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Ecological Consultants
Environmental and Rural Chartered Surveyors

Your Ref:
Our Ref: AWG/12/GEN/378

Mr Michael Jacob
68 High Road
Halton
Lancaster
LA2 6PS

Monday, 03 September 2012

Dear Mr Jacob

RE: OTTERS USING RIVER LUNE AT HALTON

Further to our recent site visit and ADAS report Ref: 11063/LCCHD/10 which we have reviewed, I would report as follows.

I am a full professional member of both the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). I am also a Chartered Environmentalist with the Society for the Environment (SocEnv)

I have undertaken numerous Otter surveys throughout Cumbria and Lancashire and have held a development license for the destruction of otter holts.

On the 14th August 2010 we viewed some of the video footage taken of families of otters using the dock under the Boat House at Halton.

We were also able to use a boat to check the bankside from the Boat House, downstream to a point approximately 150m below the existing motorway bridge. At the time of the survey we judged that water levels were slightly raised but falling and were within the range of normal summer levels.

Despite recently elevated water levels, extensive evidence of Otters using the North bank was found in areas which would until 48hrs previously have been covered by water.

Both footprints and spraints were located, particularly in the woodland immediately downstream of the motorway bridge on the North bank. Based on the number and angle of footprints as well as



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scuffs on roots and worn areas to the bank it was evident that otters are leaving the river and using terrestrial habitat both on the river bank and in the woodland.

We did not undertake an extensive search of the woodland above the river bank but based entirely upon the nature of the bankside, with large cavities and interlocking root structures, the presence of a holt or couch along this section of the River Lune is highly likely.

The ADAS report indicates that:

“Although the river had been high on a number of occasions during the summer of 2012, the level was stable and not in spate at the time of the survey and the fact that Otter spraints were recorded indicated that recent high water levels had subsided sufficiently for fresh evidence to be available and this was not a constraint on the data collected.”

We consider that the presence of otter sign, despite recent high river levels, would indicate either a locally elevated otter population resulting in the rapid deposition of new spraints and sign or dependency upon this section of river during periods of high water turbidity/ flow.

Comparing this site against other sections of both the River Lune and adjacent catchments we have assessed in recent years, we consider the population of otters in the locality of Halton is likely to be exceptionally high.

Regulation 41 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 protects not only resting places but significant populations of animals from disturbance and displacement where this affects their favourable conservation status.

Based on the evidence presented to us we do not consider sufficient survey effort has been used to ascertain the number of individual otters using this section of the River Lune. Without a population size class assessment an evaluation of the importance of this section of the River Lune or the degree of disturbance likely to be attributed to construction of a new bridge cannot be determined.

Mr John Wilding suspects there are between 12 and 15 individual otters using the Boat House. Based upon the more easily recognisable family groups where cub size can be used to distinguish them, the presence of 3 females with 7 cubs would make the population at least of County Significance.

We would expect as a minimum that DNA analysis is made of spraints to determine both the number and genetic diversity of the otters on this stretch of the River Lune. It is also possible this section of the River Lune provides a conduit for the dispersal of animals to other catchments, the seasonality and potential for transient use by dispersing otters should also therefore be assessed.

Without a reasonable population assessment the degree of disturbance to the local population cannot be ascertained. It is required that the full impact on a European Protected Species is determined before either an application for development is granted or a license for disturbance can be applied for. It is my professional opinion that the potential for disturbance to otters at this site has not been fully addressed at this time.

Yours Sincerely



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Director Envirotech NW Ltd