

Appendix 10(a) - Footpath 11 Ecology Report

Following the site meeting this morning, as discussed, these are the most appropriate steps to open up the footpath as best practice. The steps outlined are assuming that the clearance will wait until after the breeding bird season has ended.

Brief description of the footpath.

The footpath is approximately 2m wide with an approximate section length of 400m. The path is encroached along its length by branches from adjacent trees and scrub. There are also areas of fly tipped brash and occasional piles of garden waste at intervals.

As I understand it, in order to clear the footpath, tracked machinery with an attached cutter will be used to any remove ground vegetation, including bramble scrub. Manual cutting will also be undertaken of any branches from adjacent scrub and trees. It is expected that tree removal will not be necessary to open up the footpath.

Ecological considerations/constraints

Amphibians, breeding birds, hedgehog, reptiles and potentially bats. In the first instance, no work should be undertaken until such time amphibians have been fully considered. Damaging the habitat could be unlawful if great crested newt are present.

- **Amphibians:** There are ponds located near to the site and ground clearance works could impact upon great crested newt (GCN) if present. Mark the full extent of the footpath on a plan and place a 250m buffer around it to determine how many ponds are located within the buffer. Survey data for these ponds is required but may be available in the public domain due to the adjacent housing scheme. The housing scheme is ongoing and there was no evidence of newt fencing, so it's likely that GCN has been proven absent. The pond closest to the works contained fish, which lowers its value to GCN. If the survey data can be obtained and is within date (2 survey seasons) and proving GCN to be absent, no further surveys would be required for the footpath works. If the survey data is out of date and GCN were absent, then I recommend that new survey information is obtained using eDNA sampling in mid-April. However, to fully inform the appropriate approach to amphibians, the historical pond data should be obtained at the earliest opportunity to avoid delays. Traditional amphibian surveys, if required have timing constraints, which need to be considered as soon as possible.

Assuming only common amphibians are an issue, then a safe method of working should be adopted, which can be outlined in a brief method statement and following a toolbox talk.

- **Breeding Birds:** It is agreed that the works will wait until the breeding season has ended (September 2021) and thus removing the need for further bird surveys. September is suggested over August because the habitat is suitable for wood pigeon.
- **Hedgehog:** It is advised that ground clearance works potentially affecting hedgehog is undertaken prior to their hibernation period. Taking breeding birds into consideration, the window of opportunity is between September and October.
- **Reptiles:** The habitats did not appear to be ideal for reptiles, but habitat clearance methods for amphibians will also be suitable for moving reptiles if present out of harms way. This could be covered during a toolbox talk.

- **Bats:** The footpath corridor did not appear to have any trees that would be required to be removed, although there are trees adjacent to it. The footpath corridor however was heavily overgrown in places, which greatly reduces the likelihood of bats using it for commuting and accessing any bat roost features if present. It needs to be confirmed as soon as possible if any trees are to be removed. If this is the case, then they should be inspected for their bat roost potential prior to removal. If the trees do contain bat roost potential, then bat activity surveys may be required, which can only be undertaken between May and August.

It would appear that the pruning works will be small scale affecting only level low branches (recently grown stems of limited thickness). If heavy pruning of large limbs is required, then they should be checked by an ecologist to determine whether they have any bat roost potential prior to removal.

Because ultimately breeding bird habitat is being lost, a bird box scheme should be implemented. Also, to take full advantage of a potential new bat commuting corridor, bat boxes should also be considered. There has been no indication as to whether new lighting will be introduced to the footpath. Ecologically, this is not advised but if needed, then a sensitive lighting scheme should be considered a priority.

The only other potential ecological receptors is badger, but the footpath is located in a built up area and no signs of badger were seen during the meeting. I would advise that a vigilant approach to the works is undertaken, especially if removing trees. Information on this could be covered during a toolbox talk.

If you have any further questions or require quotes for further surveys, please get in touch.

Simon

Simon Booth
Senior Consultant Ecologist