

DAVID CLEMENTS ECOLOGY LTD

**LAND AT HERBERT ROAD NEWPORT
OTTER MITIGATION STRATEGY**

MARCH 2017

**David Clements Ecology Ltd
Carlton House, 5 Herbert Terrace, Penarth, Glamorgan, CF64 2AH
Tel: 029 20 350120 Fax: 029 20 711997
info@dce.org.uk**

Author:	Vicky Hannaford BSc (Hons)	<i>V. Hannaford</i>	07.02.2017
Checked by:	Neil Price BSc (Hons) MSc PhD MCIEEM	<i>D.N. Price</i>	07.02.2017
Version No./Stage	V2	Amended 16.02.2017	
	V3	Amended 20.03.2017	

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by David Clements Ecology Ltd (DCE) on the instructions of Asbri Planning, on behalf of Keepmoat, and refers to land off Herbert Road, Newport (ST 31736 8933).
- 1.2 The western boundary of the site lies adjacent to the River Usk which is the most important feature on the site being a Special Area of Conservation (SAC); a public footpath runs along this boundary. The eastern boundary lies adjacent to Herbert Road and the railway line, the southern boundary lies adjacent to housing and the northern boundary lies adjacent to Glan Usk Primary School. Habitats within the site include grassland, scrub and trees, a wet ditch and reed beds.
- 1.3 Planning permission (Ref 13/1279) has been granted for the creation of 251 dwellings within the site boundary. Condition 5 of the planning permission requires an otter mitigation strategy be designed for the site and agreed with the LPA.

Condition 5 Implementation of Offsite Otter Mitigation Area

Prior to the commencement of any development on the site details of the offsite otter mitigation areas outlined at bullet point 3 of Paragraph 7.120 of the 'Addendum to Environmental Statement – Land South of Glan Usk, Newport' (April 2014) shall be provided to the Council. The scheme shall include details of a future maintenance programme both for the short term (5 years) and longer term (10 years). Following the Council's written agreement the approved details shall be implemented fully as approved prior to the commencement of any other works within 10m of the top of the river bank unless otherwise agreed in writing.

Reason: to protect the conservation objectives of the River Usk SAC, namely otters.

- 1.4 A suite of ecological surveys, including otter surveys, of the site were completed during 2012 and 2013 by Sturgess Ecology (Sturgess Ecology, 2013) and presented in a Chapter 7 of the Environmental Statement. The otter surveys highlighted that the site has limited potential for undisturbed resting places due to disturbance by dogs and humans and it is thought likely otters pass by the site via the river or lower bank. As all habitats within the site will be lost as a consequence of the proposed development, it has been agreed with the LPA that off-site habitat enhancement within the SAC margins, including the siting of undisturbed resting areas and an artificial holt will be implemented.
- 1.5 It is a requirement that the mitigation scheme be implemented before works commence on the site.
- 1.6 Due to the time lapse since the original ecological surveys (2013) the site was visited by Vicky Hannaford and Jonathan Lee from David Clements Ecology Ltd on 25th January 2017 to assess the current condition of the habitats, particularly along the river bank. The site was also visited on February 2nd 2017, this time by Vicky Hannaford, Dylan Hammett and Thomas James from Keepmoat and Katie Godfrey, County Ecologist for

Newport CC, the purpose of this visit was to highlight a suitable area for the otter mitigation to be implemented.

2.0 STRATEGY

Off-site habitat enhancement

- 2.1. The area highlighted for the off-site habitat enhancement lies along the riverbank between the north of the site and the M4 bridge, see Plan 1. A Phase 1 habitat survey of the site was carried out by Sturgess Ecology during 2013 and is included in the Environmental Statement, Appendix 7.4 (Asbri Planning Ltd, 2014). The site was subject to a walkover survey on January 25th 2017 by David Clements Ecology Ltd, the purpose of the visit being to assess the habitats currently present on site and compare them to those reported in 2013. The outcome of this visit determined there had been no significant changes to the habitats in the Phase 1 area of the site since surveys carried out in 2013 by Sturgess Ecology. Habitats include dense and scattered bramble scrub, scattered trees, reeds and large stands of Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). These habitats have some potential to provide suitable resting places for otters, however due to current high levels of disturbance by dogs and humans it is thought unlikely otters will use them in the present situation. Otters, a species listed on Annex II of the EC Habitats Directives, are one of the primary reasons for the designation of the River Usk as a SAC and as such any improvement to the habitat in respect of otters will protect the conservation objectives of the River Usk. As a European Protected Species, otters and their resting places, such as holts and couches, are afforded the highest level of statutory protection in the UK.

Induction

- 2.2. Prior to works commencing on the off-site habitat enhancement, all contractors will be provided with a site induction outlining the protected status of otters and the River Usk SAC. Site personnel will also be issued with the contact details of an appropriately qualified ecologist who will be available on an 'on-call' basis at any time when such a person is not actually present on site. A survey of the area where work is to be carried out will be undertaken immediately prior to works commencing, to ensure no otters will be disturbed during this time.

Installation of fencing

- 2.3. Pre-construction mitigation measures aim to create undisturbed areas on the riverbank in order to provide suitable resting areas for otters. This will be achieved by the provision of mesh weld dog proof fencing, 1.5m high, 90m long with two 15m returns to the river. In order to create otter proof fencing, a 300mm return at the top of the fence angled at 30 degrees towards the river will also be implemented, see Plan 2 Mitigation Details for location and design. The fencing will be situated within the scrub approximately 3m from the edge of the grassland. Installation will be achieved using hand tools only with the posts being driven into the ground rather than using concrete to avoid contamination of the River Usk. The bay will be installed within 10m of the river bank, however any construction within 8 metres of the bank will need NRW consent.

Artificial otter holt

- 2.4 The building of an artificial otter holt is also included in the pre-construction mitigation. The holt will be sited within the fenced off area of the river bank (see 2.2 above) and be situated above the highest winter flood level. The holt will be supplied in kit form (or ready built), made from recycled plastic and have two entrances and a ventilation pipe. Details of dimensions and suppliers of the artificial holt can be found in Appendix 1. The holt will be built underground and covered in brash making it as unobtrusive as possible, with the installation carried out using hand tools only. This particular artificial of holt has been designed in conjunction with Surrey Wildlife Trust and has featured on BBC Springwatch and Countryfile (<https://www.filcris.co.uk/product/otter-holt-kitblack-1200-x-830-x-380-otterholt>).
- 2.5 The services of an appropriately qualified ecologist will be available to assist as required throughout the off-site enhancement operations, and will be available to attend the site at short notice on an ‘on-call’ basis as required. If at any time an otter holt is found during works all work must stop and a licence obtained from Natural Resources Wales.

Maintenance of Holt and Fencing

- 2.6 A yearly inspection of the holt will be carried out over 10 years ensuring the entrances and ventilation pipe are kept clear of vegetation. Any vegetation blocking the holes will be cleared. Fencing used to create the undisturbed area will also be inspected on a yearly basis. All inspections and relevant maintenance measures will be carried out by Keepmoat Regeneration Ltd up until December 2020, thereafter the annual inspections/maintenance will be carried out by Charter Housing Association.

2.7 *Habitat Enhancement*

Within the northern area of the otter mitigation zone there is a stand of Japanese knotweed which will be removed by a specialist contractor as recommended by Keepmoat Regeneration Ltd. After eradication of the knotweed within this area, the gaps are to be replanted with thorny trees and shrubs e.g. blackthorn and hawthorn to provide suitable resting places for otter.

Other Species Measures

- 2.8 Any works affecting hedgerows and scrub (i.e. felling, clearance or lopping etc.) will be undertaken on the site, ideally during the winter months. Any such works should avoid the main bird nesting season, which runs approximately from March to August inclusive. Alternatively, any works which must necessarily be carried out during this period will be immediately preceded by a survey to ensure that no nesting birds are present, and any which are present will be allowed to complete their nesting cycle unmolested.
- 2.9 In the event that nesting birds are discovered or suspected anywhere on the site at any time, all work in the immediate area will cease immediately and the advice of the Supervising Ecologist will be sought (in addition to trees, hedgerows and scrub, this can include grassland, bramble beds and buildings). The ‘immediate area’ will include any

occupied tree in its entirety, and any other habitats for an area of at least 5m radius around the find-site. The affected area will be clearly demarcated on the ground (e.g. by means of striped bunting) and made off-limits to all site personnel.

3.0 REFERENCES

Sturgess, Ecology (2013) *Land off Herbert Road, Newport, Environmental Statement, Chapter 7* Unpublished Report.

Sturgess, Ecology (2013) *Land off Herbert Road, Newport, Environmental Statement, Appendix 7.4* Unpublished Report.

<https://www.filcris.co.uk/product/otter-holt-kitblack-1200-x-830-x-380-otterholt>

http://www.otterspecialistgroup.org/Library/Papers/Building_a_Holt_from_Recycled_Plastic_2_Low_DPI.pdf

APPENDIX 1: DETAILS OF ARTIFICIAL OTTER HOLT