Kingscroft Farm, Havant

Reptile Survey & Mitigation Strategy

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Report	Reptile Survey & Mitigation Strategy
Site Name	Land at Kingscroft Farm, Havant
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

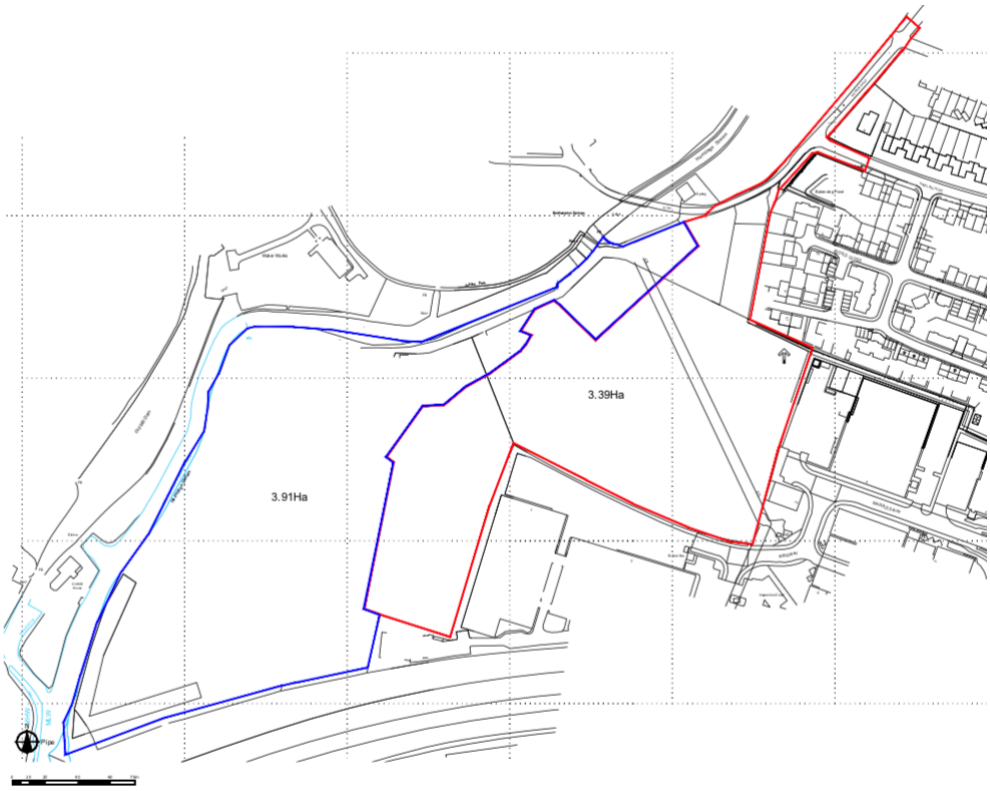
1.1 Summary

The site known as Kingscroft Farm (hereafter referred to as 'the site') has been subject to a suite of ecological survey work in support of an application for a residential development. As part of this work, a reptile survey was undertaken by Ecosupport in 2022 which identified a 'low' population of Slow Worms (*Anguis fragilis*) on site. As reptiles are legally protected in the UK and their presence is a material consideration when assessing a planning application, it is necessary to ensure they are not harmed as a result of development-related activities. This mitigation strategy details the measures which will be undertaken to avoid harm to reptiles during the development and maintain their conservation status within the local area.

1.2 Site Description

The site comprises of a series of land parcels (some of which are used as horse pasture) located to the north of the A27, Havant, PO9 1QJ (centred on OS grid reference SU 704 061) (**Fig 1**). The north and west of the site are bounded by Hermitage Stream, the east by an industrial estate and the south by the A27. The immediate surrounding environ is predominantly urbanised although the site is located within 0.4 km of the intertidal habitats associated within the Solent area SPA, SAC and Ramsar.

Figure 1. Redline location plan of the site.



1.3 Brief Description of the Proposals

The development will entail the construction of up to 120 new residential dwellings with landscaping and areas of POS.

1.4 Relevant Legislation and Policy

1.4.1 Nature Conservation Legislation

All of Britain's reptile species are legally protected to some degree. The four "widespread" reptile species (Viviparous Lizard, Slow Worm, Grass Snake and Adder) are protected from killing, injury and sale (including offering/advertising/transporting for sale), including parts or derivatives under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000 strengthened the Wildlife and Countryside Act by the addition of "reckless" offences in certain circumstances, such as where there is a likelihood of a protected species being present.

1.4.2 Policy

Due to their legal protection, Planning Policy also seeks to ensure that reptiles are not harmed as a result of development. National government guidance is provided by National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which places an onus on development to conserve and enhance biodiversity with a requirement for positive biodiversity outcomes wherever possible from the overall development process.

Policy CS11 Protecting and Enhancing the Special Environment and Heritage of Havant Borough

Planning permission will be granted for development that:

1. Ensures the key landscape and built form principles set out in the Havant Borough Townscape, Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment are protected and where possible enhanced by partnership working with developers, groups and the wider community.

2. Protects and where possible enhances the borough's statutory and non-statutory designated landscape, habitats and features of biological, hydrological or geological interest. Protection and enhancement will be achieved by appropriate adaptation and mitigation measures including wardening, education and information and the creation of new habitats, water bodies/courses planting of new trees and woodland.

3. Has particular regard to the following hierarchy of nature conservation designations within the borough (as identified on the Proposals Map): (i) Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar [International]. (ii) Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves [National]. (iii) Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), other Ancient Woodland not identified in (ii) above [Local].

4. Protects and where appropriate enhances the borough's statutory and nonstatutory heritage designations by appropriately managing development in or adjacent to conservation areas, listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, historic parks and gardens, archaeological sites, buildings of local historic or architectural interest.

5. Supports an ongoing programme of survey of habitats and species and designation of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.

6. Incorporates partnership working with conservation organisations to improve public understanding of biodiversity and to manage public access to designated sites, particularly on the coast, to reduce harm to nature conservation interests.

7. Incorporates partnership working with landowners and developers to ensure land management practices restore, enhance and where appropriate create new valued landscapes, habitats and their soil structure, particularly the ancient woodland remnants of the Forest of Bere and coastal salt marsh.

8. Protects wildlife habitats and wildlife corridors to prevent the fragmentation of existing habitats and to allow species, for example Brent Geese, to respond to the impacts of climate change by making provision for habitat adaptation e.g. coastal managed realignment and species migration.

9. Maintains undeveloped gaps between the settlements of Emsworth/Havant; Havant/Waterlooville; Havant/Portsmouth; Emsworth/Westbourne and Leigh Park/Rowlands Castle as shown on the Proposals Map.

10. Protects the best and most versatile agricultural land that has the greatest potential for local food security.

11. Responds to the emerging evidence from the Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project, the published recommendations, and future related research.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Survey Methodology

2.1.1 Desktop Survey

A data request submitted to the Hampshire Biological Records Centre (HBIC) by Ecosupport as part of the work undertaken for the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2022) using a 2 km search radius.

2.1.2 Field Survey

The surveys undertaken by Ecosupport were carried out in accordance with best practice guidelines as stated in various resources (Froglife 1999) (Gent & Gibson 1998) in April and May 2022. Artificial refugia comprising of bitumen roofing felt were distributed throughout the suitable reptile habitats on site. The distribution of 90 pieces of refugia throughout the identified suitable habitat on site. Seven visits to the site were subsequently undertaken during suitable weather conditions during which all the refugia were checked for the presence of reptiles in combination with a visual observation transect.

This survey is considered sufficient to identify the presence or likely absence of reptiles on the site. It does not provide sufficient information to allow an accurate assessment of population sizes, however, it does allow inferences to be made as to population size class in combination with other considerations such as the extent and quality of the habitat.

3.0 BASELINE CONDITIONS

3.1 Desktop Survey

HBIC returned records for Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*) (24 records) and Grass Snake (*Natrix helvetica*) (1 records) within 2 km of the site

3.2 Field Survey

The results of the reptile presence / likely absence survey are presented below in **Table 1** with the survey refugia distribution and numberings provided in **Fig 2**.

Table 1. Results of the reptile surveys undertaken on-site during April – May 2022. F = Adult Female, M = Adult Male, SA = Sub Adult, J = Juvenile and SW = Slow Worm.

Date	Start Time	Air Temp (°C)	Wind (Beaufort)	Cloud cover (%)	Slow Worms				Total (all SW)	Total (excluding SA and J)	Refugia No
					AF	AM	SA	J			
14/04/2022	12:00	14	1	60	0	1	0	0	1	1	3
21/04/2021	11:00	14	1	100	0	2	0	0	2	2	80
25/04/2022	15:00	14	2	100	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
29/04/2022	09:30	13	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	2	67 & 1
05/05/2022	09:30	13	2	50	2	0	0	0	2	2	66 & 67
10/05/2022	09:30	13	2	60	1	0	2	0	3	1	80,67 and 60
11/05/2021	10:00	14	3	70	0	1	1	0	2	1	60 and 7

Figure 2. The approximate locations of reptile mats (numbered 1-90) set out on site (blue = reptiles present, yellow = reptiles absent)

3.2.1 Evaluation

Given the size of the suitable areas of habitat, the number of refugia deployed and the maximum count of adults (which was 2), a **'Low'** population of Slow Worms (as defined by the Froglife guidance 1999) is present. Slow Worms are however relatively widespread in within Hampshire and as such the site it is considered to be ***Local Value*** for reptiles.

4.0 ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS IN THE ABSENCE OF MITIGATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the likely ecological impacts (both positive and negative) of the proposals in the absence of mitigation. In many cases, whilst a potential negative impact is identified at this stage, mitigation can be implemented to ensure no residual negative impacts. Correctly identifying the impacts of the development will ensure appropriate and proportionate mitigation to be designed and implemented.

4.2 Site Preparation and Construction Activities

Based on the latest layout, the areas where the reptiles were located are all within the boundary areas which are to be retained as part of the proposals. Therefore, site clearance works would avoid these areas ensuring all the reptile habitat is left *in situ*. If works are to be undertaken within the boundaries this would mean the reptile habitat loss is permanent. Should works take place within the boundaries then any reptiles that are present during the clearance of these areas, this could result in their death and/or injury. As all reptile species are protected, this would constitute an offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981). Given the size of the suitable habitat on site, the low numbers recorded during the surveys and the status of Slow Worms in Hampshire, loss of habitat and individual animals of these species would be significant (in terms of their conservation status) at the ***Local*** level.

4.3 Site Operation Activities

The development will result in an increased level of human activity within areas surrounding the site, which would also be used by reptiles. This is likely to result in increased disturbance of reptiles remaining within these areas and may reduce their ability to bask and forage. It may also increase their vulnerability to killing by humans and cats.

5.0 MITIGATION STRATEGY

5.1 Introduction

Due to the legal protection relating to reptiles, it is necessary to implement mitigation to ensure these animals are not harmed as a result of the impending construction works and to ensure that there is no net reduction in the conservation status of reptiles in the local area. Therefore, this mitigation strategy has been produced in accordance with best practice guidelines relating to reptiles and development, published by Gent & Gibson (1998) and the HGBI (1998).

5.2 Passive Dispersal

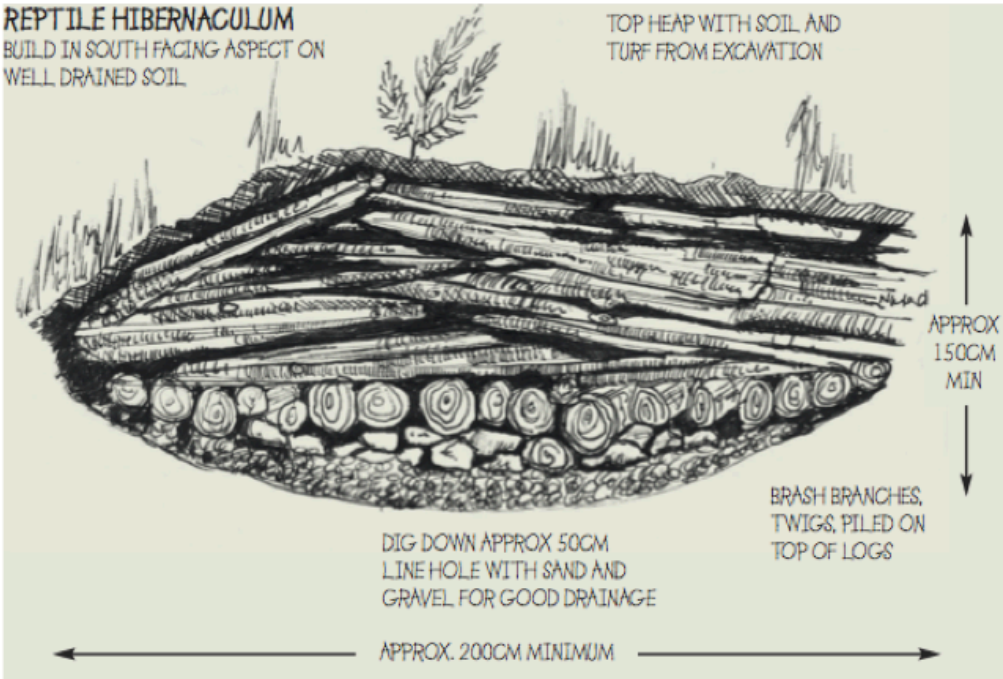
As only a small number of reptiles were found all within the boundary habitats on-site (which are largely being retained), a passive dispersal methodology is considered proportionate (***NB this strategy will remain valid provided the grassland areas are maintained as grazed / with a short sward height within the main body of site***)**.** Any potentially suitable habitat that needs to be cut will be done so using a 2-stage strim under supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist. During the first stage, the vegetation will be cut down to a height no lower than 15cm. Cutting will occur directionally, starting from the outside of the suitable areas towards the boundaries (that are to be retained) to encourage reptiles into the most suitable area of habitat, with the purpose to minimise the area requiring fencing as per **Fig 3**. A second cut (the following day) will take it right down to ground level. These works will be done prior to the installation of reptile fencing and will be undertaken during the active reptile period (April – September) when temperatures are above 12ºC with sunshine.

Figure 3. Indicative site layout with direction of passive dispersal (red arrows) clearance that will be undertaken. The approximate location of the 4 No hibernacula are shown by the yellow stars

5.3 Habitat Creation and Enhancement

Based on the nature of the existing habitats within the boundary habitats (i.e. areas of bordering scrub/hedgerows), the only potential enhancement anticipated would be the creation of 4 No wood-based hibernacula to provide reptiles with a suitable area to hibernate within (approximate locations shown in **Fig 3**). This will be created following the specification outlined within Reptile Habitat Management: Guidelines for Landowners (HART, 2009) (**Fig 4**).

Figure 4. Reptile hibernaculum design as provided in HART (2009).



It is not considered any other specific habitat enhancements measures will be necessary as the site already supports suitable habitat borders within which reptiles are present (with boundary hedgerows scrub and ruderal vegetation already present).

5.4 Protection of Ecology Area

5.4.1 During Construction

Once the passive dispersal has been completed and the site is due to commence building works, the edge of the retained areas will have a line of Heras fence or similar placed in front of it. Signage will be placed on this fence with phrases such as:

Protected Reptile Habitat, Do Not Disturb

This level of protection will remain in place for the duration of the construction works and the ecologist will make quarterly visits to the site to check on the integrity of the reptile fence and ensure any repairs are made as necessary.

6.0 REFERENCES

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