



Why do I need an ecology survey?

If you are developing a site that supports natural habitats or buildings there is potential for it to support species protected by UK or European legislation. Ecology surveys serve to identify the presence of these species to enable mitigation to be devised to safeguard species present within the site, ensuring all work to develop the site is done in accordance with legislation, therefore avoiding possible prosecution. Ecology surveys are required where there is potential for protected species to be disturbed by a proposed development. The results of these must then be submitted as part of the planning application.

What types of survey do I need?

There are a range of surveys available depending on what species require assessment. Generally, the first ecological survey undertaken at a development site is a preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA), which was formerly known as a Phase 1 habitat survey. This serves to identify whether there might be potential for protected species and if there is any need for further targeted surveys for, e.g., bats or reptiles.

How much do they cost?

Surveys will vary in cost depending on the level of survey effort required. Habitat surveys only require a single site visit, so they typically cost less than more detailed protected species surveys. Some protected species surveys require multiple site visits by a number of surveyors—e.g. great crested newt surveys require between 4

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and 6 separate site visits to survey ponds and at least 7 visits are required to undertake reptile presence/absence surveys. Once the need for surveys has been identified the costs can be calculated and agreed prior to committing to the surveys.

When are surveys carried out and how long do they take?

The PEA should be carried out as early as possible in the planning process to identify potential ecological constraints and the need for further assessments.

- The PEA can be undertaken all year round. The PEA involves a desk study and a site walkover. As part of the desk study ecological data is obtained from the relevant biological records centre. It can take a few weeks to receive this data.

Often protected species surveys are restricted to certain times of the year. Therefore, protected species surveys can cause delays to a development if the need for a specific ecological assessment is identified late in the process. Examples are given below.

- Great crested newt pond surveys can only be undertaken between March and June; a minimum of four surveys are required and at least two of these need to be undertaken in the peak breeding period between mid-April and mid-May. If great crested newts are present then a further two surveys are required for a population assessment; one of which must be within the peak breeding period between mid-April and mid-May.
- Bat activity surveys can only be undertaken between May and September. If a series of activity surveys are required these need to be spaced throughout the active season.

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- ♦ Reptile surveys can only be undertaken between March and October. A series of seven visits is required on non-consecutive days.
- ♦ Badger surveys can be undertaken all year round. This normally comprises a single site visit.
- ♦ Water vole surveys can be undertaken all year round. This normally comprises a single site visit.
- ♦ Dormouse surveys can only be undertaken between April and November. Surveys need to be conducted throughout the season. The survey operates on a points system whereby each month is allocated an 'index of value'. A score is then devised as an indicator of thoroughness. In order to sufficiently prove absence, a score of 20 must be achieved. The minimum length of time the survey needs to be carried out is five months to achieve this score, providing the survey is undertaken throughout May-September inclusive.

Will survey results stop my development?

If the potential for protected species has not been scoped out (through undertaking a PEA) the local authority may request that further ecological assessments are undertaken which could lead to delays to the project, particularly for those species groups that can only be surveyed at specific times of the year—see above. If protected species are found to be present, suitable mitigation will be devised by the ecologist to enable works to proceed. The level of mitigation will vary depending on the number and type of species present at the site. For example, a large population of great crested newts will require more complex mitigation than a low population of reptiles. Mitigation measures may take some time to implement and cause significant delays. It is therefore vital to determine the potential for pro-

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tected species early in the planning process. For example, if reptiles need to be moved from the site this can take up to three months for a large population, which can only be undertaken when reptiles are active (between March and October). Reptiles will need to be removed from the site before any ground works can commence and therefore if works are scheduled for the winter months and reptiles have not been moved, works will need to be delayed until the following summer. Identifying the potential for protected species and factoring in the necessary surveys as early as possible is advisable to avoid costly delays to a development project.

Can protected species surveys wait until a planning application is submitted (i.e. can they be made a planning condition)?

The effect of proposed development on nature conservation is a material planning consideration. As such, local planning authorities will usually require likely effects to be assessed as part of a planning application or appeal submission. Protected species surveys should therefore be carried out prior to submitting a planning application or appeal. Any necessary ecological mitigation that is recommended based on the findings of the protected species surveys is then normally conditioned.



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