



THE
ENVIRONMENT
PARTNERSHIP



SMITHY BRIDGE ROAD ROCHDALE OTTER TECHNICAL REPORT - 2024

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 TEP were commissioned by Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land in May 2021, to undertake an otter *Lutra lutra* survey within the riparian habitat on and adjacent to the River Roch running adjacent and within the site boundary on the site known as Smithy Bridge Road in Rochdale. TEP were commissioned to undertake a follow up survey to the original survey in September 2024.
- 1.2 The survey forms part of the ecology evaluation to provide input into the planning of residential development.
- 1.3 The site is located south of Rochdale and is centred on grid reference SD 9205 1535. The site comprises mostly semi-improved neutral grassland, acid grassland, scrub areas and the River Roch that runs along the southern boundary of the site. The site is waterlogged in places with marshy grassland areas and a pond within the site. The survey area and site context is shown in Figure 1 below.

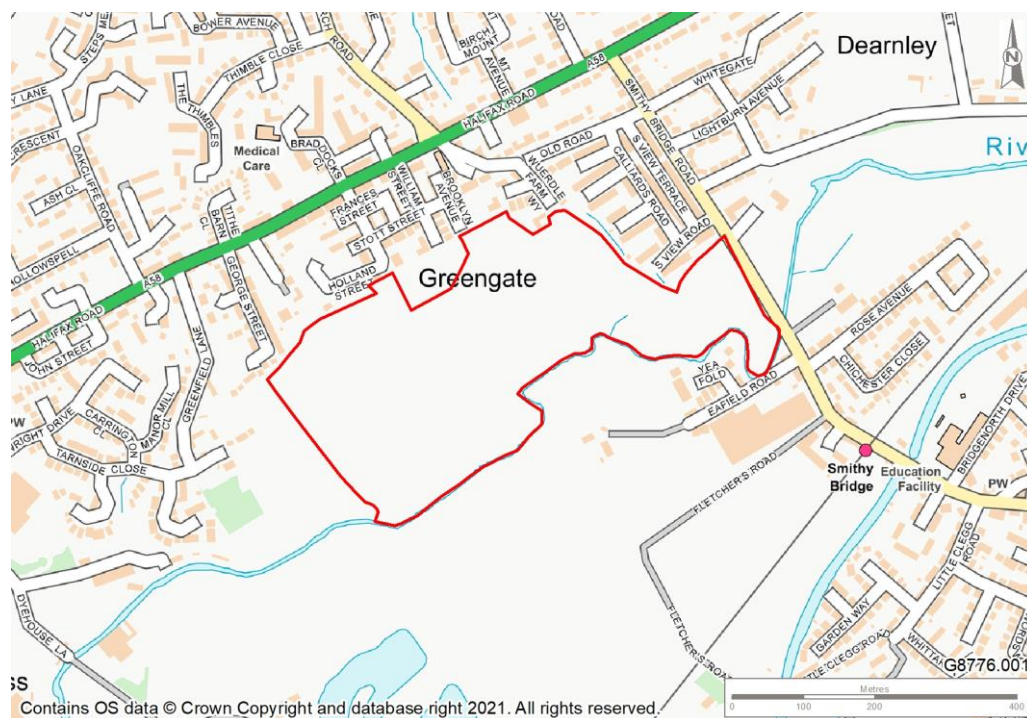


Figure 1 - Survey Location Plan

- 1.4 The River Roch provides suitable foraging habitat for otter and could provide suitable temporary resting and feeding couches for otter. As such, there is potential for disturbance of otter resting places to occur during site clearance works, should they be present.
- 1.5 The purpose of the survey was to determine the presence of otter in close proximity to the proposed works area. This information will be used to assess potential risks of the proposed works disturbing otters from their place of shelter or rest within 30m of the works, in order to inform construction methods and any necessary mitigation to ensure that disturbance, damage or destruction of active otter resting places/dens does not occur.

Legislation

- 1.6 The Eurasian otter is the only native UK otter species. It's fully protected as a European protected species (EPS) and is also protected under sections 9 and 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, together with amending legislation, lists the following as offences.
- Capture, kill, disturb or injure otters (on purpose or by not taking enough care)
 - Damage or destroy a breeding or resting place (deliberately or by not taking enough care)
 - Obstruct access to their resting or sheltering places (deliberately or by not taking enough care)
 - Possess, sell, control or transport live or dead otters, or parts of otters

2.0 Methods

Desktop Study

- 2.1 Desktop records were gathered in July 2021, as part of the overall scheme (TEP Report Ref: 8776.001), from GMEU up to 2km from the Site.

Field Survey

- 2.2 The otter survey was undertaken by experienced ecologists on the 4th June 2021, 22nd September 2021 and 17th September 2024 with assistants for health and safety reasons. The survey encompassed the banks of the River Roch and areas of suitable riparian habitat up to 200m up and downstream of the work areas, where access was permitted.
- 2.3 Field signs for otter include spraints (droppings), footprints, feeding remains and laying up areas (couches) on the immediate banksides. Other signs include potential dens or holts within exposed tree roots on riparian banks and within woodlands adjacent to and within 30m of the watercourse.

Survey Constraints

- 2.4 Permission to access the river within a survey buffer of 200m upstream and downstream of the site was not possible during the survey season.
- 2.5 Access to all parts of the river, where permission was granted, was not possible due to high water levels in some areas and deep mud sediment at the bases of the banks. Livestock within fields and within the river also acted as a constraint to the survey. The river was accessed as far as possible and where the surveyors could not survey from within the river, bankside observations were made.

3.0 Results

Desktop Study

- 3.1 Desktop records identified historical presence of otter within the 2km of the site, approximately 200m southeast.

Field Survey

- 3.2 The survey extent is illustrated in Drawings G8776.010, G8776.011 and G8776.018, within the associated water vole survey report (TEP Ref: 8776.004A).
- 3.3 No evidence of otter activity or otter holts were identified during the field surveys.

Summary

- 3.4 The survey identified that the river and the surrounding riparian habitat is suitable for otter, however no evidence was found of this species commuting along the banks in the form of feeding remains and spraints (droppings).
- 3.5 No evidence was found of active or historic laying up areas or potential holts within the exposed banks, no habitat on the banks of the river within the survey range showed potential for den creation and resting places.

4.0 Evaluation and Recommendations

- 4.1 The desktop and anecdotal evidence show that otter have been noted within the area especially along the River Roch. It is highly likely that otters are present within the wider landscape.
- 4.2 No evidence of otter activity or otter holts were identified during the surveys. As such, there are no implications with regard to otter, and development works can proceed. However, if any otter are identified on site during construction, works must cease immediately, and advice must be sought from the appointed ecologist.

Recommendations

- 4.3 Given that no evidence was found of potential holts, it is considered there will be no impact with regards to the works and otters within the area and no mitigation is required.
- 4.4 Otters are highly transient and mobile and can move quite easily within suitable habitat within the catchment and it is considered that otter will remain active within the catchment at some time, depending on environmental conditions.
- 4.5 As a precautionary measure and if work has not commenced within 12 months of the date of this report, further surveys will be required to re-assess the habitats. This may result in mitigation measures being required if outcomes of the survey have changed.

5.0 References

Natural England (NE), Otters: surveys and mitigation for development projects. Standing advice for local planning authorities to assess the impacts of development on otters. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/otters-protection-surveys-and-licences> (accessed 22/11/19)

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (As amended)

The Natural England Rural Communities Act 2006. The National Planning Policy Framework, 2019 (NPPF)

UK Biodiversity Steering Group (1995) Biodiversity – the UK Steering Group Report. Volume



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