

Reptile Mitigation Strategy Kingsclere Avenue Update

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

As all British reptiles are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) and are listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species list as UK priority species. In the absence of appropriate mitigation, the proposed development would likely result in a breach in legislation. It is therefore necessary to implement the Mitigation Strategy below to ensure no reptiles are killed or injured as a result of the development and that the development will not impact the conservation status of reptiles within the local area.

The original Mitigation Strategy was to retain the small Slow Worm population on site however for security purposes the boundary fence has to be replaced. As a result the adjacent vegetation (containing the Slow Worms) will be subject to high levels of disturbance and destruction. It is therefore considered likely that an offence protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) would take place.

As a result it is now recommended that the Slow Worms on site are translocated off site. This new approach is still informed by best practice guidelines published by English Nature (2004) and the Herpetofauna Groups of the British Isles (HGBI) (1998).

1.2 Reptiles on Site

The survey identified a maximum count of three Slow Worms. Based on the results of the survey, it is estimated that the site supports a low population of Slow Worm as defined by HGBI (1998) guidelines. The Slow Worms were found to be present within the boundary vegetation. The results do not indicate that the site constitutes a Key Reptile Site (Froglife, 1999). The majority of the site is bounded by residential gardens therefore it is considered likely that the reptiles identified on site are part of a wider metapopulation.

1.3 Site Status Assessment

Slow Worms are considered relatively widespread in Hampshire and across the South of England, with those identified on site considered likely to be part of a larger population in the local area. That said they are still protected by wildlife legislation. Consequentially, the site is considered to hold **LOCAL VALUE** with regards to reptiles.

1.4 Impacts in the Absence of Mitigation

1.4.1 Initial Impacts

Prior to the retention of the boundary vegetation buffer, the site preparation and construction phases of the proposed works would have had the potential to harm/kill resident reptiles, due to the removal of vegetation, top soil and the excavation of footings. This would have likely constituted an offence under wildlife legislation, and an **adverse impact** on local reptile populations. Although this is no longer the case there is still the risk of machinery entering areas of suitable reptile habitat or accidentally clearing in part or the entirety of these areas. It is still likely that this would constitute an offence under wildlife legislation, and an **adverse impact** on local reptile populations, without measures put in place to protect the buffer.

1.4.2 Isolation and Fragmentation

Without mitigation the boundary vegetation could have been removed and so there would have been a lack of connectivity from the site to the adjacent gardens. As the proposed development will retain the majority of this, which connects the site to the wider landscape, is not considered likely that any significant habitat fragmentation and/or isolation will be caused to local reptile population.

1.4.3 Post-development Impacts

In the absence of mitigation/compensation, the proposed works could have resulted in the loss of suitable reptile habitat on site, which would constitute an **adverse impact** on local reptile populations. As it now stands, it is considered once the development is complete, there will be no post-development impacts.

2.0 MITIGATION AND COMPENSATION

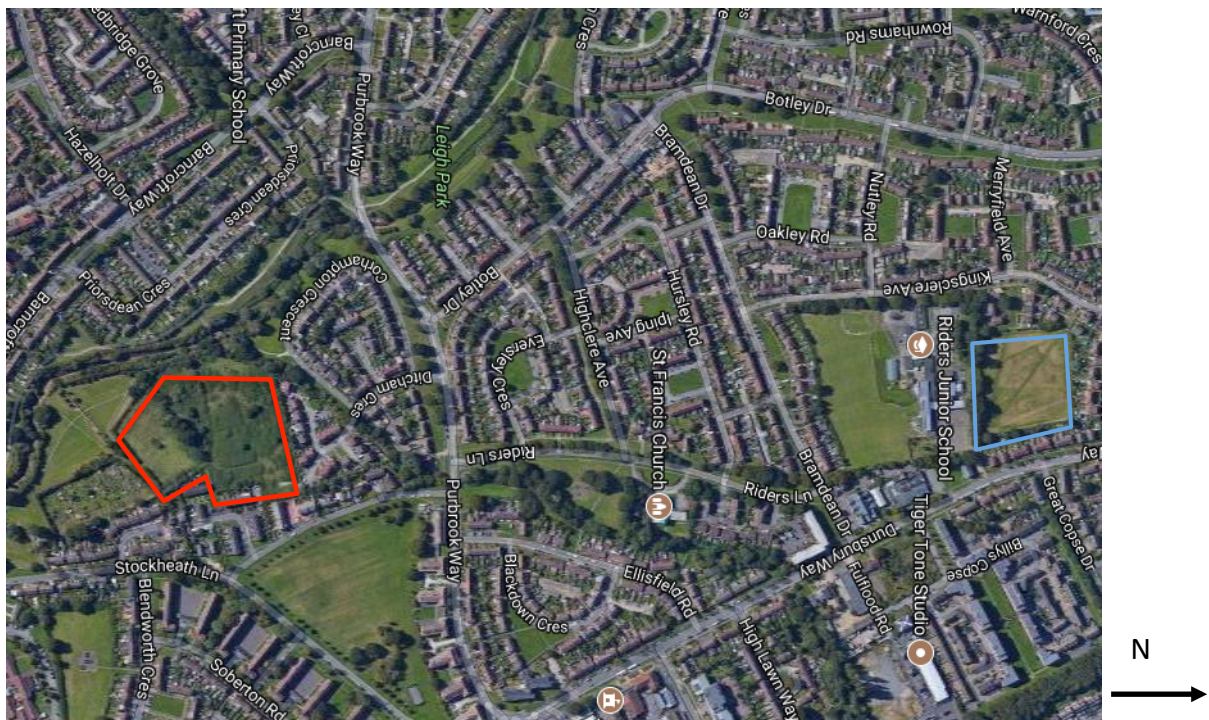
2.1 Aims

The general principles of reptile mitigation entail the protection of reptiles from harm by removing them from within the footprint of the development. The favourable conservation status of reptiles within the local area must also be maintained by ensuring there is sufficient suitable reptile habitat to support the reptile population.

2.2 Receptor Site

The Slow Worms will be relocated to a site close by off Stockheath Lane (**Figure 1**) which is also within the ownership of Portsmouth City Council.

Figure 1. Location of Receptor site (red) in relation to Kingsclere Avenue (blue).



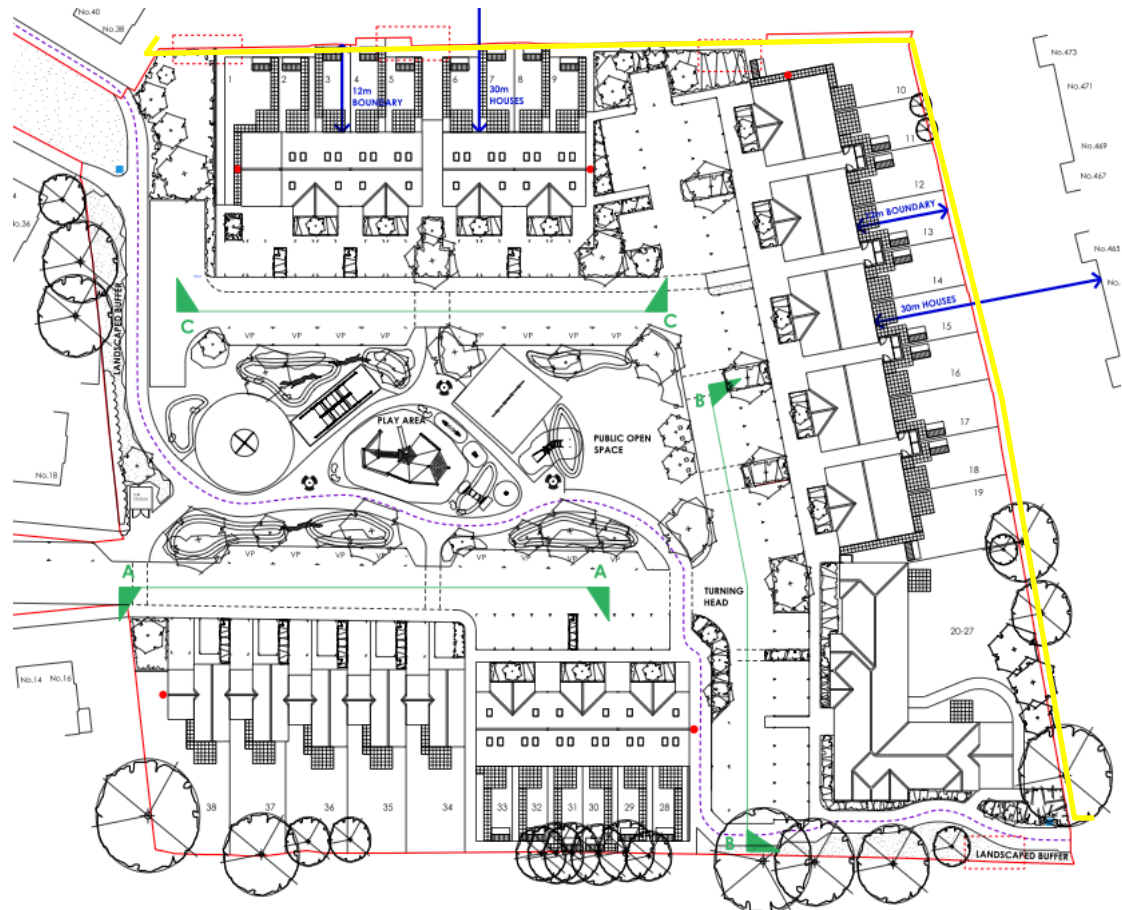
The site comprises public open space and allotments. Hermitage Stream runs along the western boundary of the site with residential development associated with St Francis Place, Sunnyheath and Riders Lane to the east. It consists of high quality habitat for reptiles. Although Slow Worms and Lizards (*Zootoca vivipara*) were recorded on site in 2015, given the small numbers to be relocated it is not considered this translocation will exceed the sites carrying capacity.

2.3 Fencing

Reptile exclusion fencing will be installed around the perimeter of the suitable reptile habitat. This will prevent reptiles from the adjacent gardens gaining access to

the site. The fencing will remain in place until all works are completed. **Figure 2** shows the location of the fencing in yellow. Once development is completed, the fence will be removed and will allow reptiles from adjacent areas to recolonize the site.

Figure 2. Location of reptile exclusion fencing.



2.4 Site Set Up

Artificial refugia will be distributed throughout the suitable reptile habitat. The refugia used will be a mixture of bitumen roofing felt and corrugated metal. The density will be increased to facilitate the capturing process and in an attempt to reduce the number of capture days required.

2.5 Capture

2.5.1 Timing

The optimum period for capture of reptiles is April to June and September, however it is possible to capture reptiles outside of this period providing weather conditions are suitable. The refugia will be distributed as soon as possible. Once seven days have passed, to allow the refugia time to bed in, the capture will get underway. By ensuring that all reptiles are translocated by the end of September, it will allow

sufficient time for reptiles to find suitable hibernation sites within the receptor site.

2.5.2 Catching

Suitably qualified ecologists, with experience in reptile capture, will carry out the trapping of reptiles during the active reptile season on days where reptiles were likely to be found (i.e. between 10°C and 20°C with little or no wind or rain).

Reptiles will be captured by hand from beneath the artificial refugia and placed into a suitable container. All captured reptiles will be released into the receptor area on the same day they are captured.

2.5.3 Capture effort

The HGBI guidelines (1998) suggest that for “low” populations of Slow Worms a density of at least 50 refugia for every hectare of suitable reptile habitat should be used over a minimum of 60 capture days. HGBI guidance also recommends that 50 artificial refugia are required per hectare. However, using increased refugia density, and given the limited size of the suitable area of reptile habitat (0.02ha), it is deemed proportionate to reduce the number of capture days to 10 days. **The capture effort will not be deemed completed until five consecutive negative days are recorded.** Therefore this may exceed 10 days.

3.0 POST DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND SITE SAFEGUARD

Stockheath Lane is safeguarded from development as access into the site is not achievable. It is not considered that specific management will be required within the site as reptiles already occupy the area under the current management regime and the site consists of high quality habitat. Therefore it will be subject to the same management as that which is currently in place.

The long-term aim of habitat management for reptiles is to provide a continued diverse habitat. Scrub habitat should not exceed 15% coverage of the site in order to create a structurally diverse habitat with ‘ecotones’ (i.e scrub/grassland interface) with suitable basking and foraging areas for reptiles. This is already the case on site.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Given the risk to reptiles now apparent on the existing site, it is considered the best way forward is to translocate them off site. It is considered that, providing the above steps are implemented, there will be no negative impacts towards reptiles.

5.0 REFERENCES

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