

APPENDIX 15.9

Otter and Water Vole Survey Report

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Atkins Limited was commissioned by Portsmouth County Council to undertake ecological surveys for the proposed Dunsbury Hill Business Park and link road near Havant in Hampshire. The proposed scheme would directly affect the Hermitage Stream which crosses the application site, through the partial restoration of the stream and through the construction of a road bridge over the stream to carry the new link road into the proposed business park. The location of the Hermitage Stream can be found on the Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map in Volume 2 Figure 15.1.
- 1.2 This report presents the results of the desk study and surveys for the presence of water voles and otters.

2. Methodology

Desk Study

- 2.1 The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre was contacted for records of protected species in 2010.
- 2.2 Previous site survey reports were also reviewed for records of otters and water voles.

Field Survey

- 2.3 The watercourse known as the Hermitage Stream was surveyed on the 12/05/2011 by two Atkins ecologists. The watercourse was surveyed in its entire length within the site boundary from the outtake of the A3(M) culvert to the north, to 50 m to the south within Cherry Tree Row SINC.
- 2.4 **Water vole** – the surveyors checked for signs of activity along the watercourse, following the guidelines set in the Water Vole Conservation Handbook (Strachan, 2006). They searched for field signs such as latrines, burrows, feeding remains and tracks, along the bank and up to 2 metres from the water edge.
- 2.5 It is important to note that field voles produce field signs similar to those of water voles. For example, field voles' feeding stations with cut vegetation can look almost identical to water vole feeding stations. Therefore, the presence of just feeding stations cannot confirm the presence of water voles in the survey area; a collection of valid field signs must be found. The absence of an abundance of these features from a survey area indicates that water voles are not commonly present.
- 2.6 **Otter** – searches were undertaken for otter spraints (faeces), footprints, runs and lying up places or holts.

Limitations

- 2.7 Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the presence of plants and animals such as the time of year, migration patterns and behaviour. Therefore this survey gives an indication of those species present or absent at the time of the survey only.
- 2.8 It was not possible to access some sections of the watercourse banks because of dense vegetation growth. However, enough of the survey area was accessible to determine presence/likely absence of water voles and otters at the time of the survey.

3. Results

Desk Study

- 3.1 The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre had no records of otters or water voles within 1 km of the site boundary.
- 3.2 A previous water vole survey in 2002 did not find evidence of water voles using the Hermitage Stream (Blunden, 2002).
- 3.3 No otter surveys have been undertaken prior to the Atkins survey in 2011.

Field Survey

- 3.4 No signs of water voles or otters were found along the Hermitage Stream. The banks of the Hermitage Stream did not offer optimal habitat for water voles as they were: vegetated with predominantly pendulous sedge and did not support a variety of different grass, rush and sedge species; shallow sided in parts towards the north; shaded as a large part of the stream ran through the woodland of Cherry Tree Row SINC and a section to the north was within a concrete sided culvert.
- 3.5 Although there were overhanging roots of some trees along the banks of the Hermitage Stream, which may provide suitable resting sites or holts for otters, no signs of otters were found and a footpath runs alongside the Hermitage Stream. This footpath is used by both people and dogs, which could disturb resting otters and therefore reduce the area's potential to provide resting sites.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

- 4.1 No signs of water voles in the Hermitage Stream were recorded from the water vole survey undertaken in 2002 (Blunden, 2002).
- 4.2 The Hermitage Stream in its current condition offers limited potential for both water voles and otters, and no signs were found of either species during the survey. Neither species were recorded from the desk study nor the survey, and therefore no specific mitigation is required for water voles and otters.
- 4.3 The Hermitage Stream is proposed to have partial restoration in the northern section which is currently a concrete sided culvert. It is recommended that these partial restoration works include planting of a variety of wetland plant species which could encourage both water voles and otters to use the watercourse for foraging and resting/breeding habitat.

5. References

- Blunden, A. (2002) Dunsbury Hill nr Havant, Hampshire: Water vole survey. Ecological Planning and Research.
- Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan (2000) European otter
<http://www.hampshirebiodiversity.org.uk/pdf/PublishedPlans/otterjDTP3.pdf>
- Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan (2000) Water vole
<http://www.hampshirebiodiversity.org.uk/pdf/PublishedPlans/WaterVolejDTPdark.pdf>
- Strachan, R. & Moorhouse, T. (2006) *Water vole conservation handbook*, 2nd edition. University of Oxford, Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCru).

UK Biodiversity Action Plan (2010) Water vole
<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/speciespages/115.pdf>

UK Biodiversity Action Plan (2010) Otter <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/speciespages/428.pdf>

Annex 1: Site photographs



Photograph 1 - Northern canalised section of the Hermitage Stream showing concrete sides of culvert with overhanging bramble



Photograph 2 - Southern section of the Hermitage Stream showing dominant bankside vegetation of pendulous sedge leading to woodland edge of Cherry Tree Row SINC (right side of photograph)