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Ref: ISP016

Dear Reuben,

RE: The Bus, Avenue Road, Hayling Island, Ecological Site Visit

CGC Environmental Manager Ruth Frith attending site on 22nd September 2021 to undertake an ecological site walkover of The Bus development site to confirm area of reptile suitable habitat and then to Northney Common to confirm presence of suitable reptile habitat and to consider potential area a reptile receptor site.

Summary of findings

The Bus, Avenue Road, Hayling Island

A walkover of the development site confirmed the findings of the previous ecological surveys. The majority of the centre of site was tussocky grass, scrub and tall ruderals with some small areas of bare ground or areas of bark chips. The boundaries consisted of hedgerows, scrub with occasional individual trees. Felled trees and logs are present at various locations throughout the plot, particularly along boundaries which provide opportunities for shelter and hibernation.

The conditions are consistent with the previous Phase Ecology Report (Arbtech, March 2020) and Phase 2 Ecological Assessment (Peach Ecology, September 2020). The site provides good quality habitat for common reptiles, particularly slow worms with hibernacula present in the form of deadwood, log piles and mound on the northern boundary. The Phase 2 reptile survey confirmed a low reptile population consisting of slow worms was recorded on site which were all confined to the boundary habitat of the site.

The proposed site area is 0.2 ha.

Receptor Sites for Reptiles

In accordance with Natural England Guidelines¹ receptor sites should:

- Be as close as possible to the development site, and within the same local planning authority if possible
- be at least the same size as the habitat that will be lost, and larger if the habitat to be lost is high quality (you can provide smaller habitat if it's substantially better quality)
- serve the same function as the habitat to be lost, eg it has hibernation features
- provide similar habitat to the area that will be lost, including water bodies
- that doesn't currently support the same species, but can be improved to make it suitable
- be safe from future development and managed in the long term

You can introduce small numbers of reptiles to an area with an existing population if you have improved the habitat so it can support the increased numbers.

You must allow enough time for new habitats to become suitable for the reptiles before you start to capture them.

Northney Common, Hayling Island

A walkover of Northney Common was undertaken from the car park on Northney Road following the footpath into the common.

Northney Common is an Area of Priority Habitat Inventory – Good Quality and semi improved grassland and Coastal Saltmarsh. It is recognised within the Havant Borough Council Biodiversity Strategy ²as a locations of potential Overwintering SPA Bird Refuge and borders the Chichester Harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Chichester Harbour is also designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Special Area of Conservation, Ramsar and Special Protection Area.

The majority of the common consisted of areas of dense scrub, occasional trees, tall ruderals and open areas of tussocky grassland. Some areas of the site were wetter particularly around ditches or supported reed beds and beyond the footpaths, tidal mudflats are present. In general the common presents itself as suitable habitat for reptiles, providing opportunities for shelter and basking on open areas and paths.

Two discrete areas were identified as potential areas suitable for translocation. Area 1 (approx. 0.2 ha) and Area 2 (approx. 0.3 ha) although both areas are connected and would provide a wider Foraging or dispersal range for reptiles. A further third area was identified with suitable habitat, however is smaller in area than the development site and was therefore discounted. It is included in the figure

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reptiles-protection-surveys-and-licences#avoidance-mitigation-and-compensation-methods>

² <https://cdn.havant.gov.uk/public/documents/Havant%20Borough%20Biodiversity%20Strategy.pdf>

below for information, and is directly connected to the other areas. A summary of both areas is provided below and in figure 1.



Figure 1: Potential reptile receptor sites

Area 1

This area is located NW of the Northney Road Carpark beyond the existing houses. A drainage ditch separates from the footpath heading north from the car park and separate path on the edge of the harbour leads into Area 1.

The area is a mosaic of habitats which includes patches of dense scrub (consisting mainly of blackthorn, dog rose and bramble), tussocky grassland with shorter areas of grass and occasional small trees (apple and elder).

The area provides key habitat requirements for reptiles:

Structural complexity – provided through a mosaic of habitat with different heights and types of vegetation. Denser scrub and grass tussock areas providing shelter, shade and cooler retreats.

Basking - Open areas of grassland comprising longer and shorter areas of grassland and trodden paths allow for unshaded areas for basking, bordered by patches of mixed height scrub.

Hibernation opportunities - on site would likely be provided through root holes, animal burrows and potentially in large grass tussocks. There was an absence of log piles or fallen trees which would also be suitable as hibernacula.

Other plant species observed include; Common fleabane, Creeping cinquefoil, Clover, Wild carrot, Creeping thistle, Dock, Common agrimony, Fescue Sp., Common centaury, Cats ear, Bristly oxtongue, Birdsfoot Trefoil and Sedges.

Area 2

This area starts just before the information board to the right of the main path. Follows the main path north and eastwards and includes suitable habitat on either side of the path.

A mosaic of habitat is present with bare ground in the location of the footpath, bound by shorter / trodden grass, which extends into tussocky grassland and then into dense scrub with occasional trees such as Sycamore Maple and Elder. The edge of the scrub is scalloped allowing for variation of size and shade into the more open grassland areas.

The scrub consisted mainly of blackthorn, bramble, hawthorn, dog rose, common dogwood and gorse is also present to the eastern end of the site.

As with Site 1 this area provides key habitat requirements for reptiles;

Structural complexity –a mosaic of habitat providing different heights and types of vegetation. Denser scrub and grass tussock areas providing shelter, shade and cooler retreats.

Basking - The open areas of grassland, shorter areas of grass, and footpaths allow for unshaded areas for basking, bordered by areas of mixed height scrub.

Hibernation opportunities - on site would likely be provided through root holes, animal burrows, and potentially in large grass tussocks. There was an absence of log piles or fallen trees which would also be suitable as hibernacula.

Other plant species observed within the grassland include: Hoary ragwort, Black Horehound, Common thistle, Clover, Bristly oxtongue, Burdock, Wild carrot, Creeping cinquefoil, Nettle, Ribwort plantain, Common mallow, Hogweed and Fescue Sp.

Summary and Recommendations

Receptor Site

In response to the NE Guidelines on suitability of the proposed areas (Northney Common) is summarised as follows;

Be as close as possible to the development site, and within the same local planning authority if possible	Northney Common is approximately 1km from The Bus and within the same local planning authority.
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Be at least the same size as the habitat that will be lost, and larger if the habitat to be lost is high quality (you can provide smaller habitat if it's substantially better quality)	On this basis either of the two identified areas would be a suitable size for a potential receptor site.
Serve the same function as the habitat to be lost, eg it has hibernation features	Suitable reptile habitat at The Bus was confirmed as mainly grassland with scattered areas of bramble scrub and tall ruderals with tree saplings. Providing areas for basking and shelter with log piles and felled trees providing additional hibernacula³. The proposed areas in Northney Common also host areas of grassland, dense scrub with occasional trees providing a mosaic of habitats and structural complexity suitable for shelter and hibernation. Open areas amongst the denser patches allowing for areas of basking reptiles. Log piles and felled trees were absent from the proposed receptor areas but could be provided through site management.
Provide similar habitat to the area that will be lost, including water bodies	
That doesn't currently support the same species, but can be improved to make it suitable	Reptile Survey of the site will confirm current usage by reptiles.
Be safe from future development and managed in the long term	The Site is located within Chichester Harbour Area of outstanding Natural Beauty, within Flood Zone 3 and within a Special Protection Area (SPA) Buffer Zone. It is located within DM9 Planning Zone (Development in the Coastal Zone) which puts heavy restrictions on any proposed development. The site is not a strategic site for development within the current Havant Borough Council Local Plan. Agreement / Liaison with Havant Borough Council to confirm the site is safe from future development should be agreed.

³ PHASE_1_ECOLOGY_APPRAISAL (Arbtech, march 2021) / PHASE_2_ECOLOGICAL_ASSESSMENT (Peach Ecology, 2021)

Reptile Survey

A survey of the potential receptor site is recommended to determine presence / likely absence of reptiles⁴. The survey will also help to establish general areas of the site being used by reptiles, size of population and any significant features being used by reptiles.

A reptile survey will also be able to inform the scale and specific location of habitat management required and can identify any key features or areas that might require special attention. In accordance with existing guidelines⁵ small numbers of reptiles can be introduced to an area with an existing population if the habitat is improved so it can support the increased numbers. Therefore a survey would help to inform the planning and management of the site.

Due to existing seasonal constraints, ie reptiles begin to go into hibernation in October a survey undertaken in 2021 will now be out of the optimal survey window. However as the current weather and temperatures are still within the acceptable range for surveys, they may still yield valuable results. It is recommended that a reptile survey of the chosen receptor site is established as soon as possible. Ideally survey set up should be undertaken week commencing 27th September 2021 or delayed until the optimal survey window in 2022. 30 artificial refugia are recommended to be set up in the survey area and seven separate survey visits should be conducted under good weather conditions in accordance with current guidance.

Area 2 may have more constraints in terms of being on the main footpath and attracting interests from members of the public who may be tempted to check under the artificial refugia or disturb them.

Management for Reptiles

As outlined above the proposed reptile survey will inform details of management within the receptor site but as a guide management should look to establish and maintain the following conditions⁴;

- Diverse or 'mosaic' vegetation structure, of open habitats and scrub..
- Habitat edges/transitional zones, for example between scrub or woodland and rough pasture, heathland or grassland, with a favourable aspect for basking.
- Connectivity of areas of suitable habitat within a site and beyond its boundaries.
- Open habitat created by removal of some trees and scrub; as shading can be caused by trees both on a site or adjacent to it. Low levels of tree cover can benefit reptiles by providing a greater variety of ground temperatures.
- Ground plants such as bramble may require management to prevent heavy shading at ground level and loss of the ground vegetation important for providing the varied habitat structure.

⁴ Reptile Habitat Management Handbook. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Edgar, P., Foster, J. and Baker, J. (2010)

⁵ Survey protocols for the British herpetofauna. Version 1.0. David Sewell, Richard A. Griffiths, Trevor J. C. Beebee, Jim. Foster and John W. Wilkinson. / Froglife advice sheet 10

The above can be achieved through the following methods and site specific details can be further informed from the outcome of the reptile survey;

- Cutting / mowing
- Scrub management
- Creating Habitat Features, for example;
 - Creating artificial hibernation sites
 - Brash and log piles can be installed to create cover, provide additional structure to the existing habitat and improve prey availability.

Engagement with the local community or council is also recommended to inform them of the proposals, survey and potential management requirements at the site. Post works monitoring may also be required.

Limitations

The site visit was conducted in September 2021 and is based upon the conditions encountered and the information available at the time of the survey. As with any survey, it is a documentation of what the surveyor observes on the specific survey day and their interpretation of those observations.

The Ecological walkover was not a full Preliminary Ecological Appraisal or Phase 1 survey and as such full botanical list of species present on site was not provided.

Due to the dense nature of the vegetation not all the verge could be walked, so much was viewed from accessible locations only.

Photographs

Area 1





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Area 2



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