Biodiversity Management Plan

For

Land at Baker's Mill, Great Cornard, Suffolk. CO10 0GF

Prepared for

Baker's Mill Community Association



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Introduction

Background

1 Hushwing prepared this management plan on behalf of the Baker's Mill Committee to inform the ongoing maintenance of features known to have ecological significance, conservation sensitivity and legal protection.

2 The Baker's Mill development is a private residential estate that was completed and fully occupied around c. 2010 (BMCA, 2010).

3 A management company, currently HLM, is responsible for appointing contractors to carry out maintenance of shared and communal elements within the estate. A major part of this commitment relates to the maintenance of the estate's grounds.

Site Location and General Description

4 Baker's Mill is a private residential estate located to the south of Great Cornard in the county of Suffolk. Constructed on the site of a former factory, the estate occupies a strip of land bounded to the east by a railway line and to the west by the River Stour (central Ordnance Survey grid reference: TL 36364 68197).

5 The built environment at Baker's Mill Estate comprises a mix of converted industrial buildings and residential on either side of a spine road. The soft-landscaped areas associated with the development include formal gardens, boundary shrubs, amenity grassland, a play area, open water, trees and hedgerows.

Land Use

6 The estate is primarily residential with a small number of businesses occupying properties close to a mill pond.

7 Amenity areas within the state include gardens, grassland and a small play area that are used by residents and local families.

8 There is public access through the estate via a riverside footpath which is used for recreation, exercise and dog walking.

Ongoing Land Management,

9 A service charge levied by a management company contributes to the upkeep of the grounds, a mill race, sections of riverbank and a culvert linking the millrace to a millpond. Residents of leasehold properties (such as Bakers Court, Meadow Court and Wood Court) pay an additional fee for the upkeep and cleaning of the buildings.

10 The main focus of this management plan is the care of the estate's sensitive ecological features. A landscape contractor attends the site weekly to carry out; mowing, strimming verges, trimming shrubs, cutting hedges and pruning trees.

11 Areas of communal grassland are frequently mown throughout the growing season.

12 Vegetation that grows within the perimeter fence of the Mill Race is managed in the autumn when tall forbs, reed and sedges are cut back to ground level. During this time, shrubs such as rose and buddleia are heavily pruned to retain shape.

13 Riparian vegetation associated with the riverbank are largely untouched.

14 Mature trees are pruned at the discretion of the contractor.

Ecological Constraints

15 The following have been identified as sensitive ecological features due to legal protection and/or priority status;

- Habitats used by nesting birds
- Priority native hedgerow
- Habitats used by common and widespread reptiles
- Habitats occupied and used by water vole
- Habitats with potential to support invasive non-native species of plant
- Habitats used by roosting, foraging and commuting bats.

Purpose and Objectives

16 This management plan has been prepared to provide the management company, contractors and tradespeople with the relevant advice to ensure that appropriate and reasonable effort is made to avoid harm to wildlife and to prevent breaches to legislation that affords protection to wild species (**Appendix 1**).

17 Reasonable and practical measures are provided which are considered proportionate to the scale of the development and the potential with which protected species are likely to be present.

18 It is intended that adherence to the methods set out below will protect local ecological features and reduce to negligible the likelihood of an offence being committed by the freeholders, the management company or their agents and contractors.

Roles and Responsibilities

19 The freeholders, management company and contractors are responsible for managing sensitive wildlife issues.

20 All involved personnel have a duty of care with respect to protected species and wildlife legislation.

21 All personnel have the responsibility of reporting incidents or last-minute unexpected discoveries of protected species such as nesting birds, water vole or reptiles.

22 Implementation of any licensable works, including such actions that would disturb or harm fully protected species (e.g. water vole and bats) will would need to be completed by a suitably qualified environmental professional such as a consultant ecologist. It would be the be the responsibility of the Freeholders/ management company to ensure that competent persons are appointed to undertake such tasks.

23 A competent person is someone who has the qualifications, training, skills and experience relevant to the task being undertaken (BSI, 2013).

Management Plan (Biodiversity)

24 The freeholders, management company and main contractor will ensure that all operatives and personnel working on site are made aware of the project constraints and contents of this management plan.

25 Dissemination of this material can be achieved through inclusion of this method statement within any pre-tender information and via site inductions and/or toolbox talks.

26 A copy of this method statement, relevant ecological reports and details of any relevant licensing obligations should be kept in such a format and location that they are accessible and readily available to estate managers and contractors.

Timing Constraints

27 Cutting, trimming and pruning of woody vegetation should be conducted during the months September to February (inclusive).

28 The maintenance of bank side vegetation should be conducted during the period mid-July to mid-September.

29 Areas of wildflower grassland will be cut and mown before and after the main growing and flowering season (see below).

Sensitive Features

Biodiversity Protection Zone

30 Within the estate is a section of mill race surrounded by a low post and rail fence. This boundary feature delineates the riparian habitat and represents a convenient physical barrier between the river and the surrounding managed grassland.



Photo 1: Open section of millrace with post and rail fence

31 Emergent and terrestrial vegetation surrounding the river supports nesting waterfowl and a local population water vole. The ecologically sensitive area within the fence line will be

treated as a biodiversity protection zone within which precautions must be taken to avoid harm or inadvertently breaking wildlife legislation.

Water Vole

32 Water voles are fully protected by law. It is an offence to harm or disturb water vole (HMSO, 1981). It is also an offence to disturb, damage or obstruct places where they rest or breed (deliberately or by not taking enough care).



Photo 2: Sensitive riverbank habitat that supports local population of water vole.

33 Maintenance operations have the potential to negatively impact the environment, but they also create opportunities for environmental enhancement. The key is to select the most sensitive management techniques for the site that is consistent with the need to maintain the management objective, including public health and safety, and the ecological value of the watercourse.

34 Control and management of bank side vegetation within the biodiversity protection zone must be conducted sympathetically and with careful consideration of water vole. The following constitute minimum standards for best practice.

- Conduct vegetation cut between mid-July and mid-September
- Use handheld tools wherever possible. Avoiding the use of machinery will reduce the risk of crushing active or occupied burrows.
- Leave at least 15cm of vegetation uncut
- Retain a strip of uncut vegetation at least 1m from the water edge
- Adopt a rotational cut pattern where 10m refuges of uncut vegetation are left every 10m of bank. Annual cuts will alternate between patches so that all the bank vegetation is cut at least once every two years.

Native hedgerow

35 A native hedgerow approximately 50m in length is present to the south of the River Stour Trust Visitor Centre. This feature exhibits characteristics indicative of poor condition and requires positive management to ensure that shrubs remain healthy and that it persists.

36 Contractors can undertake informal checks, inspections of hedgerows and vigilance for changes in hedgerow health and condition will be a routine consideration for any personnel involved with the day to day management of the estate's grounds. Signs of poor condition can be detected at any time of year, however, signs of disease are most likely visible during the seasons when shrubs and trees should be in full leaf (April to October).



Photo 3: Native hawthorn hedgerow showing signs of poor condition.

37 Check that no trees guards have been left on mature shrubs.

38 Cut the hedgerow every 3 to 5 years (September to February). Trim hedge sides and tops on alternate years. Avoid cutting all of the hedgerow in the same year. Hedgerow shrubs that are repeatedly cut to the same height will develop a hard knuckle on the main stem. Once this has been detected the cut height can be incrementally raised by cm every third to fifth cut. The hedgerow height can be raised up to approximately 4m after which point it may be necessary to coppice the feature and reset the management cycle.

39 Maintain a minimum 1m undisturbed buffer at the base of the hedge where herbaceous vegetation will be allowed to persist and tussocky grassland is allowed to form. Mow, or top, the vegetation at the base of the hedgerow on a rotational basis to check encroachment of scrub and to maintain a buffer comprising tussocky grassland. Set mowing equipment to cut to a minimum 10cm in as grass snake are likely, or known, to be present.

40 Undesirable and Schedule 9 plant species will be removed as necessary following detection. Prescribed methods will be dependent upon the species concerned and the extent to which they have been detected.

41 Replant any gaps with native shrubs, protect, mulch and water newly planted specimens as necessary.

General Guidance and Precautionary Measures

Reptiles

42 Areas within the estate are known to support common lizard, slow-worm and grass snake. Naturally occurring and manmade features such as log piles and composting heaps are useful resources for reptiles. Such features should be retained within the estate to provide refuge for wildlife.

Nesting Birds

43 Maintenance works that have potential to destroy active birds' nests such as hedge trimming and tree pruning will be completed outside the recognised main nesting season of March to August (inclusive).

44 Should maintenance work need to be completed during the period March to August then potential nesting habitat including vegetation, shrubs and trees will be inspected by an ecologist (or other competent person) for the presence of active nests.

45 It may be necessary to delay the start of works or implement effective buffer zones to ensure that no active nests are destroyed during works.

46 Active nests will be retained in-situ until the ecologist (or other competent person) has confirmed that chicks have fledged and that the nest is no longer active.

Wildflower Meadow

47 Patches of amenity grassland may be removed from the mowing cycle to allow wildflowers to grow for the benefit of wildlife. Selected patches can be enhanced in the autumn by harrowing or scarifying the sward before overseeding with an appropriate wildflower mix (e.g., Emorsgate EM2 – General Purpose Meadow Mixture).

48 Areas of wildflower meadow will be managed using traditional management techniques involving a summer hay cut in combination with autumn and possibly spring mowing. This will involve the grassland being left unmown from spring to August. After plants have flowered then the meadow will cut back to no less than 10cm. The sward will then be mown through the autumn and winter and in early spring if required.

49 Arisings / hay will be left to dry and shed seed for one week before being raked and removed. This action will prevent the formation of "thatch" and will ensure the soil remains impoverished. This action is also intended to prevent a change in soil pH – thus maintaining it as a neutral grassland.

50 To ensure the persistence of late flowering species, one cut every five years should be postponed until early September.

51 Avoid the use of any fertilisers, soil enrichment and pesticides. Take measures to prevent "overspray" when managing adjacent habitats e.g. amenity grassland.

Non-Native Plant Species

52 Riverbank vegetation has potential for invasive non-native plant species that have washed in from the watercourse. Contractors and operatives will be familiar with and capable of identifying species such as Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed.

53 If species such as those listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (HMSO, 1981) are noted then appropriate action will be taken to remove the plant and prevent it from spreading outside the site. Waste containing plant matter from scheduled species is considered contaminated waste and must be disposed of responsibly.

54 Himalayan balsam is known to occur within the area of the mill race. The plant is easy to cut by hand, provided there is adequate access. However, it often grows amongst bushes and brambles and in inaccessible locations on riverbanks. Unless the plant is cut below the lowest node, it will regrow and flower later in the season. Thus, a single cut is only effective if made very close to soil level. The seedbank lasts for approximately 18 months, so two years control should eradicate the plant if there is no further infestation from upstream. Himalayan Balsam can be controlled by spraying the foliage with glyphosate. The plants should be sprayed in the spring before flowering but late enough to ensure that germinating seedlings have grown up sufficiently to be adequately covered by the spray.

55 Giant hogweed is known to occur within the Stour Valley. The sap of giant hogweed contains a toxic chemical which sensitises the skin and leads to severe blistering when exposed to sunlight. The best option is not to cut the plant but to treat it with herbicide. Plants can be sprayed with glyphosate when the plants are growing actively but still less than about 1m high. This is usually in April and May. Long-lance sprayers may assist in accurate application of glyphosate to plants growing in inaccessible sites along the banks of rivers and ponds.

56 Japanese Knotweed has been recorded along the railway line that forms the eastern edge of the estate. Japanese knotweed often grows in or close to water. The occurrence of Japanese knotweed requires eradication by trained operatives. Spray infestations of Japanese Knotweed with glyphosate in August - October, cut the sprayed shoots after 3 weeks if required. Check for any reinfestation for at least two seasons and spot treat. Spray areas away from water with an herbicide containing picloram. Do not use mechanical control as this is likely to spread and increase infestation unless coupled with chemical control of the residues or burning on site.

Trees (Protection)

57 Avoid parking vehicles and or storing bulk materials under tree canopies. Heavy machinery and contractors' traffic should avoid driving over rooting areas. Where necessary, protect existing and retained trees using exclusion fencing in accordance with BS 5837:2012 (BSI, 2012).

Bird Nest Boxes

58 Tree mounted nest boxes require minimal maintenance. Bird's nests are protected from damage and destruction (for some species disturbance). Nest boxes must be annually inspected for presence, damage or obstruction. Boxes may be cleared of redundant nesting material only during the period September to February which will avoid the

primary nesting season of March to August. Consideration will be given to the timing of any tree maintenance within close proximity to tree mounted boxes. Such maintenance works will be timed to avoid the period March to August.

Pollution

59 All works must ensure that appropriate pollution prevention measures are applied and that they, for example, comply with the principles of the now withdrawn Pollution Prevention Guidance (PPG5) i.e., in relation to storage of material and equipment, refuelling and storage of fuel and other chemicals must all comply with the requirements of the PPG5 (working in, near or over watercourses).

Timetable for Implementation

60 Notwithstanding potential for nesting birds, water vole and reptiles (above), there are no further ecological constraints to the timing of maintenance works.

Disposal of Waste and Arising from Management Activities

61 Waste materials will be appropriately stored e.g., in covered bins. Registered carriers will be employed to move contaminated waste materials to approved disposal sites.

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Appendix 1 Relevant Wildlife Legislation

Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended), 1981
The WCA 1981, as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, consolidates and amends existing national legislation to implement the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (Birds Directive), making it an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or their eggs or nests (with certain exceptions) and disturb any bird species listed under Schedule 1 to the Act, or its dependent young while it is nesting;
- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal listed under Schedule 5 to the Act; intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct any place used for shelter or protection by any wild animal listed under Schedule 5 to the Act; intentionally or recklessly disturb certain Schedule 5 animal species while they occupy a place used for shelter or protection;
- Pick or uproot any wild plant listed under Schedule 8 of the Act.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are designated under this Act.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
The NERC Act 2006 amends the CRoW Act, by further extending the requirement to have regard for biodiversity to all public authorities, which includes local authorities and local planning authorities and requires that the Secretary of State consults Natural England (NE) in the publication of the list of living organisms and habitat types deemed to be of principal importance in conserving biodiversity.

The Protection of Badgers Act (1992)
Badgers are afforded special protection against persecution. This legislation protects individual animals from harm and protects the burrows in which they live from damage or disturbance.

Species	Relevant Legislation	Level of Protection
Birds	Protection under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended), 1981.*	It is an offence to: • intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird. • intentionally take, damage or destroy nests in use or being built (including ground nesting birds). • intentionally take, damage or destroy eggs. • Species listed on Schedule 1 of the WCA or their dependant young are afforded additional protection from disturbance whilst they are at their nests.

Species	Relevant Legislation	Level of Protection
Reptiles (adder, grass snake, common lizard & slow-worm)	Partially protected under *Schedule 5* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended), 1981.*	It is an offence to: • intentionally kill or injure these animals. sell, offer for sale, advertise for sale, possess or transport for the purposes of selling any live or dead animals or part of these animals.
Badger	*Protection of Badgers Act, 1992*.	It is an offence to: • wilfully kill, injure, take, possess, or cruelly ill-treat a badger, or to attempt to do so. • intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett.
Bats	Fully protected species under the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as amended) 2017*. Full protection under *Schedule 5* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended), 1981.* Protected by the *Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996*.	It is an offence to: • intentionally kill, injure, or take any species of bat. • intentionally or recklessly disturb bats. • intentionally or recklessly damage destroy or obstruct access to bat roosts.
Water Vole	Full protection under *Schedule 5* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended)*. Full protection under *Schedule 5* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended)*. The *Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996*.	It is an offence to: • capture, kill, disturb or injure otters (on purpose or by not taking enough care). • damage or destroy a breeding or resting place (deliberately or by not taking enough care). • obstruct access to their resting or sheltering places (deliberately or by not taking enough care). possess, sell, control or transport live or dead otters, or parts of otters.
Wild Mammals	The *Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996*.	This makes it an offence to: • crush or asphyxiate any wild mammal with intent to inflict unnecessary suffering. This may apply during site clearance for development, particularly where burrowing animals such as foxes and rabbits are present, since such animals could be crushed or asphyxiated in their burrows by heavy machinery.