

Living Ecosystems

'Working Towards Sustainable Development and Providing Ecological Education...'



Results of a terrestrial mammal survey carried out at Bowlee Park Driving Range, Heywood Old Road, Middleton M24 4TH, Near Rochdale - May 2024

1.0 Introduction

Living Ecosystems was commissioned by Improve Your Golf Ltd to carry out a terrestrial mammal survey at Bowlee Park Driving Range, Heywood Old Road, Middleton, M24 4TH. National grid reference SD 84567 06503. The survey is in support of the proposed development of an adventure golf course, an increase in the number of car parking spaces and the addition of another storey on the existing driving range building. The purpose of the survey is to provide an independent opinion of the likely presence of protected terrestrial mammal species on a site to inform the client of their obligations and to assist the Local Planning Authority in their determination of a planning application.



Figure 1 The site is Bowlee Park Driving Range

Site description and location

The development site is located at Bowlee Park Driving Range off Heywood old Road, Middleton, and measures 175 metres by 120 metres or approximately 2.10 hectare area of very flat close mown amenity grassland.

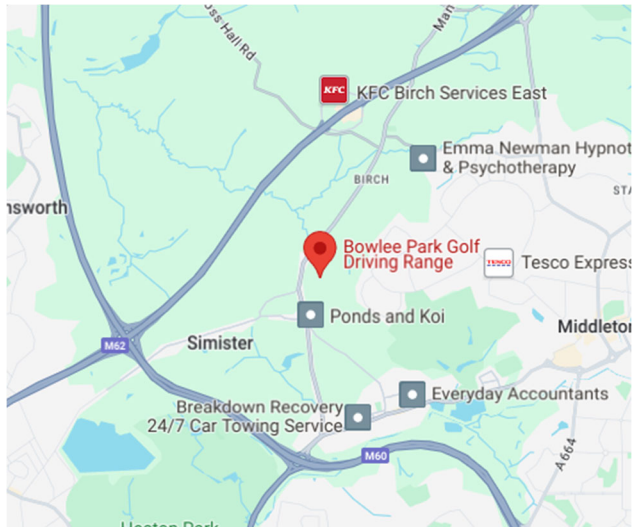


Figure 2 The survey site is Bowlee Park Driving Range M24 4TH

Details of the proposed works

The proposed development comprises the construction of an adventure golf course, an increase in the number of car parking spaces and the addition of another storey on the existing driving range building.



Figure 3 The current development proposals

2.0 Desktop Study and Data Search

This report contains the findings of a terrestrial mammal survey. The Purpose of the survey was to identify the potential for presence of protected mammal species on a site, in line with European legislation, UK law and the requirements of The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023). The brief of the ecological survey was to assess the habitats found on site and identify the potential for presence on site of protected species. The site-based element is supported by a desktop study undertaken to identify presence of Statutory/National/Local designations or protected species within the vicinity (from a 1 km radius) of the site. The final part of the project brief was to identify and make recommendations as appropriate for any further surveys required to determine presence/absence of protected species on site if the survey determined that presence of a protected species on site was considered to be reasonably likely.

The following sources of information and ecological records were consulted:

A desktop study was undertaken through MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographic Information System for Countryside). The search looked to identify the presence of statutory designated sites within a 1km radius (e.g. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR). A wider search radius up to 5 km has also been considered where appropriate in the site's context. The NBN Atlas: which is the UK's largest repository of publicly available biodiversity data was used to find local records of relevant protected species and any other species of importance locally. All measurements within this report are approximate only, and have been estimated whilst on site or calculated using mapping software (QGIS) or internet-based mapping services such as MAGiC Maps and Google Earth.

3.0 Desktop Study and Data Search Results

The site is not designated as a statutory designated site for nature conservation, and no statutory designated sites for nature conservation lie within a 1.0 kilometre radius of the site. The site does not lie within the impact risk Zone of any statutory designated site

The site has no non-statutory designations for nature conservation, and no non-statutory designated sites for nature conservation lie directly adjacent to the site boundary. No statutory or non-statutory sites exist within a 1.0 kilometre radius of the site. The site does not lie within the impact zone of a SSSI.

Previous records of protected species within a 1.0 km radius of the site.

The only protected species recorded within a 1.0 km radius of the site is the common pipistrelle bat.

Ponds

One pond exists within a 50 metre radius of the site it is considered to be suitable as habitat for water voles. For this reason a survey for water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) was considered necessary. The survey of Pond and ditch number 1 (see Figure 1 below) was carried out during May 2024 and found evidence for water voles.



Figure 4 Pond and ditch number 1 is considered to be suitable for water voles

4.0 Habitat survey methodology

A detailed survey of the site was undertaken on the morning of 1st May 2024. The weather was overcast, dry, mild (12 degrees C) with a light wind. This process was repeated on two other occasions during May and June 2024 (7th & 11th May).

Terrestrial mammal survey

A detailed inspection of the site was carried out by Richard Parkinson for evidence of terrestrial mammals on 1st May 2024.

The survey involved walking along all hedgerows, field margins, wooded banks and other landscape features which are known to be suitable habitats for water voles. These features were searched for the presence of water vole burrows, water vole lawns, larders and latrines. Water voles are typically associated with emergent reed fringe. Areas where soft banks and reed fringes are present provide the best habitats, but water voles can inhabit gaps and crevices in wash walls.

water vole signs include:

Water vole burrows.

Water vole lawns.

Water vole larders [food caches].

Water vole latrines.

Water Vole Legislation

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) was updated on April 6th 2008 and water vole protection was increased to make it an offence to:

Intentionally kill, injure or take water vole from the wild.

Possess or control live or dead water voles or derivatives.

Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which water voles use 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 offer or expose for sale or transport for sale.

Terrestrial mammal survey results

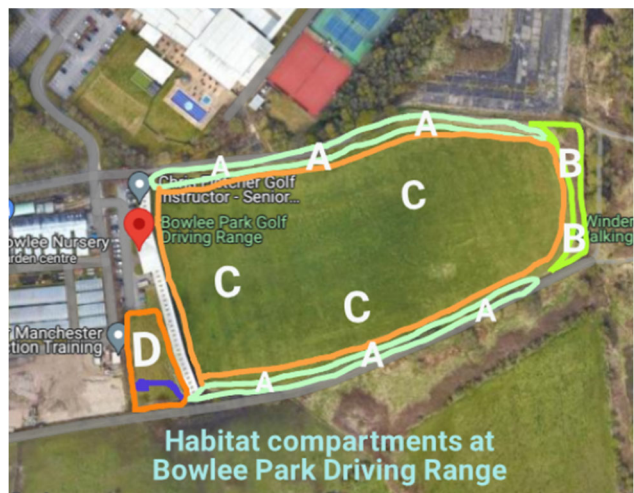


Figure 5 Habitat compartments at Bowlee Park Driving Range

Compartment D - an area of tussock grass with some trees and shrubs



Figure 6 Compartment D is an area of tussock grass with some trees and shrubs surrounding a ditch terminating in a pond. The ditch and pond were dug out to alleviate flooding approximately 18 months earlier.



Figure 7 Pond & ditch inside compartment D



Figure 8 Evidence for water voles in Pond and ditch number 1

A recently excavated ditch terminating in a small pond have been excavated during the last two years in order to alleviate flood risks. The pond is at an early successional phase and has been colonised by flote grass. A few seedlings of water loving trees

alder and willow have begun to grow on the margins of the pond. A water vole burrow was clearly visible on the southern bank of the pond and is shown in the photographs above.



Figure 9 Location of water vole burrow

Plant species present in the pond inside compartment D

Aquatics

Flote grass (*Glyceria fluitans*) 15% cover

Filamentous algae 5% cover

Margins

Grey willow seedlings (*Salix cinerea*) F

Red shank (*Persicaria maculosa*) O

Curled dock (*Rumex crispus*) R

Alder seedlings (*Alnus glutinosa*) R

Constraints of the survey

Direct evidence and secondary evidence for the presence of water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*) was found on the site. The survey was carried out at an optimal time and I am entirely confident that the survey has identified and addressed all the relevant ecological issues at the site. However such surveys can only ever be a snapshot of the conditions at a single moment in time.

Enhancements and mitigation for terrestrial mammals

A detailed terrestrial mammal survey was carried out on 1st May 2024 and upon two other occasions throughout May 2024. Evidence for water voles was found during the survey. A water vole burrow was identified on the southern bank of Pond & ditch number 1 (see Figure 10 below).



Figure 10 Location of water vole burrow on the bank of Pond & ditch number 1

As water voles are present on the site it is vital that measures be taken to avoid any negative impacts upon this protected species as a result of the development proposals. Therefore it is recommended that a reasonable avoidance strategy be adopted in relation to water voles. A 10 metre wide protective buffer zone be established around the burrow. The tussocky grassland comprising habitat compartment D is ideal habitat for water voles. For this reason this habitat should be retained and protected within a radius of 10 metres of the burrow. Any works inside this protected area should be kept to a minimum and supervised by a suitably qualified ecologist. Full details of the Water Vole RAMs can be found in Appendix 1.

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Appendix 1: Water Vole Reasonable Avoidance Strategy

A detailed terrestrial mammal survey was carried out on 1st May 2024 and upon two other occasions throughout May 2024. Evidence for water voles was found during the survey. A water vole burrow was identified on the southern bank of Pond & ditch number 1 (see Figure 1 below).



Figure 1 Location of water vole burrow on the bank of Pond & ditch number 1

Terrestrial mammal survey results



Figure 2 Compartment D is an area of tussock grass with some trees and shrubs surrounding a ditch terminating in a pond. The ditch and pond were dug out to alleviate flooding approximately 18 months earlier.



Figure 3 Pond & ditch inside compartment D



Figure 4 Evidence for water voles in Pond and ditch number 1

A recently excavated ditch terminating in a small pond have been excavated during the last two years in order to alleviate flood risks. The pond is at an early successional phase and has been colonised by flote grass. A few seedlings of water loving trees alder and willow have begun to grow on the margins of the pond. A water vole burrow was clearly visible on the southern bank of the pond and is shown in Figure 4 above.

As water voles are present on the site it is vital that measures be taken to avoid any negative impacts upon this protected species as a result of the development proposals. Therefore it is recommended that a reasonable avoidance strategy be adopted in relation to water voles.

Initially a 10 metre wide protective buffer zone be established around the burrow (see Figure 5 below). The tussocky grassland comprising habitat compartment D is ideal habitat for water voles. For this reason this habitat should be retained and protected within a radius of 10 metres of the burrow. The pond and drainage ditch being used by the water voles should be retained and maintained. Any works inside this protected area should be kept to a minimum and supervised by a suitably qualified ecologist.



Figure 5 Red line showing 10 metre protective buffer zone around water vole burrow

Reasonable avoidance methodology for carrying out works near water vole habitat without a license

If it is considered essential to undertake works inside the 10 metre radius protective buffer zone:

1. The work must be necessary and unavoidable.
2. A method statement must be prepared, describing how work will be undertaken to minimise the likelihood of any offences being committed.
3. All works within 10 metres of the nearest sett entrance must be undertaken using hand tools only unless unavoidable. In the event that work must be carried out using machines within the protective buffer zone this should be carried out under the supervision of a qualified ecologist.
4. Fires and chemicals must not be used within 20 metres of a sett. Chemicals should be stored safely away from the sett area.
5. Disturbances, such as loud noise or vibrations, that might agitate badgers occupying a sett must be avoided or limited to areas well away from the sett.
6. Trees and shrubs must be felled so that they fall away from the obvious direction of a sett and must not be uprooted but cut to ground level where necessary.
7. Entrances to burrows must not be obstructed or buried or excavated.
8. All work must be carried out as quickly and quietly as possible.

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