



Land at Manderville, Hildenborough

Reptile Mitigation Strategy

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

For information relating to the site description and previous ecological survey work conducted for the site, refer to the following ECOassistance report, which was compiled to inform a previous planning application:

- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, dated 4th August 2020

The report referred to above identified that: *"The areas of rank improved grassland in the small fenced paddock situated immediately north of the garage, the areas immediately adjacent to the buildings to be demolished and on the eastern boundary where the proposed entrance is to be all contain suitable reptile habitat"*. On this basis, further survey work for reptiles was recommended, to inform the need for mitigation measures.

A further ECOassistance report ref: Bat Emergence/Re-entry Surveys, dated 9th August 2020 concluded that: *"...bats are not using the structure for roosting and it is anticipated there will be no loss of roosting habitat. No further survey work appertaining to bats is required prior to demolishing the outbuildings..."*. Therefore, bats are not considered further in this report.

1.2 Proposed Works

It is understood that the proposed works are the subject of a planning application to Sevenoaks District Council, the Local Planning Authority (LPA), for the demolition of the existing outbuildings and replacement with a new single-storey three-bedroom dwelling on approximately the same built footprint (i.e. on previously developed land), with no encroachment into the adjacent grassland field.

1.3 Aims of Study

To inform the planning application, GreenLink Ecology Ltd. has been commissioned to conduct an ecological walkover of the site to determine whether a reptile survey is required to inform the need for an Ecological Impact Assessment¹ (EclA), since the scope of the proposals has changed since the original PEA was undertaken and the extent of habitat to be affected is significantly reduced.

¹ CIEEM (2018) *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

2 Legislation and Policy

2.1 Reptiles

All species of reptile native to the UK are legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRow Act 2000) in respect of deliberate, intentional or reckless killing and injuring. Protection of reptile habitat is only extended to rare species including smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*) and sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), which have specialist habitat requirements that are not present on the site or within the surrounding area.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

The Government updated the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2019. The NPPF states that when determining planning applications, LPAs should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by encouraging opportunities to be taken for the incorporation of biodiversity in and around developments.

3 Methodology

A walkover survey was undertaken on 23rd February 2021 by experienced consultant ecologist Marcus Fry MCIEEM², focussing on the semi-natural habitats surrounding the existing outbuildings and looking for evidence of, or potential for reptiles.

On the day of the survey, the weather conditions were sunshine with scattered cloud and the temperature at midday was around 12°C.

² Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (Full)

4 Results

In summary, semi-natural habitat is present adjacent to the northern and western aspect of the outbuildings. To the south and east there is hard standing only.

The vegetation consists of short, species-poor grassland comprised of perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), annual meadow-grass (*Poa annua*), buttercup (*Ranunculus* sp.) and dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), along with a small amount of pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*), soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), willowherb (*Chamerion angustifolium*), common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and dock (*Rumex* sp.).

There was no evidence of, or significant potential for reptiles of any species. In particular, grass snake (*Natrix natrix*) and adder (*Vipera berus*) would not utilise the habitat as it is not suitable for these species. Common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) could potentially use the habitat, although it is insufficiently extensive, species-poor and disconnected from other suitable habitats in the surrounding area.

5 Assessment

5.1 Constraints

It was possible to access the entire site and the survey was undertaken by an appropriately qualified and experienced consultant ecologist. It is therefore considered that there were no significant constraints to the survey.

5.2 Potential Impacts

The extent of potentially suitable reptile habitat adjacent to the outbuildings is estimated to be less than 20m² and is not sufficient to support a significant number of reptiles of any species.

It is understood that until relatively recently, the overall area was used to rear pigs and llamas, which further reduces the potential for reptiles to be present, due to the level of disturbance.

Therefore, it is considered unlikely that reptiles would be present in this small area of potentially suitable habitat and as a result, should not be affected by the proposals, which are restricted to the existing built area footprint.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures for reptiles are recommended on a precautionary basis only, since the area of potentially suitable habitat is very small and it is unlikely that reptiles would be present and at risk of impacts.

Therefore, during the seasonal period when reptiles will be active and able to respond to disturbance (i.e. March to October – climate dependent) it is recommended that the vegetation is carefully removed using hand-held machinery in three stages. The first pass should take the height above ground level to circa 15cm and the subsequent second pass should be completed the following day, taking the height down to ground level after which the remaining vegetation can be mown flush to the ground and maintained this way for the duration of the proposed works.

It should be noted that if at any time during the implementation of the mitigation measures reptiles are actually recorded as present and are at risk of potential impacts, works should temporarily cease whilst an experienced ecologist is contacted and the measures reviewed to ensure that the risk of an offence being committed is avoided.

6.2 Enhancement Measures

To comply with the principles of the NPPF (Section 2.2) it is recommended that the proposals incorporate the provision of 1 no. tree-mounted Schwegler 2FN bat box on one of the mature oaks within the overall site, installed above 4-5 metres and not illuminated by any artificial lighting, along with 2 no. wall-integrated/wall-mounted bird boxes, installed above 2-3 metres on different aspects but not facing due south to avoid the risk of over-heating during the summer months.

7 Conclusions

GreenLink Ecology Ltd. was commissioned to review the PEA report compiled for a previous planning application and to undertake a walkover survey to evaluate whether a reptile survey is required to inform an EclA.

The results of the survey indicate that it is unlikely reptiles would be present in the small area of potentially suitable habitat and as a result, should not be affected by the proposals, which are restricted to the existing built area footprint. Therefore, mitigation measures for reptiles are recommended on a precautionary basis only.

In accordance with the principles of the NPPF, enhancement measures have also been recommended, which are considered to be pragmatic and proportionate to the scale of the development.

8 Disclaimer

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Nothing in this report constitutes legal opinion. If legal opinion is required the advice of a qualified legal professional should be secured.

9 Appendices

Appendix 1: Photographs of the site

Photograph 1: Illustrating the unsuitable semi-natural habitat to the west of the outbuildings



Photograph 2: Illustrating the sub-optimal semi-natural habitat to the north of the outbuildings

