Conservation Management and Ecological Consultancy

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# Maidenhead Golf Course

## Preliminary Ecological Assessment Report

Client: Maidenhead Great Park CIC

Ref: MGP1 (3.0)

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## Summary

A large housing estate is proposed for development on the land now used as Maidenhead Golf Course, to the west of Rushington Lane, Maidenhead.

This report has been compiled by an ecologist independent of the developers, and employed by the local environmental group, Maidenhead Great Park Community Interest Company (CIC).

This development is likely to have a significant negative impact on the ecology of the area and it is likely to cause significant disturbance during the implementation phase.

There are no areas designated for their ecology within the Site, but there are likely to be impacts on nearby designated sites. Priority habitats and protected species are likely to be lost and negatively impacted upon because of the proposed development.

A number of constraints are recommended to further ascertain and mitigate the impact on designated sites, priority habitats and protected species.

## 1. Introduction

This document is the presentation of the findings of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) for Maidenhead Golf Course.

A PEA is a rapid assessment of the ecological features present, or potentially present, within a site and its surrounding area.

This document is not to be used as evidence to support or oppose a planning application, but rather to inform the Maidenhead Great Park CIC about the potential for wildlife on the Site so that further studies can be undertaken to inform their objection to development proposals.

The methods and contents are based on CIEEM guidance.

### 1.1 Personnel

This Preliminary Ecological Assessment has been prepared by Alex Cruickshank BSc (Hons) MSc MCIEEM. Alex is fully qualified practicing Ecological Consultant with over 20 years' experience and has an expert knowledge of an extensive range of habitats and species. He has a practical understanding of factors affecting ecology in relation to habitat management projects such as this.

As a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (MCIEEM), Alex adheres to the Institute's Code of Professional

Conduct and professional ethics and maintains a standard of knowledge and experience in accordance with the CIEEM Continuing Professional Development Policy.

### 1.2 The Site

Maidenhead Golf Course (the Site) is a roughly triangular, 56ha area of woodland and grassland lying between Shoppenhanger's Road to the west, Braywick Road to the east and Harvest Hill Road to the south, at the southern edge of Maidenhead in east Berkshire. (see maps in Appendix)

### 1.2 The proposals

The Site is included in the local plan (RBWM website) for an allocation of 2000 homes, two schools, public open space and formal play areas.

No detailed designs are available, but the local plan states that:

- Rushington Copse should be retained
- Other mature trees and hedgerows are retained where possible.
- Protected species should be safeguarded
- And the development should be designed sensitively to conserve biodiversity of the area.

These works are considered to be **high impact** and likely to cause **significant temporary disturbance** during the implementation phase.

There is likely to be **significant ecological loss** after the development has been delivered.

## 2. Ecological interest

A desk study and walkover survey were undertaken in April 2022.

The following features of ecological interest have been identified.

### 2.1 Designated sites

See Map 1. The Site lies within Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) allocated Greenbelt. This has no bearing on the ecological interest of the Site, but may have an impact on the planning process.

#### *2.1.1 Statutory*

Local Nature Reserves (LNR):

- 'The Gullet' c175m to the north west
- Braywick Park c440m to the east

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI):

- 'Bray Meadows' c750m to the east,

This site is designated for its species-rich damp grasslands, and wet alder woodland.

The Site therefore lies within the 1000m SSSI Impact Risk Zone. Because this is a 'Residential development of 100 units or more' Natural England must be consulted on the proposals.

The Site is roughly equidistant from three European designated features, namely:

- 'Windsor Forest and Great Park' Special Area of Conservation (SAC) c4.5km to the south
- 'Chilterns Beechwoods' SAC c4.7km to the northwest
- 'Burnham Beeches' SAC 7.0km to the northeast

Because of the scale of the proposals, they are likely to have an impact on these designated sites, so a **Habitats Regulations Assessment** should be undertaken by a competent authority.

#### *2.1.2 Non-statutory*

There is one Local Wildlife Site within 1km of the Site:

- 'Braywick Park', secondary woodland and pond, is approximately 440m to the east.

There is one Proposed Local Wildlife Site within 1km of the Site:

- 'Braywick Triangle'

The 'Bray to Eton Pits and Meadows' Biodiversity Opportunity Area has component sites c440mm to the east.

### 2.2 Habitats

#### *2.2.1 Priority Habitats*

See Map 2. Three types of Priority Habitat are located in, or near to, The Site (see Figure 4, data from Natural England):

- 'Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland'. Numerous stands of woodland are located within The Site, totalling c11ha.
- 'Wood Pasture and Parkland' c200m to the east.
- 'Floodplain Grazing Marsh' c 290m to the south.

In addition, 2 areas of Ancient Woodland are located in, or near The Site.

- Rushington Copse is considered an Ancient Replanted Woodland. This c2ha woodland lies within the eastern edge of The Site.
- A 0.3ha un-named copse of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland is immediately to the north.

### *2.2.2 Habitats identified on site*

The Site is dominated by improved grassland (having had treatments of herbicide, fertiliser and reseeding, resulting in poor species diversity) habitats, with stands and belts of woodland throughout, and other habitats.

**Improved grassland**

The grassland habitats are typical of a golf course, with c35ha consisting of improved, or semi-improved, grassland, with 'green' (very short, monospecific grass, with no wildlife interest), 'fairway' (short mown, lawns of mixed grasses, with little wildlife interest) and 'rough' (left to grow long, with some grass and wildflower diversity and some wildlife interest such as nectaring insects and foraging birds).

The rough and the edges of the fairways may support some notable plant species, but none were seen during the walkover survey.

**Semi-natural broadleaved woodland**

In between the areas of open grassland are belts of woodland and trees (17ha). Much of this (5.9ha) is relatively young and typical of a golf course, being well spaced and with little ground flora or understory of interest. Most of the woodland (11ha) is, however, considered a 'priority habitat': 'Broadleaved, Deciduous Woodland'. Rushington Copse, a 2ha area of this priority habitat, is considered 'Ancient Replanted Woodland'.

The following significant stands of woodland were identified during the walkover survey:

| id | description | Size |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rushington Copse and contiguous woodland. See Ancient Woodland assessment for details. | 3.0ha |
| 2 | Broadleaved woodland consisting of Oak and Yew standards, with a dense understorey of Hawthorn, Holly and Cherry Laurel. Ground flora includes Hedge Garlic and Bluebell. | 2.0ha |
| 3 | Relatively immature Oak, Hawthorn and Elm woodland, with an understorey dominated by grass species. | 1.2ha |
| 16 | Degenerate hedge and scrubby boundary, consisting of open-grown trees with Silver Birch, Rowan, Oak, Beech and copses of Elm. | 0.3ha |
| 5 | Scrubby woodland with Oak standard and Elder and Holly understorey. Ground flora dominated by Stinging Nettles | 0.75ha |
| 6 | Oak Standards with dense Holly understorey | 0.26ha |

**Scattered broadleaved and coniferous trees**

A large number of trees are present across the Site, many of which appear to have been planted for landscape purposes.

In addition, three trees are registered on the Ancient Tree Inventory (https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/)

| Species | Form | Girth at 1.5m | Status | Grid ref |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pedunculate Oak | Maiden | 4.2m | Alive, standing, notable | SU8863880163 |
| Pedunculate Oak | Maiden | 5.25m | Alive, standing, veteran | SU8868180026 |
| Sessile Oak | Maiden | 5.02m | Alive, standing, veteran | SU8891479351 |

These trees have characteristics of ancient trees such as rot holes, cracks and dead branches, all of which can support notable wildlife.

**Buildings**

A small number of buildings (c15) associated with the function of the golf course are present on the Site.

These may be used by various bat species for roosting and breeding, and by birds for nesting.

## 2.3 Likely presence of protected and priority species

See Map 3. Data held by TVERC (the Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre) (see Map 2 in Appendix) and the walkover survey have identified a number of protected or priority species that may be present.

### *2.3.1 Bats*

Various species of bat are likely to use Maidenhead Golf Course for foraging or transit, especially along the edges of woodland or linear features like hedgerows.

Bats are likely to roost under the bark or ivy in some of the more mature trees.

TVERC holds records for widespread bat species in buildings near to the Site.

### *2.3.2 Badgers*

There is at least one well used Badger sett on the Site and Badgers are likely to use much of the Site for foraging or transit.

TVERC holds a single record for a Badger sett on the Site, at SU887802.

### *2.3.3 Reptiles and amphibians*

The areas of rough grassland have the potential to support the 'widespread' reptiles: Slow Worm and Grass Snake, although TVERC does not hold any records for reptiles within the Site, it should be assumed that such reptiles are present.

A small pond to the west of Rushington Copse may support amphibians, including Great Crested Newts, a European protected species.

TVERC holds a single record for a Common Frog on the Site.

### *2.3.4 Birds*

Birds are likely to breed in the trees, hedgerows and scrub across the Site. There may also be birds which nest on the ground, such as Skylarks, on the quieter areas of the golf course. Red Kites have been recorded nesting in the woodland on the Site.

TVERC hold three records of notable birds on the Site, a Willow Warbler recorded in 2007 and two records of Stock Doves from 2017. Both species are on the 'Amber List' of UK Birds of Conservation Concern, meaning that their conservation status is of 'moderate concern'.

### *2.3.5 Invertebrates*

There are likely to be numerous species of widespread insects and other invertebrates across the Site, especially within the woodland and scrub areas and in the taller, more herb-rich grassland.

TVERC holds numerous records for Stag Beetles and other insects on, or near the Site. Stag Beetles use dead wood in the early stages of their life cycle.

### *2.3.6 Hedgehogs*

Hedgehogs are likely to be present on the Site, making use of the rough grass and scrubby woodland edges.

TVERC holds numerous records for Hedgehogs from properties bordering the Site.

# 3. Appraisal

This section outlines the likely impact of the proposed development on the features of ecological interest identified above.

### 3.1 Designated sites

Because of the scale of the proposed development, it is likely to have a significant negative impact on many or all the designated sites listed in 2.11 and 2.12, above, due to increased recreational pressure (more visitors causing disturbance and trampling to sensitive habitats), increased water use (leading to a decrease in water available to wetland habitats) and increased pollution (due to increased traffic).

### 3.2 Habitats

The development is likely to cause a significant loss of habitat within the Site, notably improved and semi-improved grassland, woodland and scrub, some of which are considered Priority Habitats. This will have a significant negative impact on the ecology of the Site.

### 3.3 Species

The loss of habitat and increased disturbance is likely to have a significant negative impact on a number of species, including reptiles, amphibians, birds, bats and badgers, all of which are afforded some legal protection.

## 4. Constraints

In order to further assess the likely impacts on the identified ecological features and to reduce the impact of the development on the ecological interest of the Site, the following actions are recommended.

### 4.1 Designated sites

A competent authority should undertake a screening exercise to determine whether a Habitat Regulations Assessment is required to assess and mitigate the impacts on the European designated sites.

Natural England should be consulted about the likely impact of the development on statutory designated sites.

The local planning authority should be consulted about the likely impact of the development on the non-statutory designated sites.

### 4.2 Habitats

The habitats should be fully surveyed to ascertain their value.

The development should be designed to reduce the loss of habitats, especially those considered to be Priority Habitats and notably the ancient woodland at Rushington Copse.

Where habitats are to be destroyed by the development, mitigation should be in place to more than offset this loss.

Where habitats (notably the ancient woodland at Rushington Copse) are likely to be impacted by disturbance through increased recreational use and antisocial behaviour, a detailed and workable management plan should be delivered to avoid such impacts.

### 4.3 Species

To fully understand and assess the likely impact of the development on notable and protected species, the following additional surveys are recommended before

detailed proposals for the development are drawn up. The results of the surveys should be taken into consideration when designing the development.

All surveys must follow best practise guidance, set by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, or equivalent.

**Bats**

Surveys to determine how they use the features present across the Site, notably the buildings and woodland, including roost surveys, emergence surveys and transects. Any features (buildings or trees) which will be destroyed because of the development must be fully assessed for their suitability for bats.

**Badgers**

Further surveys to determine the extent of their setts and to determine their foraging extent.

**Reptiles and amphibians**

A Habitat Suitability Index (HIS) assessment for Great Crested Newts should be undertaken of the pond and its surroundings, and an Environmental DNA (eDNA) survey undertaken at the appropriate time of year. If this is found to be positive, an assessment of the population size should be undertaken.

An assessment of the reptile population should be undertaken using appropriate survey techniques.

**Birds**

A detailed breeding bird survey should be undertaken to determine which birds are present and how they use the habitat features.

**Invertebrates**

A detailed invertebrate survey should be undertaken to determine whether any notable invertebrates are present and how they use the habitat features.

**Hedgehogs**

A detailed hedgehog survey should be undertaken to determine the size of the population and how they use the habitat features.

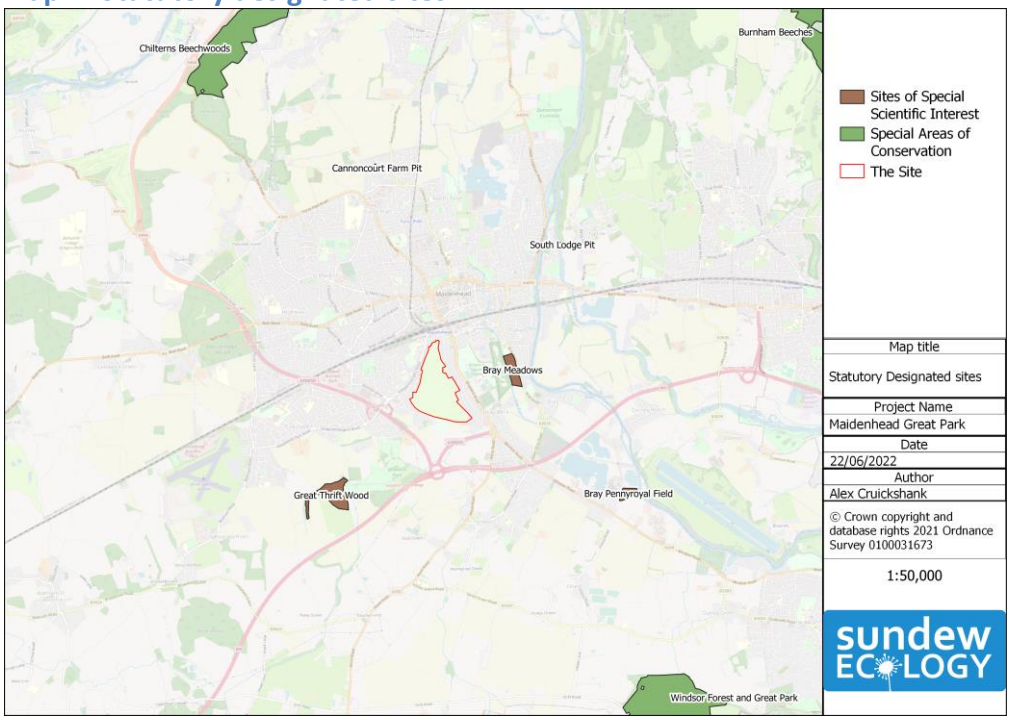
## 5. Mitigation hierarchy

Once these further surveys have been undertaken, and a detailed understanding of the ecology of the Site has been achieved, the impact of the development on the ecology of the Site should be eliminated or reduced using the 'mitigation hierarchy' of **avoiding** the impact and, if this is not possible, **minimising** the impact. If these are unavoidable then the losses should be **compensated,** or offset.

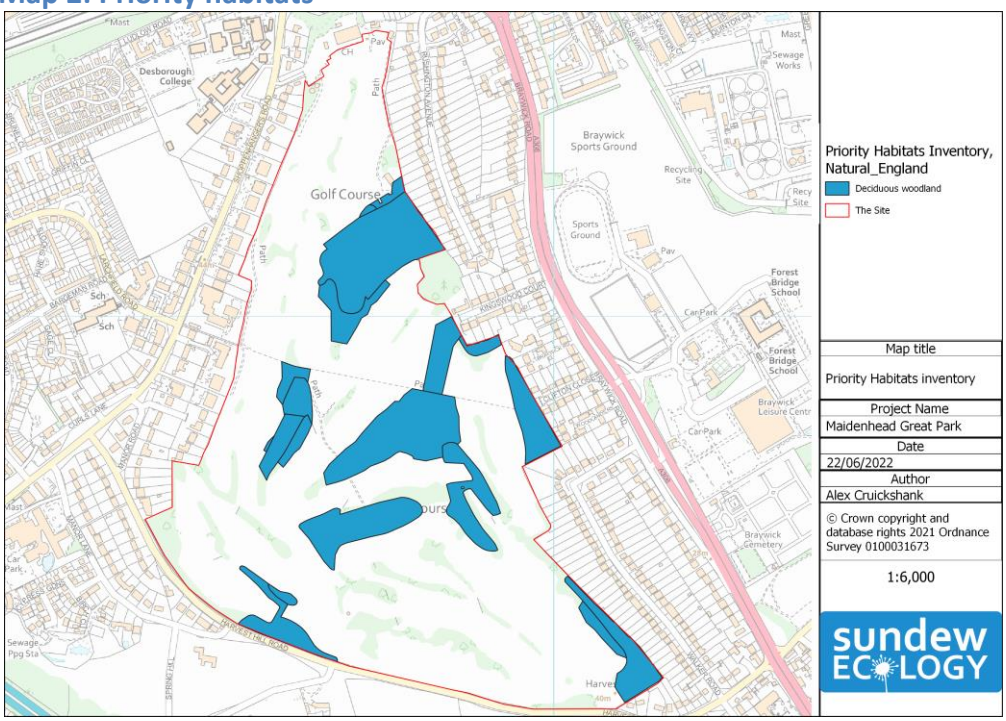
In order to inform this hierarchy, a detailed Landscape and Ecology Management Plan should be produced and delivered.

# 6. Appendices

## 6.1 Map 1: Statutory designated sites




## 6.2 Map 2: Priority habitats



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## 6.3 Map 3: Species records