

## Wildlife sightings submitted by members of the public in response to a planning application.

Derbyshire Biological Records Centre (DBRC) and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) Planning Team.

Local Planning Authorities (LPA), the DBRC and the DWT Planning Team frequently receive reports from the public of wildlife sightings on land that is subject to a planning application.

The purpose of this note is to:

- give guidance to applicants, ecological consultants, and wildlife recorders on how to deal with these reports in the planning process.
- provide advice to members of the public on how to ensure their records are a 'material consideration' in the planning process
- provide information on the main species and habitats that are a 'material consideration'

### Validation of sightings received from members of the public

Submissions of wildlife sightings to the record center are valuable for understanding species distribution in the county. The public is encouraged to contribute, regardless of experience. However, sightings from non-acknowledged naturalists must be validated before being used by the DBRC and the DWT Planning Team. An acknowledged naturalist has specific qualifications.

- a County Recorder
- an ecologist/naturalist employed in a relevant field by an independent Local Authority, Wildlife Trust, Ecological Consultancy, University, Environment Agency, Natural England, etc.
- an ecologist/naturalist who is a member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)
- a recorder who regularly submits validated natural history records of this group of species to the DBRC or another similar organisation

The DWT Planning Team supplies advice on wildlife planning matters to all LPAs in Derbyshire, EXCEPT Erewash.

### What information should you send?

To validate a wildlife sighting, the DBRC requires information on:

- **Who:** The observer's name.
- **What:** The species observed. A photograph is helpful, especially with a scale reference, along with a description justifying the identification, particularly for rare or protected species.

- **Where:** Location details, including the road name, village/town/city, grid reference, what3words, postcode, or a map screenshot.
- **When:** The exact date of the sighting, although a month or year can be accepted, which may affect the record's value.

Submitters can provide evidence of a sighting's validity, such as an email from an expert. The DBRC will either validate the sighting or consult a local expert, depending on the species and its rarity. Records of common species are typically validated easily, while those of rare or previously unrecorded species may require expert validation, including supporting photographs and detailed descriptions. Validation factors include the species' commonness in the area, the sighting's timing, and the habitat. **Evidence-supported sightings carry more weight than those based solely on claims.**

### Why is it important to validate records?

Validation is necessary to verify species identification and prevent spurious reports, particularly for contentious sites, ensuring confidence in the records used by the Planning Team. High-quality data enhances the credibility of the DBRC's responses from Local Planning Authorities. Once validated, your sighting will be recorded in the DBRC database and made available to the DWT Planning Team and the public, with personal information redacted.

### Site visits to check habitat and location of sightings

If habitats or species recorded on a site are not mentioned in the ecology report for a planning application, the DWT Planning Team may advise the applicants' ecologists to reassess the site or nearby areas, requiring landowner permission for access. If permission is denied, the sighting may remain unvalidated or regarded as anecdotal evidence. For sightings on personal property, such as a great crested newt in a garden pond, validation may depend on allowing the applicant's ecologist to survey the land, although clear photographs of the species in situ could suffice in some cases.

### Ecology Surveys

Planning applications affecting wildlife sites in Derbyshire must include an independent ecology report, adhering to guidelines from the CIEEM [Guide to Ecological Surveys and their Purpose](#) and/or the DWT Planning Team. While comprehensive reports may not always be necessary—such as for bats and great crested newts—they must be assessed by the DWT Planning Team for quality and professionalism.

Surveys should be conducted by experts, often [Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management \(CIEEM\)](#) members, with some surveys requiring a [Protected Species survey licence from Natural England](#). Most ecology surveys must consult DBRC data to consider existing local records, which can inform necessary species surveys or mitigation measures.

The applicant is responsible for commissioning these surveys, as the DBRC and DWT Planning Team do not conduct site visits unless essential for understanding critical habitats.

## Material planning considerations

Planning authorities must consider the impact on wildlife when making decisions, as biodiversity is a key factor. Applications can be denied if they cause significant harm to biodiversity, or conditions may be set to mitigate the damage, such as creating new habitats.

The importance of material consideration varies based on the habitat or species' significance at national or county levels, as well as the impact's severity. **Legal protections for species like great crested newts and barn owls are always factors, but their presence does not guarantee application refusal.** Species prioritised in the [UK's Biodiversity Action Plan \(UKBAP\)](#) and or on the [BTO's Birds of Conservation Concern](#) only matter if they represent significant populations. National guidance on this is in [ODPM Circular 06/2005](#)

Protected species include great crested newts, otters, water voles, white-clawed crayfish, barn owls, all species of bats, and badgers.

[Local Biodiversity Action Plan \(LBAP\)](#) species hold less weight, while impacts on nationally significant Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and UKBAP Priority Habitats are more critical than those on local sites. If agreed mitigation measures are put in place, the weight of these considerations may be reduced.

Contact:

### The DBRC

To send sightings to the DBRC, please use the Online Recording System (ORS) [dbrc-ors.lerc.online](http://dbrc-ors.lerc.online) Or if you prefer email [dbrc@derbyshirewt.co.uk](mailto:dbrc@derbyshirewt.co.uk)

### The DWT Planning Team

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