



JAMES BLAKE

A S S O C I A T E S

Our Ref: JBA 16/281 ECO11 Rev A

2nd December 2021

Robert Phillips,
Countryside Properties Ltd.

RE: Updated Ecological Walkover Survey of Land at Cambridge Road, Melbourn, Cambridgeshire

Introduction and Background

James Blake Associates Ltd. (JBA) was instructed by Countryside Properties Ltd. to undertake an updated ecological walkover survey of land at Cambridge Road, Melbourn, Cambridgeshire to assess the potential for protected species and invasive & non-native species and provide a report to summarise the findings of the walkover survey highlighting any significant constraints for the site since the previous survey in 2017 (JBA, 2017).

The site is approximately 6.84 hectares in size and is located northwest of Cambridge Road, in the village of Melbourn, Cambridgeshire (see Figure 1 below). The wider landscape includes a science park to the southwest, the village of Melbourn, residential and commercial buildings, and arable fields with small pockets of woodland and pastureland. Fowlmere Watercress Beds Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Reserve is located approximately 1.3km east of the site boundary.

Figure 1: Site Location (Reproduced from Magic maps data licence number 100059700)



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34-52 Out Westgate, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 3PA
tel: 01284 335797 email: jamesblake@jba-landmarc.com

Chairman: James Blake BA (Hons) Dip LA (Hons) CMLI

Company Secretary: Louise Blake BSc PGCE

Directors: Elzbieta Zebrowska MSc Eng LArch MScEnvSc CMLI

Associate Directors: Vivienne Jackson : Marie Lowe CIMA Cert BA

Associate Director - Strategic Landscape Division: Abby Stallwood BSc (Hons) PG Dip LM CMLI

www.jba-landmarc.com

Registration no. 08169866 VAT no. 512.4127.91

A previous phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken by JBA on the site in 2017, which noted the site itself as two arable fields, with variable field margins of improved grassland and managed hedgerows. A wet ditch ran along the north-western boundary, connecting the site to watercourses in the wide area, and a pocket of woodland with a pond was adjacent the eastern boundary.

Several species-specific surveys have also been undertaken including a ground and arial inspection of trees to assess bat roost potential (BRP) (2017b), a badger (*Meles meles*) survey (2017c), water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) survey (2017d), great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) survey (2017e) and reptile survey (2017f).

The updated ecological walkover survey was undertaken on the 18th of November 2021 by Christopher Bridge BSc (Hons) (Natural England (NE) Barn Owl Class Licence CL29 and NE GCN Class Licence CL08) and Bethan Feeney-Howells BSc (Hons). This report is intended to give an overview of the site habitat(s) and condition at the time of the survey and should be read in conjunction with the previous phase 1 habitat survey (JBA, 2017) and species reports (2017b-f).

The survey methodology followed the standard Phase 1 methodology of Joint Nature Conservation Committee Guidelines (JNCC, 2010). An extension of this basic methodology was also undertaken to provide further details in relation to notable or protected habitats present within the survey area, or in relation to habitats present that have the potential to support notable or protected species (CIEEM, 2013).

The baseline conditions reported in this document represent those identified at the time of the survey on 16th November 2021. Although a reasonable assessment of habitats present can be made during a single walkover survey, seasonal variations are not observed.

The relevant wildlife legislations and planning policies are listed below:

- Conservation of Habitats and Species 2019 (Amendment) (EU Exit) 2019, ('The Habitats Regulations'). The Habitats Regulations implement The Habitats Directive 1992 (92/43/EEC) into English Law. (Amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) Regulations 2012 S.I. 2012/1927).
- Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended) (WCA). [Amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)].
- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006 (NERC).
- The Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (The Badgers Act).
- The Wild Mammals (Protection) Act, 1996.
- The Hedgerows Regulations, 2007.
- National Planning Policy Framework, 2021 (NPPF).

Results and Evaluation

The site itself has gone through some change since the phase 1 habitat survey (2017); the site remains two arable fields, with improved grassland field margins that have increased in sward height in some places and now include a higher proportion of tall ruderal vegetation; this development is most obvious along the northeast boundary of the site.

Other habitats previously identified, such as the hedgerows that border the majority of the site, have not changed significantly since the previous report and remain managed and species poor. In contrast, the strip of previously identified improved grassland along the southwest border of the site, has now developed into tall ruderal habitat with a well-worn footpath running into the site. Several brash piles

previously identified on site have changed in composition and have now been classed as dead wood habitat. Furthermore, several trees present on site in 2017, deemed as having negligible BRP, are now absent with evidence of recent felling.

No rare or protected plant flora was identified during the updated walkover survey. Invasive plant species, such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), were also not identified at the site during the walkover.

Bats

The bat roost potential of the trees on site were assessed and little change has occurred since the 2017 reports (2017a, b), in terms of their level of suitability. One tree out of 16 had decreased in BRP, located [REDACTED]. In the southwest corner of the site, three trees with negligible BRP had been recently felled (see Appendix A for location of changes regarding trees on site)

[REDACTED] however, this feature could not be located during the updated survey and has likely been covered or is no longer present.

Badgers

Majority of previously identified badger signs from the 2017 badger report were still present and located in the same areas, with the addition of digging evidence, bedding material and two recent latrines.

[REDACTED] Recent activity was evident at the time of the survey as hair, scratch marks, droppings and bedding material were found, [REDACTED]. (See Appendix B for location of additional badger signs).

Water voles

Evidence of water voles using the site was found [REDACTED] but could not be confirmed as water vole. In the previous water vole survey (2017d), two burrows were noted; one deemed inactive, and the other deemed active but could not be confirmed as water vole at the time.

No additional signs of activity such as dropping, footprints and sightings were recorded at the time of the updated survey. However, multiple potential burrows were found [REDACTED] which could indicate that water voles are using this area. [REDACTED]

Reptiles and amphibians

The suitability for reptiles, GCN and other amphibians on site has not changed significantly, with good foraging and commuting habitats still present since the phase 1 habitat survey (2017a), [REDACTED]

Several brush piles previously identified on site have now been classed as dead wood, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

with the GCN report (2017e) showing an 'average' suitability, with no change to this noted at the time of the updated survey. [REDACTED] in the GCN report (2017e), with 1 smooth newt recorded, and no change in terms of suitability was noted at the time of the updated survey.

The reptile (2017f) and GCN reports (2017e) found no species (except the single smooth newt recording) on site.

Birds

The suitability for birds has not changed on site, with trees, hedgerows, grassland and tall ruderal vegetation within and surrounding the site still providing nesting and foraging opportunities. Bird species identified during the survey included: reed bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), yellow hammer (*Emberiza citronella*), sparrowhawk (*Accipiter Nisus*), blackbird (*Turdus merula*), carrion crow (*Corvus Corone*).

Invertebrates

The suitability for invertebrates has not changed since the previous report (2017a) and is still considered suitable for a variety of common invertebrate species, although significant assemblages are unlikely (JBA, 2017). No rare or protected species were recorded at the time of the survey.

Dormice

Habitats within and adjacent to the site are considered unsuitable for dormice, due to managed, species-poor hedgerows that were gappy in places. Woodland close to the site also remains unsuitable due to the lack of a good understorey habitat. The desk study undertaken as part of the phase 1 habitat survey (2017) did not find any records of dormice within 2km.

Enhancements and recommendations

The recommendations and enhancements within the phase 1 habitat survey (2017a) and individual species reports (2017-2019) remain relevant and should be followed.

An updated badger survey will be required 6 months prior to the commencement of works, and if works are proposed within 20m of an active badger sett, a badger sett disturbance/closure licence from Natural England will be required prior to works in this area. Sett closure/disturbance can be undertaken between 1st July and 30th November.

Dusk and dawn surveys for bats will be required if trees with 'moderate' and 'high' BRP are to be impacted in anyway by the development.

The following general principles for enhancement are recommended, in line with current planning practice and policy:

- Where possible, trees and hedgerows at the boundaries of the site should be retained and enhanced to create corridors and shelter/foraging areas for wildlife including birds, bats, reptiles, badgers and hedgehogs. Planting of native hedgerow species in gaps and on boundaries without hedgerows, for example along the northern boundary, will provide further opportunities for these species.
- Lighting should be designed so as to not shine directly into any boundary hedgerows with respect to potential bat habitat. Information on lighting is readily available from the Bat Conservation Trust (2018) (Guidance Note 08/18), Bats and the Built Environment series. It is recommended that a lighting strategy is agreed with the Local Planning Authority based upon this information.

- The addition of bat and bird boxes on the proposed buildings or retained trees within the site would provide additional roosting and nesting opportunities. Recommendations of appropriate boxes will be provided once the recommended bat and breeding bird surveys are completed, to ensure boxes are tailored to the site.
- Landscaping should incorporate native or wildlife attracting trees, shrubs, and wildflower areas as these would likely be of benefit to a variety of wildlife including, birds, bats and invertebrates.
- 'Hedgehog links' (i.e., 15cm diameter gaps at the base of fences) within the final design, will allow hedgehogs to move freely across gardens and public open space (POS) areas once construction has concluded.
- Woodpiles should also be included within POS areas to provide hibernacula for hedgehogs on site.

An indicative biodiversity net gain assessment has been undertaken taking into account the proposed development highlighted within the 'Framework Plan' (FINC Architects Ltd., 2021); which has concluded that the development can deliver an overall gain of 10.02% for habitat units, a 11.15% gain for hedgerows/linear features and a gain of 59.10% for 'river' units. The development is expected to deliver more of a gain when 'material' enhancements are included such as bird and bat boxes.

A circular walking and dog walking route of 2 to 3km length is identified and established to enable residents within the proposed new development to access the local countryside, recreation ground and playing fields on foot. For example the route could start and finish in the south west corner of the proposed development site proceeding out along Moat Lane heading south west, before skirting the edge of the playing fields at Melbourn College and onwards. This circular route will reduce potential recreation disturbances such as dog walking on local designated sites such as Fowlmere Watercress Beds.

Conclusion

An updated ecological walkover survey was undertaken on the 18th November 2021 of land at Cambridge Road, Melbourn, Cambridgeshire. Habitats on site have seen some change since the phase 1 habitat survey in 2017 and several additional field signs of activity from protected species has also been observed.

An updated badger survey is required 6 months prior to the commencement of works and a licence attained if works are to come within 20m of an active sett. Bat surveys will also be required if trees with BRP are to be impacted. Precautionary measures for site clearance should be taken in relation to breeding birds and the mitigation measures provided within the phase 1 habitat survey (2017) and individual species reports should be followed.

If works do not begin within 2 years of this survey, another walkover survey will be required to note any changes in the interim.

Yours sincerely,

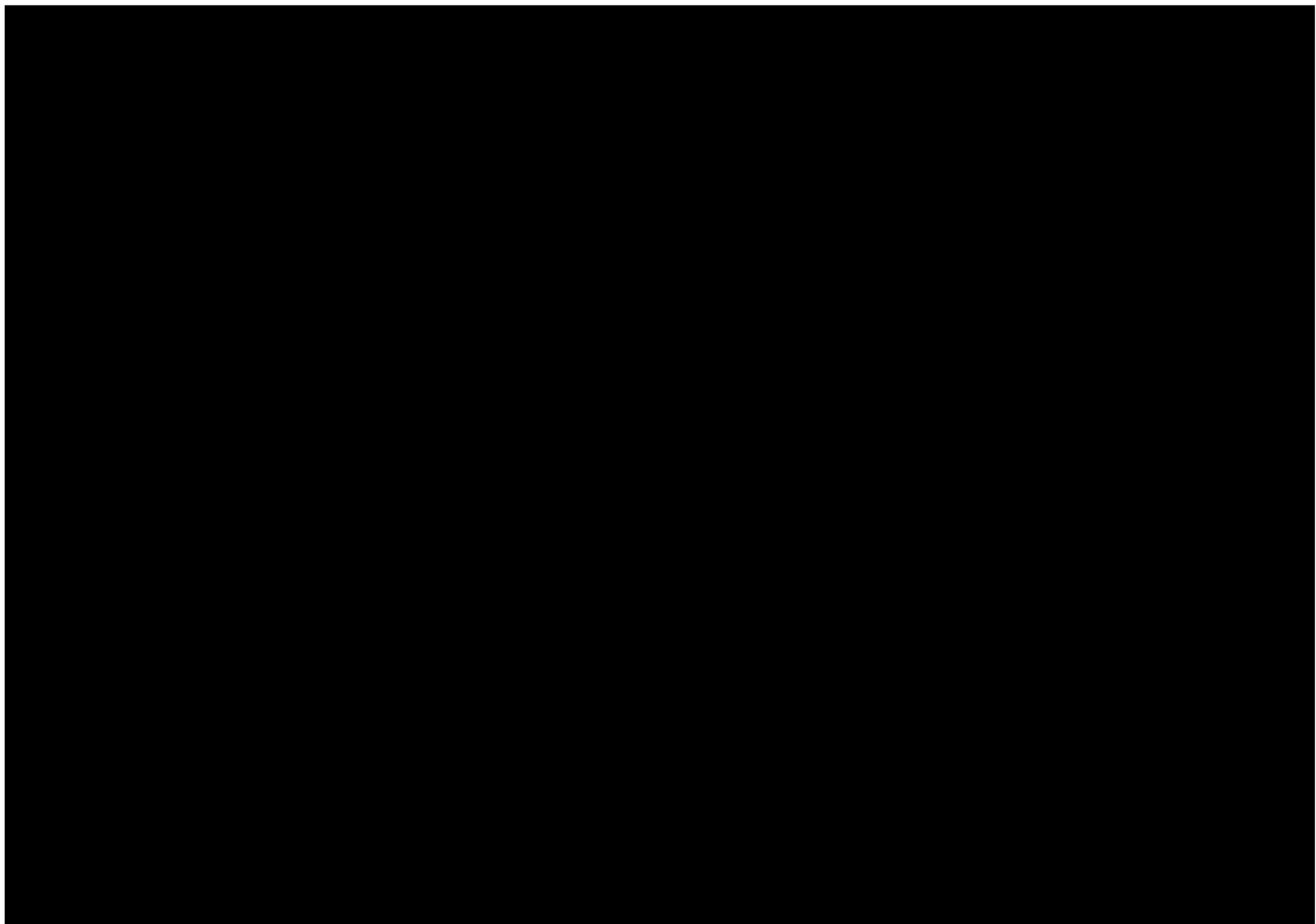
Bethan Feeney-Howells
Field Ecologist
James Blake Associates

References

- James Blake Associates Ltd. (2017a) *Me bourn Phase 1 Habitat Survey – Land north of Cambridge Road*. On behalf of Countryside Properties
- James Blake Associates Ltd. (2017b) *Ground & Aerial Inspection of Trees to Assess Bat Roost Potential at Melbourn, Cambridge Road*. On behalf of Countryside Properties Ltd.
- James Blake Associates Ltd. (2017c) *Badger Survey of Land north of Cambridge Road, Melbourn*. On behalf of countryside properties.
- James Blake Associates Ltd. (2017d) *Water Vole survey of Land at Cambridge Road, Melbourn*. On behalf on Countryside Properties Ltd.
- James Blake Associates Ltd. (2017e) *Great Crested Newt Survey of Land at Cambridge Road, Melbourn, Cambridgeshire*. On behalf on Countryside Properties Ltd.
- James Blake Associates Ltd. (2017f) *Reptile Survey of Land north of Cambridge Road, Melbourn*. On behalf of countryside properties.

Appendices

Appendix A: *Changes to trees on site since 2017*



KEY					
	Site boundary		Woodland		Brash piles
	Hedgerow		Pond		Indicative location of trees
	Arable		Tall ruderal vegetation		Trees with Low/Moderate/High bat roost potential
	Wet ditch		Target note		
<u>Changes observed 2021</u>					
	Felled Trees		Change in BRP to Low/ Moderate/High		

Appendix B: *Additional badger signs since 2017*

