

# SUREGROW, ST. HELENS

## Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report

*November 2023*



## Report Control Sheet

*Project Name:* Suregrow, St. Helens  
*Project Reference:* CW20-1385  
*Report Title:* Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report  
*Report Reference:* CW20-1385 RPT 001  
*Printing Instructions:* Print at A4 Portrait, Double Sided.

<b>Rev</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Prepared</b>	<b>Reviewed</b>	<b>Approved</b>
/	21/11/2023	Draft report sent to Client for comment.	EA	KB	OC
//	28/11/2023	Final report sent to Client.	EA	KB	OC

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<b>Site Address</b>	Suregrow, Collins Industrial Estate, St. Helens, WA9 1HY
<b>Grid Reference</b>	SJ 52285 96205
<b>Approximate Site Area</b>	0.2ha
<b>Current Site Use</b>	The site currently forms developed land which is now vacant.
<b>Designated Sites within Zone of Influence</b>	Stanley Bank Meadow Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located approximately 1.3km northeast of the site boundary. The site contains an extensive area of species-rich damp meadow, dissected by more acidic valleys.
<b>Notable Habitat Features</b>	No notable habitats are located on site.
<b>Notable Species Applicable to the Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bats (Potential foraging and commuting)</li> <li>• Breeding birds.</li> <li>• Common amphibians</li> <li>• Badger</li> <li>• Hedgehog</li> </ul>
<b>Mitigation Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precautionary Working Methods (PWMs) for badger.</li> <li>• Consideration for common amphibians.</li> <li>• Lighting mitigation for bats.</li> <li>• Consideration for hedgehog during construction.</li> <li>• Nesting bird check if work is to occur between March to September (inclusive).</li> </ul>
<b>Recommended Further Surveys and Assessment</b>	No further surveys are recommended to proceed with the proposed development.
<b>Recommended Ecological Enhancements</b>	The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) highlights the requirement for planning policies and decisions to conserve and enhance the natural environment. The proposed development provides the opportunity to enhance the site and ecological enhancements have been recommended

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. SCOPE & PURPOSE

1.1.1. Collington Winter Environmental Ltd was commissioned by Lynwoods Building Consultancy to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) at Suregrow, Collins Industrial Estate, St. Helens, WA9 1HY. This report has been prepared to inform an outline planning application for a commercial development at the site.

1.1.2. The author of this report is Emma Anderson MSc, Assistant Ecologist, and was overseen by Katie Bird MEnvSci, ACIEEM Principal Ecologist at Collington Winter Environmental Ltd. Katie is highly experienced managing schemes and has produced many ecological reports to inform planning management plans.

### 1.2. LOCATION

1.2.1. Please refer to Figure 1.1 for the site location. The site is located within the Collins Industrial Estate northwest of the town of St. Helens.

*Figure 1.1 Site Location*



### 1.3. OBJECTIVES

1.3.1. The objectives of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal are as follows:

- Identify the major habitats present
- Ascertain the presence or potential presence of any legally protected or notable species or habitats
- Identify any mitigation or further survey required and opportunities for strategic wildlife enhancements and long-term management.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. DESK STUDY

2.1.1. An initial desk-based assessment of the site was undertaken to collate baseline data. The desk study included:

- Obtaining local records of notable species and locally designated sites within 1 km of the site from Merseyside BioBank obtained on 09/11/2023.
- Review of Magic.gov.uk website for details of any designated sites, notable habitats and presence of European Protected Species Licences.
- Review of aerial and OS maps for habitat information, as well as determining locations of potential waterbodies to be considered in the assessment.
- Review of potential habitat links on and off site, to determine the potential zone of influence of the proposed development.
- On site consultation with the landowner which provided valuable information regarding historic land use and known species and habitats present within the site.

2.1.2. Please note, a lack of records for a species does not confirm absence. Instead, local surveys may not have been undertaken or records not submitted to Merseyside BioBank.

### 2.2. VEGETATION AND HABITAT ASSESSMENT

2.2.1. An Ecological Appraisal of the site was undertaken by Emma Anderson. The survey was undertaken on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The weather was overcast (8/8 oktas), with moderate precipitation, wind speed 2 and 10°C.

2.2.2. The walkover survey was undertaken broadly in line with standard UK HAB Methodology (2023). The assessment is undertaken with consideration of methodology as per "Preliminary Ecological Appraisal" (CIEEM, 2018).

2.2.3. A UK HAB Plan has been produced and is presented in the Appendix of this report. Standard methodology has been used, though adjustments have been made based on judgement to demonstrate habitats in a clearer manner, or where standard guidance does not fit the conditions found on site.

### 2.3. FAUNA ASSESSMENT

2.3.1. A search for signs of protected and notable species of fauna was undertaken during the site walkover. This included both field signs of species, as well as potential for species to be present based on habitat availability.

2.3.2. The searches broadly included the following:

- Assessment of waterbodies on site and within 250m of the site boundary, and terrestrial habitats for suitability to support notable amphibians.
- Searches for field signs of, and habitat suitability for bats.
- Suitability of habitats to support reptiles, and searches for incidental field signs.
- Searches for field signs of badger (*Meles meles*), including setts, mammal paths, snuffle holes, badger hair and latrines to indicate activity.
- Searches of watercourses for signs of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*), white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) and otter (*Lutra lutra*), and assessment of habitat availability for the species.
- Assessment of the suitability of habitats to support notable birds and recording any field sightings of birds during the walkover.
- Assessment of the sites ability to support notable invertebrates and flora.
- Searches for non-native invasive species.

### 2.4. PRELIMINARY BAT ROOST ASSESSMENT AND BAT ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT

2.4.1. A Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment (PRA) of the site was undertaken by Emma Anderson and overseen by Katie Bird who holds a Class 2 Bat Survey Licence from Natural England (Reference 2020-48950-CLS-CLS).



2.4.2. The survey was undertaken following guidance set out in Collins (2023). This includes undertaking a detailed internal and external inspection of any features to compile information on potential and actual bat entry/ exit points, roosting locations and evidence of bats.

2.4.3. Any buildings/structures were assessed as per categories listed in Table 4.1 (Collins, 2023).

2.4.4. The commuting and foraging assessment methodology is based on information contained within the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines 4th edition (Collins, 2023). The categorisation within this report is based on that set out in Table 4.1 (Collins, 2023), which is used as a basis for determining the requirement for further surveys and/or mitigation.

**Table 4.1. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats, based on the presence of habitat features within the landscape, to be applied using professional judgement.**

Potential suitability	Description	
	Roosting habitats in structures	Potential flight-paths and foraging habitats
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices/suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any commuting or foraging bats at any time of the year (i.e. no habitats that provide continuous lines of shade/protection for flight-lines, or generate/shelter insect populations available to foraging bats).
Negligible <sup>a</sup>	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used as flight-paths or by foraging bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains in order to account for non-standard bat behaviour.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically at any time of the year. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions <sup>b</sup> and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity and not a classic cool/stable hibernation site, but could be used by individual hibernating bats <sup>c</sup> ).	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of bats as flight-paths such as a gappy hedgerow or unvegetated stream, but isolated, i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat. Suitable, but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a lone tree (not in a parkland situation) or a patch of scrub.
Moderate	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions <sup>b</sup> and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only, such as maternity and hibernation – the categorisation described in this table is made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for flight-paths such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens. Habitat that is connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland or water.
High	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions <sup>b</sup> and surrounding habitat. These structures have the potential to support high conservation status roosts, e.g. maternity or classic cool/stable hibernation site.	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by bats for flight-paths such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge. High-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by foraging bats such as broadleaved woodland, tree-lined watercourses and grazed parkland. Site is close to and connected to known roosts.

## 2.5. SURVEY LIMITATIONS

2.5.1. This survey does not constitute a full botanical survey. Key species for each habitat type have been identified to give a broad representation of habitats present within the site.

2.5.2. It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive description of the site, no investigation can ensure the complete characterisation of the natural environment. This survey does not constitute a full botanical survey. Plant species may have been under-recorded, unidentifiable or not visible due to a number of factors including the time of year the survey was carried out.

2.5.3. November is a suboptimal time for carrying out a Phase 1 Habitat Surveys due to being outside of the optimal plant growing season. Therefore, it is likely that some plants are present on the site but were not evident at the time of the survey and were not recorded. This is not considered to be a significant constraint with regards to the general Phase 1 Habitat Survey results as due to the size and location of the site and limited extent of the

habitats, it is considered very unlikely that any rare or priority plant species were missed.

2.5.4. The protected species assessment provides a preliminary view of the likelihood of protected species occurring on the site. This is based on the suitability of the habitat, known distribution of the species in the local area (provided by data searches) and any direct evidence within the survey area.

2.5.5. The findings of this report represent the professional opinion of qualified ecologists and do not constitute professional legal advice. The client may wish to seek professional legal interpretation of the relevant wildlife legislation cited within this document.

## 2.6. PROPORTIONALITY

2.6.1. Collington Winter Environmental Ltd provide recommendations in line with the British Standard for Biodiversity (BS42020). Within BS42020, proportionality is encouraged for both ecologists and Local Authority Decision Makers and Consultees. Please refer to the below extract from Section 5.5 of BS42020.

*“The work involved in preparing and implementing all ecological surveys, impact assessments and measures for avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement should be proportionate to the predicted degree of risk to biodiversity and to the nature and scale of the proposed development. Consequently, the decision-maker should only request supporting information and conservation measures that are relevant, necessary and material to the application in question. Similarly, the decision-maker and their consultees should ensure that any comments and advice made over an application are also proportionate.”*

*NOTE 1 This approach is enshrined in Government planning guidance, for example, paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework for England [41].*

*NOTE 2 The desk studies and field surveys undertaken to provide a preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) might in some cases be all that is necessary.”*



## 3 SURVEY RESULTS

### 3.1. SITE CONTEXT

3.1.1. The site is located within the Collins Industrial Estate northwest of the town of St. Helens. The industrial estate is surrounded by residential estates interspersed with areas of urban greenspace, anticipated to be of value to local wildlife. The Sankey Canal runs west of the industrial estate, joining Rainford Brook to the north which then runs around to the west of the industrial estate. A large parcel of woodland and scrub is located to the north, both of which will provide habitats potentially suitable to a range of native fauna.

### 3.2. DESIGNATED SITES

3.2.1. Stanley Bank Meadow Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located approximately 1.3km northeast of the site boundary. The site contains an extensive area of species-rich damp meadow, dissected by more acidic valleys. There is a general scattering of trees and shrubs, and some larger blocks of scrub within the meadow and the site includes semi-natural alder woodland, oak woodland and willow scrub on the valley slopes.

3.2.2. Six Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are located within 5km of the site boundary:

- Parr Hall Millenium Green LNR located approximately 55m east of the site boundary.
- Stanley Bank LNR located approximately 1.3km northwest of the site boundary.
- Clinkham Wood LNR located approximately 1.7km northwest of the site boundary.
- Colliers Moss Common LNR located approximately 2.4km southeast of the site boundary.
- Thatto Heath Meadows LNR located approximately 2.75km southwest of the site boundary.
- Mill Brow LNR located approximately 3.35km southwest of the site boundary.

3.2.3. No other statutory sites are located within 5 km of the site boundary.

3.2.4. The data search returned records of non-statutory sites located within 1km of the site boundary:

- Black Brook and Sankey Valley Corridor Nature Improvement Area
- Parr Hall Millenium Green and Canal Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
- St. Helens Canal LWS
- Haresfinch Burgy Banks LWS
- Islands Brow Burgy LWS

3.2.5. The site also falls within the Impact Risk Zone of Stanley Bank Meadow SSSI.

### 3.3. PRIORITY HABITATS

3.3.1. Consultation with Magic.gov.uk highlighted the presence of the following Priority Habitats within 1km of the site boundary:



Figure 3.2 Priority Habitats within 1km from the Site (Magic.gov.uk, 2023)

### 3.4. HABITATS

3.4.1. Please refer to Drawing 20-1385 for the UK HAB Map for the site. Photographs of the site are presented in the Appendix.

#### SPARSELY VEGETATED LAND

3.4.2. The site boundaries, an area surfaced with sand at the north of the site, and an area surface with gravel to the west in the centre of the site each constituted sparsely vegetated land.

3.4.3. At the southwest corner of the site the boundary vegetation included buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*), dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.), common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), hemp agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*), sycamore sapling (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), black medick (*Medicago lupulina*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*), and herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*).

3.4.4. Along the western boundary, species included perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), sea aster (*Tripolium pannonicum*), red clover, dandelion, horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), buddleia, black medick, ribwort plantain, heath groundsel (*Senecio sylvaticus*), willowherb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*), broadleaf dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), hogweed, and broadleaf plantain (*Plantago major*).

3.4.5. Along the north boundary and large sand surfaced area, species included dandelion, willowherb, common evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*), spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), bramble, and sycamore saplings.

3.4.6. A central gravel-surfaced area was dominated by petty spurge (*Euphorbia peplus*). Other species present included dandelion, annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*), heath groundsel, ribwort plantain, white clover (*Trifolium repens*), red clover, ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*), bedstraw (*Galium album*), common nettle, spear thistle, common vetch (*Vicia sativa*), black nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*), and cranesbill (*Geranium pyrenaicum*).

#### DEVELOPED LAND; SEALED SURFACE

3.4.7. The majority of the site comprised developed land, which had constituted the foundation of the former garden centre building and yard area.

3.4.8. A small breezeblock bathroom structure was present to the southwest of the site. This is the only structure remaining on site following demolition of the main building.

#### INTRODUCED SHRUB

3.4.9. An area dominated by introduced shrub was present to the south of the site. Species present included cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), buddleia, goat willow (*Salix caprea*), snow-in-summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*), Franchet's cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster franchetii*), and dog rose (*Rosa canina*).

### 3.5. SPECIES

#### FLORA

3.5.1. The data search returned multiple records of notable vascular plants, including water fern (*Azolla filiculoides*), bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Canadian waterweed (*Elodea canadensis*), corn spurrey (*Spergula arvensis*), garden angelica (*Angelica archangelica*), Welsh poppy (*Meconopsis cambrica*), wild pansy (*Viola tricolor*), and northern knotgrass (*Polygonum boreale*).

3.5.2. The majority of the site comprised limited floristic diversity. It is anticipated that the successional, sparsely vegetated habitats are unlikely to support any notable plant species and notable flora are not considered further within the assessment.

#### INVERTEBRATES

3.5.3. The data search returned a total of 578 records of notable invertebrates within the local area, including the site. Species included (not limited to); alder leaf beetle (*Agelastica alni*), wall (*Lasiommata megera*), blue-tailed damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*), ruddy darter (*Sympetrum sanguineum*), buff ermine (*Spilosoma lutea*), sallow (*Cirrhia icteritia*), and shoulder-striped wainscot (*Leucania comma*).

3.5.4. The introduced shrub and sparsely vegetated land are anticipated to be of some value, providing a variation of habitats for invertebrate lifecycles. Ragwort, buddleia, and clover species will provide suitable food resources. Additional flowering species may also be present to attract particular species to the site, however the overall floristic diversity recorded on site during the survey was limited.

3.5.5. Overall, notable invertebrates may utilise the site for foraging but are not thought to utilise the site in significant numbers.

#### AMPHIBIANS

3.5.6. The data search returned no records of great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*). Common amphibian species such as smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*), common toad (*Bufo bufo*), and common frog (*Rana temporaria*)

3.5.7. No EPSLs for great crested newts were returned within 5km of the site boundary.

3.5.8. The site itself contained no waterbodies and therefore cannot support great crested newts in their breeding phase. However, the site is located within 250m of two small waterbodies located approximately 150m south, and 185m north of the site. The waterbodies appear small and are situated within the industrial estate. The ponds could not be accessed during the survey due to being located within private land, as such a Rapid Risk Assessment (RRA) has been completed and is detailed in Section 4.2.

3.5.9. The introduced shrub and sparsely vegetated land may provide suitable foraging resources and cover for common amphibians such as common toads (*Bufo bufo*). Therefore, it is considered that common amphibians may occur on site.

### REPTILES

3.5.10. The data search returned no records of reptile species within the local area.

3.5.11. The site provides limited value for reptiles given the site comprised predominantly developed land with some areas of sparse vegetation, which lacks the structure and habitat quality to support the species group. Therefore, reptiles are reasonably discounted from site and not considered further within the assessment.

### BIRDS

3.5.12. A total of 101 records of birds were returned during the 1km data search. Species included (not limited to); yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), house martin (*Delichon urbicum*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), reed bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*), song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and swift (*Apus apus*).

3.5.13. The site provides limited breeding habitat for birds in association with the area of introduced shrub, which passerine bird species may use for nesting purposes. The remaining habitats on site are not anticipated to be of significance.

3.5.14. The site has no value for ground nesting birds, due to the limited size of the site, lack of suitable habitat, and the intensely urban location.

### BATS

3.5.15. A total of sixty-two records of bats were returned within 1km of the site boundary. Species included unidentified bat (*Chiroptera*), brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), unidentified pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus* sp.), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), unidentified myotis (*Myotis* sp.), Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), and noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*).

3.5.16. The following EPSL were located within 5km from the site boundary:

Case reference of granted application	Species on the licence*	Distance from site (KM)	Licence Start Date	Licence End Date	Does the Licence				
					impact on a breeding site?	allow damage of breeding site?	allow damage of a resting place?	allow destruction of breeding site?	allow destruction of a resting place?
EPSM2012-4162	C-PIP	3.25 SW	07/06/2012	01/07/2013	N			N	Y
2015-15862-EPS-MIT	C-PIP	3.3 NW	23/10/2015	31/01/2016	N	N	N	N	Y
2015-17623-EPS-MIT	C-PIP	3.15 NE	10/12/2015	31/03/2016	N	N	N	N	Y
EPSM2013-5971	BLE WHISK	1.15 NE	17/07/2013	30/09/2015	N			N	Y
EPSM2009-1218	C-PIP	2.3 SW	21/09/2009	31/10/2010	N			N	Y
2017-32620-EPS-MIT	C-PIP	3.25 NE	01/01/2018	31/03/2023	N	N	N	N	Y



2018-33067-EPS-MIT-1	C-PIP S-PIP	4.3 W	06/03/2018	27/02/2023	N	N	N	N	Y
2018-38190-EPS-MIT	C-PIP	2.35 SE	04/12/2018	31/01/2019	N	N	N	N	Y
2020-49171-EPS-MIT-1	BLE C-PIP	4.3 SW	23/11/2020	30/04/2022	N	N	N	N	Y
2020-49667-EPS-MIT	C-PIP	3.9 SE	31/10/2020	31/10/2025	N	N	N	N	Y
2020-49667-EPS-MIT-1	C-PIP		31/10/2020	31/10/2025	N	N	N	N	Y
2020-49491-EPS-MIT	C-PIP S-PIP	3.8 SW	30/10/2020	30/04/2026	Y	N	N	Y	Y

Species on the licence*	Species name	Latin
C-PIP	Common pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>
S-PIP	Soprano pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>
BRAN	Brandt's bat	<i>Myotis brandtii</i>
BLE	Brown long-eared bat	<i>Plecotus auritus</i>
DAUB	Daubenton's bat	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>
L-HORSE	Lesser horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>
NOCT	Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>
NATT	Natterer's bat	<i>Myotis nattereri</i>
WHISK	Whiskered bat	<i>Myotis mystacinus</i>

- 3.5.17. The toilet block structure on site was assessed for bat roosting potential. This structure consisted of single-layer breezeblock walls, with a ceiling and roof comprised of two layers of panelling. The structure was previously an interior room of a larger building which has been demolished.
- 3.5.18. On the exterior, the breezeblock appeared in good condition with no obvious potential roosting features. In several places, shallow crevices were apparent where the distribution of mortar between bricks was uneven, although this was assessed as insufficient to allow for crevice dwelling species to roost. An empty doorframe permitted access to the structure interior.
- 3.5.19. The interior of the structure appeared predominantly well-sealed. One small hole in the ceiling permitted access to the space between the ceiling and exterior panel.
- 3.5.20. Overall, the structure was assessed as having 'negligible' bat roosting potential.

Table 3.1 PRA Summary



Exterior toilet block

Exterior toilet block



Interior toilet block



Interior toilet block



Exterior wall



Interior hole in ceiling

3.5.21. The habitats on site are anticipated to provide limited value for foraging bats given the minimal habitat on site suitable to attract invertebrate prey. Although bats may utilise the local waterways for commuting and are anticipated to be present in the wider landscape.

### **BADGER**



3.5.22. No records of badger were returned within the 1km data search.

3.5.23. No signs of badger presence were recorded within the site or the surrounding 30 m during the site visit, with the majority of the site and surrounding landscape comprising developed land. Badger is not anticipated to be present within the site, however the potential for them to commute across the site cannot be discounted.

#### WATER VOLE

3.5.24. Twenty-seven records of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) were returned within the data search, most of which related to the LNRs and LWSs adjacent to stretches of the Sankey Canal or Rainford Brook.

3.5.25. Given the anthropogenic barriers between the site and the various local watercourses (Sankey Canal and Rainford Brook), it is considered unlikely for water vole to be present on site, and they are therefore discounted from assessment.

#### OTHER TERRESTRIAL MAMMALS

3.5.26. Fourteen records of west European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) were located within the 1km search area. It is anticipated that hedgehogs may utilise the site for commuting or foraging within the dense area of introduced shrub.

3.5.27. Two records of brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*) were returned within the data search. However, the site itself provides no habitats of value for the species, and they are unlikely to be present on site.

#### NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES

3.5.28. Many records of non-native invasive flora species were located within the 1km search area. Species includes cotoneaster horizontalis (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*), Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), hollyberry cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster bullatus*), Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), montbretia (*Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora*), Archangel (*Lamiasrum galeobdolon subsp. argentatum*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), and rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*).

3.5.29. No non-native invasive species were observed during the survey. However, November is a sub-optimal period for identification, and it is possible specimens may have been missed. It should be noted that while Franchet's cotoneaster was identified on site, this species of cotoneaster is not considered to be a non-native invasive species under Schedule 9.

#### SPECIES DISCOUNTED FROM ASSESSMENT

3.5.30. Otter (*Lutra lutra*), beaver (*Castor fiber*) and white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) have been discounted from assessment as no aquatic habitats are located on site, and no records of these species were returned within the data search.

3.5.31. Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) mainly occur in southern counties, especially in Devon, Somerset, Sussex, and Kent. There are few recorded localities north of the Midlands, though they are present in parts of the Lake District and in scattered Welsh localities (Matthews et al, 2018). The species are not generally known to be present within the St. Helens area (Wembridge et al., 2016). The habitats on site are of limited value due to limited areas of extensive woodland and scrub. As such, the species are reasonably discounted from site.

3.5.32. Red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) has been discounted from the assessment. Red squirrel populations are limited to small areas of northern England and are not known to be present in the St. Helens area; with no previous records returned in the data search. It is anticipated that high abundances of grey squirrel are present within this region (Shuttleworth/RSST n.d.). This species will displace red squirrel through competition as well as cause increased red squirrel mortality through the spread of squirrel pox (The Mammal Society, 2020).

## 4 MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 DESIGNATED SITES

4.1.1. The site is located within the impact risk zone for Stanley Bank Meadow SSSI, and numerous designated sites are located within 1km of the site. As the development of the site relates to a commercial structure, no consideration of increased recreational pressure on local designated sites is required.

4.1.2. While the nature of the development is unlikely to result in an increase in visitors to these sites, a detailed Construction and Environment Management Plan (CEMP) specific to the proposed development has been created (and will be adhered to throughout the course of construction works) to avoid, minimise and mitigate for negative impacts resulting from construction practices on all habitats surrounding the site (Ref: 20-1385 RPT 002).

4.1.3. This plan details measures to avoid, minimise or mitigate any potential negative effects caused by construction practices on the environment on and surrounding the site including:

- The control of run-off from areas of arisings to prevent any pollutants/contaminants entering nearby waterbodies.
- Appropriate measures to suppress dust during hot, dry and/or windy conditions.
- Excavations should be sealed overnight or should have at least one shallow-sloping side to allow any animals that may fall in to escape.
- An ecologist should be contacted for advice should any protected species be discovered during construction.

### 4.2. SPECIES

#### AMPHIBIANS

4.2.1. A Rapid Risk Assessment (RRA) was undertaken following advice from Natural England assessing whether a Mitigation License for great crested newts would be needed. Based on this assessment, should great crested newts be within the offsite pond, the proposed development will most likely not cause an offence as indicated in the below table (total area impacted is approximately 0.2ha).

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.1 - 0.5 ha lost or damaged	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.1 - 0.5 ha lost or damaged	0.005
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
		Maximum: 0.005
Rapid risk assessment result:	<b>GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY</b>	

4.2.2. Great crested newts were deemed unlikely to be present on site and no further consideration for the species is required. However, there is a possibility that common amphibians such as common toad may be present on site.

4.2.3. It is recommended that consideration of amphibian presence during habitat management is considered. Any debris is to be cleared by hand, and any common amphibians located moved carefully, by hand, to outside of the impacted area.

4.2.4. Details regarding the mitigation measures required to minimise risk of impacting the species are included within the associated CEMP.

#### BREEDING BIRDS

4.2.5. Nesting birds are anticipated to utilise the area of introduced shrub habitat on site. While this habitat is to be retained during development, disturbance to nesting birds may be caused by works taking place on adjacent

areas.

4.2.6. Any works should be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season (March to September, inclusive). If this is not possible, a suitably qualified ecologist should undertake a nesting bird check no more than 48 hours prior to works being undertaken. If nesting activity is observed, the nest(s) should be left in situ until the young have fledged. A suitable buffer will be maintained and determined by the ecologist.

## BATS

4.2.7. The structure on site was assessed as having ‘**negligible**’ bat roosting potential, as per the BCT’s Good Practice Guidelines (Collins, 2023) which relates to a structure with no obvious or suboptimal roosting features that may be exploited by roosting bats on occasion though unlikely.

4.2.8. The Bat Mitigation Guidelines (Reason and Wray, 2023) details that a non-licensable approach to works can be adopted in cases of buildings assessed as maximum ‘low potential’ with no evidence of use, but where the presence of a bat (or very low numbers of bats) cannot be ruled out.

4.2.9. A non-licensable approach includes the implementation of PWMs as detailed:

- All contractors working on the site will be briefed with a Toolbox Talk by the licenced ecologist, on the legal protection afforded to bats and their roosts, and on how to proceed if a bat is discovered during the course of the work.
- A licenced ecologist will undertake a daylight inspection to assess the status of the site for bats prior to works commencing on site. The ecologist will check for fields of bats in relation to the shallow mortar and interior hole in the ceiling.
- The licenced ecologist will attend site on the day of the scheduled works to undertake a search for bats in relation to the potential roosting features identified during the PRA prior to the works commencing. If any bats are located, all works will cease, and Natural England is to be contacted immediately and a licence to be obtained.

4.2.10. Once the selected features have been removed under supervision, works can proceed in the absence of the licenced ecologist, at their discretion. If a bat is discovered at any unsupervised time, work must cease immediately, and a licenced bat handler must be called for advice. This advice will include leaving the bat to disperse of its own accord or wait for the licenced ecologist to move the bat. Builders and contractors are explicitly forbidden from handling bats except in the case of finding a trapped or injured bat. In which case the bat may be moved into a safe and secure place (e.g. a box) and the registered ecologist must be contacted immediately.

4.2.11. Slow-flying species such as brown long-eared, are sensitive to lighting and may be impacted by the proposed development, should no mitigation for lighting be considered.

4.2.12. Any proposed lighting/existing lighting should follow the guidance outlined in the Institute for Lighting Engineers document “Guidance for the Reduction of Obtrusive Lighting” (2005) and BCT’s “Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night” (2023).

4.2.13. An External Lighting Scheme had not been produced on the writing of this report. As such, the following recommendations are to be considered within the scheme during its condition, to minimise impacts of lighting. The recommendations are as follows:

- Keep site lighting to minimum levels.
- Luminaries should lack UV elements and preferably LED lighting with a warm white light should be used over cool white light (ideally <2700Kelvin).
- Lighting should feature peak wavelengths greater than 550nm.
- Light placement should be downward facing to prevent excess horizontal or vertical light spill.
- The use of integrated fittings such as cowls, shields, louvres and hoods, that effectively contain light spill from unintended areas.
- The use of hard landscaping features to block light and create dark corridors.
- Avoid illuminating habitats of value.
- Use of timed security lights should be set on motion-sensors and using short, 1-minute timers, to minimise light use.
- Column heights of lighting can be considered to minimise light spill.

## BADGERS

4.2.14. No badger setts were identified during the survey; however, they may be within the local area. The following Precautionary Working Methods will be adhered to during the construction phase to ensure that no badgers are impacted by the proposed development (Badger Trust, 2023):

- A pre-commencement of work badger survey should be conducted by a suitably qualified ecologist to ensure the current badger situation is known and that the recommendations are correct.
- All site personnel should be fully briefed concerning the method statement, the presence of badgers, the mitigation measures to be followed, the relevant legislation, the penalties imposed and who to contact should they need to.
- Trees and shrubs should be felled so that they fall away from the direction of a sett and outside exclusion zones.
- Ensure excavations or trenches left overnight are covered or have an escape route such as a shallow gradient at one or both ends.
- Ensure excavations or trenches are inspected each morning and evening to ensure no badgers have become trapped.
- Open pipework with a diameter of more than 120mm should be properly covered or capped at the end of the working day to prevent badgers from entering and becoming trapped.
- During the work, the storage of any chemicals should be contained in such a way that they cannot be accessed or knocked over by any roaming badgers.
- The storage of topsoil or other “soft” building materials within the site should be given careful consideration. Badgers will readily adopt such mounds and dig setts which would then be afforded the same protection as established setts. To avoid the adoption of such mounds, they should be subject to daily inspections before work commences or alternative measures put in place, such as being fenced off for higher-risk areas.
- Litter, tools and potentially dangerous materials on site should be cleared at the end of the working day. Care should be taken that there are no sharp metal objects or pointed protrusions on the ground which could seriously injure a badger due to their poor eyesight.
- Ensure no dogs are brought to the work site.
- Security lighting should be kept to a minimum and away from setts to avoid disturbance to any badgers on site.
- Fires should be lit only in secure compounds away from areas of badger activity and should be fully extinguished at the end of the working day.
- Use of noisy plant or machinery should cease at least two hours before sunset and not commence until an hour after sunrise to avoid causing a disturbance to badgers or preventing access or egress to setts.
- Badger paths must not be blocked to ensure access to foraging areas is maintained.

4.2.15. Adherence to these measures should be confirmed to planners at regular intervals by the project ecologist.

## TERRESTRIAL MAMMALS

4.2.16. European Hedgehog are anticipated to be present within the site and are a Species of Principal Importance. During habitat management, any areas of dense vegetation should first be carefully hand searched to check for the species. If identified during management, should be relocated carefully by hand to a location away from the working area. If any injured either species are located they should be taken to a local vets.

## NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES

4.2.17. No non-native invasive species were identified during the survey. However multiple records were recorded within the area, and it is possible specimens may have not been recorded during the survey. An updated walkover should be completed prior to the survey, as detailed within the CEMP.

## **5 FURTHER SURVEYS AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. FURTHER SURVEYS**

5.1.1.No further surveys are required to proceed with the proposed development.

### **5.2. OTHER MITIGATION MEASURES**

5.2.1.Mitigation measures have been outlined to minimise the risk of injuring or killing any protected species that the site provides value for, and will be adopted as detailed within the CEMP:

- Precautionary Working Methods (PWMs) for badger.
- Consideration for common amphibians.
- Lighting mitigation for bats.
- Consideration for hedgehog during construction.
- Nesting bird check if work is to occur between March to September (inclusive).

### **5.3. ECOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENTS**

5.3.1.To enhance the ecological value of the site for local species, enhancements have been recommended:

- Bird and bird boxes could be placed on the new buildings. A plan to show the locations of these boxes and the specifications should be produced by a suitably qualified ecologist once the layout is finalised.
- Planting of linear features such as hedgerows and trees where possible, to add commuting features within the site.
- The inclusion of 'hedgehog highways' to facilitate movement across the site. This includes holes of 13 x 13cm at the bases of fence panels, leaving a sufficient gap beneath gates and/or leaving brick spaces at the bases of brick walls.

### **5.4. CONCLUSION**

5.4.1.The site was found to comprise predominantly developed land, with sparsely vegetated areas, and a portion of introduced shrub. Within these habitats the presence of certain native fauna cannot be discounted, and therefore consideration must be taken for badger, common amphibians, breeding birds, bats, and hedgehog.

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Developed land; sealed surface



Southern site boundary vegetation



Sparsely vegetated, gravel surfaced area



Gravel surfaced area



North site boundary and sand surfaced area



Western site boundary





Introduced shrub habitat



Introduced shrub habitat

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