



**An Ecological Survey
of
Beaminster bridleway Buckham Down Farm to The Old Cheese
House W21/80**

**prepared on behalf of Dorset Council
by Ali Quinney, Ecologist**

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1 Summary

- 1.1.1 This report has been prepared by Ali Quinney, Ecologist, on behalf of Russel Goff, Senior Ranger, Dorset Council. It provides a record of the habitats and ecological features present along W21/80 Bridleway between Buckham Down Farm and The Old Cheese House in Beaminster.
- 1.1.2 A desk study and walkover survey of this section of bridleway was carried out on 19th April 2023, highlighting important habitats and the likelihood of protected species being present.
- 1.1.3 There are proposed plans for the diversion of part of W21/80 Bridleway through open fields rather than open / reinstate the overgrown existing route see Appendix 1.
- 1.1.4 The bridleway is approx. 590m length comprising 380m of shallow stream or wet ditch and 210m of dry, sunken Holloway-like depression. The entire bridleway is encompassed with connected wooded and scrub margins creating an ecological corridor through the landscape.
- 1.1.5 The survey identified the habitats that would potentially support nesting birds, badgers, dormice and bats.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 A walkover survey was undertaken by Dorset Council's Natural Environment Team to identify important habitats and features and the likelihood of protected species being present associated with the existing W21/80 Bridleway.
- 2.1.2 The survey was requested by Dorset Council's Ranger Team following proposed plans to redirect part of the Bridleway 80 route through open fields between Buckham Down Farm and the Old Cheese House in Beaminster.
- 2.1.3 The survey was carried out on 19th April in warm, sunny and dry conditions.
- 2.1.4 Several species and habitats are afforded protection under UK and European wildlife legislation.
- 2.1.5 Conservation of Natural Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, provides legislative protection for certain species including bats, great crested newts and Hazel dormice. The Regulations also provide protection for certain designated sites, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).
- 2.1.6 Otters, great crested newts, Hazel dormice, water voles, and all bat species are fully protected under section 9 (5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Under this act it is an offence to:
 - Intentionally capture, kill or injure one of these animals.
 - Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used by one of these animals for shelter or protection.
 - Intentionally or recklessly disturb an animal whilst it is using this place.
 - Sell, offer for sale or advertise for one of these animals live or dead.

2.2 Site description

- 2.2.1 The bridleway is an approx. 590m linear feature, running north to south and located between Buckham Down Farm and Old Cheese House, Beaminster ST47760315 north and ST47806 02646 south. Footpath W21/79 runs almost completely adjacent to the bridleway apart from when it crosses open, wet, grassland in the middle section. The bridleway is obstructed by trees and scrub in parts and is difficult to access due to wet, boggy and uneven ground. Approx 380m of the bridleway is a shallow stream. Approx 100m in the middle section of the bridleway is a deep narrow ditch. 210m at the top of the bridleway is more accessible, drier under foot and includes a wider section, dominated by wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*) with mature hazel (*Corylus avellana*) on the parallel low hedge banks. There are natural habitats surrounding the bridleway, including scattered tree and scrub lined hedge bank, deciduous woodland and dense scrub and ruderals creating an ecological corridor. The mid 1/3 of the bridleway runs through the middle of Chantry Farm SNCI ST40/057. The neutral grassland fields to the east of the top 1/3 of the bridleway is also SNCI. The SNCI habitats are neutral grassland, scrub, woodland, fen meadow and rush pasture on a south facing slope.
- 2.2.2 The proposed works are to redirect the bridleway through open fields rather than reinstate the W21/80 Bridleway.

3 Methodology

3.1 Desk study

- 3.1.1 A desktop study was undertaken using information from the Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) for protected species and priority habitats; including non-statutory designated nature conservation sites. The study was limited to records within 1km from the centre of the survey area for protected wildlife and species of conservation concern. Statutory designated sites within 2km and sites of local wildlife interest within 1km were included in the study.

3.2 Field survey

- 3.2.1 A habitat and protected species walkover survey was carried out on 19th April 2023 by Ali Quinney of the Dorset Council Natural Environment Team. This survey identified the dominant habitat types. The main species of plants and trees were noted but a full botanical species list has not been compiled.
- 3.2.2 In addition to the habitat survey, trees were assessed for evidence of use by nesting birds and their potential to support roosting bats. The value of the sites features for foraging and commuting bats was also appraised.
- 3.2.3 Hedges were assessed for their suitability to support hazel dormice and a targeted search for badger setts and evidence of badgers was performed.
- 3.2.4 The surveys also included an assessment of the potential presence of reptiles, amphibians, other mammals and invertebrates in all survey areas.

3.3 Survey methods

- 3.3.1 Habitat with intrinsic value and the potential for protected species was searched for along with protected species and signs of their presence. The methodologies used to search this site is consistent with the CIEEM Good Practice Guidance for Habitats and Species and additional guidance provided in Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines 3rd ed. (2016) The Bat Conservation Trust, Bats and trees (2015) The Bat Conservation Trust, ARC Survey Protocols and the dormouse conservation handbook, (2006) English Nature.

4 Results - describing the ecological features

4.1 Designated sites – all areas

- 4.1.1 There are no designated nature conservation sites within or immediately adjacent to the site boundaries or within 2km of the site.
- 4.1.2 There are multiple Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) within 1km of the site. The nearest being Chantry Farm SNCI, which surrounds most of the bridleway. The others are Meerhay Manor, Higher Meerhay Farm, Horn Coppice, Comon Water Lane.
- 4.1.3 The site is within an Existing and Higher Potential Ecological Network.

4.2 Desk study and field survey

4.2.1 Plants and habitats

- 4.2.2 The site is linear in nature and measures approx. 590m in length.
- 4.2.3 The entrance of the bridleway from The Old Cheese House (south) is accessible but not obvious as it has become a shallow stream, lined with pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*) and fools' watercress (*Heloscadium nodiflorum*). Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), willow sp and elder (*Sambucus nigra*) line the hedge banks that run parallel to the bridleway, crossing over the bridleway at approx. 1 – 1.5m high creating a Holloway like enclosed feature. The vegetation gets denser, lower and unpassable approx. 10 metres up the path; there are trees down and branches and vegetated growing across the bridleway.
- 4.2.4 Where it is impassable at approx. ST4774 0273, the bridleway is visible from the adjacent footpath that runs through a hazel, ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) woodland. Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and primroses (*Primula vulgaris*) are present on the woodland floor, spreading to the bridleways parallel hedge banks.
- 4.2.5 A gateway is present halfway along this section at approx. ST47710284 and the bridleway becomes narrower more enclosed. The vegetation bordering the path becomes denser with tall ruderals and scrub; bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*).
- 4.2.6 At ST4769 0289 the bridleway then 'dog legs' and travels west to east. Here it becomes a deep tree lined ditch with hazel, gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) on the higher banks. The stream still runs here and becomes denser and unpassable due to overgrown vegetation and low lying, fallen branches.
- 4.2.7 The north section at approx. ST4777 0301 is dry and much wider and open with less scrub encroachment. The hedge banks are lined with mature hazel and the ground flora is dominated by wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*). The very top section / start is blocked off by a rudimentary fence, fallen and low hanging branches and overgrown scrub.
- 4.2.8 The habitat features described are illustrated by photographs in Appendix 1

4.2.9 Reptiles

- 4.2.10 The desk study returned no records of reptiles. The interface between open areas and tree lined hedge banks, ruderals and scrub are likely to provide sub-optimal but suitable habitat for common reptiles.

4.2.11 Amphibians

- 4.2.12 The southern half of the bridleway is within the amber risk zone for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN). No records of GCN were returned in the DERC search however GCN and amphibians may be present as there is a pond at Old Cheese House and there is suitable terrestrial habitat along the bridleway.

4.2.13 Bats

- 4.2.14 The records search returned records for a number of bat species within 1km. As a linear feature in the landscape, which is bordered on both sides by trees, bats are likely

to use the bridleway to commute through the landscape and for foraging. There are many suitable gaps, cracks and holes that are likely to provide roosts for bats in the mature trees that overhang, block and encroach into the bridleway.

4.2.15 Hazel dormice

4.2.16 There are records of Hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) within 900m of the bridleway. There is connectivity to the wider landscape, successional food resources and suitable aerial connectivity and nesting sites so they may be present in the vegetation along the bridleway and in the adjacent woodland.

4.2.17 Badgers

4.2.18 There are records of badger within 1km of the site. A latrine and badger hair were found near the top section of the bridleway although no setts were observed. They may be in the denser inaccessible areas. Badgers will likely use the ditch and bridleway to navigate through the landscape.

4.2.19 Otter

There are desk study records of otter (*Lutra lutra*) within 1km of the site. No footprints, spraint or holt was found. There is suitable commuting habitat for otter up and down the wet stream.

4.2.20 Birds

4.2.21 The woodland, hedgerows, trees and scrub habitat surrounding and encompassing the bridleway provide suitable nesting and foraging habitat for breeding birds. Lots of activity from common species was observed during the visit.

Contact information

4.2.22 The Natural Environment Team can provide further advice, surveys and assessments as well as providing licenced and qualified ecologists (CSCS card holders) to act as Ecological Clerk of Works. In the first instance please contact the survey report author at, alice.quinney@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk , 01305 221697

5 **References**

Amphibian and Reptile Survey Protocols [Amphibian and Reptile Survey Protocols | Amphibian and Reptile Conservation \(arc-trust.org\)](#)

CIEEM (2021) Good Practice Guidance for Habitats and Species [Good-Practice-Guide-April-2021-v6.pdf \(cieem.net\)](#)

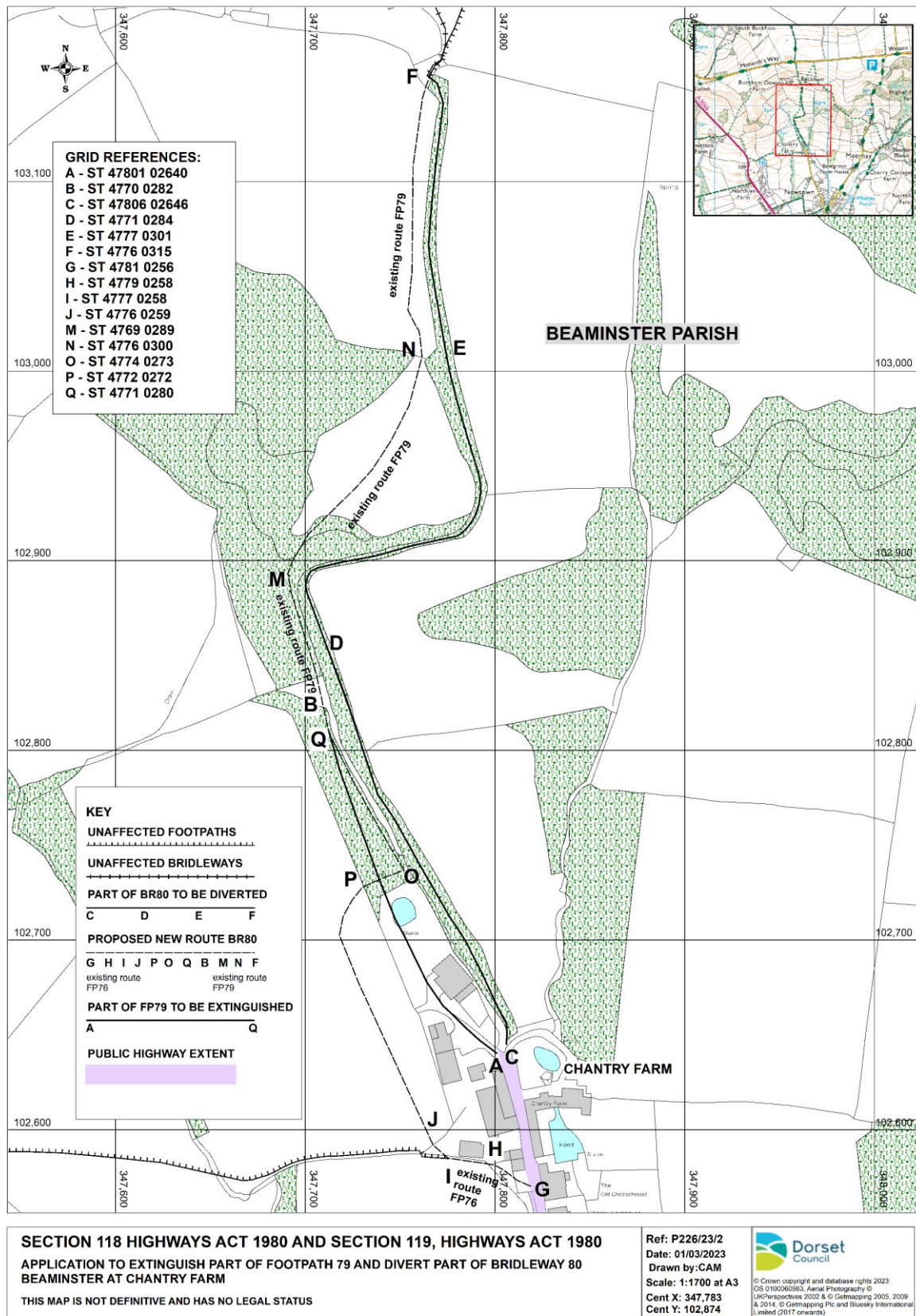
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Natural Environment Team (2011) Species and habitat advice notes Dorset County Council unpublished. <https://www.dorsetforyou.com/351345>

The dormouse conservation handbook, (2006) English Nature [EN DORMOUSE HANDBOOK \(4663\) \(cieem.net\)](#)

6 Appendix 1 Site plan of bridleway and footpath



7 **Appendix 2 Site photographs**



Looking north from southern point of bridleway near Old Cheese House.



Looking south into ditch like east to west section of bridleway.



Looking north up bridleway, top half of bridleway.



Looking south within top half of bridleway.



Looking south near wider top section of
bridleway.



Top section fenced off near Buckham
Down Farm.