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Protected Species Walkover Survey

**153 Bath Road
Reading**

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14-016-WA
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Summary

- The site was surveyed on the 8th June 2014 by a qualified ecologist to assess the site for the potential presence of any protected species and identify habitats of conservation importance and to update a previous survey carried out by AEWCLtd on the 21st July 2011.
- This report gives details of the results of a protected species walkover survey carried out at 152 Bath Road, Reading, Berks, RG20 2BD.
- No evidence of Badgers, such as setts or evidence of foraging, was found within the site boundary and, as the surrounding area is largely unsuitable for this species, no further Badger surveys are required.
- The West European Hedgehog is a UK BAP priority species. Although there is some potential habitat for this species to occur within the area, it is considered unlikely that they occur in significant numbers on site, and further surveys are not considered to be necessary, although precautions to protect this species during site clearance should be taken.
- The out buildings, trees, hedgerow, rubbish piles and *Rubus fruticosus* agg. (Bramble) scrub all have the potential to support nesting birds. If any work involving clearance of vegetation, or the demolition of the buildings or clearance of rubbish piles were scheduled to take place between the beginning of March and the end of August, a survey to check for nesting birds by a suitably qualified ecologist would be required.
- There are no records for Great Crested Newt within the vicinity of the site and the Bath Road presents a major barrier to dispersal even if this species were present in a pond in Prospect Park. Given this, further surveys are not considered to be necessary for this species.
- There is a very limited amount of habitat suitable for reptiles, and so some precautions must be taken during any site clearance to ensure that no reptiles are killed or injured.
- It is advisable that an ecological clerk of works be present during site clearance to carry out a watching brief. They can then ensure that no protected species such as Hedgehogs and reptiles are harmed during the removal of vegetation.

This report has been prepared by AEWCLimited, with all reasonable skill, care and diligence within the terms of the Contract with the client.

We disclaim any responsibility to the client and others in respect of any matters outside the scope of the above.

This report is confidential to the client and we accept no responsibility of whatsoever nature to third parties to whom this report, or any part thereof, is made known. Any such party relies on the report at their own risk.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This survey comprised of an ecological walkover survey for all protected wildlife and species of conservation importance, including habitats, and was carried out by a qualified ecologist Jacqueline Thompson, BSc (Hons), MSc, MCIEEM.
- 1.2 The objective of the survey was to identify the potential presence of any protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1982) and European Protected Species and habitats of conservation importance. This report gives details of the results of a protected species walkover survey carried out on 8th June 2014.
- 1.3 A previous survey was undertaken on 21st July 2011. This survey is intended to update any findings.

2 Background

- 2.1 The site comprises the following two areas: Area 1 is the garden to the north of the property at 7 Circuit Lane. Area 2 is to the east of this bounding Bath Road to the north and parking areas to the south. Further car parking for a garage is to the east.
- 2.2 The location of the site is shown in Figure 1 and the extent of the proposed development site is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Site location pointed out with an arrow



Figure 2.2: Site boundary and showing Area 1 and Area 2



- 2.3 The garden (Area 1, Photograph 1) is maintained as a short sward with lawn of the National Vegetation Classification type MG6 *Lolium perenne*-*Cynosurus cristatus* grassland. A mature, non-native hedge of *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* (Lawson's Cypress) and some *Rubus fruticosus* agg. (Bramble) scrub bound the garden to the north and west, and some trees of *Acer pseudoplatanus* (Sycamore), *Pyrus communis* (Pear), *Prunus* sp. (a plum) and *Laburnum anagyroides* (Common Laburnum) are to the east.
- 2.4 There is a garden building constructed of breezeblock with a corrugated iron roof and a small wooden garden shed with a wooden roof.
- 2.5 The land to the east of the garden (Area 2) is quite different having been clearly neglected for a number of years. The northern part, adjacent to Bath Road, is regenerating woodland (Photograph 2) with multi-stemmed *Acer pseudoplatanus* (Sycamore), young *Fraxinus excelsior* (Ash) and suckering *Ulmus procera* (English Elm). The ground is dominated by a carpet of *Hedera helix* (Ivy).
- 2.6 The majority of Area 2 (Photograph 3) is a mosaic of *Rubus fruticosus* agg. (Bramble) scrub, stands of nettles and a very small area of grassland of the National Vegetation Classification type MG1 *Arrhenatherum elatius* grassland.
- 2.7 The southern section is an area of *Prunus* sp. (Plum) trees with patchily vegetated ground sloping to the west. This is shown in Photograph 4.
- 2.8 There are two derelict small buildings in this area. One is constructed of pre-fabricated concrete sheeting and a corrugated roof (Photograph 5) and the other is a semi-collapsed wooden shed with a corrugated roof.

- 2.9 Piles of wood, rubble, compost and general rubbish are scattered throughout the area (Photograph 6).

Photograph 1: View of the garden of 7 Circuit Road looking east



Photograph 2: Regenerating woodland at the northern end of Area 2 adjacent to Bath Road



Photograph 3: The neglected land of 153 Bath Road (Area 2) showing grassland, nettles and scrub



Photograph 4: Plum trees at the southern end of Area 2



Photograph 5: Prefabricated concrete building with corrugated roof in Area 2



Photograph 6: Example of piles of rubbish in Area 2



3 Method

- 3.1 Taking into consideration the geographical region and habitat type, species and features that could be encountered are:
- Badgers;
 - Bats;
 - Biodiversity Action Plan Species (e.g. Hedgehog);
 - Breeding Birds;
 - Great Crested Newt; and
 - Reptiles;
- 3.2 In addition, observations of any important plant communities or other valuable ecological features will have been recorded and detailed. Details of initial survey methods for each species are given below.
- 3.3 Badger - An initial assessment was carried out to identify areas that might be used by Badgers (*Meles meles*). Signs of Badgers including setts, incidental foraging signs, runs and latrines, are recorded if encountered during the survey.
- 3.4 Bats – An inspection of the buildings was made to assess them for the potential for roosting bats and to look for evidence, such as droppings. The trees on site were examined for signs of bats such as spaces that appear suitable for bats and potential access points. Bats will roost in cavities created by woodpeckers, rot or storm damage, but they prefer cavities that go upwards into the tree. Sometimes a bat's occupation of a cavity will be revealed by the presence of scratch marks, oil stains from the bat's fur or droppings around the hole. However, small numbers of bats may not leave claw marks or oil stains, and droppings can be washed away. Therefore, further surveys are recommended if there is any doubt.
- 3.5 Biodiversity Action Plan Species – The habitats present on site were assessed for the likelihood of presence for species of regional and national importance.
- 3.6 Breeding Birds - Habitats were assessed for their suitability for nesting birds. This could include species that utilise trees and scrub or birds that favour buildings for nesting, such as the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) or Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*).
- 3.7 Great Crested Newt - Initial surveys centre on identifying suitable terrestrial habitat on site. If there are Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) breeding ponds within 500m (that are not isolated from the site by unsuitable habitat or physical barriers), the species could potentially be using terrestrial habitat on the site.
- 3.8 Reptiles - The site was assessed for reptiles, with particular attention paid to those features that provide suitable basking areas (e.g. south-facing slopes), hibernation sites (e.g. banks, walls, piles of rotting vegetation) and opportunities for foraging (rough grassland and scrub).

4 Constraints/Limitations

- 4.1 An initial site assessment such as this is only able to act like a 'snapshot' to record any flora or fauna that is present at the time of the survey. It is therefore possible that some species may not have been present during the survey, but may be evident at other times of the year. For this reason, habitats are assessed for their potential to support some species, even where no direct evidence (such as droppings) has been found.

5 Results

- 5.1 Badger – No evidence of Badger sett building activity or Badger foraging signs were observed on the proposed development footprint. Mammal runways and an entrance point were observed, however, evidence of fox scat was found adjacent to a runway. Given the surrounding environment, consisting mostly of car parking areas and roads, it is highly unlikely that Badgers would use this site.



- 5.2 Bats – all buildings were thoroughly inspected internally and externally. The garden buildings lack any crevices required for bats. The derelict sheds are both semi-collapsed. Hanging carpets on the walls were damp and unsuitable for bats to roost behind. Boarding beneath the roof was coming away allowing the space between the board and the roof to be inspected with a torch, but no signs of bats were found.

- 5.3 The trees were all fairly small with a diameter at breast height of 10cm to 20cm and so lack the features of larger trees that are necessary to support roosting bats.
- 5.4 Biodiversity Action Plan Species such as Hedgehogs could potentially occur favouring the dense cover of scrub and the opportunities for hibernation.
- 5.5 Breeding birds – The trees, derelict buildings, hedgerow and *Rubus fruticosus* agg. (Bramble) scrub all have the potential to support breeding birds. Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) and Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) all appeared to be nesting in Area 2.
- 5.6 Great Crested Newts (GCN) – The site has small amounts of suitable foraging habitat and refuges for this species. Great Crested Newts are known to disperse up to 500m from suitable breeding areas. A review of the 1:25000 OS map revealed that the nearest potentially suitable water-body that could support Great Crested Newts is situated approximately 385 metres to the north of the site in Prospect Park. However, a review of the National Biodiversity Network shows that there are no records for GCN in that area. Additionally, even if they were present, it is highly improbable that they would be able to cross the busy Bath Road to access habitat on site.
- 5.7 Reptiles – The juxtaposition of scrub and grassland is considered to be suitable for reptiles, but the garden grassland is kept at a short sward and the grassland in the Area 2 has shrunk to a smaller size than in 2011. There is, however, a local record for Slow Worm within 1km to the south east along the railway line.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 Badger – No evidence of Badgers, such as setts or evidence of foraging, was found within the site boundary. The only suitable place for a sett on sloping land to the west of the Plum trees was mostly devoid of vegetation and so any sett entrances would have been observed. Further surveys for this species are considered to be unnecessary.
- 6.2 Bats – The buildings and trees present on site are unsuitable for roosting bats and therefore further bat surveys are not considered to be necessary.
- 6.3 Biodiversity Action Plan Species - The West European Hedgehog is a UK BAP priority species. Although there is some potential habitat for this species to occur within the area, it is considered unlikely that they occur in significant numbers on site, and further surveys are not considered necessary although precautions, such as those outlined in Section 7, should be taken.
- 6.4 Breeding birds – The buildings, trees, hedgerow and *Rubus fruticosus* agg. (Bramble) scrub all have the potential to support nesting birds. The piles of rubbish may also support nesting birds. Precautions that must be taken in order to protect breeding birds are outlined in Section 7.
- 6.5 Great Crested Newts – There are no records for this species within the vicinity of the site and the Bath Road presents a major barrier to dispersal even if this species were

present in Prospect Park. Given this, further surveys are not considered to be necessary for this species.

- 6.6 Reptiles – Even though there is a small amount of suitable habitat, the site is largely surrounded by unsuitable habitat in the form of car parks and roads. Any reptiles would therefore be limited to occupying very small areas along the edges of gardens and therefore populations would be very small. However, as a precaution, recommendations for ensuring that no reptiles are harmed during site clearance are given in Section 7.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 If any work involving clearance of vegetation, or the demolition of the buildings or clearance of rubbish piles were scheduled to take place between the beginning of March and the end of August, a survey to check for nesting birds by a suitably qualified ecologist would be required. This applies to trees, hedges, shrubs, buildings, piles of rubble and wood. No vegetation can be cleared or structures demolished whilst a nest is occupied.
- 7.2 It is advisable that an ecological clerk of works be present during site clearance to carry out a watching brief. They can then ensure that no protected species such as Hedgehogs and reptiles are harmed during the removal of vegetation.

Appendix 1 – legal protection

General

This section briefly describes the legal protection afforded to protected species. It is for information only and is not intended to be comprehensive or to replace specialised legal advice. It is not intended to replace the text of the legislation, but summarises the salient points.

Breeding Birds

All species of bird are protected under *Section 1* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended). Protection was extended by the *Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000*. Under the above legislation it is an offence to intentionally:

- kill, injure or take any wild bird;
- take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or
- take or destroy an egg of any wild bird.

Certain species are listed on *Schedule 1* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended) and receive protection under *Sections 1(4)* and *1(5)*. The protection was extended by the *Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000*. There are special penalties where the offences listed above are committed for any *Schedule 1* species and it is also an offence to intentionally or recklessly:

- disturb any such bird when it is building its nest or while it is in or near a nest containing dependant young; or
- disturb the dependant young of any such bird.

Reptiles

Common Lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*), Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*), Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*), and Adder (*Vipera berus*) are listed under *Schedule 5* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended), in respect of *Section 9(5)* and part of *Section 9(1)*. This protection was extended by the *Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000*. Under the legislation it is an offence to:

- intentionally or deliberately kill or injure any individual of these species; or
- sell or attempt to sell any part of these species either alive or dead