

Ecology comments – Megan Belanger - Wed 03/04/2024

Application 23/02098/OUT

No objection subject to conditions

The Ecology ES chapter for 23/02098/OUT states the following about otter and water vole:

*‘Otter are not recorded as present on the Site but are likely to be present in the Oxford Canal adjacent on the eastern boundary of the Site. The embedded mitigation includes the retention and enhancement of the Rowel Brook, five on the six ponds at the Site, and ditches in the east of the Site. It also includes the creation of extensive greenspaces adjacent to the Rowel Brook and the Oxford Canal, including marshland and wet meadows, a doubling in the number of ponds at the Site, and the creation of SuDS wetland. Therefore, the extent and connectivity of habitat suitable for this species will result in a beneficial effect on this species.’*

*‘Water vole were not recorded on the Site in the most recent survey, but this species is likely to be present in the Oxford Canal adjacent on the eastern boundary of the Site.’*

The mitigation proposed includes buffers, pre-commencement checks for both species, and precautionary measures – all of which will be included in a CEMP for biodiversity and the LEMP, as described in the ES Ecology chapter.

Because there is no development proposed near this canal (all adjacent areas will be buffered and enhanced) I am happy with the level of survey work completed, and the level of mitigation proposed for 23/02098/OUT in regard to otter and water vole.

Following discussion and receipt of further information this provides more confidence that there will be consideration of ecological corridors for badger, and that the area will be designed to limit human disturbance near the sett. I still have reservations about the amount of space provided to badgers, particularly as there have been no monitoring surveys done to assess the population size, so impacts can't necessarily be determined.

The OLEMP provides a very brief overview of what will be done in regard to badgers. I would recommend that we attach a condition for a robust Badger Mitigation Strategy, which should include monitoring surveys, and should be provided with any REM applications coming forward. I've attached my previous response which outlines other condition recommendations for this application – this should also go up on def, so it's recorded in case Charlotte will be reviewing this at a later stage.

I also note that in my first response I requested a management plan for the area being designated as a nature reserve:

*'Rushy Meadows SSSI is adjacent to the northern boundary of the Site. The Environmental Statement Addendum (November 2023, Quod) increases the original buffer from 15m to 20m and confirms that at least 29.2ha of land will be improved as a Local Nature Reserve and buffer the SSSI from the developed areas. A management plan detailing how this 29.9ha of land will be converted and managed as a LNR should be provided as this is fundamental to ensuring that the SSSI is not impacted and that the development is in line with the local plan. This should be conditioned.'*