



Wokingham Borough Council

SOUTH WOKINGHAM DISTRIBUTOR ROAD

Badger Survey Report





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WSP

2 London Square

Cross Lanes

Guildford, Surrey

GU1 1UN

Phone: +44 148 352 8400

WSP.com



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) has instructed WSP to conduct ecological surveys to support the detailed design and discharge of planning conditions for the South Wokingham Distributor Road (SWDR) Scheme. The Proposed SWDR is located between Easthampstead Road and Finchampstead Road, south of Wokingham. The main objective of the SWDR is to facilitate access for strategic housing allocations and reduce the impact of increased traffic on local roads.

Badger *Meles meles* surveys were previously conducted by WSP in 2018 to support the planning application and reported on in the associated Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (WSP, 2018). No evidence of badgers was recorded during the survey. However, as the habitats were suitable for badger [REDACTED] construction phase mitigation measures and a pre-works check were recommended.

Further survey for badgers was conducted on 9 May 2024. Suitable habitat to support badger was again identified with no conclusive evidence of badger activity recorded. The habitats within the site are nonetheless suitable for badger should they colonise the site. Therefore, a Precautionary Method of Works (PMoW) is recommended, including a pre-works check of badger activity if a significant amount of time (12 to 18 months) has passed since the most up to date survey (May 2024).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1. Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) secured planning permission in 2021 (WBC, 2021) to construct the South Wokingham Distributor Road (SWDR) between Easthampstead Road and Finchampstead Road. The SWDR will facilitate access for strategic housing allocations and aims to reduce the impact of increased traffic on local roads. The SWDR is hereafter referred to as the 'Scheme' and the land which occupies the Scheme is hereafter referred to as the 'Site'.
- 1.1.2. The Scheme is currently progressing through detailed design and discharge of planning conditions. Given the time elapsed since the previous survey efforts, it has been recommended that an updated suite of ecological surveys is to be completed, where there is a reasonable likelihood of change in presence/absence or where previous information was not obtained.

1.2 ECOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.2.1. WSP completed ecological surveys of the Site between 2017 and 2021 to support the planning application, including badger surveys which were carried out as part of, and reported in, the 2018 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (WSP, 2018) for the Scheme.
- 1.2.2. In addition, ecological survey work for areas targeting the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL) and associated major phased development, which the Site forms part of, were carried out by ECOSA and The Ecology Partnership between 2013 and 2022. This additional survey data has not been obtained, however, a significant time period has passed where updated surveys are now required due to the previous surveys effectively becoming invalid.
- 1.2.3. The SDL is defined as the following:
'....an urban extension of Wokingham town, Montague Park and south of the railway between the boundary with Bracknell Forest and Finchampstead Road. It will include new homes, new primary schools, local shopping and community facilities in two new neighbourhood centres, open spaces and roads including a South Wokingham Distributor Road.'
- 1.2.4. An Ecology Gap Analysis (WSP, 2024) was undertaken for the Site in January 2024, consisting of a detailed, desk-based review of existing survey information, planning conditions and associated documents to determine detailed further survey and pre-construction support requirements.
- 1.2.5. The Ecology Gap Analysis (2024) identified that further badger *Meles meles* surveys are required within the Site and a 30m buffer around the Site boundary. Badgers and their setts are protected under The Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The construction of the Scheme could lead to the killing or injury of badgers and/or damage and destruction of badger setts, which would result in the contravention of this legislation (see Section 4). Badgers are a dynamic species and can regularly establish new setts in areas of suitable habitat. Updated badger surveys are therefore required to identify the potential changes in badger activity since the previous surveys and to inform any mitigation or potential licencing requirements.

1.3 BRIEF AND OBJECTIVES

- 1.3.1. WBC commissioned WSP UK Ltd to complete a badger survey of the Site plus land within a 30m buffer (the 'Survey Area'). The brief was to:

- Complete a field survey to search for signs of badger activity, recording the presence of setts and their activity status and field signs such as latrines or dung pits, pathways or tracks, prints and snuffle holes where present; and
- Evaluate the value of the Site for badgers and make recommendations as to how to proceed, accounting for badgers in relation to legislation, planning and biodiversity policy.

1.3.2. The results of this survey, and subsequent recommendations, are included within this report.

2 METHODS

2.1 FIELD SURVEY

- 2.1.1. The Survey Area was searched for evidence of badger following the standard methodology outlined by Harris, Cresswell and Jefferies (1989), with regard for recent reviews and comment on these methods (Roper, 2010 and Andrews, 2013).
- 2.1.2. Where present, evidence indicative of badger presence was recorded comprising:
- setts;
 - dung pits and latrines;
 - prints;
 - mammal paths;
 - hairs; and
 - other evidence including snuffle holes, feeding remains and scratching posts.
- 2.1.3. Where setts were recorded, their status and level of activity was noted. Sett status is broadly categorised as follows:
- Main: generally the largest sett within a badger social group home range, with a relatively large number of sett entrances with well-worn pathways between them and conspicuous spoil mounds. This type of sett tends to be occupied throughout the year and be used for breeding.
 - Annex: normally found within 150m of the main sett and comprising multiple entrances, this type of sett is connected to the main sett by one or more obvious well-worn pathways. It may not be occupied throughout the year and can be used for breeding if there is more than one breeding sow within the social group.
 - Subsidiary: similar to an annex sett, but typically located further from the main sett (at least 50m away). This type of sett will not be occupied throughout the year and lacks the well-worn paths connecting it to another sett that are associated with main and annex setts.
 - Outlier: normally consisting of one or two entrances, often with little spoil outside and with no obvious path connecting it to another sett. This type of sett will tend to be found furthest from the main sett and will only be used sporadically throughout the year.
- 2.1.4. Sett use or level of activity is broadly categorised as follows:
- Well used sett/hole: shows evidence of current use (as defined by Natural England, 2009), such as fresh spoil or bedding, well-worn pathways between entrances and the presence of badger hair.
 - Partially used sett/hole: no evidence present indicating current occupation (as distinct from current use), though hairs may be present as these can persist for some time. The sett may be occupied intermittently and cannot be categorically described as disused. It could easily be re-occupied; for example, it may contain some leaves or sticks in tunnel entrances, but entrances are not blocked and it would take little effort for a badger to reoccupy it. Badger field signs may not have decayed to the extent they can be categorically considered to no longer indicate current use (as defined by Natural England, 2009).
 - Disused sett/hole: a badger sett that appears to have been abandoned by a badger social group is described as 'disused'. These differ from partially used setts which can be temporarily disused (not in current occupation, but in current use). Disused setts are often completely blocked with

vegetation or have collapsed and badger field signs are no longer present, or have decayed to the extent they do not indicate current use.

- 2.1.5. Where encountered, other mammal excavations were recorded during the survey. Information including the location, a description of the type of evidence (i.e. pathway or burrow) and, where applicable, any signs of current use were recorded.
- 2.1.6. The overall suitability of the existing habitats within the Survey Area for badger breeding and foraging habitat was also assessed during the field survey.

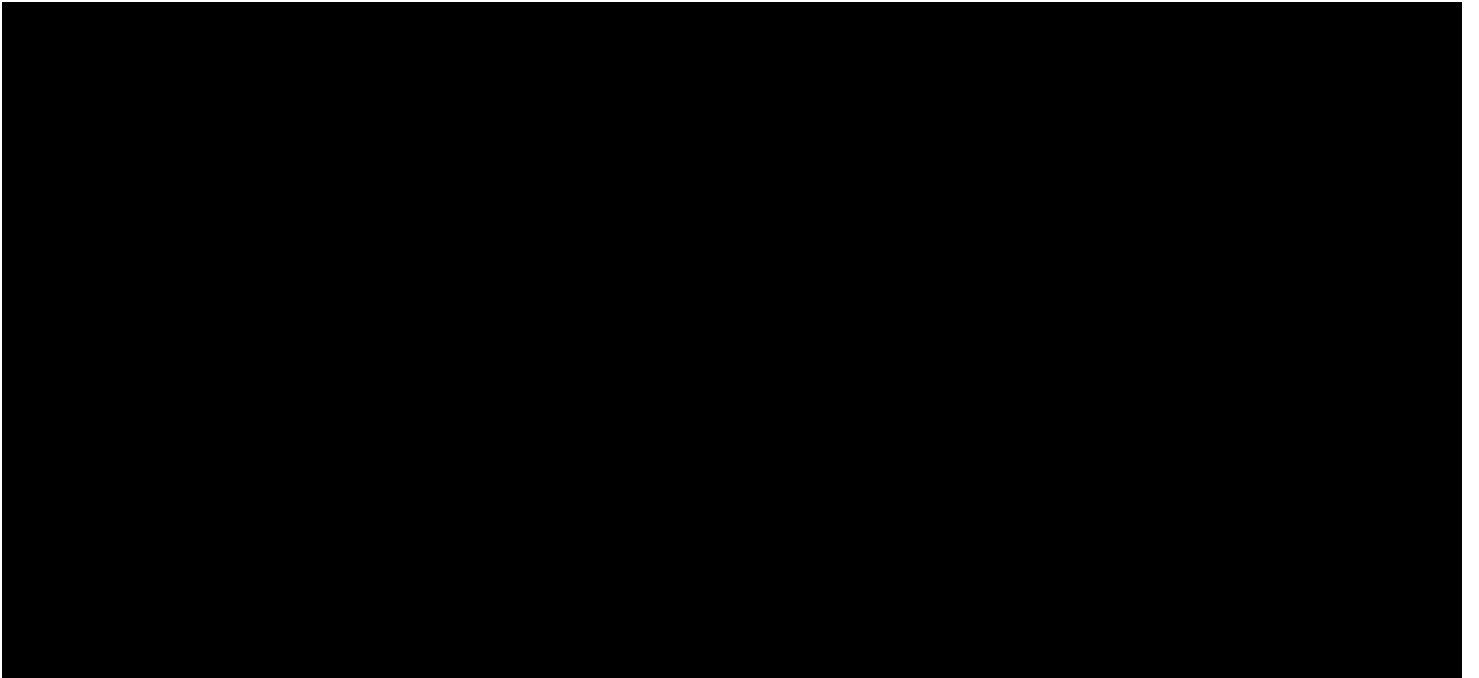
2.2 DATES OF SURVEY AND PERSONNEL

- 2.2.1. The badger survey was completed by experienced surveyors with several years' experience of ecological survey, including extensive badger survey experience.
- 2.2.2. Weather conditions during the badger survey were mild and dry. The badger survey was completed on 9 May 2024.

2.3 NOTES AND LIMITATIONS

- 2.3.1. Badger sett status can change quickly. New setts can be excavated or, for example, outlier or subsidiary setts can quickly be re-occupied after a long period of disuse. The data within this report represents an accurate assessment of badger activity within the Survey Area at the time of survey but there is potential for sett locations, status or level of activity to change prior to the commencement of works within the Site.
- 2.3.2. Some areas of land were not entered into due to access permission restrictions and in several parts of the Survey Area, scrub cover was too dense for the surveyors to enter (see hatched locations on Figure 1 for areas with restricted access). In these situations, the perimeter of the Survey Area or scrub was walked in order to identify, where possible, any evidence of badger use of these areas. Whilst it is possible setts are concealed in these areas, it is considered unlikely as an entrance pathway leading beneath the scrub would be anticipated. Some of the areas that were not accessed were residential, railway, or other highly urbanised areas where badgers would not typically enter or build setts in.
- 2.3.3. Evidence of dog walkers is present within and around many of the arable fields in the Survey Area in the form of footprints. These dog footprints could trample any potential badger footprints if present.
- 2.3.4. Ecological survey data is typically valid for up to 18 months unless otherwise specified, for example if conditions are likely to change more quickly due to ecological processes or anticipated changes in management (CIEEM, 2019).

3 RESULTS



4 IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

4.1 OVERVIEW

- 4.1.1. Badgers and their setts are afforded legal protection under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. No badger setts have been identified in the Survey Area, however, badgers are highly mobile and may create setts in areas of suitable habitat in the Survey Area.

4.2 LEGAL COMPLIANCE

- 4.2.1. The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it illegal to wilfully kill, injure or take any badger, or attempt to do so. It also makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any part of a badger sett. Activities that would otherwise constitute an offence under this legislation may be licensed by Natural England for certain purposes.
- 4.2.2. Wild mammals are protected from “unnecessary suffering” (including by asphyxiation) by the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.
- 4.2.3. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023 states the following in respect of biodiversity protection under *Section 11 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment*:

The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;*
- *recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;*
- *minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government’s commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.*

- 4.2.4. The Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Plan (2014) details:

Planning permission for development proposals will only be granted where they comply with policy CP7 – Biodiversity of the Core Strategy and also demonstrate how they:

- *Provide opportunities, including through design, layout and landscaping to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing;*
- *Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation;*
- *Ensure that all existing and new developments are ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network.*

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 OVERVIEW

- 5.1.1. No conclusive evidence of badger presence was recorded during the walkover of the Survey Area, however, the presence of suitable foraging habitat may mean they pass through the site. As such, a construction phase Precautionary Method of Works (PMoW) is recommended to avoid killing or injuring an individual.
- 5.1.2. The habitats within the site are nonetheless suitable for badger should they colonise the site (badgers readily excavate new setts) and as such a pre-works check is recommended as part of the PMoW, if works are to commence a significant amount of time from the badger survey described in this report (i.e. 12 to 18 months). If an active sett is discovered, it must first be reviewed whether the design or construction methods can avoid or mitigate impacts to badgers. As a last resort, it is possible to close it and relocate the badgers under licence from Natural England.

5.2 PRECAUTIONARY METHOD OF WORKS

- 5.2.1. A PMoW is recommended which should include, but not be limited to, the following provisions:
- Depending on the time passed between the badger survey and the commencement of demolition and construction, it is recommended that a pre-works check of the area is conducted by a suitably qualified ecologist, to re-ascertain the presence or likely absence of badger in the location where construction is to take place. The typical validity of badger survey is from 12 to 18 months (CIEEM, 2019);
 - Contractors should be briefed on the potential presence of badgers and their setts, and if any are found, the works in the area must be stopped and a suitably qualified ecologist contacted to discuss next steps;
 - Unavoidable vegetation removal within 30m of a sett (if found) should be completed sensitively using hand tools (to include chainsaws and brushcutters) rather than tracked machinery; and
 - Avoid leaving open trenches into which animals could fall. If this is not possible, a means of egress should be provided, such as a plank. It should be ensured dangerous areas such as deep excavations are fenced to prevent badger access or covered overnight; whilst ensuring at least one safe crossing point of the construction footprint is available within 100m.

6 REFERENCES

6.1 PROJECT REFERENCES

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FIGURES

Figure 1 – Survey Area and Results

Figure not included for public
release



2 London Square
Cross Lanes
Guildford, Surrey
GU1 1UN

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