

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report

Site: Land off Mercury Way, Skelmersdale

Ref: 21676

Client: Tawd Valley Developments



(Mail) 2nd Floor | 1 Hunters Walk | Canal Street | Chester | CH1 4EB

0333 123 7080 | info@indigosurveys.co.uk

www.IndigoSurveys.co.uk

Author:
Matt Liston BSc Hons, MCEEM

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SUMMARY

At land off Mercury Way in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, planning permission is being sought for the redevelopment of the site.

In September 2021, Indigo Surveys Ltd was instructed to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site. This was undertaken to determine the presence of any important habitats or species which might be impacted on by the proposed development.

A desk study is pending arrival and assimilation.

The Phase 1 visit took place on 28th September 2021, in warm, bright conditions.

The site encompassed the buildings and grounds of former Hope High School, comprising a school building and associated hard standing/car parks, along with areas of close mown amenity grassland.

Additionally, there was a large, former playing field comprising poor semi-improved grassland with perimeter hedges with trees and marginal scattered scrub.

A block of woodland ran adjacent Mercury Way, along the southern boundary of the former playing field.

A narrow stream ran along the eastern perimeter before entering a culvert.

Fencing enclosed much of the site.

No rare vascular plants were found, and all species recorded were common and widespread.

During the site visit just three species of birds were observed, both of which were Species of Low Conservation Concern (RSPB Green List).

The hedges, trees and scrub provided nesting opportunities for birds.

Since all in-use bird's nests and their contents are protected from damage or destruction, any hedge/tree or shrub removal or works which may affect a nest should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to 31st August inclusive. If this time frame cannot be avoided, a close inspection of the hedges/trees, shrubs or structures to be removed should be undertaken prior to clearance. Work should not be carried out within a minimum of 5.0 metres of any in-use nest, although this distance could be more depending on the sensitivity of the species.

A total of five trees within the site curtilage were clad with dense Ivy *Hedera helix* and were classified as having low suitability for roosting bats.

An external inspection of the former school building revealed a number of external gaps and crevices and was classified as having medium suitability for roosting and/or hibernating bats.

Given the presence of the low suitability trees and the medium suitability buildings, it is recommended nocturnal surveys are carried out in the period May to September (inclusive).

These should comprise a minimum of two surveys for the medium suitability building (with one comprising a dawn re-entry), and a minimum of one emergence survey for each of the low suitability trees.

The site was considered to offer some habitat with value for foraging bats, particularly around the margins of the playing field, and the woodland edge area off Mercury Way to the southern site perimeter.

There were no signs or evidence of Badger *Meles meles* activity, whilst the small brook along the eastern site perimeter offered poor habitats for riparian mammals and no evidence or signs of Otter *Lutra lutra* or Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius* were found.

With an absence of any standing water or pond habitats, there was negligible potential for breeding amphibians.

The site offered some moderate habitat for common reptiles, notably the scrub and grassland mosaic within the former playing field. However, given the lack of connectivity to any suitable reptile habitat in the wider area (i.e. the site is surrounded by buildings and roads) along with the previous management regime (regularly mown grassland) and it is considered reptiles are likely to be absent.

Care will be taken when carrying out earthworks, as small mammals could be present. Any small mammals disturbed or uncovered will either be caught by hand and relocated to a safe area, or left to vacate the work site in their own time.

Since the site was dominated by habitats with relatively very limited floristic diversity, it was concluded that there was no potential for significant invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Indeed, none were noted.

If excavations are to be undertaken, it should be noted that open trenches could potentially trap wildlife, especially if these fill up with water. Escape routes should therefore be provided if trenches cannot be infilled immediately. These can be in the form of branches or boards placed on the bottom of the trench, with their upper ends above ground level and touching the sides, or sloping ends left in trenches.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and survey objectives

At land off Mercury Way in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, planning permission is being sought for the redevelopment of the site.

In September 2021, Indigo Surveys Ltd was instructed to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site. This was undertaken to determine the presence of any important habitats or species which might be impacted on by the proposed development.

A desk study is pending arrival and assimilation.

1.2 Site description

The site encompassed the buildings and grounds of former Hope High School, comprising a school building and associated hard standing/car parks, along with areas of close mown amenity grassland.

The amenity grassland comprised a short uniform sward of Perennial Ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, Creeping Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Meadow Grasses *Poa spp.*, whilst forbs were limited to White Clover *Trifolium pratense*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Dandelion *Taraxacum section vulgaria* and Daisy *Bellis perennis*.

Additionally, there was a large, former playing field comprising poor semi-improved grassland with perimeter hedges with trees and marginal scattered scrub.

The poor semi-improved grassland contained a similar grass composition to the amenity grassland else where on the site, however the sward was taller, rank and was dominated by Meadow-grasses rather than Perennial Ryegrass. Additional forbs were also present, these including Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Broadleaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*.

Marginal scrub comprised entirely of Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*.

The hedge with trees comprised Hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna*, Elder *Sambucus nigra* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, whilst trees included Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Goat Willow *Salix carpea* and Silver Birch *Betula pendula*.

A block of woodland ran adjacent Mercury Way, along the southern boundary of the former playing field. The woodland included Sycamore, Pedunculate Oak, Ash, Silver Birch, Goat Willow and Holly *Ilex aquilinum*.

A narrow brook ran along the eastern perimeter before entering a culvert.

Fencing enclosed much of the site.

No rare vascular plants were found, and all species recorded were common and widespread.

The Ordnance Survey Grid Reference is SD 50257 05603 centred on the middle of the site.

1.3 Proposed works

It is understood that the proposals are for a residential development.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk study

A desk study is pending arrival and assimilation.

2.2 Habitat survey

A Phase 1 Habitat Survey was carried out across the whole of the survey site. It was conducted using standard JNCC (2003) techniques and methodologies.

The Phase 1 visit took place on 28th September 2021, in mild, bright conditions.

2.3 Protected species survey

During the surveys the potential for other protected and important species was assessed. This included European Protected Species, legally protected species and Local Biodiversity Action Plan Species (and habitats).

2.4 Constraints

The survey was carried out late in the season, however the habitats could be clearly identified.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Desk study

A desk study is pending arrival and assimilation.

3.1.1 Designated sites

Statutory Sites

N/A

Non-Statutory Sites

N/A

3.1.2 Protected species

N/A

3.2 Habitat survey

3.2.1 *Habitat descriptions*

The following habitats were recorded across the site:

- ❑ Woodland;
- ❑ Scattered scrub;
- ❑ Poor semi-improved grassland;
- ❑ Amenity grassland;
- ❑ Running water;
- ❑ Intact hedge with trees;
- ❑ Fence;
- ❑ Building and hard standing.

These are shown on the Phase 1 Habitat Survey map in Appendix 1, with the target notes (where applicable) in Appendix 2.

Woodland

A block of woodland ran adjacent Mercury Way, along the southern boundary of the former playing field. The woodland included Sycamore, Pedunculate Oak, Ash, Silver Birch, Goat Willow and Holly (Figs. 1 and 2).



Figs. 1 & 2 Woodland

Scattered scrub

Marginal scrub growing around the former playing field comprised entirely of Bramble (Figs. 3 and 4 - overleaf).



Figs. 3 & 4 Scattered scrub

Poor semi-improved grassland

The poor semi-improved grassland contained a similar grass composition to the amenity grassland elsewhere on the site, however the sward was taller, rank and was dominated by Meadow-grasses rather than Perennial Ryegrass. Additional forbs were also present, these including Ragwort, Common Knapweed, Broadleaved Dock, Creeping Buttercup and Creeping Thistle (Figs. 5 and 6).



Figs. 5 & 6 Poor semi-improved grassland

Amenity grassland

The amenity grassland comprised a short uniform sward of Perennial Ryegrass, Creeping Fescue and Meadow Grasses., whilst forbs were limited to White Clover, Ribwort Plantain, Dandelion and Daisy (Figs. 7 and 8 - overleaf).



Figs. 7 & 8 Amenity grassland

Running water

A narrow brook ran along the eastern perimeter before entering a culvert (Fig. 9)



Fig. 9 Running water

Intact hedge with trees

The hedge with trees comprised Hawthorn, Elder and Blackthorn, whilst trees included Sycamore, Ash, Pedunculate Oak, Goat Willow and Silver Birch (Figs. 10 and 11).



Figs. 10 & 11 Intact hedge with trees

Fence

Sections of fence ran around much of the site perimeter (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12 Fence

Buildings and hard standing

The site encompassed the building and grounds of former Hope High School, comprising a school building and associated hard standing/car parks (Figs. 13 and 14).



Figs. 13 & 14 Buildings and hard standing

3.2.2 Flora

The botanical composition of each habitat was typical, and all species recorded were common and widespread.

No rare vascular plants were found.

3.3 Protected species survey

3.3.1 Bats

A daytime inspection was carried out on 28th September 2021, commencing at 14:00 pm. The weather conditions during the time of the survey were recorded and are presented in Table 1 below.

Parameter	Value
Temperature (°C)	14
Cloud cover (%)	40
Precipitation	None
Wind speed (Beaufort scale)	0

Table 1 Weather conditions during the diurnal survey

Externally, the inspection of the former school building revealed the presence of a number of external gaps and crevices; these included open vent holes and loose fitting soffits (Figs. 15, 16, 17 and 18).

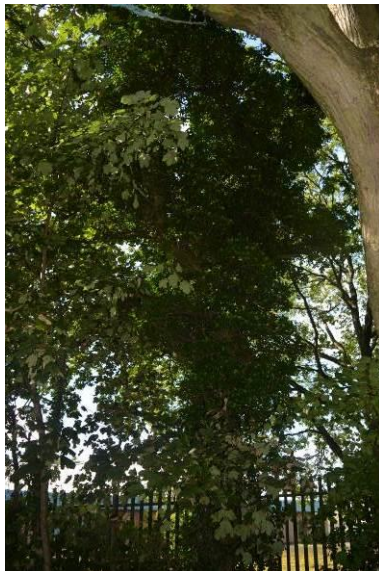


Figs. 15 & 16 External gaps / vent holes (arrowed)



Figs. 17 & 18 External gaps cont'd (arrowed)

Additionally, a total of five trees within the site curtilage were clad with dense Ivy and were classified as having low suitability for roosting bats (Figs. 19 -23).



Figs. 19, 20, 21 Ivy Clad trees in hedgerow



Figs. 22 & 23 Ivy clad trees

The site was considered to offer some habitat with value for foraging bats, particularly around the margins of the playing field, and the woodland edge area off Mercury Way to the southern site perimeter.

3.3.2 Badgers

There were no signs of Badger *Meles meles* activity.

3.3.3 Otters

The small brook offered poor habitat for Otter *Lutra lutra* and no evidence or signs were found.

3.3.4 Water Voles

The small brook offered poor habitat for Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius* and no evidence or signs were found.

3.3.5 Birds

During the site visit just three species of birds were observed, both of which were Species of Low Conservation Concern (RSPB Green List).

The hedges, trees and scrub provided nesting opportunities for birds.

A full list of the bird species noted is given in appendix 3.

3.3.6 Reptiles

The site offered some moderate habitat for common reptiles, notably the scrub and grassland mosaic within the former playing field. However, given the lack of connectivity to any suitable reptile habitat in the wider area (i.e. the site is surrounded by buildings and roads) along with the previous management regime (regularly mown grassland) and it is considered reptiles are likely to be absent.

3.3.7 Great Crested Newts

With an absence of any standing water or pond habitats, there was negligible potential for breeding amphibians.

3.3.8 Invertebrates

Since the site was dominated by habitats with relatively poor floristic diversity, it was concluded that there was low potential for significant invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Indeed, none were noted.

3.3.9 Other species

No other protected or LBAP species were observed during the site visit.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Site evaluation

The site was considered to be of low to moderate value to wildlife;

Much of the site was dominated by buildings, hard standing and managed/previously managed grassland habitats with relatively poor floristic diversity.

However, the woodland, perimeter hedgerows, trees and shrubs had potential to support nesting and foraging birds.

Furthermore, the former school building was classed as having medium suitability for bats, whilst several hedgerow trees were Ivy clad and were classed as low suitability for roosting bats.

The site was considered to offer some habitat with value for foraging bats, particularly around the margins of the playing field, and the woodland edge area off Mercury Way to the southern site perimeter.

There were no signs or evidence of Badger activity, whilst the small brook along the eastern site perimeter offered poor habitats for riparian mammals and no evidence or signs of Otter or Water Vole were found.

With an absence of any standing water or pond habitats, there was negligible potential for breeding amphibians.

The site offered some moderate habitat for common reptiles, notably the scrub and grassland mosaic within the former playing field. However, given the lack of connectivity to any suitable reptile habitat in the wider area (i.e. the site is surrounded by buildings and roads) along with the previous management regime (regularly mown grassland) and it is considered reptiles are likely to be absent.

Since the site was dominated by habitats with relatively very limited floristic diversity, it was concluded that there was no potential for significant invertebrate assemblages, in particular those species listed as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Indeed, none were noted.

4.2 Possible impacts of proposed work and recommendations

Since all in-use bird's nests and their contents are protected from damage or destruction, any tree or scrub removal or works which may affect a nest should be undertaken outside the period 1st March to 31st August inclusive. If this time frame cannot be avoided, a close inspection of hedges to be removed should be undertaken prior to clearance.

Work should not be carried out within a minimum of 5.0 metres of any in-use nest, although this distance could be more depending on the sensitivity of the species.

Care will be taken when carrying out earthworks, as small mammals could be present. Any small mammals disturbed or uncovered will either be caught by hand and relocated to a safe area, or left to vacate the work site in their own time.

If excavations are to be undertaken, it should be noted that open trenches could potentially trap wildlife, especially if these fill up with water. Escape routes should therefore be provided if trenches cannot be infilled immediately. These can be in the form of branches or boards placed on the bottom of the trench, with their upper ends above ground level and touching the sides, or sloping ends left in trenches.

4.3 Further surveys

Given the presence of the low suitability trees and the medium suitability building, it is recommended nocturnal surveys are carried out in the period May to September (inclusive).

These should comprise a minimum of two surveys for the medium suitability building (with one comprising a dawn re-entry), and a minimum of one emergence survey for each of the low suitability trees.

If any tree/scrub removal works cannot be timed appropriately to avoid the bird nesting period (considered to be March to August inclusive), then further surveys of these habitats will be required

5. REFERENCES

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APPENDICES

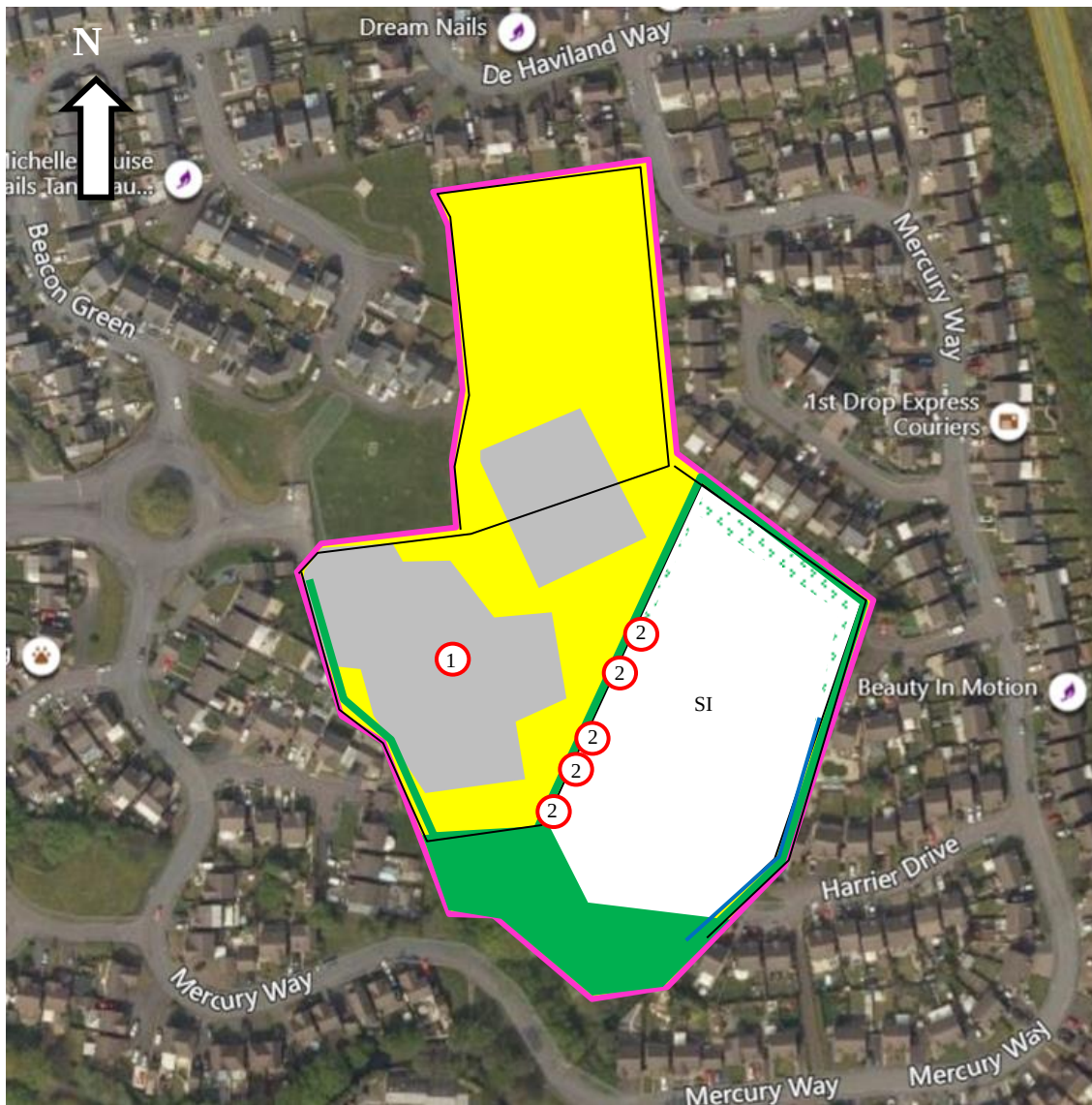
Appendix 1: Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map

Appendix 2: Target Notes

Appendix 3: Bird species list

Appendix 4: Relevant legislation

Appendix 1: Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map



(Not to scale)

Legend		
	Survey boundary	 Intact hedge with trees
	A Amenity grassland	 Running water
SI	Poor semi-improved grassland	 Scattered scrub
	 Buildings/hard standing	 Woodland
		 Fence
		 Target Note

Appendix 2: Target Notes

Target Note 1 = Former school building with medium suitability for roosting bats.

Target Note 2 = Ivy clad hedgerow tree with low suitability for roosting bats.

Appendix 3: Bird species list

Common name	Latin name
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>

Appendix 4: Relevant legislation

4.1 – Birds

In Britain, all wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. There are penalties for:

- ❑ *Killing, injuring or capturing them, or attempting any of these;*
- ❑ *Taking or damaging the nest whilst in use;*
- ❑ *Taking or destroying the eggs.*

4.2 – Bats

In England, Scotland and Wales, all bat species are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) (as amended), through inclusion in Schedule 5. In England and Wales this Act has been amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), which adds an extra offence, makes species offences arrestable, increases the time limits for some prosecutions, and increases penalties.

All bats are also included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 1994, (or Northern Ireland 1995) (the Habitats Regulations), which defines ‘European protected species of animals’.

The above legislation can be summarised thus (Mitchell-Jones and McLeish, 2004):

- ❑ *Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture (or take) bats;*
- ❑ *Deliberately disturb bats (whether in a roost or not);*
- ❑ *Recklessly disturb roosting bats or obstruct access to their roosts;*

- ❑ *Damage or destroy roosts;*
- ❑ *Possess or transport a bat or any part of a part of a bat, unless acquired legally;*
- ❑ *Sell (or offer for sale) or exchange bats, or parts of bats.*

The word 'roost' is not used in the legislation, but is used here for simplicity. The actual wording is 'any structure or place which any wild animal...uses for shelter or protection' (WCA), or 'breeding site or resting place' (Habitats Regulations).

As bats generally have both a winter and a summer roost, the legislation is clear that all roosts are protected whether bats are in residence at the time or not.