

# Heronsbridge School: Badger Survey File Note

|                                                     |                                                       |                                                             |                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Project name</b><br>Heronsbridge School          | <b>Client</b><br>Bridgend County Borough Council      | <b>Project number</b><br>60704349                           | <b>Date</b><br>July 2025                              |
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## 1. Introduction

AECOM was instructed by Bridgend County Borough Council (hereafter the 'client') to provide an updated badger *Meles meles* assessment in association with the proposed Heronsbridge Special School (hereafter the 'Proposed Development') at land in Bridgend, South Wales (hereafter the 'Site').

Ecological input was initially provided in the form of a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA)<sup>1</sup> and hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* report<sup>2</sup> in 2023. An update PEA file note was produced by AECOM in 2025 following a Site visit in April 2025 to confirm the existing condition of habitats within the Site boundary as the 2023 survey work is considered 'expired', as per Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) guidance<sup>3</sup>.

The Site is located on the southern outskirts of Bridgend, at ordnance survey central grid reference SS 90179 78239, within arable land bound by woodland and residential areas.

The Proposed Development is for a new build project to replace the existing Heronsbridge Special School which is currently located approximately 0.8 km northeast of the Proposed Development, within Bridgend. The Proposed Development will accommodate 300 primary and secondary pupils. A lighting plan has not been finalised.

This file note presents the results of the badger survey, assesses the potential for the Proposed Development to cause impact to badgers, and provides recommendations for further survey and/or mitigation (where required).

### 1.1 Quality Assurance

This survey and file note was undertaken in line with AECOM's Integrated Management System (IMS). Our IMS places great emphasis on professionalism, technical excellence, quality, environmental and health and safety management. All staff members are committed to establishing and maintaining our certification to the international standards BS EN ISO 9001:2015 and 14001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018. In addition, our IMS requires careful selection and monitoring of the performance of all sub consultants and contractors.

All AECOM ecologists who worked on this project are members of (at the appropriate level) the CIEEM and follow their code of professional conduct<sup>4</sup> when undertaking ecological work.

## 2. Legislation

Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (as amended). This makes it an offence to:

- wilfully kill, injure or take a badger;
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a badger sett; or,

<sup>1</sup> AECOM (2023) Heronsbridge School Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and BREEAM Report

<sup>2</sup> AECOM (2023) Heronsbridge School Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) Survey Report

<sup>3</sup> CIEEM (2019) Advice Note: on the Lifespan of Ecological Report & Surveys. Accessed online at: [\[https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Advice-Note.pdf\]](https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Advice-Note.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> CIEEM (2025) Code of Professional Conduct. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). April 2025.

- disturb a badger in its sett.

It is not illegal to carry out disturbance activities near setts that are not occupied, i.e. those that do not show signs of current use.

Where required, licences for development activities involving disturbance or sett interference or closure are issued by Natural Resources Wales. It is understood that badgers are relatively tolerant of moderate levels of noise and activity around their setts, and that a low or moderate level of apparent disturbance activity at or near to badger setts does not necessarily disturb the badgers occupying these setts<sup>5</sup>. However, advice regarding the need for a licence should be sought from a suitably experienced ecologist. Licences are normally not granted from December to June inclusive, as this is the badger breeding season and dependent cubs may be present within the setts.

### 3. Methods

The PEA completed in 2023<sup>1</sup> identified the presence of suitable habitat for badger within the Site and surrounding area including woodland, scrub and grassland which are suitable for sett creation and foraging. A walkover survey for badger activity was undertaken by a suitably experienced AECOM ecologist on 29 April 2025 during suitable weather conditions. During the survey, the location of any evidence of badger presence/usage within the Site and a 30 m buffer was recorded. Potential evidence of badger includes:

- Setts: comprising either single isolated entrances or a series of entrances. The number of entrances present, in addition to other criteria would determine the sett category as either main, annexe, subsidiary or outlier (see Table 3-1 for further detail).
- Faeces: latrines are regularly placed along paths on the boundary of their territory.
- Well-worn mammal paths: these usually lead to setts or feeding areas.
- Claw marks: on the bark of trees, stones or scrapes in soil.
- Hair: usually with a white root, black band and white tip. Hairs are often found on fences and rough wood near mammal paths and in the entrance to setts.
- Snuffle holes: these are formed during foraging and comprise characteristically disturbed soil and ground vegetation.
- Footprints.

Mammal paths and snuffles holes are assumed to be created by badger if the character of the path or hole (in terms of size and shape) was appropriate and/or if any other field signs are recorded in close proximity. Where possible, mammal paths were followed by surveyors in search of badger hairs, footprints, snuffle holes and latrines.

Setts are classified according to the criteria used in the currently accepted best practice guidance<sup>6,7</sup>, as summarised in Table 3-1

**Table 3-1 Badger Sett Classification Descriptions**

| Category of Sett | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Average Number of Entrances |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Main             | These usually have a large number of entrances with large spoil heaps and the sett generally looks well used. There will be well-worn paths to and from the sett and between sett entrances. Although normally the breeding sett and in continuous use, it is possible to find a main sett that has become disused. | 12                          |
| Annexe           | Often close to the main sett, usually between 15 and 150 m, and usually connected to the main sett by one or more obvious well-worn paths. Annexe setts usually have several entrances but may not be in use all the time if the main sett is active.                                                               | 5                           |
| Subsidiary       | Setts usually beyond 50 m from a main sett and with no obvious connecting path to the main sett. Often used intermittently (seasonally). Multiple entrances with spoil heaps.                                                                                                                                       | 4                           |
| Outlier          | Outlier setts usually lack obvious paths connecting them to another sett with small or absent spoil heaps. They are only used sporadically and can be taken over by rabbits/foxes when not in use.                                                                                                                  | 1-2                         |

<sup>5</sup> Nature England (2009) Interpretation of 'Disturbance' in relation to badgers occupying a sett.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, S., Cresswell, P. & Jefferies, D. (1989) Surveying Badgers. Occasional Publication no.9. The Mammal Society, London.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, C. J. & Symes, R.G. (1998). The Management of Problems Involving Badgers (*Meles meles*).

Any setts identified were assessed for current activity levels. Three levels of activity are used as shown in Table 3-2.

**Table 3-2. Levels of Activity Used for Recording Purposes**

| Activity Level | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Active         | Entrances are clear of any debris or vegetation, obviously in regular use and may or may not have been excavated recently. Recent activity at these entrances is usually indicated by the presence of badger hairs, footprints, snuffle holes or latrines in proximity to the entrance.                                                                                           |
| Partially used | Entrances are not in regular use and have debris such as leaves or twigs in the entrance or moss or other plants growing in and around the entrance. Partially used entrances could be in regular use after minimal clearance by badger.                                                                                                                                          |
| Disused        | Entrances have not been in use for some time, these are often partially or completely blocked and cannot be used without considerable clearance. If the entrance has been disused for some time, all that may be visible is a depression in the ground where the entrance used to be. The remains of a spoil heap, which may be covered by moss and plants, is sometimes visible. |

### 3.1 Limitations

Where any conclusions and recommendations contained in this file note are based upon information provided by others, it has been assumed that all relevant information provided by those parties is accurate. Any such information obtained by AECOM has not been independently verified by AECOM, unless otherwise stated in the file note. AECOM accepts no liability for any inaccurate conclusions, assumptions or actions taken resulting from any inaccurate information supplied to AECOM from others.

The methodology adopted and sources of information used by AECOM in providing this service are outlined above. The work described in this file note was conducted in April-May 2025 and is based on the conditions encountered and information available at the time. The scope of this file note and the services are accordingly factually limited by these circumstances. AECOM disclaim any undertaking or obligation to advise any person of any change in any matter affecting the file note which may come or be brought to AECOM's attention after the date of completion.

## 4. Results and Recommendations

No setts or field signs indicative of the presence of badger were recorded within the Site boundary or 30 m buffer.

It is therefore concluded badger are likely absent from the Site.

Badger activity can change rapidly, therefore a pre-works walkover should be conducted by a suitably experienced ecologist immediately prior to the commencement of works to facilitate the Proposed Development to confirm the continued absence of badger. A suitably experienced ecologist should be present for the clearance of any suitable habitat that cannot be thoroughly searched during the pre-works walkover. Should a badger sett be identified within the Site or 30 m buffer, additional consideration will be required to avoid further impact. In the first instance, ground-breaking works within 30 m of any badger sett should be avoided. Where this is not possible, liaison with a suitably experienced ecologist will be required to identify suitable precautionary working methodology and/or the need for a licence to disturb, obstruct or destroy a badger sett.

Should badger sett closure be required, this will require 30 days of monitoring in advance of the works to confirm the presence or likely absence of badger within the sett. An additional 30 days will be required following the installation of one way gates to ensure that no badgers are present within a sett, should it be necessary to dig the set out. It is recommended that a licence application is submitted no less than 50 days in advance of works commencing.

As badgers are a mobile species that frequently establish new setts and reoccupy disused setts, an updated badger survey should be conducted should the Proposed Development be delayed beyond May 2026.