



Morven Hawthorn Pit Grid Connection Project

Preliminary Environmental Information Report

Volume 3, Annex 3.11: Interim Water Vole Survey
Technical Report

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Glossary

Term	Meaning
Alternating Current (AC) connection cables	AC cables that will connect the proposed onshore land substation to the National Grid Hawthorn Pit Substation.
Desk study	A desk-based research method used to collect and analyse existing information, including the review of literature, previous survey reports, databases and maps to inform the baseline environment and the need for further surveys.
Development Consent Order (DCO)	An order made under the Planning Act 2008, as amended, granting development consent.
Expert Working Group (EWG)	A topic-specific group of specialists formed under the evidence plan process (EPP) to resolve technical issues and agree approaches for environmental assessments.
Field survey	The direct on-site observation and collection of environmental data, through sampling and recording, undertaken within the Survey Area.
High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC)	A HVDC electric power transmission system uses direct current for electric power transmission, in contrast to the more common alternating current systems. Most HVDC links use voltages between 100 kilovolts (kV) and 800kV.
High Voltage Alternating Current (HVAC)	A HVAC electric power transmission system uses alternating current for electric power transmission that periodically reverses direction at regular intervals.
Landfall	The area in which the offshore export cables make landfall (come onshore) and the transitional area between the offshore cabling and the onshore cabling. This term applies to the entire landfall area between the trenchless technique exit pits and the transition joint bay inclusive of all construction works.
Mean High Water Springs (MHWS)	The most inshore level location reached by the sea at high tide during mean high water spring tide. This is defined as the average throughout the year, of two successive high waters, during a 24-hour period in each month when the range of the tide is at its greatest.
Mean Low Water Springs (MLWS)	The average height of the low water levels of each pair of successful low waters during the periods of about 24 hours when the tidal range is at its greatest.
MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore	Spatial extent used to define the environmental assessment within the PEIR. The area within which all onshore components of the MHPGC Project will be located landward of Mean High Water Springs, including areas required on a temporary basis during construction and/or decommissioning (e.g. construction compounds).
MHPGC Project Evidence Plan Process (EPP)	A voluntary consultation process with specialist stakeholders to agree the approach to, and information to support, the EIA and Habitats Regulations Assessment processes for certain topics.
MHPGC Project PEIR Red Line Boundary	The area within which all components of the MHPGC Project will be located, including areas required on a temporary basis during construction and/or decommissioning (such as construction compounds).
MHPGC Project Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)	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.
MHPGC Project Scoping Boundary	The spatial extent of the area used to define the environmental baseline to inform impact assessments at the time the MHPGC Project Scoping Report was submitted.
MHPGC Project Scoping Opinions	Separate scoping opinions received from Planning Inspectorate (PINS) (on behalf of the Secretary of State (SoS)) and Marine Directorate – Licencing Operations Team (MD-LOT) (on behalf of the Scottish Ministers) in response to the MHPGC Project Scoping Report. The MHPGC Project Scoping Opinions contain the range of issues that PINS, and MD-LOT in consultation with statutory stakeholders, have identified should be considered within the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process.

Term	Meaning
MHPGC Project Scoping Report	A Scoping Report for the MHPGC Project, scoping the likely significant effects of the project on the environment, was submitted and accepted by PINS and submitted to the Scottish Ministers, via the MD-LOT in February 2025.
Morven Hawthorn Pit Grid Connection Project	The MHPGC Project is comprised of the offshore export cables in Scottish and English waters from the Morven North or the Morven South offshore substation platform(s) (OSP), landfall, onshore export cables, the onshore land substation (LSS) and Alternating Current (AC) connection cables. Also referred to in this report as the MHPGC Project, for ease of reading.
Offshore substation platform(s) (OSP)	OSP(s) comprise the support structure, topside and electrical components used for collecting they generated by the wind turbine generators, in Scottish waters, for the passage or transmission to landfall. These OSP(s) can be divided into two types: - HVAC collector substations; - HVDC converter substations.
Onshore export cables	HVDC cables which bring electricity from the TJB to the onshore land substation.
Onshore land substation (LSS)	A purpose-built site comprising a compound containing the electrical components for converting the HVDC to HVAC power. The LSS site associated with the MHPGC Project adjusts the power quality and power factor to meet the requirements of power supply being fed to the National Grid Hawthorn Pit Substation.
Planning Inspectorate (PINS)	The PINS is an executive agency of the UK Government responsible for administering and examining Development Consent Order (DCO) applications for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) in England. PINS manages the application process, oversees consultation and examination, and makes a recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State on whether consent should be granted.
Study Area	For each environmental topic, the baseline environment will be characterised, and the likely significant effect will be described within a topic-specific Study Area. Specific Study Areas are defined for each topic and are based on the maximum spatial extent across which likely significant effects of the MHPGC Project may be experienced by the relevant receptors (i.e. Zone of Influence).
Survey Area	The area within which field surveys for the environmental topic are undertaken. This would include all areas for which impacts from the MHPGC Project may occur on relevant receptors.
Water Vole Habitat Survey Area	The area within which habitat was considered for its suitability to support water vole. It consisted of the MHPGC Project PEIR Onshore Red Line Boundary and a 10m buffer.
Water Vole Study Area	The area subject to a desk study for water vole and comprises the MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore, with a 2km buffer applied

Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
CIEEM	Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ERIC NE	Environmental Records Information Centre North East
ES	Environmental Statement
MD-LOT	Marine Directorate – Licencing Operations Team
MHPGC	Morven Hawthorn Pit Grid Connection

MMO	Marine Management Organisation
NBN	National Biodiversity Network
OS	Ordnance Survey
PEIR	Preliminary Environmental Information Report
PINS	Planning Inspectorate
SoS	Secretary of State
SPI	Species of Principal Importance
UKHab	UK Habitat Classification

Units

Unit	Meaning
°C	Degrees Celsius
km	Kilometre
m	Metre

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of the water vole *Arvicola amphibius* desk study and field surveys undertaken for the Morven Hawthorn Pit Grid Connection Project to inform **Volume 3, Chapter 3: Terrestrial Ecology and Terrestrial and Intertidal Ornithology, of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)**.

A programme of water vole surveys was undertaken, including desk studies and field surveys covering the Water Vole Survey Area. Following the water vole desk study and initial water vole field survey, four watercourses and adjacent habitats were scoped in for further survey across the Water Vole Survey Area. The desk study identified historical records of water vole activity, with all the records obtained from Environmental Records Information Centre North East (ERIC NE). These records included one for water vole located within the Water Vole Study Area.

The field survey was carried out in line with best practice guidance (Dean *et.al.* M., Strachan, R., Gow, D. and Andrews, R. ((2016) and Strachan R. (2012)) within the identified Water Vole Survey Area. The survey involved surveyors conducting a walkover survey of the Water Vole Survey Area, searching for field signs of water vole including burrows, droppings/latrines, feeding stations, footprints, and runs. Field surveys were conducted in September 2025 and April 2026 to cover the optimal summer and spring survey periods respectively.

Results of the field surveys processed to date did not record any sightings of water vole or other field evidence of water vole activity within the Water Vole Survey Area.

Further field surveys have been undertaken in August/ and September 2026 within the Water Vole Survey Area to provide two surveys in all suitable habitat within the Water Vole Survey Area within the optimum survey periods in line with best practice guidance. The data gathered will be included within the Environmental Statement (ES).

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1.1 This report presents the water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) survey undertaken for the Morven Hawthorn Pit Grid Connection Project (hereafter the 'MHPGC Project'). It forms **Volume 3, Annex 3.11: Interim Water Vole Survey Technical Report, of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)** prepared for the MHPGC Project and supports **Volume 3, Chapter 3: Terrestrial Ecology and Terrestrial and Intertidal Ornithology, of the PEIR**.
- 1.1.1.2 The water vole surveys were completed to assess the suitability of watercourses and adjacent habitats, within the MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore, to support populations of water vole. The report presents the methodology and results of the water vole survey undertaken in September 2025 and April 2026.

1.2 Legislation

- 1.2.1.1 The water vole is a European Protected Species (EPS), fully protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is therefore considered an offense to intentionally or recklessly:
- trap a water vole;
 - injure or kill a water vole;
 - disturb a water vole occupying a place of shelter (e.g. burrow): or
 - obstruct access to/damage/destroy a water vole place of shelter.
- 1.2.1.2 The water vole is further listed as a Species of Principal Importance (SPI) in England pursuant to Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
- 1.2.1.3 Developers must comply with the legal protection of water vole. A mitigation licence may be required for developers where proposed works are considered to comprise the aforementioned activities that would otherwise be illegal, should presence be confirmed.

1.3 Consultation and engagement

1.3.1 EIA Scoping

- 1.3.1.1 The MHPGC Project Scoping Report was issued to the PINS and MD-LOT in November 2024 (RPS, 2025). Following consultation with the appropriate statutory bodies, PINS (on behalf of the SoS) and MD-LOT provided a Scoping Opinion in March 2025 (PINS, 2025; MD-LOT, 2025).
- 1.3.1.2 **Section 3.3 of Volume 3, Chapter 3: Terrestrial Ecology and Terrestrial and Intertidal Ornithology, of the PEIR** sets out the key comments raised during the scoping process specific to terrestrial ecology and terrestrial and intertidal ornithology.

1.3.2 Expert Working Groups

- 1.3.2.1 Further detail regarding consultation undertaken with respect to terrestrial ecology and terrestrial and intertidal ornithology can be found in **Volume 3, Chapter 3: Terrestrial Ecology and Terrestrial and Intertidal Ornithology, of the PEIR**.

2 Methodology

2.1 Overview

- 2.1.1.1 A combination of a desk study and field survey were undertaken to identify habitats with potential to support water vole and to determine presence/likely absence of water vole within waterbodies, watercourses, and adjacent habitats, that are within the MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore .

2.2 Study area

- 2.2.1.1 The study area considered for water vole (referred to as the Water Vole Study Area) is the area subject to a desk study for records and comprises the MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore, with a 2km buffer applied. This is intended to cover the area within which an impact (direct or indirect) can be reasonably expected to occur and describes the geographical extent subject to desk study.
- 2.2.1.2 Water vole are mobile animals, with females covering territories up to 150m along watercourses while males have larger territories of up to 300m. The size of the Water Vole Study Area has been selected to account for the potential movement of water vole up and down waterbodies and watercourses. The location and geographic extent of the Water Vole Study Area is presented in **Figure 2.1**.

2.3 Survey area

- 2.3.1.1 The survey area is defined as the area subject to field surveys and is based on species-specific guidance on the extent of survey required.
- 2.3.1.2 The survey area considered for water vole (referred to as the Water Vole Survey Area) has been defined as inclusive of habitats within and up to 10m surrounding the MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore, considered suitable to support water vole. The size of the buffer for the Water Vole Survey Area was determined based on what was considered to constitute a potential disturbance distance of potential for impacts associated with the MHPGC Project on water vole, as per best practice guidance (see **Paragraph 2.4.2.1**). The Water Vole Survey Area is shown in Error! Reference source not found.. Surveys were undertaken beyond the site boundary where necessary to assess potential impact pathways.

2.4 Survey methodology

2.4.1 Desk study

- 2.4.1.1 The purpose of the desk study was to collect and analyse existing baseline data in relation to water vole records, and designated sites notified for water vole, within the Water Vole Study Area. The existing baseline data has been gathered from the following sources:
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) Map (Natural England, n.d.);
 - Environmental Records Information Centre North East (ERIC NE, n.d);

Habitat Suitability Assessment

- 2.4.1.2 The desk study identified waterbodies and watercourses considered to be suitable to support water vole and provided the necessary information to refine the riparian areas to be surveyed as part of the field surveys. This was further informed by habitat surveys on waterbodies, watercourses and riparian habitats undertaken in 2023 (WSP, 2023) and during 2025 UKHab walkover surveys. Suitable riparian habitat with potential to support water vole was also identified using aerial imagery and supplemented by existing habitat data (WSP, 2023). A total of five riparian areas were scoped in for field surveys, as shown on **Figure 2.2**.

- 2.4.1.3 Suitable water vole habitat includes riparian habitats associated with waterbodies and watercourses (including vegetated riverbanks, islands, reedbeds, ditches) and woodlands which may be used for foraging, breeding and resting. Water quality and land use were also considered.

2.4.2 Field survey

- 2.4.2.1 The field surveys were carried out in line with best practice guidance (Dean *et. al.*, (2016) and Strachan R. (2012)) within the identified Water Vole Survey Area (where land access permissions allowed). Survey visits were timed to encompass the survey periods in spring (mid-April to end of June), and summer (July to September). Note – surveys can span over two survey seasons, however, a further survey in September 2026 was undertaken to ensure two survey visits are conducted in the optimal survey season in one year. A separate survey visit was also undertaken in August 2026 as a first visit to Hesledon Moor East SSSI. Access to this area had not previously been permitted, as detailed in **Section 2.4.4**. Hesledon Moor East SSSI was also surveyed in the September 2026 survey visit.
- 2.4.2.2 The first field survey visit was undertaken in the week of the 8 September 2025 and was completed by experienced ecologists. The weather conditions were clear and dry, 15°C with no wind. Minimal precipitation leading up to the survey meant that conditions afforded an increased likelihood of detecting field signs such as footprints or droppings.
- 2.4.2.3 The second field survey visit of the Water Vole Survey Area was undertaken in April 2026 and was completed by experienced ecologists. The weather conditions were warm and dry on the day of the surveys. Minimal precipitation leading up to the survey meant that conditions afforded an increased likelihood of detecting field signs such as footprints or droppings.
- 2.4.2.4 A third repeat survey visit of the Water Vole Survey Area was undertaken for September 2026 in order to provide a full year of survey data in accordance with best practice guidance for all areas surveyed. The results of this survey visit will be included within the ES.
- 2.4.2.5 The field surveys involved surveyors conducting a walkover survey, examining the Water Vole Survey Area for sightings of water voles and evidence of their presence water vole including burrows, droppings/latrines, feeding stations, footprints and runs.
- 2.4.2.6 Any signs of water vole activity (including an approximate indication of the ‘age’/freshness of signs) were recorded and marked in the FieldMaps Application, and the Ordnance Survey (OS) British National Grid Reference (OSGB36) of each sign was noted, to determine habitat usage and presence of water vole across the MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore.

2.4.3 Incidental records

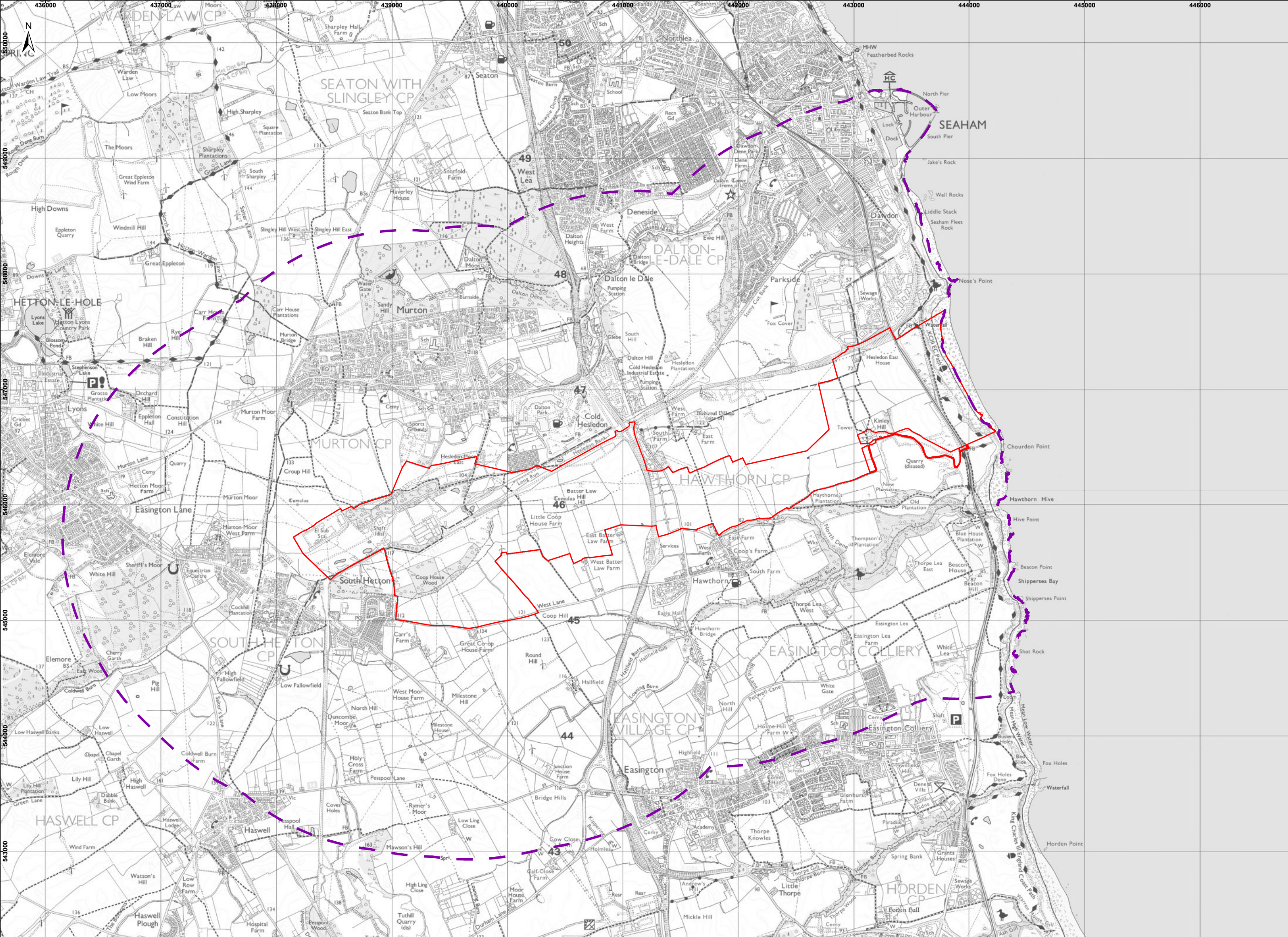
- 2.4.3.1 Any sighting (or evidence) of non-target species recorded during surveys were reported in the separate incidental records form on the FieldMaps Application and included within the relevant taxa report.

2.4.4 Limitations

- 2.4.4.1 It should be noted that the availability and quality of the information obtained during the desk study is reliant on third party responses and recorders. This varies for regions and different species groups. Furthermore, the comprehensiveness of information often depends on the level of coverage, the expertise and experience of the recorder and the submission of records to the local recorder. This is not considered to be a limitation of the desk study, as this was further supplemented by the field surveys undertaken.
- 2.4.4.2 Water vole activity levels are liable to fluctuate seasonally and/or in response to other environmental factors. As with any ecological study, the water vole field survey provides only a snapshot of the conditions within the Water Vole Survey Area prevailing at the time of survey.
- 2.4.4.3 Some habitats scoped in for water vole field surveys, located within the Water Vole Survey Area, were not accessible in September 2025 and April 2026 due to land access permissions.

These habitats are located to the north, including Hesledon Moor East SSSI (access denied for September 2025 and April 2026) and south, including the north-eastern area of Coop House Wood (access denied September 2025), of the access road to Jade Business Park. In order to ensure two surveys are completed in the optimum survey period, the north-eastern area of Coop House Wood has been further surveyed in April 2026 and September 2026. The area within Hesledon Moor East SSSI has been surveyed in August and September 2026. Survey results will be included within the ES.

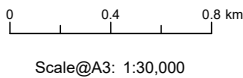
- 2.4.4.4 It should be noted that private gardens, roads and carriageway embankments, railways and railway embankments and areas under construction were excluded from the Water Vole Survey Area due to access restrictions. Where access was not possible to private land, a review of satellite mapping, together with surveys from adjacent land where possible, was utilised.



- LEGEND**
- MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore
 - Water Vole Study Area - 2km Buffer

Project Name:
MORVEN HAWTHORN PIT GRID
CONNECTION PROJECT

Drawing Title:
FIGURE 2.1 MHPGC PROJECT WATER VOLE STUDY AREA



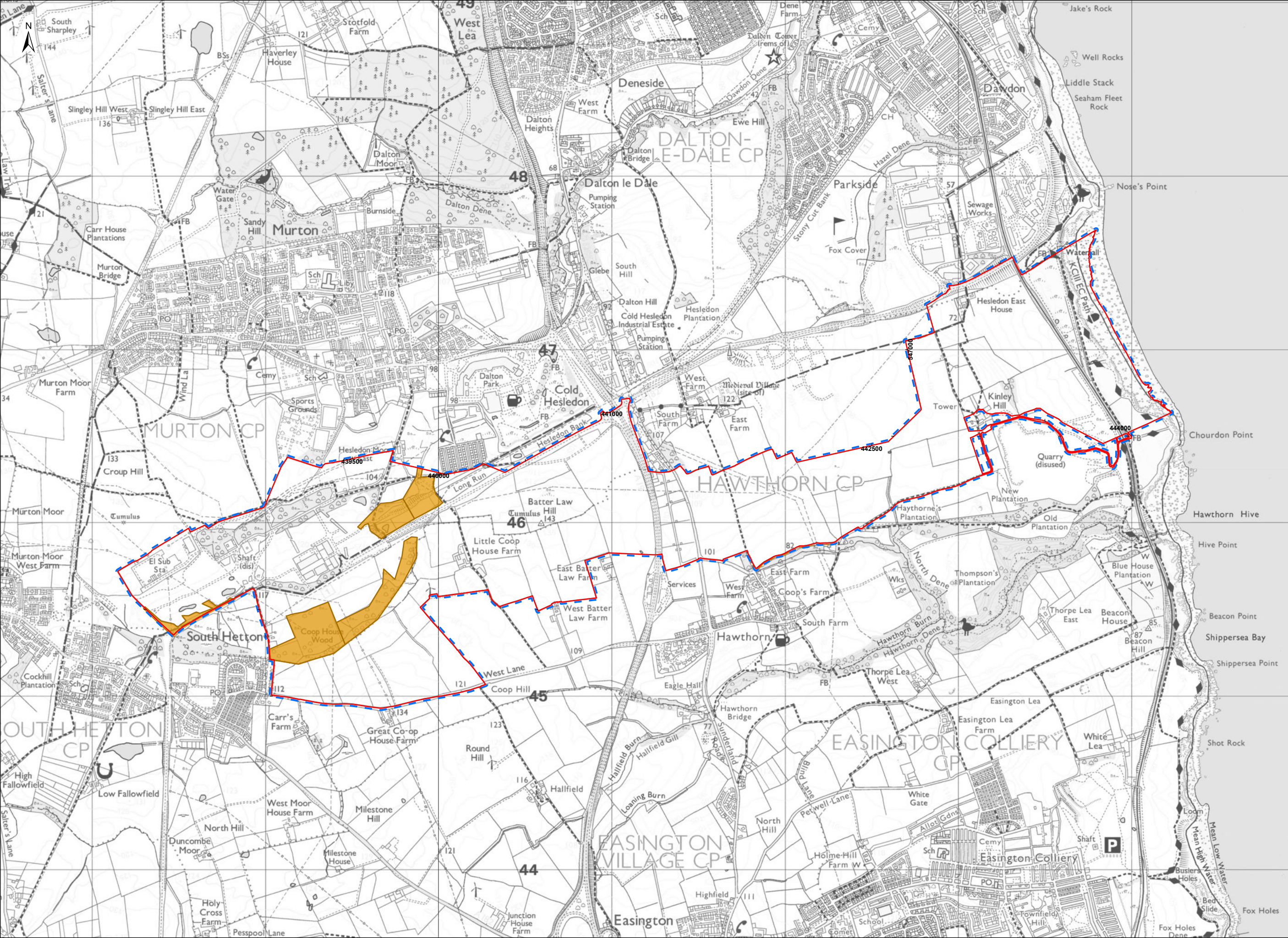
Geodetic Information:
Datum: OSGB 1936
Projection: British National Grid

Data Sources:
BP, Ordnance Survey

Service Layer Credits:
GB Background: Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2026. Contains data from OS Zoomstack
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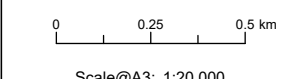
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- LEGEND**
- MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore
 - Water Vole Survey Area - 10m Buffer
 - Areas Scoped in for Surveys
 - Water Vole Survey Area

Project Name:
MORVEN HAWTHORN PIT GRID
CONNECTION PROJECT

Drawing Title:
FIGURE 2.2 MHPGC PROJECT WATER VOLE SURVEY AREA



Geodetic Information:
Datum: OSGB 1936
Projection: British National Grid

Data Sources:
BP, Ordnance Survey

Service Layer Credits:
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MHPGC-WSP-PEIR-054

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3 Baseline Characterisation

3.1 Desk study

3.1.1 Statutory and non-statutory sites

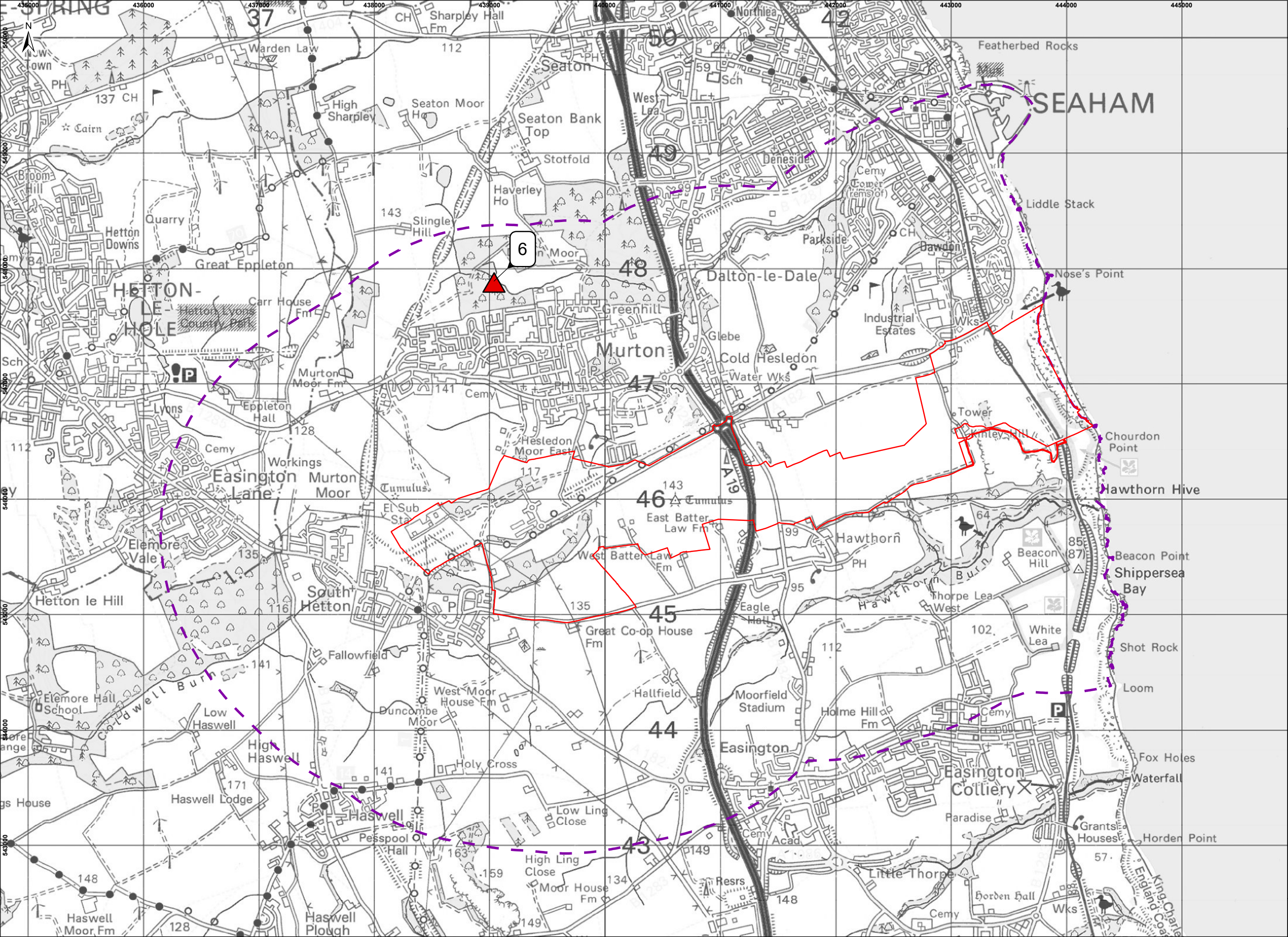
- 3.1.1.1 No statutory or non-statutory sites notified for water vole were identified within the Water Vole Study Area.

3.1.2 Local records

- 3.1.2.1 Records were requested from ERIC NE and were obtained on 28 October 2025. Records obtained from ERIC NE, specific to records of water vole, are listed in **Appendix A, Table A.1**. To ensure a baseline informed by representative records, the ERIC NE data only include records dating back to 2016 (industry standard approach). The data return included only one record within the Water Vole Study Area, approximately 1.4km from the MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore. The distribution of records in relation to the MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore is shown in **Figure 3.1**.

3.2 Field survey

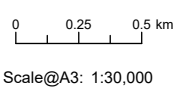
- 3.2.1.1 The Water Vole Survey Area is set out in **Figure 2.2**. Following the water vole habitat suitability assessment, four watercourses and adjacent habitats were scoped in for further survey across the Water Vole Survey Area.
- 3.2.1.2 Watercourses within the Water Vole Study Area were identified to comprise steep mud/earth banks. These features are considered suitable for burrowing by water vole. However, the limited presence of herbaceous vegetation along the banks afford sub-optimal opportunities for foraging, while evidence of significant human disturbance within the surrounding habitats further reduces the suitability of this habitat.
- 3.2.1.3 During surveys of the Water Vole Survey Area, no sightings of water vole or other evidence of their presence were recorded in the areas surveyed during the 2025 and April 2026.
- 3.2.1.4 As stated in **Section 2.4.2**, further survey visits have been undertaken with the first visit for Hesledon Moor East SSSI being undertaken in August 2026 and the final visit for all completed September 2026 and will inform the ES.



- LEGEND**
- MHPGC PEIR Red Line Boundary: Onshore
 - Water Vole Study Area - 2km Buffer
 - ERIC NE Water Vole Records

Project Name:
MORVEN HAWTHORN PIT GRID
CONNECTION PROJECT

Drawing Title:
FIGURE 3.1 MHPGC PROJECT WATER VOLE ERIC NE RECORDS



Geodetic Information:
Datum: OSGB 1936
Projection: British National Grid

Data Sources:
BP, Ordnance Survey

Service Layer Credits:
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4 Summary

- 4.1.1.1 This report presents the results of the water vole desk study and field studies undertaken for the MHPGC Project to inform **Volume 3, Chapter 3: Terrestrial Ecology and Terrestrial and Intertidal Ornithology, of the PEIR**.
- 4.1.1.2 The desk study data obtained from ERIC NE identified historical records of water vole activity, with one located within the Water Vole Study Area.
- 4.1.1.3 Following the water vole habitat suitability assessment, four watercourses and adjacent habitats were scoped in for further survey across the Water Vole Survey Area. A programme of water vole field surveys commenced in September 2025 and completed in September 2026.
- 4.1.1.4 Field surveys undertaken within the Water Vole Survey Area, that data for which have been processed to date did not record any water voles or evidence of their presence within the areas surveyed.
- 4.1.1.5 As stated in **Section 2.4.2**, further survey visits were undertaken with the first visit to Hesledon Moor East SSSI undertaken in August 2026 and the final visit for all habitats within the Water Vole Survey Area completed and September 2026 and will inform the ES.
- 4.1.1.6 No incidental sightings were recorded during the water vole field survey.

5 References

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[Morven%20Hawthorn%20Pit%20Grid%20Connection%20Project%20Scoping%20Report.pdf](https://nsip-documents.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/published-documents/EN0210005-000004-Morven%20Hawthorn%20Pit%20Grid%20Connection%20Project%20Scoping%20Report.pdf) (Accessed: 11/2025).

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Appendix A

Table A.1: Summary of water vole records obtained from ERIC NE

Record ID on Figure 3.1	Date	National Grid Reference	Comments
6	23 September 2021	NZ3903847890	One count