

Update Ecological Site Walkover

Project	The Downs, Stebbing
Date	04/08/2023
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Reviewer	Simon Thomas MCIEEM, Director of Ecology

Summary: An updated ecological site walkover was undertaken on 17th July 2023 at the site known as The Downs, Stebbing. No significant changes were noted within the site since the detailed Preliminary Ecological Appraisal undertaken by Hybrid Ecology in 2021. Due to the lack of notable changes, the recommendations made within the previous report are still considered valid. Since the original PEA, additional surveys have been undertaken for great crested newt eDNA sampling, reptile surveys, National Vegetation Classification survey and ground level tree assessments for bat roosting potential. The recommendations in these reports take precedent over the recommendations in the original PEA report.

Purpose of this report

This report has been instructed by Montare.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal survey was previously undertaken in May 2021 by Gemma Holmes ACIEEM, of Hybrid Ecology (report published September 2021). An updated site walkover has been undertaken to note any changes within the site and inform a new planning application. A full site assessment is included in the original report. As such this memo document should be accompanied by the original report.

The proposed development involves the creation of a residential development.

This update report assesses the continued validity of the aforementioned reports and notes any changes to the recommendations made.

Limitations

The site was accessed during July 2023, a time when the majority of plant species would be expected to be evident, particularly extensive stands of invasive species such as Japanese

knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) or giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*). Where further botanical or invasive species surveys are considered necessary, these have been recommended within this report.

All areas of the site were fully accessed at the time of the surveys.

As the attributes of the site and its potential for protected, notable and invasive species may change over time, this report is broadly considered valid for a duration of **18 months**, after which time it is recommended that an update site assessment is undertaken. In some cases, protected or invasive species' use of a site may change over a shorter timescale, for instance the use of a badger sett by badgers, or the extent of invasive plant species, which may change month to month. In such cases, appropriate precautionary advice or recommendations for update surveys are given within this report. Although invasive plant species have been recorded if observed within the site, we cannot guarantee that all occurrences have been found.

Site location

The site is split in to two plots, A and B. The site is in a rural location to the west of Stebbing in Essex. Stebbing lies north-east of Great Dunmow, and London Stansted Airport; and north-west of Braintree within the rural district of Uttlesford. The ancient monument of The Mount with Stebbing Park is to the west of both sites, with the access road lined by a mature avenue of lime trees in the centre. The Mount and immediate surrounds provide a good mosaic of habitats including woodland, ponds and grassland.

The central grid reference for site A is TL 65746 24610. The central grid reference for site B is TL 65913 24430. The combined surveyed site covers approximately 5.7 hectares.

Methodology

A walkover survey the site was undertaken on 17th July 2023 by Bradley Collins of Tim Moya Associates, an experienced ecological consultant and Qualifying Member of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). During the survey the weather conditions were not considered to pose any limitations to the survey.

Updated ecological records data has not been purchased for this updated site walkover.

The vegetation and habitat types within the site were compared to those originally recorded during the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal in 2021. Where changes had occurred, these were noted and are detailed within the report.

The site was inspected for evidence of and its potential to support protected or notable species, especially those listed under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), including those given extra protection under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, and listed on the UK and local Biodiversity Action Plans. Such species include amphibians, reptiles, bats, badgers, birds, dormice and water voles. Evidence of badgers was searched for throughout the site, including setts, footprints, feeding signs, hairs and droppings.

The site was searched for evidence of invasive plant species, such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), horizontal/wall cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*) and floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*).

Survey Findings

The site is dominated by grassland habitats, including modified grassland and other neutral grassland. Hedgerows/ lines of trees are present around the boundaries of the site. A ditch is present on both A and B sites.

No significant changes were noted from the previous 2021 survey, as such the survey findings and recommendations detailed in the 2021 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal report are unchanged. However, Since the 2021 report, additional protected species surveys have been undertaken.

- The Original PEA report recommended eDNA Surveys on Ponds 1-5 to assess presence or absence for great crested newts. eDNA surveys have been undertaken by MKA Ecology on Ponds 1, 2 and 3 in 2022. The results returned negative for the presence of great crested newts. Access was not granted for Ponds 4 and 5 and it is recommended that the advice from the eDNA report is followed, and district licensing procedures are followed (MKA Ecology, August 2022, eDNA Survey).

- The Original PEA report recommended a reptile survey. A reptile survey was undertaken in 2022 by MKA Ecology. They found grass snakes and slow-worms to be utilising the site. The report recommends that a mitigation strategy should be developed (MKA Ecology, November 2022, Reptile Survey)
- The Original PEA report recommended a ground level tree inspection survey for bat roost potential. A ground level tree assessment survey has been completed and the recommendations in that report should be followed (MKA Ecology, November 2022, Land at Stebbing, Essex: Ground Level Tree Assessment Technical Note). No new potential bat roost features were found during the 2023 survey.
- The Original PEA report recommended a national vegetation classification (NVC) survey. This was completed by MKA in July 2022. The NVC survey will assist in the classification of habitats for the upcoming biodiversity net-gain assessment (MKA Ecology, November 2022 Land at Stebbing, Essex: National Vegetation Classification Survey).

All other recommendations excluding the above from the original PEA are still valid. Please refer to the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Hybrid Ecology, September 2021) for details.

References

- British Standards Institution (2013). BS42020 – Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development.
- CIEEM (2017). Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, 2nd edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.
- Collins, J. (ed.) (2016). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.
- Institution of Lighting Professionals (2018). Bats and artificial lighting in the UK. Guidance Note 08/18.
- Hybrid Ecology (2021). Preliminary Ecological Appraisal: Land adjacent to Stebbing, Essex.
- MKA Ecology (2022). Land at Stebbing, Essex: Ground Level Tree Assessment Technical Note.
- MKA Ecology (2022). Land at Stebbing, Essex: Reptile Survey.
- MKA Ecology (2022). Land at Stebbing, Essex: eDNA Survey.
- MKA Ecology (2022). Land at Stebbing, Essex: National Vegetation Classification Survey.

Appendix 1 – Photos (2023)

Photo 1 – Site A overview	Photo 2 – Site A overview
	
Photo 3 – Site B overview	Photo 4 – Site B overview
	