



Water Vole Survey Report

Hollins Cross
Burnley

Prepared on behalf of
Prospect GB

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REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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This report is based on survey data collected at this site at Hollins Cross, Burnley BB11 2QN.

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1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Biora Ltd was commissioned by Prospect GB in August 2021 to undertake an update Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius* survey of all ditches around the site boundary to determine the status of Water Vole at this location and to ascertain whether proposed development of this site would have any impact on this protected species.
- 1.2 Despite the site supporting good potential habitat and exhibiting good connectivity with a wide network of drainage ditches, no evidence of Water Vole was found at this location.
- 1.3 The proposed development of this site would not, therefore, result in any significant adverse impact on Water Vole in either the short-to long-term and there are, therefore, no recommendations for any licensing, mitigation or compensation for this species.
- 1.4 The 2019 PEA by BWB found no records of Water Vole in the desktop study within 2km of the site. The dedicated Water Vole survey by BWB found no evidence of this species. Update survey by Biora found no evidence of Water Vole during the survey.
- 1.5 Given the absence of evidence of Water Vole at this location, there are currently no recommendations for any licensing, mitigation or compensation for this species. Beneficial mitigation could include:
- *programme for the removal of non-native species (if present)*
 - *in any remodelling of the watercourses, enhancement with appropriate native emergent and riparian flora and provision for a wider range of habitats*
 - *implementation of a sympathetic management regime of the water courses, to encourage a diverse range of native herbaceous flora and to discourage over-shading of the water courses.*

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background and Commission

- 2.1.1 Biora Ltd was commissioned by Prospect GB in August 2021 to undertake an update Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius* survey of all ditches around the site boundary to determine the status of Water Vole at this location and to ascertain whether proposed development of this site would have any impact on this protected species.
- 2.1.2 A thorough survey effort had previously been carried out at this site by BWB, including: Preliminary ecological appraisal report (November 2019) and a wide range of Phase II Surveys [ref: HCF-BWB-ZZ-RP-LE-0001_PSS] (October 2020). These should be read in conjunction with this report.
- 2.1.3 The results of the Phase II Surveys are still deemed as current and reliable as they were conducted last survey season (2020), and therefore they have not been repeated this year. The eDNA was not updated this survey season due to the time of year of the instruction, however as the previous seasons results were negative and the conditions on site have not changed, it is acceptable to assume that GCN are still absent from these ponds.
- 2.1.3 The following update surveys and assessments were conducted by Biora in 2021:
- Botanical walkover (update)
 - Invasive species (update)
 - Water vole check (update)
 - BNG habitats and calculation

2.2 Legislation and Policy

- 2.2.1 In 2008 the Water Vole received an increased level of legal protection, becoming fully covered by the provisions of section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Prior to this, the species was only covered by section 9(4) and had limited legal protection. Full legal protection under the Act makes it an offence to:
- Intentionally kill, injure or take Water Voles
 - Possess or control live or dead Water Voles or derivatives
 - Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection
 - Intentionally or recklessly disturb Water Voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose
 - Sell Water Voles or offer or expose for sale or transport for sale
 - Publish or cause to be published any advertisement which conveys the buying or selling of Water Voles
- 2.2.2 Water Vole is listed as a Section 41 'Species of Principle Importance'. The section 41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 *'to have regard' to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when reaching any planning decision*.
- 2.2.3 Water Vole is a conservation priority species (Biodiversity Action Plan) in the UK, where the population has undergone a 90% decline during the past century (Strachan et al. 2000). The causes of the decline have primarily been attributed to the widespread loss of suitable wetland habitats and predation of populations by feral American mink *Neovison vison* (Jefferies et al. 1989).
- 2.2.4 Water Vole is listed under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework, which sets out targets and objectives for the conservation of listed species and is used to guide decision makers to have regard to these targets and the goals they aim to achieve.
- 2.2.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 sets out Government policy on biodiversity in planning decisions. Both the NPPF and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Circular 06/05 state that Local Planning Authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity. These documents set out the Government's view on how planners should balance nature conservation with development and helps to ensure that Government meets its biodiversity commitments regarding the operation of the planning system.
- 2.2.6 The NPPF confirms that weight may be given to policies in emerging plans following their publication and that the wider benefits of an ecosystem should be recognised. Both the NPPF and ODPM Circular 06/05 state that the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal. In accordance with the NPPF, it is important that developments should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- Minimising impacts on existing biodiversity and habitats,
- Providing net gains in biodiversity and habitats, wherever possible,
- Establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

2.3 Aims of the Survey

2.3.1 Survey aimed to:

- Determine the presence or likely absence of Water Vole and the location and size of any Water Vole populations occurring within the application boundary or adjacent to it
- Determine the impact of the proposed development scheme on any Water Vole population(s) identified by survey
- Highlight any other potential ecological constraints to the proposed development of this site
- Advise on any mitigation or licensing requirements where development is likely to impact Water Vole or other protected species

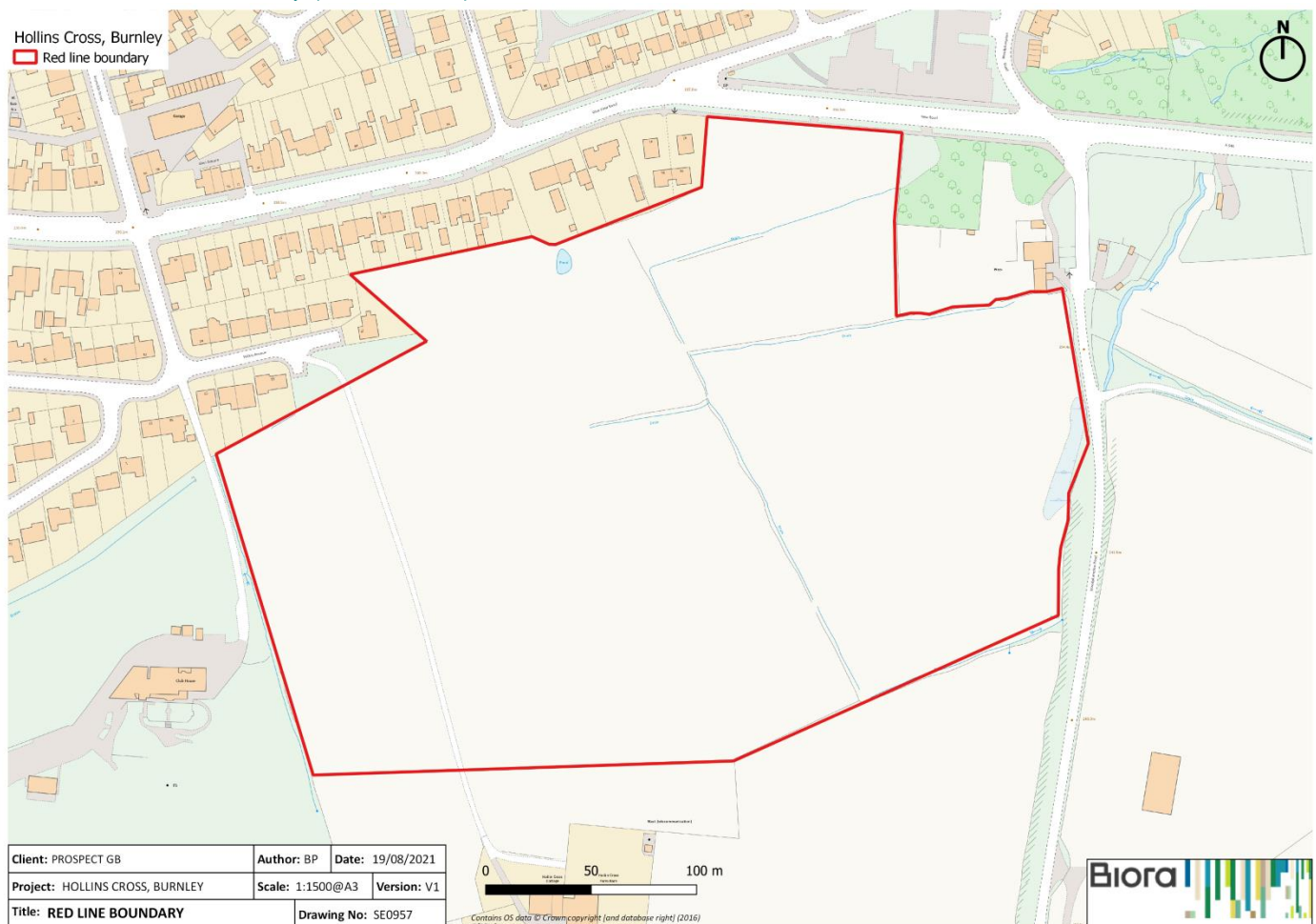
2.4 Site Description and Context

2.4.1 Measuring approximately 8.78 ha and situated within Burnley, the application site is located within a semi-rural setting. The red-line boundary, hereby referred to as ‘the site’, comprises a site of largely neutral grassland, currently used for grazing livestock, with a hardstanding path running through which is for access to Hollins Cross farmhouse. The site is bound by Burnley Golf Course to the west, residential areas and an A-road to the north, and further open fields to the east and south.

2.4.2 The site is centred on OS grid reference **SD 83729 30724**.

2.4.3 The application boundary is presented as a red line at *Plan 1*.

Plan 1: Red line boundary (not to scale)



3.0 SURVEY METHODS

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 A desk study was undertaken by BWB in their Preliminary Ecological Appraisal report at this site (November 2019).

3.2 Field Survey

3.2.1 Field survey followed standard methodologies described in the 3rd Edition of *The Water Vole Conservation Handbook* (Strachan et al. 2011)¹ and *The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook* (Dean et al. 2016)².

3.2.2 An assessment of the suitability of watercourses and waterbodies within the survey area to support Water Vole was guided by the presence of habitat conditions considered to influence the presence of Water Vole, i.e. water depth and flow, bankside cover, suitable food plants, bank gradient and suitable burrowing substrate, the presence of predators and/or competitors, e.g. American Mink *Neovison vison* and Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*, and the connectivity of the site to the wider environment.

3.2.3 Survey of suitable habitat extended 2 m up each bank from the water's edge. Any field signs of Water Vole activity encountered, including burrows, nests, latrines, prints and feeding stations, recorded by survey had their position marked using a hand-held GPS unit (accuracy 3-6 m) and details noted on standard field recording forms. Field signs within the survey area indicating the presence of Water Vole competitors or predators were also noted.

3.1.7 Details of field survey date(s), time, personnel, weather conditions and equipment used are presented in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Surveyors, dates and weather conditions

SURVEY TYPE	DATE/ TIME	SURVEYORS PRESENT	WEATHER CONDITIONS
Water Vole Check	18th August 2021 Start time: 11:00	Amy Stanley (Lead ecologist), Bethany Phythian (Ecologist)	Air temperature: 15°C, Wind speed: 31km/h W, Cloud cover: 20% cloud, Precipitation: 0

3.3 Survey personnel

3.3.1 Amy Stanley **BSc PG Dip, ACIEEM** is a Senior Ecologist at Biora with over seven years' experience of leading ecological surveys. Amy is a level 2 licence holder for Bats and level 1 licence holder for Great Crested Newts. Amy provides technical support to clients and training to other ecologists. Amy is an Associate Member of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and a member of Cheshire Bat Group. She is highly experienced in conducting bat surveys and in preparing appropriate bat mitigation packages.

3.3.2 Bethany Phythian **BSc GradCIEEM** is an Ecologist at Biora and is experienced in conducting habitat and protected species surveys. She has over four years' experience of surveying for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, bats, great crested newts, breeding birds and reptiles, and over a years' experience of project management and co-ordinating ecological surveys. Beth also has experience of putting together Natural England GCN district level and bat licences. She is a member of South Lancashire Bat Group.

3.4 Survey Constraints and Limitations

3.4.1 No constraints were identified.

¹ Strachan, R., Moorhouse, T. & Gelling, M. (2011) *Water Vole Conservation Handbook (3rd Edition)*. WildCRU: Oxford

² Dean, M., Strachan, N. R., Gow, D. and Andrews, R. (2016) *The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook* (The Mammal Society Mitigation Guidance Series). Eds F. Matthews and P. Chanin. The Mammal Society.

4.0 SURVEY RESULTS AND EVALUATION

4.1 Desktop Survey

- 4.1.1 The 2019 PEA by BWB found no records of Water Vole in the desktop study within 2km of the site.
- 4.1.2 The dedicated Water Vole survey by BWB found no evidence of this species.

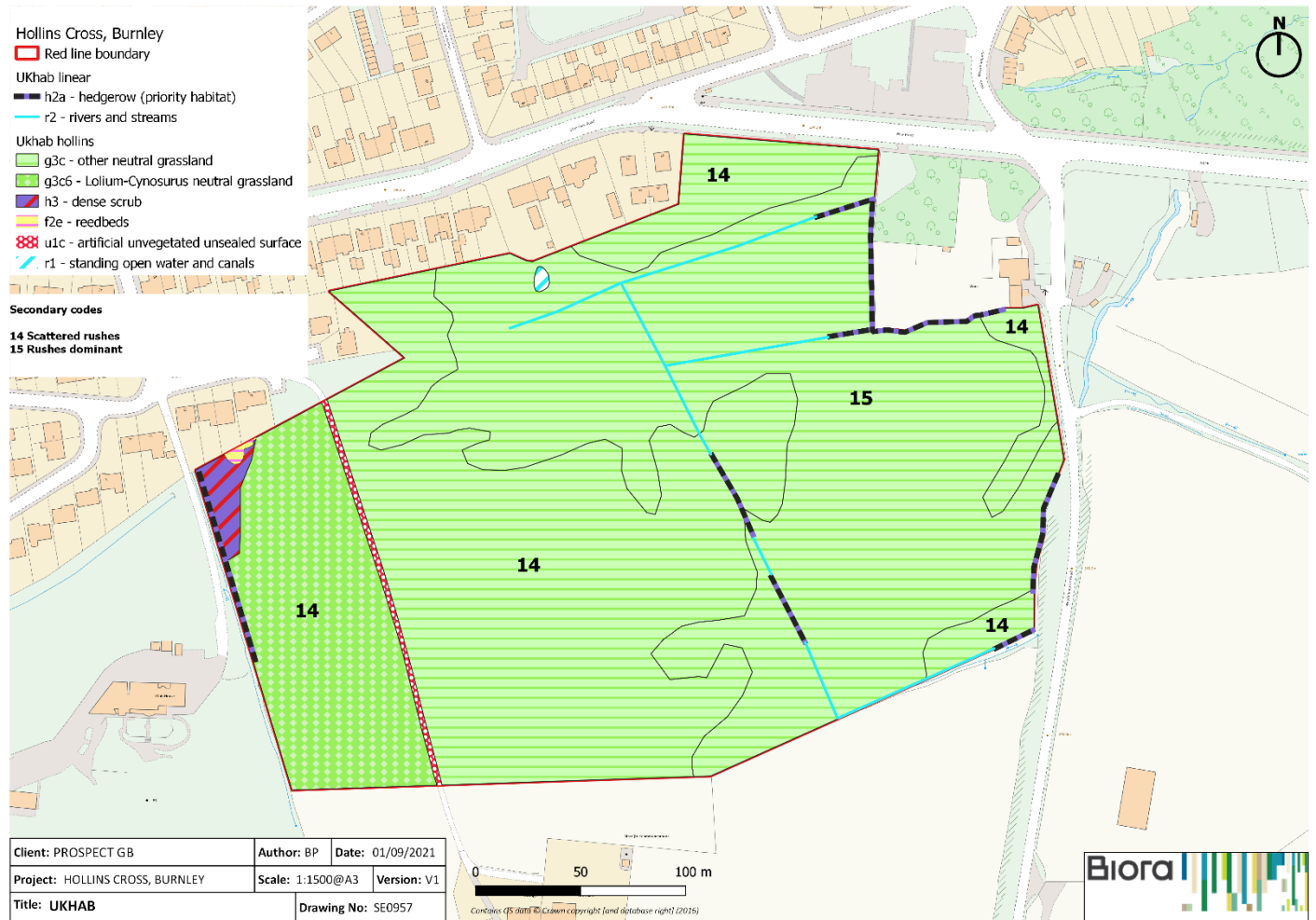
4.2 Field Survey

- 4.2.1 The extensive ditches on site had previously been assessed as having potential habitat for Water Vole. The ditches were found to be mostly dry after a period of wet weather. It was deemed unlikely that the ditches supported a permanent population of Water Voles due to the low water level.
- 4.2.1 No evidence of water vole was identified during the survey.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1.1 The potential Water Vole habitat at this site and in the adjacent landscape was good for provision of cover and grazing, and well connected to the wider landscape through a series of ditches.
- 5.1.2 There were no signs of Water Vole or Mink, one of the major predators. Previous survey by BWB found no Water Vole evidence.
- 5.1.3 Given the absence of evidence of Water Vole at this location, there are currently no recommendations for any licensing, mitigation or compensation for this species. Mitigation for development which would benefit biodiversity may include:
- *programme for the removal of non-native species (if present)*
 - *in any remodelling of the watercourses, enhancement with appropriate native emergent and riparian flora and provision for a wider range of habitats*
 - *implementation of a sympathetic management regime of the water courses, to encourage a diverse range of native herbaceous flora and to discourage over-shading of the water courses.*

Figure 1: UKHab plan - showing location of ditches assessed for Water Vole



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