

27th January 2014

Technical Briefing Note: Ecological survey update

Survey work to date

A number of surveys have been completed to date and are summarised below.

1. An extended Phase 1 Habitat survey of the entire allocation site has been completed, together with some land to the east between the allocation site and the B1363 Wigginton Road, where access roads may need to be located. Additional survey work completed in November 2013 covered all safe-guarded land, as well as land to the west of the site up to the public footpath that runs from Brecksfields (north) to the A1237 (south).
2. A badger survey of the same area has also been completed.
3. Three winter bird surveys have been completed, one each in November & December 2013 and one in January 2014.

Key matters

Current knowledge of the site indicates that a number of ecological features may be present. However, it should also be noted that a) none of these represent serious constraint to the development at this stage; b) some of these matters may be found to be of low significance once further scheduled protected species survey work is completed; and c) careful scheme design would mean that some features could be retained and incorporated into the development and, in some cases, enhanced.

Key matters remain largely the same as previously outlined with the topic paper prepared for the workshop meeting in November 2013, however note changes to text at points 4, 6 and 8.

1. The majority of the site comprises arable farmland with species-poor hedgerows.
2. There are a number of occasional mature trees (mostly oak and ash) within hedgerows that may have some level of bat roost potential.
3. There are several wooded areas with mature trees that could also have bats in, though the general quality of foraging habitat for bats across the site is considered to be low with occasional medium hotspots along woodland edges.
4. A number of badger setts are present within the area surveyed.
5. Most of the clusters of farmhouses/farm buildings have some level of bat roosting potential within them.
6. The area of land previously thought to be a Site of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) is in fact not formally designated but has been highlighted by the LPA as being of some interest for its botany and invertebrate assemblage.
7. Several of the wooded areas have Himalayan balsam in.
8. There is breeding bird potential across the site (including barn owl potential) within hedges, trees, scrub and woodland, as well as within buildings. The potential presence of long-eared owls and corn bunting on the site was highlighted by the County Ecologist.

9. There are a number of ponds located on the site or within 250m of the site with great crested newt potential, as well as several wet ditches, which have some potential for water voles.
10. The area of land that forms part of the old airfield highlighted as having botanical/invertebrate interest also has reptile potential – as do some of the field margins, which are often quite wide (>5m).

Further survey work

A suite of ecological survey work is currently underway and will continue into the summer of 2014, in order to fully inform the planning application and accompanying Environmental Statement. The scope of survey work proposed has been discussed with the County Ecologist (Bob Missin) by telephone and email, and agreed to be appropriate to the site.

A summary of proposed survey work for protected species is given in the table below, together with an indication of likely effort required and the appropriate timings of surveys. Note that these timings are based on aiming to submit an ES mid-summer 2014 and would be adjusted should the submission date be significantly delayed. In particular, the bat survey work would be spread more evenly through the bat active season (April – September, depending on weather conditions) in order to more closely following standard BCT bat survey guidelines.

Survey	Effort/timing
Winter bird surveys	4 visits (1 per month, per transect) in November & December 2013 and January & February 2014
Breeding bird surveys	3 visits (1 per month per transect) in April, May and June 2014
Botanical survey of the remaining area of the old airfield (located to the south west of the site)	May 2014
Invertebrate survey of the remaining area of the old airfield (located to the south west of the site)	2 visits between April – June 2014
Barn owl surveys	April/May 2014
Great crested newt surveys	4 – 6 visits per pond during mid-March to mid-June 2014
Reptiles	8 visits during April & May 2014
Bat activity transects & static detector installation	At least 1 visit per month per transect, ideally throughout the active bat season as per standard guidelines. If early submission of a planning application were required, additional surveys would be required during the earlier part of the year to compensate for lack of surveys data in the later part of the year. Bob Missin has agreed with this approach; approval would also be required from Natural England.
Visual ground-based external surveys of trees and buildings for bats	February/March/April 2014
Water voles/otters	May 2014