

Lea Castle Farm (Planning Application ref. 19/000053/CM)

Response to comments relating to Dormouse Survey Report

The following summary note is provided in response to comments made regarding the submitted Dormouse Survey Report, primarily relating to the items listed below:

1. A map showing extent of area surveyed for dormouse.
2. Name of surveyor and confirmation of their competence (experience and qualifications) to undertake the dormouse survey.
3. Amounts of nuts surveyed.
4. Rationale for selecting nut search survey method.

1. A map showing extent of area surveyed for dormouse

A map has been provided showing the full extent of the areas surveyed for dormice. Due to the lack of hazel within the woodland, the search was extended to the North and West in order to search for signs of Dormice.

2. Name of surveyor and confirmation of their competence (experience and qualifications) to undertake the dormouse survey

The initial nut searches completed in 2018 and 2020 were carried out by Nick Staples and Steven Pagett. Nick Staples BSc (Hons), MSc, DIC, CBIOL, MRSB is a chartered Ecologist with over 20 years' experience carrying out dormice surveys using nut search techniques as well as using dormouse tubes and nest boxes. Nick holds a dormouse survey class licence. Steven Pagett BSc (Hons), Grad CIEEM is a chartered Ecologist with 8 years' experience conducting dormouse surveys, having completed a number of specific courses in relation to dormouse survey techniques, providing experience handling dormice and conducting nut searches.

3. Amounts of nuts surveyed

During all the nut searches completed in 2018 and 2020, over 100 nuts were searched on each occasion. However, the majority of these nuts were located a large distance from the boundary of the site as the woodlands immediately surrounding the site had very little areas of hazel.

4. Rationale for selecting nut search survey method

The guidance on the Government Website provided by Natural England was followed before undertaking nut searches for dormice on the site. It is not considered that nut searches were required, however for completeness these surveys were carried out. Government guidance states that surveys for dormice are only required if "distribution and historical records suggest dormice may be present and the development will affect an area of woodland, hedgerow or scrub suitable for dormice habitat". Furthermore, "don't survey for dormice if it's an area of woodland, hedgerow or scrub unsuitable for dormice habitat and development is unlikely to affect dormice".

All optimal areas of habitat, which consist of the surrounding woodland, are to be retained during the extent of the works and therefore it is considered that conducting nut searches, more than meets the survey criteria provided by Natural England.

The guidance also goes on to state that *“you need to be a suitably experienced ecologist with a dormice licence to survey for dormice. You do not need a licence just to search for evidence of dormice such as hazelnut marks. 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*
- *removing a small amount of bramble scrub*

For more damaging projects and licence applications, acceptable methods for surveying dormice are:

- *using nest tubes*
- *using nest boxes*

You can combine using either nest tubes or nest boxes with checking hazelnuts for dormouse marks”.

As this project is not considered as a damaging project, due to the areas of suitable habitat being retained, it is therefore considered that the nut search survey provided more survey information than was required under this guidance.

Further support for this approach can be found within page 19 of the Dormouse Conservation Handbook which is the referenced guidance suggested by CIEEM. Within table 3, it provides a list of the major threats to dormice that should be considered for development. These include:

- Decline in coppice management;
- Heavy shading and lack of thinning;
- Loss of woodland habitat;
- Habitat fragmentation;
- Loss of species-rich infrequently cut hedgerows;
- Deer and squirrels; and
- Climate change and unpredictable weather.

It is therefore assessed that the proposed development will not have any impact on any of these threats and will subsequently provide mitigation through the proposed restoration, which will enhance the site by reducing existing habitat fragmentation and by increasing the area of available woodland in the long-term.

It should be further considered that, even in the unlikely case that dormice were present within a 50m buffer of the site, limited recommendations could be provided for a mitigation strategy and a licence would still not be required from Natural England. As part of the proposed works, there is to be a minimum stand-off of 10m from the boundary woodlands of the site. In some areas of

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the site this stand-off would be as high as 95-100m. Combined, 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.

On the 16/12/2020, a further nut search was conducted to provide an additional visit between the September and December period. Over 100 hazelnuts were checked for signs of dormouse gnawing. No evidence was found during the survey. As with the previous surveys, there were very limited hazelnuts in close proximity to the site boundary.

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