

## Preferred ecological survey report headings

The information provided in your site survey report is crucial to the LA ecologists in reviewing planning applications and advising the planning officer with regard to whether a planning permission would be legal under the relevant European and domestic environmental legislation and whether it support policy. Insufficient information or unclear conclusions as to how the proposed development could impact on the ecology of the site may mean we have to request additional survey, which may delay the planning decision.

To assist you in presenting essential evidence, your report should include the following information:

**Summary sheet:** This should be a single page of bullet points stating the date of survey, the OS grid reference of the site, together with the main findings, conclusions and recommendations for mitigation where necessary.

### Main report

#### Introduction

- Aims and objectives of survey and report
- Site location – include maps, aerial photographs and OS grid reference
- Site description including as much of the following information as can be gathered:
  - Area measurement of application site
  - Current use of site (e.g. farmland, school site, light industrial, brownfield)
  - Previous use of site if abandoned
- Description of proposed works (including all necessary infrastructure) – ensure that you have sought this information from the developer and conduct your survey(s) appropriately.

#### Methodology

- Desk study
  - List all sources used. If no desk study has been undertaken, this must be stated with reasons for the omission.
  - The main source of species records and local sites designations should always be the local biodiversity records centre to ensure the most accurate resolution.
- Field survey
  - Date of survey
  - Survey methodology used e.g. BCT Bat survey guidelines; NE Great Crested Newt Survey Guidelines and evidence that the survey methodology has been tailored to the specific site conditions.
  - Weather conditions
  - Names of all surveyors, their species licence numbers and relevant competencies/experience
  - List of equipment used by each surveyor (e.g. number of surveyors, number of bat detectors used, type of bat detector, type of traps, etc.)

#### Limitations of survey

- If there are any areas of the site or immediate surroundings that are not accessible for survey, this must be explained in full since there is a risk that significant

features, habitats and species may remain undetected or their importance misinterpreted.

## Results

- State the findings of your survey(s) as clearly as possible, including:
  - What habitat(s) are present on the site – Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats? Locally/nationally important?
  - What adjacent habitats exist: immediately outside the site and in the wider landscape, whether good connectivity is evident.
  - Potential for European Protected Species (EPS) to use site
- Evidence of EPS using site
  - What evidence was found
  - Where the evidence was found
  - Whether ID of species from this evidence is possible
  - Understanding of species' use of the site, not just their presence/absence
- Evidence of other protected species using site
  - Nerc Act S.41 lists of species and habitats of principal importance
  - What? Where? How many?

## Conclusions

- Make an assessment of the significance of any habitats and species within or adjacent to the site that could be affected by the proposal.
- Give your professional judgement as to how the proposed development will impact on the ecology of the site, based on the evidence found during survey.
- Ensure that all numbered plans, appendices and photographic evidence are fully referenced to ensure clarity.
- State whether further survey is required, what that should consist of and when it should be carried out.
- Can all expected impacts be mitigated for?
- Give clear recommendations of what mitigation measures will be needed to ensure no adverse impact to habitats or species.
- State whether any part of the proposed development could have an adverse impact for which it will not be possible to design suitable mitigation.

## Recommendations

- Timing of works to reduce adverse impacts
- Specific mitigation designed to remove or reduce impacts on named habitats or species

## Mitigation

- Mitigation must be designed specifically to avoid or reduce the impacts of the development on the ecology of the site
- NOT broad brush, "worst case scenario" solutions
- While the Local Planning Authority (LPA) ecologists are prepared to consider innovative mitigation where appropriate, they require a high level of confidence that proposed mitigation will be successful
- Ensure that you cite other situations where this mitigation has proven successful
- Your mitigation strategy should build on cumulative national and international knowledge
- Any mitigation proposed may also need approval from the LPA landscape officer

- For larger projects mitigation schemes should have monitoring built in to assess their success and allow for minor adjustment to ensure effectiveness
- If mitigation is designed for EPS it must be likely to satisfy the NE licensing criteria
- If a licence is likely to be refused the LPA cannot issue the planning permission.

### **Enhancement**

- This must be designed over and above mitigation
- Design for named habitats and/or species
- In line with Wiltshire BAP targets
- Examples:
  - Improve connectivity between habitats for dormouse by extra planting
  - Increase area of priority habitat e.g. chalk grassland
  - Increase roosting opportunities for bats in structure of building
  - Management of rough grassland around amenity grassland for reptiles

N.B. Although Wiltshire Council does not require legislation and policy to be quoted in your report, it can be useful to include a brief summary of the relevant parts for the benefit of the client.