

**LAND WEST OF
'THE RETREAT'
LYDD ROAD
OLD ROMNEY
KENT:
ECOLOGICAL SCOPING SURVEY**

BY

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16th March 2020

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This document was compiled in order to report upon a protected species scoping survey of land west of 'The Retreat', Lydd Road, Old Romney, Kent¹. The survey site is an area of grassland which extends south of the A259 Brenzett to New Romney Road. The site is immediately west of 'The Retreat', and has a verge fronting the A259. South of the verge is a wooden fence which marks the approximate boundary of the north of the site. To the east, fencing separates the site from the Retreat, and this extends down to a drain which forms the southernmost boundary of the site; the drain is mostly hidden beneath large willows and blackthorn scrub and at the time of survey was only filled with about 5 centimetres of water². The western boundary is another drain, which is 80% covered with scrub, with reed filling the rest, and at the time of survey was almost dry. About a third of the way from the A259, and running parallel to it, is a raised earth embankment which is part of the Rhee Wall, an ancient flood - defence structure; the structure is covered with mature scrub. The whole site is grassland, albeit that it has evidently been grazed in the past and has been recently mown. There is a hardcore access from the road, which leads through the Rhee Wall to an area where several mobile homes are situated on concrete hardstandings. The site is level, and is located at approximately 4 metres OD, on alluvial soil.

1.2 The survey area is located approximately 600 metres south – east of Old Romney village and is set amidst large areas of arable farmland. There are no **designated sites** within one kilometre of the survey site, but the following are present within two kilometres' radius:

- The nearest part of the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SSSI³ is located 1.7 kilometres to the south – east.
- Midley Chapel Pasture is a Local Wildlife Site⁴ and is situated approximately 1.7 kilometres south - east of the survey site.

1.3 The survey site is currently the subject of a planning application⁵.

¹ OS / TR038249 – approximate centre. Grid reference taken from <http://gridreferencefinder.com/#>

² This is despite the recent heavy rains.

³ Hereafter 'SSSI'. SSSIs are protected by law to conserve their wildlife or geology.

⁴ Hereafter 'LWS'. LWS are protected against development at a local (county) level.

⁵ Y19/0958/FH.

2.0 METHODS

2.1 The site **visit** took place on Saturday 14th March 2020 and took approximately one hour, during which time the whole site was visited. The purpose of the visit was to carry out ecological scoping surveys as follows:

2.1.1 The plant and animal **species** of the site were listed by using the variety of inventory methods described by Sutherland (2000) and Beattie and Oliver (1994). Obviously – introduced or planted species of plants were not included in this list.

2.1.2 A search was made for any species, or habitat suitable for any species that are specifically **protected** for conservation purposes by wildlife legislation⁶ such as badgers⁷, bats and common reptiles⁸, using appropriate established techniques e.g. assessment of potential habitat for reptiles by comparison of the habitat on site with descriptions of potential reptile habitat given by Gent and Gibson (2003) as augmented by previous personal experience.

2.1.3 A search was also made for species⁹ that are included within the short list of the national **Biodiversity Action Plans** and associated lists¹⁰. For birds, a search was made for species which are included within the red part of the national bird '**Red List**'¹¹ as well as any other species that were recorded within the Kent Red Data Book¹², Kent Rare Plant Register¹³ and other similar publications.

⁶ Mostly, this included species listed in <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-3408> as being protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and related legislation.

⁷ *Meles meles*.

⁸ E.g. common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*) and slow – worm (*Anguis fragilis*).

⁹ Or habitat suitable for species.

¹⁰ Biodiversity Steering Group, 1995 as amended. Hereafter known as the 'BAP'. Also, the species subject of Biodiversity 2020 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biodiversity-2020-a-strategy-for-england-s-wildlife-and-ecosystem-services>).

¹¹ Hayhow et al. (2017).

¹² Waite, 2001. Hereafter referred to as 'KRDB'.

¹³ <http://bsbi.org/kent>

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 A total of 44 **species** of plants and animals were initially recorded on the site and are listed in Appendix 1.

3.2 The **plant** list consisted of 26 species, all typical of the prevailing grass – dominated habitat of the site. Several species were widespread, but none were abundant, except for the pasture grasses which are normally associated with properties of this type, and the blackthorn – dominated scrub of the two drains. There were no botanically – interesting areas or plant species in the whole site. The grassland was provisionally classified¹⁴ in terms of the National Vegetation Classification¹⁵ as closest to Rodwell's (1998) MG10 *Holco – Juncetum* rush - pasture, albeit heavily modified.

3.3 Six **bird** species were recorded at the site. There was little nesting habitat in the site apart from the scrub along the drains. The following notable bird species was recorded:

- **House sparrow** was feeding on the site. House sparrow is an RSPB red book and KRDB species.

3.4 The following evidence of species, or habitat suitable for any species which are specifically **protected** under wildlife legislation was found on the site;

- One of the crack willows on the southern drain had many deep woodpecker holes and cracks, some of which were sufficiently deep enough to potentially hold **bats**. Most of the remaining crack willows had lesser potential; but still had some holes and fissures. All bats and their roosts are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

3.5 No evidence of the presence of any **BAP**, KRDB or other notable species was found on site.

¹⁴ It was difficult to determine the identity of the grass species of the site due to their mown nature.

¹⁵ Hereafter 'NVC'.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Short surveys such as this one are good at giving a sample of the ecological value of a given site and showing which species, if any, require more detailed survey¹⁶.

4.3 The **methods** of the survey have been used extensively elsewhere with consistent results and accord with good practice guidelines¹⁷. Signs of protected species and their habitat parameters are reasonably obvious to an experienced surveyor and ecological surveys of this type are valuable in terms of helping to determine whether protected or notable animals or plants are likely to be present, are present, or have been present in or around a site and whether further, more detailed Phase 2 survey is required for certain species. However, the results of a survey are partially determined by the time of year at which the survey takes place, the stages in an organism's life cycle, and the accessibility of the site. At this site, access was complete.

4.4 The **plant** list was typical of the flora which is found in similar such grassy areas. There were no unusual or uncommon or protected plant species at the site. The identified habitat type was a common one which is widespread throughout the country¹⁸.

4.5 Apart from, house sparrow, no notable species of **birds** were recorded at the site. A few additional species¹⁹ might be expected to occur on or over the site at other times of year due to their occurrence in the surrounding area. No vegetation clearance of suitable nesting habitat in the drain – side scrub, if required, should take place between March to early August inclusive when birds are nesting, unless a contemporary survey reveals that no breeding birds are present.

- **House sparrow** is still a nesting species in the Old Romney area²⁰. Overall, though, house sparrows have declined considerably throughout Britain in recent years²¹ although the population is now stabilised at a lower level²² but there is still considerable concern for the species' future. The causes are

¹⁶ Stork and Samways, 1995.

¹⁷ E.g. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, 2013: British Standards Institute, 2013, Collins, 2016.

¹⁸ Rodwell, 1998.

¹⁹ E.g. Collared dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), dunnoek (*Prunella modularis*) and blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*).

²⁰ Personal observation.

²¹ Parkin and Knox, 2010; Summers – Smith, 1999.

²² De Laet and Summers – Smith, 2007.

not properly known but there is a suggestion that abundance of invertebrate prey within the home ranges of breeding house sparrows limits the quantity and quality of chicks raised to fledging²³. However, it is unlikely that any changes to the site will have any significant effect upon the species since it is doubtful if the species depends upon the survey site alone. If appropriate mitigation measures such as sparrow nesting terraces are incorporated into any new development, there will be an increase in potential nesting habitat of higher quality than presently exists. As a result, there would therefore be no long – term impact.

4.6 There was no evidence of **bat roosting** in the trees, other than that the habitat was potentially suitable. There is no intention to fell the trees²⁴ due to their value as a windbreak in an otherwise featureless landscape. There is therefore no impact and no requirement for further survey. The mobile homes were not examined, not least because they are unsuitable habitat for roosting bats and had only recently been placed on site.

4.7 Consideration was given to a wide range of other protected species that might occur on site, but none were found. For example:

- There was no suitable habitat on the site for **reptiles**. The grassland was too short for these species and is subject to winter flooding.
- There were no **badger** setts on site, nor any field signs, although a footprint of a badger was seen on the opposite bank of the western drain.
- There were no ponds in or near to the site that might be used by **great crested newts**²⁵ the nearest record for which is understood to be approximately 2 kilometres to the south – east. The drains around the survey site were almost dry in places and did not hold much water despite recent heavy rains, and although they drain into bigger watercourse, the nearest of these is nearly 300 metres away and contains fish. It is therefore unlikely that this species ever occurs on or near to the site.
- The drains were also totally unsuitable for use by **water voles**²⁶

4.8 The development proposals for the survey site will not directly affect any of the **designated sites** in the area and are unlikely to result in increased impact.

²³ Vincent, 2005.

²⁴ Anon, verb. comm.

²⁵ Triturus cristatus.

²⁶ Arvicola amphibious.

4.9 In **summary**, therefore, no potential breeding bird habitat should be cleared between late March to the beginning of August inclusive. The old crack willows may have potential for use by roosting bats and should be subjected to detailed ecological survey if they are to be felled. There is no other impact on any other protected species at the site and no requirement for mitigation.

4.10 It is strongly recommended that, in order to accord with the National Planning Policy Framework²⁷ and to provide some positive ecological benefits, some of the wildlife conservation measures and **mitigation** suggested by Gunnell, Murphy and Williams (2013) for instance, for the built environment should be incorporated into any proposed Scheme by means of a biodiversity plan for any completed development. Such measures could include:

- The provision of bird²⁸ and bat boxes.
- The provision of log piles for invertebrates.
- The provision of bumble bee nest boxes and pollinator resources.
- Provision for some of the species on the Kent BAP species list²⁹ where applicable to the site and conditions.
- A scheme of native species landscaping and similar measures.

²⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019.

²⁸ Especially sparrow terraces.

²⁹ For details see <http://www.kentbap.org.uk/habitats-and-species/priority-species/>. The list includes such species as great crested newt, common toad, slow worm and other common reptiles, house sparrow, hedgehog, noctule, soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared bat, dormouse and other species

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED FROM THE SITE (All data approximate) (Notable species in red)				
	SCIENTIFIC NAME	VERNACULAR NAME	NOTES	NO SPP
LICHENS				
	<i>Caloplaca sp.</i>	A lichen	On crack willows	
	<i>Ramalina farinacea</i>	A lichen		
	<i>Xanthoria parietina</i>	A lichen		3
MOSSES				
	<i>Brachythecium rutabulum</i>	A moss	Other species present.	
	<i>Hypnum cuppresiforme</i>	A moss		
	<i>Thuidium tamariscinum</i>	A moss		3
VASCULAR PLANTS				
	<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent - grass		
	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley		
	<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy		
	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping Thistle		
	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle		
	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn		
	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cocksfoot Grass		
	<i>Elytrigia repens</i>	Common Couch		
	<i>Festuca ovina / rubra</i>	Sheep's / Red Fescue		
	<i>Galium mollugo</i>	Hedge Bedstraw		
	<i>Geranium columbinum</i>	Dovesfoot Cranesbill		
	<i>Helminotheca echoides</i>	Bristly Oxtongue		
	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire Fog		
	<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	Red Deadnettle		
	<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Rye Grass		
	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	Common Reed		
	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain		
	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn	Along drains.	
	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup		
	<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>	Blackberry		

	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad Dock		
	<i>Salix capraea</i>	Goat Willow		
	<i>Salix cinerea ssp. oleifolia</i>	Rusty Sallow	Provisional identification.	
	<i>Salix fragilis</i>	Crack Willow	Very old trees by southern drain.	
	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elderberry		
	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Stinging Nettle		26
MOLLUSCA				
	<i>Cepaea nemoralis</i>	Grove Snail		
	<i>Cornu aspersa</i>	Garden snail		
	<i>Monacha cantiana</i>	Kentish Snail		3
BIRDS				
	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Woodpigeon	Evidence of nesting in scrub.	
	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin	Singing male.	
	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch	Singing male.	
	<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit		
	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	Feeding on site.	
	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren	Singing male.	6
MAMMALS				
	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Rabbit		
	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Brown Rat	Footprints only.	
	<i>Talpa europaea</i>	Mole		3
Total number of species:				44

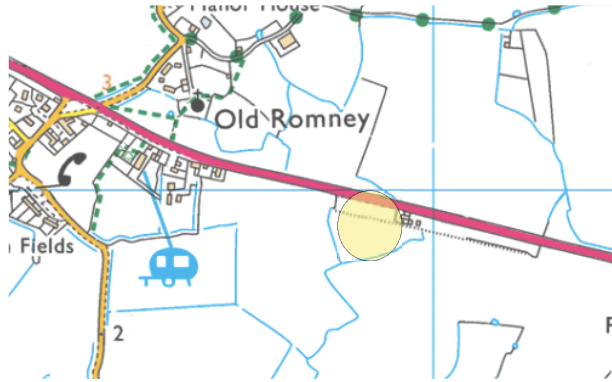


Figure 1: LOCATION OF THE SITE.
 Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey (Licence no. 100016414).

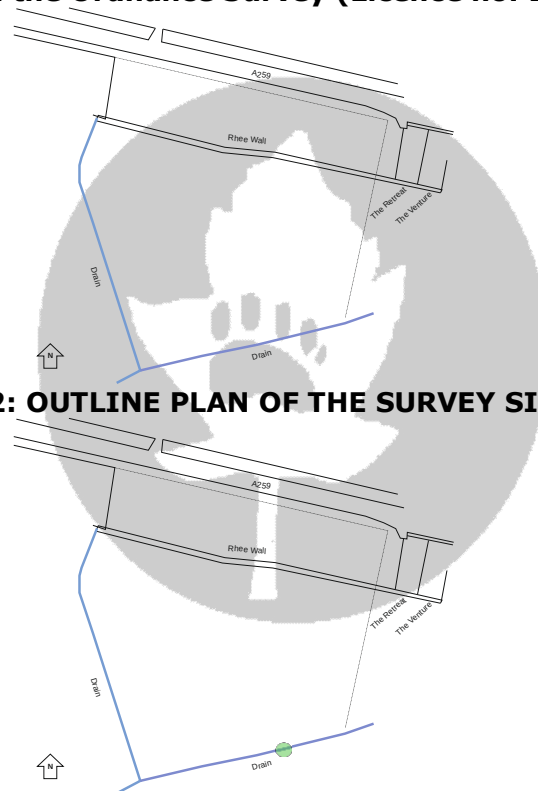


Figure 2: OUTLINE PLAN OF THE SURVEY SITE.

Figure 3: THE APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF THE POTENTIAL BAT TREE.



Figure 4: A VIEW OF THE SITE FROM THE SOUTH – WEST.



Figure 5: THE RHEE WALL.



Figure 6: THE SOUTHERN DRAIN SHOWING THE BLACKTHORN SCRUB AND THE POTENTIAL BAT ROOST CRACK WILLOW.



Figure 7: A CLOSER VIEW OF THE POTENTIAL BAT ROOST WILLOW.



Figure 8: THE WESTERN DRAIN.



Figure 9: THE GRASSLAND OF THE SITE.

ⁱ Martin Newcombe is principal of MN Wildlife, a small ecological practice in Kent, which has now been operating for over 30 years. Martin studied botany and zoology at college before qualifying as a further education lecturer. His interests and that of his practice are in mammals and woodland matters, with extensive experience in badgers, bats, dormice, deer, woodland management and conservation and general ecology. He holds a Natural England (NE) bat class licence level 2, and a NE dormouse licence, and has also held many NE badger licenses.

