



Tadmarton Road
Bloxham, Banbury

Protected Species Report: Otter and Water Vole

Prepared For: Gladman Developments

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TEP
401 Faraday Street,
Birchwood Park,
Warrington,
WA3 6GA

Tel: 01925 844004
Email: tep@tep.uk.com

Offices in Warrington, Market Harborough, Gateshead, London and Cornwall

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The conclusions and recommendations contained in this document are based upon information gathered by TEP and provided by third parties. Information provided by third parties and referred to herein has not been independently verified by TEP, unless otherwise expressly stated in the document.

Nothing in this report constitutes legal opinion. If legal opinion is required, the advice of a qualified legal professional should be secured.

Executive Summary

Site Details	The site is located at Tadmarton Road, Bloxham, Banbury. The site application boundary measures 4.4ha. The anticipated footprint of the project elements, including construction and soft landscaping works, is estimated to be 4.4ha.
Proposals	It is understood an outline planning application will be submitted for the construction of up to 60 residential dwellings with provision for public open space, landscaping, a sustainable drainage system (SuDS) and a vehicular access point.
Survey Details	Two survey visits were undertaken, on 28 th April 2023 and 10 th July 2023 to confirm the likely presence or absence of otter and water vole. Ditches D1 and D1, and Stream S1 were subject to survey.
Summary	Ditches D1, D2 and Stream S1 were assessed to be suitable for otter. An otter footprint was found at Stream S1, indicating that otter utilise the stream, likely for foraging and commuting. No evidence of otter was found at Ditches D1 or D2. Ditch D1 and Stream S1 were assessed to be suitable for water vole. No evidence of water vole was found at either watercourse.
Conclusions	No evidence of water vole and no otter holts were found at any watercourse. There are no implications to the development works in relation to otter and water vole. Further surveys will be required if works have not commenced within 12 months of this report.
Recommendations	As otter are known to be present within the area, a pre-construction check of all watercourses on site for otter is recommended prior to the commencement of development works. The survey will re-affirm the absence of holts within influencing distance of the works. Further water vole surveys will be required if works have not commenced within 12 months of the initial surveys.

This Executive Summary is not a substitute for the full report. Refer to the full text of this report for further detail.

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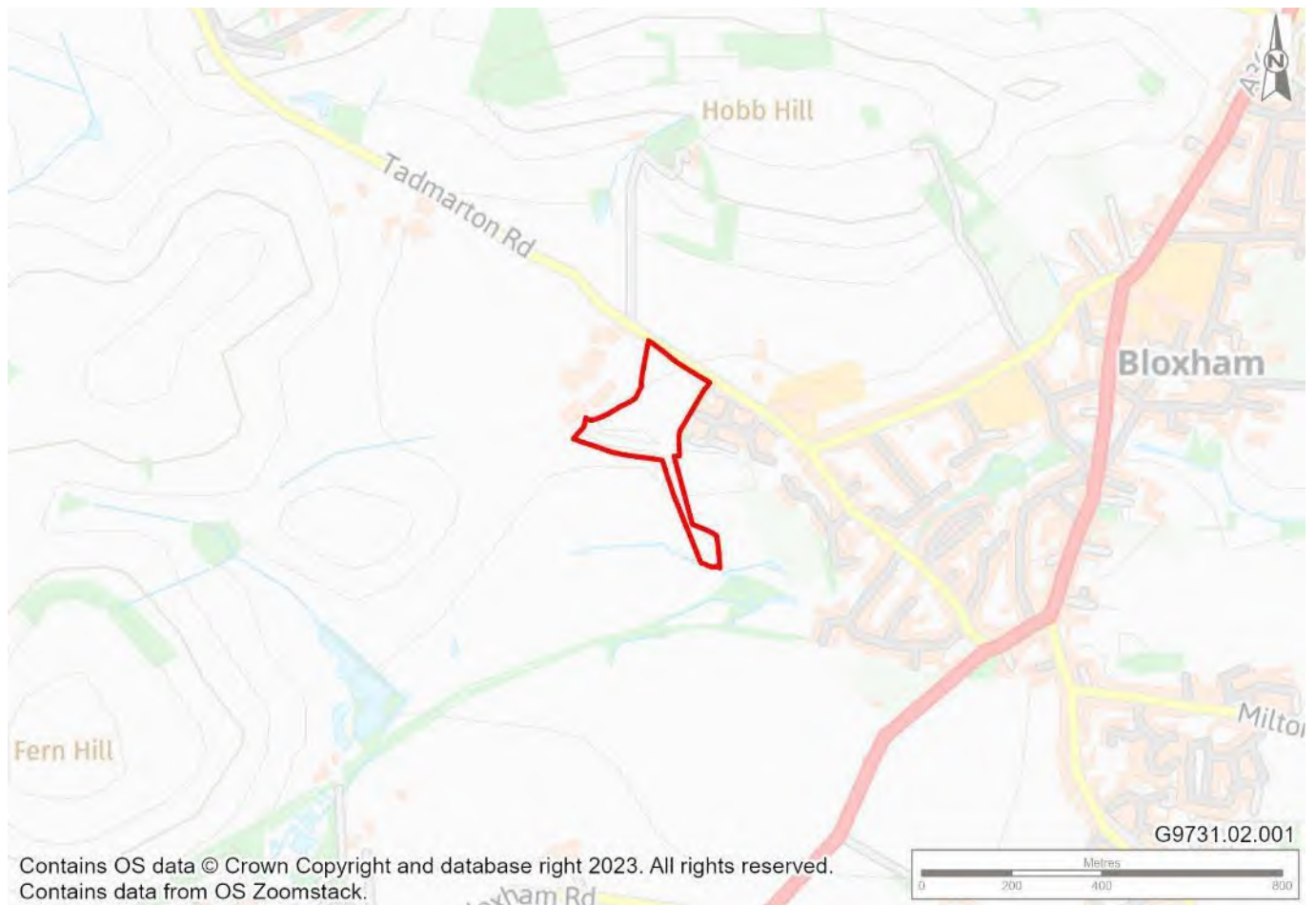
1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Environment Partnership (TEP) was commissioned by Gladman Developments in January 2023 to undertake an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) in support of a planning application for residential development at Tadmarton Road, Bloxham, Banbury (hereafter referred to as 'the site').
- 1.2 An Ecological Desk Study has been produced to support the EclA, reported under a separate cover (TEP Ref: 9731.02.001). The EclA report should read in conjunction with the Desk Study.
- 1.3 Otter *Lutra lutra* and water vole *Arvicola amphibious* surveys were completed as part of a suite of ecology services to inform the EclA. Watercourses included for survey were identified as potentially suitable for otter and water voles during the Phase 1 habitat survey conducted in January 2023.
- 1.4 This technical report includes details of the methods employed and any limitations of the surveys undertaken. Results are provided with supporting maps, together with an evaluation of the ecological features within the site.

Site Location

- 1.5 The site is located at Tadmarton Road, Bloxham, Banbury. The location of the site is depicted by the red line shown in Figure 1. The approximate central grid reference of the site is SP 42049 35945.
- 1.6 The site is dominated by two arable fields comprising temporary grassland ley. Hedgerows are present along Tadmarton Road on the northern boundary and along a field boundary, and a short section of stream within semi-natural broadleaved woodland grazes the southern site boundary. Former quarry workings bisect the site encompassing a small section of running water, a large pond, dense scrub, and scattered trees. Wet ditches, tall ruderal vegetation, and scattered scrub habitats were also found within the site.
- 1.7 Tadmarton Road forms the north-eastern site boundary, a working farm is located directly to the north-west of the site, and the eastern boundary abuts a new housing development and associated public open space beyond which lies the village of Bloxham. Rural land under agricultural use extends in all other directions.

Figure 1: Site location



Legislation

Otter

1.8 The Eurasian otter is the only native UK otter species. It's fully protected as a European protected species (EPS) and is also protected under sections 9 and 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), together with amending legislation, lists the following as offences.

- 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

Water Vole

- 1.9 In England and Wales water voles are listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended), receiving full protection since 2008. The WCA 1981, together with amending legislation, lists the following as offences:
- Section 9(1) - Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal included in Schedule 5;
 - Section 9(2) - possess or control any live or dead wild animal included in Schedule 5 or any part or derivative of such an animal (other than for exemptions provided under Section 9(3));
 - Section 9(4) Intentionally or recklessly
 - ▶ damage or destroy any structure or place which any wild animal included in Schedule 5 uses shelter or protection;
 - ▶ disturbs any wild animal included in Schedule 5 while it is occupying a structure place which it uses for shelter or protection; or
 - ▶ obstructs access to any structure or place which any wild animal included in Schedule 5 uses shelter or protection.
- 1.10 The Environment Act (EA) 2021 amends the licensing regime under Section 16 of the WCA 1981 (as amended) to enable licences to be granted (in England only) for reasons of overriding public interest. This new purpose will enable those involved in development activities to apply for a derogation under the WCA for domestically protected species. Further, the amendments introduced by the EA 2021 at Section 16(3) requires that licensed may only be granted (in England) where:
- there is no other satisfactory solution, and
 - the grant of the licence is not detrimental to the survival of any population of the species of animal or plant to which the licence relates.
- 1.11 In summary, a water vole licence for development is available, but will only be issued subject to an accompanying method statement confirming that water vole disturbance is the only satisfactory option and that mitigation measures will ensure the population of water voles can be sustained.

2.0 Methods

Desktop Study

- 2.1 In line with current best practice (CIEEM, 2016¹, 2017b²), information regarding designated sites, notable habitats and existing protected and notable species records of the past decade, within a 2km minimum radius of the site was collated and reviewed to inform this ecological assessment. Further details are presented in the Ecological Desk Study (TEP Ref 9731.02.001).
- 2.2 The desk study identified records of otter within 2km of the site. The desk study did not identify any records of water vole. Further details are presented in the Ecological Desk Study report.

Field Survey

- 2.3 The otter and water vole surveys were undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist, accompanied by a health and safety assistant.
- 2.4 Surveys were undertaken at Ditch D1 located along the northern site boundary, Ditch D2 located along the southern site boundary, and Stream S1 located along the southern site boundary. The locations of the features are shown on drawing G9731.02.014. The surveys of the ditches and stream included all sections within and immediately adjacent to the site, and sections up to 100m upstream and downstream of the site. All sections of the watercourses were accessible to survey.
- 2.5 The standard methods, as outlined within the latest guidance by Dean et al. (2016)³ and Strachan et al. (2011)⁴ were followed to complete a thorough search for evidence that would indicate the presence of water vole and other riparian mammals both on the site and locally. This evidence may include:
- Burrows;
 - Feeding remains;

¹ CIEEM (2016) Guidelines for Accessing and Using Biodiversity Data. Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management

² CIEEM (2017b) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, 2nd Edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management

³ Dean, M., Strachan, R., Gow, D. and Andrews, R. (2016). The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook (The Mammal Society Mitigation Guidance Series). Eds Fiona Mathews and Paul Chanin. The Mammal Society, London.

⁴ Strachan, R., Moorhouse, T. & Gelling, M. (2011) Water vole conservation handbook (3rd Ed.). Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, Oxford.

- Droppings;
- Footprints; and
- Incidental evidence of other riparian mammals (including otter and North American mink *Neovison vison*).

- 2.6 Field signs for otter include spraints (droppings), footprints, feeding remains and laying up areas (couches) on the immediate banksides. Other signs include potential dens or holts within exposed tree roots on riparian banks and within woodlands adjacent to and within 30m of the watercourse.
- 2.7 Two surveys were undertaken to determine presence or likely absence of otter and water vole. Surveys were undertaken on 28th April 2023 and 10th July 2023.
- 2.8 The survey included the banks and in-channel of the watercourses to assess for signs of otter and water vole. Suitable habitat for otter holt creation e.g. trees and woodland, was also surveyed where located up to 30m from a watercourse.
- 2.9 The water vole survey was designed taking into account the proposed development and The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook 2016⁴. Appendix A presents further details.

Limitations

- 2.10 All watercourses were accessed as far as possible. Where the surveyors could not survey from within the ditch due to dense vegetation, bankside observations were made.

Assumptions

- 2.11 Information provided by third parties, including publicly available information, is assumed to be correct at the time of publication.

3.0 Results

Desktop Study

- 3.1 The desk study (TEP Ref: 9731.02.001) identified two records of otter within 2km of the site, the nearest record is located approximately 200m from the site boundary. The desk study did not identify any records of water vole.

Field Survey

Habitat Description

Ditch D1

- 3.2 Ditch D1 is associated with a hedgerow, adjacent to Tadmarton Road, and is located outside but adjacent to the site boundary (Figure 2). The ditch has shallow, earth banks, approximately 1.5m in height. The channel is approximately 1m in width. The ditch supports only limited in-channel vegetation, including ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea* and great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*. Bankside vegetation includes grasses, cleavers *Galium aparine* and nettle *Urtica dioica* on the northern side, with hedgerow species on the southern side. Water levels were variable during the surveys. The maximum depth of the water was 10 cm on 28th April 2023, although some sections contained more limited water and some sections were dry. The ditch was dry across its length on 10th July 2023.

Figure 2: Ditch D1



Ditch D2

- 3.3 Ditch D2 is located within the former quarry workings on site (Figure 3). It is fed by an outflow pipe and is surrounded by dense scrub and trees. The ditch has a soft earth base, and the channel was approximately 2m in width. There are no banks. The water depth was a maximum of 5 cm on 28th April 2023. The ditch supports no in-channel vegetation, and bankside vegetation is limited to only nettles. The ditch is heavily shaded by willow *Salix* species, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg.

Figure 3: Ditch D2



Stream S1

- 3.4 Stream S1 flows along the southern site boundary, flowing west to east (Figure 4). The stream is lined with semi-mature to mature trees and woodland. The channel is approximately 2 – 3 m in width. The channel supports steep, earth banks, up to 1m in height. The ditch does not support any in-channel vegetation. Bankside vegetation includes ground-ivy, meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, cleavers, nettles, grasses, lesser celandine *Ficaria verna* and cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*. The ditch is heavily shaded by hawthorn. The water was typically 50 cm deep on 28th April 2023, going to a maximum depth of 1 m in places. The water was generally 50 cm deep on 10th July 2023.

Figure 4: Stream S1



Habitat Suitability for Otter and Water Vole

- 3.5 Full results of the habitat suitability of all the watercourses and ditches subject to survey are provided in the Appendix B.
- 3.6 Ditch D1 has potential to support foraging otter. The earth banks are shallow and therefore are of low suitability for water vole burrow creation. Food plants for water vole are present. The ditch supported water in some sections during the first survey undertaken on 28th April 2023. The ditch contained water up to 10 cm deep adjacent to the site boundary. Water was more limited within the west of the ditch approaching the farm access. The ditch was completely dry to the east of the site boundary. Given the presence of water within some of the ditch, the ditch was assessed as having suitability for water vole during the first survey. However, during the second survey the ditch was dry and therefore not suitable for water vole at that time.
- 3.7 Ditch D2 has potential to support foraging otter. The ditch was assessed to be unsuitable for water vole. This is because there are no banks, and therefore no opportunities for water vole burrow creation. In addition, there was no aquatic vegetation and limited bankside vegetation to provide a food source for water vole.
- 3.8 Stream S1 has potential to support foraging otter. The woodland and trees along the banks also provide opportunities for otter holt creation. The earth banks are steep and are therefore suitable for water vole burrow creation. Limited food plants are present. The

ditch contained water ranging from 50 cm to 1 m in depth. The ditch was assessed as having suitability for water vole.

Field Signs

3.9 Field signs of otter and water vole identified during the surveys are provided below:

- Survey Visit 1 – 28th April 2023:
 - ▶ Ditch D1 – No field signs of otter or water vole
 - ▶ Stream S1 –
 - No field signs of water vole
 - Otter footprints identified on the woodland side of the stream (NGR: SP 42285 35518) (Figure 5).
- Survey Visit 2 – 10th July 2023:
 - ▶ Ditch D1 – No field signs of otter or water vole
 - ▶ Stream S1 – No field signs of otter or water vole.

3.10 Incidental evidence of badger, deer and rat was recorded within stream S1 during the surveys. This included mammal paths, deer and badger prints and claw marks, and a rat burrow. Mammal paths were also identified at Ditch D1.

Figure 5: Otter print



Summary

Otter

- 3.11 Ditches D1, D2 and Stream S1 were identified to be suitable for otter.
- 3.12 Evidence of otter was found at Stream S1, which comprised an otter footprint. No evidence of otter was found at D1 or D2.
- 3.13 No otter holts, resting places, or couches were identified along any watercourse or amongst suitable habitat including woodland or trees within 30m of a watercourse.

Water Vole

- 3.14 Ditch D1 and Stream S1 were identified to be suitable for water vole. No evidence of water vole was found during the survey visits conducted on 28th April 2023 and 10th July 2023.

Other Mammals

- 3.15 Signs of activity by other mammals including badger, deer and rat were identified at Ditch D1 and Stream S1.

4.0 Evaluation and Recommendations

- 4.1 The survey consisted of two separate site visits, conducted on 28th April 2023 and 10th July 2023. This enabled adequate coverage of all ditches and streams within and adjacent to the site to confirm the likely presence or absence of otter and water vole.
- 4.2 The second survey was conducted at the beginning of July. During this period, water vole activity would be at its highest. As no signs of water vole were found in any ditch or stream during the two surveys, it is highly unlikely that water vole are present within the water courses. There are therefore no implications to the development proposals in relation to water vole.
- 4.3 As no otter holts, couches or resting places were found during the surveys, there are no implications to the development proposals in relation to otter. However, an otter footprint was identified at Stream S1, indicating that otter do utilise the stream, likely for commuting and foraging purposes.
- 4.4 As otter are known to be present within the area, a pre-construction check of all watercourses on site for otter is recommended prior to the commencement of development works. The survey will re-affirm the absence of holts within influencing distance of the works.
- 4.5 Given that water voles are dynamic species and that the ditches and stream provide suitable habitat, it is recommended that a repeat of the survey should be undertaken if, after 12 months from the date of the initial surveys, no works have occurred.

Appendix A: Survey Design

Survey Design

(The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook, Box 1, Page 9)

1. Type of works: Very small-scale works affecting up to 15m of watercourse	
Example project	Construction of an outfall, bridge repair works, or installation of pipes up to 15m long within a narrow field drains (where these do not form part of a larger development)
To confirm presence or likely absence of water voles	Field survey – footprint of the works, including temporary work areas plus 100m upstream and downstream. A comprehensive desk study exercise will not necessarily be required.
Additional information (if water voles present)	Micro-mapping of the habitat and burrow locations to allow design to minimise impacts (when relevant). Further data may be needed to ensure that there is sufficient alternative habitat available to displace water voles into. This may be obtained through desktop study or a habitat assessment combined with 'spot checks' for water voles over a wider area (1-2km upstream and downstream of the works).

2. Type of works: Works temporarily affecting up to 50m of watercourse	
Example project	Pipeline crossing a watercourse
To confirm presence or likely absence of water voles	Field survey – footprint of the works, including temporary work areas, plus 200m upstream and downstream of the works. A comprehensive desktop study exercise will not necessarily be required.
Additional information (if water voles present)	Micro-mapping of the habitat and burrow locations to allow design to minimise impacts (when relevant). Further data may be needed to ensure that there is sufficient alternative habitat available to displace water voles into. This may be obtained through desktop study or a habitat assessment combined with 'spot checks' for water voles over a wider area (1-2km upstream and downstream of the works).

3. Type of works: Works temporarily affecting more than 50m of watercourse	
Example project	Watercourse re-profiling or repair/reinstatement of bank stabilisation structures
To confirm presence or likely absence of water voles	Field survey – footprint of the works, including temporary work areas, plus at least 200m upstream and downstream of the works. For works affecting more than 500m of watercourse, the study area should increase to 500m upstream and downstream of the works. A comprehensive desk study exercise will not necessarily be required, but would be advisable for works affecting ≥ 250 m of watercourse.
Additional information (if water voles present)	Desk study – Site and up to 2-5km around it (or a habitat assessment combined with 'spot checks' for water voles) to inform the approach to mitigation and the assessment of fragmentation effects. The study area should be proportionate to the length of habitat affected.

4. Type of works: Works with permanent impacts affecting 15-50m of watercourse	
Example project	Bank side revetment works
To confirm presence or likely absence of water voles	Field survey – footprint of the works, including temporary work areas, plus 100-200m upstream and downstream of the works (proportionate to the length of watercourse affected). Desk study – site and up to 2km around it (or a habitat assessment combined with 'spot checks' for water voles).
Additional information (if water voles present)	Sufficient information is likely to have been provided by the 'presence/likely absence' surveys.

5. Type of works: Works with permanent impacts affecting more than 50m of watercourse OR Works requiring permanent culverting of watercourse

Example project	Bank side revetment works OR Highway schemes or some residential/mixed-use developments
To confirm presence or likely absence of water voles	Field survey – footprint of the works, including temporary work areas, plus 200-500m upstream and downstream of the works (proportionate to the likely fragmentation effects). Desk study – site and up to 2-5km around it, or a habitat assessment combined with 'spot checks' for water voles.
Additional information (if water voles present)	The study area for the desk study (or habitat assessment combined with 'spot checks' for water voles) may need to be increased to inform the approach to mitigation.

6. Type of works: Very large scale works

Example project	Coastal re-alignment projects (where there are reasonable grounds to expect the presence of water voles)
To confirm presence or likely absence of water voles	Field survey – footprint of the works, including temporary work areas, plus approximately 1km around it. Desk study – site and up to 10km around it (or a habitat assessment combined with 'spot checks' for water voles.
Additional information (if water voles present)	The study area for the desk study (or habitat assessment combined with 'spot checks' for water voles) may need to be increased to inform the approach to mitigation.

Field sign surveys - one site visit or two?

The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook (Page 15)

The water vole is a mobile species that responds to habitat changes over the course of the breeding season: a single visit can therefore be insufficient to confirm likely absence in many cases. In addition, where water voles are present, survey data based on two visits will allow a more robust assessment of the impacts of the project, particularly where water voles use different parts of a site during different parts of the breeding season. This can also be important in determining the most appropriate approach to mitigation. These guidelines therefore recommend that two field survey visits are routinely undertaken. However, it is recognised that the second visit may not be required in some cases, and it may therefore be possible to make a case for an assessment based on one visit. Examples of scenarios where a single visit (before submitting a planning application) may be sufficient as follows:

1. Water vole presence is confirmed during the first survey visit.

A second visit may not be needed where the assessment of effects on water voles can be made on a precautionary basis (i.e. water voles are present throughout the site at the maximum density that the habitat could support), and the approach to mitigating incidental mortality (displacement, relocation by trapping, off-site translocation, etc.) can be determined from the first visit alone.

The assessment of the quality of the habitat, and therefore the likely maximum density of water voles, will need to consider changes to the habitat in different parts of the breeding season as a result of natural processes (e.g. changes to water level) and management activities. This can be a difficult assessment to make for many sites.

2. Water vole presence is not confirmed during the first survey visit.

A second visit may not be needed where the habitat is of very low suitability for water voles and there is a very low likelihood that water voles are present in the surrounding area - up to 2km from the area of the proposed works, or less where significant barriers to water vole dispersal are present.

The assessment of the suitability of the habitats will need to consider changes to the habitat in different parts of the breeding season as a result of natural processes and management activities. This can be a difficult assessment to make for many sites. It will be difficult to make a robust case for not undertaking a second survey where access to surrounding areas is limited or impossible. A second visit may also not be needed where the assessment of effects on water voles can be made on a precautionary basis (as per point 1 above).

In all cases, a second visit would be advisable prior to commencing works.

Appendix B: Habitat Suitability Assessment

Watercourse D1	Description
Bank Profile	Shallow sloping banks, up to 1.5m high.
Bank Substrate	Soft earth
Water Depth	Approx 5 – 10 cm
Fluctuations	<p>Water fluctuates. During the first survey limited water was present within the west of the ditch by the farm. The ditch was completely dry to the east of the site.</p> <p>The ditch was completely dry across it's length during the second survey.</p>
Shading	0%
Bank Vegetation	Grasses, cleavers <i>Galium aparine</i> and nettles <i>Urtica dioica</i> on northern side. Hedgerow species on southern side.
In-channel Vegetation	Ground-ivy <i>Glechoma hederacea</i> , greater willowherb <i>Epilobium hirsutum</i> .
Management	Culvert over farm access
Constraints	None
Suitability	Suitable for water vole when it contained water.

Watercourse D2	Description
Bank Profile	No banks, water mainly running through open space.
Bank Substrate	Soft earth, silt
Water Depth	Approx 5 cm
Fluctuations	Yes
Shading	80% shading by willow <i>Salix</i> species, hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> and bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>
Bank Vegetation	Nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i>
In-channel Vegetation	Absent
Management	Outlet from farm at western end

Watercourse D2	Description
Constraints	None
Suitability	Not suitable for water vole – no vegetation, shaded, no profile to ditch, only limited water.

Watercourse S1	Description
Bank Profile	Steep banks, up to 1m high. Meanders through woodland.
Bank Substrate	Soft earth, silt
Water Depth	Generally, 50 cm. Up to 1 m in places.
Fluctuations	Yes. Water levels had dropped to 50 cm by the second survey.
Shading	80% shading by hawthorn.
Bank Vegetation	Nettle, ground-ivy, meadowsweet, cleavers, grasses, lesser celandine <i>Ficaria verna</i> , cow parsley <i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i> , lords and ladies <i>Arum maculatum</i> .
In-channel Vegetation	Absent
Management	None
Constraints	None
Suitability	Confirmed presence of otter. Suitable for water vole.

Drawings

Drawing: G9731.02.014 Otter and Water Vole Survey Results



KEY

- Site boundary
- Survey extent
- Watercourse**
 - Standing water
 - Running water
- Otter Survey Results**
 - 👤 Prints

Note:

The locations of habitats and habitat features are indicative.



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Rev	Description	Drawn	Approved	Date



**THE
ENVIRONMENT
PARTNERSHIP**

401 Faraday Street, Birchwood Park, Warrington, WA3 6GA
Tel 01925 844004 e-mail tep@tep.uk.com www.tep.uk.com

Project
Tadmarton Road, Bloxham

Title
Otter and Water Vole Survey Results

Drawing Number
G9731.02.014

Drawn	Checked	Approved	Scale	Date
IJ	BJ/SP	KM	1:3,000 @ A3	07/11/2023

HEAD OFFICE	MARKET HARBOROUGH	GATESHEAD	LONDON	CORNWALL
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