

PROJECT RESEARCH and ADVISORY CONSULTANCY

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ROYAL BATH & WEST OF ENGLAND SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

BASELINE ECOLOGY REPORT

Introduction

1. We were tasked to conduct a preliminary assessment into possible environmental sensitivities likely to arise from the initial development plan for the site of the Royal Bath & West Showground. Matters of archaeological and arboreal interest were specifically excluded from our brief.

2. This summary does not constitute a detailed report but rather an introductory document identifying 'heads of issues'. These may require to be explored in greater detail at a later date when all the relevant environmental factors are considered and incorporated into the detailed development plans'. Therefore this report only presents an outline of key areas with some abridged conclusions.

Aim

3. The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment summary of major environmental and ecological aspects of the land comprising and surrounding the Showground.

4. Our summary concentrates on 3 main aspects which impinge on site sensitivity:-
- Establishing the wildlife habitat areas of the site.
 - Verifying the occurrence of or potential for protected species within those habitats.
 - Identifying areas for possible further detailed investigation.

Site Description

5. **General.** The site lies on lias and comprises some 240 acres converted from original farmland. The land slopes from higher ground in the north (hereinafter called the 'ridge'), comprising approximately one-third of the total Showground area, to a relatively flat area which makes up the remainder of the site. The geology is unremarkable and typical of this part of Somerset. The northern end consists of a layer of sandstone on clay; whilst the central and southern area, comprising some two thirds of the total area of the site, is formed of a clay bed over limestone. The north-west corner contains a small pond (named the 'Darling Pond') which is fed by water seeping from the hillside. An old quarry exists in the north-west of the site which until recently was used as a rubbish tip. This has now been re-landscaped and forms part of a cross-country 4-w-d test track. The central southern part of the site has a small stream running through it which feeds eventually into the lake at the bottom south-west corner.

6. **Protected and Designated Sites.** There are no distinctive habitats on the site receiving special protection or any areas meriting specific designation. The site is well used with a number of buildings (see attached map) and served by an extensive road and track network. There are three strips of unconnected hedgerow which provide little positive benefit to wildlife; in the centre-west of the site is a small neglected coppice wood.

Plants and Trees

7. We understand that a separate report is to be made concerning the trees on site; however the Society's Environmental & Conservation Committee carried out a full Plant Survey and an Arboreal Review in the mid-1990s. These reports are held in the RB&West archives. Recent inspection has not indicated the presence of any rare species. There are no current tree preservation orders in force.

Wildlife

8. Our findings result from three field surveys carried out over the past two months under varied conditions, together with data from previous studies, reports and observations.

9. The following noteworthy wildlife has been identified on the site:-

a. **Badgers.** There is a Badger sett (secondary) on top of the ridge which appears not to be occupied at the present time.¹ We found no evidence of any other badger occupancy existing on the site.

b. **Newts.** The smooth, great crested and palmate newt have all been identified in the Darling Pond but not elsewhere on the site, although there is a possibility that they may be present in the bottom lake.

c. **Aquatic Life.** A variety of other aquatic life, as might be expected, is present in the Darling Pond. No water voles have been recorded and there are no signs present.

¹ The primary sett with the main entrance is on the north side of the hill, outwith the Society's ownership.

- d. Birds. There are no unusual resident birds which require special protection, apart from a pair of buzzards which is currently nesting on top of the ridge.² There are no migratory implications.
- e. Reptiles and Amphibians. There are no recorded signs of any reptiles, although frogs and toads are likely to be present in the lake and Darling Pond.³
- f. Bats. Although bats are transitory, there are no signs of any roosts on the site.⁴

Further Study

10. A current extended Phase 1 Habitat Study needs to be carried out in relation to detailed development proposals to reveal if additional studies or migration measures will be required

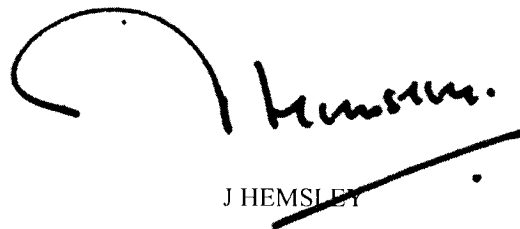
Conclusions

11. The site in general is typical of the farming landscape of the area. Working to our remit, our research has not identified anything which could lead to establishing any statutory or non-statutory designated areas of environmental importance; nor, apart from those mentioned in paragraph 8 *supra*, have we recorded any flora or fauna species of notable conservation interest.

12. It is unlikely that the development plans as presented to us would cause any significant disruption to any of the wildlife on the site, with the exception of the Darling Pond and its immediate surroundings.

Recommendations

13. The Darling Pond and its immediate environment should be incorporated into any Development Plan.


J HEMSLEY
Senior Partner

9 June 2010

² The last detailed study was carried out during 1992 and 1993; the resulting Ornithological Report being submitted to the RB&West Executive Board in May 1993.

³ There are no recent reports of any snakes and it is considered unlikely in view of the amount of human activity and the generally unsuitable habitat (with the possible exception of the lake area).

⁴ A bat detector was employed in this survey.