



Kent International Gateway
Dormouse Report 2006
Kent International Gateway Ltd

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Executive Summary

A dormouse nest tube and nest box survey of suitable habitats within and immediately adjacent the proposed Kent International Gateway development site was undertaken between April and October 2006.

Some 115 dormouse nest tubes were deployed by an English Nature licensed ecologist in hedgerows and woodland around the proposed development site and 30 nest boxes were installed in The Belt and Chrismill Shaw. The nest tubes and boxes were inspected over two or three occasions; a final check was made before retrieval on 25 and 26 October 2006.

The surveys did not find any evidence of dormouse at the site, and as such there are no ecological constraints in respect of this taxon at this site. Detailed mitigation and compensation for dormouse, usually undertaken under the provisions of a European Protected Species Licence, is not required.

Dormouse has been found at two sites within 2km of the site, the closest being within 100m of the site boundary. Given time, it is possible that dormouse could colonise parts of the site pre-development, particularly if the proposed development is delayed by several years. Therefore, if the development does not proceed within the next two years, a nut search of the proposed development site is recommended.

Notwithstanding the negative result of the survey, development of the site should, wherever possible, avoid damage or removal of woodland, hedgerow and scrub habitats (impact avoidance) in order to minimise overall ecological impacts.



1 Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.1.1 This report outlines the findings of dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* surveys undertaken in 2006 at a proposed development site near Hollingbourne in Kent and is one of a series of baseline ecological reports that are intended to inform and Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed development.

1.1.2 The proposed scheme is a large, primarily business development called the Kent International Gateway that would be situated to the west of Hollingbourne (centred at National Grid Reference TQ815 55).

1.1.3 During 2005, a preliminary dormouse report was prepared by WSP Environmental which assessed the potential for this species to be present on the site and included a hazel nut search (WSPE, 2005). Subsequent discussion with Natural England (formerly English Nature) and with dormouse specialist Michael Woods, identified that full dormouse surveys using nest tubes and nest boxes would be necessary in order to confidently predict presence/absence of dormouse within the site.

1.1.4 In 2006 Andrew McCarthy Associates Ltd, acting on behalf of WSP Environmental, undertook a survey for dormouse using nest tubes and nest boxes within suitable hedgerow, woodland and scrub habitat within the site of the proposed Kent International Gateway and its immediate environs (central O.S. Grid Ref. TQ 813 553).

1.1.5 The dormouse survey was part of a suite of ecological surveys undertaken at the proposed development site from 2005 to 2006 in order to assess potential ecological impacts of the proposed development and to assist with preparing avoidance, mitigation and compensation proposals.

1.2 LEGISLATION AND POLICY

Legislation

1.2.1 Dormouse is legally protected in the UK through its inclusion on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981, as amended by the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 in England and Wales, and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994, making it a European protected species. In combination, these pieces of legislation make it an offence to:

- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture a dormouse;
- Damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by a dormouse;
- Deliberately disturb a dormouse while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose.

1.2.2 A European protected species licence (EPS licence) from Natural England (formerly issued by DEFRA) is required for any development works that would affect dormouse or dormouse habitat (e.g. hedges, scrub or woodland) where the species is known to be present.

Policy

1.2.3 Dormouse is a Priority Species for nature conservation in the UK and Kent Biodiversity Action Plans and is a Species of Principal Importance under Section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

1.2.4 Government Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9 and its accompanying circular Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) 06/2005 sets out Government Policy on Biodiversity and Nature Conservation and places a duty on planners to make material consideration to the effect of a development on legally protected species, such as dormouse, when considering planning applications.



2 Methodology

2.1 FIELD SURVEY

2.1.1 The dormouse survey was undertaken following best practice methodology, as described in Bright & MacPherson (2002), Chanin & Woods (2003) and Bright, Morris & Mitchell-Jones (2006).

2.1.2 A total of 115 dormouse nest tubes were installed in hedge habitat at 20m intervals within and immediately adjacent to the proposed development site; 47 of these were installed in suitable habitat along the railway that runs through the centre of the site and 68 were installed within and immediately adjacent to the proposed development site.

2.1.3 Thirty dormouse nest boxes were installed on trees within Chrismill Shaw and The Belt. Nest boxes were used on these trees instead of nest tubes because of the limited amount of understorey in the woodlands and because it is not practical to set nest tubes on the trunks of large mature trees. The boxes were located between 5 and 6m high on suitable trees which were either immediately adjacent scrub habitat or in trees whose canopies connected with others¹. Boxes were generally set approximately 20m apart, however, in areas of better quality dormouse habitat, boxes were installed in clusters in order to improve occupancy rates and increase the probability of detecting this species.

2.1.4 The nest boxes and tubes (with the exception of those along the railway and in Common Wood) were installed on 3 and 4 April 2006 and subsequently checked by English Nature licensed surveyors on 11 and 16 May 2006, 27 June and 15 August, and again immediately before retrieval on 25 and 26 October 2006. Due to access difficulties, the 47 nest tubes along the railway and the 25 tubes within Common Wood were installed on 11 and 16 May 2006, and inspected on 27 June, 15 August, and 25 and 26 October.

2.1.5 The survey area and locations of nest tubes and boxes are shown in Figure 1.

2.1.6 There were no significant limitations to the survey.

¹ Dormouse feed amongst the branches of trees and shrubs and rarely descends to the ground (except for hibernation); therefore connectivity between tree canopies increases the probability of use by this species.



3 Results

3.1.1 No evidence of dormouse was found during the nest tube or box survey on this site.

3.1.2 The nest tube survey results gave an index of probability of recording dormice over the survey period (Chanin & Woods, 2003) of 45.7 for the 115 tubes set within the proposed development site (allowing for the different timing of installation). This exceeds the minimum threshold of 20, indicating that adequate survey effort was undertaken.

3.1.3 The nest box survey did not find any evidence of dormouse in Chrismill Shaw or The Belt woodlands. There is currently no method of calculating an index of probability of recording dormouse in nest boxes but dormouse is known to readily use boxes in some woodlands where natural nest sites are scarce (Bright & Morris, 1993).

3.1.4 A wood mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus* was found in a nest tube during the July and August surveys and several bird nests characteristic of blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* were found within the nest boxes. Both species are very common and widespread; wood mouse has no legal protection in the UK. However, blue tit, its active nests and nest contents (eggs or young), are protected from damage during the breeding season under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).



4 Discussion and Recommendations

4.1.1 The survey did not find any evidence of dormouse at the proposed development site or along the railway. As such, there are no ecological constraints in respect of this taxon and detailed mitigation and compensation for dormouse, usually undertaken under the provisions of a European Protected Species Licence, is not required.

4.1.2 With the exception of Common Wood and areas of scrub along the railway, the habitats on site appeared to be suboptimal for dormouse due to an intensive hedge management regime on farmland and the small size, and lack or limited extent of understorey vegetation in Chrismill Shaw and The Belt woodlands. Intensive hedge management does not always preclude the presence of dormouse although it probably results in low population density of mainly transient animals.

4.1.3 Dormouse has been found at two sites within 2km of the site, the closet being within 100m of the site boundary. Given time, it is possible that dormouse could colonise parts of the site pre-development, particularly if the proposed development is delayed by several years. Therefore, if the development does not proceed within the next two years, a nut search of the proposed development site is recommended.

4.1.4 Notwithstanding the negative result of the survey, development of the site should, wherever possible, avoid damage or removal of woodland, hedgerow and scrub habitats (impact avoidance) in order to minimise overall ecological impacts.

4.1.5 Hedge removal should not be undertaken during the bird breeding season, which is generally from March to August inclusive in southern England.



References and Bibliography

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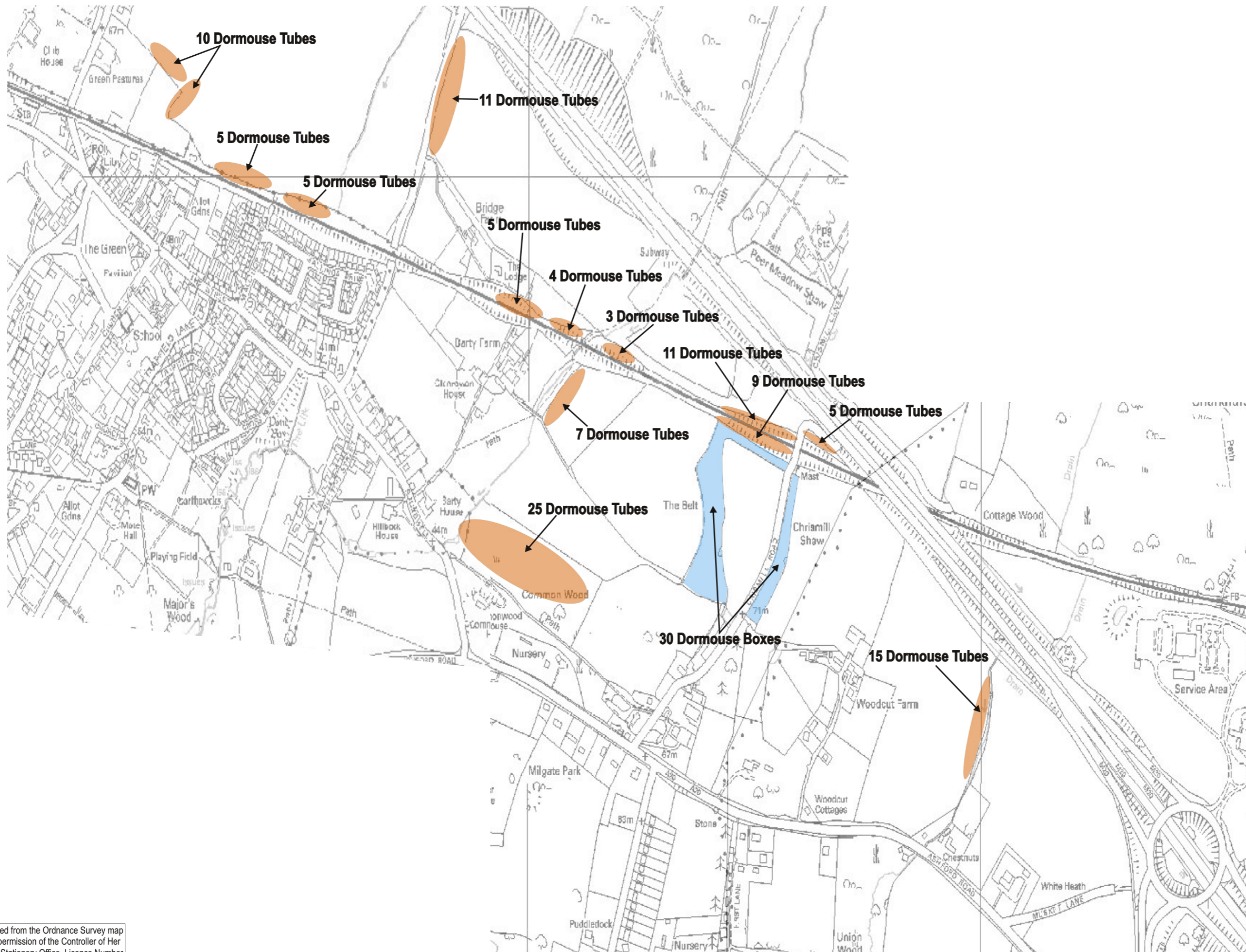
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WSP Environmental (2005) Hollingbourne Business Park Dormouse Report.



Figure 1 Location of Nest Tubes and Nest Boxes



Key

-  Position of Dormouse Tubes
-  Position of Dormouse Boxes

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