

Update Ecological Assessment

May 2024

**Leicester Road,
Earl Shilton**

Prepared by
CSA Environmental

On behalf of
Vistry South East Midlands

Report No: CSA/4519/12

This report may contain sensitive ecological information. It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to determine if this should be made publicly available.

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CONTENTS	Page
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Methods	2
Update Site Walkover	2
Badger Survey	2
HSI Assessment	3
Limitations	3
3.0 Results	4
Update Site Walkover	4
Badger Survey	4
HSI Assessment	5
4.0 Discussion and Recommendations	6
5.0 References	7

Appendices

Appendix A: Site Photographs

Appendix B: Badger Survey Plan (CSA/4519/115)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by CSA Environmental on behalf of Vistry South East Midlands.
- 1.2 It provides an update review of ecological constraints and opportunities for land at Leicester Road, Earl Shilton where planning permission for 140 homes was agreed in 2022 (ref: 21/00135/OUT).
- 1.3 The review is informed by an update site walkover, badger survey and Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment of the on-site pond, completed in May 2024.
- 1.4 The scope of this report has been determined with due consideration for best-practice guidance provided by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, 2017), and to the *Biodiversity: Code of practice for planning and development* (BS 42020:2013) published by the British Standards Institution (2013).

Ecological Background

- 1.5 During survey work completed at the Site by CSA Environmental during 2019 and 2020, the Site was previously found to support a range of common bat and bird species, as well as individual grass snake *Natrix Helvetica* and brown hare *Lepus europaeus*. A badger *Meles meles* latrine was found confirming their presence locally but no setts were found on-site. Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* were found to be absent from the on-site pond though a population was confirmed more distantly within Earl Shilton village. Habitats at the Site are common and widespread. No constraint was identified in relation to designated sites. Full information is available within the Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) report (CSA/4519/09).

2.0 METHODS

Update Site Walkover

- 2.1 An update site visit was completed by Kate Kibble MCIEEM and Georgina Gard on 14 May 2024 to review any change in Site conditions since the previous ecological survey and assessment work was completed.
- 2.2 Field 1 was not included within the survey as this is being retained under agricultural use, separate from the proposed development (see Appendix B for map showing field references).
- 2.3 The survey was undertaken during intermittent light rain. Photographs of the Site are included in Appendix A.

Badger Survey

- 2.4 A dedicated badger survey was also conducted on 14 May 2024 by Kate Kibble and Georgina Gard, using standard survey methods, searching the Site and immediately adjacent areas for field signs of badger and mapping any present such as:
 - Feeding signs such as 'snuffle holes' made during foraging
 - Hairs caught on vegetation or fences
 - Latrines, usually positioned on territorial boundaries
 - Pathways through vegetation or under fences
 - Badger setts
- 2.5 When badger setts are found the number of entrances are recorded as well as the level of usage. Recording this information gives an indication of the type of sett by categorising it according to the criteria listed in Table 1 below (Harris *et al.* 1989, Cresswell *et al.* 1990, Wilson *et al.* 1997).

Table 1. Sett Description

Sett Type
Main Setts - These usually have a large number of entrances with large spoil heaps, and the sett generally looks well used. There will be well-used paths to and from the sett and between sett entrances. Although normally the breeding sett is in continuous use, it is possible to find a main sett that has become disused due to excessive digging or some other reason; it should be recorded as a disused main sett. In the first survey, the average size of an active main sett was twelve entrances (including all categories of use).
Annexe setts - They are often close to a main sett, usually less than 150 metres away, and are usually connected to the main sett by one or more obvious well-worn paths. They usually have several entrances, but may not be in use all the time even if the main sett is very active. In the first survey the average size was five entrances (including all categories of use).
Subsidiary setts - These often only have a few; four (including all categories of use) was the average number in the first survey. They are usually at least 50 metres from a

main sett, and do not have an obvious path connecting with another sett. They are not continuously active.
Outlying setts - These usually have only one or two entrances, often have little spoil outside the entrance, have no obvious path connecting with another sett, and are only used sporadically. When not in use by badgers, they are often taken over by foxes or even rabbits. However, they can still be recognised as badger setts by the shape of the tunnel (not the actual entrance entrance), which is usually at least 250mm in diameter, and is rounded or a flattened oval shape. Fox and rabbit tunnels are smaller and often taller than broad.
Entrance Type
Well used entrances - These are clear of any debris or vegetation, are obviously in regular use, and may or may not have been excavated recently.
Partially used entrances - These are not in regular use and have debris such as leaves and twigs in the entrance, or have moss and/or other plants growing in or around the entrance. Partially used entrances could be in regular use after a minimal amount of clearance.
Disused entrances - These have not been in use for some time, are partially or completely blocked, and could not be used without a considerable amount of clearance. If the entrance has been disused for some time, all that may be visible is a depression in the ground where the entrance used to be, and the remains of the spoil heap, which may be covered in moss or plants.

HSI Assessment

- 2.6 A Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessments was undertaken for the on-site pond to help determine any change in its character, and suitability for breeding great crested newts. The ponds were assessed by Kate Kibble (Class Survey Licence CL08 – Registration number: 2015-16710-CLS-CLS) and Georgina Gard, using the standard approach set out by Oldham et al (2000).

Limitations

- 2.7 Very dense scrub prevented thorough searching for badger setts within certain areas of the Site. These areas are shown on the Badger Survey Plan in Appendix B. These areas were mostly limited in extent but the presence of distinct pathways through the scrub suggests that there may be unseen evidence of badger which should be considered during future surveys or construction-related clearance works.

3.0 RESULTS

Update Site Walkover

- 3.1 The Site conditions were consistent with those previously assessed within the Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA). No grazing animals were currently present within the grassland fields at the time of survey.
- 3.2 It was observed that habitat clearance and pre-commencement works had been commenced on land to the south of the Site for a separate residential development (20/00916/FUL).
- 3.3 Photos of the Site conditions are included in Appendix A.

Badger Survey

- 3.4 A badger survey plan showing field signs (or potential field signs) of badger is included within Appendix B.
- 3.5 No definitive evidence of badger was found within the Site itself, such as setts or latrines. However, several mammal paths were recorded in and around the on-site area of woodland, as well as through grassland and scrub in the south-east corner of field F4 and beneath heras fencing marking the boundary of the adjacent development site. There was a possible badger footprint in mud within the woodland but this was poorly defined.
- 3.6 A badger sett was visible just off-site to the south (within the adjacent development land), and this had been fitted with badger exclusion gates that were partly blocked, indicating that badgers had been excluded from the sett (under licence from Natural England). Documentation on the public domain indicates that a main badger sett and an outlier badger sett were previously found within that land and that mitigation was required as part of the proposed development. Information is limited however as all detail has been withheld from the public realm for confidentiality reasons. It is therefore suspected that the sett found represents the main sett and an artificial sett is likely to have been constructed elsewhere. The location of other badger setts is unknown. Mammal pathways leading to and near the former sett were apparent and there may be extant setts or newly dug nearby. The pathways suggest that badgers are accessing the Site.
- 3.7 The survey was undertaken at a time of year when vegetation was very dense, and it wasn't possible to search or view all areas. Whilst there was no evidence of mammal activity across most of the Site to suggest badger activity within an inaccessible area, the eastern boundary of the woodland was found to support several clear pathways as well as a possible badger footprint. This area is relatively close to the impacted sett to the south, so on-site evidence may only relate to foraging

badgers. However, there exists potential for a badger sett to be present within the dense scrub/hedgerow surrounding the eastern and southern tip of the woodland. The evidence suggests that if a sett was present, this would likely only be a small outlying sett and not a more significant main sett.

HSI Assessment

- 3.8 The on-site pond appeared similar to previous visits. There was a significant amount of bulrush within the open water (c. 50%) with dense tall ruderals around the eastern banks, and overhanging hedgerow trees and scrub around the western side. A summary of the HSI results are set out in Table 1:

Table 1: Habitat Suitability Index Assessment of on-site pond

SI No	SI Description	Results	SI Value
1	Geographic location	A	1
2	Pond area	175m ²	0.35
3	Pond permanence	Rarely dries	1
4	Water quality	Moderate	0.67
5	Shade	0.4	1
6	Water fowl effect	Absent	1
7	Fish presence	Major	0.01
8	Pond Density	7	0.85
9	Terrestrial habitat	Good	1
10	Macrophyte cover	50%	0.8
HSI Score			0.53
Pond suitability (see below)			Below Average

Categorisation of HSI Score

HSI Score	Pond Suitability
< 0.50	Poor
0.50 - 0.59	Below average
0.60 - 0.69	Average
0.70 - 0.79	Good
> 0.80	Excellent

Based on ARGUK Advice Note 5 - Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index (Oldham *et al*, 2000)

- 3.9 The pond was found to support the same suitability for great crested newt as previously. The only aspect which may have changed is a slight increase in bulrush coverage. The previous eDNA survey (2020) returned a negative result for great crested newt. With a lack of other ponds in close proximity to the Site, it is suspected that great crested newt remain absent.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 With reference to the EclA report prepared to support the planning application (CSA/4519/09) there have no significant changes to the Site conditions and the previous conclusions are considered to remain valid.
- 4.2 The only added consideration is confirmation of badger activity adjacent to the Site, with likely badger presence within the Site and the potential for unseen setts. Planning condition 7 of the outline consent requires a detailed badger mitigation strategy to be submitted prior to commencement of the development. This is being prepared as a separate document but will set out measures to ensure that both the construction and operation of the development fully consider badgers and the legal protection afforded to them and their setts.
- 4.3 A Reptile Mitigation Strategy has also been prepared (CSA/4519/13) to set out precautionary working measures for vegetation clearance works at the Site where there is potential for grass snake to occur.

5.0 REFERENCES

British Standards Institution, 2013. *BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity — Code of practice for planning and development*. London: BSI.

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Appendix A

Site Photographs



Photograph 1. Eastern field (F4), view south



Photograph 2. Well-developed hedgerow/scrub edge.



Photograph 3. Semi-mature woodland



Photograph 4. Overview of central field (F2)



Photograph 5. View south across F3.

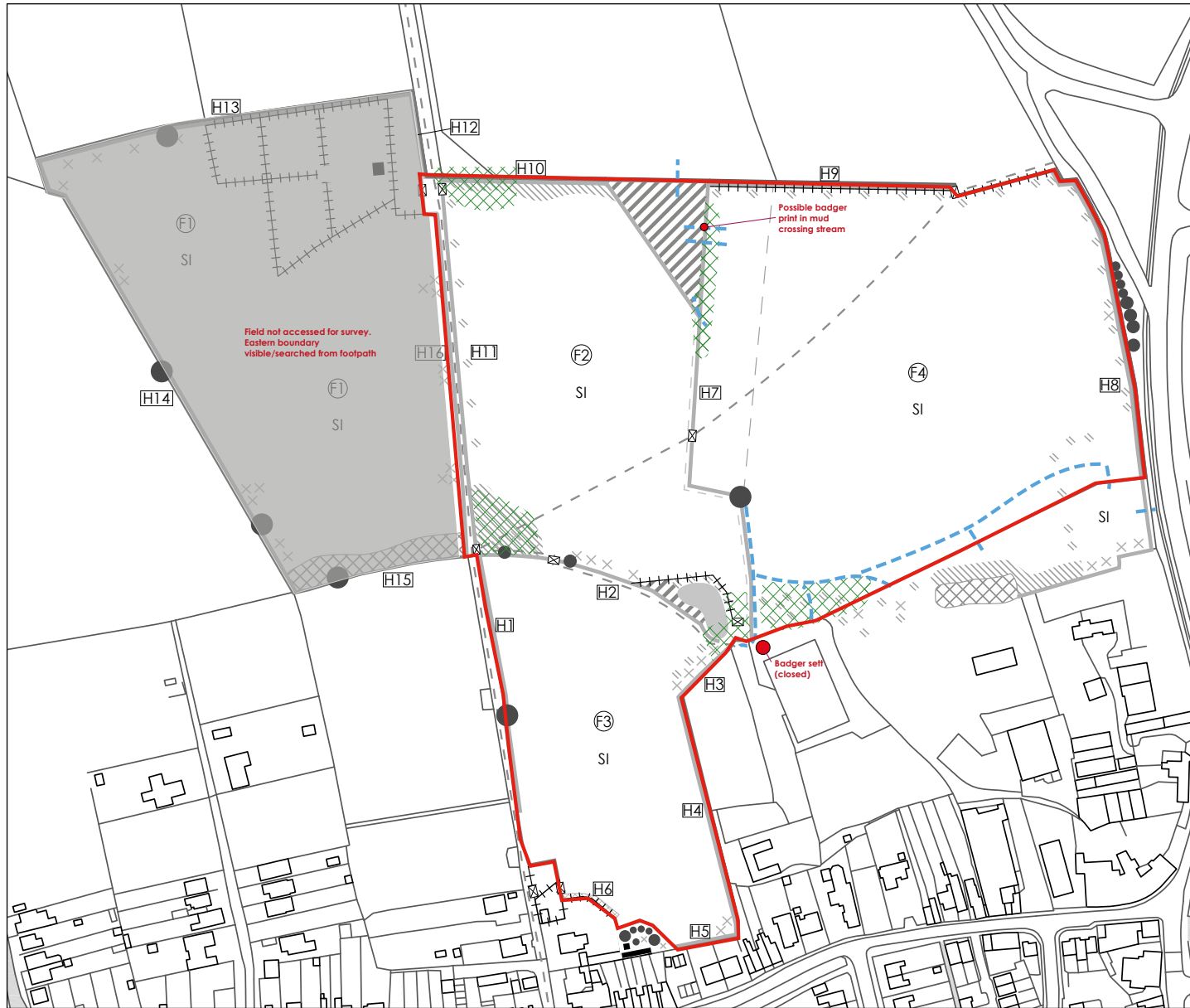


Photograph 6. Adjacent development land to south.

Appendix B

Badger Survey Plan

CSA/4519/115



-  Survey Area
-  Mammal Pathway
-  Badger field signs (see notes on map)
-  Dense scrub/vegetation inaccessible for full survey

*Base plan adapted from Habitats Plan (CSA/4591/105)



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Project Leicester Road, Earl Shilton
Drawing Title Badger Survey Plan: 2024
Client Vistry South East Midlands

Date	May 2024	Drawing No.	CSA/4519/115
Scale	Refer to scale	Rev	-
Drawn	KK	Checked	AP



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