Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Canford Bridge Repairs

Wimborne, Dorset

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Dr Annabel King, Snr Ecologist, Dorset Council,

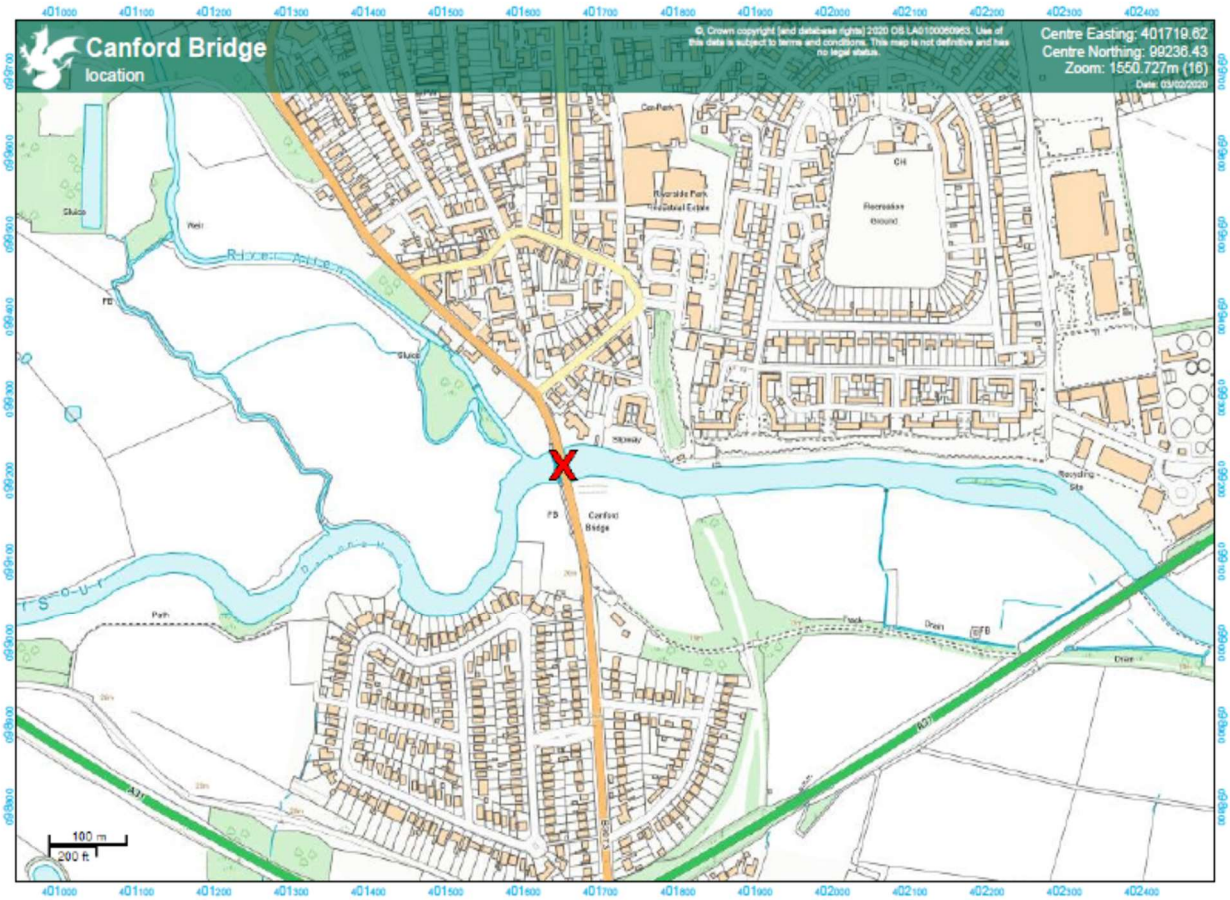
on behalf of

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council

Introduction

Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council have commissioned this Preliminary Ecological Appraisal in support of works to repair the downstream arches of Canford Bridge on the B3073 at Wimborne. The bridge is located on the river Stour south of Wimborne, at 401651,099222. Plan 1 below shows the location, and details of the works (including the upstream access route) can be found on plans WZ0048-101, WZ0048-103 and WZ0048-108, supplied separately.

Plan 1: Location of Canford Bridge



Legislation and Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) sets out the requirements to consider Biodiversity in respect of development. Several species and habitats are afforded legal protection which Local Planning Authorities must consider when determining planning applications. Protected species and habitats are a material consideration under planning law. Similarly, habitats and species cited within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan must be considered under the Biodiversity Duty placed on public bodies.

Bats, Dormouse, Otter: All bat species, dormouse and otter are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and by the EC Directive 92/43/EEC, which is enforced in the UK by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (known as the Habitats Regulations).The Wildlife and Countryside 1981 Act states that 'it is an offence to 'intentionally' or

‘recklessly’ damage or destroy any structure or place which a bat/dormouse uses for shelter or protection. It is also an offence to intentionally disturb these species whilst it is occupying such a structure or place and/or obstruct the access or entrance to such a place.

Birds: All birds and their active nests are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Section 1 of this Act, makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird, and to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built. It is also an offence to take or destroy any wild bird eggs. In addition, bird species listed under Schedule 1(3) of the Act receive extra protection. The Act states that ‘it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly(4) disturb any wild bird listed in Schedule 1 while it is nest building, or at (or near) a nest containing eggs or young, or disturb the dependent young of such a bird’.

Common protected reptiles: (slow worm *Anguis fragillis*, grass snake, *Natrix natrix*, adder, *Viperus berus* and common lizard, *Zootoca vivipara*) are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). All are Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species and as such are included within s41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.1

Badgers: are protected under the 1992 Badgers Act which covers the animals against killing, capture, taking and injury, and their setts from disturbance, obstruction and destruction.

Water vole: Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) protection against intentional killing, injury and disturbance, damage, obstruction and destruction to burrows.

Protected species surveys are to ensure that the client and relevant planning authority complies with wildlife legislation protecting species and habitats, e.g. The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended, and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. If protected species are found on a site, then a licence may need to be sought, before work can take place, from the appropriate licensing authority (i.e. Natural England). A licence means that work that would otherwise be unlawful can be carried out. A licence can take several weeks to be granted so planning ahead is essential for work to proceed smoothly and good survey information is crucial in determining the size of populations of some species. In addition to licensing, the conservation of ecological interests may be achieved through planning agreements, conditions and informatives.

Method

A desk study was carried out using the Dorset Explorer website and specialist ecological data provided by the Dorset Environmental Record Centre, to identify ecological information relating to the development within a 500m radius. This radius was chosen to reflect the minor, short term and low impact nature of the works.

A walkover survey was carried out on the 31st January 2020, approaching the downstream side of the bridge from the field to the south and using binoculars to examine the bridge arches in detail, and approaching the upstream side of the bridge from the cyclepath and angling path to examine the proposed access route. It was not possible to examine the downstream face of the bridge (where works are proposed) from above as there is no pedestrian path over the bridge on that side and the bridge is subject to constant use by traffic.

Evidence of water vole, badger, reptiles, otter and bats was looked for, although it is acknowledged that the time of year made it unlikely that field signs would be found.

Results

The only species record within the project area is for a lichen: *Xanthocarpia crenulatella*.

Dean's Court Meadow Site of Nature Conservation Interest lies 250m north west of Canford Bridge, designated for its unimproved water meadow habitat adjacent to the River Allen. The following species are also found within 500m of the bridge: mute swan, otter, hedgehog, badger, lapwing, house sparrow, common frog and stag beetle. Also the following bats: serotine, soprano pipistrelle, pipistrelle and whiskered bat.

Vegetation growing on the affected parts of the bridge was extremely sparse, comprising individual plants which it was not possible to identify to species level at this time of year. The works area will be accessed via a floating pontoon which will be transported to the upstream, south bank of the river across a field directly adjacent to the bridge. Once in the river it will be secured under each arch in turn, but will never affect the full width of the bridge at any one time.

The field from which the pontoon will be launched will also house a small compound area. Vegetation in this field comprised of a mix of rushes and rank grasses including soft rush *Juncus effusus*, hard rush, *Juncus inflexus*, cock's foot *Dactylis glomeratus* and Yorkshire fog, *Holcus lannatus*, as part of a species mix typical of seasonally wet floodplain grassland. There were no trees, scrub or taller ruderal species and it appears that the area is regularly disturbed as part of a local angling club access route to the river.

No evidence of badger, water vole, otter, reptiles or bats was found. No potential bat roost features were identified on or adjacent to the affected areas of the bridge. No possible bird nest sites or abandoned nests were identified on or adjacent to the affected areas of the bridge. Limited bird nesting opportunities are available in the long grass/rush vegetation in the field which will be used to access the river bank and launch the pontoon, although this depends on management of the area in the months between now and start of works.

Discussions and Recommendations

The proposed works will have a very limited impact on the bridge and adjacent vegetation.

Although the DERC data search identified a rare lichen, *Xanthocarpia crenulatella*, present on the downstream face of the bridge, subsequent discussions with DERC established that this species was listed as rare as it was under-recorded but is now known to exist widely and commonly within the UK. Therefore no further consideration of this species is needed.

Although no evidence of otters was found, there is a record for otters within 500m of the site. However, there will be minimal disturbance to the river bank when the pontoon is launched and the pontoon will only ever be moored under one arch at a time, ensuring that otter passage along the Stour will never be affected.

No evidence of water vole was found and it is considered extremely unlikely that water vole are present due to the variable water levels of the Stour at this location and the lack of previous records. Therefore, no mitigation is deemed necessary for this species.

No evidence of badgers was found and it is considered extremely unlikely that this species will be affected by the works, despite a record existing within the wider data search area. No setts were found within or adjacent to the works area and badger foraging habitat will be largely undisturbed by the presence of the small compound and short-term vehicle use of the angling path to access the river bank.

Although the long grass/rush habitat would normally be suitable for common reptiles such as slow worm and grass snake, the seasonal inundation of this habitat at this location makes it extremely unlikely that any reptiles will be found within the works access and compound area. Therefore no mitigation is deemed necessary for reptiles, although mitigation outlined below for nesting birds will also provide certainty that the works area will be free of common reptiles.

There are no opportunities for bats or nesting birds to use the existing bridge structure and therefore no mitigation is needed for these species.

However, the walk over survey did identify habitat with limited nesting bird potential in the area west of the bridge on the south bank where the pontoon will be launched and where vehicles will access the river bank. Rank grasses and rushes may be used by ground nesting bird species such as skylark or lapwing, and mitigation is therefore needed to ensure that there is no impact on these species:

Recommendation: All vegetation within the compound area and within a 2.5m corridor between the gate and the river bank (along the path to be used by site vehicles) must be cut down to ground level outside of bird nesting season. Bird nesting season is from the 1st March to the 31st August and therefore vegetation must be cut down by the end of February, and kept at this height until the start of works to ensure that the area remains free of nesting birds.

Net Gain: In line with the National Planning Policy Framework, 2019, all projects are required to secure net gain, as well as ensuring no net loss of biodiversity. Therefore it is recommended that two nest boxes suitable for dippers or grey wagtails (such as those sold by the NHBS or The Nestbox Company) are mounted on the underside of two of the flood arches, to provide further bird nesting opportunities on site.

Acknowledgements

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