



Otter Survey Report:

Land at
Park Gardens,
Begelly,
Pembrokeshire,
SA68 0AA

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Contents

- **SUMMARY**
- **INTRODUCTION**
- **METHODOLOGY**
- **DESK SURVEY**
- **FIELD SURVEY**
- **CONCLUSION**
- **RECOMMENDATIONS**
- **LEGISLATION**
- **Appendix 1**

Summary

I & G Ecological Consulting Ltd were commissioned to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of an area of land adjacent to Park Gardens, Begelly, Pembrokeshire (the site), centrally located at OS Grid Reference: SN 11930 07541 (Fig. 1)

The plans for the proposed development are for a Tourist Attraction comprising a number of accommodation units (currently 22), and associated infrastructure, including communal parking area and reception building.

The site, approximately 2 hectares in size, consists of an area of presently unused land located adjacent to Park Gardens. It is set within a semi-rural landscape and is boarded by low-density housing to the south and west, woodland and riparian corridor to the east and an agricultural field to the north.

The PEA assessed the site as having habitat suitable to support otter and evidence of otter was observed.



Figure 1. Aerial image of the site with the approximate site boundary is shown in red. (from

An otter survey was undertaken on the 4th May 2025. Signs of otter were observed at a number of locations within the site boundary. The wet woodland and stream were considered to be particularly important for otter and need protecting through suitable mitigation and enhancement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The survey relates to proposals to support a planning application for a Tourist Attraction at Park Gardens, Begelly, Pembrokeshire. Comprising a number of accommodation units (currently 22), and associated infrastructure, including communal parking area and reception building.

This report presents the findings of a desk study and a site appraisal undertaken in May 2025. The report outlines the ecological constraints/opportunities associated with the site in relation to otter.

The survey was conducted under optimal conditions, during a period of settled dry weather and stable river flows.

2. METHODOLOGY

A desk-based survey and an ecological site survey were undertaken to determine the suitability of the site for otter, and establish how otter are utilizing the lake and adjacent river catchment.

The unnamed tributary of the upper Creswell River was surveyed for signs of otter from the downstream point where it exits the development boundary (SN 12002 07374) to a point above the outlet from the lake (SN 12006 07604) where ground conditions prevented further access (Fig. 2). The entire lake and adjacent habitat and the minor waterbodies at the southern end were also surveyed. The survey was conducted on the 4th May 2025 during the optimal survey period, in a period of settled, mild weather with stable flows.

The survey was undertaken in line with current recommendations (Gov.UK 2016).

The area was inspected closely for signs of otter including spraint (droppings), runs and tracks, slides, couch's (temporary laying up sites in soft undergrowth) and potential holts. Spraint was classified according to its age:

- Fresh – wet, black, tarry, strong scent, deposited within previous 24hr period
- Recent – drier than above, but still black and scented.
- Old – dry, white, bones clearly visible



Figure 2. Area surveyed (Google)

3. Desk Study

- The data search undertaken for the PEA returned 0 entries for Otter (*Lutra lutra*) within the 2km search buffer.

The PEA survey undertaken by I&G Ecology in February 2025 found otter spraint, runs and a slide at the southern end of the lake (Fig. 3).

Below: Otter Field signs; Spraint, flattened vegetation, slide (TN2)



Figure 3.

The Otter Survey of Wales (Kean & Chadwick 2021) had 84% positive sites within the Cleddau hydrometric area in 2015-17 compared to 97% positives in 2002 and 2009. The Park Gardens Lake and stream drain into the upper reaches of the Creswell River which has two sites that are monitored, the upper being positive and lower a new negative in the most recent survey (Fig. 4).

Table 5 Cleddau results

	1977-78	1984	1991	2002	2009-10	2015-17
Positive sites (positive/total)	23/58	36/67	52/67	64/66	65/67	56/67
% positive	40%	54%	78%	97%	97%	84%

Cleddau

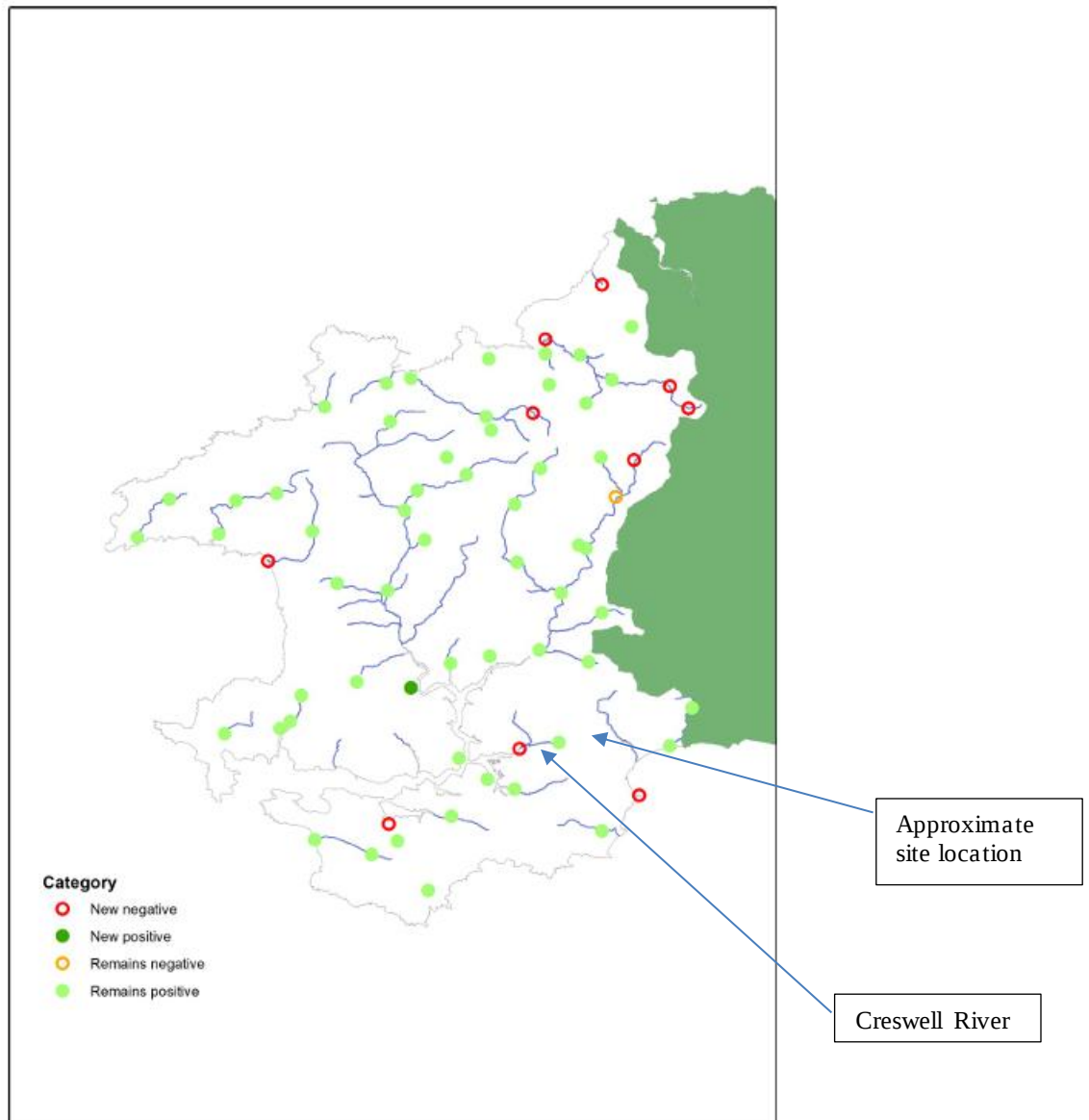


Figure 4. Otter Survey Wales summary 2019/20

4. SURVEY RESULTS

Results of the survey are shown in Figure 5.

The site lies at the top of the Cresswell River catchment draining to the Daugleddau estuary to the west. The stream flows through wet woodland dominated by alder and willow with areas of standing water and dense undergrowth dominated by areas of bramble, nettle, hemlock water dropwort and pendulous sedge (Figs. 6-11).

The stream is small, averaging 1m wide, and shallow in the main with the occasional deeper pool flowing over a substrate of fine gravels and pebbles. Water quality appears to be good, with large numbers of river limpets on stones. It is likely that the stream will support brown trout, eels and smaller fish species such as minnow.

Signs of otter were observed at a number of locations along the watercourse. Otter spraint was located on a boulder at the water edge which had a number of recent and old spraint (Fig. 12; TN1). Above this where the bank was constricted by a fallen tree a clear run and smoothed clay bank indicated where otter are travelling under the obstruction, with a possible couch under the trunk (Fig. 13; TN2). The upper sprainting site was on a trunk spanning the river where the spraint was again recent (Fig. 14; TN3). The stream lacked any major undercuts or root plates to provide holts within the accessible section surveyed, but the woodland provides ideal resting cover for otter and is sufficiently large and inaccessible to support a breeding site. Ponded areas throughout the wet woodland are likely to provide amphibian spawning sites (Fig. 15). Areas of the western edge of the wet woodland towards the site entrance have been cleared/tipped over (Fig. 16).

The lake has been constructed alongside the woodland edge and drains at the southern end via a heavily sedimented ditch and spreads. There appears to be no inflow to the lake so it is assumed it is groundwater fed. The lake is eutrophic and lacks aquatic vegetation with the exception of water lilies and a fringe of rush, reed and reedmace. The eastern bank is beginning to scrub up (it was being mown when the site was surveyed in 2022) and provides reasonable cover for otter (Fig. 17-18). The western bank is more open with little cover (Fig. 19). There are a couple of small inaccessible islands towards the upper end of the lake with alder and bramble where it would be possible for otter to lie up (Fig. 20), and an area of open reedbed at the northern end (Fig. 21). A couple of discarded bread bags along the lake edge possibly indicate fishing effort, so the lake may be stocked with coarse fish which would be a food source for otter. The lake and small pools (Fig. 22) to the south together with the ponded areas within the wet woodland will support breeding amphibians which will again provide a seasonal food source.

No spraint was found around the lake, but there were obvious mammal runs along the bank with runs into the water at both the southern and northern end of the lake (Figs. 23-24; TN4-5).

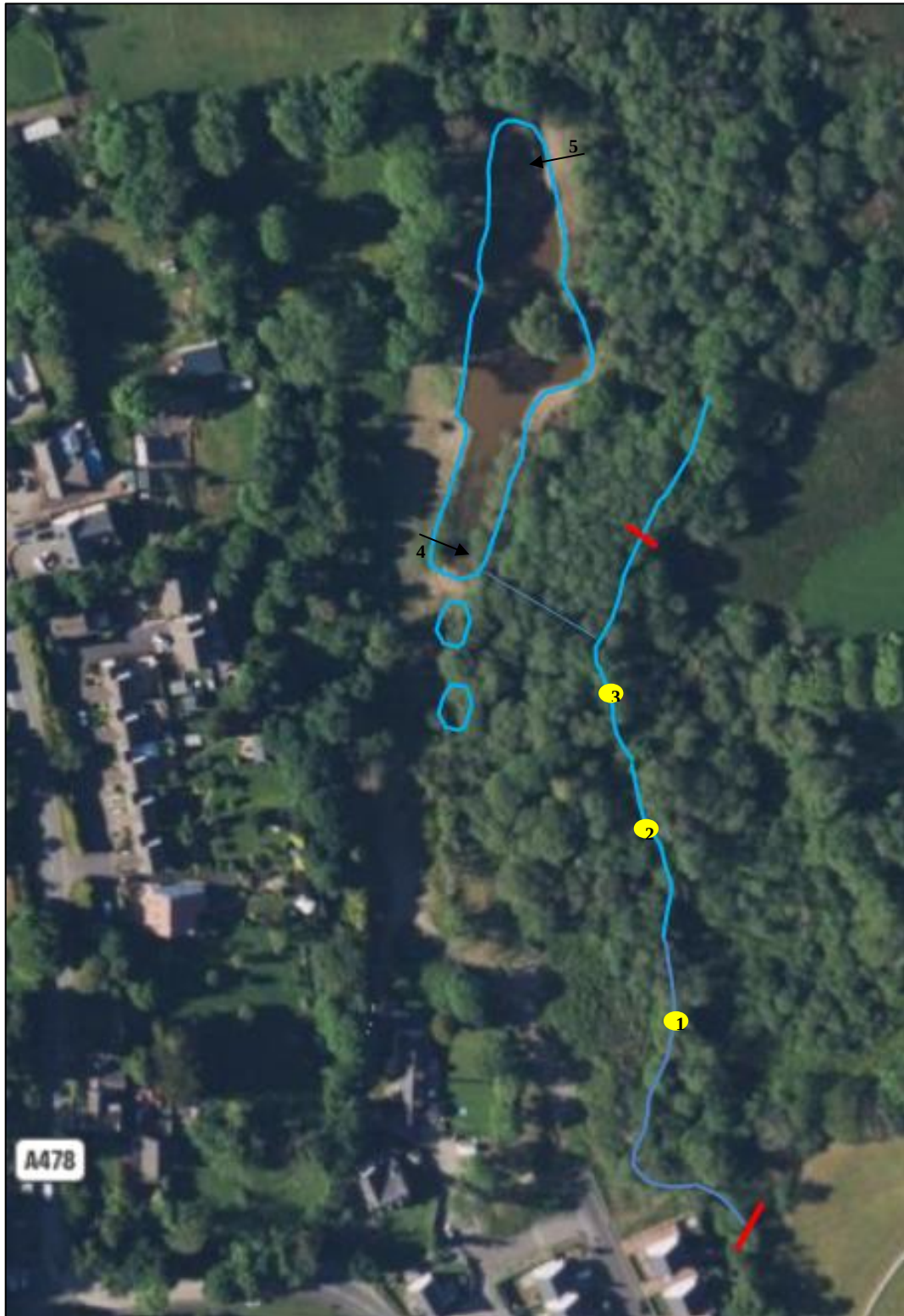


Fig.5

5. CONCLUSIONS

The site provides a good mix of foraging, commuting and resting sites for otter, and recent and old spraint along with other signs shows that otter are either present or moving through the site on a regular basis. This is further confirmed by spraint and signs located during the PEA survey in February 2025.

The stream and wet woodland provide ideal habitat for otter to move through and connect to suitable habitat in the wider catchment upstream and downstream of the site. They link to the Daugleddau estuary and to catchments across the watershed.

The stream itself is unlikely to support a large enough biomass of fish to sustain a resident otter, but the possible presence of fish in the lake and the quantity of amphibian breeding habitat would certainly provide seasonal opportunities for otter. The OS map indicates further ponds in the upstream catchment and on a number of tributaries in the wider area downstream.

The size, extent and density of the wet woodland together with generally poor ground conditions provides a good area of undisturbed habitat for otter to lie-up in and meets many of the criteria for a breeding site. No evidence of breeding otter was observed, and it would be expected to see more signs than are currently present, but it is important that any potential sites are protected and maintained. Aside from habitat loss, disturbance from humans and particularly from dogs is likely to be the biggest threat to otter on site.

Protection of the wet woodland and the eastern bank of the lake by the installation of appropriate fencing to minimize human and dog access, and no further encroachment on the wet woodland habitat should be instigated. A lighting scheme should be designed to ensure the maintenance of a dark corridor along the eastern bank and wet woodland.

The development has the potential to impact indirectly through polluting impacts and sediment run-off. The adherence to best practice guidelines will mitigate potential impacts

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- A tool-box talk should be undertaken to make operatives aware of the sensitive and protected feature on site, and the potential to impact upon off-site features. It is important for operators to remain vigilant for otters and other protected species while undertaking work.

- The use of silt fencing may be required to prevent sediment impacts on the lake, watercourse and riparian habitat.
- Excavations should not be left open overnight. If unavoidable then an access ramp should be installed to allow for animals to escape.
- Fuels and oils should be kept in a bunded area away from drains and watercourses. All refueling should be away from watercourses.
- Spill kits should be available on site, and contractors should be aware of their location and deployment
- De-watering of excavations should be to vegetated land well away from the lake, stream and ditches.
- A lighting scheme should be designed to ensure the maintenance of a dark corridor along the far lake shore and wet woodland.
- Access to the eastern shore of the lake and the wet woodland beyond should be prevented during construction and operation of the site to reduce any potential for disturbance, especially by dogs.
- No further encroachment onto the wet woodland should be allowed.

LEGISLATION

Otters and the Law

The otter is a European Protected Species (EPS). It is against the law to damage or destroy an otter breeding site or resting place, or deliberately to capture, kill, injure or disturb an otter.

Otters are fully protected by the following pieces of legislation:

- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (regulation 42) fully protects otters, making it **an offence to**: -
 - *Intentionally or deliberately capture, injure or kill an Otter.*
 - *Damage or destroy a breeding or resting place of an Otter, or intentionally or recklessly damage or destroy any structure or place used for shelter or protection*
 - *Intentionally or recklessly disturb an Otter in a place used for shelter or protection, or deliberately disturb Otters in such a way as to be likely significantly to affect (i) the ability of any significant group of Otters to survive, breed, rear or nurture their young, or (ii) the local distribution or abundance.*
 - *Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection.*
 - *Possess an Otter (alive or dead), or any part of an Otter*
- Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW [Countryside Rights of Way] Act 2000) fully protects otters, making it **an offence to**:-

For any disturbance to occur a derogation or **EPS licence** must be gained from Natural Resources Wales. To gain an EPS Licence from Natural Resources Wales (NRW), NRW must be satisfied that;

- i. granting the licence would not be detrimental to the Favourable Conservation Status (fcs) of the populations of species concerned within its natural range.
- ii. the derogation (licence) is in the public interest of Health and Safety or for other reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of a socio-economic nature or will have a benefit of primary importance to the environment.
- iii. there is no satisfactory alternative to the derogation which would allow the described development to proceed but which would avoid or reduce the need for any adverse impact to the species.

Otters are also protected by;

- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and in Wales specifically, by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

- Annex II Habitats Directive (protection through Special Areas of Conservation)
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species and Species of Principal Importance in Wales.

Environment Act (Wales) 2016

This act has replaced the section 40 duty in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act 2006), in relation to Wales, and applies to those authorities that fell within the previous duty. It came into force in May 2016.

Section 6 of the Act places a duty on public authorities to 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity' so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In so doing, public authorities must also seek to 'promote the resilience of ecosystems'. Under Section 6 public authorities will be required to report on the actions they are taking to improve biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience.

Section 7 of the Act places a duty on public authorities to take steps to maintain and enhance biodiversity. This section replaces the duty in section 42 of the NERC Act 2006. The Section 7 Priority Species under this act is a list of the living organisms of principal importance for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in relation to Wales. The Section 7 Priority Habitats is a list of the habitats of principal importance for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in relation to Wales.

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Fig.6



Fig. 7



Fig.8



Fig. 9



Fig.10



Fig.11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24