

MONA OFFSHORE WIND PROJECT

Environmental Statement

Volume 7, Annex 3.11: Otter survey technical report

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Image of an offshore wind farm

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Glossary

Term	Meaning
Expert Working Group (EWG)	Expert working groups set up with relevant stakeholders as part of the Evidence Plan process.
Holt	A hole in the ground used by an otter for resting and sleeping.
Landfall	The area in which the offshore export cables make contact with land and the transitional area where the offshore cabling connects to the onshore cabling.
Mona Onshore Development Area	The area in which the landfall, onshore cable corridor, onshore substation, mitigation areas, temporary construction facilities (such as access roads and construction compounds), and the connection to National Grid infrastructure will be located.
Species of Principal Importance	Species recognised in Welsh policy and afforded due regard in the planning system by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Section 7. Public bodies have a legal duty to conserve such species through their work.

Acronyms

Acronym	Description
Defra	Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
MAGIC	Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside
MLWS	Mean Low Water Springs
SPI	Species of Principal Importance

Units

Unit	Description
km	Kilometre
m	Metre

1 OTTER SURVEY TECHNICAL REPORT

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1.1 This document forms Volume 7, Annex 3.11: Otter survey technical report of the Environmental Statement for the Mona Offshore Wind Project.
- 1.1.1.2 This technical report presents the results of the Otter *Lutra lutra* desk study and field surveys undertaken between April and October 2023 to inform Volume 3, Chapter 3: Onshore ecology of the Environmental Statement.
- 1.1.1.3 The desk study and field surveys were designed to determine the presence or likely absence of this species.
- 1.1.1.4 Two separate areas have been defined for the purposes of this technical report. These include the 'study area', which describes the geographical extent subject to desk based research, and the 'survey area', which describes the area of land subject to site-specific surveys. The extent of the study area and the survey area were selected to ensure data was collected for the Mona Onshore Development Area and the surroundings that may support this species and may reasonably be affected by the Mona Offshore Wind Project. The extent of the study area and the survey area were discussed and agreed with the onshore ecology EWG.

1.2 Study area

- 1.2.1.1 The study area comprises the Mona Onshore Development Area, landward of Mean Low Water Springs (MLWS) and a 2 km buffer ('the otter study area').
- 1.2.1.2 The location and geographic extent of the otter study area is presented in Figure 1.1 of this technical report.

1.3 Survey area

- 1.3.1.1 Following the commencement of otter surveys, the Mona Onshore Development Area has been refined and now occupies a smaller geographical area. As such, the area of land subject to otter surveys ('the otter survey area') extends beyond the current iteration of the Mona Onshore Development Area. The results from surveys undertaken beyond the Mona Onshore Development Area (i.e. surveys undertaken based on an earlier design iterations) have been included in this technical report because they provide further context regarding the ecological sensitivity of the wider area and to inform Volume 3, Chapter 3: Onshore ecology of the Environmental Statement (where relevant). All the ecological data collected as part of the Environmental Statement for the Mona Offshore Wind Project has been made publicly available through the relevant data records centre.
- 1.3.1.2 Adopting a survey area that is greater in extent than the Mona Onshore Development Area is in accordance with the precautionary approach. It ensures that the Environmental Statement is accurately informed with data from within the Mona Onshore Development Area (i.e. that may be subject to direct impacts) and data from outside the Mona Onshore Development Area (i.e. that may be subject to indirect impacts).
- 1.3.1.3 The location and geographic extent of the otter survey area is presented in Figure 1.1 of this technical report.

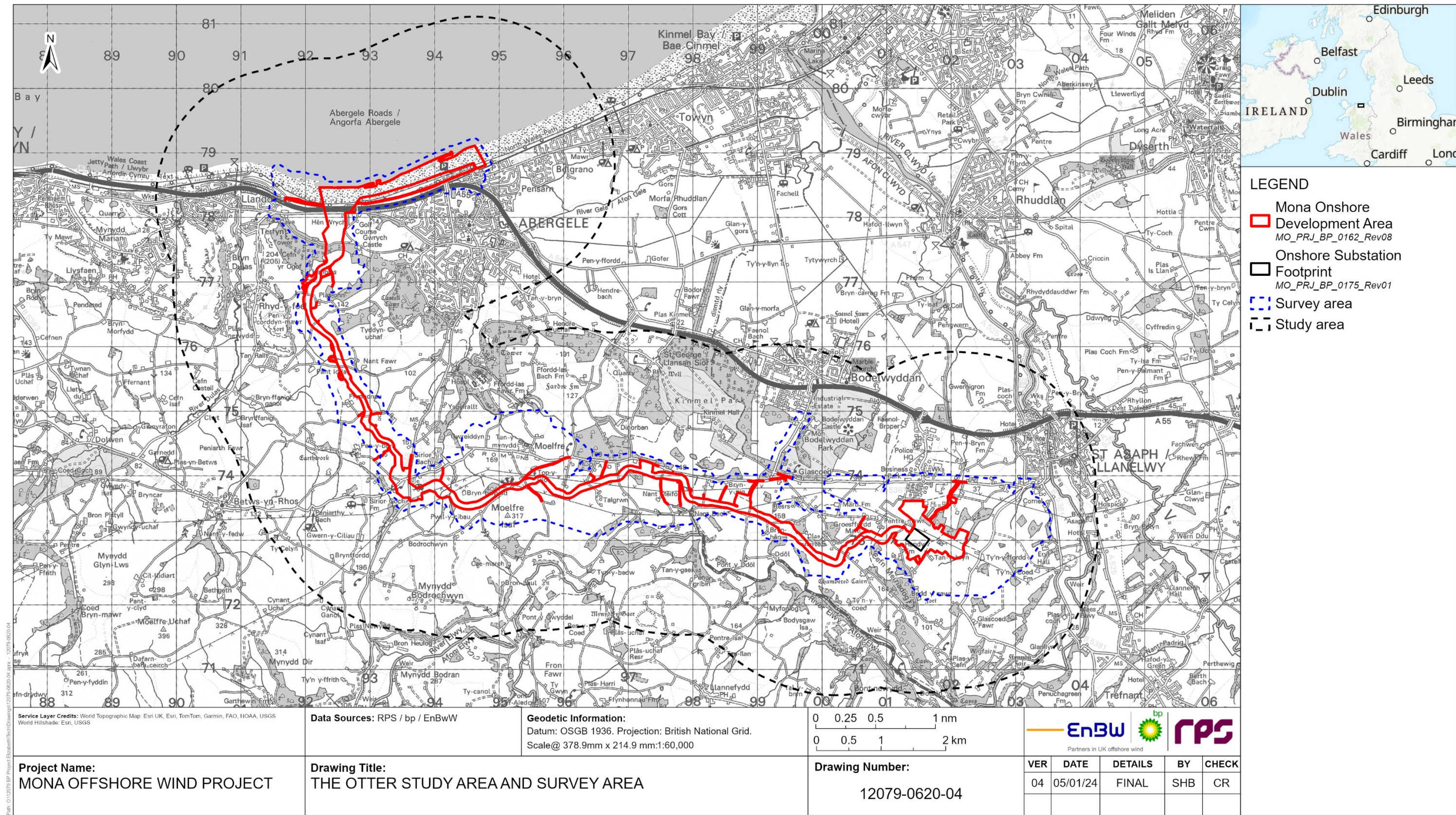


Figure 1.1: The otter study area and survey area.

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1.4 Relevant legislation

- 1.4.1.1 Three key pieces of legislation are relevant for otter under Welsh and UK law: the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the Habitats Regulations), the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
- 1.4.1.2 Otter are listed under Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations making the species a European protected species. This makes it an offence to:
- Deliberately capture, injure or kill an otter
 - Deliberately disturb an otter
 - Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of an otter.
- 1.4.1.3 Otter are fully protected under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Under Schedule 5 it is an offence to:
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb an otter while it is occupying a structure or place, which it uses for that purpose
 - Obstruct access to a place of shelter or protection.
- 1.4.1.4 Otter are also afforded due regard in the planning system in Wales by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Section 7. Otter are listed as a Species of Principal Importance (SPI), giving public bodies and local planning authorities a legal duty to have regard for conserving a SPI when exercising their duties.

1.5 Consultation

- 1.5.1.1 The scope, methodology and findings of the otter surveys, including those undertaken beyond the current Mona Onshore Development Area, were discussed and agreed with stakeholders via regular Onshore Ecology Expert Working Group (EWG) Meetings. Further detail regarding consultation undertaken with respect onshore ecology, including otter surveys can be found in Volume 3, Chapter 3: Onshore ecology of the Environmental Statement and the Consultation Report (Document reference: E.3).

1.6 Methodology

- 1.6.1.1 A combination of a desktop study and site-specific surveys were undertaken to establish the likely presence or absence of otter within the otter study area.
- 1.6.1.2 The results of the onshore ecology desktop study are presented in Volume 7, Annex 3.1: Onshore ecology desk study technical report of the Environmental Statement and summarised in section 1.7.1 below.

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1.6.1 Desktop study

1.6.1.1 Information on otter within the study area was collected from existing studies and datasets. These are summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Summary of key desktop sources.

Title	Source	Year	Author
Historical biological records	Cofnod	2023	Cofnod
DataMapWales	Welsh Government	2023	Welsh Government
Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)	Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)	2023	Defra
UK Protected Area Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)	JNCC website	2023	JNCC
The Welsh National Survey for Otter	Natural Resources Wales	2021	Natural Resources Wales

1.6.2 Site-specific surveys

Extended phase 1 habitat surveys

1.6.2.1 Extended phase 1 habitat surveys undertaken between May 2022 and September 2023 were used to identify watercourses likely to support otter. The data informed which watercourse should be subject to further surveys (see Volume 7, Annex 3.2: Phase 1 habitat surveys technical report of the Environmental Statement).

Otter surveys

1.6.2.2 The otter surveys followed the best practice survey guidelines as set out in Monitoring the Otter *Lutra lutra* (Chanin, 2003) and the Fourth otter survey of England (Crawford, 2003).

1.6.2.3 Two surveyors walked the banks of all suitable watercourses and surveyed for any evidence of otter, where safe access permitted. Surveyors walked slowly along each bank inspecting it and the habitat within 2 m of the water's edge for signs of use by otter. Where only one bank was accessible, the opposite bank was inspected from the accessible bank using binoculars.

1.6.2.4 All evidence of otter and other notable species such as mink *Neovison vison* were recorded. Evidence of mink, can be easily confused with otter field signs. Otter evidence included, as a minimum, the number and location of the following field signs:

- Presence of natal holts, holts and potential holt sites
- Presence of couches
- Presence of spraints
- Presence of anal jelly
- Presence of tracks/ footprints
- Presence of silt/ sand heaps

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- Presence of slides.

- 1.6.2.5 In accordance with the standard survey methodologies and where access permitted, three survey visits were conducted at approximately three-monthly intervals, in April, July and October 2023 when water levels were generally low. Surveys were not conducted during or shortly after heavy rainfall, as field signs may have been washed away. In addition, surveys were timed to avoid high water levels, or when river management works were scheduled (where practicable).
- 1.6.2.6 The following information was recorded for each watercourse surveyed for otter:
- The watercourse number reference
 - Signs of otter
 - Number of signs
 - Location
 - Photographs, including a site plan showing the location of the field signs.
- 1.6.2.7 Selected areas of terrestrial habitat within 100 m of the watercourses were surveyed for potential otter breeding sites. Habitat subject to these specific surveys comprised areas of extensive concealed habitat, including dense woodland or scrub. The surveyors carefully inspected the habitat for signs of otter breeding activity, such as well used paths, play areas or large accumulations of spraint. All field signs and evidence of breeding otter were recorded, along with its location using digital data capture.
- 1.6.2.8 All field surveyors were suitably trained and experienced in undertaking the survey methodologies set out in the following sections of this report.

1.6.3 Limitations

- 1.6.3.1 Some land located along the surveyed watercourses outside the Mona Onshore Development Area were not accessible due to unsafe topography, physical barriers (e.g. very dense vegetation, security fencing) or where access permission was not granted. Where surveyors experienced such limitations, surveyors assessed watercourses from a distance using binoculars and accessed neighbouring land to ensure habitats were appropriately assessed from different angles. All watercourses and adjacent land in the Mona Onshore Development Area was surveyed at least once.

1.7 Results

1.7.1 Desktop study

- 1.7.1.1 The desktop study confirmed that otter are distributed across Wales, but the population is in decline. Otter were present at 90% of the 1073 sites surveyed by Natural Resources Wales in 2010 but the occupancy had dropped to 70% in 2015 to 2018, indicating a decline of approximate 20% (Natural Resources Wales, 2021).
- 1.7.1.2 There were 19 historical records of otter from between 2011 and 2022 within the otter study area (i.e. within 2 km of the Mona Onshore Development Area). No otter records were recorded within the Mona Onshore Development Area.

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1.7.2 Site-specific surveys

- 1.7.2.1 The analysis of the extended phase 1 habitat survey confirmed that there were four watercourses located within the otter survey area with potential to support otter. Watercourses 1 and 2 were located at the eastern end of the water vole survey area, near the Onshore Substation. Watercourses 3 and 4 were located at the western end of the water vole survey area, towards landfall. The dates of the surveys are presented in Appendix A of this technical report. All four watercourses were considered suitable as they had potential foraging, commuting or breeding habitat and were subsequently surveyed.
- 1.7.2.2 Possible evidence of otter was recorded at two of the four watercourses. A possible otter holt was recorded at watercourses 1, approximately 274 m outside the Mona Onshore Development Area. A second possible otter holt was recorded at watercourse 3 within the Mona Onshore Development Area.
- 1.7.2.3 The results of the otter surveys, including the location of possible holts are shown in Figure 1.2 to Figure 1.4 of this technical report below.

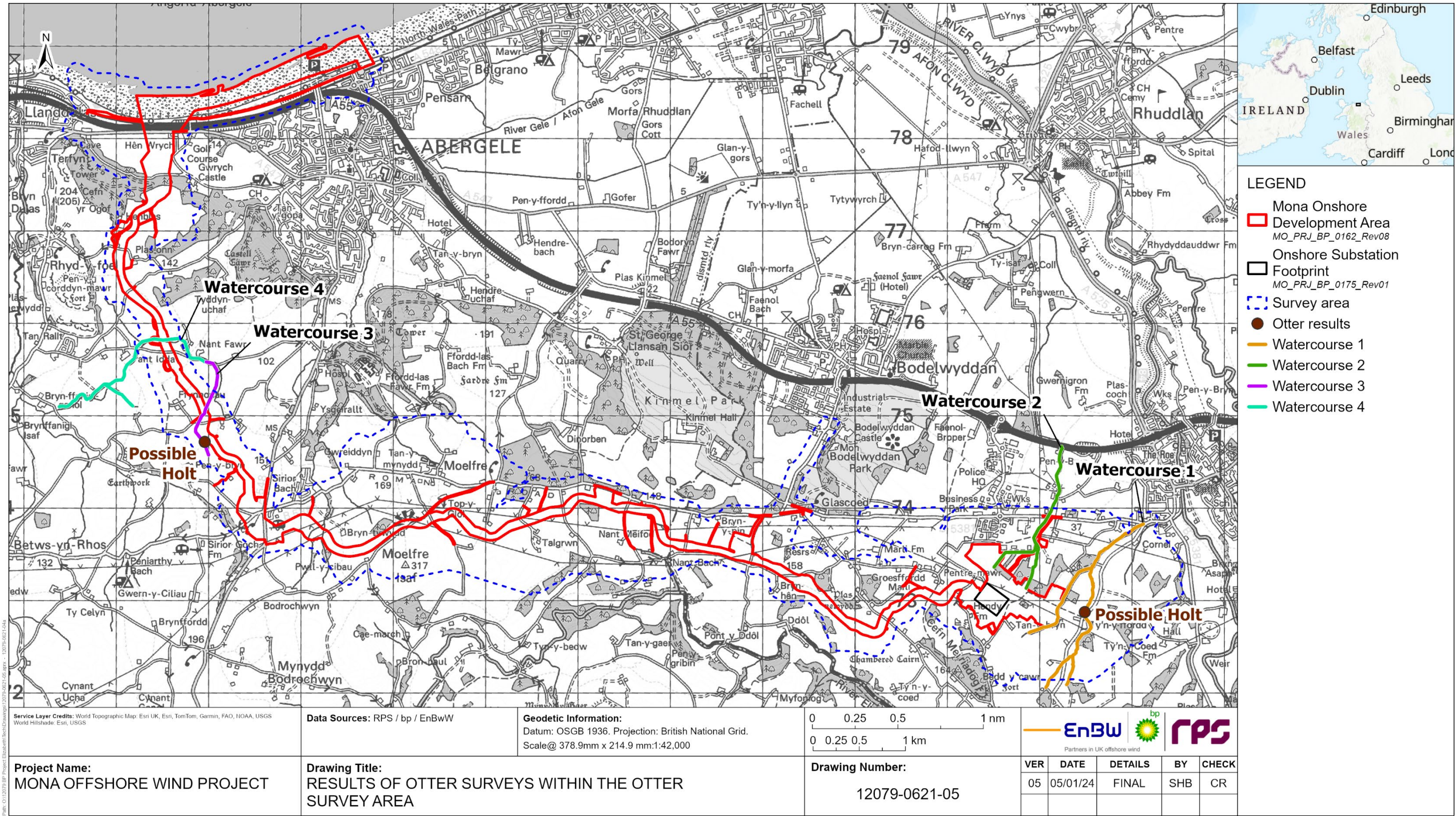


Figure 1.2: Results of otter surveys within the otter survey area.

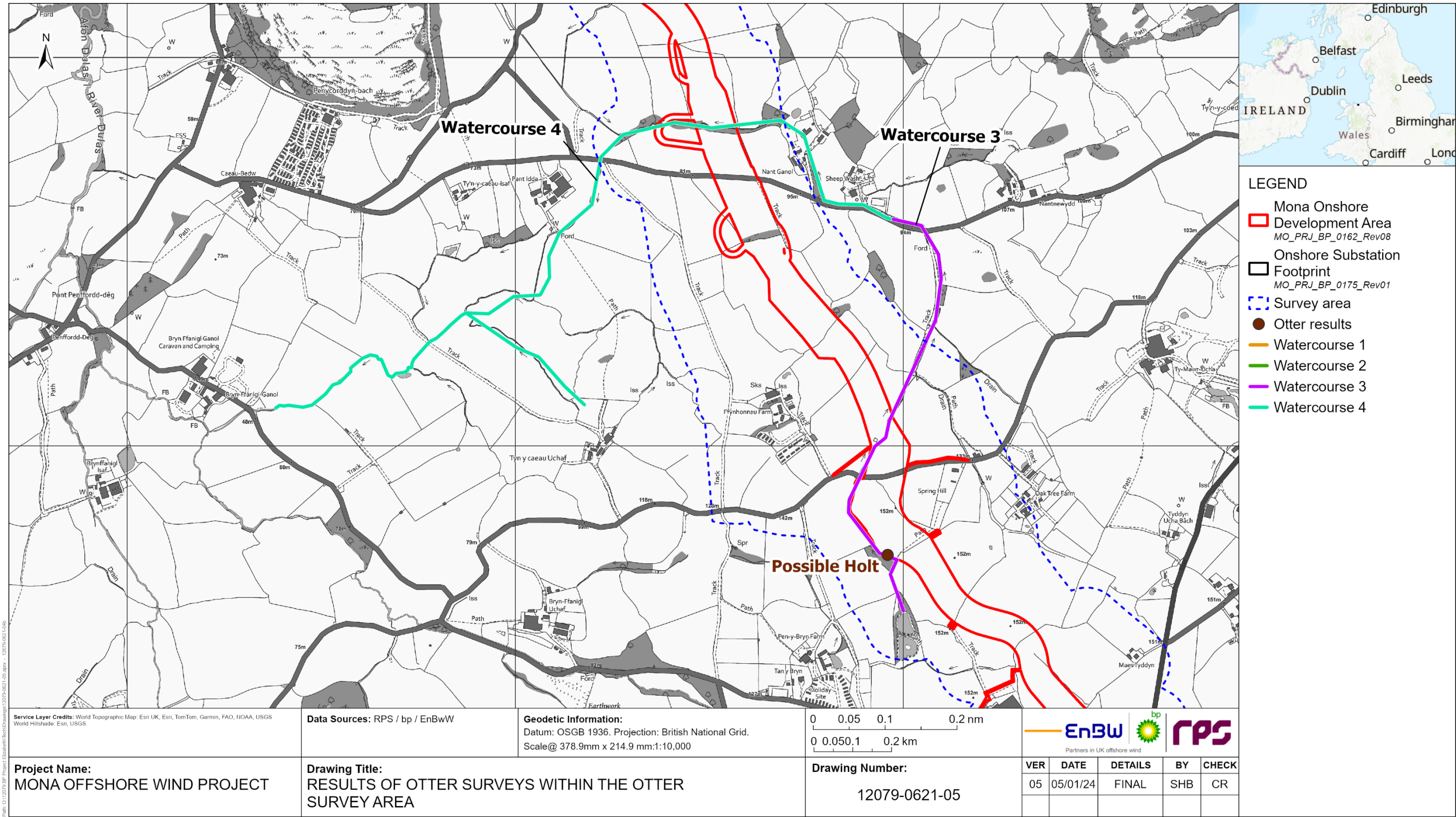


Figure 1.3: Results of otter surveys within the otter survey area.

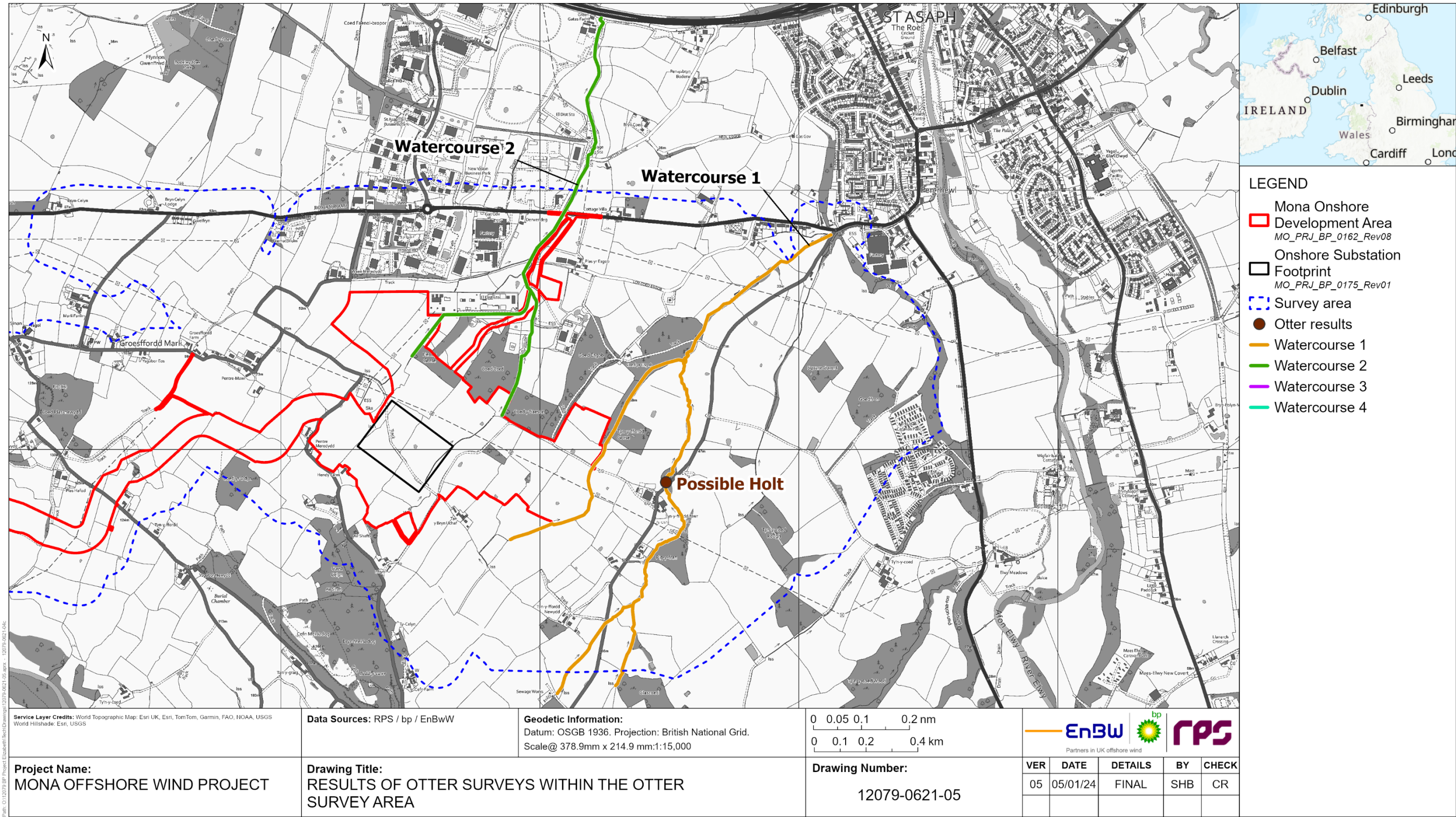


Figure 1.4: Results of otter surveys within the otter survey area.

1.8 Summary

- 1.8.1.1 This technical report presents the results of the otter surveys undertaken between April and October 2023 to inform Volume 3: Chapter 3: Onshore ecology of the Environmental Statement.
- 1.8.1.2 The desk study confirmed that otter are present across Wales, but the Welsh population has declined by approximately 20% in the past ten years. A total of 19 historical otter records from between 2011 and 2022 were confirmed within 2 km of the Mona Onshore Development Area. No historic otter records were confirmed within the Mona Onshore Development Area.
- 1.8.1.3 Four watercourses were identified as having potential to support water voles within the Mona Onshore Development Area. All four were surveyed. Three surveys of each watercourse were undertaken between April and October 2023.
- 1.8.1.4 Two possible otter holts were identified during the surveys. One 274 m outside the Mona Onshore Development Area at watercourse 1 and one within the Mona Onshore Development Area at watercourse 3. No evidence of otter was recorded in the Mona Onshore Development Area and no otter were directly observed.
- 1.8.1.5 Otter are present in the wider landscape, but their numbers are declining. It is likely there is a very small population present based on the evidence recorded during these surveys.

1.9 References

Chanin P (2003) Monitoring the Otter *Lutra lutra*. Conserving Natura.

Crawford, A. (2003) Fourth otter survey of England. Technical Report WI-061/TR. Environment Agency, Bristol.

Natural Resources Wales (2021), The Welsh National Survey for Otters shows partial decline of otter populations in Wales. Available at: Natural Resources Wales / The Welsh National Survey for Otters shows partial decline of otter populations in Wales. Accessed: November 2023.

Appendix A: Raw survey results – otter surveys

Table A. 1: Otter survey results

Site	Date	Signs recorded
Watercourse 1	4 th April 2023	Possible otter holt
	20 th July 2023	None
	9 th October 2023	None
Watercourse 2	5 th April 2023	None
	20 th July 2023	None
	9 th October 2023	None
Watercourse 3	6 th April 2023	None
	26 th July 2023	Possible otter holt
	10 th October 2023	None
Watercourse 4	6 th April 2023	None
	26 th July 2023	None
	10 th October 2023	None