *et al.* (1995) for species and any specialist habitat appraisal as required, and/or the current guidance on survey methods and Ecological Impact Assessment from the (Chartered) Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (*e.g.* CIEEM 2013, IEEM 2007 and updates).

It should be noted that, whilst the investigation of the site was appropriately intensive within the intended framework, and it is unlikely that significant species will have been overlooked.

The grounds were surveyed and habitats present mapped. In addition any evidence of protected species (badgers, bats, birds, herptiles, and BAP (Schedule 41) species), as well as BAP habitats was recorded.

Invasive Non-native Species

Phase 1 habitat survey does not involve exhaustive surveying for any individual plant species, but if invasive plant species listed under Schedule 9 (Part II) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), e.g. *Heracleum mantegazzianum* (Giant Hogweed), *Impatiens glandulifera* (Himalayan Balsam) or *Reynoutria japonica* (Japanese Knotweed), were seen during the normal course of the survey then they were noted.

RESULTS

Designated Sites

River Loddon SSSi is 1.1km to the north-west. Bramshill Forest SSSI part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA is 2.25km to the south-east.

Non-Statutory Sites

Swallowfield Meadow LNR is 72m to the north.

Phase 1 Survey Results

PROTECTED HABITATS

UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) Priority Habitats are also Habitats of Principle Importance (HPI) listed under The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 Section 41 (NERC S41). These habitats do not receive statutory protection, but the S41 list is intended to provide guidance to decision-makers, e.g. those representing public bodies and local/regional authorities, in implementing their duty under Section 40 of the NERC Act to ‘...have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England when carrying out their normal functions’.

Habitats

The site comprises former nursery and is dominated by disturbed ruderal habitats growing on a gravelly substrate (see figure 1). There are numerous imported debris piles (spoil, crushed concrete, and roofing tiles etc.) and bunds created by scrapping parts of the site back to bare gravel. There are two large derelict greenhouses which are overgrown with bramble scrub. A large willow has also grown up in the southern glasshouse.



Figure 1. Habitat map

The southern part of the site was used as a log yard and several piles of timber plus numerous wooden pallets are still *in situ* (see figures 2 and 3).

The northern edge of the site lies close to a slow flowing stream with emergent vegetation including fool's watercress and watercress. There are large bunds of gravelly spoil along the northern boundary (See figure 4).

There is a dense blackthorn dominated hedge alongside Part Lane north of the entrance (See figure 5). This has developed on a large bund which runs along the eastern boundary.

PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY OF ROBIN LODGE NURSERY



Figure 2. Looking north across centre of site.



Fig. 3. Looking east across southern third of site.



Figure 4. Looking north across north-western part of site



Figure 5. Blackthorn thicket along eastern boundary north of north entrance.

Plantlife

A list of vascular plants recorded on the 13th October is given in appendix 1. No nationally scarce plants were noted. The bunds are dominated by nettles, thistles and Himalayan balsam with brambles also locally dominant. Canadian fleabane was very abundant on the more open disturbed areas, with redshank also locally dominant.

Common fleabane and apple mint are locally dominant across the scraped areas of the northern part of site. Elsewhere the ruderal community includes relics of nursery activity, including garden lobelia, petunia and snapdragons. The dumped debris piles have populations of Indehiscent Amaranth, and a plant of thorn -apple.

PROTECTED SPECIES

Reptiles

All native British reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) from killing and injury. All native UK reptiles are UK BAP Priority Species and SPI.

The site has potential for reptiles (primarily slow worms, but possibly grass snakes) in the rank areas across the site primarily on or close to the bunds and well vegetated heaps of spoil.

Amphibians

Great Crested Newts are protected under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 2010 from intentional killing and injury and from intentional damage, destruction or obstruction of access to a place of shelter. In addition Great Crested Newts and Common Toads are UK BAP Priority species and SPI.

Common Toads are included in Schedule 41 of the NERC act 2006.

According to DEFRA's MagicMap the nearest GCN return is 490m to the north-west at Wyvols Court. The site supports habitats suitable for GCN in their terrestrial phase.

Common frog was present on site and other amphibians could well utilise the damper shadier parts of the site (ie bramble and nettle patches and dense scrub and debris piles).

There is a pond 54m over the road to the north-east.

Badgers

Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, which makes it illegal to kill, injure or take a badger or to interfere with their setts; such as by the use of heavy machinery nearby.

No evidence of any badger activity on site, and the area is low-lying with streams nearby, and there doesn't appear to be any suitable sites for setts within 10m of the site boundary.

Birdlife

All wild birds are protected under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, from damage or destruction of their nest whilst in use or construction, some birds listed on Schedule 1 receive additional protection from disturbance during nesting.

Birds noted included Blue Tit, Chiffchaff, Dunnock, Great Tit, Red Kite, Robin, Wood Pigeon, Wren.

Bats

Bats are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, and also receive additional protection via The Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations (2010) from intentional killing and injury and from intentional damage, destruction or obstruction of access to a place of shelter. It is an offence to kill or injure a bat or interfere with any roosting or resting site. A bat roost is interpreted as "any structure or place used for shelter or protection" whether or not bats are present at the time or not. Barbastelle Bats, Bechstein's Bat, Noctule, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared Bat, Greater Horseshoe Bat and Lesser Horseshoe Bat are also UK BAP Priority Species and SPI.

There are no buildings on site with any potential to support bats. No large trees with bat potential occur on site, but the mature oaks along the western boundary could well support roosting bats.

Invasive Non-native Species

Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* is locally dominant across much of the north and west of the site and scattered elsewhere. It is an offence to spread this plant into the wild. Site clearance works must ensure that living plants and soil with a seed bank are disposed of in appropriate manner to ensure no further spread occurs on and off site.

EVALUATION, IMPACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Protected Species

Reptiles and Amphibians

The denser rougher open areas across the site have high potential to support slow worms and grass snake. Further presence/absence surveys would be required to confirm which species occur on site. These can be undertaken from mid-late March-early October depending on weather conditions.

Common frog was recorded on the site visit, and the rubble piles etc. have potential to support other amphibians. amphibians could well use the surrounding scrub and rank vegetation.

Amphibians also utilise artificial refugia as employed in reptile surveys (felt squares, carpet tiles etc.) this and a search of surface debris should be carried out to identify which species utilise the site, and a mitigation strategy created once this has been completed.

Breeding Birds

Any clearance of trees and scrub, demolition of outbuildings etc. should ideally be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season, which is typically 1st March to 31st August.

If any works occur within the breeding bird season the area should be checked, ideally by an ecologist, and if any nesting birds are found there is a legal obligation to protect the affected area with a buffer zone of 10m until after the young have fledged.

Hence, it is usually best to undertake works where nesting birds may be disturbed outside of the nesting season to avoid delays.

Bats

There are no potential bat roosts within the area earmarked for development. Therefore, **a Phase 2 bat survey is not recommended.**

However bats are likely to forage and migrate across the site, therefore the final layout should have mitigation in place to ensure bats are not negatively impacted.

Lighting can be detrimental to roosting, foraging and commuting bats and many bats, including brown long-eared bats are known to light sample - only leaving the roost if the ambient light is considered viable. Any new lighting around the buildings must be focused away from the tree lines and new integral bat roosts, hooded or baffled to ensure minimal light spillage. Lamps of greater than 2000 lumens (150 W) must not be installed.

Habitats

As habitats will be lost a trading summary will be required using the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric (Arthur *et al*, 2021).

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Appendix 1. Plant species list

LD =locally dominant, F= frequent, O= occasional, R= rare P=planted

PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY OF ROBIN LODGE NURSERY

<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	very common	O
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow	very common	O
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	Common Bent	very common	O
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent	very common	F
<i>Amaranthus bouchonii</i>	Indehiscent Amaranth	Local	LD
<i>Anagallis arvensis</i>	Scarlet Pimpernel	very common	F
<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	Snapdragon	common	O
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False Oat-Grass	very common	O
<i>Atriplex patula</i>	Common Orache	very common	LD
<i>Buddleja davidii</i>	Butterfly-bush	very common	F
<i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Hedge Bindweed	very common	F
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	Shepherd's-purse	very common	O
<i>Carex pendula</i>	Pendulous Sedge	very common	F
<i>Carex spicata</i>	Spiked Sedge	Local	O
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping Thistle	very common	F
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle	very common	LD
<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Hemlock	very common	O
<i>Conyza canadensis</i>	Canadian Fleabane	very common	LD
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	Dogwood	very common	F
<i>Coronopus squamatus</i>	Swine-cress	common	F
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel	very common	LD
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	very common	F
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	Broom	very common	O
<i>Datura stramonium</i>	Thorn Apple	naturalised	R
<i>Epilobium ciliatum</i>	American Willowherb	common	F
<i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i>	Sun Spurge	very common	F
<i>Euphorbia peplus</i>	Petty Spurge	very common	O
<i>Festuca pratensis</i>	Meadow Fescue	very common	O
<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	Fennel	common	O
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	very common	F
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Cleavers	very common	LD
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Herb-Robert	very common	F
<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>	Ground-ivy	very common	R
<i>Gnaphalium uliginosum</i>	Marsh Cudweed	common	O
<i>Hypericum maculatum</i>	Imperforate St John's-wort	common	O
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft-rush	very common	F
<i>Lamium album</i>	White Dead-nettle	very common	O
<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	Red Dead-nettle	very common	F
<i>Lapsana communis</i>	Nipplewort	very common	F
<i>Lemna minor</i>	Common Duckweed	common	F
<i>Lobelia erinus</i>	Garden Lobelia	casual	F
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial Rye-grass	very common	F
<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	Black Medick	very common	F
<i>Mentha x villosa</i>	Apple-mint	common	LD
<i>Mercurialis annua</i>	Annual Mercury	common	O
<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	Sweet Tobacco	casual	O
<i>Oenanthe crocata</i>	Hemlock Water-dropwort	common	R
<i>Panicum miliaceum</i>	Common Millet	casual	F
<i>Pentaglottis sempervirens</i>	Green Alkanet	common	LD
<i>Persicaria maculosa</i>	Redshank	very common	LD
<i>Petunia x hybrida</i>	Petunia	casual	O
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain	very common	F

PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY OF ROBIN LODGE NURSERY

<i>Plantago major</i>	Greater Plantain	very common	F
<i>Poa annua</i>	Annual Meadow-grass	very common	F
<i>Polygonum aviculare</i>	Knotgrass	very common	LD
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn	very common	LD
<i>Pulicaria dysenterica</i>	Common Fleabane	common	LD
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Pedunculate Oak	common	O
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow Buttercup	very common	O
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup	very common	F
<i>Ribes rubrum</i>	Red Currant	common	O
<i>Rorippa amphibia</i>	Great Yellow-cress	common	R
<i>Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum</i>	Water-cress	common	LD
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg	a bramble	Local	LD
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	Curled Dock	very common	LD
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock	very common	F
<i>Sagina procumbens</i>	Procumbent Pearlwort	very common	F
<i>Salix cinerea</i>	Grey Willow	very common	O
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder	very common	LD
<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>	Common Figwort	very common	O
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Common Ragwort	very common	F
<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	Groundsel	very common	F
<i>Sisymbrium officinale</i>	Hedge Mustard	very common	O
<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>	Bittersweet	very common	LD
<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Black Nightshade	common	LD
<i>Sonchus asper</i>	Prickly Sow-thistle	very common	F
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	Smooth Sow-thistle	very common	F
<i>Stachys sylvatica</i>	Hedge Woundwort	very common	O
<i>Taraxacum</i> agg	a dandelion	common	F
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	White Clover	very common	O
<i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i>	Scentless Mayweed	very common	F
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle	very common	LD
<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	Great Mullein	common	O
<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>	Argentinian Vervain	casual	O
<i>Veronica persica</i>	Common Field-speedwell	very common	F
<i>Veronica polita</i>	Grey Field-speedwell	common	O
<i>Veronica serpyllifolia</i>	Thyme-leaved Speedwell	very common	F
<i>Viburnum lantana</i>	Wayfaring-tree	common	R
<i>Vicia sepium</i>	Bush Vetch	very common	F