

Ecological Report

Water Vole Presence/Absence Survey Report

Oldlands Farm,
Shripney Road,
Bognor Regis,
West Sussex

July 2014

140134-ED-05

TIM M●YA ASSOCIATES



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Project	Oldlands Farm, Bognor Regis
Report Type	Ecological Report – Water Vole Presence/Absence Report
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Re-issue	04.07.14 minor amendments

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This report assesses the extent of water vole presence within and adjacent to the proposed development site.

The proposed development involves erection of 2no. detached industrial/distribution units including access and servicing arrangements, car parking, landscaping and associated flood compensation area.

The site survey included the surveying of the four ditches on site for signs of water vole. Each ditch was also assessed for its habitat suitability for water voles.

Evidence of water voles was found in ditches D1, D3 and the northern part of D2. Water voles are also considered to be present in D4 as it offers suitable habitat and links to D1. The majority of ditch D2 offers very sub-optimal habitat for water voles as it was completely dry.

The proposed development includes the removal of ditch D2, earthworks close to ditch D1 and D3 and the excavation of a small part of the bank of ditch D4.

Enhancements:

- A large attenuation pond will be built which will offer ideal water vole habitat.
- Managed meadow grassland alongside ditches D1 and D3 will enhance these ditches for water voles and in places increase the vegetated buffer from the current width.

Recommendations:

- To avoid killing or injuring water voles during the removal of ditch D2, it is recommended that water voles are relocated from the ditch using either passive displacement or relocation by trapping. Suitable mitigation must first be agreed with Natural England.
- Potential disturbance of water voles during earthworks at ditches D1 and D3 must be minimised as far as possible. A range of measures are recommended to minimise disturbance.
- ✳ To avoid killing or injuring water voles during excavation of a short section of ditch D4, it is recommended that a fingertip search of the bank is undertaken one month prior to excavation. If water vole burrows are present, liaison with Natural England should be sought to discuss appropriate mitigation options.

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This report has been commissioned by Bericote Properties Limited.
- 1.2 A planning application has been submitted for the erection of 2no. detached industrial/distribution units (B1(c)/B2/B8) including access and servicing arrangements, car parking, landscaping and associated Flood Compensation Area (FCA).

Purpose of the report

- 1.3 This report assesses the presence or likely absence of water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*) within the ditches in the site of the proposed development. TMA have been commissioned to undertake a Water Vole presence/absence survey - a method outlined in the water vole conservation handbook (Strachan *et al*, 2011). A summary of legislation pertaining to water voles is included in Appendix 3 of this report.

Limitations

- 1.4 Due to fencing, extremely dense scrub vegetation and nesting birds in some positions, not all sections of ditch could be inspected for the presence of evidence of water voles. Therefore this report combines the direct evidence of water voles recorded during the survey with an assessment of the habitat suitability in order to draw conclusions about the likelihood of water voles being impacted by the proposed works.

Information supplied

- 1.5 This report has been prepared with reference to the following supplied plans (amongst others), showing extent of the site boundary and the proposed development:
- 30699-FE-37 Application Boundary Plan
 - Drawings C14443-200 – C1443-207 Drainage diagrams
 - DLA-1606-L02-03 Planting Proposals

Site location

- 1.6 The site is located to the north-east of Bognor Regis and directly to the east of Shripney Road, the A29. The Oldlands Farm site is dominated by arable agricultural fields and comprises the development site and the flood compensation area (FCA). The two parts of the site are divided by the Bognor Northern Relief Road, which is currently under construction. The development site is located to the south of the relief road and the FCA is to be located to the north. The development site was (at the time of the survey) used for wheat crops and the site is divided in two by a largely dry ditch running north-south. The FCA was (at the time of the survey) used for potatoes and wheat. Neighbouring land uses of the Oldlands Farm site include a railway track and disused airfield to the east, an industrial estate to the south, a caravan park to the west, across the A29 and open space and farmland in all other directions. The village of Shripney is located approximately 300 metres to the north.
- 1.7 The central grid reference for the site is SU 94305 01844.

Ditch descriptions

- 1.8 The proposed development site includes four ditches, as follows (see Appendix 1 and 2 for plans):
- Ditch D1 runs west to east on the northern boundary of the proposed development site. This ditch held 10-15 centimetres of water at the time of the survey. This ditch is approximately 2 metres deep, 2 metres wide and very densely vegetated with common reed (*Phragmites australis*) throughout. The banks are fringed with a margin of dense brambles (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) and nettles (*Urtica dioica*) up to 3 metres wide; as such the ditch is very shaded. This ditch is linked to the network of ditches in the wider landscape to the east and west.
 - Ditch D2 runs north to south through the centre of the proposed development site. The majority of this ditch was almost completely dry at the time of the survey and has been recorded as a dry ditch in previous surveys undertaken at the site. This ditch is approximately 1.5 metres deep and has a 2 metre border of bramble on the east side, with very little marginal vegetation on the west side. The vegetation within ditch D2 is less dense than in ditch D1 but includes common reed. At its northern end this ditch is linked to ditch D1 and offers similar habitat. The northern 50 metres of this

ditch holds up to 30 centimetres of water. At its southern end the ditch is dry and appears to terminate.

- Ditch D3 runs south to north along the eastern boundary of the proposed development site and alongside the railway track. This ditch held up to 30 centimetres of water in the north and became progressively drier to the south, being almost completely dry at its southern extent. This ditch is approximately 2 metres deep, 2 metres wide and very densely vegetated with common reed throughout. The banks are fringed with a margin of dense brambles and nettles up to 2 metres wide; as such the ditch is very shaded. At its northern end this ditch is linked to ditch D1. At its southern end this ditch appears to terminate.

The proposed FCA is located adjacent to and will be connected to one ditch, as follows:

- Ditch D4 runs north-west to south-east to the western side of the proposed FCA. Ditch D4 was slightly wet at the time of the survey, generally holding approximately 15 centimetres of water. This ditch is approximately 2 metres deep, 2 metres wide and very densely vegetated with common reed and fools watercress (*Apium nodiflorum*) throughout. The ditch has a margin of up to 3 metres of bramble scrub on its east side and 1-2 metres of nettles on its west side. At its south-eastern end this ditch is connected to Ditch D1 via large culverts under the new Bognor Northern Relief Road.

2 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Data search

- 2.1 The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway and Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SxBRC) were consulted for records of water vole in the local area.

Site survey

- 2.2 The survey was undertaken on Wednesday 18th June 2014 by Simon Thomas and Mark Doherty of Tim Moya Associates. Both surveyors are experienced ecological consultants with experience of undertaking water vole surveys. During the survey the weather conditions did not pose any limitations to the survey. The survey was undertaken in June, which is within the optimal survey season for water voles, although dense vegetation at this time may obscure some field signs.
- 2.3 All four ditches on site were inspected for evidence of water voles in accordance with methods detailed in Strachan et al (2011). Where access was possible, the entire length of each section of ditch was searched thoroughly from within the ditch. However, dense vegetation, fencing and the presence of nesting birds meant that some sections of ditch were sampled periodically at discrete positions rather than along the length of the ditch. Notes on the accessibility of the ditches are included in Appendix 2 of this report, along with descriptions of the water levels in each part of the ditches.
- 2.4 The ditches were searched every 8 to 25 metres, wherever access was possible. Where possible the ditch between the survey points was also surveyed thoroughly. The following signs of water voles was searched for;
- Latrines
 - Feeding stations
 - Footprints
 - Tunnel entrances
 - Actual water vole sightings

3 SURVEY RESULTS

Data search results

- 3.1 NBN Gateway did not hold records of water voles within 2 km of the site.
- 3.2 SxBRC held 18 records of water voles within 2 km of the site. The closest record to the site was located 0.62 m east-south-east from the site and the most recent record was from 2013.

Site survey results

- 3.3 A plan showing the signs of water voles recorded during the survey can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 shows the points which were surveyed along with notes on the water depths and other features of the habitat at each point. No water vole tunnels were recorded within any of the ditches during the survey. However, the ditches were largely densely vegetated by common reed, amongst which water vole tunnels are likely to have been well-concealed. Water voles burrows are considered to be present in those ditches containing suitable water vole habitat and evidence of water voles.

Ditch 1

- 3.4 Due to the water levels and vegetation present, ditch D1 is considered to provide suitable habitat for water voles.
- 3.5 Various signs of water voles were found throughout this ditch, including a sighting of a water vole at the western end.

Ditch 2

- 3.6 The habitat along the majority of ditch 2 is considered to be very sub-optimal for water voles as it is completely dry and filled with brambles. No signs of water voles were recorded throughout the majority of this ditch.
- 3.7 The northern 50 metres of ditch D2, where it connects with ditch D1, is considered to offer suitable water vole habitat and indeed numerous signs of water voles were recorded in this location.

Ditch 3

- 3.8 Due to the water levels and vegetation present, ditch D3 is considered to provide suitable habitat for water voles.

- 3.9 For much of its length this ditch is inaccessible for thorough survey. However, at the points where this ditch was accessed, signs of water voles were recorded, including a water vole sighting close to the mid-point of the ditch.

Ditch 4

- 3.10 Due to the water levels and vegetation present, ditch D3 is considered to provide suitable habitat for water voles. It is also connected directly to the western end of ditch D1, where a water vole was seen during the survey.
- 3.11 Due to the presence of suitable habitat but lack of field signs discovered during the survey, water voles are considered likely to be present within this ditch at low densities, which may fluctuate seasonally.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential impact on water voles

- 4.1 The proposed development has been designed to retain ditches D1, D3 and D4.
- 4.2 The development is subject to various spatial and timing constraints. The proposed development is due to have the following impacts:

Removal of ditch D2

- 4.3 Ditch D2 will be removed for the proposed development. Throughout the majority of this ditch there would be no anticipated impact on water voles. However, water voles are considered to be present in the northern 50 metres of the ditch and in this location the removal of the ditch has the potential to:

- Destroy water vole burrows
- Kill or injure water voles within their burrows

- 4.4 Despite the above risks, the section of ditch represents a small proportion of the suitable habitat available to water voles in the surrounding areas. Therefore the removal of this section, if mitigated to avoid the above risks, would not be considered to have a major impact on water vole populations in the local area. Since ditch D2 is very sub-optimal for water voles throughout the majority of its length and does not connect to suitable habitat to the south, the removal of ditch D2 would not impact the dispersal of water voles in the local area.

Earthworks to D1 and D3

- 4.5 Ditches D1 and D3 will be retained and form the northern and eastern boundaries of the site. However, during the construction process, earthworks close to these ditches will be necessary. The earthworks will involve the building up of levels on top of the banks, in some cases up to the edge of the ditch. However, the earthworks will not involve excavation into the banks or direct impacts into the water courses. The maximum length of impacted ditches is predicted to be 450 metres. These earthworks have the potential to:

- Disturb water voles within their burrows

- 4.6 The earthworks to ditches D1 and D3 are not expected to destroy water vole burrows or kill or injure water voles. The ditches will remain suitable for occupation by water voles throughout construction. Ditch D3 is located adjacent to a mainline

railway track with frequent passing trains. In this context the relative increase in disturbance is considered less than to a similar ditch in a very quiet location.

Flood Compensation Area

- 4.7 The proposed FCA is located in arable land to the east of ditch D4. The FCA is due to link to ditch D4 in order that water can drain from the ditch into the FCA in times of flood. This will require the excavation of an approximately 10 metre length of the ditch down to a height of 1 metre. This operation has potential to:

- Destroy water vole burrows within the 10 metre length
- Kill or injure water voles within their burrows

- 4.8 Evidence of water voles was not found within this ditch during the survey, although they are considered likely to be present within this ditch at low density.

Enhancements

- 4.9 The development will include the following habitat enhancements for water voles:

Attenuation ponds

- 4.10 Current plans include a large attenuation pond in the south-east corner of the development. This pond is considered to provide a significant enhancement for wildlife including water voles. The pond will be planted with a range of native marginal and aquatic vegetation including species listed in the Water Vole Conservation Handbook (Strachan et al., 2011). The pond will link with the southern end of ditch D3 in order to allow water voles to colonise the new pond.

Buffer strips

- 4.11 Once the construction phase has been completed, the marginal strips alongside the impacted ditches will be re-instated as meadow grassland. The buffer strips are due to be at least 5 metres wide where feasible. This is considered to offer another significant enhancement to the ditches as currently the marginal strips are cultivated as crops as close as 2 metres from the ditches, with the minimal marginal strip being dominated by dense bramble.

Mitigation

- 4.12 Due to the potential impacts on water voles, the following mitigation measures are recommended, in order to minimise the impact of the scheme on water voles.

Removal of ditch D2

- 4.13 To avoid killing or injuring of water voles within the northern 50 metres of ditch D2, it will be necessary to ensure that water voles are not present at the time of its removal. Site clearance is scheduled to take place in Autumn 2014.
- 4.14 The most suitable method for ensuring that water voles vacate a small area of suitable habitat is by passive 'displacement'. This involves the complete removal of vegetation in the affected water course in order that water voles relocate to adjacent nearby habitat. This method is considered appropriate in this situation since the length of impacted ditch is short and suitable habitat (Ditch D1) is available for the impacted voles to move into. However, displacement is only likely to be successful from late February to early April. Due to the time constraints of the development (site clearance in Autumn 2014), this technique may not be successful or appropriate. Nevertheless, displacement is considered preferable to the below option of relocation by trapping, since displacement is less intrusive to water voles.
- 4.15 The alternative strategy is relocation by trapping. Since it involves capturing water voles, this operation must be licensed by Natural England. Licences are only available where the operation will result in a conservation benefit to water voles. In this case, trapped water voles may be relocated to the newly constructed attenuation pond. Trapping of water voles may be possible in spring and early summer, or in autumn. However, water voles trapped in autumn should be over-wintered in captivity before being released the following spring, as they are otherwise unlikely to survive the winter. To trap and relocate water voles on this site, the attenuation pond would have to be prepared and vegetated in time to receive the captive water voles. Natural England would also have to consider the operation to provide a conservation benefit to water voles, and that there is no reasonable alternative to trapping.
- 4.16 In order to agree a suitable mitigation scheme for the removal of the 50 metre section of ditch supporting water voles, it is recommended that liaison is sought from Natural England.

Earthworks to D1 and D3

- 4.17 Ditches D1 and D3 will be retained but earthworks close to these ditches will be necessary. The earthworks may disturb water voles occupying burrows within the ditches. Since there is no alternative but to undertake earthworks close to these ditches, the disturbance of water voles must be minimised in accordance with the following measures:

- Vegetation on the bank tops should be strimmed prior to the works to reduce their suitability for water voles.
- Once strimmed, a survey must be undertaken by an ecologist to confirm that no water vole tunnels are present in the impacted areas.
- Barriers should be installed to ensure that spoil, pollutants and other materials do not enter the water course.
- The earthworks must be restricted to increasing of ground levels adjacent to the ditches and must not involve excavation of the banks (which may destroy water vole tunnels).
- Noise and movement of vehicles should be kept to a minimum.
- Any lighting required overnight must be positioned to avoid pointing directly into the ditch.

4.18 Although disturbance of water voles may occur, the above approach is considered preferable to trapping and relocating water voles from the ditch for the duration of the construction period.

Flood Compensation Area

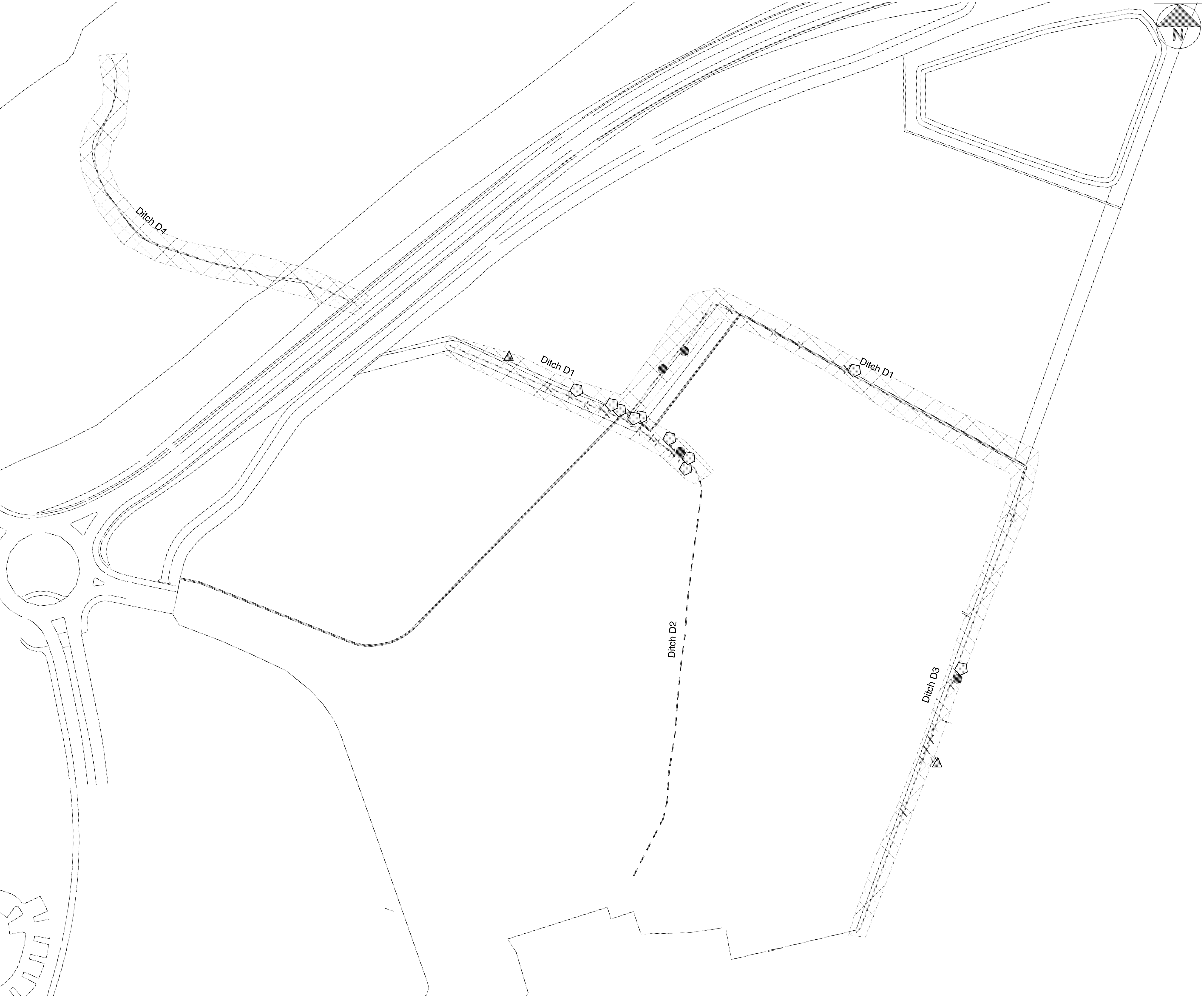
4.19 Excavation of the proposed FCA will require the excavation of an approximately 10 metre length of the ditch down to a height of 1 metre. To minimise the impact of the proposed works, it is recommended that the impacted length of ditch is minimised as far as possible. To avoid killing or injuring water voles it is recommended that the impacted section of ditch is subject to a thorough fingertip search one month prior to the commencement of site works, to confirm that no water vole burrows are present. If burrows are present, liaison with Natural England should be sought to discuss appropriate mitigation options.

5 REFERENCES

- Strachan, R., Moorhouse, T. & Gelling, M. (2011). Water Vole Conservation Handbook (3rd Edition). Wildlife Conservation Research Unit.
- Tim Moya Associates (TMA) (June 2014). 140134-ED-03 Oldlands Farm Ecological Assessment.

Appendix 1

Plan of Water Vole Evidence





INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

X

Feeding Station

▲

Vole Sighting

●

Latrine

⬠

Footprints

- - -

Water Vole Considered Absent

⌵⌵⌵

Water Vole Considered Present

REVISIONS		
Base Drawing		
	306393-PE-25	

0

10m

20m

40m

60m

80m

100m

Title

Water Vole Evidence

Client

Bericote Properties Ltd

Project

Oldlands Farm, Shripney Road,
Bognor Regis, West Sussex

Date

June 2014

Drawn by

AH

Drawing No

140134-E-05

Rev

-

Scale

1:1000@A1

DO NOT SCALE Use only figured dimensions

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Appendix 2

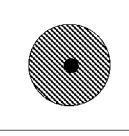
Plan of Target Note Points

Target Notes Schedule





INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE



Target Note



Water Course

REVISIONS		
Base Drawing		
	1306393-PE-25	

0

10m

20m

40m

60m

80m

100m

Title

Water Vole Target Note Plan

Client

Bericote Properties Ltd

Project

Oldlands Farm, Shripney Road,
Bognor Regis, West Sussex

Date

June 2014

Drawn by

AH

Drawing No

140134-E-06

Rev

-

Scale

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Water voles

Object ID	Notes and findings
1	Completely dry. No evidence
2	Completely dry. No evidence
3	Completely dry. No evidence
4	Completely dry. No evidence
5	Completely dry. No evidence
6	Completely dry. No evidence
7	Completely dry. No evidence. 10m of ditch clearly visible
8	Completely dry. No evidence. 8m of ditch thoroughly inspected
9	Completely dry. No evidence
10	Completely dry. No evidence
11	Slightly wet at ditch crossing. Up to 5cm of water. No evidence
12	Ditch fully accessible north of crossing. Ditch wet but no standing water. No evidence

Water voles

Object ID	Notes and findings
13	Ditch wet but no standing water. No evidence
14	Completely dry. No evidence
15	Ditch very slightly wet but no standing water. No evidence
16	Completely dry. No evidence
17	Completely dry. No evidence
18	Access to area of ditch no possible due to thick reeds and nesting reed warbler
20	Ditch holding up to 30cm of water
28	Ditch holding up to 30cm of water. Water evidence found. Burrows considered likely in dense reed
31	Ditch holding up to 30cm of water. Water evidence found. Burrows considered likely in dense reed
35	Ditch holding up to 30cm of water. Water evidence found. Burrows considered likely in dense reed
40	Ditch holding up to 30cm of water. Water evidence found. Burrows considered likely in dense reed
43	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
46	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water

Water voles

Object ID	Notes and findings
48	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water
49	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water
52	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water
53	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
54	Ditch holding up to 20cm of water
55	Ditch holding up to 20cm of water
56	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water
57	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
58	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
59	Ditch holding up to 3cm of water
60	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
61	Ditch holding up to 5cm of water
62	Ditch holding up to 5cm of water

Water voles

Object ID	Notes and findings
63	Ditch holding up to 5cm of water. very densely vegetated with fools water cress
64	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water. Densely vegetated with fools water cress
65	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water. Densely vegetated with fools water cress
66	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water. Densely vegetated with fools water cress
67	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water. Densely vegetated with fools water cress
68	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water. Densely vegetated with fools water cress
69	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
72	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
73	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
76	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
78	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water
80	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water
81	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water

Water voles

Object ID	Notes and findings
84	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
85	Ditch holding up to 3cm of water
86	Ditch holding up to 5cm of water
87	Ditch wet but no standing water
88	Ditch wet but no standing water
89	Ditch holding up to 3cm of water
90	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water
91	Completely inaccessible due to fence, bramble & nesting birds
95	Ditch holding up to 30cm of water
97	Completely inaccessible due to fence & bramble
98	Completely inaccessible due to fence & bramble
100	Ditch holding up to 30cm of water
104	Ditch holding up to 15cm of water

Water voles

Object ID	Notes and findings
107	Ditch holding up to 10cm of water
109	Ditch holding up to 5cm of water
110	Ditch wet but no standing water

Appendix 3

Wildlife Law and Planning Policy

STATUTES AND ENGLISH LAW

Water Voles

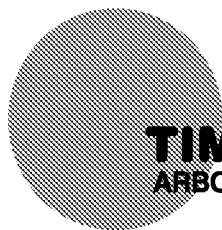
Water voles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) which makes it an offence to:

- 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.

PLANNING POLICY

In addition to the statutes described above, various planning policy imposes duties upon planning applicants to take account of protected species and habitats at sites of proposed development and in particular, protected species. The objective of this policy is to prevent a net loss of species and habitats diversity identified as priorities for the U.K. as a consequence of development activity.

- ✿ Habitat Surveys (Extended Phase 1/ Walkover/ Botanical)
- ✿ Protected Species Surveys
- ✿ Ecological Mitigation & Licencing
- ✿ BREEAM & CFSH
- ✿ Ecological Management Plans
- ✿ Hedgerow Surveys
- ✿ Landscape Analysis
- ✿ Arboricultural & Ecological Reports for Planning
- ✿ Feasibility Tree Surveys
- ✿ British Standard 5837 Tree Surveys
- ✿ Tree Constraints Reports & Drawings
- ✿ Appeal Statements & Proofs
- ✿ Expert Witness
- ✿ Evidence at Hearings & Public Inquiries
- ✿ Method Statements to Satisfy Planning Conditions
- ✿ Design Solutions
- ✿ Landscape Plans
- ✿ Tender Documents & Drawings
- ✿ Supervision & Inspection of Works
- ✿ Contract & Project Management
- ✿ Health & Safety Surveys
- ✿ GPS Surveys
- ✿ Computerised Tree Population Surveys
- ✿ CAD Plans & Consultancy
- ✿ Subsidence Risk Assessments
- ✿ Mortgage & Insurance Reports
- ✿ IPO Review
- ✿ Local Government Officer Contracts



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