

BADGER SURVEY WINKHILL

JULY 2008

INTRODUCTION

This survey has been produced at the request of the Winter Partnership in relation to the planning application for W G Tonkers.

THE SITE

This site is approximatelyhectares and is situated at Winkhill, to the North West of Ashbourne and South East of Leek, in the Staffordshire moorlands. Most of this site is covered by heathland, although the actual development area has had the top layer removed. A percentage of this site is to be left undisturbed and later managed as a heathland site.

BADGERS

Badgers live in family or social groups of related mature and young adults and cubs, sometimes known as clans. Their 'home ranges' consist of feeding grounds and one or more setts. A badger set is defined in the legislation as 'any structure or place, which displays signs indicating current use by a badger'. Sets can usually be classified as one of the following:- 1

1) **Main sets:** Usually have a large number of holes within large soil heaps and the set generally looks well used. They have well used paths to and from the sett and between the sett entrances. Although normally the breeding sett is in continuous use all year round, it is possible to find a main sett that has become disused because of excessive disturbance or for some other reason 2

2) **Annexe setts:** These are always close to a main sett and are usually connected to the main sett by one or more obvious well- worn paths. They consist of several holes, but are not necessarily in use all the time even if the main sett is very active 2

3) **Subsidiary setts:** Often these have only a few holes, are usually at least 50m from a main sett and do not have an obvious path connecting them with another sett. They are not continuously active 2

4) **Outlying setts:** These usually only have one or two holes, often they have a little spoil outside the hole, have no obvious path connecting them with another sett, and are only used periodically.

BADGERS AND THE LAW

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 offers the badgers and their setts significant protection. Planning authorities are required to take them into account when assessing planning applications. This legislation makes it illegal (without license) to:

- wilfully kill, injure or take, or attempt to kill, injure or take, a badger
- cruelly ill-treat a badger, dig for a badger using badger tongs, use a firearm other than a type specified under the exceptions, within the Act
- interfere with a badger sett by damaging, destroying, obstructing, causing a dog to enter a sett, disturbing an occupied sett, either by intent or negligence
- sell or offer for sale a live badger, having possession or control of a live badger
- mark a badger or attached any ring, tag or other marking device to a badger

THE SURVEY

The whole site was surveyed for the presence of badgers including 30 metres beyond the development area unless the road or river bordered it. A detailed methodical search was carried out on several days. The evidence of badgers looked for are as follows:-

- latrines: badgers usually deposit faeces in characteristic excavated pits, concentration of which, is typically found along home territories
- sets: as described in 'About Badgers'
- pathways: badgers frequently use routine pathways between setts and/or leading to feeding areas
- footprints: badgers footprints are very characteristic and easy to identify
- hairs: characteristic badger hairs can be found caught on fences and vegetation near setts and feeding areas
- evidence of feeding: badgers leave characteristic holes and scrapes where they forage for invertebrates and bulbs etc
- scratching: marks on tree trunks

FINDINGS

Having checked with Staffordshire ecological record centre, no records were found on this site. However some time ago a single RTA was recorded several hundred metres from this site.

During discussions with several parties involved in this development a badger sett had been found on this site. My initial surveys found no evidence of a badger sett, but I did come across a pathway, which looked to be that of a badger. On further investigation no hairs were found on brambles etc along the pathway. During a later visit with Emma Mortimer (SMDC) Countryside Officer, we located the sett. This sett lies approximately 30 metres away from the development boundary and 10 - 15 metres away from the field boundary to the South East of the site.

It is my opinion that this is an outlying sett, which is, at the time of this survey, unoccupied. No other evidence of badgers was found on or near this site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 requires

- not using very heavy machinery i.e usually tracted machinery within 30 metres of an entrance to an active sett
- not using lighter machinery (generally wheeled), particularly for digging operations, within 20 metres

With this sett being close to the 30-metre mark, my advice would be to re-visit the sett on the commencement of the development and at regular intervals during the development. If at any time the sett becomes occupied, and the above advice could not be adhered to, then Natural England should be consulted for advice. The pathway that was found on the initial survey is further away from the development and therefore will not be disturbed.

At no time during this development should any machinery, or storage of any materials, be allowed within 20 metres of this set.

REFERENCES

- 1) Thornton, P. S. (1988)
- 2) Natural England Badgers and Development

Entrance 1 (note intrusion grass)



Entrance 2 (again intrusion vegetation)





Entrance 2 (note old spiderweb)



Pathway (nearly overgrown)