MKA Ecology Ltd

New Cambridge House
Bassingbourn Road
Litlington
Cambridgeshire
SG8 0SS

01763 262 211

info@mkaecology.co.uk
www.mkaecology.co.uk

Gooseacre, Markyate: PRE-COMMENCEMENT BADGER CHECK TECHNICAL NOTE

07 November 2023

1. Aims and background

The aim of the pre-commencement badger check was to confirm the presence or absence of active badger setts on site prior to the commencement of construction works.

A pre-commencement badger check was recommended following recommendations made in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal conducted at the Site in November 2018 (MKA Ecology Ltd, 2019). During this survey, two disused setts/sett entrances were identified on the west boundary. A further active sett was identified at the base of the large ash tree on the western boundary, the presence of fresh bedding at the entrance indicating that this is likely to be active. This is likely to be an outlying sett used by one or two individuals and was considered to only be used occasionally.

Due to the recorded presence of the disused and active outlier badger sett, and given that badger activity can change rapidly, a pre-commencement badger check was recommended to confirm the continued absence of active badger setts prior to the commencement of construction works.

2. Methodology

A site visit was conducted on 07 November 2023 to confirm whether any active badger setts were present on site in order to inform any mitigation or licensing measures that may be required.

The survey area is shown in Figure 1, Appendix 1, and included the Site and a 30m buffer zone. The survey was conducted in accordance with the methodology outlined in Harris *et al.* (1989) and involved a walkover of the survey area (where access permitted), recording any field signs of badger including sett entrances, badger paths, latrine pits, snuffle holes and footprints. Any setts identified on site were classified by sett type (main, annexe, subsidiary or outlier) and individual holes were defined by level of use (well used, partially-used or disused).

The survey was conducted by Megan Stigling, Ecologist at MKA Ecology Ltd. Megan has over three years' experience conducting badger surveys. The report was reviewed by Will O'Connor CEcol MCIEEM, Director and Principal Ecologist at MKA Ecology Ltd. Will has 15 years' experience as an ecologist.

The date, time and weather condition during the survey are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Date, time and weather conditions

Date	Time of survey	Weather conditions*	
07/10/2023	10:30	Wind: 1 Cloud: 2/8	Temp: 11˚C Rain: None

*Wind as per Beaufort Scale / Cloud cover given in Oktas.

3. Constraints

Areas of dense bramble scrub was present along the western boundary. However, several clearings were present allowing for the majority of the western boundary to be inspected during the visit and as such this is not considered to have significantly constrained the survey effort.

Two private residential houses were present to the east of the red line boundary which are in the 30m buffer zone. Access into these gardens was not possible at the time of the survey and it is possible that if a badger sett was present in these areas it would not have been surveyed. However, as the gardens are under private ownership no impacts to these areas are anticipated.

4. Results and evaluation

No current evidence of badger activity was recorded on site or within the 30m buffer zone. The active badger sett that was identified in 2018 (Appendix 1: Photograph 1) was covered in leaf litter and no signs of active badger were recorded near the hole or onsite. The tree underneath which the badger hole was dug also appears to have fallen over slightly causing the tunnel within the base of the tree to narrow (Appendix 1: Photograph 2).

Subsequent to the 2018 visit a new metal chain-link fence has been installed on the neighbouring arable field which now surrounds the boundary of the Site and is likely to prevent access from the neighbouring arable fields. A hole was noted in the fencing to the north-west of the Site which may still provide limited access into the Site.

No active badger setts, or evidence of badger activity (e.g. latrines, dung heaps, snuffle holes or footprints) were recorded on site or within the 30m buffer zone. Therefore, active badger setts are

considered to be absent. As such, no Natural England licence is required and badgers do not present a significant constraint to the development.

5. Recommendations

If development works do not commence within six months, it is recommended that a further walkover badger survey is undertaken to obtain up to date data on the current distribution of active badger setts in and around the Site. This is because badger activity can change significantly over a short period of time. By undertaking this check future delays can be avoided. This data will then be used to inform the need for a Natural England licence application, as necessary. Timing of this survey should bear in mind that Natural England licence applications, should they be required, can take several days to compile and up to 30 days to process.

Recommendation 1

If development has not commenced within six months, carry out a follow-up badger survey prior to the start of development works at the Site to confirm the continued absence of badgers.

There is some potential for badgers to create new setts on site during the course of development works. Any new badger setts created during the course of development works may require additional mitigation and, potentially, licensing from Natural England. As a precaution, areas of retained green space should be monitored weekly by site workers for the presence of new badger setts. Where a badger sett is suspected, works should cease and an ecologist should be contacted to confirm the present of the sett (see Recommendation 4).

In order to safeguard badgers and other mammals such as rabbits and hedgehogs that may enter onto the Site, trenches, excavations and spoil heaps will be covered overnight. Where this is not possible, the trenches or excavations will contain a means of escape. This should be provided by a ramp angled at no greater than 45 degrees and 300mm in width.

Recommendation 2

Monitoring for the presence of active badger setts throughout the duration of development works should be undertaken by site contractors, and particularly before significant ground works.

Recommendation 3

Trenches, excavations and spoil heaps will be covered overnight. Where this is not possible, the trenches or excavations will contain a means of escape for mammals such as badger, hedgehog and rabbit. This should be provided by a ramp angled at no greater than 45 degrees and 300mm in width.

In the event that a new active badger sett is discovered on site during the course of development works, all ground works within 30m of the sett location must cease immediately and the advice of an experienced ecologist sought. It should be noted that further mitigation and licensing may be required in this event.

Recommendation 4

In the event that a new active badger sett is discovered on site during the course of development works, all ground works within 30m of the sett location must cease immediately and the advice of an experienced ecologist sought.

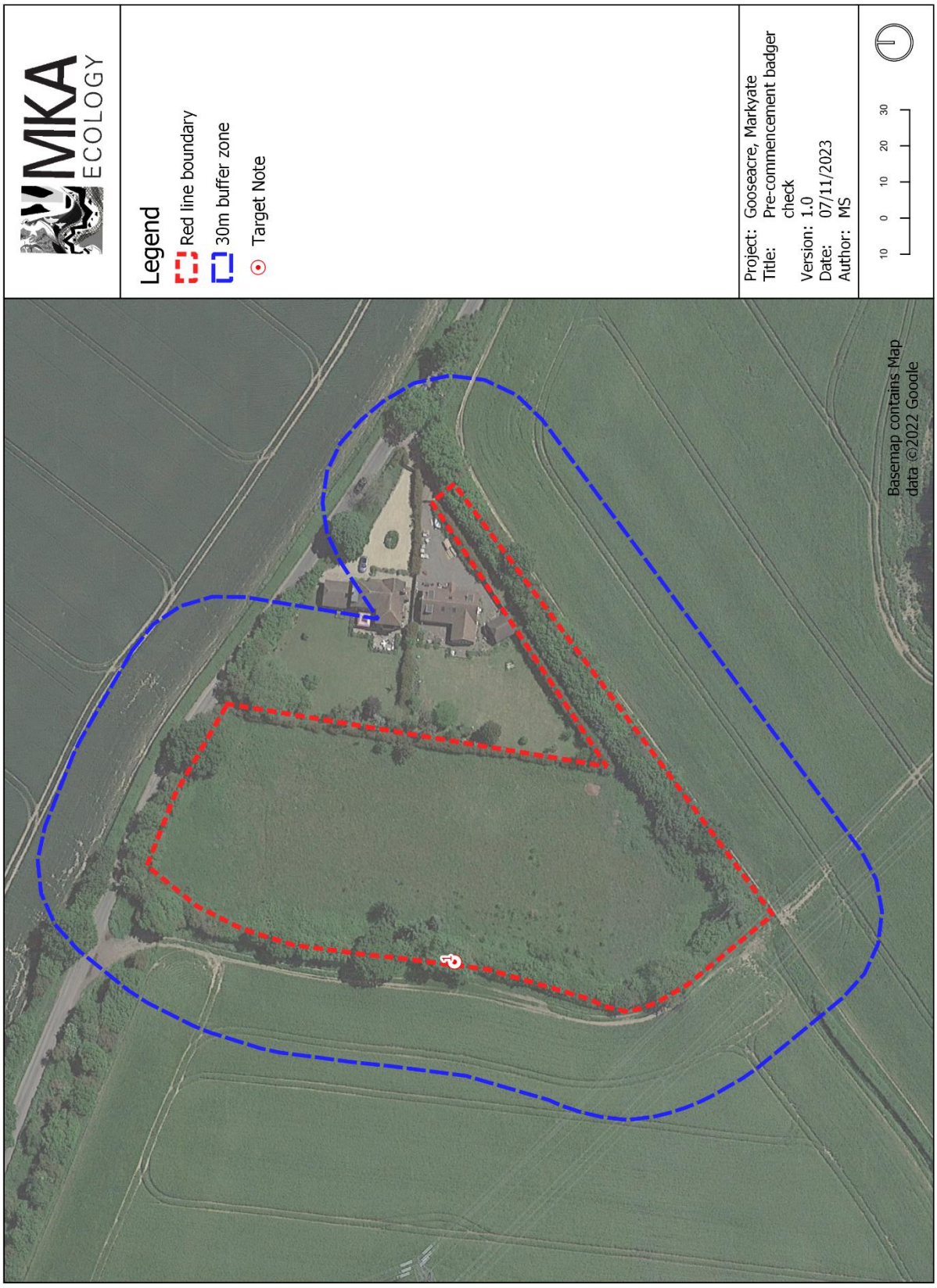
6. References

Harris, S., Cresswell, P. and Jefferies, D. (1989) *Surveying Badgers.* Mammal Society: London.

MKA Ecology Ltd (2019) *Gooseacre, Markyate – Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. MKA Ecology Ltd: Cambridge.

Appendix 1: Figures

Figure 1: Survey area and results



Target note 1: Disused badger sett

Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Badger sett identified in 2018 (MKA Ecology Ltd, 2019)

Photograph 2: Disused badger sett 2023