

Reference Number – DAERA/26-756

Requested Information

Full breakdown of the activities carried out at Brook Hall Estate to date through the Bovine Tuberculosis Regionalisation Research Pilot.

Please make sure to include the following:

- Results of sett survey including locations of active and inactive sets and latrines
- Locations of traps deployed
- Number of badgers trapped, tested, vaccinated and culled

Exemption / Exception under consideration

Regulation 12 (5) (g) Protection of the environment

Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

There is a significant public interest in promoting transparency and accountability regarding the operation of the Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) Regionalisation Research Pilot and the use of public resources in connection with that work.

Disclosure would contribute to public understanding of the activities undertaken at Brook Hall Estate, including the methods used to gather ecological and disease-related information and the evidence informing the Department's approach to bTB management.

There is also a public interest in facilitating informed public debate on animal health, wildlife management and environmental protection matters. Disclosure would enhance public confidence in the conduct of the research by enabling greater scrutiny of the work undertaken and the information obtained through the study.

The Department recognises that environmental information should be made available wherever possible and has applied the statutory presumption in favour of disclosure.

Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

The information under consideration includes the precise locations of badger setts, latrines and trap deployment sites. This information relates directly to the protection of the environment and, specifically, to the location and activity patterns of a protected wild species.

Disclosure of detailed location information would reveal sensitive information about badger activity and habitat use within the study area. The Department considers that disclosure would create a risk of disturbance, interference with, or damage to badger setts and associated environmental features. The public interest in maintaining the exception therefore lies in avoiding the adverse effect on the protection of the environment that could arise from disclosure.

The Department also considered whether disclosure of the numbers of badgers trapped, tested, vaccinated and culled could contribute to the identification of sensitive badger locations when combined with other information relating to the study area. The

Department considers that, in the circumstances of this case, these figures cannot be wholly separated from the associated information relating to badger activity and distribution. Disclosure would therefore increase the likelihood of sensitive badger locations being inferred from the data and would contribute to the adverse effect on the protection of the environment identified above.

There is a strong public interest in ensuring that information capable of identifying sensitive wildlife locations is appropriately protected. The Department also considers there is a public interest in safeguarding the integrity of environmental protection measures and avoiding unnecessary risks to wildlife and associated habitats.

Conclusion

The Department has carefully balanced the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in maintaining the exception and has applied the presumption in favour of disclosure required by Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

While the Department recognises the public interest in openness, transparency and public understanding of the Bovine Tuberculosis Regionalisation Research Pilot, it considers that the disclosure of precise sett, latrine and trap location information would adversely affect the protection of the environment to which that information relates.

The Department has also considered the disclosure of the numbers of badgers trapped, tested, vaccinated and culled. While these figures do not identify sensitive locations in isolation, the Department considers that, when combined with other information relating to the study area, they could contribute to inferences being drawn regarding badger activity, distribution and the locations within which badgers were identified and monitored during the study. The Department therefore considers that these figures cannot be wholly separated from the sensitive environmental information to which they relate.

In all the circumstances of the case, the Department considers that the public interest in maintaining the exception at Regulation 12(5)(g) outweighs the public interest in disclosure. Accordingly, the precise location information relating to badger setts, latrines and trap deployment sites, together with the associated information on the numbers of badgers trapped, tested, vaccinated and culled, is withheld.

Veterinary Service Animal Health Group