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Hallam Land Management, Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd, William Davis, Connolly Homes and

Bellcross Homes

South West Milton Keynes

BADGER SURVEY REPORT

November 2014

FPCR Environment and Design Ltd

Registered Office: Lockington Hall, Lockington, Derby DE74 2RH

Company No. 07128076. [T] 01509 672772 [F] 01509 674565 [E] mail@fpcr.co.uk [W] www.fpcr.co.uk

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following report has been prepared by FPCR Environment and Design Ltd on behalf of a consortium comprising Hallam Land Management, Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd, William Davis, Connolly Homes and Bellcross Homes, and provides details of a badger *Meles meles* survey undertaken to support the proposed development on a site at Salden Chase, Southwest Milton Keynes.
- 1.2 The subject site is located on the south west edge of residential development of Bletchley. The parcel of land lies between Newton Longville to the south and the A421 Standing Way and B4034 Buckingham Road at its north boundary.
- 1.3 The surrounding landscape comprises mixed arable and pasture farmland to the south and west; established residential development to the north and east; and new development land adjacent to the A421 within Tattenhoe Park to the north, which also includes warehouse development and a network of ponds.
- 1.4 The survey was undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist on the 25th February to search for signs of badger across the whole of the application site. Where access allowed an additional 30-50m margin around the boundary was also included (Please refer to Figure 1 for survey extents).

Survey Aims and Objectives

- 1.5 The aims of the survey work undertaken were to:
- confirm the presence or absence of badgers within the study area;
 - record the location of badger setts, status, and other field signs indicative of badger activity, should they be present;
 - to establish a baseline record of badger activity that can be used to support a Natural England sett exclusion or disturbance licence, should one become necessary in the future; and
 - Identify any conflicts between the proposed development plans and the proposed development plans and the Protection of Badgers Act (1992).

2.0 LEGISLATION & POLICY

- 2.1 Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. This Act is based on the need to protect badgers from baiting and deliberate harm or injury. The Act makes it an offence to:
- Wilfully kill, injure, take possess or cruelly ill-treat a badger, or attempt to do so
 - To intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett. Sett interference includes disturbing badgers whilst they are occupying a sett, as well as damaging or destroying a sett or obstructing access routes
- 2.2 A sett is defined as: "Any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a badger".
- 2.3 Recent guidance produced by Natural England suggests that badgers are relatively tolerant of moderate levels of noise and activity around their setts. Low or moderate levels of apparent

disturbance at or near to badger setts do not necessarily disturb the badgers occupying those setts. Some examples of activities at or near setts that are considered unlikely to cause disturbance to badgers include:

- i. Development, or other activities occurring close to badger setts (use of hand tools and/or machinery), where there is no reason to believe that the 'disturbance' will be greater than that which badgers commonly tolerate, and therefore any badger(s) occupying the sett are unlikely to be disturbed;
- ii. Vegetation removal (including felling small trees or shrubs) over or adjacent to setts (using hand tools and/or machinery);
- iii. Clearing out of ditches/watercourses using machinery and/or hand tools where badger setts are present.

- 2.4 Natural England is responsible for issuing licences under section 10(1)(d) of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 where it is necessary to interfere with a badger sett in the course of development.
- 2.5 The likelihood of disturbing a badger sett, or adversely affecting badgers' foraging territory, or links between them, or significantly increasing the likelihood of road or rail casualties amongst badger populations, are capable of being material considerations in planning decisions.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Desk Study

- 3.1 Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes biodiversity partnership and the Buckingham and Milton Keynes environmental records centre were contacted for archive badger records within 1km of the proposed development site.

Field Survey

- 3.2 The survey followed the standard methodology outlined by Harris, Cresswell and Jefferies (1989)¹.
- 3.3 This involved a through search of the entire site and up to 30m from the site boundary, where access was permitted, for evidence of badger occupation and/or activity. Particular attention was paid to the inspection of hedgerow, scrub patches, woodland, ditches and banks as these features are particularly likely to support badger setts. Field signs and evidence sought included;
- Setts, including earth mounds, evidence of bedding and runways between setts;
 - Latrine, often located close to setts, at territory boundaries or adjacent to favoured feeding areas;
 - Prints, paths and trackways;
 - Hairs, caught on rough wood or fencing;
 - Other evidence, including snuffle holes, feeding and playing areas and scratching posts.

¹ Harris, S. Cresswell, P and Jefferies, D. (1989) *Surveying Badgers*. The Mammal Society Publication No. 9 Mammal Society

- 3.4 Where setts are found their status and level of activity is noted and categorised based on the definitions in Tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1 – Sett Classification

Sett Type	Definition
Main	Usually continuously used with many signs of activity around, a large number of holes and conspicuous spoil mounds.
Annexe	Usually located close to a main sett and connected to it by well used paths. Annexe's may not be continuously used.
Subsidiary	Lesser used setts comprising a few holes and without associated well-used paths. Subsidiary setts are used intermittently.
Outlier	One or two holes without obvious paths connecting to other setts. Little spoil heaps, used sporadically.

Table 2 – Activity Classification

Level of Activity	Definition
Well Used	Clear of debris, trampled soil mounds and obviously active, with signs of activity such as presence of prints, dislodged guard hairs around entrances.
Partially Used	Some associated debris or plants at the entrance. Could be used with minimal excavation and usually with signs of activity within the vicinity, for example, badger pathways.
Disused	Partially or completely blocked entrances.

4.0 RESULTS

Desk Study

- 4.1 Consultation responses identified no historical reports of badger setts directly on site, however badgers were present in the area. The result with the closest proximity to the site was a sett at the railways sidings local wildlife site, 100m to the east. All records were modern with the most historical being from 2004.

Field Survey

- 4.2 An active main sett (S1) was found in the railway embankment to the south of the site (photo 1). This consisted of approximately 8 active holes, 2 partially active holes and 4 disused holes. Fresh bedding was observed at entrances, as well as substantial fresh earth works. A latrine was found near the sett (photo 2) that consisted of 5 active pits a further latrine was found nearer the stream and this consisted of 4 active pits. A scratch post (photo 3) was also noted in the vicinity of the sett. Although this sett was outside the site boundary its proximity to the site and the size of the sett suggests that badgers are likely to utilise the general area.
- 4.3 Further badger evidence was limited in extent but found widely across the site. The evidence included a single pit latrine, feeding evidence, footprints and pathway runs (Figure 1).
- 4.4 Several well-worn pathways lead down from the railway embankment to the south into the arable fields (photo 4), along one of these there were snuffle holes, evidence of badger foraging (photo 5). There were also a worn pathway crossing weasel lane near Dagnall house and a pathway crossing the hedgerow near the Milton Keynes boundary walk. Wet ground near the

railway embankment boundary to the south and ground to the north near the boundary of the site with the B4034 revealed badger footprints; evidence of recent activity in the area.

- 4.5 As well as the two latrines found in the vicinity of the main sett, likely to be marking the social groups core territory or hinterland, a further one pit latrine was found to the west of the Milton Keynes boundary walk, on the opposite side of the hedgerow (photo 6).
- 4.6 A disused old sett was noted along weasel lane, this consisted of 3 disused holes and it is now thought to be occupied by rabbits and entrances have collapsed on a number of holes.

5.0 DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The survey undertaken during February 2013 identified a single main sett outside the site's southern boundary. This consisted of approximately 8 active holes stretched along the wooded railway embankment to the south. Another disused sett was located along Weasel lane, this is no longer occupied by badgers. Further evidence of the species including worn path-ways, latrines, signs of foraging and footprints found in two areas. Such evidence was recorded at low levels but widely within the site boundary.
- 5.2 Based on the highly active status of the sett (S1), yet the comparatively low levels of activity recorded on site during the survey, it is considered that the site serves as part of a core territory for a badger social group. However, the social group is highly likely to forage south of the railway as well as to the north in the site. The result of the survey supports the conclusion that a badger social group does utilise the site for foraging and this forms a part of their more extensive territory.

6.0 IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT AND PROPOSED MITIGATION

Habitat Loss

- 6.1 The footprint of the proposed development will result in the permanent loss of arable and semi-improved grassland of limited value as foraging habitat. The very minor loss of some hedgerow habitats of greater value for foraging is necessary to create access roads, however the majority of such habitat, including woodland will be retained. Enhancements include the provision of a significant area of open space and flood attenuation with good connectivity throughout; providing enhanced foraging for badgers. Habitats of similar foraging value to those being lost are available within the local area, including agricultural fields to the south of the disused railway. Due to the location of the sett along the embankment of a disused railway, badgers from this social group can travel along this feature to other areas without risk of road traffic collision. In the long-term the proposed development will be of benefit to badgers and in the short to medium-term it is unlikely the loss suitable foraging within the site will result in an adverse impact to the local badger social group.

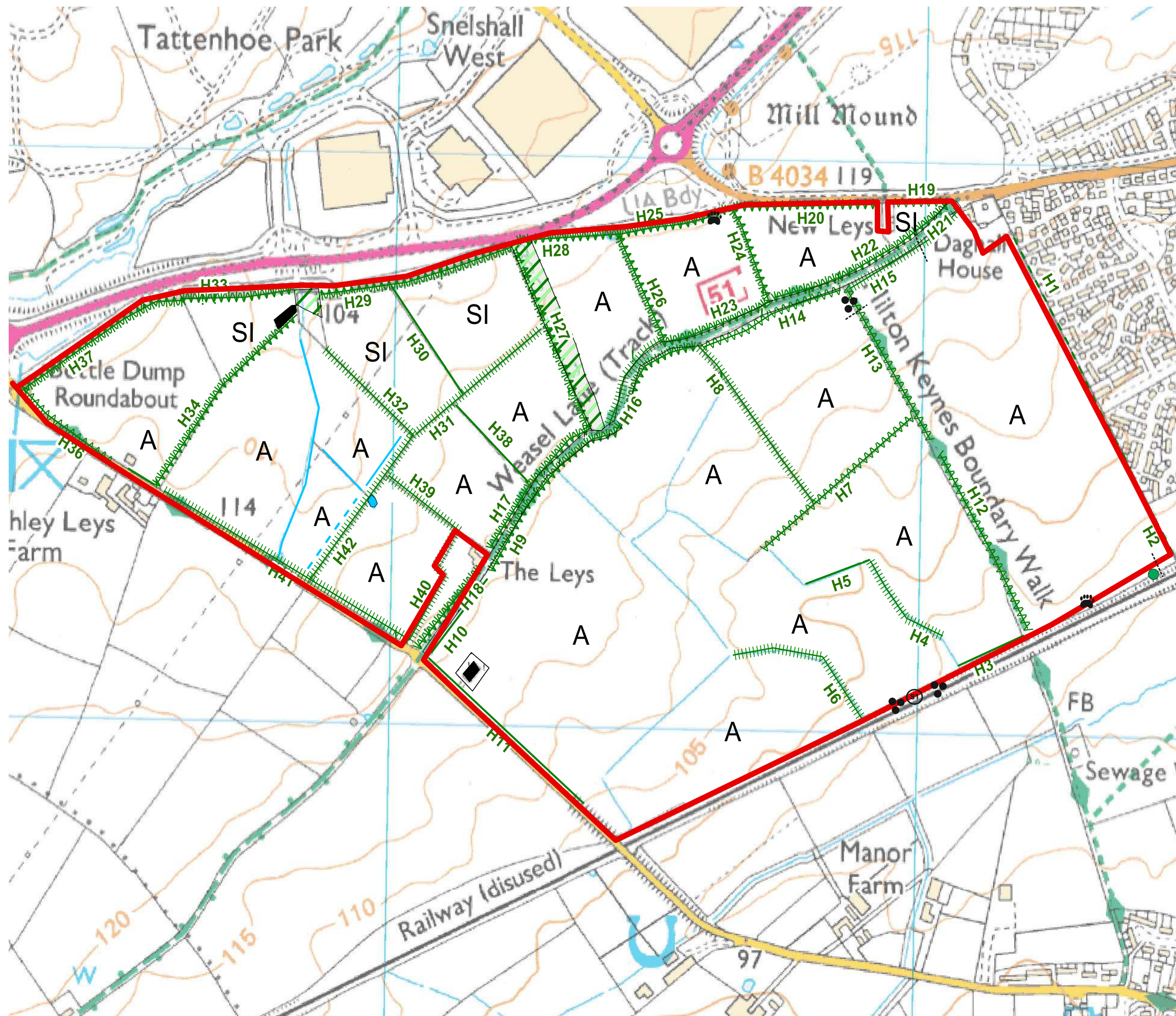
Interruption of regular routes of movement

- 6.2 The movement of badgers along habitually used paths may be disrupted during and after construction of the proposed development. Principle corridors of movement likely to be affected include hedgerows, particularly those with flood attenuation in close proximity.

- 6.3 Boundary hedgerows and arable in the south-west of the site will be largely unaffected during Phase 1 of proposed development and suitable badger foraging will be available here. Following Phase 1 hedgerows adjacent Milton Keynes Boundary Walk in the south-east and newly created green space and flood attenuation will provide connectivity and suitable foraging for badgers through to the north of the site. (refer to Parameters Plan SWMK03\074 and Development Phasing Plan SWMK03\081). The retention and enhancement of commuting routes and foraging away habitat from human disturbance is important in determining whether badgers utilise the site during and following development.
- 6.4 Where construction activities occur close to routes of movement and suitable foraging there is the potential for badgers and other mammals to become trapped or harmed. Therefore, where trenches or holes are created during construction and left overnight, measures will be taken to ensure that badgers cannot enter trenches or, if trenches are left open, badgers must be able to escape if accidentally trapped. This would be achieved by covering all trenches overnight or providing a means of escape (scaffold boards placed in trenches to allow escape).

Development within 30m of active setts

- 6.5 It is unlikely that development will occur within 30m of the only active sett (S1) identified in the vicinity of the site (adjacent the south site boundary) as a buffer of green space is proposed for the southern extent of the site (refer to Parameters Plan SWMK03\074). However should excavations such as for flood attenuation (proposed for Phase 1) be planned within 30m of S1 a further badger check is recommended and a licence from Natural England may be required to legitimise works should the use of heavy machinery be required within 30m of sett S1
- 6.6 Were sett S1 likely to be disturbed during works, such works should avoid the period from December-April when badgers are most sensitive to disturbance. To further reduce disturbance the sett should be clearly marked prior to works with high visibility fencing sett 30m from its position in order to minimise disturbance.
- 6.7 There is also the potential for badgers to excavate further setts within the site immediately prior to, or during development, particularly where topsoil mounds or other features are created during construction. Where this occurs badgers could be inadvertently disturbed or harmed during routine operations. A badger survey of all affected habitats would, therefore, be completed a maximum of 6 – 8 weeks prior to the commencement of works to ensure that the status of badgers within the site has not altered.
- 6.8 On occasions, an active sett may be discovered during the course of construction. If a suspected badger sett is discovered, advice should be sought immediately from a suitably experienced ecologist on whether it is indeed a badger sett and if so, whether it is occupied allowing appropriate action to be taken.



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- Key**
- Site Boundary
 - Mixed woodland - plantation
 - SI Neutral grassland - semi-improved
 - A Arable
 - Buildings
 - Standing water
 - Defunct hedge - native species-rich
 - Defunct hedge - species-poor
 - Hedge with trees - native species-rich
 - Hedge with trees - species-poor
 - Intact hedge - native species-rich
 - Intact hedge - species-poor
 - Dry ditch
 - Running water

- Fauna Key**
- Sett
 - Latrine
 - Badger Print
 - Mammal Pathway
 - Snuffle Holes

Hallam Land Management,
Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd, William Davis,
Connelly Homes and Bellcross Homes

Salden Chase, Milton Keynes
Buckinghamshire

BADGER SURVEY RESULTS

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Figure 1 0000-L-01A