

(land off)

Maypole Farm Court, Knowsley Village

Preliminary Ecology Appraisal

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Scope	4
1.2 Qualifications of the Acting Consultant	2
2. METHODOLOGY	7
2.1 Phase 1 Ecology Desk Study	7
2.2 Phase 1 Field Survey	7
3. RESULTS	9
3.1 Desk Study	9
3.2 Field Survey	12
3.3 Protected Species	11
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	19
5. REFERENCES	22
 APPENDIX A : PHASE 1 HABITATS PLAN	 23
APPENDIX B: PHOTOGRAPHS	24

1. Introduction

Sensible Ecological Survey Solutions was commissioned to complete a 'Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) at a site referred to as:

(off) "**Maypole Farm Court, Knowsley, Merseyside, L34 9BD**" (to be subsequently referred to as '**the site**').

The site (**Figures A & B; Photographs 2 & 3**) currently comprises of a small roughly rectangular plot of waste land measuring approximately 47m long by 25m wide (at widest point), which narrows slightly to its southern end. The site is largely covered by loose stone hard standing which is still exposed and evident to the centre of the site, however lack of site management in recent years has allowed invasive scrub, tall perennials and rough grassland to establish to the margins. Juvenile self-seeded trees are also found to the site margins. A small stand of larger semi mature trees are found to the northern and eastern margins of the site.

The site is surrounded by established urban development with residential buildings, roads and further hard standing to the east, west, and south; and improved grassland fields to the north.

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was completed to determine if the site and its immediate surrounds contain important habitats, or have the potential to support wildlife species protected under law and/or listed under national or local biodiversity action plans. The survey findings presented in this report, along with conclusion and recommendations will assist the Local Planning Authority in its assessment of potential impacts on biodiversity.

Figure A: Aerial view of site and surrounds.

Note: The centre of the site is marked with a red 'X'. Note the trees to the northern end, the exposed loose stone hard standing (cream colour) to the centre and the scrub and small grassland area to the south of the site. Established residential buildings can be seen to the east and west of the site. The large metal structure with green roofing to the north of the site is associated with a stables and horse training facility.



Figure B: Plan of site with red line indicating current site boundary.

Note:



Photograph 1: General view of the site entrance off Maypole Court.



Photograph 2: General view looking north over site from the southern margin.

Note: exposed hard standing to the centre of the site with encroaching scrub to the margins and trees to the back of the image at the northern end of the site.



Photograph 3: General view looking south over the site from its northern margin.

Note: The site entrance to the left of image and the scrub to the right of image..



1.1 Scope

The ecological assessment reviewed in this report comprises of three key elements:

1. An evaluation of the conservation status of the site based on a desktop review of collated data for the site and surrounds, including protected species records and nature conservation designations for the area;
2. An assessment of the site's habitat composition and floristic abundance, which is derived from a walkover survey.
3. A protected species audit that evaluates the likelihood of protected or otherwise notable species occurring on the site based on appraisal of the sites habitats and features.

1.2 Acting Consultant Qualifications

The ecological appraisal was completed by Dr David Bell, Director, Sensible Ecological Survey Solutions Ltd (SESS). Dr Bell has forty years' experience as a professional ecologist. He was a Local Planning Authority Principal Ecologist for fourteen years before moving into private sector consultancy. He has led on ecological appraisals at sites across the North West and wider UK, prepared Environmental Impact Assessments and served as an ecology expert witness at Public Inquiries. Dr Bell is a long standing member of the 'Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management' (MCIEEM). He has considerable experience in the completion of protected species surveys and assessments, and the development of species mitigation schemes associated with development proposals.

2. Methodology

The Phase I Ecology Survey was undertaken with reference to the Institute of Environmental Assessment's 'Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment' (IEMA, 1997). In accordance with these guidelines the survey comprises of both a desk-based data trawl and field study, as described below.

2.1 Desk Study

The desk study component of the ecological appraisal comprises reference to statutory and non-statutory nature conservation agency data bases. The aim of this exercise is to supplement the field survey results by collating and reviewing existing ecological information relevant to the site and the local area. Records of legally protected species and sites of importance for nature conservation, e.g. 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSI) are obtained in order that potential impacts from the development proposals can be assessed.

Species and local wildlife sites data was requested from **Merseyside Biobank** for a 2km radius search area around the site. Statutory wildlife sites data was also obtained from the DEFRA's '**Magic**' **Interactive Mapping** web site.

2.2 Field Survey

The field survey of the site was undertaken on the 17th September 2024. Weather conditions were ideal. There was restricted surveyor visual access to the site and immediate surrounds.

Phase I Habitats Survey

An Extended Phase I Ecology Survey was undertaken for the whole site and land and features up to 250m radius out from the site, following the guidelines recommended by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (IEA). The Phase I survey aims to identify habitat types and species present at the time of survey, and also assess the potential of the habitats and features present to support other protected or notable species.

According to IEMA 1997, Phase I ecology surveys can be undertaken all year round to support and verify the findings of the desk study. Although certain protected species surveys need to be undertaken during particular seasons it is possible through a Phase I habitat survey to identify any potential habitats on site where protected species may be present. In the event that suitable habitats

are identified, it will be necessary to undertake further seasonal surveys to investigate the potential for protected species fully. However, in the event that no suitable habitats for protected species are identified on site, a Phase I Ecology Survey is sufficient to determine the potential impacts associated with a proposed development. The dominant plant species were recorded and habitats classified according to their vegetation types. These are presented in the standard Phase I habitats survey format with habitat descriptions and plan (see **Appendix A to rear of report**).

The presence of noxious and invasive species, such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), if encountered during the field survey was also recorded.

3. Results

3.1 Desk Study

Designated Wildlife Sites

No part of the application site has been designated as a wildlife site for its nature conservation interest, including any statutory designation such as **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** or **Local Nature Reserve (LNR)**. The nearest LNR is '**Acornfield Plantation LNR**' located 1.8 km to the north; the nearest SSSI is the southern tip of the '**Sefton Coast SSSI**' 12km to the west. (**Table 1, Figure D**).

Table 1: Statutory Designated Sites within 10km radius of site

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's)

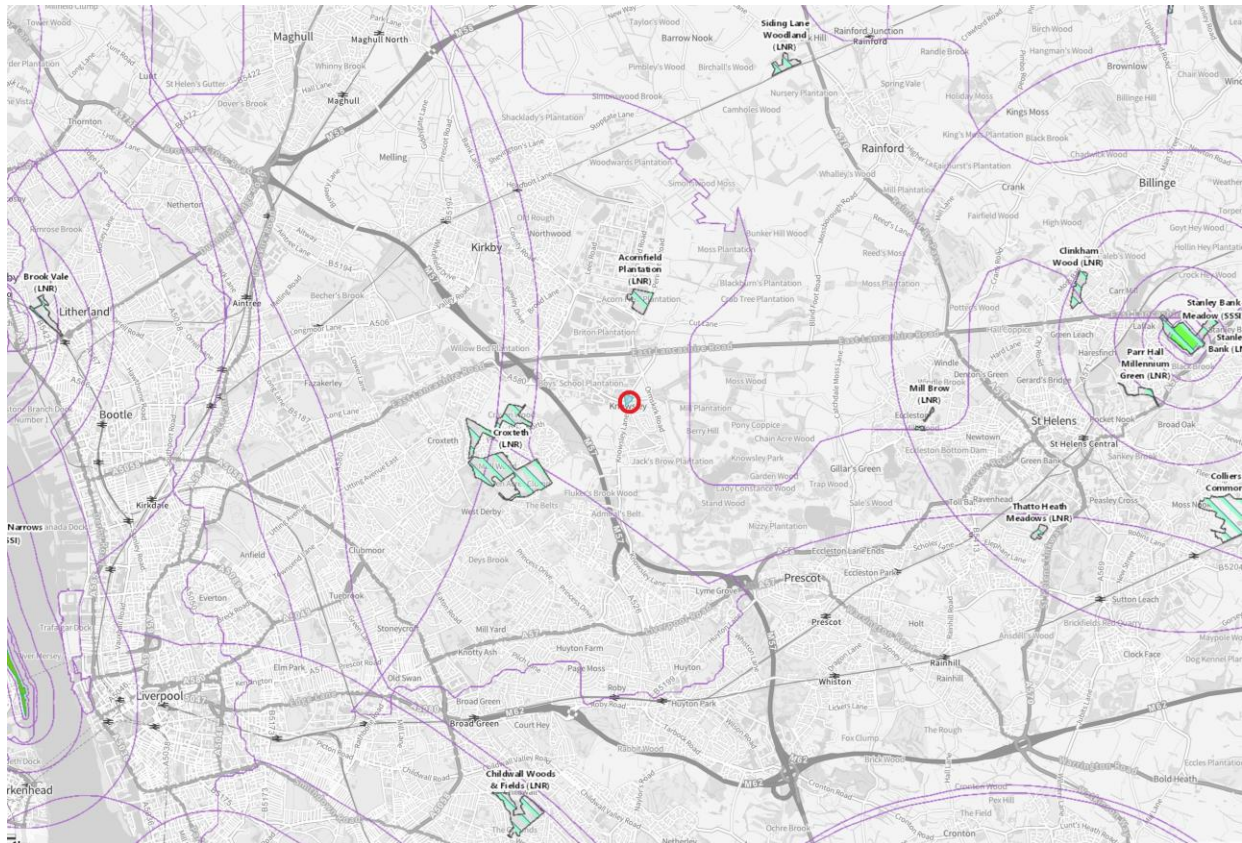
<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>
None	

Local Nature Reserves (LNR's/ proposed LNRs)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>
Acornfield Plantation LNR	1.8km N
Croxteth LNR	2.4km SW
Millbrow LNR	5.4km E
Siding Lane Wood LNR	6.5km NE
Childwall Wood LNR	7.6km S
Thatto Heath LNR	7.9km E
Clinkham Wood LNR	8.3km NE
Stanleybank LNR	9.9km E

Figure D: Plan showing distribution of Statutory Wildlife Sites around the site.

Note: A small red circle indicates the approximate location of the target site. The purple rings superimposed on the plan identify the Natural England SSSS Impact Risk Zones. The site does not fall within any SSSI Impact Risk Zones.



Protected Species Records

Merseyside Biobank was approached for species records for a **2.0 km radius** around the site.

[Please see separate submitted rear of the report to review the Biobank generated data in detail] The data search generated records for the following notable species which have the potential to be present at the site or associated with habitats present in proximity to the site boundaries, given the range of habitats or features present:

Mammals

European Hedgehog (<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>)	widespread
Common Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pipisterellus</i>)	widespread
Soprano Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>)	widespread
Brown long-eared (<i>Plecotus auratus</i>)	scattered
Badger (<i>Meles meles</i>)	rare

Amphibians

Common Frog (<i>Rana temporaria</i>)	widespread
Common toad (<i>Bufo bufo</i>)	widespread
Smooth Newt (<i>Lissotriton vulgaris</i>)	scattered
Great Crested Newt (<i>Triturus cristatus</i>)	scattered

Reptiles

Common lizard (<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>)	rare
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Birds (incomplete species list – sample of notable species which could be dependent on the site due to location and habitats present)

Song Thrush (<i>Turdus philomelos</i>)
House Sparrow (<i>Passer domesticus</i>)
Nuthatch (<i>Sitta evropaea</i>)
Dunnock (<i>Prunella modularis</i>)
Chiffchaff (<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>)

3.2 *Field Survey*

Phase 1 Ecological Survey

A site walkover survey was undertaken in order to identify the habitats present within the site and any habitats or features of ecological importance which may be directly or indirectly affected by any proposed development.

Habitat Descriptions

During the field survey, all habitats present at the site were mapped using the standard methodology (JNCC, 1993). Findings are presented as a **Habitats Plan** (see '**Appendix A**' to the rear of report).

The survey identified the following habitats within, or in close proximity, to the site (listed in approximate order of decreasing area:

ON SITE

- **Hard standing**
- **Scattered scrub**
- **Scattered trees**
- **Tall ruderal**
- **Rough grassland**

IN PROXIMITY TO SITE

- **Hard standing**
- **Improved grassland**
- **Buildings**
- **Tall ruderal**
- **Amenity grassland**

Descriptions of Key Habitats recorded within the Site

Hard standing

The majority of the site's surface area is covered with compressed stone chipping hard standing (**Photograph 3; Appendix B: Photograph 4**). The hard standing represents a generally hostile environment to wildlife offering no foraging or refuge opportunities.

The hard standing is assessed as having negligible nature conservation.

Scattered Scrub

Small stands of scattered scrub are found to the site margins (**Photograph 5**). Buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*) has established in scattered stands to the site margins. The scrub will offer limited shelter and foraging opportunities to birds, small mammals and amphibians, however its very restricted area scored down its nature conservation value and the habitats is widespread in the local area.

The scattered scrub is assessed to have low nature conservation interest at the local level

Scattered Trees

Juvenile self-seeded trees are scattered across the site margins. The juvenile trees have low overall nature conservation interest, but may offer limited foraging opportunities to birds.

Semi mature trees (largely sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) are present to the norther site margins (**Photograph 6**); these trees ca be expected to offer forging and potentially breeding opportunities to birds. None of the trees were assessed to have potential to support roosting bats but bat may be attracted to the trees to forage. The small number of trees sored down their overall nature conservation value.

The trees to the site margins are assessed as having low to moderate nature conservation value at the local level.

Tall Ruderals

Small stands of mixed ruderal plant communities (**Photograph 7**) are scattered around the site margins. All identified plant species present are common and widespread within the UK. The vegetation will provide foraging for a range of birds and small mammals however its small area and its relative isolation scored down the habitat's nature conservation value.

The invasive ruderal plants community habitat is assessed as having low nature conservation value at the local level.

Rough grassland

Small stands of species poor rough grassland can be found to the southern end of the site (**Photograph 8**). The grassland has limited nature conservation interest but may offer very restricted foraging opportunities to birds and mammals.

The improved grassland is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Spoil/vegetative waste

A number of recently created small piles of vegetation clearance arisings (**Photograph 12**) are present largely to the southern end of the site. Piles of vegetative materials are known to attract small mammals, including hedgehog, and amphibians as shelter and hibernacula.

The piles of vegetative material have negligible nature conservation interest, unless they are found to offer refuge to valued wildlife.

Descriptions of Key Habitats recorded in proximity to the Site

Hard Standing

The site entrance is directly off Maypole Court, an extensive area of hard standing (**Photograph 9**). Further hard standing is associated with the Tithebarn Road (B5194) which passes to the immediate south (**Figure A**) parking provision on a vehicle showroom business unit to the immediate north and business park to the east. Hard standing represents a hostile terrestrial environment for wildlife.

The hard standing is assessed as having negligible nature conservation value.

Improved grassland

Improved grassland pasture farmland (**Figure 1**) is present to the north of the site. The grassland is associated with a stables complex. The grassland is species diversity poor and heavily grazed. The grassland has low nature conservation interest.

The improved grassland is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Buildings

The nearest building to the site is a detached garage structure associated with the residential plot to the immediate west (Figure 1). The garage outbuilding is located approximately 2m from the site boundary, external survey assessed the structure as having negligible potential to support roosting bats. A large metal structure agricultural outbuilding is located 6m (at its closest point) from the northern site boundary (**Photograph 11; Figure 1**); The building was appraised based on external survey only as having negligible potential to support roosting bats. The nearest residential building is located approximately 10m to the east of the site entrance (**Photograph 10**); the building was again appraised as having negligible potential to support roosting bats.

No evidence of breeding bird activity was recorded for any of the above surveyed buildings.

Buildings located in proximity to the site were assessed as having negligible nature conservation interest. The risk of harmful disturbance to wildlife dependent on the buildings is assessed as negligible.

Tall Ruderals

A small stand of tall ruderal plants is present to the immediate north of the northern site boundary (**Photograph 11**). All identified plant species present are common and widespread within the UK. The

vegetation will provide foraging for a range of birds and small mammals however the small area of the site and its relative isolation scored down the habitat's nature conservation value.

The invasive ruderal plant community is assessed as having low nature conservation value.

Amenity grassland

Small areas of amenity grassland are present to the east, west and south of the site. The amenity grassland is species poor and heavily managed. It may offer limited foraging opportunities for common passerine bird species small mammals and amphibians.

The amenity grassland is assessed as having low nature conservation value at the local level.

Invasive Plants

No evidence of listed invasive plants such as Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) were recorded within the site or in close proximity to the site.

3.3. Protected Species

Protected species are those with statutory protection measures, as:

- Listed on Schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
- Covered under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, and;
- Listed on Annexes of the European Communities Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (implemented by the Conservation Regulations 1994 (as amended)).

Notable species are those that are not specifically protected by the statutes mentioned above, but are nevertheless important in a regional or local context; this includes species covered within BAPs and those that are regionally or locally scarce or rare.

Given the nature of the site and historical species records for the local area, the following species or animal groups are considered to require special reference.

Birds

No evidence of specially protected bird species, such as barn owl (*Tyto alba*) was recorded during the site walkover. The site overall is assessed to have negligible value to specially protected bird species.

The site is unsuitable for ground nesting birds due to its small area and high levels of urban disturbance.

The scattered scrub and tall perennial plant communities which together account for the majority of the natural vegetation onsite will offer limited foraging opportunities to a wide variety of common passerine species, however their restricted area scores down their overall nature conservation value, and the habitats are widespread in the local area.

The semi mature trees to the site margins can also be expected to support a range of common passerine bird species. However, their small number and small size again scores down the general value of the trees for birds as breeding, roosting or foraging sites.

The impact on birds is assessed as low overall; however, it is recommended that site clearance works are avoided during the bird breeding season (1st March - 31st August in any year). If works must commence during the bird breeding season, then appropriate checks for

active nests should be completed by a suitably qualified person, no more than two weeks prior to commencement of works.

Bats

There are no natural features, such as mature trees, within the site itself identified as offering potential refuge for roosting bats.

No buildings or features in proximity to the site were assessed to having negligible bat roost potential.

The scattered trees on site can be expected to attract small numbers of foraging bats, however the small size of the site scores down its potential value to the local bat population. The proposed residential development on site is not expected to interfere with established foraging areas or flight paths used by the local bat population

The impact on roosting bats is assessed as negligible, the impact on the local bat population is assessed as negligible.

Hedgehogs

The site's currently offers only limited foraging to hedgehogs, although the small areas of scrubs to the northern end of the site and the scattered heaps to cut vegetation found to the southern end of the site could potentially offer foraging and refuge opportunities respectively.

The overall impact on the local hedgehog population is assessed as low.

Individuals would be harmed during site clearance works. It is recommended that potential hedgehog refuges/hibernacula are hand searched by a suitably qualified person prior to and during site clearance works. Recovered hedgehogs should be removed to a suitable receptor area off site.

Amphibians

The site has negligible potential to support Great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*), however it can be expected to offer refuge and foraging to common amphibian species, such as Common frog, Common toad & smooth newt.

Preliminary site clearance should be phased to allow amphibians time to disperse out of harm's way. The potential refuge/hibernacula mitigation checks proposed above for hedgehogs are equally applicable to amphibians.

4. Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

HABITATS

The site currently comprises largely of loose stone hard standing which has been colonised to the site margins by small stands of self-seeding scrub, tall ruderal plant communities and grassland. These habitats have low nature conservation value and are widely represented elsewhere in the local area.

Juvenile self-seeded trees are also scattered around the site margins. The juvenile trees have low overall nature conservation interest, but may offer limited foraging opportunities to birds.

A small number of semi mature trees (largely sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) are present to the norther site margins (**Photograph 6**); these trees can be expected to offer limited forging and potentially breeding opportunities to birds and were assessed as having moderate nature conservation value at the local level.

The site is surrounded on three sides by a residential development and road infrastructure; with farmland managed largely as improved grassland pasture to the north. The surrounding habitats were assessed to have either negligible or low nature conservation value.

WILDLIFE SITES

The nearest LNR is '**Acornfield Plantation LNR**' located 1.8 km to the north; the nearest SSSI is the southern tip of the '**Sefton Coast SSSI**' 12km to the west. (**Table 1, Figure D**). **Acornfield Plantation LNR** is separated from the site by established urban development, the risk of impacts on any of the LNR is assessed negligible. The site does not fall within any SSSI Impact Risk Zones (**Figure D**).

The risk of direct or indirect impacts on any designated wildlife sites has been assessed as negligible.

SPECIES

The current site habitats are generally of low value to wildlife. The overall threat to legally protected and/or biodiversity action plan species is assessed as low overall; and negligible provided simple mitigation measures to protect breeding birds, common amphibian species, and hedgehogs are adopted.

BATS

None of the trees on site were assessed to have potential to support roosting bats. None of the trees, buildings or other features present in close proximity to the site boundaries were assessed to have potential to support roosting bats. The proposed new residential development is not expected to interfere with the flight paths and foraging behaviour of the local bat population. Phase 2 bat surveys are not considered to be justified and are not recommended.

No special bat mitigation measures are required.

BIRDS

The scrub and scattered trees to the site perimeters have limited potential to support breeding birds, and there is only a small risk of harmful disturbance to breeding birds associated with preliminary site clearance works. Mitigation measures are proposed to reduce the risk to breeding birds to negligible.

It is recommended that works, including preliminary site vegetation clearance, commence outside the bird breeding season (1st March – 31st August). If this recommendation cannot be met then there will be a requirement for a breeding birds survey to be completed no more than two weeks prior to scheduled commencement of works. If evidence of an active nest (or nests) is recorded then works should be delayed or alternatively, and only if appropriate, a standoff of at least 4 metres from the nest site should be retained until the nest is confirmed as abandoned.

HEDGEHOGS & AMPHIBIANS

Hedgehogs and amphibians can be considered together as the same general protective mitigation measures are applicable. Both can be expected to be present in low numbers within the site, and both will seek shelter/hibernacula refuge as well as forage within the site and are therefore vulnerable.

It is recommended that immediately prior to commencement of site clearance works hand searches are completed of potential animal refuges, such as piles of arisings (Photograph 12). Recovered animals should be recovered and moved to a suitable receptor area out of harm's way. Escape ramps should be placed in excavations overnight to minimise the risk of entrapment. A search within excavations should be completed each morning prior to recommencement of works and entrapped animals recovered.

NATURE CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENTS RECOMMENDATIONS

The erection of bird and bat boxes on trees and/or bat tubes in-cooperated into new build structures will enhance the overall value of the site to the local bat and breeding bird populations.

It is recommended that at least two permanent bat boxes and two bat boxes (or alternatively bat tubes built into the new build) are erected on site. The design and erection of the boxes to be supervised by a suitably qualified person to maximise the potential wildlife occupancy uptake of the boxes.

5. References

Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report (1995). UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Institute of Environmental Assessment (1997) Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (1993) Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: A Technique for Environmental Audit.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

Appendix A : Phase 1 Habitats Plan



Phase 1 Habitats Survey Key

-  Hard Standing
-  Amenity grassland
-  Buildings
-  Tall Ruderals
-  Scattered Scrub
-  Scattered trees
-  Semi improved grassland

Appendix B: Photographs

Photograph 4: View of loose stone hard standing evident to the centre of the site.



Photograph 5: View of small stand of scrub present to the eastern site margin.



Photograph 6: View of semi mature trees present to northern site margins of the site.



Photograph 7 View of stand of tall ruderal plants to northern end of site.



Photograph 8: View of rough grassland and perennial plants to southern end of site.



Photograph 9: View of hard standing to immediate east of site.



Photograph 10: View of residential buildings within Maypole Court cul-de-sac to east of site.



Photograph 11: View of tall ruderal plants present just beyond the northern site boundary.
Note: a large agricultural building, part of a stables complex, can be seen to the rear of the image.



Photograph 12: View of one of a number of small piles of vegetative waste materials.
Note: The arisings piles could offer temporary refuge to hedgehogs and amphibians.

