



## Ecological Planning & Research

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# 09/0434

Ray Fielding  
BBF Fielding Limited  
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39 Chobham Road  
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Surrey  
GU21 6JD

Dear Ray,

### Moor Lane, Woking, Surrey - Ecological Appraisal

As instructed, I visited the site on 9 March 2009 and undertook a walkover to identify any ecological issues relating to protected habitats and species that could potentially be impacted upon by the proposed scheme.

From your brief, the scheme involves constructing two new access roads at Westfield, Woking, Surrey (centred on grid ref: TQ 004 563). The northern proposed access road will run south off Balfour Avenue for approximately 49m before turning east for approximately 61m into Oaklands Nursery (horse paddocks) while the southern road will run south off Westfield Way for approximately 57m turning southeast for approximately 62m into a large field grazed by sheep. Both roads initially have to cut through woodland habitats that form part of Westfield Common SNCI (see **Map 1**).

The two proposed roads are to provide access to a future residential development on the land north of Moor Lane that will provide 190 affordable rented homes on a mixed tenure development of approximately 470 homes.

Given the small scale of the proposed access roads, there are unlikely to be any significant ecological impacts extending beyond the footprint of the scheme. The features below have been assessed for their likely ecological value (where appropriate) and further recommendations or actions given:



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## Vegetation & Habitats

### Wet Woodland (Westfield Common SNCI)

The two woodlands either side of Westfield Way constitute the eastern extent of Westfield Common SNCI. The northern half covers approximately 0.6ha and the southern half approximately 1.2ha. The SNCI has been designated because it is an area of species-rich wet woodland with associated drains and pools that supports Chamomile (a nationally scarce plant) and Great Crested Newt populations. The two woods are not considered to be ancient in origin and are not listed in the Ancient Woodland Inventory (NDAD 2009).



Figure 1 Northern Wet Woodland (Westfield Common SNCI)

Although wet woodland is a UK and Local BAP priority habitat and is uncommon within Surrey as a whole, these two areas are considered poor examples of this type of habitat as they have become very degraded. Although there are some mature and veteran Oak trees *Quercus robur* on the woodland boundaries, the majority of the woodland however comprises of only young Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Oak trees (5-10 years old) and a predominance of young Holly bushes *Ilex aquifolium* (dominating large areas within the southern parcel of woodland) that may indicate that these woods has been cleared at sometime in the recent past. The ground flora is also impoverished and comprises mainly of dense stands of Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and the majority of herbs seen were introduced species such as Violets *Viola* sp. , Spanish Bluebells *Hyacinthoides hispanica* and Daffodils *Narcissus* sp. either planted or garden escapees (the southern woodland had extensive mounds of dumped garden waste). The woodlands can be classified as W5 *Alnus glutinosus-Carex paniculata* woodlands (Rodwell 1991) although they lack many of the indicator species representative of this type of community.

### Ponds & Ditches

Within the southern woodland a series of ditches fed four small shallow ponds, although all ponds and ditches contained water, they were largely shaded and contained no aquatic or marginal vegetation at the time of the survey.

### Fields

The northern field (Oaklands Nursery) are horse paddocks that comprise of grazed grassland. These are considered neutral grasslands in origin occurring on damp ground, however they are generally species-poor and are characterised by the dominance of grasses such as False Oatgrass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Creeping Bent *Agrostis capillaries*. Herbaceous species found here are those species more associated with a degree of high fertility in the soil (i.e manure) such as White Clover *Trifolium repens* and Nettles *Urtica dioica*.

The southern field (North of langhurst) comprises improved grasslands grazed by sheep. These are characterised by dominance of Perennial Ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, Common Bent and White Clover.

### **Assessment & Recommendations**

#### Vegetation

The route of the two proposed access roads (see Map1) would have a very limited impact to the two wet woodlands on either side of Westfield Way as in both instances they would only intrude into a very small area of habitat on their north-eastern corners. The northern road follows the route of an informal footpath and would result in the loss of a small amount of scrubby vegetation (approximately 0.1ha) considered to be of low ecological value. The southern road follows a gravelled parking area before entering the wood and would result in the loss of some scrubby vegetation and bramble (approximately 0.1ha) of low ecological value. The proposed roads would also lead to the loss of approximately 0.2ha of grassland within the two fields, these areas of vegetation have little ecological value and therefore no impact is predicted.

Although it is considered that the proposals will have a very minimal impact on this small section of Westfield SNCI, I would like to make you aware of saved Policy NE02 of Woking Borough Council's Local Plan in the respect that it creates a presumption against development within or affecting an SNCI unless it can be demonstrated that it would not directly or indirectly harm the nature conservation interest of the site. Dependant on the results of additional surveys recommended below, at this stage, it is advised that as compensation for the loss of a small area of the SNCI to land take (approximately 0.2ha or 11% of the total area of the 2 woodlands) that the wet woodland be brought into management. Management options should include clearing rubbish and garden waste from the site, opening up the tree canopy around ponds and creating new ones and managing invasive scrub and removing non-native species. Such measures would more than compensate for loss of habitats to the proposed scheme and would be seen as beneficial to the local biodiversity of these woodlands.

#### Chamomile

The line of the road and adjacent habitat including woodland and within the grazed fields was searched for Chamomile. No Chamomile was found on the survey and therefore there is no predicted impact from the proposed scheme.

## Bats

Three species of bats have been recorded within a 1 km radius of the site; Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, Noctule *Nyctalus noctula* and Brown Long-eared bats *Plecotus auritus*.

Although there is potential for bats to use the woodlands, fields and hedge boundaries within the immediate area for foraging, especially Noctules and Pipistrelles, roosting opportunities within the potential zone of influence (considered to be the line of the proposed access roads) are very limited. However, there are 5 mature veteran Oak trees *Quercus robur* (see Map1) which are situated close to the proposed access road routes, 2 of which have numerous holes in their trunks and are initially assessed as having medium bat roost potential, although no signs that the trees were used by bats was found. The remaining 3 trees have ivy covering their trunks and have been identified as having low roost potential for bats.



**Figure 2 Veteran Oak Tree Close to line of the Proposed Northern Access Road**

At the present time, it is unclear as to whether these would be affected by the proposals although it is strongly recommended that these trees should be retained because of their potential to support roosting bats. All species of British bat are protected from harm or disturbance under the *Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations, 1994* (as amended). The advice for Planning Authorities at paragraph 99 of *Government Circular Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and their Impact within the Planning System* is that they must establish the presence of such protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by proposed scheme, before planning permission is granted. Therefore, if the trees are to be affected by the line of the proposed road (i.e. felled or overhanging tree limbs cut back) then further bat surveys should be undertaken on these trees to determine appropriate mitigation. This may involve timing the felling to avoid the most vulnerable periods, removing the roosts by hand, and under the supervision of a bat expert, and providing alternative bat roosts in areas away from the proposed access roads (i.e. within the woodlands).

### Badgers

Badger *Meles meles* are also known to occur within 1km to the south of the proposed scheme.

However, no Badger setts or other signs of Badger usage was detected within the woodlands and fields bordering the proposed scheme during this survey. Although there is a possibility that some field signs were missed due to the dense vegetation, especially within scrub and bramble along the southern edges of the southern field, and also could have been missed due to the heavy usage of the woodlands by the public obscuring obvious Badger signs. The proposed scheme is nevertheless in close proximity to woodland and scrub habitats and it is conceivable that badgers could use the area as foraging habitat. The possibility of a breeding or outlier sett cannot at this stage be discounted.

Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, which makes it an offence to wilfully harm a badger. Although the location of the proposed access roads will not impact on any setts located with a distance of 30m, it is advised that there should be no night working and all holes/trenches are to be covered to prevent them from becoming a pitfall danger. If these measures are put in place it is considered that there would be only a minor impact during site preparation and construction on Badgers. It is also very unlikely that the loss of a small amount of foraging habitat to the scheme would impact upon the local Badger population. Because Badgers are highly mobile animals and can move into an area where previously they were absent, it is also recommended that a detailed Badger survey of the area surrounding the access roads (within 30m) be undertaken one month prior to starting works to reassess the current situation.

Car traffic using these roads into and out of the eventual larger development scheme are unlikely to cause injury to Badgers that may cross these roads as this is already within a residential area and traffic speed is already kept to a minimum (i.e. 30mph).

### Reptiles

Although it was not the optimum time of year to assess the presence of reptiles, the rough grassland margins to fields and scrub within the zone of influence (i.e. within 200m of the scheme) and the proximity to water bodies (see Map 1) provide suitable habitats for reptiles, particularly Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* and possibly Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*. Reptiles may also use open habitats (i.e. grazed fields, woodland clearings, trackways and gravelled parking areas) for basking and foraging. Spoil heaps and piles of logs, rocks and debris also provide suitable refugia where reptiles can shelter and hibernate.

However, available habitat for reptiles is limited within the line of the proposed access roads and it is considered likely, that if present, there will be only be a small number of reptiles affected within the zone of influence of the scheme. These species are protected from harm under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981*, as amended. In accordance with the government guidance referred to above, I therefore recommend that we undertake a reptile survey, in accordance with Froglife's 1999 guidance. This must be completed in spring or autumn, when reptiles are likely to utilise the refugia that are the basis of this method. If reptiles are present, we will advise on the necessary mitigation. This is likely to involve the collection and relocation of reptiles to safe areas away from the proposed scheme (i.e. into adjacent habitats).

