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# **Badger Survey for a Barn Conversion at Wills Ayley Farm Sewards End Saffron Walden Essex CB10 2LT**

On behalf of:

**Ford Homes**

**July 2022**

Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.

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## **0 SUMMARY**

- 0.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Ford Homes to undertake a badger assessment for a Barn Conversion at Wills Ayley Farm Swards End Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 2LT. Appeal Ref: APP/C1570/W/20/3265543.
- 0.2 The survey was required for a planning condition discharge for residential conversion of barns.
- 0.3 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal incorporating bats and badgers was conducted by T4 Ecology Ltd. on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020 and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The surveys found a main active badger sett present in a mound adjacent to the site. The report concluded proposed development would be unlikely to impact badgers or the sett.
- 0.4 The applicant (Ford Homes) is now ready to commence works and Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was consulted because levelling of some of the mound was desirable to improve the view of the new barn conversions on completion. Therefore, an update badger survey was undertaken 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 by experienced ecologist Roger Spring BSc MCIEEM. The survey included surveying the site and surrounding habitats for signs and evidence of badger activity including setts, droppings, trails, diggings, hairs and tracks.
- 0.5 The old badger sett entrances were found in the mound adjacent to the site as recorded by T4 Ecology Ltd. However, these were completed devoid of recent activity with dense vegetation growing all around the entrances and debris such as leaves, sticks and other material in the entrances. No fresh excavations were observed. No trails or tracks were observed around the entrances or around the mound at all. No latrines were present. From the photographs in the T4 Ecology Ltd. report, the entrances were certainly active in 2020, however, these same holes have been abandoned for some time (likely more than 1 year).
- 0.6 Overall, it was considered that the mound could be removed with a low risk of significant impact or harm to badgers or active badger setts. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Ford Homes to undertake a badger assessment for a Barn Conversion at Wills Ayley Farm Swards End Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 2LT. Appeal Ref: APP/C1570/W/20/3265543.
- 1.1.2 The survey was required for a planning condition discharge for residential conversion of barns.
- 1.1.3 Wildlife such as badgers and active badger setts are protected by law. Protected and priority species and habitats, are also a material consideration for individual planning decisions under the National Planning Policy Framework, 2019 (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2019).
- 1.1.4 Ecological surveying typically remains valid for between 12-18 months (CIEEM, 2019).
- 1.1.5 Legislation for badgers and badger setts was primarily created for protection from persecution rather than for conservation reasons due to declining badger numbers.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Study Limitations**

- 2.1.1 No major study limitations were identified.

### **2.2 Site Surveys**

#### *Badgers*

- 2.2.1 Original surveys were undertaken by T4 Ecology Ltd. on 21st January 2020, 10th January 2020, 13th February 2020 and 30th June 2020. The update badger survey was undertaken on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 by experienced ecologist Roger Spring BSc MCIEEM and included inspection of the site and surrounding habitats for signs and evidence of badger activity.
- 2.2.2 Signs and evidence of badgers searched for included the following:
- Setts and hole entrances;
  - Foraging holes and other diggings;
  - Latrines & droppings;
  - Hairs;

- Paw prints and other tracks;
- Scratch marks, bedding material and other signs.

### **3 RESULTS AND RISK**

#### **3.1 Site Description & Location**

3.1.1 The site includes an active farmyard with several modern barns which are used for commercial and agricultural uses. The buildings proposed for conversion are modern structures surrounded by concrete. An earth mound is present beyond the concrete in the east of the site. The mound then backs onto open arable farmland.

3.1.2 The broader landscaping is dominated by arable farmland, low density housing, the occasional copse and grassy field.

#### **3.2 Protected Species**

##### *Badgers*

3.2.1 Daylight inspection of the site in 2022 failed to find recent evidence or signs of badger activity within the proposed development site or in the adjacent earth mound or the arable field east of the site. Old badger sett entrances were found, these were devoid of recent activity with debris such as leaves, twigs and other material in the holes. No fresh excavations or trails were present around the entrances. No latrines or any other signs of badger activity were found.

3.2.2 It is clear from the photographic evidence in the T4 Ecology Ltd. report that in 2020 the sett was active. However, no such activity was present in 2022 and it appears that the sett has been abandoned for some time, likely more than 1 year.

### **4 DISCUSSION OF RISK AND LEGISLATION**

#### **4.1 Protected & Priority Species**

##### *Badgers*

4.1.1 The following provides an indicative summary of offences likely to be most relevant to development activities under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992:

- Wilfully kill, injure, take or attempt to kill, injure, possess or take a badger;
- Cruelly ill-treat a badger;

- Dig for a badger;
  - Disturb a badger while it is occupying a sett, or cause a dog to enter a sett;
  - Interfere with a badger sett by e.g. damaging, destroying or obstructing a sett or any part of it.
- 4.1.2 The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 defines a badger sett as “any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a badger” (OPSI, 2007).
- 4.1.3 Given that no fresh/recent signs or evidence of badger activity were observed on the site or in nearby habitats, it was considered highly unlikely that badgers were present or actively using the mound or site generally. Therefore, the risk of impact to badgers or active badger setts from levelling the mound was considered very low.
- 4.1.4 Therefore, further badger surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary for the levelling to proceed. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to badgers, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

## **5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### *Badgers*

- 5.1.1 The following recommendations should be undertaken to minimise the risk of impact to badgers:
- Before levelling commences, vegetation should be cut back by hand with strimmers under ecological supervision. The mound should then be inspected again for any fresh signs or evidence of badger activity by the ecologist.
  - If no evidence of badger activity is found the mound levelling can begin slowly under ecological supervision.
  - If at any point evidence of recent badger activity is found or badgers are found, works should stop and the ecologists advice followed to prevent harm or impact.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Recent signs or evidence of badger activity were not observed on the site or nearby. Old badger holes were present, though no recent activity was present around the holes.
- 6.2 The risk of presence and potential for impact to badgers was very low.
- 6.3 Further badger surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. Precautionary measures are recommended to minimise any residual risk of impact.
- 6.4 With recommendations followed as described, the proposed development could proceed with a minimal risk of harm or impact to badgers, badger setts or local badger conservation.

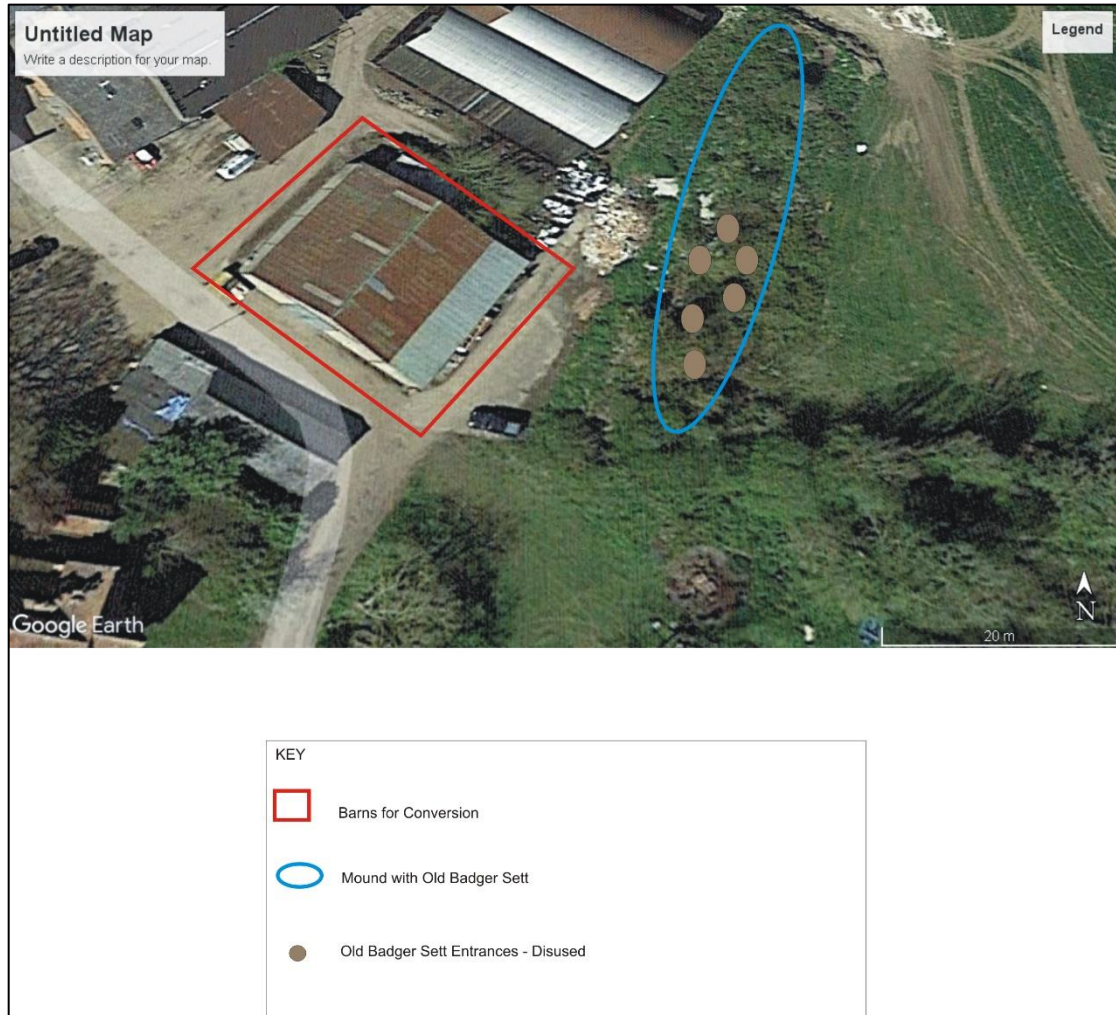
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## 8 APPENDICES

### 8.1 Appendix 1: Figures

**Figure 1: Site location and historical evidence of badger activity in a boundary mound.**





## 8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

**Photograph 1: The main site area with barns to left of photograph and mound to the right of photograph at Wills Ayley Farm Swards End Saffron Walden.**



Photograph by Roger Spring 2022

**Photograph 2: Old badger sett entrance with lots of debris -clearly inactive at Wills Ayley Farm Swards End Saffron Walden.**



Photograph by Roger Spring 2022



**Photograph 3: Old badger sett entrance with lots of debris -clearly inactive at Wills Ayley Farm Swards End Saffron Walden.**



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**Photograph 4: Top of the mound with one old badger sett entrance in the foreground at Wills Ayley Farm Swards End Saffron Walden.**



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