

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF LAND AT BIRCHALL GARDEN SUBURB

HAZEL DORMOUSE SURVEY

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1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Tarmac Trading Ltd are in the process of formulating proposals for the development of land near Welwyn Garden City known as Birchall Garden Suburb.
- 1.2 As part of the development process, Tarmac commissioned Philip Parker Associates Ltd (who have undertaken other survey work for them at Panshanger Park) to undertake various surveys to provide baseline ecological information to assist in the Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) process.
- 1.3 As part of the initial internal scoping exercise for the site undertaken by Philip Parker Associates, the hazel dormouse was identified as a species that could potentially occur on the site and therefore further survey work was undertaken.
- 1.4 The report should be read in conjunction with Drawing 9.1.1 Ecological survey compartments and ponds and Drawing 9.3.1, dormouse survey.

2.0 LEGISLATION AND POLICY

- 2.1 The hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanurius* is legally protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and is afforded significant further protection as a European Protected Species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). Collectively and in summary, this legislation *inter alia* makes it an offence to:
 - Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture dormice;
 - Intentionally, deliberately or recklessly disturb dormice in such a way as to be likely to significantly affect the ability of any significant group of dormice to survive, breed, or rear or nurture their young or the local distribution of or abundance of the species;
 - Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to places used by dormice for shelter or protection (whether occupied or not) or intentionally or recklessly disturb a dormouse whilst it is occupying such a place;
 - Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a dormouse;
 - Possess or transport a dormouse (or any part thereof) unless under licence;
 - Sell or exchange dormice.
- 2.2 Development proposals affecting the hazel dormouse require a European Protected Species licence from Natural England.

2.3 The hazel dormouse is also listed under the NERC Act 2006 (Section 41 list). This is a list of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The list (including 56 habitats and 943 species) has been drawn up in consultation with Natural England and draws upon the UK BAP List of Priority Species and Habitats. The S41 list should be used to guide decision-makers such as local and regional authorities when implementing their duty: to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of their normal functions – as required under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006.

3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY

3.1 The objectives of the hazel dormouse survey were as follows:

- To assess which of the areas could potentially provide the habitat requirements of hazel dormouse,
- Where potentially suitable habitat was identified, to undertake specific survey to establish the presence/absence.

4.0 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scope of the survey

During the original scoping survey undertaken by Howard and Malcolm Hillier in March 2014, the whole of the site was assessed to identify the habitat features most likely to support dormice. Key features looked for included a tree or shrub structure that allows dormice to move around freely and safely off the ground; a good supply of natural food throughout their waking year; dense foliage or nest holes in which to build nests to breed and raise young during the summer; and suitable, undisturbed places to hibernate at ground level. Food plants include pollen and nectar of flowers in the early summer such as hawthorn, honeysuckle, sycamore and bramble; insects during the summer when fewer flowers are available and beech nuts, hazel nuts, seeds and berries during the autumn when fattening up for the winter. The habitats that provided some of these features were as follows:

- Woodlands W1, W2, W4, W5, W6, W9,
- Boundaries B1 and B34.

4.2 Desk Top review

The Hertfordshire Dormouse Action Plan identifies that the distribution of the hazel dormouse in Hertfordshire is probably limited by the fragmented nature of appropriate habitat such as

ancient coppiced woodland. All records are lodged at the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre. Pre-1985 records show concentrations in woodlands around Stevenage in central/north Hertfordshire, the Broxbourne/Northaw Great Wood complex in the south-east and Ashridge in the extreme west. Other scattered sites include Bricket Wood/London Colney, Bramfield/Tewin Woods, Brocket Park and in the north-east Scales Park. This distribution shows most association with major areas of woodland rather than woodland type, though no structured survey has been undertaken.

4.3 A jointly run survey by The Wildlife Trust and the Herts Mammal Group began in 1993. This suggests that Dormice may now have declined. Current records show populations around Stevenage, Ashridge, Breachwood Green, Scales Park and Broxbourne Woods. There are also a few scattered sites outside this. However, the survey effort to date has not been great enough to determine to what extent Dormice have declined in the county or whether their distribution has reduced.

4.4 A initial data search was undertaken with with HERC in November 2014 (5km from the centre point of the site) updated in February 2016. Due to the further delay in submitting the planning application, the data search was updated on the 30th March 2017 (the search this time extended 2km from the boundary to the site).

4.5 Data provided by HERC in the 2016 data search included 3 records for hazel dormouse as follows,

- 2 records reported from 1985 (tetrads TL20Y and TL21S – no detailed grid reference given),

TL20Y is located at Little Berkhamstead. The closest edge of the tetrad is 2.55km from the south-east boundary of the application site. There are some connecting hedgerows and other habitats between the two sites but the A414 is a significant barrier.

TL21S is located at Tewin. The edge of the tetrad is 1.26km from the northern edge of the application site. There are some connecting hedgerows and other habitats between the two sites but the B1000 also forms a barrier to potential movement.

- 1 record from Sharradspark Wood in 2008 (3.65km to the north-west of the site). On the basis of this 2008 record, nest boxes were apparently being put up in the woodland but it is assumed that there have been no more records. This site is separated from the application site by Welwyn Garden City.

4.6 The 2017 data search which extended 2km from the site boundary did not include any records for hazel dormouse.

4.7 On the basis of these limited records, a discussion was held with Martin Hicks (principal ecology officer at Hertfordshire County Council) on 15th May 2014. It was verbally agreed that to provide for certainty, a survey would be undertaken of the habitats offering the greatest hazel dormouse potential on or adjacent to the study area. It was not agreed that it was necessary to survey sub-optimal habitats.

4.8 **Field Work**

The hazel dormouse survey was undertaken using the standard survey technique of using nest tubes (Dormouse Conservation Handbook Second edition (2006). These were made from stiff double-walled black plastic sheet, 5 x 5 cm in cross section and 25 cm long. A small plywood tray was placed inside, projecting 5 cm beyond the tube's entrance to allow the animals' easy access. The opposite end of the tube was sealed with a wooden block mounted on the tray.

4.9 140 tubes (significantly more than the minimum requirement) were installed between 1st and 4th June 2014 at a height of 1-2 metres in the most suitable hazel dormouse looking habitat and maximum centres of 30 metres as appropriate to the habitat.

4.10 The tubes were then surveyed on a monthly basis between 26th June and 19th November 2014 (6 months).

4.11 **Survey personnel**

The hazel dormouse surveys were undertaken by Howard Hillier (Licence ref CLS 001996) who has 20 years experience in undertaking dormouse surveys, plus experienced field surveyors Malcolm Hillier and Sue Hillier.

4.12 **Constraints**

There were no constraints in undertaking the survey. All parts of the site which were considered to provide potential suitable dormouse habitat were covered by the surveys.

5.0 SURVEY RESULTS

5.1 Distribution of the tubes and a summary of the survey results is given in the following table and shown on Drawing 9.3.1:

Table 1 Results of dormouse survey

Habitat	Tube Numbers	Dormice	Other Species
W1	21-30	None	
W2	31 – 50	None	Wood mice
W4	131-140	None	
W5	91 – 110	None	Woodmice
W6	71 – 90	None	
W9	1 – 20	None	Woodmice
B1	111 – 130	None	
B34	51 – 70	None	Woodmice, Blue tit

5.2 The Dormouse handbook sets out the amount of survey effort required to give a reasonable chance of finding dormice if they are present. Given the number of tubes and the number of visits undertaken which included the two peak dormouse months (August and September), the survey effort undertaken on the site (Scoring 20 – see Table 5 of the handbook) is sufficient to conclude that hazel dormice are likely to be absent from the site.

6.0 SUMMARY

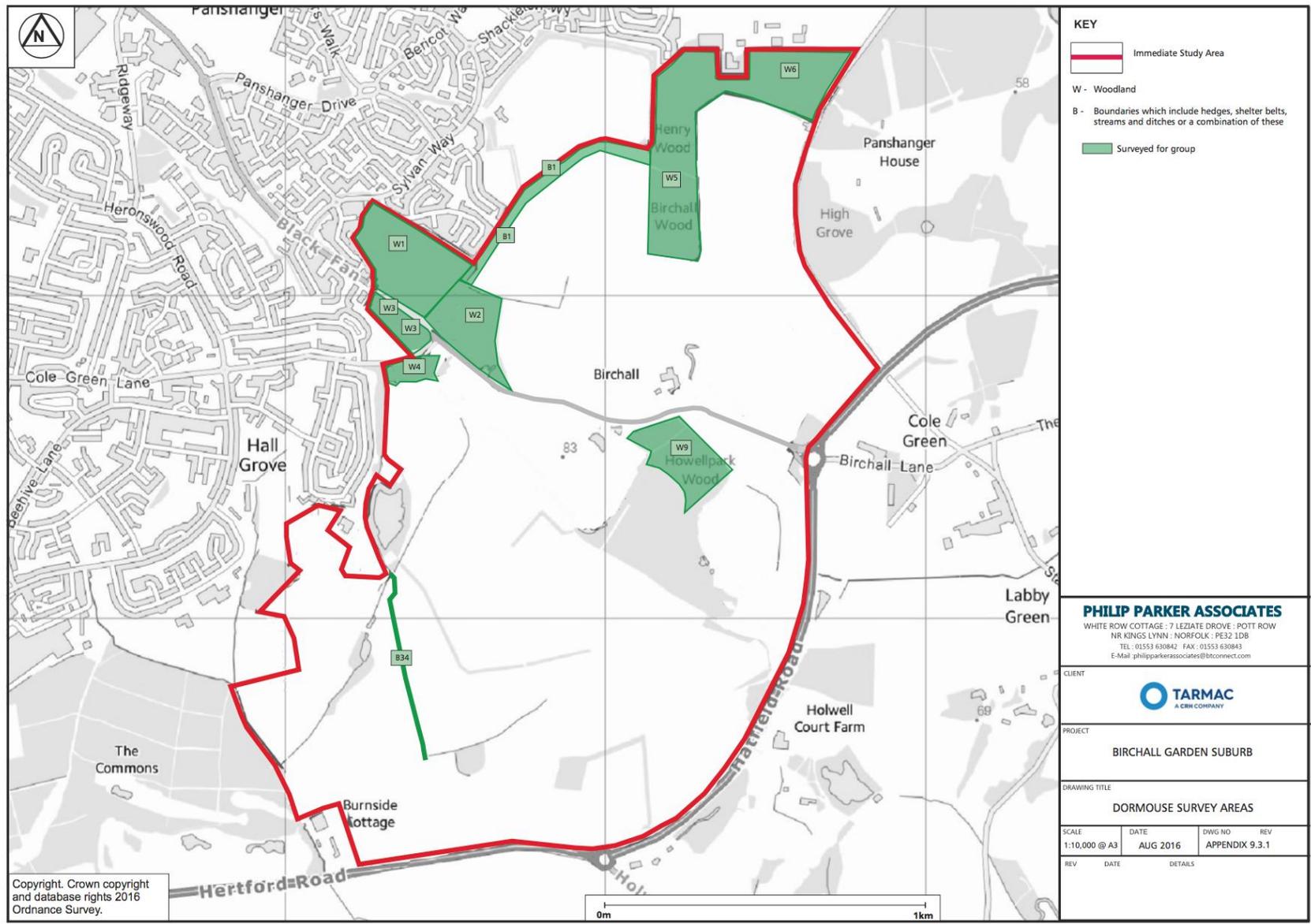
6.1 A detailed survey of areas which could potentially provide the most suitable habitat for hazel dormouse was undertaken between 26th June 2014 and 19th November 2014.

6.2 No evidence of hazel dormouse was present during the survey and it is concluded that they are likely to be absent from the proposed development site.

7.0 REFERENCES

The Dormouse Conservation Handbook Second Edition (2006); Paul Bright, Pat Morris and Tony Mitchell-Jones; English Nature.

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