

WATER VOLE METHOD STATEMENTS.

It is not possible to issue a licence for “development” under the Wildlife and Countryside Act in a similar way to some of the licences issued under the Habitats Regulations. Licences can be issued by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for the purpose of ‘preserving public health and public safety’ e.g. restoration of a canal bank. However, not all developments fit under this heading.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act provides a defence against the above offences where the action is the incidental result of an otherwise lawful operation and could not reasonably be avoided (10(3)(c)).

The best advice from NRW is for the developer to undertake the work in such a way that avoids offence issues where possible and minimises the likelihood of them occurring where not. This can be achieved through the preparation and approval of a method statement that is agreed with the local NRW officer through consultation with the Regional Species Officer.

The critical issues are:

- That appropriate survey information is obtained and made available about the water vole population on the site.
- That all measures are taken before, during and after development to ensure that minimal impact is made upon the population.
- That any works in the area used by water voles is carried out with due regard to the ecology and behaviour of the species concerned.
- That the area made available to the species post-development is suitable for the maintenance of the population.
- That all works are carried out following appropriate guidance such as the ***Water Vole Conservation Handbook third Edition*** and ***The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook 2016***.
- That all works are overseen by a suitably qualified ecologist.

- That communication is maintained at all times with the appropriate NRW officer.
- That all works should cease with immediate effect if it is considered that the development is having a detrimental impact on the population.

MITIGATION AND METHOD STATEMENTS.

Water voles can potentially be affected by a range of work within the riparian bankside and beyond. The following points represent key themes to bear in mind when formulating mitigation plans for a piece of water vole casework.

- An initial assessment of the water vole population through baseline surveys
- The impact of the proposed work on water vole habitat post operations
- The impact on the water vole population during and post operations
- The impact on connectivity with other water vole populations within/across the site
- Phasing of operations (over a number of years)
- Use of displacement or exclusion techniques to ensure water voles are not present at the time of the works
- Contingency plans
- Post operation site management and safeguard, short & long term
- Post operation monitoring programme (when and by whom)
- New areas of riparian habitat created or restored in situ as compensation for loss of original habitat including planting of suitable vegetation. Note that this should be available in advance of damage to existing habitat.
- Translocation of water vole population to another site (as last resort)
- Suitability of receptor site/s and their site safeguard in long term

Note that NRW has advisory, operational and regulatory roles in all riparian environmental assessments.

The Method Statement should describe fully how the operation/s impacting on a water vole population are going to be carried out. It should incorporate **avoidance measures** such as plans put in place to control and minimise harm or impact to any water vole bearing in mind the time of year. **Contingency plans** should also be included describing procedures to be followed if unforeseen circumstances prevent/hinder compliance with the method statement.

A Method Statement should include:

- Timing of operations
- Phasing of operations with accompanying map illustrating programme of work
- How water voles are to be excluded from the area
- How the impact of the operations is going to be minimised
- Who is going to carry out the work (under licence, if necessary)
- Health & Safety procedures
- Who operators will contact for advice e.g. NRW, if required
- Reference to appropriate licences

Where can I find out more information on water voles?

*The **Water Vole Conservation Handbook** third Edition provides extensive advice on habitat management and mitigation, including a number of case studies.*

*The **Water Vole Mitigation Handbook 2016** provides comprehensive advice for developments and should be consulted alongside the **Water Vole Conservation Handbook**.*