

Client Name: Axis PED
On Behalf of: Kronospan
Site Name: Kronospan, Chirk – Engineering Stores
Project Ref: AxisL-043-1588
Date: 11th April 2023

Condition Discharge Report – Condition 9

Introduction

Avian Ecology have been commissioned by Axis PED to undertake a site inspection for evidence of badger and nesting birds in relation to the proposed development of new engineering stores (the 'Proposed Development') at the Kronospan wood product manufacturing plant in Chirk, Wrexham, LL14 5NT (the 'Site').

The Proposed Development has been granted planning permissions, subject to conditions (Ref: P/2022/0615). Condition 9 of the permissions concerns the requirement for pre-construction checks for badger and nesting birds, as follows:

Condition 9: *No part of the development shall commence, including any site / tree / vegetation clearance, until the site has been inspected by a competent ecologist for signs of occupation by badgers or breeding birds. The results of this survey shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development / site clearance works shall commence no later than within one month of the approval of these survey results.*

This report presents the results of a pre-construction survey.

Methodology

The Site and immediately adjacent habitats were subject to a walkover survey on 16th March 2023 by Mr. K. Love, a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist. The primary focus of the survey was to look for evidence of badger and nesting birds. Evidence of any protected species that may have taken up residence within the Site since the extended habitat surveys was also noted. The results of the extended habitat surveys are presented within the Ecological Assessment Report¹ for the Proposed Development.

The survey involved walking all suitable habitats within the Site, with a particular focus on earth bunds bounding the Site. The survey included a search for badger setts and field signs such as latrines, pathways and hair.

The classification of sett entrances as active, partially used, or disused, follows Harris, Cresswell & Jefferies (1989)². Active sett entrances are clear of any debris or vegetation, and will have some of the following features, well-worn paths, spoil mounds, footprints, fresh bedding outside the entrance and / or footprints leading in. Partially used entrances are considered to not show signs of current use (e.g.

¹ Avian Ecology (2022) Kronospan, Chirk – Engineering stores: Ecological Assessment Report

² Harris, H., Cresswell, P. and Jefferies, D. (1989) *Surveying Badgers*. Available at: https://www.mammal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Surveying_Badgers_Mammal_Society.compressed.pdf

have vegetation growing across the entrance), but could easily be reused if required. Disused sett entrances are partially or completely blocked, with substantial excavation required to allow reoccupation.

Main setts are considered to be the most important sett within the territory of a badger group or clan, and are where breeding takes place. They tend to be large, with five or more entrances and large spoil heaps and to be used throughout the year. Annexe setts also have many well used entrances, and tend to be 50-150m from the main sett, connected by well-worn paths, but may not be used all year round. Subsidiary setts are not usually connected to the main sett by obvious paths, and may have any number of entrances. Outlier setts tend to have only one or two holes and are used occasionally. There may be no obvious path to an outlier sett.

The inspection for nesting birds was undertaken by carefully monitoring suitable vegetation for evidence of breeding birds visually through looking for visible nests, watching birds for nesting behaviours such as the gathering of nesting material and/ or food and repeat visits to the same location and listening for alarm calls, singing and/ or territorial displays.

Results and Discussion

A map showing the results of the surveys is presented as **Figure 1** with photographs presented as **Appendix 1**.

Nesting Birds

No confirmed current nesting attempts were observed within the Site, however calling wren and blue tit were noted within cypress trees to the north of the Site. Additionally, a woodpigeon was flushed from within this line of trees, with an old nest observed nearby, however no conclusive evidence of fresh vegetation or current nest occupation was observed.

It is recommended that vegetation clearance is undertaken as soon as practicable before further nesting attempts. Any vegetation clearance should be undertaken under a watching brief by a suitably qualified ecologist to ensure no new nests have been established in the intervening period.

Badger

A single hole outlier badger sett (TN1, Figure 1) was observed within the earth bund bounding the Site to the south, with a faint mammal path leading to the entrance. The entrance to the tunnel was clear with fresh earth and no debris, and so is considered to be active, however given the outlier status of the sett this usage is likely to be sporadic only and so may go for extensive periods without showing use.

Additionally, fresh badger latrines were found immediately outside of the Site (TN2, Figure 1), confirming badger are likely to utilise the Site.

In order to confirm badger occupation and assess activity levels at this sett, sett monitoring has commenced utilising a motion activated camera and soft blocking with sticks. Monitoring commenced on the 28th March and will be undertaken for a minimum of 21 days. It should be noted however that an absence of use within these 21 days does not necessarily mean the sett has been abandoned.

Natural Resources Wales have produced a guide³ for developers relating to badgers which states:

“Before a sett can be damaged or closed without a licence it would have to be demonstrated that the sett had been abandoned by badgers and is not just currently unoccupied. Monitoring for a period of up to 12 months may be needed to demonstrate this.”

It is anticipated that this monitoring will inform a licence application to Natural Resources Wales. Any licence granted by NRW would only permit works between July and November to avoid disturbing badgers when pregnant or nursing cubs⁴.

While it is considered that badgers using the sett will be habituated to the considerable levels of disturbance associated with current use of the Site, no vegetation clearance works should be undertaken within a minimum of 10m of the identified sett to ensure no damage occurs.

Additionally, no works generating noise significantly exceeding baseline levels should be undertaken within 30m of the sett.

Conclusion

No confirmed bird nesting attempts were observed within the Site, and therefore it is recommended that vegetation clearance is undertaken as soon as practicable. Vegetation clearance should be undertaken under a watching brief by a suitably qualified ecologist in case any nests are established in the intervening period.

An active, single hole outlier badger sett was found within the Site. A 10m exclusion zone should be established around the sett, in which no site clearance works should be carried out, while further monitoring is undertaken to establish occupation and patterns of use. It is anticipated a licence would be required from Natural Resources Wales in order for the development to proceed lawfully.

Additionally, no noise generating works above baseline levels should be undertaken within 30m of the Sett.

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https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20140523111208/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/WMLG17_tcm6-11815.pdf

⁴ <https://naturalresources.wales/permits-and-permissions/species-licensing/list-of-protected-species/badger-licensing?lang=en>

Appendix 1: Photographs

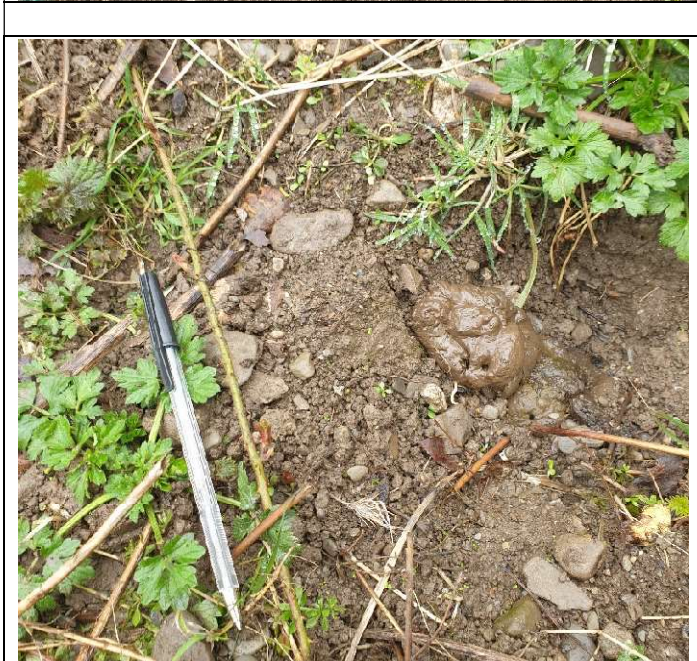
	TN1: Single hole, outlier badger sett along southern site boundary.
	TN1: Single hole, outlier badger sett along southern site boundary.
	TN2: Fresh badger latrine outside site western boundary

Figure 1: Badger and Nesting Bird Check Results

