Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route

Pre-Ground Investigation Walkover Report - Kingcausie Estate

Final Report

April 2008

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Client: AWPR Managing Agent

Project: Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route Job No: B1033200

Title: Pre-Ground Investigation Walkover – Kingcausie Estate

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the walkover was to set out the provisional borehole and trial pit positions within the wooded area of Kingcausie Estate as indicated on the Environmental Constraints Map (B1033200/DGI/ENV/SL03) (discussed at the meeting between the Managing Agent, Mr Irvine-Fortescue, Jacobs and Geotechnics on the 25th March) and identify any ecological / archaeological constraints in the vicinity.

Additionally, the potential access(s) from the public highways were also walked and assessed.

1.2 Method

The walkover was conducted on 2nd April 2008, between 10am and 4pm.

A handheld GPS was used to place the Ground Investigation (GI) locations. All positions were marked as described in the specification with a small flag unless dense vegetation (particularly trees) made access by the necessary plant impossible. These locations were repositioned at the discretion of Geotechnics so that they would be accessible without the felling of any trees.

Once the positions were marked a zone 50m around the positions was searched by Jacobs staff. All potential constraints described in the Detailed Ground Investigation Environmental Report were noted. Where possible, they were located with a GPS grid reference.

The walk over was conducted by:

David Chadwick (Ecologist, Jacobs)

Alastair Rees (Archaeologist, Jacobs)

Gordon McKeown (Site Agent, Geotechnics)

2 Results

Evidence of red squirrel occupation was the main criteria for the ecological aspect of the walkover although indications of the presence of other protected species such as badger, bats, otter and nesting birds were considered.

2.1 Red Squirrel

Two grey squirrels were observed during the walkover: one very close to the Old Coach House and one by the southern access to Cleanhill Wood. No red squirrels were seen and no alarm calls heard.

Eleven dreys or potential dreys were recorded and are shown in Figure 1 with the 50m buffer as indicated in the Method Statement for Red Squirrel Dreys. With the exception of one, they were all located in the south west of Cleanhill Wood. The majority were contained within the crown of mature Scots pine. Although many stripped pine cones were found in the vicinity of the dreys, no evidence to indicate the squirrel species was observed. No particular “feeding stations” were recorded.

The “state of repair” of each drey was recorded. Six were assessed to be in a poor state of repair (thin, small or partial destroyed) and therefore unlikely to be in use by squirrels. However, they may also have been under construction. A typical drey is shown in Figure 2.

A number of squirrel nesting boxes (Figure 3) have been erected on or in the vicinity of the proposed alignment, spaced at approximately 50-60m. The boxes are numbered and a Number 30 was observed. It is not known how many boxes there are in total or their geographical extent as this walkover did not cover the entire wooded area. The majority of the boxes are attached with string to mature Scots pine, typically 4-5m from the ground.

The boxes all seem to be new (*estimated* at less than one month old) and the majority show no signs of habitation such as claw marks, hair or discolouration around the entrances or any bedding material on the floor beneath them. The only exception is box No.2 where the entrance hole has been chewed / enlarged (Figure 4).

2.2 Badger

Signs potentially indicating the presence of badgers were observed, including fresh scrapes and foraging signs, but no setts or latrine pits.

2.3 Bats

No potential roosts were noted within the area of the proposed ground investigation.

2.4 Otter

No signs indicating the presence of otter were noted within the woodland.

2.5 Nesting birds

No nests were observed during the walkover. However, common woodland species such as wrens, long-tailed tits and blackbirds were seen to be exhibiting nesting behaviour such as gathering nesting materials.

3 Access Routes

The contractor's preferred access is shown in Figure 1. Access from both the north *and* south may be required to avoid felling trees and/or rhododendron in the more densely vegetated areas.

Access from the south follows an old forestry track and will require the traversing of a wet, open area dominated by gorse and rushes. Mitigation as detailed in the Detailed Ground Investigation Environmental Report will be employed to avoid excessive damage to the ground and it is recommended that the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) pre-surveys the area for nesting birds.

In order to access the mature forest itself, several windblown trees will need to be removed / sawn up and some bridging / filling of dry ditches will be required. Once again, the ECoW should examine this route immediately prior to the operation.

4 Recommendations

A hair tube survey to establish whether the natural dreys and the new nest boxes are currently being used as places of shelter by red squirrels should be undertaken as per the Method Statement for Red Squirrel Dreys. In order to allow time for this to be carried out, surveys should begin within the next two weeks.

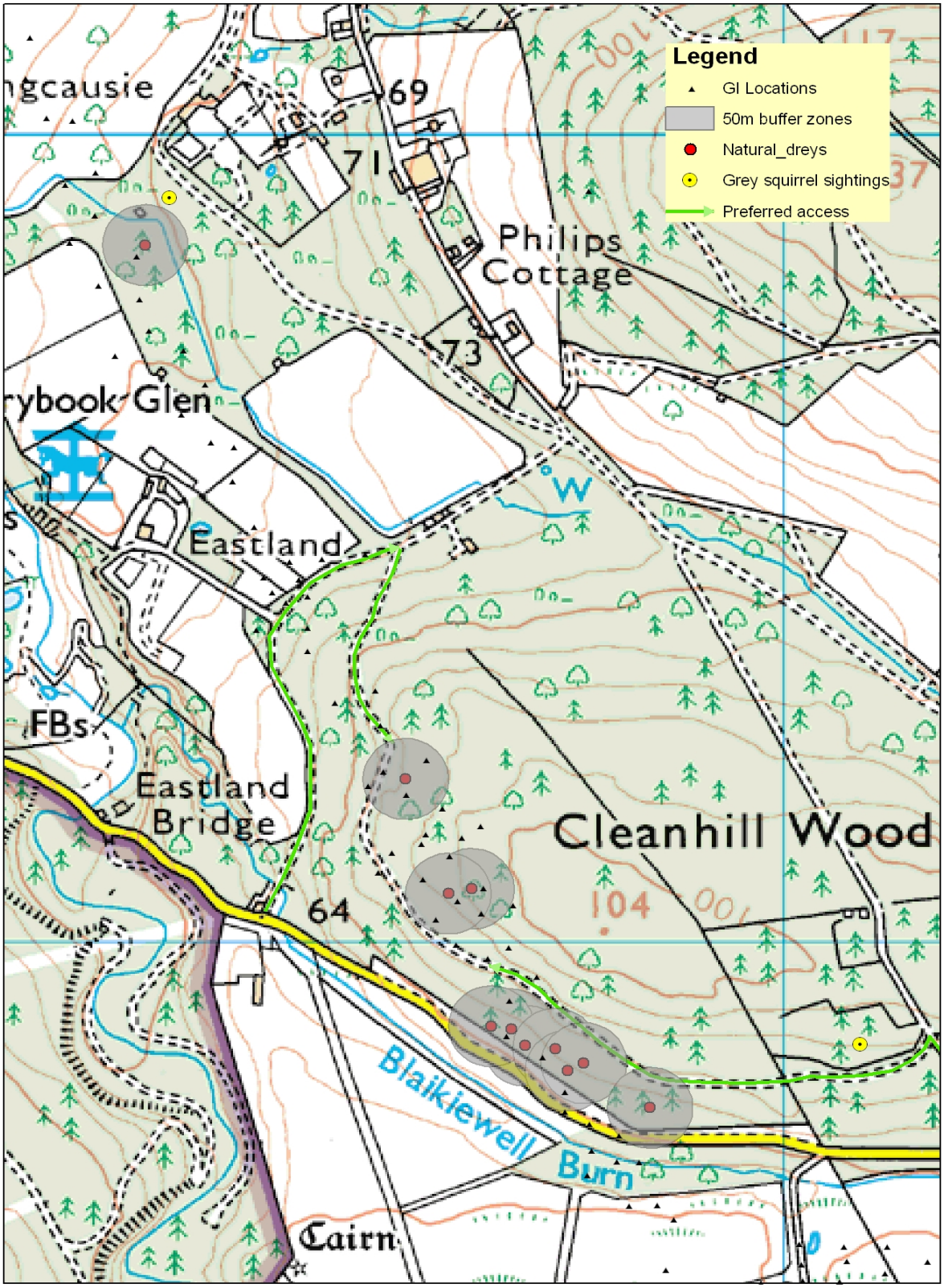

Figure 1: Map to show GI locations and known potential dreys

Figure 2: Typical drey

Figure 3: Squirrel nesting box

Figure 4: Squirrel nesting box No.2 showing enlarged entrance hole