



Our Ref: JBA 17/364 ECO07 SR

30th October 2020

Daniel White,
On behalf of Persimmon Homes (Suffolk)

Dear Daniel White,

RE: Water Vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) Habitat Assessment – Haverhill Relief Road

James Blake Associates Ltd. was commissioned by Persimmon Homes (Suffolk) to undertake a water vole habitat assessment of the watercourses on site, particularly to the western boundary. The assessment was required due to the proposed development of the relief road and archaeology works required.

The site is predominantly a series of former arable fields which now consist of tall ruderal vegetation and scrub. Other habitats present are managed hedgerows, scattered trees and wet and dry ditches. Majority of ditches on site are now dry, or partially dry and heavily overgrown with bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*). There is a watercourse present at the western most boundary which continues under Hales Barn Road.

Relevant wildlife legislation

In England and Wales water voles are listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, receiving full protection since 2008. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, together with amending legislation, lists the following offences;

- Intentionally killing, taking or injuring a water vole (Section 9(1));
- Possessing or controlling any live or dead water vole, any part or derivative (Section 9(2));
- Intentionally or recklessly damaging or destroying a water vole’s place of shelter or protection (Section 9(4)(a));
- Intentionally or recklessly disturbing a water vole whilst it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection (Section 9(4)(b)); and
- Selling, offering for sale, or possessing or transporting for the purposes of sale, any live or dead water vole, or any part or derivative, or advertising any of these for buying or selling (Section 9(5)).

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 required the Secretary of State to publish lists of habitats and species of principal importance (SPI) for the conservation of biodiversity in England and Wales, under Sections 41 and 42 of the Act, respectively. These lists re sued to grade decision makers (such as planning authorities) in implementing their duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their normal functions (under Section 40 of the NERC Act). Water voles are listed as SPI for the conservation of biodiversity in England and Wales, under Sections 41 and 42 of the NERC Act 2006, respectively.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was published in 1994, and included water voles as a ‘Priority Species’. The UK BAP has now been succeeded by the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework (July 2012) and biodiversity conservation work is now generally focussed on the individual countries and their SPI for the conservation of biodiversity. Water voles are therefore considered a national priority for conservation in England, Scotland and Wales. They are also identified as regional or local priorities for conservation in BAPs produced at relevant geographical levels.

Over 30 Years of Service, Value and Innovation

34-52 Out Westgate, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 3PA
tel: 01284 335797 email: jamesblake@jba-landmarc.com

Chairman: James Blake BA (Hons) Dip LA (Hons) CMLJ
Company Secretary: Louise Blake BSc PGCE
Directors: Elzbieta Zebrowska MSc Eng LArch MScEnvSc CMLJ
Associate Directors: Vivienne Jackson : Marie Lowe CIMA Cert BA
Associate Director - Strategic Landscape Division: Abby Stallwood BSc (Hons) PG Dip LM CMLJ

www.jba-landmarc.com

Registration no. 08169866 VAT no. 512 4127 91

Water voles are also included as a priority species for conservation in BAPs produced by water companies and government departments, such as Highways England.

Evaluation

The western watercourse is a moderate to fast flowing stream which runs north along the western boundary of the site, from under Hales Barn Road via a culvert. The immediate area adjacent to the culvert is considered unsuitable for water vole burrow creation due to concrete banks present and a covering of thick tree roots, with limited digging substrate. There is also minimal vegetation for foraging in this area; dominated by common nettle (*Urtica dioica*). See Appendix A for watercourse photographs.

The stream bank habitats become more suitable for water vole further north from Hales Barn Road, however there is still limited foraging vegetation until approximately 115m from the culvert (approximately 35m outside the proposed relief road footprint). Species dominating this area include common nettle and bramble.

After ~115m the banks become vegetated on the eastern bank with grassland species such as smooth meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*) and Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) which are suitable food sources for water vole, although variation is limited. However, the bank sides are less steep in this area (~45°), whereas water voles prefer, though not limited to, steep banks for burrow creation. No aquatic vegetation was observed in the watercourse.

The watercourse's adjacent habitats (within 5m) are subject to high levels of disturbance from regular dog-walking routes and recreational activities on the eastern side and active arable field to the west.

No evidence of water vole was recorded during the walkover. Evidence would include; burrows, feeding stations, droppings/latrines, footprints and pathways. However, the assessment was undertaken outside the optimal survey window for identifying water vole evidence; between mid-April to September).

The archaeology works will be undertaken at least 5m from the watercourse, it is therefore considered that there are no constraints for this work with regards to water voles. The proposed relief road footprint is approximately 35m from suitable water vole habitat and therefore no further surveys are considered necessary. However, if works come within 10m of the suitable habitat, then works should be undertaken under the supervision of an experienced ecological and reasonable avoidance measures may be required. See Appendix B for the suitable habitat location.

Conclusion

Majority of the watercourse at the western boundary of the site is considered suitable or sub-optimal for water vole. The archaeology works will not be working within 5m of the watercourse and therefore can continue without causing any significant impacts to the watercourse in relation to water vole. The proposed relief road development is unlikely to come within 10m of the suitable water vole habitat; however, works within 10m of the suitable habitats (if required) will be undertaken under the supervision of an ecologist.

Yours sincerely,

Sam Rigg

Senior Ecologist

James Blake Associates Ltd.

REFERENCES

Dean, M., Strachan, R., Gow, D. and Andrews, R. (2016). *The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook (The Mammal Society Mitigation Guidance Series)*. Eds Fiona Mathews and Paul Chanin. The Mammal Society, London.

Appendix A – Photographs

Habitat adjacent to culvert:



Suitable habitat ~115m from culvert:



Appendix B – Suitable habitat (yellow)

