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Ecological Survey

**Heatherton World of Activities, St
Florence, Pembrokeshire**

Mr C Davies

Final Report

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kite ecology

Chelston Narberth Road Tenby Pembrokeshire SA70 8JD

01834 842851 07867 805055

enquiries@kiteecology.co.uk

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This report, and the information contained in it, is intended to be valid for a maximum of 12 months from the date of the survey, providing no significant baseline changes have occurred.

Project number	Report number	Revision number	Date of issue
1098	005	Draft	17092020
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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 An updated ecological survey of a section of the pitch and putt golf course at Heatherton World of Activities, St Florence, Pembrokeshire, was commissioned in relation to a planning application. Under the proposals, new lodges are to be constructed on the site. These would extend the current area already developed to the south.
- 1.2 Numerous surveys of Heatherton have been completed since 2007, with a survey of the whole site undertaken in October 2012. This application relates to a small area of the site, so the updated survey was limited to this area. A walkover survey of the proposed development area was completed on 3rd September 2020 when the site was surveyed for evidence of use by badgers, bats and birds as these were considered the species most likely impacted by the scheme. Other species seen or heard during the survey were recorded, as were habitats on site. All surveys were undertaken by a suitably licensed and experienced ecologist.
- 1.3 The survey relates to an improved grassland field currently forming part of the 18 hole pitch and putt facilities on site. A small stream forms the southern boundary which has sycamore, ash and willow along its banks. There are several patches of planted trees forming the 'rough' areas on the golf course area and these include small specimens of silver birch, alder, wild cherry, hawthorn, field maple, hazel and oak.
- 1.4 The area is of relatively low ecological value, with the majority of habitat affected consisting of improved grassland. There was no evidence of protected species on site. It is considered unlikely that the proposed development will impact on biodiversity.

2 Introduction and site description

- 2.1 An updated ecological survey of a section of the pitch and putt golf course at Heatherton World of Activities, St Florence, Pembrokeshire, was commissioned in relation to a planning application. Under the proposals, new lodges are to be constructed on the site. These would extend the current area already developed to the south. The centre of the proposed development is located at OSGR SN09500265.
- 2.2 The survey relates to an improved grassland field currently forming part of the 18 hole pitch and putt facilities on site. Only the area highlighted on Figure 1 was included in this survey.



Figure 1. Survey area.

- 2.3 Unless the client indicates otherwise, all species records will be submitted to the relevant biological records centre.

3 Desk study and survey methodology

3.1 General

Numerous surveys of Heatherton have been completed since 2007, with the most recent survey of the whole site undertaken in October 2012. This application relates to a small area of the site, so the survey was limited to this area. A walkover survey of the proposed development area was completed on 3rd September 2020 when the site was surveyed for evidence of use by badgers, bats and birds as these were considered the species most likely impacted by the scheme. Other species seen or heard during the survey were recorded, as were habitats on site. The weather on the day of the survey was mild (16°C) and relatively clear with light westerly winds of Force 1-2. All surveys were undertaken by a suitably licensed ecologist who is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and a Chartered Environmentalist. Surveys and reports have been completed following accepted guidelines and in accordance with CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing (2015) and BS 42020:2013 *Biodiversity. Code of practice for planning and development.* (2013).

3.2 Desk study

3.2.1 Previous surveys

Numerous surveys of Heatherton have been completed since 2007, with the most recent survey of the whole site undertaken in October 2012. Copies of these reports were available for the purpose of this study.

3.2.2 Aerial photographs

Google Earth was used to identify any important landscape features surrounding the site.

3.2.3 Designated sites

The Multi-Agency Geographic Information website (www.magic.gov.uk) was used to identify the presence of any protected sites within 2km of the survey area.

3.3 On site surveys

3.3.1 Phase 1

A Phase 1 habitat survey was carried out following the standard field methodology set out in the *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey – A Technique for Environmental Audit*, Joint Nature Conservation Committee 1990 (2003 edition).

3.3.2 Badgers

The site, and where possible, a radius of 30 metres from the site boundary was searched for badger setts. Sett entrances are recognised by entrances c.300mm wide and c.200mm high and tend to have large accumulations of earth outside. Other signs searched for included 'snuffle holes' (holes dug by badgers when searching for invertebrates), 'dung pits' (small pits in which badgers deposit their faeces) and 'day nests' (nests of bedding material made by badgers for sleeping above ground).

3.3.3 Bats

The habitat was assessed for its potential use by commuting and foraging bats. Any mature trees were surveyed for their suitability for use by roosting bats. Trees were assessed as being low, medium or high bat potential depending on the presence of potential roosting features such as cracked or split limbs, peeling bark, woodpecker holes and dense coverings of ivy.

3.3.4 Birds

Any birds seen or heard on site during the survey were recorded.

3.3.5 Other species

Incidental records of any other species seen or heard on site during the survey were also recorded.

4 Results

4.1 General

The site is surrounded by farmland and there are good hedgerow links off the site into the wider countryside.

4.2 Desk study

4.2.1 Previous surveys

During previous surveys, the field had been identified as improved grassland which is used as an 18 hole pitch and putt. The grassland is managed accordingly with a uniformly short sward height maintained throughout, except in areas of rough.

4.2.2 Aerial photographs

The site is surrounded by farmland (Figure 2) and there are good hedgerow links off the site into the wider countryside.

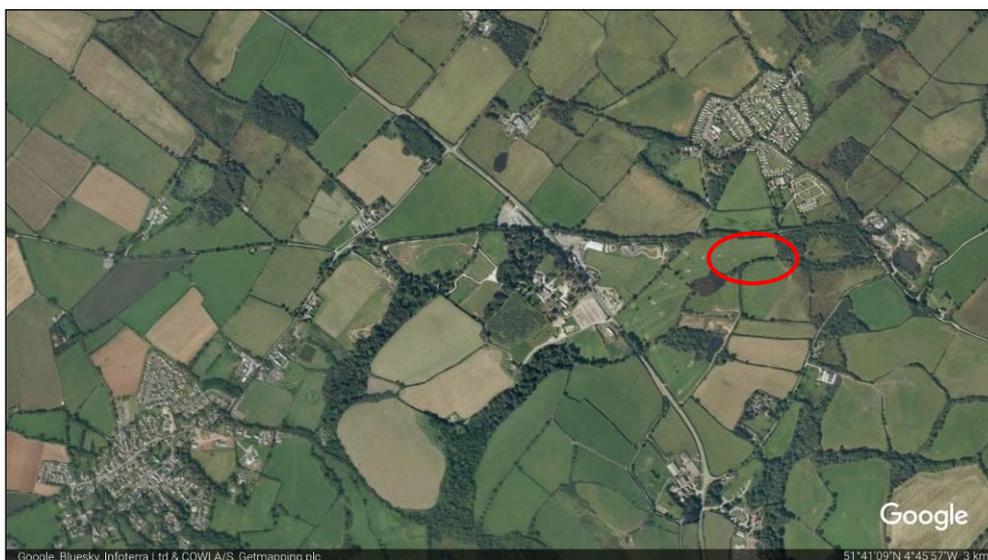


Figure 2. Aerial photograph of the survey area in relation to the surrounding habitat.

4.2.3 Designated sites

A section of the Ritec Valley, known as Ritec Fen has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This site is of special interest for its extensive area of valley and floodplain fen which stretches for two kilometres on the north side of the river Ritec between Tenby and St Florence. The north western corner of the SSSI is adjacent to the south eastern corner of the woodland boundary at Heatherton and the SSSI is visible from several vantage points on the site.

4.3 On site surveys

4.3.1 Phase 1

The field is improved grassland and includes species such as Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, sweet False oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne* red clover *Trifolium pratense*, white clover *T. repens* and creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*. There are occasional patches of *Juncus sp.* There are patches of planted trees in the 'rough' areas of the golf course and these include silver birch, alder,

wild cherry, hawthorn, field maple, hazel and oak. A small stream forms the southern boundary which has sycamore, ash and willow along its banks.



Figure 3. Overview of the survey area taken from the west facing an easterly direction.



Figure 4. Overview of the survey area taken from the eastern boundary facing westwards.

4.3.2 Badgers

No evidence of badgers was found on the survey area or within a 30m radius of the boundary.

4.3.3 Bats

None of the trees in the areas of rough were large enough to have any features suitable for use by roosting bats. The mature trees around the survey area are to remain unaffected. Given the high number of known bat records in the area (pers comm.), it is likely that the site is used by foraging and commuting bats.

4.3.4 Birds

Blackbird *Turdus merula*, robin *Erithacus rubecula*, wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, magpie *Pica pica* and herring gull *Larus argentatus* were all seen or heard on site during the survey.

There is some scrubby vegetation along the northern, southern and eastern boundaries that may be used by nesting birds at appropriate times of year.

4.3.5 Other species

No other species were recorded.

5 Limitations to surveys

- 5.1 The results and recommendations of the report are based on findings as they were at the time of the survey. Kite Ecology cannot be held responsible for any base line changes to the site that have occurred since the survey was carried out that may have any effect on the results and recommendations.

6 Legislation and planning policy

6.1 Designated sites

Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest are strictly protected through both European Directives and UK legislation including the conservation and Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

6.2 Bats

All species of bat and their breeding sites or resting places (roosts) are protected under the Conservation and Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence for anyone intentionally to kill, injure or handle a bat, to possess a bat (whether live or dead), disturb a roosting bat, or sell or offer a bat for sale without a licence. It is also an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place used by bats for shelter, whether they are present or not. Licences are available from Natural Resources Wales to allow actions that would otherwise be unlawful.

6.4 Birds

All birds, their nests and eggs are protected under Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

6.5 Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act places a duty on public bodies listed in the Act to carry out sustainable development.

6.6 **Environment (Wales) Act 2016**

The Environment (Wales) Act has been designed to complement the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act by applying the principles of sustainable development to the management of Wales' natural resources. The Act puts the ecosystem approach into statute through a set of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) principles, which are based on the 12 principles (Ecosystem Approach principles) contained in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

6.7 **Nature Recovery Plan for Wales**

The Nature Recovery Plan for Wales is aimed at addressing the underlying causes of biodiversity loss. It sets out how Wales will deliver the commitments of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the EU Biodiversity Strategy to halt the decline in our biodiversity by 2020 and then reverse that decline.

6.8 **The Planning (Wales) Act 2015**

The Act sets out a series of legislative changes to deliver reform of the planning system in Wales, to ensure that it is fair, resilient and enables development. Taken together with proposed changes to secondary legislation, policy and guidance, one of the objectives of the act is to provide opportunities to protect and enhance our most important built and natural environments.

6.9 **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006**

Section 40 of the NERC Act places a 'Biodiversity Duty' on local planning authorities as far as is consistent with the proper exercise of their functions. This replaces Section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

6.10 **Technical Advice Notes 5**

TAN 5 gives advice to local authorities on development control issues for Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). It also covers the selection and designation of non-statutory nature conservation sites, such as local nature reserves, and the protection of species, commons and greens.

6.11 **Local Development Plan**

Policy GN.37 (Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity) from the Pembrokeshire Local Development Plan states:

'All development should demonstrate a positive approach to maintaining and, where ever possible, enhancing biodiversity. Development that would disturb or otherwise harm protected species or their habitats, or the integrity of other habitats, sites or features of importance to wildlife

and individual species, will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where the effects are minimised or mitigated through careful design, work scheduling or other appropriate measures.'

7 Discussion and key recommendations

7.1 Designated sites

7.1.1 Ritec Fen Site of Special Scientific Interest

The small water course along the southern boundary enters the Ritec River and so without appropriate measures, there is the possibility that the proposals may impact on this designation. Consideration must be given to the storage of materials (particularly liquids) on site during the construction phase to ensure that it does not impact on the designated sites. The boundary of the site should be clearly marked and storage of materials and machinery kept within these boundaries.

7.2 Bats

Given that there are a number of known roosts in the area for a variety of species (pers comm.), it is very likely that the habitat would be used by foraging and commuting bats. Of particular importance are the hedgerows. Under the proposals, the existing boundary features are to remain unaffected. All lighting must be hooded and downward facing and positioned to avoid shining directly onto the features such as woodland edges, hedgerows and ponds. The lighting should also be PIR sensitive LED type which have a much more directional lighting range.

7.3 Birds

Any site clearance should be carried out between late August and early March in any year which will avoid the bird nesting season, so preventing the potential killing or injuring of birds or destruction of their eggs or active nests. If it is unavoidable to carry out site clearance during the bird nesting season, then it should be conducted carefully and the presence of birds and/or their nests checked for throughout the clearance. Should a nest be encountered during such works, then clearance in that area should cease immediately with the nest being protected until the young have fledged or the nest is no longer in use.

8 Conclusions

The area is of relatively low ecological value, with the majority of habitat affected consisting of improved grassland. There was no evidence of protected species on site. It is considered unlikely that the proposed development will impact on biodiversity.

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