

Binfield Badger Group

Protecting badgers in Berkshire

Charity Number: 1075886



PO Box 3805
Bracknell
RG42
1HH

11th August 2020

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: 20/01238/OUTMAJ Outline planning permission for up to 1,000 new homes.

At Binfield Badger Group, we protect badgers across Berkshire and are affiliated to the Badger Trust. The Group holds records of setts and road casualties for the whole of Berkshire and works with Councils by providing information and comment on the impact of developments.

Badger Biology

The European Badger (*Meles meles*) is widespread in Britain. They live in social groups called clans which occupy and defend a territory. New clans may be formed as mature cubs are driven from the natal sett.

Adult males (boars) average 90cm in length and weigh about 11kg. Females (sows) are usually slightly smaller and lighter. They are largely nocturnal animals with highly developed hearing and smell but their eyesight is not particularly acute. They are well adapted for digging, with powerful front legs and strong claws.

Within a territory, the clan usually has a number of setts, categorised as main setts, annexe setts, subsidiary setts and outliers. Setts have a range of uses, including sleeping quarters. They are also used for cover when a badger perceives danger. Despite their robust build and the potential for fierce inter-badger fighting, they are neophobic and will readily run away and hide in the face of circumstances not encountered before.

Badgers are omnivorous although about 50% of their diet consists of earthworms when available. Up to 200 worms may be eaten in one night. Pasture provides approximately 5 times as many worms as woodland and is therefore a vital part of their territory. Badgers' diet also includes insects, fruits, berries and small mammals. Their feeding may be significantly negatively impacted by disruption as they may withdraw under ground for many hours.

Badgers do not hibernate but become much less active in December and January and may not emerge above ground for several days at a time during this period.

A badger's reproductive cycle relies greatly upon the condition of the sow and the absence of any disturbance, particularly during the winter months. Although mating can occur at any time of year, due to delayed implantation, most cubs are born in February and generally emerge above ground in April or May. Pregnant sows may be forced to miscarry by a more dominant intra-clan sow or by inter-clan fighting. Such conflict may also occasion the death of cubs. Implantation is also disturbed by disruption in the sow's environment. Such disturbance may be occasioned by building work, amongst other factors.

Observations on this application

Prior to any decision being taken, we request that a full survey be made to determine current badger presence and use of the site. The Environmental Statement, Chapter 6, Ecology, 6.1, p.1 refers to a 'badger letter report', Appendix F11. We appreciate this being redacted but would be pleased to have sight of it.

We welcome the indication of on-going assessments for badger presence during any development of the site if approval is given, as indicated in ES, Ch. 6, Ecology, 6.5.3 Actionable Mitigation Measures, p. 22.

Whilst we support the redaction of such information in reports, we would be grateful to receive NGR details for this sett so that we can comment more specifically. In the meantime, although our comments below are necessarily generalised, they are relevant to this type of development.

On this basis, we offer the following observations:

If approval is given, restrictions on lighting are clearly appropriate for badgers. The value of a buffer zone is affected by many factors. If it simply encloses the

badger sett in a highly developed area, such that they are effectively 'walled in', then the value is clearly greatly reduced. The nature of the barrier provided to protect the buffer is also highly significant. An open strip over which dogs may traverse is much less effective than fencing and dense scrub, provided of course that badgers still have egress. Whilst wildlife corridors and 'connections between woodlands' (p.20) may be beneficial, depending on their proximity to public amenity space, badgers may still be disturbed whilst using them and therefore inhibited from future use.

However, we would observe that human noise, presence and that of associated dogs on recreational routes may still prove disruptive to a clan.

We would also observe that:

- Whilst sensitive planting and land use proposals in a development are welcome, loss of established foraging areas, especially open pasture, can be disruptive to badger clans, causing them to seek new foraging areas which may bring them into conflict with other clans. Injury and death may occur as a result of consequent fighting.
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- If approval is given, we welcome the requirement for best building practice during the construction phase.

The Group requests that it is involved with providing advice to the Council to minimise the impact on local badgers and that it be kept directly informed on the progress of this application.

Yours faithfully

Andy McCoy

Committee Member and Trustee

Binfield Badger Group