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HIGHGROVE HOUSE, RUISLIP

BRIEFING NOTE – BADGER SURVEY RESULTS

Introduction

1. Ecology Solutions was commissioned by Brian Madge Ltd to undertake a Badger *Meles meles* survey of the land within and surrounding Highgrove House, Ruislip, Hillingdon (see Plan ECO1) in January 2021 to determine the level of use of the site by Badgers.
2. The development proposals are for the construction of a residential property in the grounds of Highgrove House.
3. This briefing note details the survey results and any ecological constraints in relation to the proposed works.
4. Previous surveys had been undertaken by AA Environmental LLP in February 2011 within the woodland adjacent to the garden of Highgrove House.

Methodology

5. Specific surveys for Badgers were undertaken within the site and surrounding woodland in January 2021.
6. This comprised of two main elements. Firstly, searching thoroughly for evidence of Badger setts. For any setts that were encountered standard survey practice would record the location of each sett entrance, even if the entrance appeared disused. The following specific information was recorded where appropriate:
 - i) The number and location of well used or very active entrances; these are clear of any debris or vegetation and are obviously in regular use and may, or may not, have been excavated recently.
 - ii) The number and location of inactive entrances; these are not in regular use and have debris such as leaves and twigs in the entrance, or have plants growing in or around the edge of the entrance.
 - iii) The number of disused entrances; these have not been in use for some time, are partly or completely blocked and cannot be used without considerable clearance. If the entrance has been disused for some time all that may be visible is a depression in the ground where the hole used to be together with the remains of the spoil heap.

7. Secondly, any evidence of Badger activity such as well-worn paths, run-throughs, snagged hair, footprints, latrines and foraging signs was recorded so as to build up a picture of the use of the site by this species.

Survey Results

8. A main Badger sett was recorded within the woodland south of the garden of Highgrove House, which is separated by a tall, metal railing fence.
9. The sett was recorded as having 14 active entrances, plus one inactive entrance and two entrances that appear to be used by Rabbits. The vast majority of the sett lies within a fence-off area (a mixture of metal railings, close-board and chain-link), although to the south, where there is a dilapidated chain-link fence, there were two additional inactive / partially blocked entrances where it appears that people have tried to cover the entrances with cut garden vegetation. The metal railing fence along the northern boundary of the sett are set on top of a low brick wall that is generally impenetrable to Badgers. The metal railing fence along part of the western boundary of the sett, and which extends to the west of the sett, has large gaps at the base, allowing Badgers free access into the grounds of Highgrove House. The close-board fencing along the eastern boundary of the sett has a couple of panels missing in one part, and there is evidence of tunnels extending beneath this fence line. As set out above, there is a dilapidated chain-link fence to the south of the sett, although the active area of the sett is generally contained within the fencing.
10. The tunnels appear to predominantly head towards the centre of the sett, with a few heading towards the east (beneath the close-board fencing). Access beyond the close-board fencing was not possible. No tunnels appeared to head west or northwest, towards the lawn area of Highgrove House itself, and although there is evidence of a mammal push-through beneath the metal railing fence, there is no evidence of extensive foraging within the lawn areas of Highgrove House. No tunnels extend to the north, as the sett is blocked by a low retaining brick wall, with the ground of the sett being at the same height as the brick wall but higher than the adjacent patio area of Highgrove House.
11. Evidence of Badger foraging was recorded in the woodland areas to the west and south of the sett, within Highgrove Woods. As set out above, although no evidence of foraging was recorded within the lawn of Highgrove House, the metal railing fence is highlight permeable to Badgers, with gaps present all along the fence line and there is a mammal push-through at the northwestern corner of the sett.
12. Previous surveys carried out by AA Environmental LLP recorded two well-used sett entrances heading generally east and a further six partially used sett entrances, one heading north, one heading southeast, and the other tunnel directions not recorded. In addition, a single disused sett entrance was also recorded.
13. It appears there has been an increase in Badger use of the sett since 2011, with a number of additional entrances constructed. However, anecdotal evidence from a resident of Highgrove house indicates there are a maximum of six Badgers present, with generally only three seen at any one time.
14. Buffer zones of 30m around the active Badger entrances (as well as the inactive and Rabbit entrances) have been plotted, as shown on Plan ECO2. It can be seen

that the nearest active and inactive sett entrances lie within 30m of the proposed new building, and as such it is considered that a Natural England licence will be required for any ground works within 30m of this sett. However, given the presence of a retaining wall along the northern boundary of the sett, this effectively limits the extent to which the sett tunnels can extend northwards. It can be seen on Plan ECO2 that the area within which tunnels are likely to extend does not fall within the footprint of the proposed development, and as such the impacts from construction are considered to be much reduced.

Mitigation

15. Given the presence of a main Badger sett within the woodland to the south of Highgrove House, it is considered that a **Natural England licence** will likely be required prior to any ground works commencing within 30m of this sett. However, as set out above, it is considered unlikely that tunnels will extend from the main sett into the development footprint, due to the presence of a retaining wall along part of the northern boundary of the sett.
16. As part of the licensable works, the furthest extent of the building foundations and associated groundwork will be dug either by hand or using a small digger, which will be overseen directly by an ecologist. Any sett tunnels that are recorded within the development footprint will be dug back by hand and under the direct supervision of an ecologist, to remove the tunnels. Any tunnels found will also be dug back towards the metal railing fence line by hand, and again directly oversee by an ecologist, with an exit created to the surface, to prevent any Badgers that may be in these tunnels from being trapped. However, as set out above, it is considered that tunnels are unlikely to be present within the development footprint area. The tracing back of any tunnels encountered would be carried out under a live-dig, and the main sett itself would not be temporarily or partially closed. However, it is often necessary to undertake a number of additional measures to safeguard any Badgers present on a site, particularly in regard to disturbance and other related issues.
17. All contractors working on the site should be briefed regarding the presence of Badgers in the local area and of the types of activities that would not be permissible on site.
18. Any trenches or deep pits that are to be left open overnight should be provided with a means of escape should a Badger enter. This could simply be in the form of a roughened plank of wood placed in the trench as a ramp to the surface. This is particularly important if the trench fills with water.
19. Any trenches/pits should be inspected each morning to ensure no Badgers have become trapped overnight. Should a Badger get stuck in a trench it will likely attempt to dig itself into the side of the trench, by forming a temporary sett. Should a trapped Badger be encountered, the project ecologist should be contacted immediately for further advice.
20. The storage of topsoil or other 'soft' building materials within the site should be given careful consideration. Badgers will readily adopt such mounds as setts, which would then be afforded the same protection as established setts. To avoid the adoption of any mounds, they should be subject to daily inspections (or nightly patrols if 24-hour security is present on site) or consideration given to fencing them with Badger-proof fencing.

21. During the development the storage of any chemicals required for the building construction should be well away from any Badger activity and contained in such a way that they cannot be accessed or knocked over by any roaming Badgers.
22. No percussive pile driving or similar should be undertaken during construction works, as this could any collapse tunnels within the sett.
23. A single Sycamore tree is to be removed, which lies adjacent to the metal railing fence and within the woodland area. It is recommended that this tree be removed using hand tools only, and no machinery is tracked through the woodland. In addition, it is recommended that the stump and roots are not grubbed out, as this could cause disturbance to Badgers in the adjacent sett.
24. It is also recommended that pruning of the trees further west of the sett also be undertaken using hand tools, and that no machinery is tracked through the woodland.

Enhancements

25. As an enhancement, it is recommended that the chain link fencing bordering the southern boundary of the land within the client's ownership be repaired where it has fallen, in order to prevent public access to the sett from pathways that run adjacent to the fence. The fence should be designed to still allow Badgers access to the wider woodland, such as through gaps beneath the fencing.
26. The gaps beneath the metal railing fence around the lawn of Highgrove House should be maintained to allow Badgers access to the gardens of Highgrove House for foraging and dispersal.
27. The planting of any new fruit or berry-bearing trees within the grounds of Highgrove House or the woodland west of the sett (outside of the 30m buffer zone) would provide additional seasonal foraging resources for Badgers.

Conclusions

28. In conclusion, it is considered that taking account the recommendations set out above, there will be no adverse impacts on Badgers as a result of the development proposals. As such, there is not deemed to be any overriding ecological constraints for development purposes.



KEY:



STUDY AREA



LAND WITHIN CLIENT'S OWNERSHIP



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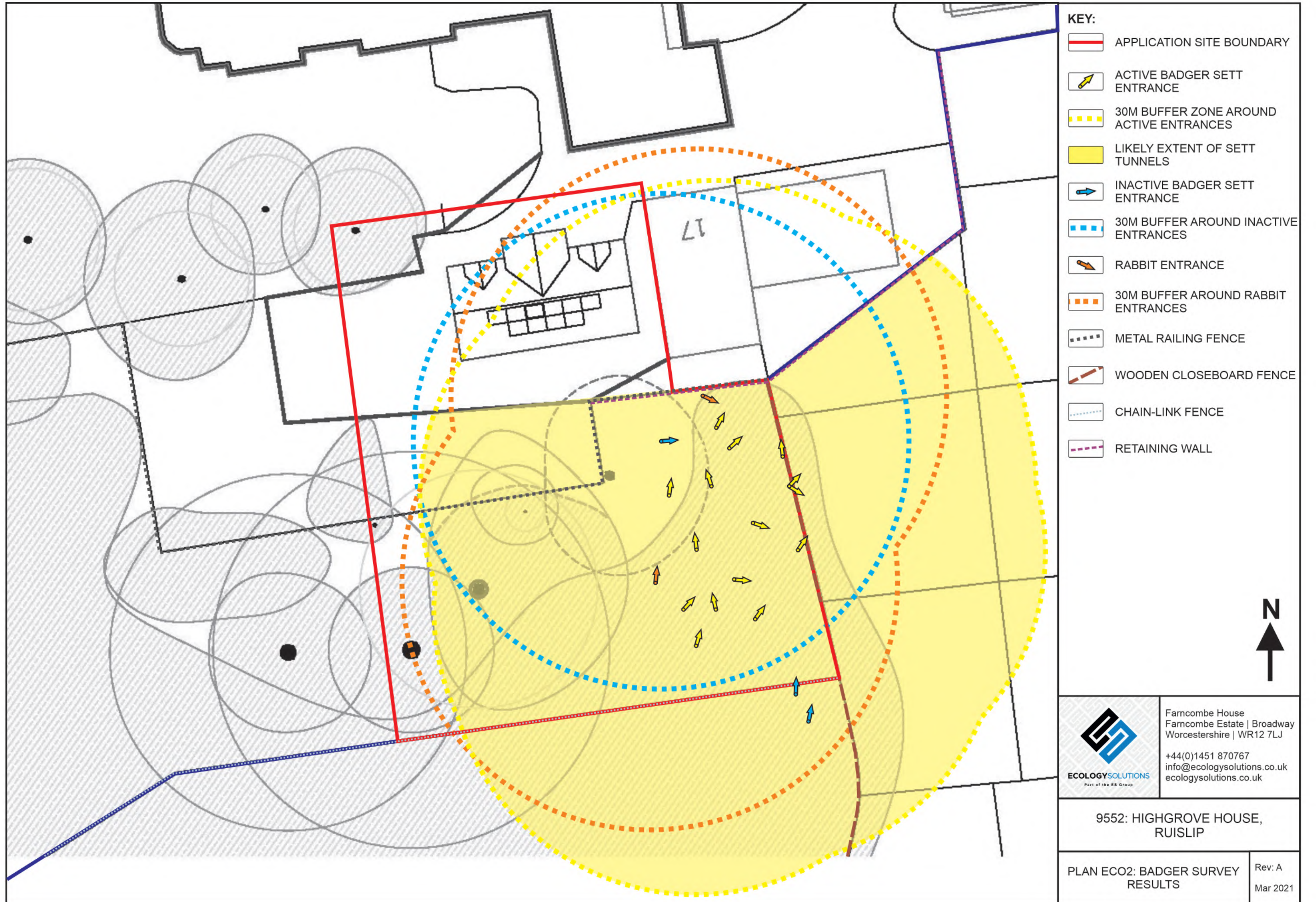
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9552: HIGHGROVE HOUSE,
RUISLIP

PLAN ECO1: SITE
LOCATION

Rev: A
Mar 2021



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