

CALDECOTE FARM

NEWPORT PAGNELL · MILTON KEYNES

APPENDIX 6

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

ECOLOGY AND NATURE CONSERVATION

APPENDIX 6.3

REPTILE REPORT



Newlands Developments

Land at Caldecote Farm, Newport Pagnell

Appendix 6.3 Reptile Report

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following report has been prepared by FPCR Environment & Design Ltd on behalf of Newlands Developments and provides details of reptile surveys undertaken at a site known as ‘Land at Caldecote Farm, Newport Pagnell’.
- 1.2 This report should be read in conjunction with the Environmental Statement¹ and associated protected species reports produced for the site.

Site Location and Context

- 1.3 The site is located between Milton Keynes and Newport Pagnell in Buckinghamshire, central grid reference SP 8757 4228 (see Figure 1). The M1 motorway corridor forms the boundary to the west of the site, whilst Monks Way (A422) bounds the north / north-west boundary and Willen Road is located immediately to the east. Surrounding land use in the wider area consists of existing residential areas of Newport Pagnell to the north and Tongwell Industrial Estate and adjacent residential areas, comprising Willen and Blakelands to the west of the M1. To the east is an active sand and gravel extraction site and further afield consists of extensive open farmland and habitats associated with the River Ouzel.
- 1.4 The site comprises a field compartment which has been partially restored to agriculture following cessation of historic extraction activities. The site currently consists of species-poor grassland interspersed with tall ruderal species and scattered scrub. Remnant sand and gravel deposits, shallow ephemeral pools and bunds in varying stages of succession, between bare ground and poor semi-improved grassland, are located at the eastern periphery of the grassland. The site is bound by native hedgerows to the east, west and part of the north boundary, which widen to highway planting where associated with the A422 at the north-west and Willen Road to the south. The eastern-most extent of the site is formed by a short section of highway (Willen Road) and a section of adjoining arable field compartment.
 - 1.4.1. The site was originally subject to an extended Phase 1 Habitat survey in April 2016, which was subsequently updated on the 29th May 2018 and 21st January 2021, to confirm that there had been no significant alterations in the nature or extent of habitats or of their suitability for faunal species.
 - 1.4.2. Comments received from the Countryside Officer at Milton Keynes Council (Offer’s Committee Report, dated 10th June 2020, planning reference 19/02402/FUL)², in regard to reptile surveys undertaken on-site as part of a previous planning application, are detailed below.

“Reptile Report,

The reptile surveys were carried out between August and September 2016 and are therefore out of-date. Only two reptile records were returned from a BMERC data search and habitats suitable for reptiles were limited in extent. The site is isolated from surrounding habitats by the main road network and therefore recruitment of reptiles to the site is unlikely. No reptiles were recorded during the surveys. Therefore, further reptile surveys are not required, because of the low likelihood of reptiles being present”.

¹ FPCR, 2021 Land at Caldecote Farm, Newport Pagnell Environmental Statement

² Milton Keynes Council 10.06.2020 – CF – Officers Committee Report.pdf Available at: <https://publicaccess2.milton-keynes.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=PY2TIKKW0K600&activeTab=summary>

- 1.5 Taking note of these comments, no further surveys in regard to reptiles will be undertaken to inform this application. The assessment undertaken within this report is based upon the results of the reptile surveys undertaken in 2016, which are considered to provide an accurate account of reptile activity within the site, given its location and the limited habitats present.

Development Proposals

- 1.6 The proposals entail the erection of two storage and distribution units (Class B8) with associated access, car parking, servicing, landscaping, earthworks and drainage.

2.0 LEGISLATION

- 2.1 All common reptile species, including slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, common lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, grass snake *Natrix helvetica* and adder *Vipera berus*, are partially protected under Sections 9(1) and 9(5) of Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)³. This legislation protects these animals from:

- Intentional killing and injury,
- Selling, offering for sale, possessing or transporting for the purpose of sale or publishing advertisements to buy or sell a protected species.

- 2.2 This partial protection does not directly protect the habitat of these reptile species; however where these animals are present on land that is to be affected by development, the implications of the legislation are that providing that killing can be reasonably avoided then an operation is legal. Guidance provided by Natural England and the Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK recommends that this should be achieved by ensuring that:

- The animals must be protected from injury or killing,
- Mitigation is provided to maintain the conservation status of the species,
- Following operations the population should be monitored.

- 2.3 All common reptiles are also included on the list of species which are of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biodiversity in England as required under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006⁴. The S41 list is used to guide decision makers, including local planning authorities, in implementing their duty under Section 40 of the Act, to have regard to the conservation of Biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Desk Study

- 3.1 As part of the desk study the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC) was consulted during June 2016, and updated in January 2021, for information on existing ecological data regarding existing reptile records within a 1km radius of the site.

³ The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). [Online]. London: HMSO Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69> [Accessed 02/12/2014]

⁴ The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. [Online]. London: HMSO Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents> [Accessed 02/12/2014]

Field Survey

- 3.2 A strategic reptile presence/absence survey was undertaken in areas identified as being of potential suitable reptile habitat within the application site boundary. The survey was undertaken based on current best practice guidelines as detailed within the Herpetofauna Workers Manual⁵ and Froglife Advice Sheet 10 – Reptile Survey⁶. A total of 61 artificial refugia were placed within the survey area. The indicative locations are shown in Figure 1.
- 3.3 Surveys were undertaken between August and September 2016 by suitability experienced ecologists. Surveys were conducted in suitable weather conditions i.e. at a temperature of between 9°C and 18°C and when there was no strong wind or heavy rain. The prevailing weather conditions at the time of the surveys are provided in Table 1.
- 3.4 In addition, the surveys also followed the guidelines' recommendations by:
- Using regularly spaced roofing felt (0.5m²) as artificial refugia, with a black upper side,
 - Approaching refugia from downwind and avoiding casting a shadow and with care so as to not disturb basking animals when checking, and
 - That lifting and replacing naturally occurring or artificial refugia, to check for the presence of reptiles, is undertaken with care as to avoid potential harm to any animals.

Table 1: Survey Dates and Weather Conditions

Survey	Date	Temp. (°C)	Cloud	Rain	Wind
1	17/08/2016	17	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	26/08/2016	16	N/A	N/A	Light breeze
3	30/08/2016	17	N/A	N/A	Light breeze
4	12/09/2016	17	Partial cover	N/A	Light breeze
5	21/09/2016	18	Overcast	N/A	N/A
6	23/09/2016	14	N/A	N/A	N/A
7	29/09/2016	17	Partial cover	N/A	Slight breeze

Limitations

- 3.5 Reptile surveys were not undertaken on land within the highways which comprised mainly busy roads, considered unlikely to support reptile populations that wouldn't otherwise be recorded within the main site. Any junction improvement works are anticipated to occur largely within the extent of the existing carriageways and are unlikely to be subject to any significant effects from habitat change.

⁵ (2003) Herpetofauna Workers Manual

⁶ Froglife (1999) Reptile Survey: An introduction to planning, conducting and interpreting surveys for snake and lizard conservation. Froglife Advice Sheet 10.

4.0 RESULTS

Desk Study

- 4.1 Consultation with BMERC in 2010, and January 2021, returned two records of grass snake at 700m and 1.4km south of the site boundary, separated from the application site by the presence of the M1 Motorway and extensive built up areas of Willen and Tongwell. No records were returned for habitats within the boundary of the site and no statutory or non-statutory designated sites of nature conservation importance for reptiles were highlighted within the search area.

Field Survey

Habitat Assessment

- 4.2 Habitats within the boundary of the site were considered to provide some suitability for reptiles, particularly areas associated with the eastern peripheries of the central field compartment which comprised vegetated bunds, ephemeral pools and bare ground. These habitats however formed only a small proportion of the total area of the site, with the remainder comprising poor semi-improved grassland of low suitability subject to regular ploughing as a form of on-going vegetation management. The value of the site was further limited by the surrounding road network which was considered to act as a barrier to the dispersal of reptiles and so isolate the site from any surrounding suitable habitat.

Reptile Survey

- 4.3 During the course of the surveys no reptiles were recorded or observed.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- 5.1 Habitats within the boundary of the site provided limited suitability for common reptile species. Existing records of grass snake are present for the wider area, however these are separated from the site by a considerable distance as well as by intervening barriers such as the M1 motorway and extensive urban areas.
- 5.2 Reptile surveys were last undertaken during the latter stages of 2016, during which time no reptiles or signs of reptiles were recorded. Given these survey results and the sub-optimal nature of the majority of on-site habitats the presence of reptile species on-site is considered extremely unlikely and as such they can be reasonably discounted and do not pose a constraint to the proposals. The extremely isolated nature of the site also suggests that future recruitment of reptiles to the site is highly unlikely and as such no further survey or mitigation is considered necessary going forward.

Biodiversity Enhancements

- 5.3 Opportunities for enhancement of habitats for reptiles are present throughout the proposed scheme, especially in conjunction with the western periphery within the existing M1 Motorway Wildlife Corridor. Creation and enhancements of habitats in these areas will provide a mosaic of habitats suitable for reptiles providing areas for sheltering and foraging as well as improved habitat links.
- 5.4 Further enhancement in the form of artificial hibernacula and log piles in suitable locations could be created to provide overwintering and basking opportunities. These features should be placed at the transition zone between habitats to maximise their value to reptiles throughout their life cycle.



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Key

- Site Boundary
- Reptile Refugia Locations

fpcr

client
Newlands Developments

project
Land at Caldecote Farm, Newport Pagnell

drawing title
Reptile Refugia Locations

scale
1:4000

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Figure 1