


RSK TECHNICAL NOTE

Project No.: 2480586
Title: Skimmingdish Lane
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Project manager	Pete Flood	Reviewer	James Hildreth
Signature		Signature	
Date:	23/11/21	Date:	24/11/21

1.0 PROTECTED SPECIES MITIGATION AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT

1.1 Issues raised by Cherwell District Council Ecology Officer

- 1.1.1 This note addresses specific issues raised by Ecology Officer Dr Charlotte Watkins via email (dated 13 September 2021) regarding the existing biodiversity and future management of the site at Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester, currently part of a planning proposal by Created Life Three for the construction of a drive-through concession.
- 1.1.2 RSK Biocensus were employed by the client to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Assessment of the site in February 2021, followed by a Biodiversity Assessment using the Defra 2.0 metric (RSK Biocensus, 2021a and b). Both reports were delivered in May 2021. The Biodiversity Assessment has subsequently been reviewed following changes to the original design (RSK Biocensus, 2021c).
- 1.1.3 The Ecology Officer raised concerns about mitigation strategies for birds and reptiles. The provision of wetland habitat, now part of the updated scheme, will benefit both groups. Proposed enhancement to scrub areas include the planting of a wider range of woody species and the cutting of clearings and glades, both of which would benefit birds in particular. Grassland restoration is more difficult given its amenity use. It is accepted that the raising of this habitat to moderate condition or above might not be possible at this site and a target condition of fairly poor has been applied instead. But the sowing of wildflower seed around the pond and over ground disturbed during the construction stage will provide more seed forage for birds and flower forage for invertebrates. An area dominated by Michelmas-daisies (*Symphotrichum* sp.) should be omitted from grassland

cuts where possible to allow late season flower forage. Nestboxes will be provided at scrub edges to encourage breeding birds, while hibernacula and logpiles will be sited in sunny spots for the use of reptiles and invertebrates.

- 1.1.4 Stands of Blackthorn scrub, as mentioned in the Ecology Officer's report, will not be lost during the development as they lie to the south of the development footprint. Blackthorn was frequently recorded through the site during the initial assessment, and is present in many areas of mixed scrub. Brown Hairstreak butterflies have been recorded at Calvert to the east and Bullingdon to the south – about 5 km away in both cases. Their eggs overwinter on Blackthorn, making unflailed specimens at a site such as this potentially valuable. This species shows a preference for sites with mature Ash trees as the adults conduct most of their lives in the crowns of 'master' trees. Unfortunately Ash is rare at the Skimmingdish site, only present as saplings and young trees, making the presence of this species unlikely. The planting of Ash saplings has been suggested by the client as part of the management strategy (subject to current regional guidance on Ash dieback mitigation).
- 1.1.5 The revised biodiversity assessment highlights potential gains of 18% achievable at the site. The majority of these gains come from enhancement of the existing southeastern belt of species-poor scrub. Grassland areas, although clearly a valuable part of the habitat mosaic, account for fewer units in the metric. Their amenity use also suggests a fairly low ceiling to possible enhancement, with nutrient inputs from canine enrichment, possible trampling, flytipping, fires and littering restricting the potential of this habitat to fairly poor condition.

1.2 Initial site enhancements

- 1.2.1 The following management actions are recommended for areas of scrub:

- Planting of native tree and shrub species, including

Name	Quantity	Notes
<i>Acer campestre</i> (Field Maple)	4	
<i>Corylus avellana</i> (Hazel)	3	
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i> (Dogwood)	3	
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i> (Spindle)	3	
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Ash)	4	Some specimens planted close to stands of Blackthorn to encourage Brown Hairstreak butterflies. To be replaced with Oak if the planting of new Ash runs contrary to local policies on Ash dieback.
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i> (Holly)	3	
<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i> (Wild Privet)	3	

<i>Quercus robur</i> (Pedunculate Oak)	6	Some specimens planted close to stands of Goat Willow to encourage Purple Emperor butterflies.
<i>Salix caprea</i> (Goat Willow)	8	
<i>Taxus baccata</i> (Yew)	2	

- all new planting to include appropriate tree guards against deer browsing;
- removal of the invasive non-native Variegated Yellow Archangel, which is locally-dominant in the field layer;
- the cutting of new paths, clearings and glades where the scrub is thickest and least diverse in order to allow light in and maximise vegetated edges for nesting birds; and
- the planting of native scrub and tree species in areas of poor Blackthorn and Bramble scrub in order to increase species diversity.

1.2.2 Other proposed actions elsewhere onsite include:

- The clearance of an area of suckering Lombardy Poplar on the southwestern boundary. This non-native species is not invasive, but it hybridises with scarce native Black Poplars. It also supports little biodiversity, shading out other plant species to form a dense monospecific stand. After eradication this area would be replanted with native trees or shrubs;
- the construction of a pond and swale;
- the reseedling of bare ground with appropriate seed mixes;
- creation of three logpiles using lengths of cut False Acacia and Lombardy Poplar from the trees onsite;
- creation of two hibernacula on south-facing areas of scrub edge for the benefit of reptiles and amphibians;
- provision of six nestboxes, sited on scrub edges in shady locations; and
- provision of four batboxes in woodland along the southeastern margin.

1.2.3 The above proposals are set out on the attached Vector document: 15987-VL-L02 Landscape and Ecological Enhancement Plan.

1.3 Recommended management regime

1.3.1 Future management should include:

- Yearly mowing of wildflower areas. It is the view of RSK Biocensus that the optimal mowing pattern here will be one in which mowing times fall in a window between late June and late August but shift from one year to the next. But in the event of a disagreement the client is prepared to accept the advice of the council ecologist in this matter;

- maintenance of the pond area and swale, keeping them free from clogging by vegetation on an 'as-and-when-needed' basis;
- control of invasive non-native species, as well as the persistent undesirable species Lombardy Poplar and False Acacia for three years, in line with the time-to-condition value for changing scrub habitats from moderate to good condition; and
- maintenance of paths and clearings throughout scrubby areas.

1.4 References

Ingram, J. (2021) *15987-VL-L02 Landscape and Ecological Enhancement Plan*. The Harris Partnership, Wakefield

RSK Biocensus (2021a) *Skimmingdish Lane Ecology PEA*. RSK Hemel

RSK Biocensus (2021b) *Skimmingdish Biodiversity Assessment*. RSK Hemel

RSK Biocensus (2021c) *2480586 Biodiversity Assessment Report Revision November 21*. RSK Hemel