

Water Vole Survey & Assessment
Plot L, Kingsway Business Park, Rochdale

DLA Architecture Ltd.

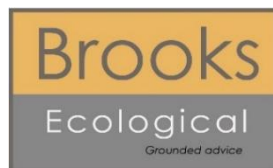
Report Reference: ER-5429-03.1

18/07/2023

Report Title:	Water vole Survey & Assessment Plot L, Kingsway Business Park, Rochdale
Report Reference:	ER-5429-03.1
Written by:	Josh Birchall BSc (Hons) ACIEEM Senior Ecologist
Technical Review:	Rob Weston BSc(Hons) MSc MCIEEM Technical Director
QA:	Courtney Halstead BSc (Hons) Graduate Ecologist
Approved for Issue:	Rob Weston BSc(Hons) MSc MCIEEM Technical Director
Date:	18/07/23

In accordance with CIEEM (2019), unless otherwise stated the findings of this report remain valid for a period of 18 months. After this period advice should be sought on the scope of any updating work required. CIEEM (2019) Advice Note - On the Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys

Brooks Ecological Ltd has prepared this report for the sole use of DLA Architecture Ltd.. The information which we have prepared and provided is in accordance with the CIEEM's Code of Professional Conduct. We confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional bona fide opinions. This report does not constitute legal advice. The report is in accordance with the agreement under which our services were performed. No warranty, express or implied, is made as to the advice in this report or any other service provided by us. This report may not be relied upon by any other party except the person, company, agent or any third party for whom the report is intended without the prior written permission of Brooks Ecological Ltd. This report presents a snapshot of the site at the date it was surveyed; the conditions and the species recorded present, or likely absent, can change rapidly. Resurvey is recommended to any third-party seeking reliance on this report. The content of this report may, in part, be based upon information provided by others and on the assumption that all relevant information has been provided by those parties from whom it has been requested. Information obtained from any third party has not been independently verified by Brooks unless otherwise stated in the report. This report is the copyright of Brooks Ecological Ltd. Unauthorised reproduction or usage by any person is prohibited.



Unit A, 1 Station Road, Guiseley,
Leeds, LS20 8BX
01943 884451
admin@brooks-ecological.co.uk
www.brooks-ecological.co.uk
Registered in England Number 5351418



Summary Statement

Survey has confirmed the likely absence of water vole from the on-site watercourse and ditch.

The risk of the Site supporting Water Vole would appear very limited based on recent survey results and historic records from the Site. Further survey should be undertaken during the survey window July - September to bring survey effort in line with guidance and confirm results.

Introduction

1. Brooks Ecological was commissioned to carry out an updating water vole survey at the proposed development Site known as Plot L, Kingsway Business Park, Rochdale.
2. The survey was focussed along a remnant section of watercourse and ditches, likely created when the Site was reprofiled in anticipation of development many years ago; as highlighted in Figure 1 overleaf.

Legal Background

3. In England, water voles are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), receiving full protection since 2008. This Act, together with amending legislation, lists the following as offences:
 - intentionally killing, taking or injuring water voles (Section 9(1));
 - possessing or controlling any live or dead water voles, or 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));
 - intentionally or recklessly obstructing access to a water voles place of shelter or protection (Section 9(4)(c));
 - selling, offering for sale, or possessing or transporting for the purposes of sale, any live or dead water vole, or any derivative, or advertising any of these for buying or selling (Section 9(5)).
4. It is generally agreed that a place of shelter or protection used by water vole includes a network of active burrows and/or any nests that have been constructed within the burrow system or above ground amongst dense vegetation.
5. Water voles occupy a variety of water's edge habitats but can also be found away from water in some regions of the UK. Their places of shelter are normally found within 2m of the water's edge and comprise a series of connected burrows with both above water and under water entrances.

Background

6. The Site is adjacent to Plot M, off the northern boundary. Plot M previously supported Turf Hill Marsh, where historic water vole survey has been carried out during the initial stages of the development of Kingsway Business Park.
7. At this time Turf Hill Marsh supported a population of water vole in what was considered sub-optimal habitat, but which was linked to a population in Sudden Brook which fed the Marsh from the west. Sudden Brook was lost during the development of the Kingsway Business Park, having been trapped out under license, along with Turf Hill Marsh, during 2006-2007. Monitoring of the remaining Turf Hill Marsh area continued for several years after trapping ceased – concluding likely absence on all occasions.
8. As such, continuing surveys of other potential water vole habitat, focused around good potential habitat in the Stanney Brook area, concluded their likely loss from the wider Site in 2018. This is likely due to the continuing presence of mink, general pressures from development, and increases in the numbers of people (particularly dog-walkers) using the area. At this point water vole were considered to have been lost from the Site altogether, and for the purposes of on-going development the risk of impacting on water vole were considered negligible.
9. During late summer 2021, Brooks Ecological were made aware (by GMEU) of a newly logged record of water vole, dated from 2019, and relating to Turf Hill Marsh. The record was provided by a reliable source and "on the 1st November 2019 reported 'Potential feeding signs -Clump of rush with angled cuts'".
10. Following this, surveys were again carried out during 2021, with the primary focus being Turf Hill Marsh itself. Other potentially suitable areas of Plot M were also surveyed, these being terrestrialising ponds and ditches to the northeast of the Site. A likely absence of water vole was concluded following surveys, and Plot M, and the Turf Hill Marsh, have now been built on.

Method

11. Survey followed the methodology for field survey outlined in Dean and Strachan (2016).
12. In this case, early season visits were completed on 5th and 19th April 2023, with camera traps running for the intervening 14 days.
13. Survey was carried out from the banks of the beck and ditch, and where safe to do so within the channel. With the surveyor attempting to locate evidence of water vole including the following field signs:
 - Water vole latrines
 - Sightings of water vole
 - Water vole tunnel entrances
 - Water vole "lawns"
 - Water vole feeding stations
 - Water vole footprints
14. The presence of water vole droppings is the only field sign that can be used reliably on its own.
15. Experience is required to distinguish between feeding remains, burrows and footprints of water vole and other species. However, a combination of these field signs in close proximity is highly suggestive of water vole presence.

Limitations

16. Dense vegetation preventing direct access is present along sections of the watercourse, however these are limited in area and much of it remains accessible.
17. To overcome this constraint, and increase detectability, three floating latrines and remote camera traps were deployed in strategic locations, with two along the ditch and one along the watercourse. This is a survey method that has proven very effective in similarly densely vegetated habitats. Camera traps were deployed on 5th April and collected in on 19th April, as were floating latrines.

Figure 1 Site area (red line), with survey areas, the ditch and watercourse also shown (blue line).



Results

Habitat Assessment

18. Two areas were subject to survey, being the watercourse and the ditch as shown in Figure 1.
19. The watercourse is a remnant section of what was once a continuous stream, but now only flows through part of Plot L. As such, waterflow has been significantly altered by previous phases of development associated with Kingsway Business Park upstream of the Site. It now supports only a limited water flow, despite survey being early in the year when water levels should be higher. Banks and the channel are shallow, except for a brief section where there are steeper stone banks, making it sub-optimal for water vole. Woodland and tree cover is present but is open and suitable foraging opportunities could be present beneath.
20. The ditch was likely created when the Site was partially levelled during a much earlier phase of construction works. It is varied in depth, with the eastern section supporting deeper water but shallower banks, whilst further west it is shallower with more substantial banks. As such some opportunities for burrows are present but limited to western areas. Surrounding grassland would make for suitable foraging areas and much of the Site is a wet grassland particularly over winter which may also support suitable foraging habitat.

Figure 2 Watercourse, mostly dry in this section.



Figure 3a Wetter section of ditch with shallow banks



Figure 3b Drier section with steeper banks



Field Signs

21. No evidence of water vole activity was observed during either of the bankside inspections, and no evidence of them was deposited on any of the floating latrines or recorded on any of the camera traps.

Conclusions & Recommendations

22. Survey in April 2023 has confirmed the likely absence of water vole from the watercourse and ditch.
23. Given that the suitability of any given habitat for water vole can change markedly over the course of the breeding season, affecting the distribution and apparent population size, two survey visits should ideally be undertaken in most cases: one in the first half of the season (mid-April to the end of June) and one in the second half of the season (July to September inclusive). These visits should be undertaken at least two months apart.

Ecological Enhancement

24. It is anticipated the Site will be significantly reprofiled during development, however, even in the absence of water vole, riparian habitats are of value and landscaping should seek to incorporate similar features to those lost. These should be planted and sown with a mix of suitable native marginal and aquatic plant species to maximise value to wildlife. Where possible any new ditches should have a varied profile to create shallow and deeper areas of water, acting as pools and increasing the diversity habitats.

References

- CIEEM (2019) Advice Note - On the Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys
- Dean, M., Strachan, R., Gow, D. and Andrews, R. (2016). *The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook*. The Mammal Society
- Strachan et al., (2011). *Water Vole Conservation Handbook*.
- Ryland, K and Kemp, B (2009) *Using Field Signs to Identify Water Voles ...* Bulletin of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, March 2009
- www.gov.uk Environmental management – guidance