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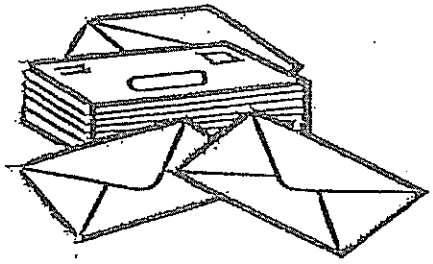

F/2001/3636

CONDITION 13

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**Commissioned by:**
Mr Steve Gent
Manston
120 London Road
Ruscombe
Berkshire RG10 9HJ

DETAILS TO COMPLY WITH CONDITIONS
W - 3636

# REPORT OF A SURVEY OF A STRETCH OF BANK AT THE OLD BOATHOUSE, HENNERTON BACKWATER, WARGRAVE FOR WATER VOLES

January 2004

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# REPORT OF A SURVEY OF A STRETCH OF BANK AT THE OLD BOATHOUSE, HENNERTON BACKWATER, WARGRAVE FOR WATER VOLES

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# REPORT OF A SURVEY OF A STRETCH OF BANK AT THE OLD BOATHOUSE, HENNERTON BACKWATER, WARGRAVE FOR WATER VOLES

## 1.0 Background

Wokingham District Council has granted planning permission for the reconstruction of a wooden boathouse next to the Hennerton Backwater at Wargrave, Berkshire. A condition of the permission was that before works could start, a survey of the riverbank be carried out to check for signs of water vole, as this species receives legal protection.

The owner of the site Mr Steve Gent commissioned Dr Paula Cox to carry out a survey of the area affected to establish if water voles are present.

## 2.0 Legislation

Water vole, *Arvicola terrestris*, was added to *Schedule 5* of *The Wildlife and Countryside Act, Section 9(4) (a) and (b)* in 1998. The *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 'CROW Act'* that applies only to England and Wales, makes further minor amendments to the species protection measures provided by the *Wildlife and Countryside Act*. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly (added by the *CROW Act*) damage or destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place that water voles use for shelter or protection, or to disturb water voles while they are using such a place.

## 3.0 Methodology

On 13 January 2004, about 30m of the eastern bank of the Hennerton Backwater to the north of Wargrave, were searched for signs of water vole presence. These field signs include burrows, feeding stations, latrines, grazed lawns, footprints and runways. Where necessary, vegetation was lifted away from the bank in the area of potential disturbance during works. The survey was carried out from the bank as the water was too fast flowing to allow safe access.

A search of information held on the 'Recorder' database was carried out to establish if water voles had ever been recorded from this backwater of the River Thames. The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust 'Water Vole Recovery Project' report (June 2001) was also consulted.

## 4.0 Results

### 4.1 Water vole information relating to the site

Between 1998 and 2000 the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust Project Officer and team carried out surveys of 206 sites in Berkshire for water

voles. Of 46 sites examined on the Thames, 28% revealed water vole signs, mostly off the main river on the Cut near Holyport and on the York Stream at Cookham.

The nearest historic record for the River Thames was at SU783848 in September 1993. This was at Mill End to the northeast of Henley-on-Thames and about 9km downstream from the Thames at its nearest point to the present site.

4.2 General description of site

The concrete base of the old boathouse is situated next to the eastern bank of The Hennerton Backwater, north of Wargrave and west of the A321. Between the water and the road was a small area of mixed woodland and a rabbit grazed hillside. The water was high at the time of visit on 13 January 2004 and some of the surrounding land was waterlogged. The river was about 6-8m wide here and flowing swiftly at the time of the visit. The riverbed could not be seen as the water was silt laden but at the bank the depth was approximately 1.5 m. On the other (western) bank the flat grassland was partially flooded.

4.3 Survey site results

There was no public access to the 30m of bank that was apparently undisturbed. The concrete base and brick edge of the old boathouse lay to the south and the remaining bank was flat earth with some vegetation and a small amount of rubble, mainly slate and brick. Elder *Sambucus nigra* scrub was at the water's edge and then waterlogged ground dominated by moss, with very little short or tussocky grass at the time of visit. The tall vegetation had mostly collapsed, but noted species included great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum,* nettle *Urtica dioica,* bramble *Rubus fruticosus,* hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* and ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea.*

There was a single alder *Alnus glutinosa* next to the south edge of the concrete and some hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* to the east. There were no burrows or feeding signs, no footprints present in the soft earth and no other signs of water vole presence, and the bank appeared too flat for burrow excavation.

4.4 Summary of results

No holes excavated by water voles were found in the 30m of bank examined, no footprints were present in the soft earth and there were no chewed plant remains or droppings. No signs of water vole presence were found on the section of the Hennerton Backwater surveyed. The nearest historic record is from 1993 at a site on the Thames some 9km downstream.

## 5.0 Impacts of proposals on water voles

As no evidence of the current or recent presence of water vole was found near the site, reconstruction of the boathouse as proposed should have no adverse effects on any population on the nearby River Thames.

The site did not seem suitable, as it did not meet many of the habitat preference criteria of water voles. The water was fast flowing, greater than 3m wide, there were extreme fluctuations in level including regular winter flooding, the bank was flat not steep or stepped and there was little in the way of tussocky grass, rush, sedge and reed present.

## 6.0 Summary and conclusions

30m of bank within the site boundary on the Hennerton Backwater at Wargrave were searched for signs of the presence of water vole. None were found, there are no recent sightings and the nearest historic record is over 9km downstream. The habitat does not appear optimal for water vole colonisation. Therefore the proposed reconstruction works should have no adverse effects on any water vole populations on the nearby River Thames.

## 7.0 Bibliography

Philcox, Cengiz (2001) *The Water Vole Recovery Project April 1998 – March 2001* BBOWT

Strachan, Rob (1997) *Water Voles* Whittet Books

Strachan, Rob (1998) *Water Vole Conservation Handbook* Wildlife Conservation Research Unit

Tel. 0118 974 6445 (Direct Line)
E-mail: Angela.Odell@wokingham.gov.uk
Date. 21 March, 2006
My ref. AO/F/2001/3636

Mr. A. Spinks
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Dear Mr Spinks

**PLANNING PERMISSION F/2001/3636**
**PROPOSED ERECTION OF REPLACEMENT BOATHOUSE AT THE OLD BOATHOUSE, WARGRAVE ROAD, WARGRAVE**

Thank you for your letter of 12 March and I address your points as follows:

Method of determination: The application was approved by the Development Control Committee on 9 January 2002.
Site Notice: Nicola Lake's site visit notes record that the site notice was displayed 'on gate post', but do not say on which date.

1. It is not our policy to check with land registry records when granting planning permission.

2. The right of way is a private not a public one. There is no mention of the private right of way in the Committee report. We were not aware of it when agreeing the parking details.

3. The private right of way was not shown on the proposed parking plan submitted by Mr. Gent.

4/5. This cannot be done. As I explained in my previous letter to you, granting planning permission does not override any property rights. However; in view of the problems you are experiencing, I could write to Mr. Gent and point out the private right of way and ask him to propose alternative parking that would not conflict with it. Please let me know if you wish me to do so.

I trust the above is clear, but if you wish to discuss the matter further please contact me.

Yours sincerely

AO.

MRS A ODELL
Planning Officer

F/2001/3636

SSE Power Distribution

PLANNING
DC: AO ADMIN:
07 AUG 2006
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2 August 2006

Our site reference: 4-0128-001
Your site reference: AO/F/2001/3636

Dear Mrs Odell

**Access to Pole Mounted Transformer Wargrave Road Wargrave**

SSE Power Distribution has received an enquiry from Mr Spinks regarding the above.

He is concerned that since you granted planning permission to Mr & Mrs Gent for two parking spaces that access to our transformer would be impeded.

I have assured Mr Spinks that we have not experienced any access problems.

However, I must emphasise that we do require 24/7 access.

I apologise for having to state the obvious, but Mr Spinks did want reassurance that we would look into the matter.

Yours sincerely

FWalsh

Mrs F Walsh-Kay
**Wayleave Officer**

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