

Guidance note for applicants and developers:

Ecology Information needed to support planning applications in Blaby, Hinckley & Bosworth, Harborough, Melton, North-West Leicestershire, Oadby & Wigston, Rutland

What information is needed?

If the request for information has come from a local authority's ecologist, they will specify what the Ecology survey should include. If the planners have asked you to provide the ecology report, **PLEASE CHECK THE SCOPE WITH THE ECOLOGIST**. This will prevent you wasting time and money doing unnecessary surveys.

Ecology Surveys could include the following elements, depending on your scoping advice:

A Preliminary Ecology Assessment (PEA)

This is useful on large sites as it will help to scope out what detailed surveys are needed as a second phase of survey.

On smaller sites it can be a waste of time and money – it's best to go straight to the detailed surveys, after taking advice on the scope from the Ecology team.

An extended Phase 1 Habitat survey

A PEA should include this. On smaller sites that don't need a PEA, it may be requested if there is permanent grassland or other good habitat on site. **It should be done between April and mid-October** – surveys done outside this season may be rejected.

An 'extended' survey should include 'Target Notes', and should identify any habitats that meet Local Wildlife Site criteria; further information in the [Habitat Survey protocol](#) (PDF).

When you are commissioning the survey, make sure this is part of the brief; it should save you time when the application is being considered, and will smooth the process.

Protected and priority species survey(s)

Bats, badgers and Great Crested Newts are the usual surveys requested, but otters, water vole, white-clawed crayfish, barn owl, swifts or other species are also sometimes needed. [There are restricted survey seasons for bats, swifts and great crested newts – check the guidance](#) (PDF).

Beware of survey reports that don't give you answers; if they are inconclusive and recommend further surveys they are liable to be rejected. We recommend you ensure that your ecologists have completed all the surveys needed before you submit your application. It may be some time before the LA ecologist is consulted on your application; if you need more surveys, this delay can cause you to miss the survey season and for your application to be refused or deferred.

Bat and Great Crested Newt surveys should be carried out to national guidelines; make sure you ask for this in the brief. Further information here:

[Great Crested Newt survey protocol](#) (PDF)

[Bat protocol](#) (PDF)

Ecology reports should include Impact Assessment, Mitigation and Enhancement proposals.

The extent of this will depend on the survey findings. If there are impacts on significant habitats and species, the report should include recommendations for mitigation, which should be incorporated into the development plans. For instance, if a bat loft is needed your planning drawings should show this. Planning authorities should ensure that developments provide enhancement and net gain for biodiversity. For large developments, the report should have a Biodiversity Impact Assessment and provide evidence of net gain.

Who does the survey?

You will need to commission it from an independent ecological consultant. We strongly recommend you ensure that the ecologists are members of CIEEM; there is a [list of members on the CIEEM website](#).

The Ecology Team at LCC can send you a list of local consultants, but cannot recommend any. We recommend you prepare a brief and give your ecologist clear information about the development you are planning, and that you ensure the ecologists have full and safe access to the site, including any buildings.

Do I need a Data-search?

- **For large sites and major development** – yes; usually this will be an area covering 1km or 2km buffer outside the site boundary, depending on the size of development, and it should cover protected and priority species and designated sites. Some developments with potentially high indirect impacts - e.g. wind farms, major road and rail, industry, minerals and very large development - will need larger areas of data-search.
- **On smaller sites** – possibly, if there are good habitats on site or close by; 1km buffer around the site should be adequate.
- **For householders** – very rarely (unless the house is very large!). A householder bat-search may be helpful if you have been asked for a bat survey.

Usually the ecology consultant will commission the search, and it will carry a fee. The search should be from the [Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre \(LRERC\)](#) which has further information, including costs of standard searches.

Searches of the 'NBN' or 'Magic' are free, but can't be used for commercial purposes, and do not produce adequate results. If your site is close to the County boundary, you may also need to commission a search from the neighbouring record centre.

The ecology team will not reject your application if it does not have a data-search. It will provide useful information to your ecologists. For most developments (apart from householders) it would be negligent of them not to commission one, without discussing it with a local authority ecologist first.

Contacts

Leicestershire County Council's Ecology Team gives ecology advice to Leicestershire, Blaby, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Melton, North West Leicestershire, Oadby & Wigston and Rutland planning authorities

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