

Water Vole and Otter Assessment

Land off Brown Edge Road,
Buxton
Derbyshire

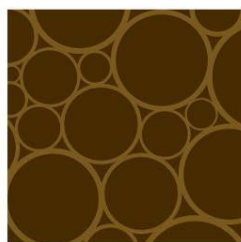
Derbyshire County Council

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Prepared by
Clear Environmental Consultants Limited
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ENVIRONMENTAL



DRAINAGE



FLOOD RISK



ECOLOGY

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Water Vole and Otter Survey –Buxton, Derbyshire.
Clear Environmental Consultants Limited
08.06.10

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1

Summary

This report was commissioned by Derbyshire County Council to establish the presence or absence of water voles *Arvicola terrestris* and otter *Lutra lutra* within a section of a tributary of the Hogshaw Brook, near Brown Edge Road, Buxton.

A previous report by Clear Ltd. (2009) highlighted historical records of water vole and otter within the area including sightings from 2005 and 2008 within 1km of the site. The report also highlighted the potential presence of terrestrial habitat suitable for supporting water voles and otters along the stream.

The surveys undertaken during this latest assessment were carried out using guidelines as set out in 'Water Vole Conservation Handbook' (Strachen and Moorhouse 2006) and 'Otters and River Habitat Management' (Environment Agency 1999).

No evidence of water vole and otter was recorded during the survey. Furthermore, the proposed development site was located approximately 20m from the site boundary.

It is considered that water vole and otter do not act as a constraint to development.

In the unlikely event that water voles or otter are found on site, all works should be stopped immediately and further instruction sought from the ecology consultancy and Natural England. As water voles, otters and their habitat are protected it is likely that any works would need to be undertaken under licence from Natural England.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

Clear Environmental Consultants were commissioned by Derbyshire County Council to undertake a water vole and otter survey on a stretch of a tributary to the Hogshaw Brook, adjacent to a site at Brown Edge Road, Buxton.

The aim of this survey is to further assess the ecological importance of the site and to ascertain the presence/absence of water voles and otters within the areas of suitable habitat adjacent to the site.

2.2 Scope of this report

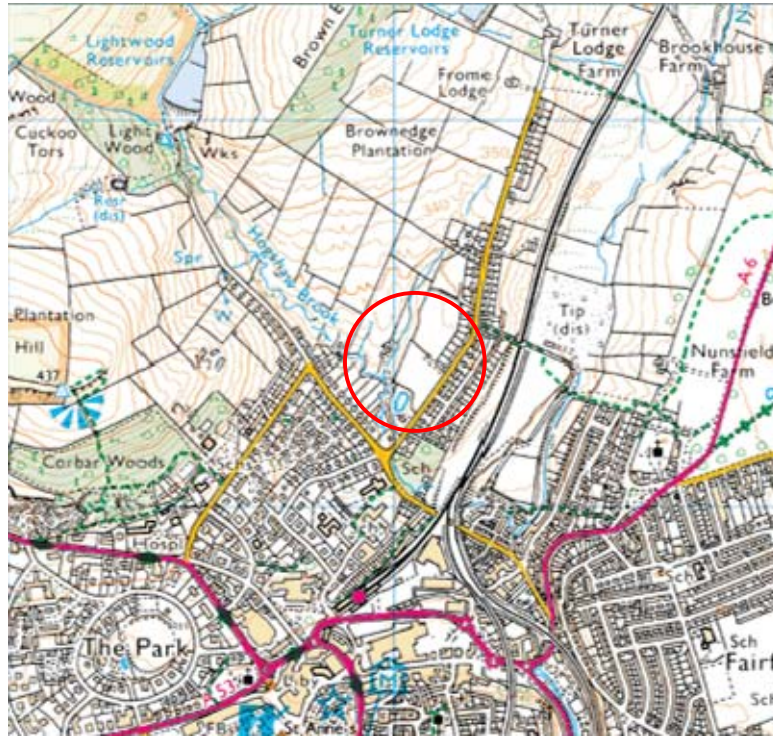
The surveys were carried out using guidelines as set out in the 'Water Vole Conservation Handbook' (Strachen and Moorhouse 2006) and 'Otters and River Habitat Management' (Environment Agency 1999).

2.3 Site context and status

The site is situated to the north of Buxton, Derbyshire (Central Grid reference SK 060 743).

The location of the site is shown in (Figure 2.1) overleaf, with the site highlighted by a red line.

Figure 2.1: OS map view of Brown Edge Road, Buxton



3 Regulatory and Policy Framework

Otter

Otters are protected under Annex IIa and IVa of the EC Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) and applied in the UK under Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (Habitat Regulations). Also a Schedule 5 species, otter receive full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 as amended by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. Under the Act it is illegal to:

- wilfully kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill treat an otter or attempt to do so;
- deliberately or recklessly disturb an otter, whether in a place of shelter or not; and
- damage, destroy or obstruct access to, or any entrance of, an otter holt or resting place.

Water Vole

From the 6th April 2008 water voles became subject to increased legal protection and are now fully covered by the provisions of section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Legal protection makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take water voles
- Possess or control live or dead water voles or derivatives
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb water voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose
- Sell water voles or offer or expose for sale or transport for sale
- Publish or cause to be published any advertisement which conveys the buying or selling of water voles

4 Methodology

4.1 Protected Species Survey

The survey area comprised 20m sections of the stream adjacent to the site plus an additional 20m at either end. Physical channel features such as bank profiles, depth, width and flow were noted, wherever possible. General habitat information was collated, such as dominant vegetation types around areas of potential and significant geomorphic features. Watercourse sections are shown in Appendix 1.

The water vole survey follows standard methodology as outlined in the 'Water Vole Conservation Handbook' (Strachan and Moorhouse 2006). The methodology included searching for water vole signs such as sightings, latrines, burrows, feeding remains, tracks, and cropped grass at tunnel entrances and also noting potential impacts that may have an adverse affect on the species.

The otter survey follows standard methodology as outlined in '*Otters and River Habitat Management*' (Environment Agency 1999). The methodology included searching for otter signs such as sightings, footprints, spraints, couches and holts.

The surveys were carried out by two suitably experienced ecologists on 8th June 2010. Weather conditions were warm with light rain and no wind.

4.2 Limitations

It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive description of the site, no investigation could ensure the complete characterisation and prediction of the natural environment.

Evidence of water vole is sometimes difficult to distinguish from that of rats. Droppings can be of a similar size, shape and colour, whilst burrows and footprints can also be difficult to identify.

5 Results

5.1 Habitat Description

The stream was shallow (5cm), 40cm wide with a moderate-fast flow. Deeper pools (15cm) were present at the bottom of waterfalls and riffles. The predominant substrate was silt. No aquatic vegetation was present at the time of the survey. The banks ranged from shallow to steep and formed overhangs in places. The banks were overhung by vegetation along the majority of the length of the water course, with very few open areas. Vegetation present at the time of the survey included soft rush *Juncus effusus*, hard rush *J. inflexus*, rosebay willowherb *Chamaerion angustifolium*, yellow flag iris *Iris pseudacorus*, common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and water mint *Mentha aquatica*.

5.2 Water Vole and Otter Survey

Site surveys did not identify the presence of otter or water vole. No signs such as feeding stations, latrines, spraints, holts or burrows were recorded.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

No signs of otter or water vole were recorded during the survey, therefore it is considered that otter and water vole will not cause a constraint to development. Furthermore, it is considered that the stream had limited potential for supporting otter and water vole due to the shallow water, and narrow channel.

6.2 Recommendations

As otter and water vole were not recorded on site, no further recommendations are necessary.

In the unlikely event that water voles and otter are found on site during development, all works would be stopped immediately and further instruction sought from the ecology consultancy and Natural England. As both water voles, otters and their habitat are fully protected it is likely that any works would need to be undertaken under licence from Natural England should water voles be found on site.

7

References

Strachan, R. & Moorhouse, T. (2006) *Water Vole Conservation Handbook*. 2nd edition. Tubney, Oxon, Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, University of Oxford.

Environment Agency. (1999) *Otters and River Habitat Management*. 2nd edition. Almondsbury, Bristol, Environment Agency.

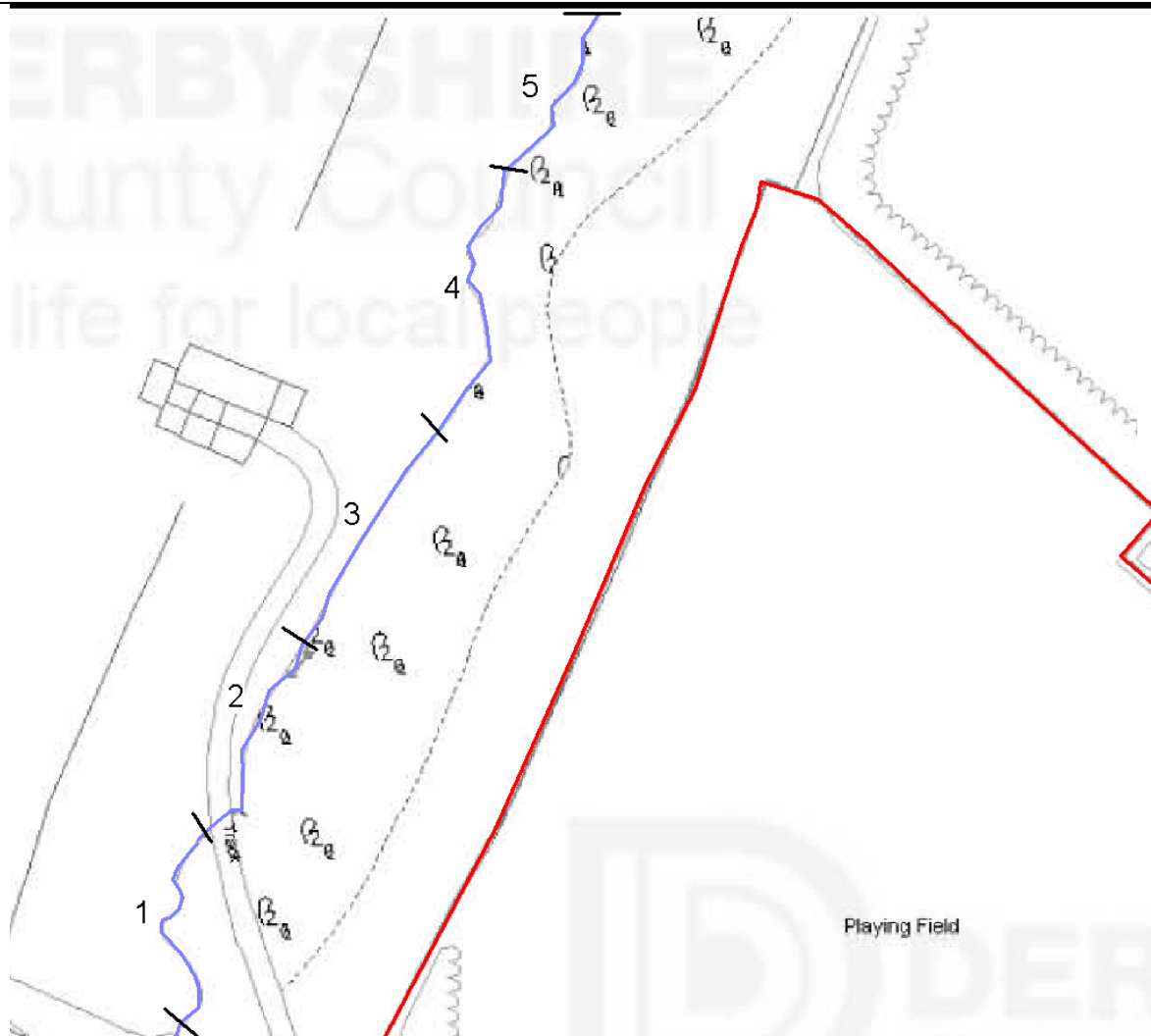
Environment Agency (2007). *Water Habitat Survey in Britain and Ireland*. Field Survey Guidance Manual: 2003 Version.

Appendix 1

Watercourse Section Plan






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ENVIRONMENTAL

Key

	Site Boundary
	Watercourse Sections
	Stream

Watercourse Section Plan

Created on: 08.06.10
Created by: HGE
Not to Scale





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Appendix 2

Photographs



Water Vole and Otter Survey – Buxton, Derbyshire.
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<p>Photograph number one</p> <p>Section 1</p>	
<p>Photograph number two</p> <p>Section 2</p>	

<p>Photograph number three</p> <p>Section 3</p>	
<p>Photograph number four</p> <p>Section 4</p>	

<p>Photograph number five</p> <p>Section 5</p>	

Appendix 3

Plant Species List



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Caltha palustris
Chamaerion angustifolium
Iris pseudacorus
Juncus effusus
Juncus inflexus
Mentha aquatica
Ranunculus acris
Rumex acetosa
Ulex europaeus

Marsh marigold
Rosebay willowherb
Yellow flag iris
Soft rush
Hard rush
Water mint
Meadow buttercup
Common sorrel
Common gorse