

**Habitat survey of proposed Sites of Importance for  
Nature Conservation in the London Borough of  
Richmond upon Thames**

**2017 Addendum**



Produced on behalf of the

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction and Scope**

1.1.1 Salix Ecology was commissioned by Richmond upon Thames Council in July 2016 to undertake a number of habitat surveys in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. Five sites were selected for survey:

- Meadway Orchard
- Mereway Nature Park
- St Michael's Convent
- St Margaret's Residential Grounds
- The Rifle Range

1.1.2 A survey report was produced for the Council in September 2016 (Salix Ecology, 2016). As access to St Michael's Convent was denied during the original survey, a full assessment for this site could not be provided. As a consequence the site's ecological value was assessed via a data search.

1.1.3 However access to the site was provided by the site owners in October 2017 and a brief walk-over survey was carried out on 5 October 2017.

1.1.4 This addendum describes habitats present at St Michael's Convent and provides an assessment of the site's nature conservation value. The report also considers whether the site qualifies for designation as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and to recommend an appropriate grade of designation.

1.1.5 Please refer to the original report (Salix Ecology, 2016) for details of the methods used in the survey as well as the approach taken to evaluate nature conservation value.

### **1.2 Limitations**

1.2.1 Due to time constraints, the survey was a rapid walk-over and no attempt was made to make a full list of vascular plants present. The surveys was undertaken at a sub-optimum period for vegetation survey (regarded as May to September), and consequently a number of species present may not have been noticed. This habitat survey does not, therefore, constitute a full botanical survey.

## 2.0 Results

### 2.1 St Michael's Convent (site code 24676/01)

**Owner:** Beechcroft Developments Ltd

**Grid ref:** TQ1771172241, Area 1.54 ha

#### **Habitats Present:**

Mixed woodland 30%

Orchard 7%

Planted shrubbery:9%

Acid grassland 12%

Neutral grassland (Semi-improved): 12%

Allotments (vegetable garden): 11%

Standing water: <1%

Bare artificial habitat: 11%

Bare ground: 8%

#### **Site description:**

The site supported a number of habitat types, some of which have developed since the cessation of more intensive management/gardening.

#### **Mixed woodland**

There was a large area of mixed woodland covering much of the northern portion of the site. The majority of species present were non-native trees and shrubs likely to have been planted. There were however a number of mature native species including a mature pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and some standing dead trees likely to be of value for invertebrates. A full list of tree species can be found in the tree report for the site (ACD Environmental, 2013)

#### **Orchard**

There was a small orchard towards the centre of the site with a number of mature fruit trees including wild cherry *Prunus avium* and apple *Malus* sp. The Ecological Assessment of the site (Ecology Solutions, 2016) also recorded pear *Pyrus communis* and plum *Prunus domestica*.

#### **Planted shrubbery**

There were planted shrubs present at the site boundary and around the buildings. A comprehensive list is given in the Ecology Solutions Ltd report (2016).

#### **Acid grassland**

There was a relatively large area of acid grassland immediately to the north of the house. This was previously managed as a lawn through regular mowing and was incorrectly recorded as amenity grassland in the Ecological Assessment for the developer (Ecology Solutions Ltd, 2016). The sward was dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra* and bent species *Agrostis* sp with frequent ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and yarrow *Achillea millefolium*.

### **Neutral grassland (semi-improved)**

There were small areas of semi-improved neutral grassland close to the house which are likely to have been closely mown in the past. These were dominated by false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*.

### **Allotments (vegetable garden)**

There was a neglected vegetable garden which was becoming overrun with tall ruderal herbs and other ephemeral vegetation.

### **Standing water**

There were two small ponds on site which may support amphibia.

A map of the site is reproduced in Appendix 1.

### **Invasive, rare or otherwise notable species and features of interest:**

There were a few mature trees of note including a mulberry tree recorded on site. Some of these have potential to support bat roosts and at least two dead standing trees are likely to be of value for invertebrates.

Traditional orchards and lowland dry acid grassland are habitats of principal importance in England.

Four badger setts have been recorded on site, at least two of which appear to be active. Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers act (1992).

Non-native invasive species recorded include variegated yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*. The Ecological Assessment (Ecology Solutions, 2016) report also lists *Cotoneaster* species, snowberry *Symphoricarpos albus*, false acacia *Robinia pseudoacacia*, tree of heaven *Ailanthus altissima* and cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*. Variegated yellow archangel, cotoneaster species and false acacia are listed in schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981 (as amended). The act makes it illegal to release or allow to escape into the wild any animal which is not ordinarily resident in Great Britain and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state, or is listed in Schedule 9 to the Act. It is also illegal to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any plant listed in Schedule 9 to the Act. All of the above species are also listed as species of concern by the London Invasive Species Initiative (LISI).

### **Records of protected and notable species retrieved from GIGL:**

A number of species records were returned for this site and its 500 m buffer:

Birds included house sparrow, swift, song thrush, starling and dunnock. Suitable habitat was present to support nesting of these species.

Unspecified bat species were recorded including pipistrelle; there were several records of badger and hedgehog. Common shrew, stag beetle and common frog were also noted. Given the habitats reported to be present there is a reasonable possibility that all these species reside on site.

## 3.0 Evaluation

### 3.1 Overview

3.1.1 The table below details the SINC selection criteria for the site. Comments on the performance of each site against these criteria are also given. This information was employed in the selection of SINC's and to determine potential grade of each. The selection methodology using these criteria follows that detailed by the London Wildlife Site Board (2013).

### 3.2 Table 1: SINC selection criteria

Criteria	Comments
Representation	Typical of older religious establishments (retreats, convents etc) with gardens.
Habitat rarity	An old orchard and lowland acid grassland present – habitats of principal importance in England, the 300 year old mulberry tree could be considered ancient.
Species rarity	Of local note are badgers and bat species including daubenton's.
Habitat richness	Average, contains scattered trees, an orchard, lowland acid grassland, semi-improved neutral grassland and small ponds
Species richness	Average to rich, a good range of trees and birds has been recorded as well as amphibians and invertebrates.
Size	1.54 ha (small)
Important populations of species	None known
Ancient character	300 year old Mulberry tree
Recreatability	Mostly not recreatable within a human life time
Typical urban character	Not typical
Cultural or historic character	There is a 300 year old vine and black mulberry tree on site, Orford House is listed and of a similar age.
Geographic position	This site is an important part of the River Thames to Richmond Park Green Corridor.
Access	None
Use	Convent, but in the process of development as a retirement home
Potential	Would have great potential as a limited access public open space
Aesthetic appeal	Was a regular retreat frequented by the public by prearrangement up until summer 2016.
Geodiversity interest	None known

## 4.0 Recommendations

### 4.1 St Michael's Convent Garden

- 4.1.1 The site supports a good range of habitats within a relatively small area providing habitat for foraging and possibly roosting bats, invertebrates and amphibia. There is also potential bird nesting and reptile habitat.
- 4.1.2 There are two habitats of principal importance within the site, lowland acid grassland and traditional orchards. Habitats of principal importance are the habitats in England that were identified as requiring action in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) and continue to be regarded as conservation priorities in the subsequent UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework (JNCC, 2012).
- 4.1.3 The desktop study found the site to be an important part of the River Thames to Richmond Park Green Corridor. It contains a wide variety of native and non-native tree species. Most notable is a 300 year old black mulberry. Forty five species of birds have been recorded using the site including song thrush, house sparrow, tawny owl, sparrowhawk, kestrel and cuckoo (some of which are Red List species). A number of bats also commute across the site including Daubenton's bat.
- 4.1.4 A number of species records were returned from the GiGL data search e.g. birds included house sparrow, swift, song thrush, starling and dunnock. Unspecified bat species were recorded including pipistrelle; there were several records of badger and hedgehog. Common shrew, stag beetle and common frog were also noted. There is a reasonable possibility that all these species reside on site.
- 4.1.5 If the site is developed there is a risk that the green corridor it sits within will be seriously fragmented. It is recommended that this important site be designated as Borough Grade 2 SINC.

## 5.0 References

ACD Environmental (2016) *Tree Report*. Unpublished report

Burton R. (1983) *Flora of the London Area*. London Natural History Society, London.

Defra (2012) *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework*. Available from:

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=6189>

Ecology Solutions Ltd (2016) *St Michael's Convent, Ham Common Ham, Richmond Upon Thames: Ecological Assessment*. Unpublished report.

JNCC, (2012). *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough. <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6189>

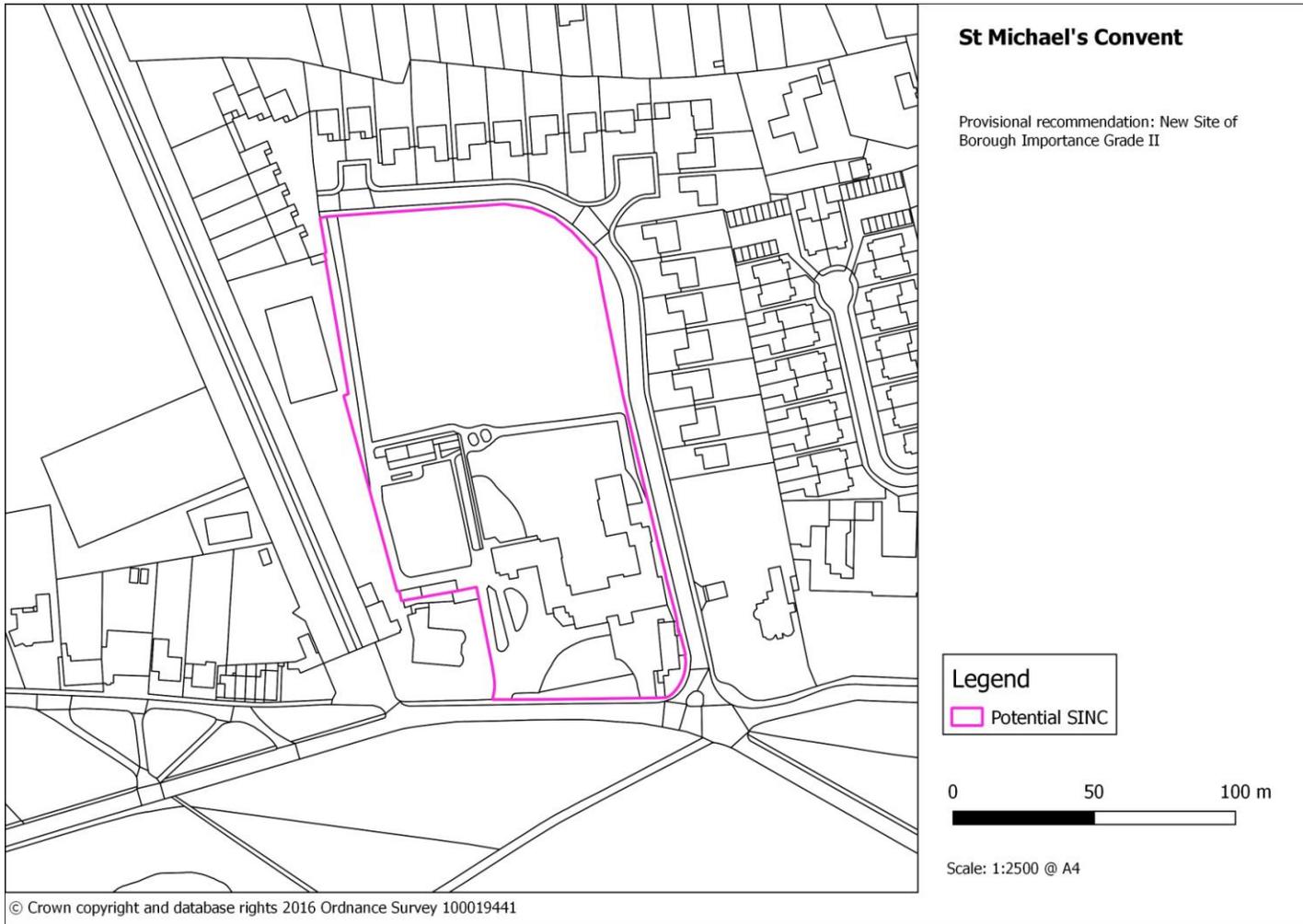
London Invasive Species Initiative, (2013) *Species of Concern*. Available from

<http://londonisi.org.uk/lisp/>

London Wildlife Site Board, 2013 The London Wildlife Site Board (LWSB) Advice Note: *Process for selecting and confirming Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in Greater London*. Available from: [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sinc\\_selection\\_process\\_-\\_update\\_march\\_2013.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sinc_selection_process_-_update_march_2013.pdf)

Salix Ecology (2016) *Habitat survey of proposed Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames*. Unpublished report.

## **Appendix 1: Site map**



**Map 1: St Michael's Convent**

## **Appendix 2: Photographs**

*Photo 1:* Acid grassland to the north of the house



*Photo 2:* Black mulberry



*Photo 3:* Orchard in the northern half of the site



*Photo 4:* Standing dead wood – a valuable resource



*Photo 5:* Standing dead tree with bat roost potential



*Photo 6:* Semi-improved neutral grassland



*Photo 7:* Overgrown vegetable garden



