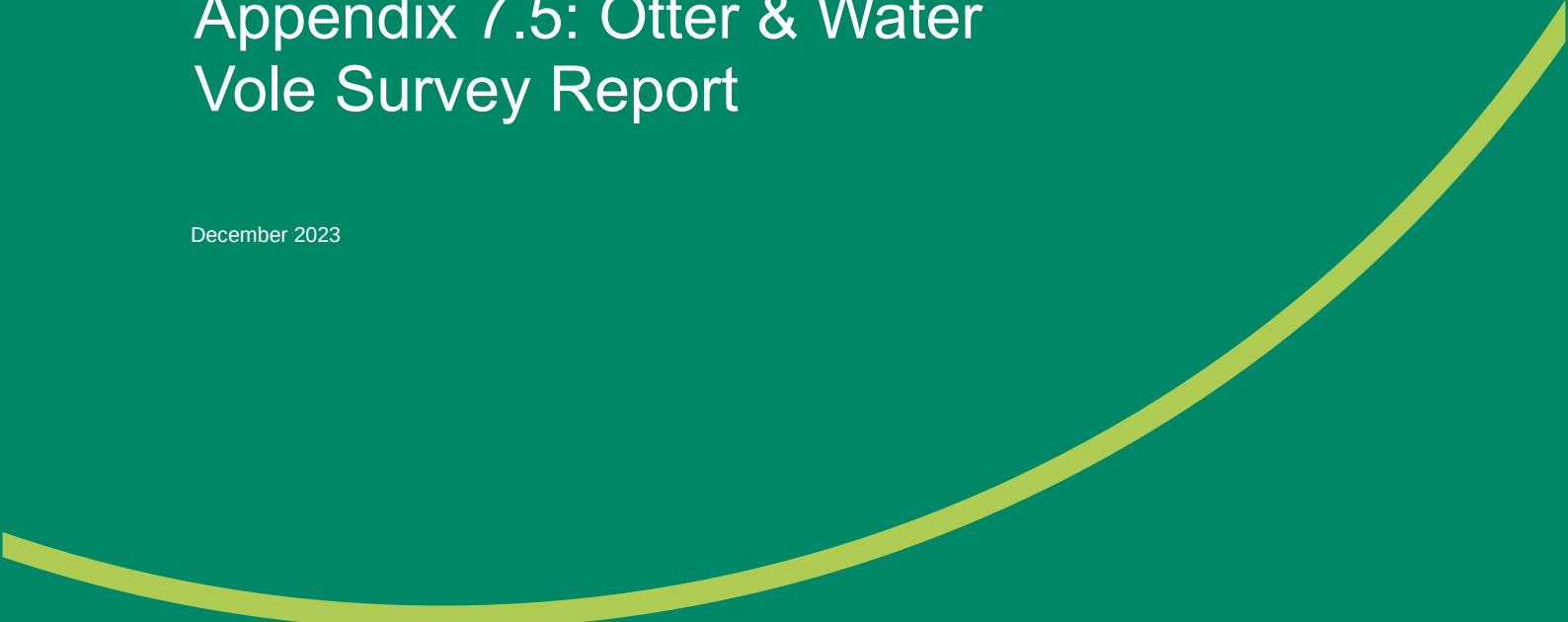


National Grid  
Cable Tunnel Replacement  
Project

Environmental Statement -  
Volume VI

Appendix 7.5: Otter & Water  
Vole Survey Report

December 2023



## Quality information

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 AECOM Ltd (hereafter referred to as AECOM) was commissioned by National Grid to undertake an ecological assessment to support the Environmental Statement for the TKRE Cable Tunnel Replacement Project (hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development'). The Proposed Development relates to the replacement of the below ground cabled section of the TKRE 400 kV circuits with the construction of new bored tunnel under the River Thames to carry new XLPE cables, together with new associated infrastructure either side of the Thames comprising:
- Two tunnel shafts one each side of the Thames measuring approximately 15m in diameter and 50m deep;
  - Two new tunnel headhouses to cover the tunnel shaft and house monitoring and ventilation equipment;
  - Two new Sealing End Compounds (SECs) which will house the connection between the overhead lines and underground cable; and
  - Overhead line re-stringing to connect the overhead lines to the new SECs.
- 1.1.2 The required headhouses and SECs would fall within the jurisdiction of Thurrock Council (north of the River Thames) and Gravesham Borough Council (south of the River Thames).

## 1.2 Site Description

- 1.2.1 The extent of land required for the Proposed Development (hereafter 'the Site') is split into two areas, one in Tilbury ('the Tilbury Site') and the other in Gravesend ('the Gravesend Site'). They are split from each other by the River Thames and Thames Estuary.

### Tilbury Site

- 1.2.2 The area north of the River Thames is located in Tilbury in the borough of Thurrock, Essex at Ordnance Survey (OS) grid reference TQ 66312 75869. The Tilbury Site is a mixture of in-use and disused industrial grounds and consists of a mixture of sparsely vegetated hard-standing, and larger areas of grassland, scrub and adjoining ditches.
- 1.2.3 The Tilbury Site is surrounded by an industrial and agricultural landscape with the River Thames adjacent to the south.
- 1.2.4 Two wet ditches are located within/adjacent to the Tilbury Site, WB1 and WB2 (see Figure 1), with the former running north to south on the western edge of Site, and the later running east to west along the haul road that passes through the centre of the Tilbury Site. A further seasonally wet ditch (WB6) is located on the northern and eastern margins of the large hardstanding areas used for car storage (west of the proposed Tilbury SEC).

### Gravesend Site

- 1.2.5 The area to the south of the River Thames is located in Gravesend, in the borough of Gravesham, Kent at OS grid reference TQ 67440 74151. The habitats on Site include grassland, scrubland, bare ground, ditches and marshy grassland. The eastern sections of the Gravesend Site are within Milton Rifle Range, and the western sections contain grazed pasture fields and the existing Eastcourt Marshes Electricity Substation.
- 1.2.6 Two ditches are present within the Gravesend Site, WB3 and WB4, with the former running north to south on the western edge, and the later running east to west along the southern edge.

- 1.2.7 The River Thames adjoins the northern boundary and the Thames and Medway Canal runs along the southern boundary of the Gravesend Site. Neither of these water bodies were included in the survey scope as neither will be subject to direct impacts.

## 1.3 Pre-existing Information

- 1.3.1 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA)<sup>1</sup> was completed in November 2022 in support of the Proposed Development, covering a wider area than the Red Line Boundary as part of the site selection process. The area covered by the PEA survey is shown in Figure 1 of the PEA report (ES Volume VI Appendix 7.1).
- 1.3.2 Correspondence with Bioscan who undertake ecological monitoring of the Site at Tilbury on behalf of the Port of Tilbury has identified that water vole have been previously recorded utilising ditches WB1 and WB2.
- 1.3.3 The desk study completed within the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) for the Tilbury and Gravesend Sites returned 12 recent records of water vole from within 1km of the Gravesend Site, with the closest record being directly adjacent to the Site to the south. No recent records were returned from within 1km of the Tilbury Site; however, there is a water vole mitigation area approximately 650m north of the Site, where water voles were translocated to in 2019 as mitigation for the Tilbury2 project<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.3.4 No otter records were returned for either site.
- 1.3.5 Non-specific American mink records were returned for Higham Marshes, more than 1km to the east of Gravesend, but these were more than 10 years old. No American mink records were returned from within 2km of Tilbury.

## 1.4 Objectives

- 1.4.1 The objectives of the water vole and otter surveys were to;
- Determine the presence or likely absence of water voles and otters in both the Tilbury and Gravesend sections of the TKRE Site;
  - If present, determine the likely disturbance of water voles and otters within the two survey areas; and
  - Determine the presence/likely absence of American mink within the two survey areas.

---

<sup>1</sup> AECOM Ltd (2023) TKRE Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

<sup>2</sup> <https://tilbury2.co.uk/wildlife-mitigation/> [accessed: 11/01/2023]

## 2 Legislation

- 2.1.1 Otters are listed on Annex IV ('European Protected Species') of the Council Directive 94/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora, adopted in 1992 (hence forth referred to as the 'Habitats Directive'). The Habitats Directive was transposed into British Law through the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 1994, now amended, updated and consolidated to form the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended, henceforth referred to as 'Habitat Regulations'). Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations lists the European protected species of animals, which includes otters.
- 2.1.2 Under the Habitats Regulations a person is guilty of an offence if they:
- deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of a European protected species;
  - deliberately disturb wild animals of any such species;
  - deliberately take or destroy the eggs of such animal; and/or
  - damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any such animal.
- 2.1.3 For all species listed on Schedule 2, it is also illegal to possess, control, transport, offer for sale or exchange, or sell or exchange any living or dead individual, or anything derived from or any part of such a species.
- 2.1.4 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) provides protection to certain wild animals – listed on Schedule 5 – including water voles and otters. Sections 9 (4) & (5) detail the offences concerning these two species, which are as follows;
- Disturbance of a species listed on Schedule 5 while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses as shelter or protection;
  - Obstructing access to any structure or place which any animal uses for shelter or protection; and
  - Selling, offering or exposing for sale, advertising for sale, possession of/ or transporting for the purposes of sale, any live or dead animal included in Schedule 5 (or any part of).
- 2.1.5 Licenses, which permit otherwise unlawful activities, may be granted for certain purposes, but only if certain conditions are met. In England, the Statutory Nature Conservation Organization (SNCO) responsible for issuing licenses in respect of both otters and water voles under the Habitats Regulations in Natural England.
- 2.1.6 While not protected, American mink is covered by Section 14 of Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The offences covered in Section 14 include the following;
- Release of a species listed on Schedule 9 into the natural environment; and
  - Allowing a capture individual to re-enter into the natural environment.

## 3 Methods

### 3.1 Desk Study

- 3.1.1 Records of protected and/or notable species recorded within a 2km radius of Proposed Development were obtained from Essex Field Club and Kent<sup>3</sup> and Medway Biological Records Centre (KMBRC)<sup>4</sup> in support of the PEA<sup>5</sup>.
- 3.1.2 In addition, a review of publicly available information collected in support of nearby large scale infrastructure developments has been undertaken, and included a search for relevant data in planning documentation for the following developments:
- Lower Thames Crossing<sup>6</sup>;
  - Thurrock Flexible Generation Plant<sup>7</sup>;
  - Tilbury 2<sup>8</sup>; and
  - Application for external storage for a temporary period at former Tilbury B Power Station (Application Reference; 21/01927/FUL)<sup>9</sup>.

### 3.2 Field Survey

- 3.2.1 This section details the methods used to conduct the water vole and otter presence/ likely absence surveys. These methods are based on the walkover methodology set out in the PEA. The surveys comprised of field-based presence/absence surveys for water voles, looking for field signs as well as burrows, feeding remains and latrines as well as sighting and soundings of the species, and otters, looking for feeding remains, otter couches and latrines, in suitable habitats for these species.

#### Scope of Survey

- 3.2.2 The water vole and otter surveys were targeted on two ditches on the Tilbury Site (WB1 and WB2) and two ditches on the Gravesend Site (WB3 and WB4), all of which were deemed to be suitable to support otters and water voles when the PEA was carried out. The locations of these water bodies are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 in Annex A.
- 3.2.3 The areas adjacent to the Gravesend and Tilbury Sites were not surveyed, as they will not be impacted by the Proposed Development. The areas to the south of the Gravesend Site include the Medway Canal, which contains suitable habitat for water voles, as well as American mink. The section of the River Thames adjacent to the Site does not contain suitable habitat for water voles, but the foreshore habitats are potentially suitable for otters. These water bodies are separated from the Proposed Development by areas of retained terrestrial habitat and there is negligible risk of any species using these watercourses being subject to impacts.
- 3.2.4 Each ditch selected for survey was subject to two walkover surveys, the first in May/June 2023 and the second in September 2023. The details of surveys undertaken are provided in Table 1.

<sup>3</sup> Essex Field Club (2022) Datasearch Report Ref: EFC5454 28-11-2022

<sup>4</sup> Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre (2022) Records Search Ref: ENQ/22/506

<sup>5</sup> AECOM Ltd (2023) TKRE Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

<sup>6</sup> [Lower Thames Crossing | National Infrastructure Planning \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](https://planninginspectorate.gov.uk/consultations/2023/01/lower-thames-crossing/)

<sup>7</sup> [Thurrock Flexible Generation Plant | National Infrastructure Planning \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](https://planninginspectorate.gov.uk/consultations/2023/01/thurrock-flexible-generation-plant/)

<sup>8</sup> [Tilbury2 | National Infrastructure Planning \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](https://planninginspectorate.gov.uk/consultations/2023/01/tilbury-2/)

<sup>9</sup> Bioscan (2021) Land at the Former Tilbury Power Station: Tilbury 3: Temporary Use of Land For Port-Related Storage – Ecological Appraisal November 2021 Available at [https://regs.thurrock.gov.uk/online-applications/files/CAC2F3238A203CAD43D932A0A07E81B5/pdf/21\\_01927\\_FUL-ECOLOGICAL\\_APPRAISAL-754664.pdf](https://regs.thurrock.gov.uk/online-applications/files/CAC2F3238A203CAD43D932A0A07E81B5/pdf/21_01927_FUL-ECOLOGICAL_APPRAISAL-754664.pdf)

**Table 1. Survey Dates and Weather Condition**

| Survey Date | Site      | Weather Conditions                    |
|-------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| 26/05/2023  | Gravesend | 4/8 Cloud Cover, Bf 3 Wind, Dry, 19°C |
| 02/06/2023  | Tilbury   | 2/8 Cloud Cover, Bf 2 Wind, Dry, 25°C |
| 18/09/2023  | Gravesend | 1/8 Cloud Cover, Bf 1 Wind, Dry, 28°C |
| 18/09/2023  | Tilbury   | 3/8 Cloud Cover, Bf 1 Wind, Dry, 23°C |

- 3.2.5 During each survey visit a walkover survey was carried out along the banks of the ditches present on Site. The extents covered by the surveys are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Each ditch was surveyed from the banks, typically focusing on the opposite bank to identify and record any signs indicating activity by water vole and/or otter.
- 3.2.6 For otter this included a search for the following:
- natal holts, holts and potential holt sites;
  - couches;
  - spraints
  - anal jelly;
  - tracks/footprints;
  - silt/sand heaps; and
  - slides.
- 3.2.7 For water vole this included a search for the following
- latrines;
  - burrows;
  - runs;
  - footprints;
  - feeding remains;
  - individual droppings; and
  - sightings and/or sounds (characteristic sound of individuals entering the water).
- 3.2.8 While unlikely to be discovered far from waterbodies, field signs in terrestrial habitats of all three species were also recorded where discovered.
- 3.2.9 Any feature that was determined to attributable to either otter, water vole or American mink, was recorded and where possible and appropriate (e.g. feeding remains / spraint), removed to ensure that they weren't recorded during further follow-up surveys.
- 3.2.10 Where possible the boundaries of water vole territories were determined based on the location of latrines that typically mark the boundaries of a single vole's territory.
- 3.2.11 For water vole relative population density estimates were made where possible utilising the criteria set out in Table 2. The highest population estimate from the two surveys undertaken was used.

**Table 2. Water Vole Relative Population Density Estimates**

| Relative population density | Approximate number of latrines per 100m of bankside habitat               |                                                                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                             | First half of survey season (mid-April to June)                           | Second half of survey season (July to September)                          |
| High                        | 10 or more                                                                | 20 or more                                                                |
| Medium                      | 3-9                                                                       | 6-19                                                                      |
| Low                         | Less than or equal to 2 (or none but with other confirmatory field signs) | Less than or equal to 5 (or none but with other confirmatory field signs) |

### Survey Limitations

- 3.2.12 The seasonally wet ditch on the northern and eastern boundaries of the large hardstanding slab (WB6) was not subject to survey due to this area being a later addition to the design. However, this is not considered a constraint as historic data is available for surveys undertaken by third parties (see Section 4.1).
- 3.2.13 Aspects of some of the ditches were too vegetated with stepped common reed (*Phragmites australis*) on the banks when combined with the gradients of the banks to fully access for field signs during the June and September surveys, potentially obscuring latrines and feeding signs. Spot checks were undertaken wherever it was safe to do so, however due to the steepness of the banks, some of the water bodies were inaccessible for close survey, particularly in areas along Water Body 1 at Tilbury and Water Bodies 4 and 5 at Gravesend where vegetation obscured the view from the banks.
- 3.2.14 At Gravesend, no signs of water vole activity were confirmed and due to the density of vegetation, and steepness of banks hampering access, the presence of water vole evidence cannot be discounted. In light of previous records of water vole within these waterbodies a precautionary approach has been adopted in the subsequent assessment (see Section 4).
- 3.2.15 Water voles were found to be present during the surveys at Tilbury, and therefore this is not considered a significant limitation to the survey.

## 3.3 Lifespan of the Report

- 3.3.1 The results of these surveys are valid for 18 months and will need repeating if works are due to commence outside this period. If works are likely to be required within 5m of the ditches or reed bed habitat on Site, or to impact these habitats, then more up to date surveys may be required to inform works and any necessary mitigation or licence applications.

## 3.4 Quality Assurance

- 3.4.1 All AECOM ecologists follow the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) code of professional conduct when undertaking ecological work and many are Full or Fellow Members. They are appropriately qualified and will conduct their work using all reasonable skill and care. Many senior AECOM ecologists are also Chartered Environmentalists or Ecologists.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Tilbury

#### Desk Study

- 4.1.1 The Thurrock Flexible Generation Plant Environmental Statement (ES), and the Lower Thames Crossing ES both identify the ditches within and adjacent to the Tilbury Site as supporting water vole. Based on survey results from between 2017 and 2020 population estimates were as follows:
- WB1 was found to support a medium water vole population;
  - WB2 and WB3 were found to support high water vole populations.
- 4.1.2 Previous survey information for WB6 is documented in the ecological appraisal produced by Bioscan in support of an application for external storage<sup>10</sup>. The report identifies that water voles have been found in ditch WB6 to the north of the hardstanding slab in 2015 and 2018. Survey in 2021 was hampered by the steep sided nature of the ditches but it was assumed that water vole is likely to remain present at least periodically.
- 4.1.3 There are no recent records of otter activity in the vicinity of the Tilbury Site.

#### Field Survey

- 4.1.4 During the initial May / June 2023 surveys no evidence of otters or water voles were recorded on in the Tilbury waterbodies. As set out in Section 3.2 access to the ditches to survey was restricted. However, it was evident that the majority of the ditches had relatively steep banks suitable for water voles and otters to build burrows and holts in. There were also suitable foraging resources on Site for water voles in the form of grasses and reeds present on Site. While fish were not recorded from the water bodies, they were considered likely present in at least some of the water bodies.
- 4.1.5 During the September 2023 survey visit at Tilbury, field signs of water vole were recorded in the form of latrines and feeding remains along the length of WB3 and within the reed bed habitat adjoining this ditch.
- 4.1.6 The details of these features recorded on Site are included in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Water Vole Evidence**

| Field Sign Name            | Site Name | Associated Water Body | Location       |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Water Vole Latrine         | Tilbury   | Water Body 3          | TQ 66433 75836 |
| Water Vole Feeding Remains | Tilbury   | Water Body 3          | TQ 66350 75997 |
| Water Vole Latrine         | Tilbury   | Water Body 3          | TQ 66364 76029 |
| Water Vole Latrine         | Tilbury   | Water Body 3          | TQ 66364 76029 |

- 4.1.7 The photographs of the features recorded on Site are included in Table 4 below.

<sup>10</sup> Bioscan (2021) Land at the Former Tilbury Power Station: Tilbury 3: Temporary Use of Land For Port-Related Storage – Ecological Appraisal November 2021 Available at [https://regs.thurrock.gov.uk/online-applications/files/CAC2F3238A203CAD43D932A0A07E81B5/pdf/21\\_01927\\_FUL-ECOLOGICAL\\_APPRAISAL-754664.pdf](https://regs.thurrock.gov.uk/online-applications/files/CAC2F3238A203CAD43D932A0A07E81B5/pdf/21_01927_FUL-ECOLOGICAL_APPRAISAL-754664.pdf)

**Table 4. Water Vole Field Signs at WB3 September 2023**



**Photograph 1: Water Vole Latrine**

**Photograph 2: Water Vole Feeding Remains**



**Photograph 3: Water Vole Latrine**

**Photograph 4: Water Vole Latrine**

- 4.1.8 In the second waterbody on Site, WB1, any signs would have been obscured by the thick reed stands on the banks, and the steepness of those banks. This made close inspection of the ditch difficult along its length. As a consequence, the presence of water vole signs cannot be ruled out and on a precautionary basis it is assumed that water voles may be present in suitable habitat (ditches and reedbeds) throughout the Tilbury Site.

## 4.2 Gravesend

### Desk Study

- 4.2.1 The data search from the Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre identified a range of water vole records associated with the wider Gravesend and Higham Marshes area. The closest record of water vole is associated with the Kent and Medway Canal approximately 15m to the south of the Gravesend Site.

- 4.2.2 During surveys in support of the Lower Thames Crossing<sup>11</sup> water vole was found to be present within WB5 directly to the east of the existing substation, and on the southern boundary of the rifle range. Based on the density of field signs these waterbodies were considered to support a medium water vole population. During the same set of surveys the ditches on the western boundary of the Gravesend Site, adjoining the Metropolitan Police Training Centre and extending into the centre of the Gravesend Site also contained water vole, with a low population assumed on the basis of the density of field signs.
- 4.2.3 The Kent and Medway Canal which is located approximately 15m to the south of the Site was also found to support a low population of water vole.
- 4.2.4 There are no recent records of otter activity in the vicinity of the Gravesend Site.

### Field Survey

- 4.2.5 No evidence of water vole was recorded at Gravesend during the 2023 surveys. However, the habitat present was considered suitable, and within some sections (in particular WB5) the steepness of banks and density of common reed (*Phragmites australis*) severely restricted access. In addition in those sections where access was possible to undertake spot checks the density of reed may have obscured field signs. As a consequence, the presence of positive evidence could not be ruled out.
- 4.2.6 No signs of otter or American mink were recorded either survey at Gravesend.

---

<sup>11</sup> National Highways (2022) Lower Thames Crossing: 6.3 Environmental Statement – Appendices: Appendix 8.10 – Water Vole [TR010032-001428-6.3 Environmental Statement Appendix 8.10 - Water Vole.pdf \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](#)

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Water Vole

#### Tilbury

- 5.1.1 Water vole were confirmed as still being present at Tilbury within WB3, which adjoins the areas of hardstanding where the tunnel shaft and head house are proposed. The northern section of this ditch is also straddled by a pylon that is to be relocated as part of the Proposed Development.
- 5.1.2 While only three latrines were identified during the September 2023 visit, given the density of vegetation it is likely that others were present. As such caution should be taken in translating these results to a relative population density. While the overgrown nature of the ditch may overtime reduce the suitability of the water course for water vole, as a precaution for the purposes of assessment it is assumed that WB3 continues to support a high population of water vole, as reported within the Lower Thames Crossing ES and Thurrock Flexible Power Generation ES.
- 5.1.3 No positive evidence of water vole presence was found at WB1 during the 2023 surveys. WB1 adjoins an access road and area of hardstanding that will be used for car parking during construction of the Proposed Development. Based on the constraints to survey and previous records of water vole within this water course it is assumed as a precaution that WB1 continues to support at least a small population of water vole.
- 5.1.4 WB6 to the north of the large hardstanding slab did not show signs of use by water vole in 2021 surveys by Bioscan. However, based on historic records from multiple years and constraints to survey in 2021 it is assumed that a small population of water vole continue to utilise the ditch at least on an periodic basis.

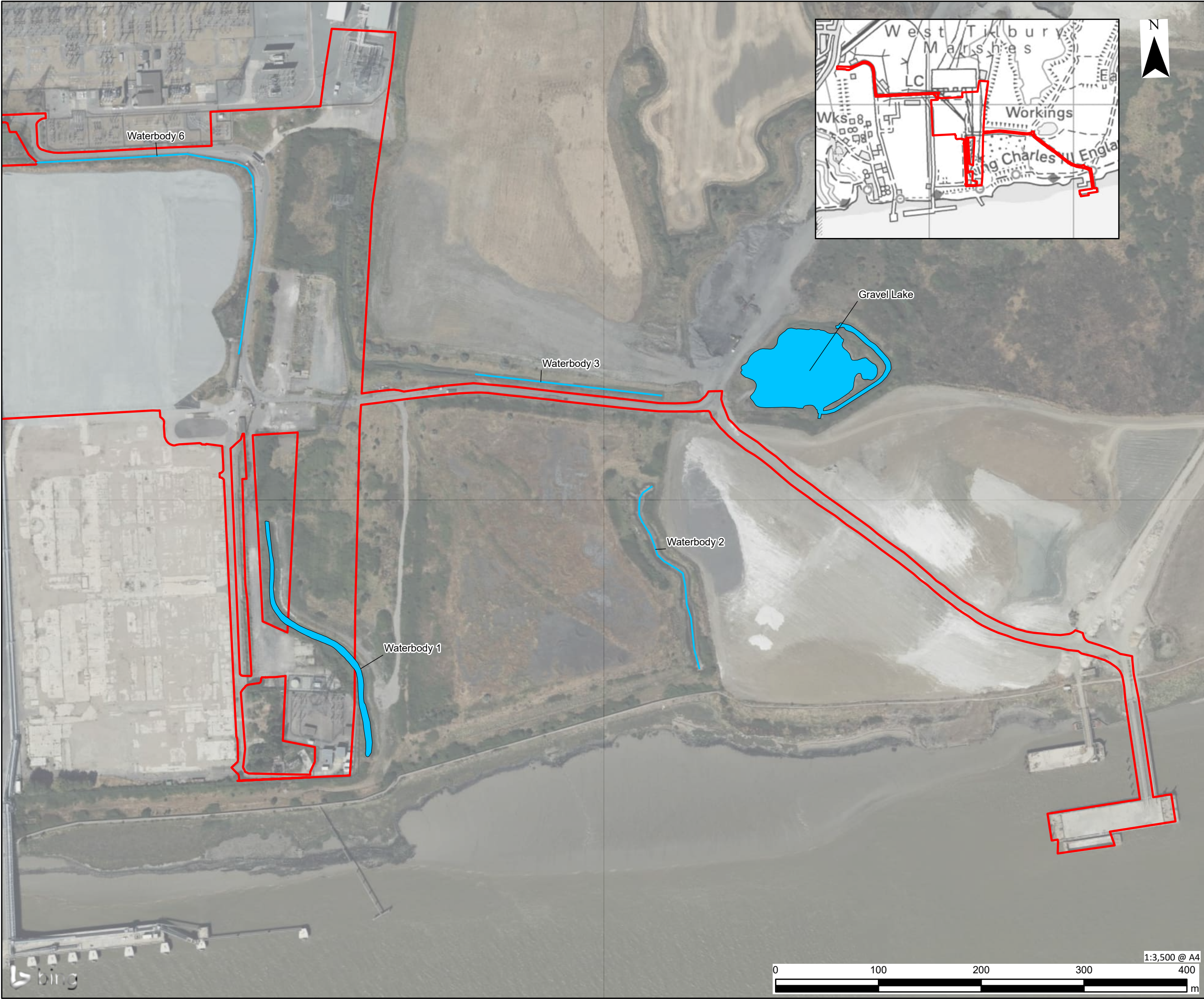
#### Gravesend

- 5.1.5 While no confirmed evidence of water vole was recorded at the Gravesend Site, based on the level of constraint to the survey and the presence of records from the adjacent waterbodies to the south, it is recommended that on a precautionary basis it is assumed that water vole may be present within WB4 and WB4 and the associated areas of reedbed habitat.
- 5.1.6 Given the proximity of known water vole records (immediately to the south of the site), and the highly suitable habitat on site, it is recommended that water vole are assumed likely to be present in at least low numbers in all of the ditches within or adjacent to the Site.

### 5.2 Otter

- 5.2.1 Otters and American mink are considered likely to be absent from both sites, due to a lack of records from the wider area within the desk study, and a lack of evidence found on Site.

# Annex A      Survey Locations



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**LEGEND**  
 Red Line Boundary (Above Ground)  
 Waterbody  
 Waterbody

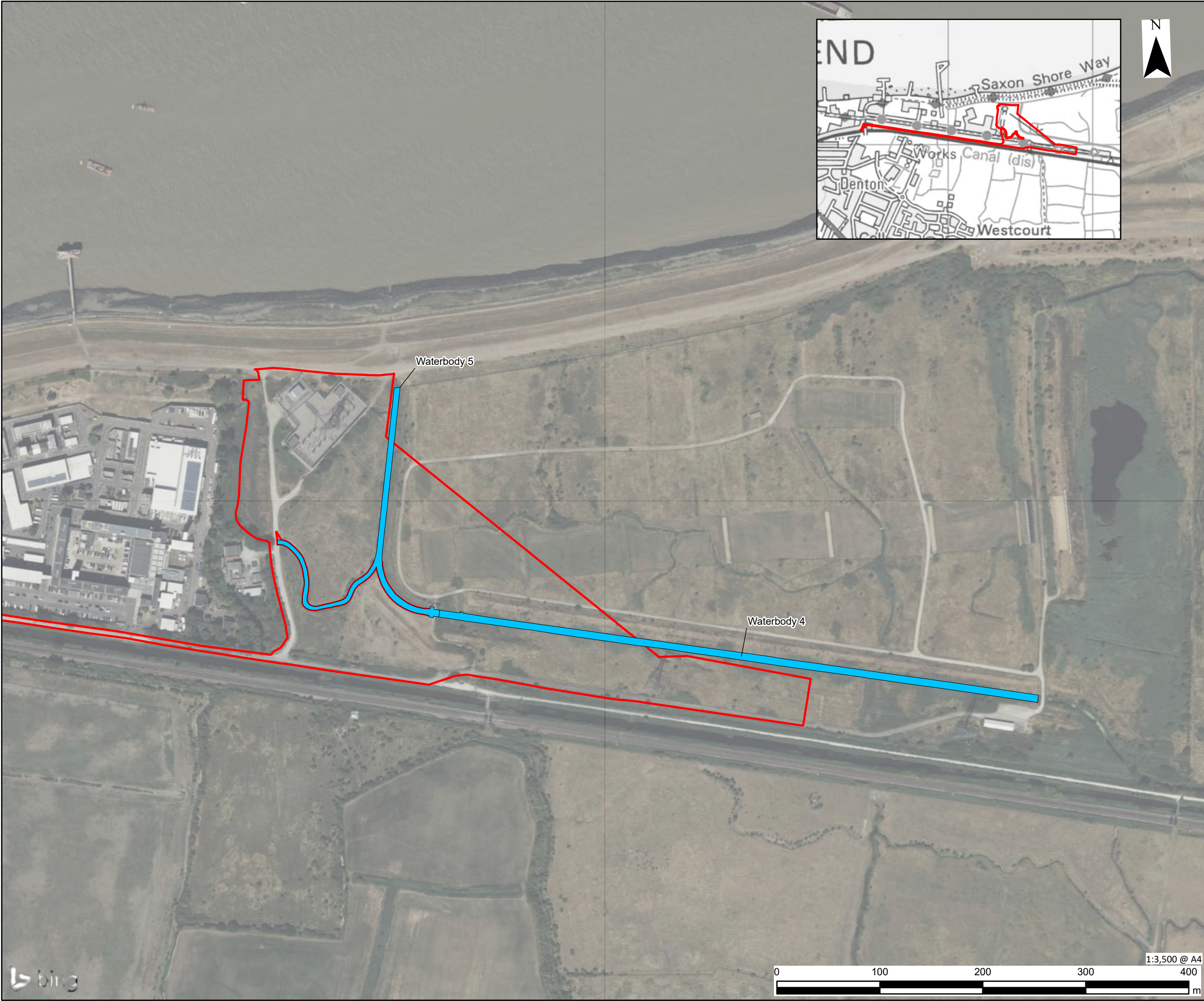
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**ISSUE PURPOSE**  
Water Vole and Otter Report

**PROJECT NUMBER**  
60677311

**FIGURE TITLE**  
Location of Waterbodies  
Page 1 of 2 - Tilbury

**FIGURE NUMBER**  
Figure 1



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**LEGEND**

-  Red Line Boundary (Above Ground)
-  Waterbody

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**ISSUE PURPOSE**

Water Vole and Otter Report

**PROJECT NUMBER**

60677311

**FIGURE TITLE**

Location of Waterbodies  
Page 2 of 2 - Gravesend

**FIGURE NUMBER**

Figure 2

