

ECOLOGICAL SCOPING ASSESSMENT



Site Name:	Spencer Close	Location (Address):	GU16 6HN
Grid Reference:	SU 88455 56559	Report Date:	22/10/2020

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69	The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1012/contents/made
--	---

SCOPE OF WORKS *(Briefly describe the extent of works planned to be undertaken at the site):*

Due to health and safety concerns it has been proposed that a footbridge should be installed to replace the current pedestrian level crossings at The Hatches and Farnborough North train station. In order to carry out these works it is proposed that a compound is to be created on an area of land adjacent to the western end of Spencer Close. In accordance with Network Rail's environmental policy and relevant UK legislation, an ecological assessment was required to determine any ecological constraints to the proposed works.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site and adjacent habitats (where access was available) was conducted by Ecologist [REDACTED] on 20th September 2020. The purpose of the survey was to determine the value of the site and surrounding areas for protected and notable species and check for any evidence of their presence, as well as the presence of any protected or notable habitats. The survey was carried out with specific regard for the presence or otherwise of badgers (*Meles meles*), bats, great crested newts (GCNs) (*Triturus cristatus*), nesting birds, hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), and reptiles, as well as the potential for any other protected or notable species or any invasive species to be present. In addition, as part of the desktop study forming part of the overall assessment, the presence of any statutory or non-statutory ecological designations on or adjacent to the site was determined using the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) resource and records of protected and notable species and any non-statutory designated sites not available through MAGIC for a 1 km radius surrounding the site were also requested from Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre (SBIC).

SITE DESCRIPTION AND NOTES *(Description of ecological features identified on site):*

Overview

The site could not be assessed in detail as access to the site could not be gained. However, a small area of the site could be viewed from the western end of Spencer Close. The site is located at the western end of Spencer Close, a residential road situated within the village of Frimley Green. The site consists of deciduous trees, ruderal vegetation, unimproved grassland, and large patches of bare ground. A bank is present along the eastern boundary of the site which has been colonised by species such as immature pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*). Along the western boundary of the site is a line of coniferous trees. Adjacent to these trees, to the west, is the running line.

Biodiversity Baseline Units

Due to a lack of access, a biodiversity baseline survey could not be conducted.

Designated Sites

There are no statutory designated ecological sites located on or adjacent to the proposed work site, according to MAGIC. However, the following designated sites are located within a 5km radius of the site. These are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Statutory designated sites within 5 km of the site.

Level of designation	Designation	Name	Distance & direction from site
International	SPA	Thames Basin Heaths	1000 m south-east
		Thames Basin Heaths	3360 m west
		Thames Basin Heaths	4460 m south-west
	Ramsar	N/A	N/A
	SAC	Thames Basin Heaths	1000 m south-east

		Thursley, Ash, Pirbright, and Chobham	1670 m south-east & 3680 m north-east
		Thames Basin Heaths	3360 m west
		Thames Basin Heaths	4460 m south-west
National	SSSI	Basingstoke Canal	990 m east & 4350 m south
		Ash to Brookwood Heaths	1090 m south-east
		Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons	3560 m north-west
		Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath	3460 m east
		Blackwater Valley	4540 m north-west
		Eelmoor Marsh	4830 m south-west
		Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths	4990 m north
	NNR	N/A	N/A
County	LNR	Snaky Lane	2370 m south
		Lakeside Park	4730 m south

Due to the distance of the work site from these designated sites and the small-scale, localised nature of the works, it is expected that any potential impacts (either direct or indirect) to these or any other statutory designated sites in the wider area will be negligible.

Badgers

The site provides some suitable foraging habitat for badgers. Furthermore, the bank along the eastern boundary offers suitable habitat for sett creation. However, in order to classify the potential of the bank for sett creation (low, moderate, high), access to the bank would be required.

Great Crested Newts

The site provides low value terrestrial habitat for GCNs due to the vast areas of bare ground. The desktop study found three fishing lakes within 500 m of the site (c.80 m west; c.240 m north-west; and c.250 m south). Although the fishing lakes are within the roaming range of GCNs, the lakes provide unsuitable breeding habitat for GCNs due to the presence of large numbers of fish. Therefore, a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment (Oldham *et al.*, 2000¹; ARG UK, 2010²) was not undertaken on these lakes.

The desktop study found that there have been no European protected species (EPS) licences granted for GCNs within a 5 km radius of the site. Additionally, the data search conducted by SBIC found no records of GCNs within 1 km of the site.

Based on a combination of the above factors, GCNs are considered unlikely to be encountered on site and, in turn, any impacts to them as a result of the works are expected to be negligible.

Reptiles

The site is considered to be of moderate-high suitability for reptiles as the areas of ruderal vegetation provide good foraging habitat. In addition, the railway adjacent to the site provides a wildlife corridor that connects the site to suitable reptile habitat in the wider landscape. Furthermore, the data search conducted by SBIC found records of adder (*Vipera berus*), grass snake (*Natrix natrix*), slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*), and common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) within 1 km of the site.

Providing mitigation is incorporated into the works, any impacts to reptiles are expected to be low.

Nesting Birds

The site was considered to be of moderate suitability for nesting birds, with the trees on site providing suitable nesting habitat for a variety of bird species.

Providing basic mitigation measures are implemented, any impacts to nesting birds as a result of the works are expected to be low.

¹Oldham *et al.* (2010) Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). *Herpetological Journal*, 10(4), pp. 143 – 155.

²Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (2010) ARG UK Advice Note 5: Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index. Available: <http://www.arguk.org/download-document/9-great-crested-newt-habitat-suitability-index-arg-advice-note-5>

Dormice

The habitats on site are suboptimal for the requirements of dormice. In addition, the data search conducted by SBIC found no records of dormice within 1 km of the site; and according to MAGIC there have been no EPS licences granted for dormice within a 5 km radius of the site.

Due to the above factors, it is highly unlikely that dormice will be using the site. Therefore, any impacts to local dormouse populations is thought to be negligible.

Bats

None of the trees on site that could be viewed from Spencer Close were considered to be suitable for roosting bats. However, as the site could not be fully accessed, it is possible that trees are present that could be suitable for roosting bats.

The trees and ruderal vegetation provide suitable bat foraging habitat in the immediate vicinity of the site. Bats follow linear landscape features, such as the coniferous treeline along the western boundary of the site, to commute from their roost sites to their feeding grounds. Likewise, they use these features to navigate between feeding areas and alternative roosts. In addition, the nearby fishing lakes and woodland provide good foraging habitat for a range of bat species.

For the reasons discussed above, the site could not be assessed for its potential to support roosting bats. However, the site offers high suitability for foraging and commuting bats.

Invasive Species

As access to the site could not be gained, it is unknown if any invasive species are present on the site.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>If yes, describe below</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A biodiversity baseline survey could not be conducted; • A score could not be given for the site's potential to support badgers; • A score could not be given for the site's potential to support roosting bats; • High quality bat foraging habitat is present on site; • Moderate-high reptile habitat is present on site; • It is unknown whether invasive species are present on site. 					

FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>If yes, describe below</i>
--------------------------	-----	-------------------------------------	----	--------------------------	-------------------------------

As the site could not be fully assessed for its suitability for sett creation due to lack of access it is recommended that a walkover of the site is conducted by a suitably qualified ecologist (SQE) prior to the commencement of any works. This walkover will allow the ecologist to search for any evidence of badgers, and to assess and score the site (negligible, low, moderate, high) for its suitability for sett creation. If any active badger setts were found prior to or during works, appropriate mitigation would need to be implemented. Mitigation would be likely to include exclusion of the badgers and closure of the sett(s) under licence if significant impacts resulting from the works could not be avoided.

If any night works are required at any stage, a sensitive lighting regime should be implemented to minimise unnecessary light spill and consequent disturbance of any foraging or commuting bats present in the area.

As the site could not be fully assessed for its suitability for roosting bats, it is recommended that the site is visited by a SQE to carry out this assessment before works commence. Alternatively, if no trees are to be felled or affected in any other way by the proposed works, works are free to continue. However, if trees are to be felled or affected in any other way, they must first be inspected by a SQE.

If any vegetation clearance works are to take place, this should ideally be timed to commence outside of the nesting season, which is defined as running from March to August, inclusive. If this is not feasible for any reason, a nesting bird survey must be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist (SQE) shortly prior to the start of works to confirm the absence of any active nests. In the event that any active nests were found during this check or at any point during the works, a suitable exclusion zone must be put in place around the nest, with no work taking place in the area until the nest can be confirmed as no longer active by a SQE. In addition, if works take place during the nesting season, they should be carried out under a watching brief by a SQE.

As the works will impact suitable reptile habitat, reptile surveys should be carried out to establish whether reptiles are present. This is in line with Natural England's standing advice: (<https://www.gov.uk/reptiles-protection-surveys-and-licences>). Standard methods involving a SQE placing sheets of heavy-duty roofing felt (artificial refugia) in areas where they are most likely to be used by reptiles. So far as possible, the artificial refugia should be placed on slightly uneven ground so as not to lie completely flat (to create a varied microclimate).

GCNs are considered unlikely to be present on site. However, in the improbable event that any are encountered during works, it is a legal requirement to stop work until appropriate discussions have taken place and an alternative work strategy has been agreed, which may include consultation with Natural England.

As the site could not be fully assessed for the presence of invasive species due to lack of access, it is recommended that a walkover of the site is conducted by a SQE before the commencement of works to determine whether or not any invasive species are present.

Depending on the time elapsed between the September 2020 ecological survey and any further work to be carried out on site, an update assessment is likely to be required to determine any significant changes in habitat composition and how this may alter the findings discussed above.



Figure 1. Site location plan.

(Image taken from Google Earth Pro ©2020 Google).



Figure 2. Aerial view closeup of the site

(Image taken from Google Earth Pro ©2020 Google).



Image 1. View of the site standing at the entrance looking west.



Image 2. View of the bank on the western boundary.