

XLINKS MOROCCO-UK POWER PROJECT

Preliminary Environmental Information Report

Volume 2, Appendix 1.6: Otter and Water Vole Survey (Public)



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Glossary

| Term | Meaning |
|--|--|
| Alverdiscott Substation | The existing National Grid Electricity Transmission substation at Alverdiscott, Devon, which comprises 400 kV and 132 kV electrical substation equipment. |
| Applicant | Xlinks 1 Limited. |
| Converter Site | The Converter Site is proposed to be located to the immediate west of the existing Alverdiscott Substation site in north Devon. The Converter Site would contain two converter stations (known as Bipole 1 and Bipole 2) and associated infrastructure, buildings and landscaping. |
| Converter station | Part of an electrical transmission and distribution system. Converter stations convert electricity from Direct Current to Alternating Current , or vice versa. |
| Environmental Impact Assessment | The process of identifying and assessing the significant effects likely to arise from a project. This requires consideration of the likely changes to the environment, where these arise as a consequence of a project, through comparison with the existing and projected future baseline conditions. |
| Environmental Statement | The document presenting the results of the Environmental Impact Assessment process. |
| High Voltage Direct Current Cables | The High Voltage Direct Current cables which would bring electricity to the UK converter stations from the Moroccan converter stations. |
| Landfall | The proposed area in which the offshore cables make landfall in the United Kingdom (come on shore) and the transitional area between the offshore cabling and the onshore cabling. This term applies to the entire landfall area at Cornborough Range, Devon, between Mean Low Water Springs and the Transition Joint Bay inclusive of all construction works, including the offshore and onshore cable route s, and landfall compound(s). |
| Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor | The proposed corridor within which the onshore High Voltage Direct Current cables will be located. |
| Preliminary Environmental Information Report | A report that provides preliminary environmental information in accordance with the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. This is information that enables consultees to understand the likely significant environmental effects of a project and which helps to inform consultation responses. |
| Proposed Development | The element of the Xlinks Morocco-UK Power Project within the UK, which includes the offshore cables (from the UK Exclusive Economic Zone to landfall), landfall site, onshore Direct Current and Alternating Current cables, converter stations, road upgrade works and, based on current assumptions, the Alverdiscott Substation Connection Development. |
| Xlinks Morocco UK Power Project | The overall Proposed Development from Morocco to the national grid, including all onshore and offshore elements of the transmission network and the generation site in Morocco (referred to as the 'Project'). |

Acronyms

| Acronym | Meaning |
|---------|--|
| BAP | Biodiversity Action Plan |
| EIA | Environmental Impact Assessment |
| HVDC | High Voltage Direct Current |
| PEIR | Preliminary Environmental Information Report |
| NERC | Natural Environments and Rural Communities |

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| Acronym | Meaning |
|---------|------------------------------------|
| NNPF | National Planning Policy Framework |
| UK | United Kingdom |

Units

| Units | Meaning |
|-------|-----------|
| km | Kilometre |
| ha | Hectares |
| m | Metres |

1 OTTER AND WATER VOLE SURVEY

1.1 Introduction

To protect the welfare of otters and water vole, information pertaining to the location of these protected species identified following desk based research and field surveys have been removed. A separate version of this technical report containing confidential data is available upon request to those with a legitimate need to view this information.

Purpose and Scope of this Report

- 1.1.1 This document forms Volume 2, Appendix 1.6: Otter and Water Vole Surveys of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) prepared for the United Kingdom (UK) elements of the Xlinks Morocco-UK Power Project (referred to hereafter as ‘the Proposed Development’). The PEIR presents the preliminary findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process for the Proposed Development.
- 1.1.2 RPS was commissioned by Xlinks 1 Ltd to undertake a series of surveys to provide an ecological baseline of habitats and species which could be affected by the proposed Onshore High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Cable Corridor and Converter Site from Cornborough Range at the coast to the existing substation at Alverdiscott in north Devon.
- 1.1.3 As a part of this process, an initial assessment of the scope of ecological receptors which could be affected by the proposals, a desk study, Phase 1 Habitat Survey, and a preliminary protected species assessment were carried out. Further, a series of species-specific surveys were undertaken to provide a detailed baseline of the potential ecological receptors which could be affected by the proposed development. This report forms a part of the species-specific surveys and relates to the potential presence of otters and water vole. This assessment is intended to feed information into Volume 2, Chapter 1: Onshore Ecology and Nature Conservation of the PEIR.
- 1.1.4 The survey aims to:
- undertake a field-based review of all accessible parts of the Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor and converter station with appropriate habitats present to search for and record any field signs for these species present; and
 - assess and interpret any field signs identified.
- 1.1.5 This report pertains to the otter and water vole survey and its results only; recommendations included within this report are the professional opinion of an experienced ecologist and, therefore, the view of RPS. The surveys and desk-based assessments undertaken as part of this review and subsequent report, including the Ecological Appraisal Notes, are prepared in accordance with the British Standard for Biodiversity Code of Practice for Planning and Development (BS42020:2013).
- 1.1.6 The design of the Proposed Development has changed since these surveys were undertaken. As such, updated surveys will be carried out (where required) prior to application to ensure that all elements of the revised Proposed Development site

have been considered. The updated survey results will be reported as part of the Environmental Statement.

Study Area and Zone of Influence

- 1.1.7 The onshore elements of the Proposed Development are located in north Devon. The cable route is approximately 12 km in length and the Converter Station is approximately 14 ha (at the time of surveys). The National Grid coordinates for either end of the Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor are SS412278 and SS501251. The centre of the proposed Converter Site is at SS493238.
- 1.1.8 The Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor passes through a mixture of pastoral and arable farm land, with fields bounded by Devon hedgerows, and occasionally crossing small watercourses in wooded valleys. The Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor also crosses the tidal Torridge estuary.
- 1.1.9 Aerial imaging available via Google Earth Pro was also reviewed to assess the site in relation to its context in the wider landscape.
- 1.1.10 The term Zone of Influence is used to describe the geographic extent of potential impacts of a proposed development. The Zone of Influence is determined by the nature of the development and also in relation to designated sites, habitats or species which might be affected by the proposals.
- 1.1.11 For this scheme, in addition to the landscape-based appraisal discussed above, given that the presence of otters in this area is widely known, the survey effort focussed on the potential for places of rest for otters, or the presence of field signs indicating the presence of water voles along watercourses crossed by the Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor. The Zone of Influence for otters is considered to be the watercourse, banks and areas of adjoining suitable habitat for the creation of holts. For water vole, the Zone of Influence was considered to consist of the banks of watercourses crossed by the Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor for a distance of 50 m up and down-stream.
- 1.1.12 The design of the Proposed Development has changed since these surveys were undertaken. As such, updated surveys will be carried out (where required) prior to application to ensure that all elements of the revised Proposed Development site have been considered. The updated survey results will be reported as part of the Environmental Statement.

Development Proposals

- 1.1.13 The proposals consist of a landfall of a power supply coming from north Africa, with an Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor from landfall at Cornborough Range through to a connection to the National Grid at the existing Alverdiscott Substation. There will also be construction of a Converter Site, located close to the existing Alverdiscott Substation site.
- 1.1.14 The location and geographic extent of the Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor and Converter Site are shown in **Figure 1.1** to **Figure 1.12**.

1.2 Methods

Field Survey

1.2.1 Surveys of all areas along the Onshore HVDC Cable Corridor and Converter Site were undertaken by a suitably experienced Ecologist. Visits were undertaken during summer and autumn 2022.

1.2.2



1.2.3 The following are features/field signs used to identify the presence of otters:

- Holts – a structure often used as a breeding nest by otters. Unlikely to be permanently occupied but may be occupied for prolonged periods if young are present.
- Couches/hovers are more temporary resting places.
- Otter spraint is characteristic otter droppings used to mark important features along otter territories. Often placed near bridges crossings.
- Feeding remains – characteristically stripped fish carcasses.
- Slides are sometimes identified where otters regularly enter watercourses via a characteristic “slide”.
- Footprints are also sometimes left in locations where they remain identifiable.

1.3 Limitations

Survey

1.3.1 It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive description of the site, no investigation can ensure the complete characterisation and prediction of the natural environment.

1.3.2



Accurate Lifespan of Ecological Data

1.3.3 The majority of ecological data remain valid for only short periods due to the inherently transient nature of the subject. The survey results contained in this report are considered accurate for two years, assuming no significant considerable changes to the site conditions. It is possible that mobile species

such as otters may create and occupy new places of rest or abandon previously-used places of rest quite frequently.

- 1.3.4 Site specific surveys used to inform Volume 2, Chapter 1: Onshore Ecology and Nature Conservation of the PEIR were undertaken between 2021 and 2024. CIEEMs Advice Note: On the lifespan of ecological reports and surveys (CIEEM, 2019) recommends that surveys exceeding three years in age are likely to require updating, whilst surveys undertaken between 18 months and three years prior to application may require site visits pre-construction to review the validity of survey findings. Therefore, in accordance with CIEEM guidance, site specific surveys undertaken over 18 months prior to the submission will be updated, where required (following a site review to confirm the validity of survey findings by a suitably qualified ecologist). Those surveys undertaken over three years will be supplemented by further surveys (if the DCO is granted) to be completed pre-construction.

1.4 Results

Otters and Water Vole

- 1.4.1 The results of the otter and water vole surveys are presented in in **Figure 1.1** to **Figure 1.12** of this report and summarised below.



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Figure 1.1: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 1) (removed – confidential information)

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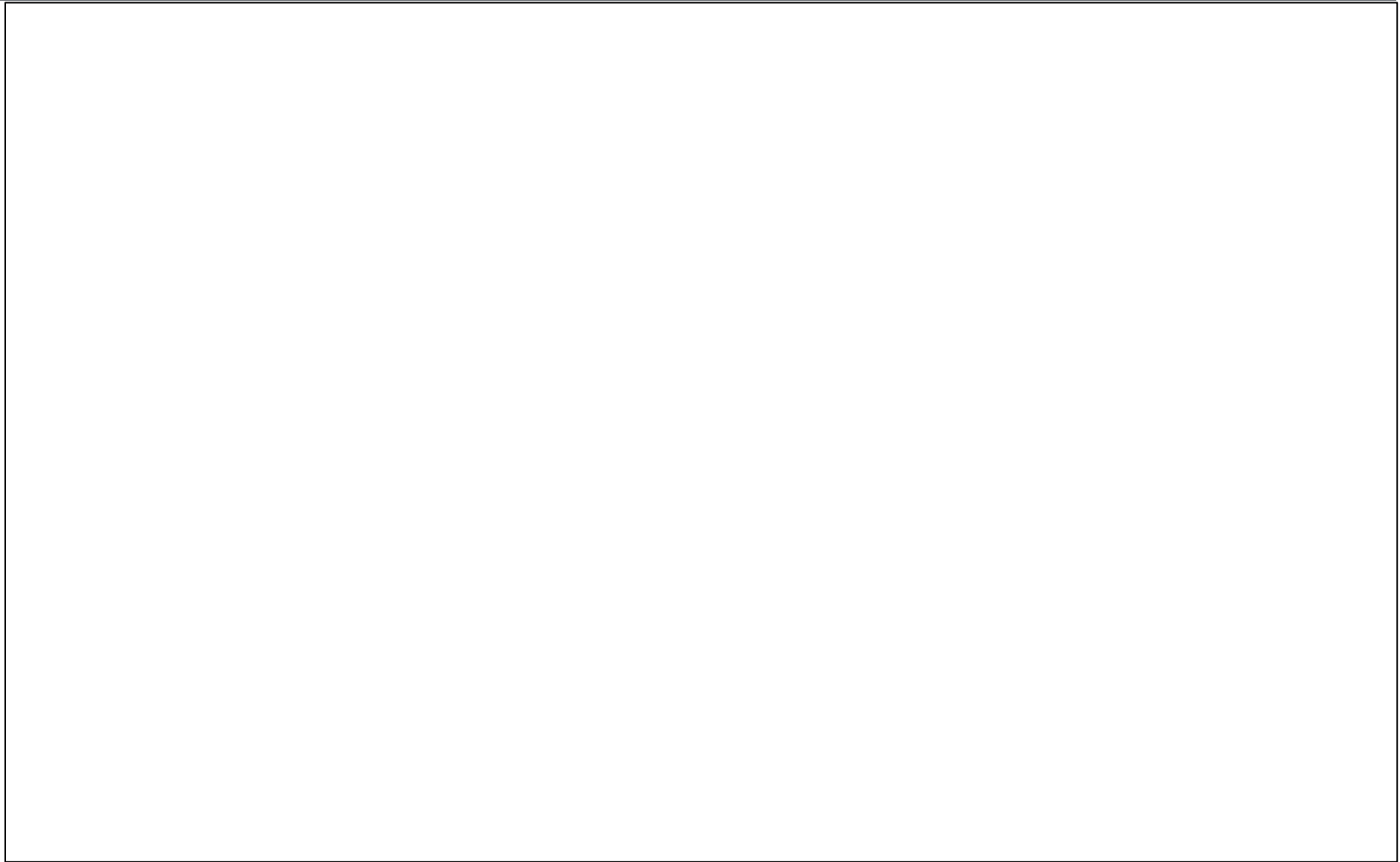


Figure 1.2: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 2) (removed – confidential information)

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Figure 1.3: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 3) (removed – confidential information)

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Figure 1.4: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 4) (removed – confidential information)

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Figure 1.5: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 5) (removed – confidential information)

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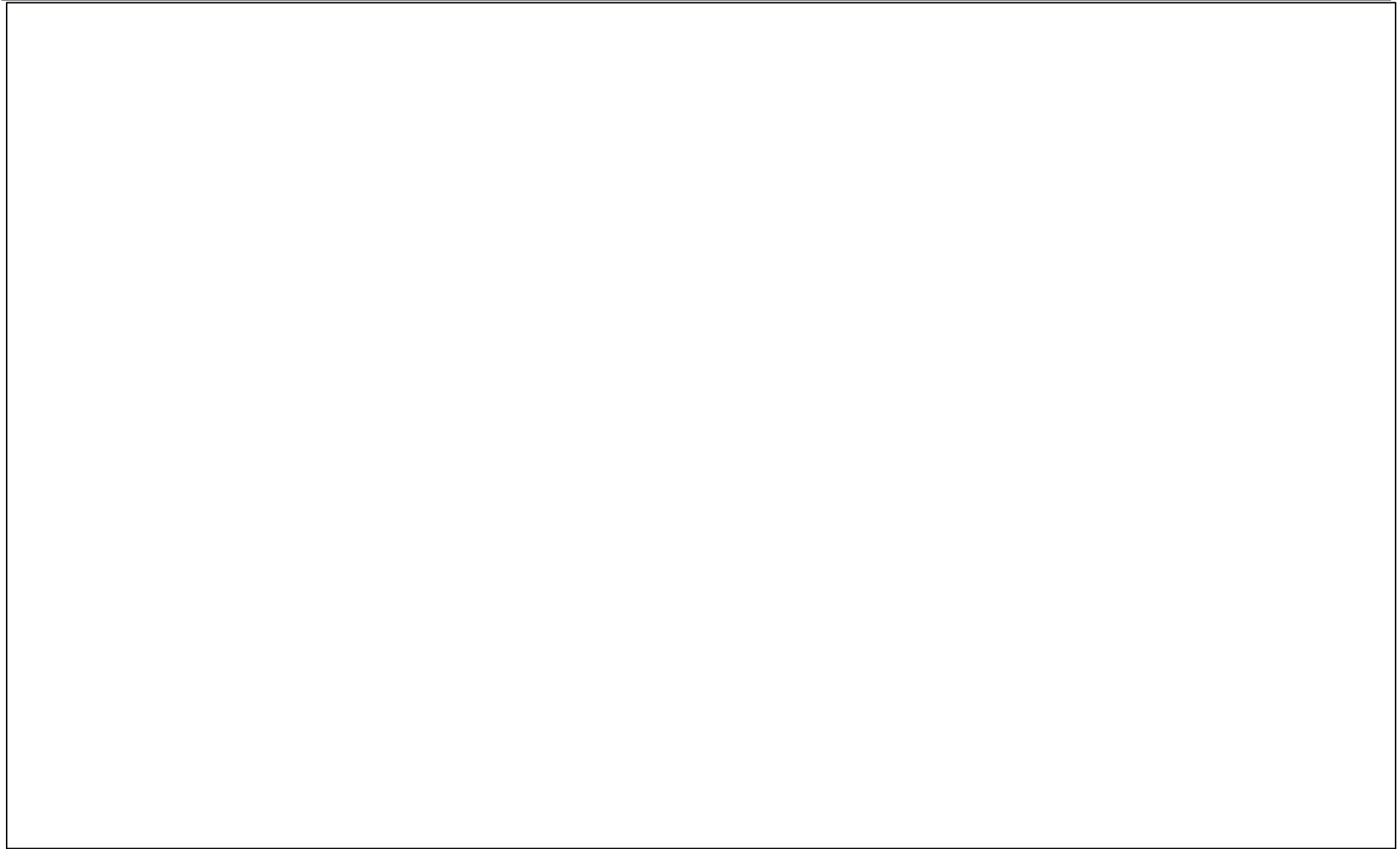


Figure 1.6: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 6) (removed – confidential information)

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Figure 1.7: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 7) (removed – confidential information)

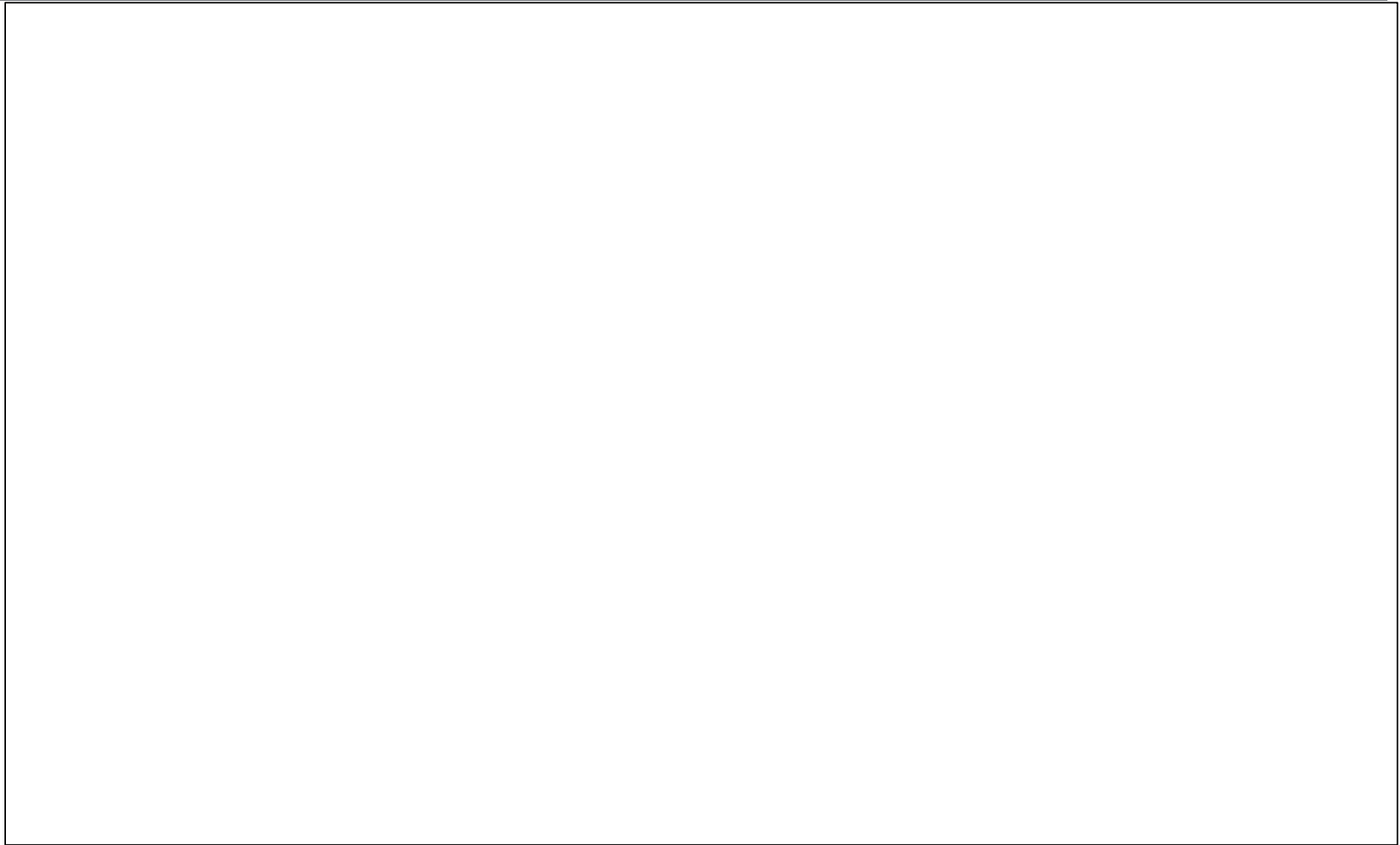


Figure 1.8: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 8) (removed – confidential information)

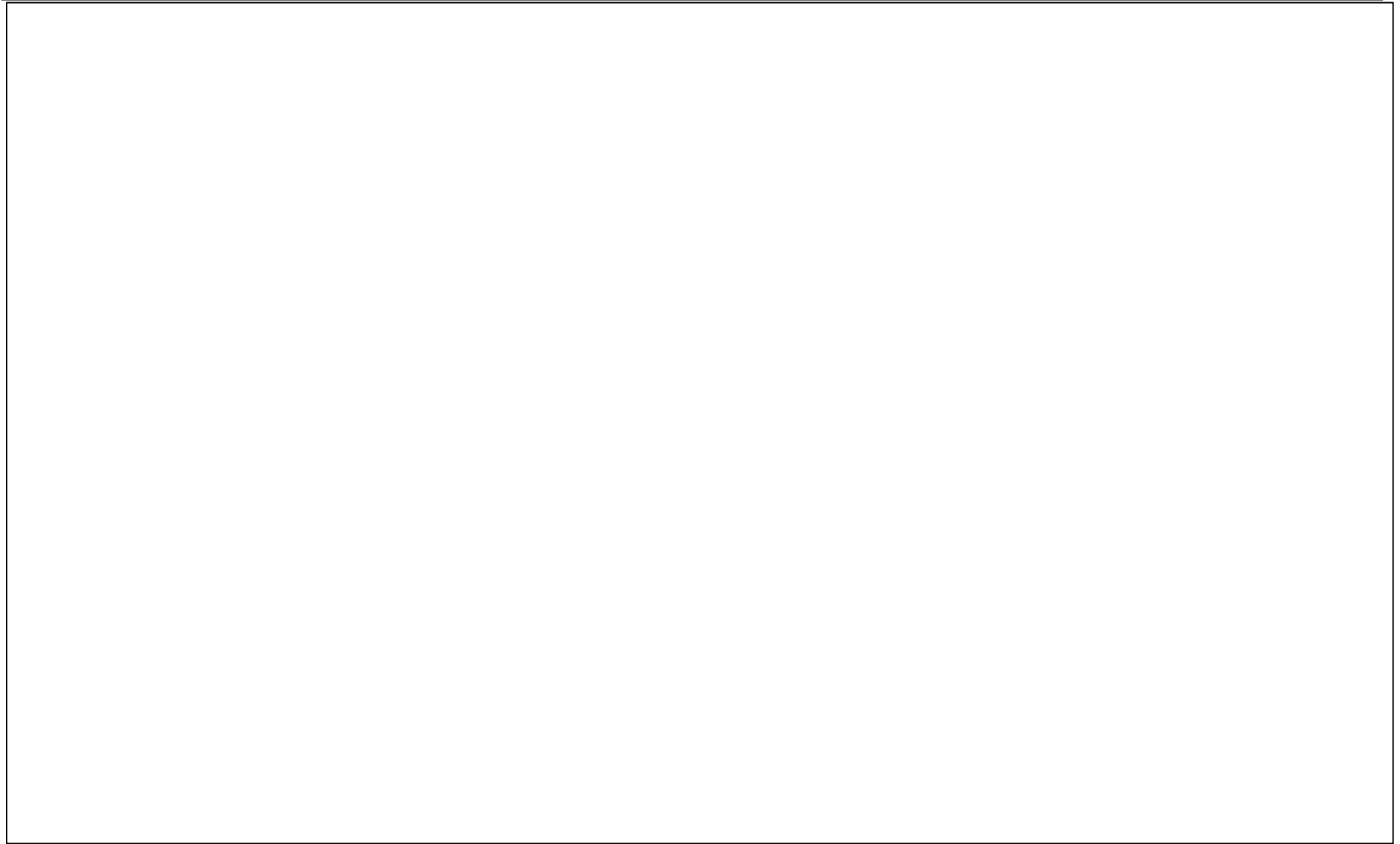


Figure 1.9: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 9) (removed – confidential information)

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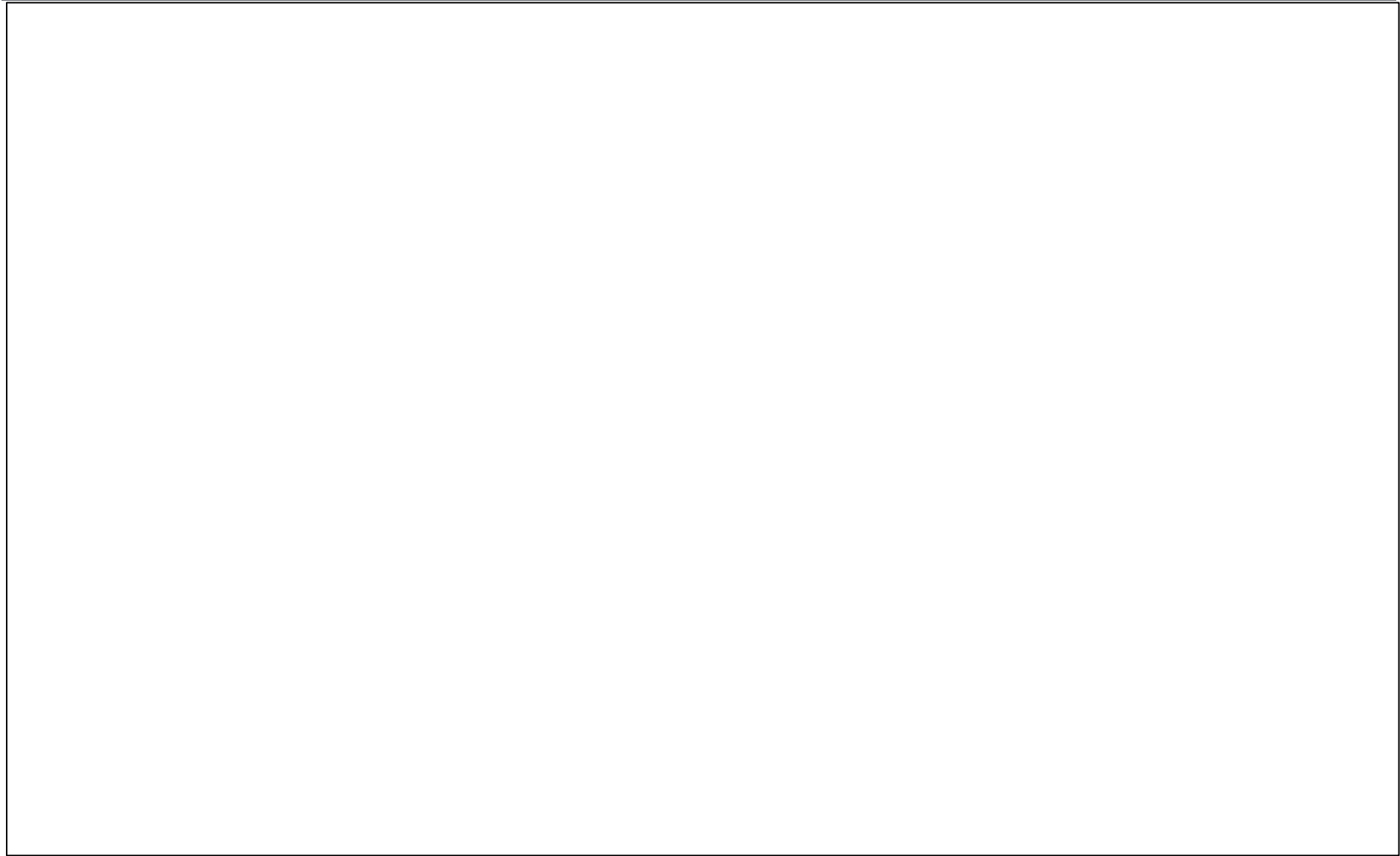


Figure 1.10: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 10) (removed – confidential information)

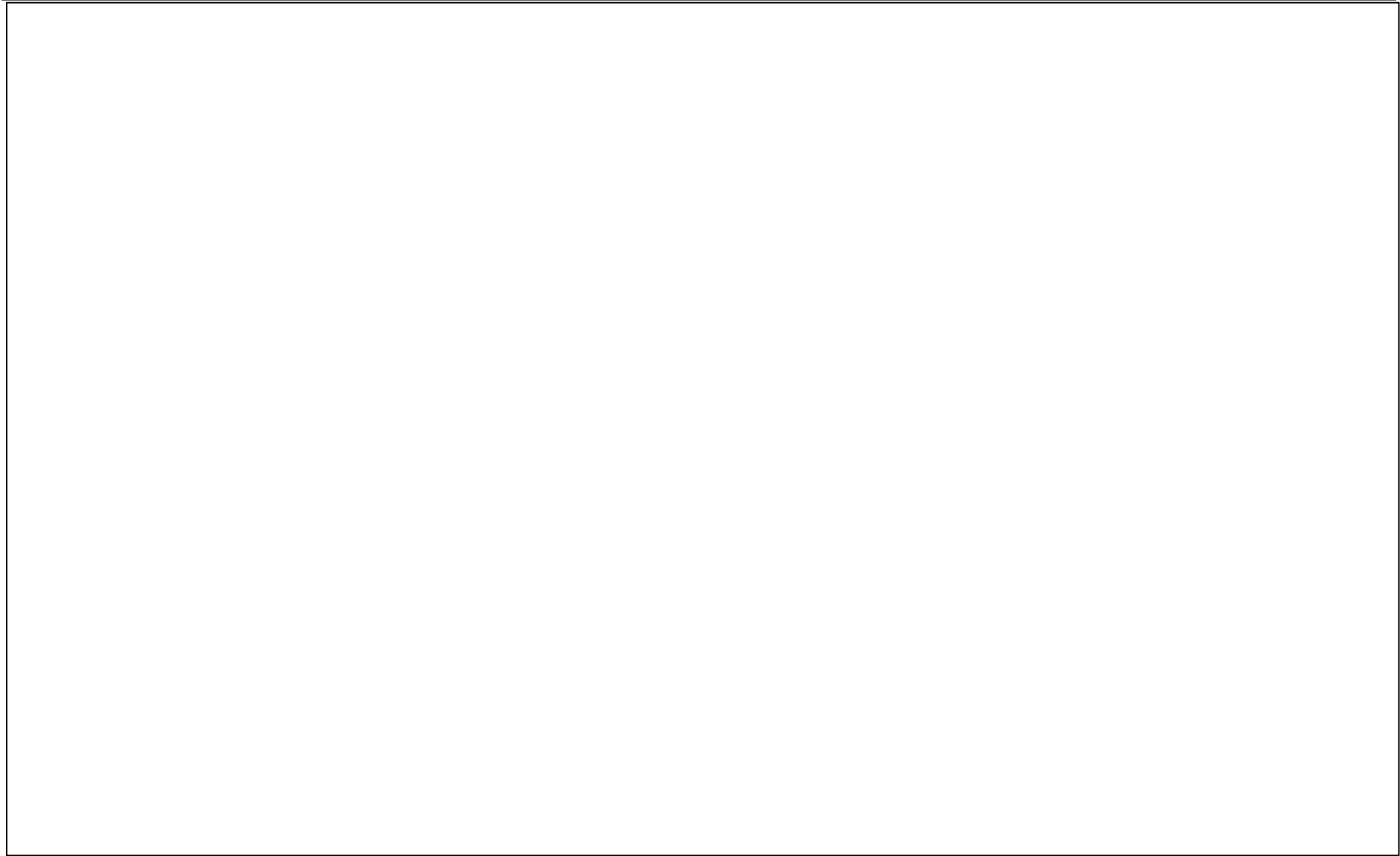


Figure 1.11: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 11) (removed – confidential information)

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Figure 1.12: Results of the otter and water vole surveys (sheet 12) (removed – confidential information)

1.5 Conclusions

Conservation Status of Otters

- 1.5.1 Otters in England are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1982 (as amended). They are also listed as a priority species in the UK Post 2010 Biodiversity Framework and protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Status of Otters in the Vicinity of the Proposed Development

- █ [REDACTED]
- █ [REDACTED]
- █ [REDACTED]
- █ [REDACTED]

Status of Water Voles

- █ [REDACTED]

1.6 References

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