



## Dormouse Survey Report

in respect of

Land at LEA Castle Farm, Wolverley, Kidderminster

for

**NRS Aggregates LTD**

Prepared By

**Heaton's**

**November 2020**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Heaton's have been commissioned by NRS Aggregates Ltd to undertake dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) surveys at LEA Castle Farm (hereafter referred to as the site).

1.2 These surveys were required to inform the determination of a planning application for the phased extraction of mineral and subsequent restoration of the site and to help ensure compliance with national legislation and inform mitigation and enhancement proposals (where necessary and appropriate).

### Survey Scope

1.3 The purpose of the dormouse surveys was to determine the presence or likely absence of dormouse within suitable on-site habitats and the habitats immediately adjacent to the boundary. These habitats include areas of defunct hedgerow present within the site boundary and areas of broad-leaved woodland surrounding the boundary of the site.

1.4 Sufficient ecological information is required to fully inform the site design and the proposed works. Reports will enable the project to satisfy all current UK and European legal wildlife requirements, as well as national and local planning regulations. All public bodies have statutory obligations under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

### Site Location and Description

1.5 The site is located on land to the north of Wolverley Road, Wolverley, Kidderminster. The site is located approximately 2.3km to the north-east of the centre of Kidderminster, Worcestershire. The site is centred at grid reference SO840790.

1.6 The site comprises approximately 45ha of arable farmland with semi-improved and improved grass headlands. A hardstanding track separates the site from south to north that is delineated by standards of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and lime (*Tilia* sp.). The field boundaries of the site include post and wire fencing, hedgerows containing native species, woodland edge and estate boundary brick wall. Occasional standard trees were present within the fields, including pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and non-native conifers.

- 1.7 The surrounding area includes the River Stour approximately 100m to the north-west of the site, as well as extensive arable land to the north, east and west and blocks of broadleaved woodland to the north, west and south. Wolverley lies 1km to the west of the site and Cookley lies 800m to the north.

## **2.0 LEGISLATION**

2.1 Hazel dormice are a European protected species and therefore receive protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010), making it an offence to:

- Deliberately kill, injure or capture a dormouse;
- Deliberately disturb dormice, including in particular any disturbance which is likely to:
  - impair their ability to survive, reproduce or to rear or nurture their young;
  - impair their ability to hibernate or migrate; or
  - significantly affect their local distribution or abundance.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a dormouse;
- Possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a dormouse;
- Sell, offer for sale, possess or transport a dormouse (live or dead, part or derivative) for the purpose of sale or advertise for buying or selling.

2.2 In addition, dormice are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which contains further provisions making it an offence to intentionally or recklessly:

- Damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which a dormouse uses for shelter or protection; or
- Disturb a dormouse while occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose.

2.3 European Protected Species Licences (EPSL's) can be obtained from the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO), in this case Natural England, for development activities that would otherwise be unlawful under the legislation.

## **3.0 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY**

### Desktop Study

3.1 To accurately assess the potential ecological impacts of the scheme, a desktop study has been undertaken to identify the presence of sensitive ecological receptors at the site and within the surrounding area. Data has been obtained from a range of information sources including:

- Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC).
- National Biodiversity Network (NBN); and
- Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC).

### Habitat Assessment

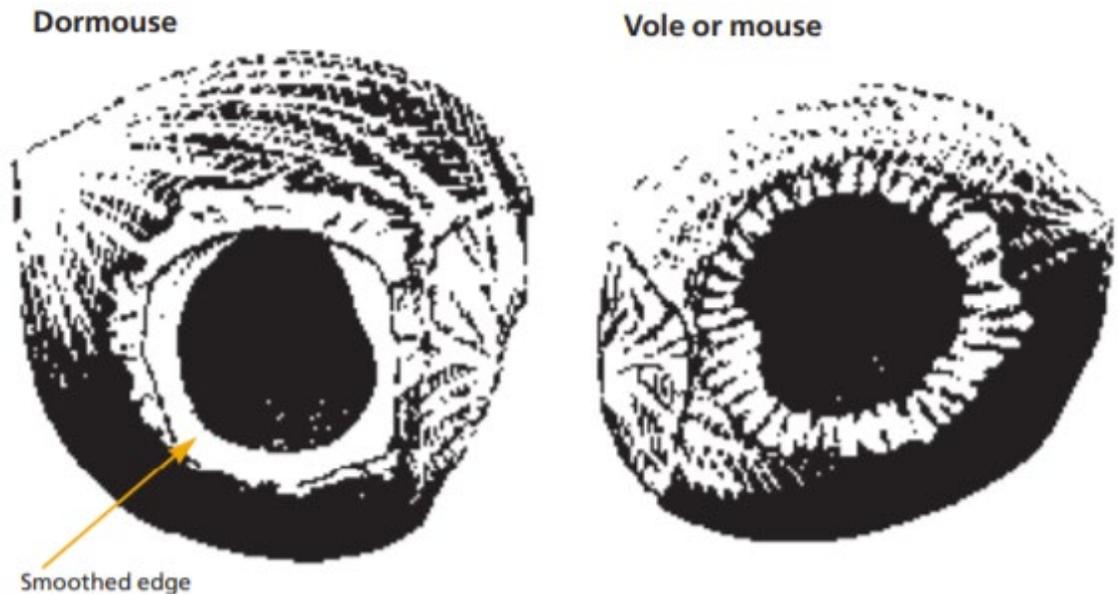
- 3.2 The site offers small areas of sub-optimal habitat for dormouse in the form of hedgerows and woodland surrounding the boundary of the site. The hedgerows present on the site are mostly limited in length, condition and species diversity and not well connected to other areas of more suitable habitat. The woodland that surrounds the site provides sub-optimal habitat for this species, due to the lack of a varied structure. The woodland is generally without an understorey that dormice can use to forage, nest and commute between.

### Field Survey

- 3.3 The methodology for the dormouse surveys followed that described in the Dormouse Conservation Handbook, Second edition (English Nature, 2006).
- 3.4 As only a small area of sub-optimal habitat within the site is to be removed during the works, guidance states you can limit surveys to visual searches for nests and opened nuts if the work only involves losing a small amount of habitat, for example:
- gaps in hedgerows; and
  - removing a small amount of bramble scrub.
- 3.5 As a result, extensive nut searches were conducted across suitable habitat within the site and within the adjacent woodland of the site. Adjacent habitats to be retained during the works were surveyed in order to try and identify the presence of dormice within optimal areas of foraging habitat. This would provide an indication of whether dormouse were present within the immediate surrounding area.
- 3.6 Nut searches involved searching for optimal areas of habitat within the site such as areas of heavily fruiting hazel. A 10m x 10m search radius of this area was then conducted for approximately 20 minutes. The search involved searching for evidence of hazelnuts that had been gnawed by dormice. Figure 1 below provides the details of what hazelnuts look like when they have been gnawed by dormice. A total of five nut searches were conducted on the site during the

2020 surveys, these surveys were conducted on the 28/07/2020, 04/08/2020, 17/09/2020, 24/09/2020 and the 27/01/2020. In addition, previous nut searches were also conducted on the site during the 2018 ecological surveys.

Figure 1 – Gnawed hazelnut examples



#### 4.0 RESULTS

##### Desk study

- 4.1 Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) returned no records for dormice within 2km of the site boundary.
- 4.2 To provide further indication of the records for dormice within 2km of the site boundary, an updated NBN search has been undertaken. This search returned 1 record for dormice within 2km of the site boundary. This record was dated from 2014. This record was located approximately 1.75km from the boundary woodland to the east of the site boundary. It should be noted that there is no connectivity between the site boundary woodlands and the woodland in which the record for dormice was returned. In addition, located between the site and this record is large areas of open fields, housing and the A449 road network, which are therefore assessed as a barrier for this species between the site and this record for this species.
- 4.3 When consulting with the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database, an updated search has been undertaken to identify whether there are any active or pre-existing records for European

Protected Species Mitigation Licences relating to dormice within 10km of the site boundary. Following the completion of the search, no active or pre-existing dormouse licences were found within 10km of the site boundary. This suggests that all development works within 10km of the surrounding area have been conducted without the requirement for a dormouse Mitigation Licence from Natural England, suggesting there are no known populations for this species within 10km of these proposals.

- 4.4 Extensive nut search surveys were conducted as part of the ecological surveys conducted in 2018. No evidence of dormice was recorded on the site or within adjacent habitats during these surveys.

#### Survey Results

- 4.5 During the five nut searches carried out in 2020, no dormouse nests or characteristically chewed hazel nuts were recorded on the site throughout the surveys. During these surveys, all hedgerows within the site boundary were surveyed and the full extent of the woodland surrounding the site was also surveyed as part of the nut searches. It should be noted that very little areas of heavily fruiting hazel were recorded in the site, however there were patches of this habitat located approximately 200m to the north of the site boundary. This area was extensively searched during the surveys.

### **5.0 LIKELY IMPACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 As no evidence of dormice has been found within the site or within optimal adjacent habitats during the 2018 and 2020 nut searches, it is therefore considered to be highly unlikely that the proposed works will have any impact on dormice. In addition, as part of the proposed works, there is to be a minimum stand-off of 10m from the boundary woodlands of the site. However, in some areas of the site this stand-off will be as high as 95-100m in certain areas of the site proposals. This would ensure that in the unlikely case that any dormice are present within the site boundary woodlands, that no dormice would be disturbed during the extent of the works.
- 5.2 As shown within the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment Report submitted as part of the Reg 25 submission, areas of hedgerow are to be created within the overall site boundary as part of the proposed restoration strategy. This will increase the overall connectivity within the site boundary providing optimal

dormice habitat within the medium to long-term. The proposals include the creation of 0.5km of hedgerows with an additional 0.6km of existing hedgerows being enhanced as part of these proposals. This creation and enhancement of hedgerows along with planting of native woodland blocks to include hazel and other fruiting, nut and seeding species during the advanced planting and progressive restoration will help ensure areas of optimal habitat for dormice are created, should dormice migrate to or are introduced to the area over time.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

6.1 Heaton's have been commissioned by NRS Aggregates Ltd to undertake dormouse surveys at Lea Castle Farm (hereafter referred to as the site). These surveys were required to inform the preparation and submission of a planning application for the phased extraction of mineral and subsequent restoration of the site and to help ensure compliance with national legislation and inform mitigation and enhancement proposals (where necessary and appropriate).

6.2 As only a small area of sub-optimal habitat within the site is to be removed during the works, guidance states you can limit surveys to visual searches for nests and opened nuts if the work only involves losing a small amount of habitat. As only small areas of sub-optimal habitat are to be removed during the proposed works, visual searches for dormice were conducted.

6.3 Extensive nut search surveys were conducted as part of the ecological surveys conducted in 2018. No evidence of dormice was recorded on the site or within adjacent habitats during these surveys.

6.4 During the five nut searches carried out in 2020, no dormouse nests or characteristically chewed hazel nuts were recorded on the site throughout the surveys. During these surveys, all hedgerows within the site boundary were surveyed and the full extent of the woodland surrounding the site was also surveyed as part of the nut searches. It should be noted that very little areas of heavily fruiting hazel were recorded in the site, however there were patches of this habitat located approximately 200m to the north of the site boundary. This area was extensively searched during the surveys.

6.5 As no evidence of dormice has been found within the site or within optimal adjacent habitats during the 2018 and 2020 nut searches, it is therefore

considered to be highly unlikely that the proposed works will have any impact on dormice.

## 7.0 REFERENCES

1. English Nature, 2006. The Dormouse conservation handbook, second edition. Version: January 2006.
2. Harris, S. and Yalden, D.W. (Editors), 2008. Mammals of the British Isles: Handbook, 4th Edition. The Mammal Society.

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