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Heol Martin, Eglwysbach – Ecology Update

Dear Robin,

Following the site visit on the 7th June 2023, please see the summary below with regards to the site ecology. Enfys Ecology undertook a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal on 28th November 2019 and additional reptile surveys in July 2020, the results of which were previously provided in an ecological report (EE.652.19.PK; Heol Martin: Biodiversity Statement) and form the baseline for this update.

Habitats

The habitats present on site had not changed significantly and corresponded to those reported during the original survey. The site consisted of approximately 0.6 Ha of improved grassland, the majority of which had a generally low, but patchy, sward height (approximately 2-15cm) at the time of the site visit. The grassland showed signs of having recently been cut, but a 1-2m wide strip had been left uncut along the edges of the field and consisted of taller grass and ruderal vegetation (nettle, hogweed); in places, dense patches of nettles dominated the field margin. The patch of tall ruderal habitat in the western corner of the site, reported during the original survey, was still present but had a high proportion of grass present. Bramble scrub was present along the north-eastern site boundary and, as noted during the original survey, there were patches of compost and garden waste. The stream adjacent to the south-western edge of the site was completely dry at the time of the survey, revealing an unvegeated cobble and boulder substrate. Representative photographs of the habitats within the site are shown in Figure 1, below.

Invasive non-native species (INNS)

A small number of Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), an invasive non-native species, were observed in the western corner of the site during the original survey. This area was re-checked for himalayan balsam and no balsam plants were found in this area or elsewhere within the site. A small number of balsam plants were present beyond the south-western site boundary, on the opposite side of the stream. While Himalayan balsam currently appears to be absent from the site, it can rapidly spread over short distances and there is a high risk of reintroduction (see table 1 below). Any Himalayan balsam plants discovered during the works should be eliminated, and biosecurity measures must be put place in place to prevent the accidental spread of Himalayan balsam onto the site or the movement of contaminated material off site.

TABLE 1: BIOSECURITY RISKS AND PROCEDURES.

Species	Potential contamination route	Likelihood of risk	Operational Procedure
Himalayan balsam	Spread of species via construction machinery/ movement of soil.	High. Himalayan balsam has previously been recorded from the site and is present in the immediate vicinity.	Ensure contractors and know what Himalayan balsam looks like.
	Introduction of seeds from wild plants.	Very high. Himalayan balsam is present within 10m of the site.	If any plants are identified these should be pulled up and left to dry before the seeds set (July/ August).
	Introduction of seeds via contaminated soil.	Low. There are no known requirements to import soil.	

Reptiles

As there have been no major changes to the habitats on site or to the features providing habitat connectivity, the site remains suitable for and accesible to local reptile populations. It is therefore assumed that the results of the previous reptile survey are still valid, and a small number of slow worms are likely to be present.

Reasonable Avoidance Measures

As the habitat remains suitable for reptiles and a population of slow worms is likely still present, the Reasonable Avoidance Measures set out in the original report are still valid. The key points are:

- Reptile fencing should be installed around the perimeter of the site (this must be done between March - September) to prevent reptiles from entering the works area.
- If any tall vegetation (such as scrub or hedges) needs to be removed to allow installation of the fence, it should initially be cut to a height of no less than 15cm on a warm day (>10°C), working from west to east. Afer a period of at least 24 hours, these areas can then be strimmed to ground level. The clearance should be carried out under supervision of an ecologist.
- Stone piles around the edge of the site should be moved by hand at the same time as the vegetation clearance, under the supervision of an ecologist.
- To ensure all/as many as possible reptiles are absent from the work zone, an intensive translocation programme will be carried out immediately after the fence is erected.
- Vegetation remaining within the work areas can be cleared following the translocation and any remained vegetation should be maintained at a short sward height.
- All works and material storage will occur WITHIN the workzone or on the hard standing outside the property (and stored above ground).
- The stripping of any top soil within the workzone will be supervised and carried out in a directional manner.

Western corner: transition from improved grassland into tall ruderal vegetation

Central area of the field: improved grassland

North-eastern side of the field: improved grassland with uncut margin

North-western boundary: improved grassland with uncut margin

North-western boundary: Stone piles near to the site entrance

North-eastern boundary: Bramble scrub with ruderal vegetation and compost pile

Figure 1: Examples of the habitats present at Heol Martin, Eglwysbach.

Conclusions

The site visit concluded that there had been no significant changes in the habitats on the land at Heol Martin in Eglwysbach since the previous site surveys in 2021 and 2022. Himalayan balsam, an invasive non-native species, no longer appeared to be present on the site but is in the immediate vicinity and poses an ongoing biosecurity risk.

With no changes to the habitat, a small population of slow worms (observed on the previous survey) is likely to stiill be present on the site and appropriate Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) must be followed.

Yours sincerely

Richard Cutts
Ecologist