

Land adjacent to Fairfield High School Peterchurch Herefordshire

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal By:



On Behalf Of:

Fairfield High School

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### 1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Two parcels of land, adjacent to Fairfield High School in Peterchurch, Herefordshire, are being put forward for development in order to provide the School with additional indoor and outdoor sporting facilities. Both parcels form part of larger fields located on opposite sides of a road on the edge of Peterchurch. In order to assess the habitats on site, as well as the presence or potential presence of protected species, a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site was undertaken in July 2021.
- 1.2 Site survey covered parts of two fields, as well as a small section of a third field, which may be used for providing access. Both fields are grass covered and surrounded by hedgerows. Habitats on site were classed as of moderate ecological value.
- 1.3 Protected species and their potential presence on site were considered as part of the assessment. No further survey is recommended at this time. Occasional presence of great crested newts on site is assumed and a method statement will need to be followed. If great crested newts are found present, works must stop and advice be sought from Natural England, which may result in the need to apply for a licence at that time. Only small sections of the hedgerows on site are to be removed and therefore no other survey is currently recommended for these, unless impacts on large sections of the boundary hedgerows cannot be avoided or lighting of the sports pitch is proposed.
- 1.4 Breeding birds are likely to be present on site, due to the suitability of the habitats. Breeding birds and all results of their breeding activities are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Any removal of vegetation must be timed to occur during winter, outside the breeding season. Effectively, vegetation clearance must be conducted between September and February, inclusive. Bird boxes must be installed as part of the development.
- 1.5 Other recommendations are also made in this report relating to improving the general biodiversity of the site post-development, and the creation of a buffer corridor to the river Dore and the dismantled railway line, as well as a sensitive lighting scheme to consider the likely presence of nocturnal fauna on site. The lighting scheme is to pertain to the new building only, no lighting of the sports pitch is proposed, this would require further survey.

#### 2 Introduction

- 2.1 Just Mammals Limited was commissioned by Bernard Eacock, on behalf of Fairfield High School, to complete a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of two areas of land adjacent to the School in Peterchurch, Herefordshire. This comprised an ecological survey of the site and formal desktop study in accordance with current guidelines. Survey was completed during the day in July 2021, and included an assessment of habitats, as well as protected/priority species.
- 2.2 It is understood that the site is being put forward for the development of a sports hall and outdoor play area. Situated on the outskirts of Peterchurch, the site is made up of parts of two grass fields on opposite sides of the road. The centre of the site has a National Grid Reference of SO 34450 38259, and an altitude of approximately 125m Above Ordnance Datum.
- 2.3 This report details the findings of the assessment. The different types of habitat were assessed, and the potential presence of protected species, such as badger (*Meles meles*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), reptiles and amphibians, as well as bats and birds were considered. Additionally, the report makes recommendations concerning the ecological value of the site, as well as the need for further survey work as appropriate.

### 3 Surveyor Experience

3.1 Surveyor and author of this report is Carola Hoskins. Carola is an Associate Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (ACIEEM) and holds an MSc in Environmental Conservation Management. She has practical expertise with bats, birds, botanical assessments, mammalian and reptile surveys. As well as assisting in conservation-based research, she has carried out biodiversity audits and ecological enquiries. Carola holds licences with Natural Resources Wales for otters, bats, white-clawed crayfish and great crested newts. She has completed a study of water voles. Carola is the Principal Ecologist with Just Mammals Limited.

#### 4 Survey Methodology

4.1 A PEA was conducted on Wednesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2021. Details of the survey activities and weather conditions are provided in Table 1. Prior to the site visit, a desktop study was undertaken,

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which involved a standard search area of a 2km radius from the site (using a central grid reference), using the MAGIC website. A record search was commissioned from the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC) for historic records within 1km from the site centroid.

- 4.2 The PEA comprised a survey employing the Phase 1 habitat survey methodology. This is a standardised technique for classifying and mapping British habitats. All areas within the site were inspected and assessed for indicators of ecological value, including the presence, potential presence and/or field signs of any protected or rare habitats and species. The site was walked over, recording all plant species and features onto a custom-made recording sheet. Habitats and notes were drawn onto a map of the survey site and photographs were taken. A coloured Phase 1 habitat map was produced (see Appendix II).
- 4.3 Assessment for the presence or potential presence of protected species, including bats, hazel dormouse, badger, reptiles and amphibians, was undertaken by considering the features of the site. Such features include grassland, trees and dense vegetation. The potential suitability of the site for nesting birds was also considered, as well as the potential presence of invasive species, such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), and Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

### 5 Site Description

- 5.1 The survey site comprises parts of two fields, one grazed by cattle and one not currently grazed, divided by a road. The total combined site area is approximately 1.8 hectares (ha), in combined size, with the area to the south of the road approximately 0.4 ha and the one to the north approximately 1.4 ha in size. The more southerly field runs flat for a short while from the road, before turning relatively steep at the southern extent, the more northerly field is relatively flat with a slight slope towards the watercourse to the north. Boundaries around the site are made up of hedgerows or are arbitrary lines across the field.
- 5.2 Surrounding land use is largely agricultural, with a mixture of arable and pastoral fields, as well as some scattered woodland. The remainder of the village of Peterchurch lies to the north-east of the site. A dismantled railway runs adjacent to the northern boundary of the northern field and a stream just skirts the northernmost point of the site.

### 6 Survey Constraints

6.1 No major constraints were encountered during the Phase 1 survey and all habitats on site could be identified with confidence. It must be noted that this PEA is not intended to confirm the presence or absence of all plant species on site. This would require a more detailed botanical assessment over multiple site visits. However, it does provide a comprehensive ecological assessment of habitat types and dominant species at the time of the survey and highlights areas where further survey effort would be required. Access to the site was possible at all times.

### 7 Desktop Study

- 7.1 HBRC's record search (unique reference 3873) reported several BAP Priority habitats within 1km. A deciduous woodland is 200m to the west of the site, and approximately 900m to the south are two such woodland areas; a traditional orchard is *circa* 682m to the north-west. Unfortunately, HBRC record searches reveal very little information regarding the type of record received, with most records just being shown as present. A lot of records are also only presented at a six figure grid reference scale, making it difficult to determine the exact location of the record.
- 7.2 The data set revealed a total of 333 species records for legally protected and priority species within 1km of the site. No records were returned for the site itself. Records are summarised below.
  - terrestrial mammals excluding bats accounted for 12 records of all species records, and these included West European hedgehog,
     polecat (*Mustela putorius*), and European otter (droppings found *circa* 415m to the south-east by Trenant Brook);
  - bats accounted for 99 of species records, including lesser horseshoe bat (Rhinolophus hipposideros), with a roost recorded circa 500m to the north-east, pipistrelle (Pipistrellus sp.), brown long-eared bat (Plecotus auritus), Natterer's (Myotis nattereri), noctule (Nyctalus noctula), Daubenton's (Myotis daubentonii), western barbastelle (Barbastella barbastellus), and whiskered bat (Myotis mystacinus).
  - reptiles accounted for 1 record of slow-worm (Anguis fragilis);

- amphibians accounted for 4 records, including great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and common frog (*Rana temporaria*);
- bird records included the Schedule 1 species such as red kite (Milvus milvus), peregrine (Falco peregrinus), kestrel (Falco tinnunculus), redwing (Turdus iliacus), and kingfisher (Alcedo atthis), the data search also reported several Section 7 species including house sparrow (Passer domesticus), and song thrush (Turdus philomelos);
- · vascular plants accounted for 5 records;
- invertebrates accounted for 56 records, most of them moth records, including white ermine (Spilosoma lubricipeda);
- fish accounted for 11 of the records, including Section 7 European eel (Anguilla anguilla).

### 8 Survey Results

8.1 The extended Phase 1 habitat survey was carried out on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2021, by an experienced ecologist. Details of the conditions under which the survey was conducted are given in Table 1 below. Wind speeds shown employ the Beaufort scale.

Table 1: Summary of Survey Activity and Weather Conditions

Date	Survey Type	Timing	Weather Conditions
07/07/2021	Day time visual inspection, botanical survey and habitat assessment, including protected species assessment of field	12:00 – 13:00 hours British Summer Time	Air temperature: 19°C Cloud cover: 4/8 oktas Wind speed: F1, light air Conditions: Dry
Surveyor	Carola Hoskins		

8.2 For recording purposes, the site was divided into two different habitat types and mapped following the codes and conventions described in the Phase 1 Habitat Survey Handbook (JNCC 2010). Table 2 below describes the on-site habitats in order of surface area, with the most extensive habitats listed first. Some of the plant species present are also listed.

Table 2: Summary of Phase 1 Habitat Notes

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Habitat	Phase 1 Classification	Description of Area and Typical Species	
Type 1	B2.2 Neutral semi-improved grassland	The majority of the site is covered in this type of habitat. The more southern field shows some signs of mowing, although it is not known whether this is the regular management regime for the field. The more northerly field was grazed by cattle at the time of survey;  Species present include perennial rye-grass (Lolium perenne), red clover (Trifolium pratense) and crested dog's tail (Cynosurus cristatus). Also present are sweet-vernal grass (Anthoxanthum odoratum) and cock's foot (Dactylis glomerata)	
Type 2	J2.1.2 Native species-poor hedgerow	Hedgerows make up the majority of the site boundaries, these are well-established, if relatively species poor. They vary in height from approximately 1.5m to over 3m;  Species present include hazel (Corylus avellana), which is dominant, as well as hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna), blackthorn (Prunus spinosa) and wych elm (Ulmus alabra)	

- 8.3 A Phase 1 map showing habitats is displayed in Figure 2 (see Appendix II). Photographs of the site are provided in Appendix III.
- 8.4 The site is made up of two separate parts. The site to the south of the dividing road is made up largely of a section of field adjacent to the existing school, as well as a small section of the field directly adjacent to that, presumably in order to provide access. The second part of the site, to the north of the road, is also part of a larger field, it has no current access, so presumably part of the hedgerow will need to be removed in order to provide this. The habitats on site are classed as of moderate ecological importance.
- 8.5 Ecological assessment included identification of the potential for protected and priority species to be present on site. Hedges on site are connected to further linear habitats and pockets of habitat suitable for bat foraging and potentially roosting across the wider site and countryside, such as a small woodland to the north-west, as well as the River Dore. The tree line dividing the southern site from the access, as well as that located just west of the more northerly field, are both well established and have a range of suitable roosting features for bats, in the form of woodpecker holes, tears et cetera.
- 8.6 No evidence for the presence of badger, such as setts, worn tracks, footprints, latrines/dung pits or hair was recorded during the survey.

- 8.7 Reptiles require mosaics of habitat that provide the range of features they need for foraging, sheltering and overwintering purposes. Sward height is low and the grazing pressure by the cattle considerable. No evidence of reptiles was found during the preliminary site visit. The records search returned only a single reptile record, that of a slow worm. A dismantled railway runs to the north-east of the northern part of the site, railway lines are known as excellent features for bats.
- 8.8 Hazel dormice are not only a woodland species, but also make use of connecting hedgerows and scrub, both for dispersal and long-term purposes. Hazel, an important food species, was recorded as present on site. The record search returned no records for this species, it is not known whether they are present in the woodland to the north-west. The hedgerows surrounding the site are suitable for the species.
- Amphibians require ponds in which to breed and good quality terrestrial habitat that provides shelter. A previous pond located just above 60m to the north-west has dried up, another one is located just under 300m to the south-east. Habitats on site are suitable for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) in principle, yet the grazing pressure reduces the potential suitability. The local records centre returned a single historic records for this relatively well-surveyed species. Unfortunately due to the record being made at six figure grid reference it is not possible to determine where the animal or evidence was found, the record centroid lies to the east of the site. Since great crested newts are known to use terrestrial habitat up to 500m from their breeding ponds, the wider landscape must be considered.
- 8.10 Hedges and standard trees provide suitable habitat for nesting birds. Although no Section 7 birds were observed during the site visit, several species have been recorded in the vicinity. No sign of a nest was found during this PEA. Habitats on site are considered suitable for species such as song thrush (*Turdus philomelos subsp. Clarkei*), and cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), evidence of woodpecker was found on and adjacent to the site. A more detailed breeding bird survey earlier in the season would be required to comprehensively assess the site's use by breeding birds.

#### 9 Discussion and Conclusions

- 9.1 Two areas of land adjacent to Fairfield High School are to be developed in order to provide indoor and outdoor sporting facilities. Proposals are for the erection of a sports hall on land directly adjacent to the current school complex, as well as a playing field across the road from the school. A PEA was carried out to assess the site for its ecological value and potential for protected species to be using the site. Desktop study and field survey were both used to evaluate the ecological value of the site's different habitat, the site was assessed as being of moderate value. No nationally protected sites are located within 2km of the site.
- 9.2 The hedgerows on site are likely to form important corridors and habitats for both terrestrial and flying mammals, as well as birds and must therefore be kept in place wherever possible. It will however be necessary to remove at least three small sections of hedgerow in order to provide the necessary access to the sites from the road and from the existing school site. This must be kept to the minimum possible and ideally standard trees will be planted on either side of the new gaps in order to provide aerial connectivity and shelter.
- 9.3 No buildings are present on site. While there are trees present within the wider hedgerows, none are to be removed as part of the proposals. A tree line to the west (and therefore outside of) the more northern part of the site has multiple features that can be used by a range of animals including roosting bats. This treeline is not to be affected by the proposals, as no night time lighting is proposed. If this changes and lighting is to be installed, further survey of the tree line and hedgerows for nocturnal species including hazel dormice and bats will be necessary.
- 9.4 At least one pond was identified to be located within 500m of the site from aerial mapping, the closest of which is located about 300m from the site. Habitats on site do have some limited suitability for great crested newts, a European Protected Species. It will be necessary to put in place avoidance measures and ensure there is a suitable buffer between the river corridor and the dismantled railway line, as well as improving the habitat currently present on site.
- 9.5 The site has potential to support west European hedgehog, in the hedgerows and grassland areas and the species was returned in the record search. On-site habitats are highly unlikely to be of critical importance for the species, so further surveys are not recommended provided that future

developments account for their potential presence with appropriate avoidance/enhancement measures.

- 9.6 Hedgerows on site have the potential to support hazel dormice. As the hedgerows are largely to be retained and no lighting is to be installed, dormice are not to be affected by the proposals. Small sections will need to be removed to provide access, however if large visibility splays need to be installed or if plans are to change and affect the hedgerows, further survey must be carried out.
- 9.7 Although no Section 7 birds were observed during the site visit, all hedgerows provide suitable habitat for nesting birds. There is scope for safeguarding nesting birds on site with habitat retention/enhancement measures and artificial nesting opportunities.
- 9.8 While reptile presence was not established during the initial survey, the northern part of the site has some low-level suitability for species such as slow-worm or common lizard, the wider landscape includes some wet areas next to the river Dore which may also provide suitability for grass snake. The same avoidance and enhancement measures as for great crested newts above can also be employed for reptiles. In the case of the reptiles, the low sward height of the northern site may allow the assumption that the main area of development is only used by these species opportunistically and that relevant habitat areas closer to the river are able to be protected, negating the need for further survey.

9.9

9.10 Lighting is a key factor when it comes to the disturbance of nocturnal species, including, bats, badgers and dormice. No lighting is to be included in the new proposals for the sports pitch, although some limited safety lighting is likely to be part of the new sports hall. Such lighting will need to be designed away from natural areas, further recommendations are made below.

### 10 Recommendations

- 10.1 No further survey is recommended for the site. A method statement for the potential presence of great crested newts must be drawn up prior to the works and followed throughout the works taking place. In the event that a great crested newt is found during the works, all works must stop and advice from Natural England sought, it may be necessary to apply for a licence at this point.
- 10.2 Landscape proposals for the site must be inspired and informed by its rural location and the natural features around it. Plants used, especially for hedgerows and green spaces must be native and of local provenance. Such planting will also provide a food source for native fauna. Lighting is also a key consideration, this must be kept away from natural areas. Dark corridors must be maintained around and across the site and the hedgerows must be retained. If the hedgerows cannot be retained for any reason, further survey effort for hazel dormouse will be necessary.
- 10.3 Removal of woody vegetation must be carried out outside of the bird nesting season, which runs between March and August, inclusive. All nesting birds, their chicks, eggs and nests whilst in use are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). If, whilst the vegetation is being removed an active nest is discovered, all works within a 2m radius of the nest must be immediately stopped, and not recommenced until all chicks have fledged.
- 10.4 The site abuts the river Dore, as well as a dismantled railway line along its northern tip. Both of these are features of value and are likely to provide important corridors along the valley. A buffer zone between the pitch and the edge of the site of at least five meters must be observed and this must be improved for biodiversity by a variety of means including provision of high quality grassland, hibernacula etc. A Biodiversity Enhancement Scheme must be drawn up to detail the proposals for the corridor, as well as further enhancement on site itself.
- As an enhancement for the building, at least two woodcrete bird boxes with a small diameter hole must be installed in a suitable position on the new sports hall. Additionally, at least two integrated bat boxes must be included in suitable locations on the new building. New native species hedgerow planting is proposed as part of the new boundaries and this will serve to replace what is being lost in terms of hedgerows, as well as creating additional habitat.
- 10.6 To protect any mammals, such as hedgehog that may pass through the site, any trenches dug forming part of the groundworks must be covered overnight, or left with a 45° sloping side to prevent

any animal from becoming trapped. Similarly, any unconnected pipes must be capped overnight to prevent any animal from becoming stuck.

- 10.7 Potential presence of nocturnal animals such as foraging bats on site requires considerate design of a sensitive lighting scheme for the new sports hall. Any new lighting columns must not exceed 4m in height, and must be affixed with cowls, hoods or shrouds to minimise upward light spill. Luminosity will be limited to the absolute minimum required by Health and Safety standards, and will ideally be timed to be extinguished for as long a period as possible during the night. All lights must face downwards and must not point directly at any natural features, such as the hedgerows. This is also important for any temporary lighting installed for use during construction. Any external lighting affixed to the exterior of the proposed building must be motion-activated and pointed in a downward-facing direction, away from natural features. No lighting of the new sports pitch is proposed, if this changes further survey for bats and hazel dormice must be carried out.
- 10.8 Development of an area gives the opportunity to carry out enhancements to benefit wildlife, especially during the landscaping process. Where possible, species used must be native. Table 3 below includes a list of suitable native tree and hedgerow species, which can be planted as part of the landscaping proposals. It is essential that such plants are sourced locally in order to reduce likelihood of importing diseases.

Table 3: Recommended Native Tree and Shrub Species

Common Name	Scientific Name
Alder	Alnus glutinosa
Crab apple	Malus sylvestris
Dogwood	Cornus sanguinea
Elder	Sambucus nigra
Field maple	Acer campestre
Hawthorn	Crataegus monogyna
Hazel	Corylus avellana
Holly	llex aquifolium
Rowan	Sorbus aucuparia
Silver birch	Betula pubescens
Yew	Taxus baccata

- Most developments include areas of grassland, and whilst some will require an amenity grassland seed mix, there are opportunities to sow wildflower areas on parts of the site. To meet these needs it is recommended that the following seed mixes are used. British Seed Houses Mix A24 is a wear and tear mixture suitable for lawns and hard-working areas near to pathways. It contains five species of plant which are suitable for this location. For the wildflower areas the Emorsgate EM3 wildflower seed mix is recommended, with some twenty-five wild plant and grass species.
- 10.10 It is important to implement good horticultural practice in any landscaping scheme, including the use of peat-free composts, mulches and soil conditioners. The use of pesticides (i.e. herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and slug pellets etc) must be discouraged to prevent cumulative fatal effects to animals via the food chain, particularly invertebrates, birds and/or mammals. Any pesticides used must be non-residual.
- 10.11 Ideally, as part of this proposal, the opportunity will be taken to develop a full and detailed biodiversity management plan. The plan would be expected to cover monitoring of all of the enhancement proposals set out above and the appointment of a biodiversity champion during and after the development.

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# Appendix I: Site Plan



# Appendix II: Phase 1 Habitat Map

Figure 2: Phase 1 habitat map



# Appendix III: Site Photographs

Plate 1: View towards east across southern field



Plate 3: Access point in southern field





Plate 5: View across northern field



Plate 6: View across top of northern field





Plate 8: Feature within tree line





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