

LAND AT GREEN LANE, ASHWELL

REPTILE SURVEY REPORT

Prepared for Osprey Homes

by

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HDA Document Control and Quality Assurance Record

APPENDICES

A Reptile Survey Summary Plan

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location and summary description

1.1.1 This report describes a reptile survey of approximately 0.38ha of Land at Green Lane, Ashwell, hereinafter referred to as 'the site'. The site centre is located by National Grid Reference TL 27312 40096. The study was commissioned by Osprey Homes in October 2023.

1.1.2 The site is located to the north of the village of Ashwell in Hertfordshire, and comprises part of a residential garden. The site is dominated by a well-managed modified grassland lawn with an area of mixed scrub to the north of the site and a small area of semi-natural broadleaved woodland spanning much of the eastern boundary. The site is bordered by paddocks to the north; arable farmland to the west and east; and the village of Ashwell to the south. A full description of the habitats within the site is provided in the Ecological Appraisal report (HDA, 2024).

1.2 Background and legislative context

1.2.1 Four species of reptile are widespread in England: Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and Adder *Vipera berus*. The Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca* are restricted to certain sand dune and heathland sites.

1.2.2 Reptiles can be found in a range of habitats and typically require a mosaic of vegetation types. Habitat interfaces are important with reptiles requiring woodland, scrub or hedgerow for shelter, with adjacent longer vegetation for hunting and patches of sheltered short turf, bare ground or log piles for basking areas. Areas which catch the sun (i.e. those with a southerly aspect) are preferred over those where direct sunlight is absent for most of the day. In addition, Grass Snakes favour damp habitats such as those associated with still and running water, grazing marshes, mires etc.

1.2.3 All species of reptile are protected through Sections 9(1) and 9(5) of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). It is an offence to:

- Intentionally kill or injure any reptile; and
- Sell, offer for sale, possess or transport for the purposes of sale or publish advertisements to buy or sell any reptile.

Due to their rarity, Sand Lizards and Smooth Snakes have additional protection.

1.2.4 Reptiles across the UK have undergone significant declines in recent years and all native reptile species are listed as priority species on the UKBAP and identified as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural

Communities (NERC) Act. Section 40 of the Act requires that these species are a material consideration in the planning process.

1.3 Development proposals

1.3.1 The site is proposed for the provision of residential development comprising 7 homes with garages, vehicular access, landscaping and associated works.

1.4 Scope and purpose of the report

1.4.1 The desk study carried out as part of the Ecological Appraisal (HDA, 2024) identified the presence of reptiles within the wider area, and the extended Phase 1 habitat survey identified the presence of potentially suitable reptile habitat across the site in the form of scrub and woodland edge habitats.

1.4.2 A reptile survey was subsequently undertaken to inform an assessment of the likely effects of the proposed development of the site on reptiles and this is the subject of this report.

The aims of this study are:

- i. To establish the presence/probable absence of reptiles at the site;
- ii. To assess the relative importance of different parts of the site for reptiles; and
- iii. To predict likely impacts potentially arising from the proposed development of the site on reptiles and give recommendations for impact avoidance, minimisation and mitigation.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The methodology has been devised to accord with the requirements of all relevant legislation and good practice guidance, including the Herpetofauna Worker's Manual (JNCC, 1999) and Reptile Survey guidance (Froglife, 1999).

2.2 The site was surveyed on six occasions by Filippo Faraone and Gerald Selvey of HDA. Surveys were generally carried out during optimum temperature and weather conditions (intermittent or hazy sunshine, temperature between 9°C and 20°C and low winds). Dates of survey visits, with survey timings and weather conditions, are shown in *Table 1* below:

Table 1: Survey times and weather conditions

Survey visit	Date	Time of Visit	Weather conditions	Temp (°C)
1	08-05-2024	10:00 – 10:15	25% cloud cover, Beaufort Scale = 1, clear and dry	13
2	09-05-2024	17:00 – 17:15	0% cloud cover, Beaufort Scale = 1, clear and dry	21
3	05.06.2024	11:00 – 11:15	80% cloud cover, Beaufort Scale = 3, clear and dry	13
4	13-06-2024	14:00 – 14:15	100% cloud cover, Beaufort Scale = 2, clear and dry	16

Survey visit	Date	Time of Visit	Weather conditions	Temp (°C)
5	17-06-2024	11:30 – 11:45	10% cloud cover, Beaufort Scale = 0, clear and dry	20
6	19-06-2024	15:15 – 15:50	60% cloud cover, Beaufort Scale = 3, clear and dry	19

2.3 Two methods of surveying were used. Firstly, artificial refugia (squares of roofing felt 0.5m x 0.5m) were placed, in advance of the survey commencing, at potential basking areas throughout the site. A total of 20 refugia were placed across the site, giving a total density of approximately 60 refugia per hectare. This is above the recommended density of 5 to 10 refugia per hectare and was intended to increase the chance of encountering reptiles and, if present, provide a more accurate indication of their distribution within the site. Locations of refugia are shown on the map in *Appendix A*.

2.4 During each of the six subsequent visits, each refugium was inspected for any reptiles basking on the upper side, then lifted and checked for sheltering animals before being carefully replaced.

2.5 The second survey method involved transect searches across suitable habitats within the site. This ensured that all areas were represented in the survey, and that the survey was not biased towards those reptiles more likely to use refugia. Transect searches involve walking slowly around the site, visually searching potential basking areas and marking the locations of any reptiles observed on a map. Potential reptile refuges already present on the site such as logs were also lifted to check for the presence of reptiles.

2.6 The following information was recorded for each reptile survey: species seen, number of animals seen, location (refugium number), date, start and finish times, temperature and weather.

Limitations

2.7 The reptile surveys were carried out at appropriate times of the year during suitable weather conditions for reptile activity. On one occasion the temperature exceeded 20°C but it has been HDA's experience that minor exceedances do not significantly change rates of detection, and in some instances may improve detection of reptiles. It is therefore considered that no significant limitations were encountered during the surveys and the survey findings allow a robust assessment of the likely effects of the proposed development on reptiles and basis for the recommendations provided in *Section 5* of this report.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Habitat assessment

- 3.1.1 The majority of the site comprises low quality reptile habitat in the form of a well managed modified grassland lawn with some moderate quality reptile habitat, albeit limited in extent, provided by scrub and woodland edge habitats.

3.2 Refugia and visual searches

- 3.2.1 Despite the presence of suitable habitat for reptiles within the site, no reptiles were recorded during the reptile survey.

4 SITE EVALUATION

- 4.1 A number of guidelines are used to evaluate the importance of a site for reptiles, based on both the population density and number of species present, in addition to historical factors.

- 4.2 The Guidelines for Biological Selection of SSSIs (JNCC, 2022) identifies that for the more common and widespread species of reptile (Adder, Grass Snake, Common Lizard and Slow-worm) the following criteria should be considered for candidate SSSIs:

- The best 5 locations supporting established populations of Adder in any area of search; and/ or
- The best localities in which three or more common and widespread reptile species occur.

The presence of populations of one or two common and widespread reptile species, should also count positively in the evaluation of potential SSSIs chosen largely on other grounds, especially where populations are large, located in areas where the species concerned is rare or at the geographical limits of its range.

- 4.3 The Herpetofauna Workers' Manual (JNCC, 1998) suggests that sites falling outside of the SSSI selection criteria should be designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) if they meet the following criteria:

- Any site with a large population of a single species;
- Any site with a moderate population of two species;
- Any site at the edge of the geographical range of a species; and
- Any site with a long documented history.

- 4.4 The Key Reptile Site register is a mechanism designed to promote the safeguard of important reptile sites. To qualify for the register, the site in question must meet at least one of the following criteria (Froglife, 1999):

- Supports three or more reptile species;
- Supports two snake species;

- Supports an exceptional population of at least one species (*Table 2*);
- Supports an assemblage of species scoring at least 4 (*Table 2*); and
- Does not satisfy the above criteria but is of particular regional importance due to local rarity (e.g. in the East Midlands, Adders are very rare so even "low" populations should be designated as Key Sites).

The criteria for scoring populations of the four common reptile species for the purposes of the Key Reptile Register are given in *Table 2* below.

Table 2: Population parameters for the Key Reptile Sites register

Reptile species	Low population Score 1	Good population Score 2	Exceptional population Score 3
Adder	<5	5-10	>10
Grass Snake	<5	5-10	>10
Common Lizard	<5	5-20	>20
Slow-worm	<5	5-20	>20

Figures in the table refer to maximum number of adults seen by observation and/or under tins (placed at a density of up to 10 per hectare) by one person in one day.

- 4.5 Despite the presence of suitable habitat within the site, no reptiles were recorded during the reptile survey. The site is therefore extremely unlikely to qualify for consideration as a SSSI, SINCR or Key Reptile Site either wholly or in part, and is considered to be of negligible importance for reptiles in a local context.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 No reptiles were recorded during the reptile survey. It is therefore considered that the site does not support reptiles on a regular basis and that where areas of suitable reptile habitat are affected by the proposed development, reptiles are unlikely to be present. No mitigation specific to reptiles is therefore currently recommended in relation to the proposed works.
- 5.2 It is recommended however that any need for mitigation is reviewed at an appropriate stage prior to works commencing in order to allow consideration of any changes to management of habitats at the site which may have affected their ability to support reptiles since this report was produced, or time that has passed since the 2024 survey was undertaken.
- 5.3 Notwithstanding the apparent absence of reptiles from the site, consideration should also be given to inclusion of areas of suitable reptile habitat within the landscape scheme for the proposed development, such as scrub and hedgerow planting. The value of these habitats could be further enhanced through provision of refuge and hibernation opportunities such as log piles and purpose built hibernacula. This would be in keeping with planning policy and guidance and Section 40 of the 2006 NERC Act.

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APPENDIX A

Reptile Survey Summary Plan



KEY

- Site boundary
- Reptile refugia

No reptiles recorded

CLIENT:
Osprey Homes

PROJECT:
Land at Green Lane, Ashwell

TITLE:
Reptile Survey Summary Plan

SCALE AT A3:
1:500

DATE:
September 2024

1139.1 / 04b

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