

BOW0017/616 Chipping – Water Vole and Otter Advice Note

Background Information

Bowland Ecology was instructed by SCPi Bowland Ltd to undertake an updated water vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) and otter (*Lutra lutra*) survey on land at Chipping, Lancashire (NGR: SD619434) (see indicative masterplan, **Appendix A**). The survey is part of the pre-commencement works for the residential development.

The site had previously been subjected to a water vole and otter survey in October 2015.

The aim of the current assessment was to evaluate the presence or absence of water vole and otter in the suitable habitats highlighted in the previous report (Appendix A) where recommendations stated a pre-commencement survey be carried out to assess the status of water vole and otter where works may impact on the banks of the river and within 5 m of the water's edge.

Two sections of the Chipping Brook were previously identified to provide suitable habitat for water vole, an approximately 55 m section at NGR: SD 62174 43539 (Area 1) and approximately 150 m section at NGR: SD 62557 42941 (Area 2) whilst two sections of the Chipping Brook were found to offer greatest potential for otter. Area 3 is approximately 140 m between NGR: SD 62128 43550 to NGR: SD 62148 43452 (which overlaps with Area 1) and Area 4 which is approximately 160 m between SD 61854 43649 and SD 61944 43564.

Methodology

The site visit was undertaken on the 28th June 2016 and 8th July 2015 by Mark Breaks BSc (Hons) and Jade Relf BSc (Hons), MSc, GradCIEEM. The weather was cloudy, with no wind, mild and light drizzle starting at the end of the survey on both visits.

The method for the water vole survey followed that of Strachan, Moorhouse and Gelling (2011) *Water Vole Conservation Handbook 3rd Edition*. During the survey the following evidence of water voles was searched for: sounds of water voles entering the water (a distinctive 'plopping' noise), burrow entrances, feeding stations, latrines or droppings, waterside paths, runs in vegetation and footprints. Signs of brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), bank vole and field vole (*Microtus agrestis*) were also searched for, as these can easily be confused with those of water vole.

The method for the otter survey followed a modified method of that described in Chanin (2003). During the survey, the following evidence was searched for: spraints, footprints, holts, couches, feeding remains, lay-ups and sightings of otter.

Survey Results

Area 1

No evidence of water vole was identified during the survey with the habitat remaining consistent with that surveyed in October 2015. Whilst the vegetation comprised primarily tall grass species, with some ruderal vegetation on the unmanaged grassland present on the eastern bank and adjacent to wooded areas. The habitat does provide appropriate cover and food for water vole however the river is fast flowing and shallow over a stony/cobble substrate, unfavourable characteristics for water vole.

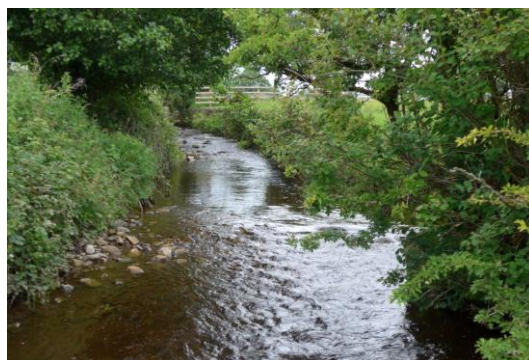
During the survey several plants of Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) were recorded on the western bank.



Photographs 1 and 2. Watercourse in Area 1

Area 2

No evidence of water vole was identified during the survey. The habitat remained the same as recorded in October 2015 with favourable eastern bank habitat for water vole that consists of a steep bank with tall vegetation, comprising primarily grasses and species including Himalayan balsam. The river, however has a clear, fast flow, with an average depth of less than 30cm, over a cobble substrate, unfavourable characteristics for water vole.



Photographs 3 and 4. Watercourse in Area 2

Area 3

Evidence of otter along the watercourse was identified by the presence of spraints in two locations. One very fresh spraint was found on a stone within the channel under the bridge at NGR: SD 62121 43543 (S1) on the upper limit of the survey area and the second spraint was found on a protruding bankside rock under overhanging trees at approximately NGR: SD 62174 43500 (S2). However no holt, couch or lying up sites were present implying the section of brook is used for commuting and foraging otters.



Photograph 5 S1 under bridge



Photograph 6 S2 on bankside rock



Photographs 7 and 8. Watercourse in Area 3

Area 4

No evidence of otter was identified along the watercourse during the survey. The habitat remained the same as surveyed in October 2015 with the banks being shaded with numerous mature trees, with semi-natural habitats present on the western bank providing opportunities for holts and couch sites. No spraints, prints, couch sites or holts were found to be present.



Photographs 9 and 10. Watercourse in Area 4

Evaluation and Recommendations

Following the survey in October 2015 it was recommended that consideration should be given to water vole and otter during the development where suitable habitat is present, developers must ensure that unnecessary damage is avoided and all reasonable steps are taken to minimise impacts on these species.

Water Vole

Water vole are fully protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and are a priority species under Section 41 of the NERC Act. They are also a Lancashire BAP species.

Two areas of the Chipping Brook identified during the October 2015 survey were highlighted as sub-optimal habitat for this species. No evidence of water vole was recorded during surveys at either site on this pre-commencement check that corresponds to the findings in October 2015.

No additional mitigation measures are required for this species.

Otter

Otter receives full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and are Section 41 priority species as well as receiving protection under the Conservation Regulations 1994, as amended. They are also Lancashire BAP species.

Two sections of the Chipping Brook was identified during the previous survey as providing potential habitat for holts and couch sites. Evidence for otter presence was identified during the pre-commencement of works survey in the form of two spraints, however no holts or couch sites were recorded.

Throughout the duration of the proposed works, the following Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) should be adhered to:

- Working area to be minimised at all times;
- All contractors to be made aware of the presence of otters on the water course;
- Avoid night working or working around dusk or dawn in close proximity to the watercourse;
- Where night working is required, no artificial lighting will be used adjacent to, or directed towards the watercourse;
- Any excavations/trenches/open pipe systems must be backfilled at the end of each working day. Where this is not practical, an escape ramp will be provided to allow egress for any animals which become trapped in excavations. The ramp must be positioned at a 45° angle; and
- It is advised that appropriate pollution prevention measures should be implemented to protect the watercourse from leakages of fuels or lubricants from vehicles and equipment and from siltation and run off.

Repeat Survey of the Site

If no works are undertaken on site within 12 months of this survey or if any changes to the proposals are made, a further ecological survey may be necessary (because of the mobility of animals and the potential for colonisation of the site).

References

Chanin P (2003). *Monitoring the Otter Lutra lutra*. Conserving Natura, 2000 Rivers Monitoring Series No. 10, English Nature, Peterborough

Strachan, R., Moorhouse, T. & Gelling, M. (2011) *Water Vole Conservation Handbook* (third edition). WildCru: Oxford

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Appendix A – Areas for Repeat Survey



**Areas for Repeat Survey
Prior To Commencement**

Water Vole 

Otter 