

Appendix 8.2 Otter Survey Report – October 2019

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Appendix 8.2 Otter Survey Report – October 2019

Introduction

Overview

ITP Energised (ITPE) was appointed by Orkney Islands Council to undertake a survey for otter (*Lutra lutra*) at the Proposed Development site at Quanterness located north-west of Kirkwall, Orkney (hereafter referred to as 'the site'). The site has central Ordnance Survey Grid Reference 341560, 1013640.

Site Description

The site covers an area of 172.27 hectares and is made up entirely of agricultural land, which extends to the west, east and south. The northern perimeter of the site is made up of a rocky shoreline with open sea extending north, while steep heather moorland rises to Wideford Hill approximately 500m south of the site perimeter.

Aims

The otter survey was undertaken to inform the planning application for the Proposed Development.

Legislation and Biodiversity

An overview of relevant legislation, policy and guidance is provided below.

Legislation

Otter is protected as a European Protected Species (EPS) under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). As such, it is an offence to deliberately or recklessly:

- capture, injure or kill an otter;
- harass an otter or group of otters;
- disturb an otter in a holt or any other structure or place it uses for shelter or protection;
- disturb an otter while it is rearing or otherwise caring for its young;
- obstruct access to a holt or other structure or place otters use for shelter or protection, or otherwise deny the animal use of that place;
- disturb an otter in a manner or in circumstances likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species; and
- disturb an otter in a manner or in circumstances likely to impair its ability to survive, breed or reproduce, or rear or otherwise care for its young.

It is also an offence to:

- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal (whether or not deliberately or recklessly); and
- Keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange any wild otter (or any part or derivative of one) obtained after 10 June 1994.

It should be noted that otter shelters are legally protected whether an otter is present or not.

Otter is included on the Scottish Biodiversity List (SBL), where it is listed for avoidance of negative impacts (The Scottish Government, 2013). Otter is also listed as a priority species in the Orkney Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) (Orkney's Biodiversity Steering Group, 2018).

Good Practice Ecological Guidance

As part of the protected species survey, recognisance has been taken of the following best practice guidelines / survey method publications:

- Competencies for Species Survey: Otter (CIEEM, 2018); and
- Monitoring the Otter *Lutra lutra* (Chanin, 2003).

Methods

Overview

This section describes the methods used for the otter survey, which comprised a combination of desk study and field survey

Desk Study

The purpose of the desk study was to collect baseline information from the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas (NBN Atlas, 2019) and also a data request from Orkney Wildlife Information & Records Centre (OWIRC). This included any recent (i.e. within the last 10 years) records of otter within 2km of the site boundary.

Field Surveys

The field survey of the site and 250m buffer was undertaken on the 4th of October 2019.

A thorough search was undertaken of the riparian zone and up to 20m away from the water's edge (where suitable habitat was found to be present). Throughout the survey, overhanging banks, cavities, bankside vegetation and riparian features, such as boulders and mud, were searched for the following signs of otter use:

- spraints – otter dung, which is used for marking territories, is often located on prominent features within the channel or on the bank (including weirs, bridges, rocks, tree roots, confluence of watercourses, etc.); and
- footprints – located in soft mud, silt or sand banks.

Other potential evidence of otter presence was also searched for in the survey. The following signs, when interpreted in conjunction with spraints and footprints, can provide data to support an assessment of otter activity on a site. They cannot, however, be used in isolation to definitively indicate otter presence/absence:

- resting-up places – comprising couches (areas of flattened vegetation) or hovers (lay-up areas, including ledges under rocks or hollows under fallen trees or roots);
- potential holt sites – holes or dens;
- runs and trails – pathways from the water into dense cover or around bankside trees;
- slides – down banks as an entry to waterbodies; and
- feeding remains – e.g. remains of fish, birds and amphibians.

Survey Limitations

The otter survey was carried out according to current recommended guidelines and took place during dry and clear weather conditions. As such, there are considered to be no limitations to the survey results.

Baseline

Desk Study

The data provided by Orkney Wildlife Information & Records Centre identified two records of otter the first located close to the north-west of the Site boundary recorded in 2010 and the second 1.3km west of the Site boundary on Damsay, recorded in 2013 (Orkney Wildlife Information & Records Centre, 2019).

Survey Results

Figure 8.3 presents the results of the otter survey, as well as relevant Target Note (TN) locations detailing further information obtained from the survey. The TNs are presented in full in Annex A.

Otter spraints were identified on the track north of the A965 (TN1) within the site boundary, on a field boundary at the north of the site boundary (TN2), on a concrete drainage channel to the west of the site boundary (TN3) and around the edge of the pool located to the west of the site boundary (TN4, TN5a and TN5b).

No holts or hovers were identified within the site boundary or the 250m survey buffer.

Recommendations

Given the identification of spraints within the site and 250m survey buffer, otters are using the site and surrounding area to forage and commute. Whilst no resting places or holts were identified during the survey, given the presence of otter in the area they could arise in the future. Therefore, the following recommendations, endorsed by SNH (SNH, 2019) are advised:

- avoid damage or disturbance to otters or otter habitat, including avoiding any obstructions to established otter access to open water;
- cap exposed pipe systems when contractors are off site, and cover or provide exit ramps from exposed trenches or holes, to prevent otters becoming trapped; and
- a pre-construction survey should be carried out prior to construction works commencing, and regular monitoring surveys should be undertaken throughout the construction phase to ensure that no breeding/natal dens have established and that no holts or resting places have developed since the baseline survey was conducted.

References

Chanin P (2003). Monitoring the Otter *Lutra Lutra*. Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers Monitoring Series No. 10. English Nature, Peterborough.

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The Scottish Government (2013). Scottish Biodiversity List. Available online at: <https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/16118/Biodiversitylist/SBL> (accessed October 2019).

Annex A: Target Notes

Target Notes (TN)	Grid Reference		Description
1	341146	1013744	An otter spraint was identified on the track north of the A965.
2	342361	1014034	An otter spraint was identified on the field boundary at the north of the Site boundary
3	340341	1013724	An otter spraint was identified on a concrete drainage channel to the west of the Site boundary
4	340365	1013987	An otter spraint was identified on the north of the pool located to the west of the Site boundary
5	a	340392 1013917	Two otter spraints were identified on the edge of the pool located to the west of the Site boundary
	b	340408 1013937	

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