Elite Ecology

Passionate about Ecology

Dower House,

Harlington

Reptile Method Statement

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0. Executive Summary

This report has been prepared at the request of Mr. Michael Edwards (Komfort Services). It relates to the potential presence of reptiles at the proposed works site located at Dower House, High Street, Harlington, Bedfordshire, UB3 5DH (OS Grid Reference: TQ 08846 77323).

Under the current proposals, the plans are to rebuild the listed building, and create thirteen additional residential dwellings with new access and community woodland. This will result in both the permanent and temporary loss and/or alteration of some of the habitats located on the proposed re-development site.

Based on the information gathered, the proposed scheme of works at Dower House, Harlington will have a **low** impact on the local reptile populations during the construction phase. This is because the terrestrial habitats at the site contain potential to support reptiles.

Please refer to **Section 5** for the recommendations for this project, including the method statement to be adhered to.

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Report Rationale

This report has been prepared at the request of Mr. Michael Edwards (Komfort Services). It relates to the potential presence of reptiles at the proposed works site located at Dower House, High Street, Harlington, Bedfordshire, UB3 5DH (OS Grid Reference: TQ 08846 77323).

Following this method statement will ensure that the development does not cause harm to any reptiles in accordance with Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

1.2 Site Description and Works

The site is located within in an urban setting in the village of Harlington, found within the London Borough of Hillingdon.

The site measures approximately 0.7ha and contains a number of habitats. These include broadleaved scattered trees, buildings, coniferous scattered trees, fence, hard standing ground, other habitat (waste piles), recently felled broadleaved trees, scattered scrub, short ephemeral, tall ruderal, and wall. The habitats on site could have the potential to support a number of protected species.

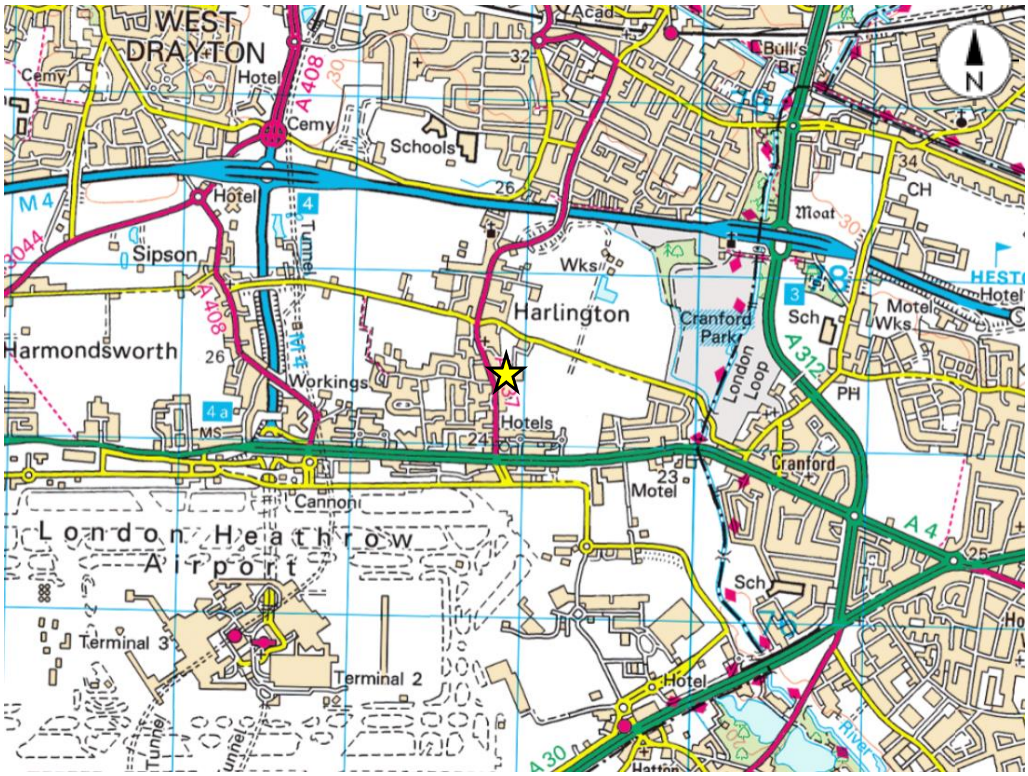
Within the wider landscape, further habitats are present. These come in the form of amenity grassland, arable land, buildings (and their associated gardens/yards), hard standing ground, hedgerows, scattered trees, standing water, and woodland. The habitats that surround the site also have the potential to be utilised by reptiles.

Under the current proposals, the plans are to rebuild the listed building, and create thirteen additional residential dwellings with new access and community woodland. This will result in both the permanent and temporary loss and/or alteration of some of the habitats located on the proposed re-development site.

Figure 1: An aerial map showing the boundary of the site at Dower House, Harlington (as shown by the red outline)

Figure 2: An aerial map showing the boundary of the site at Dower House, Harlington (as shown by the yellow star) in relation to some of the local landscape.

Figure 3: An OS map obtained from Bing showing the location of Dower House, Harlington (yellow star).



2. Desktop Study

The local records centre was commisioned to provide data on reptile species within 2km of the site. Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) was the relevant local records centre for this project.

Reptiles

Within the ecological data search provided by GiGL, no reptile species have been identified within 1km of the survey site.

3. Field Survey

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was undertaken by Elite Ecology in March 2023. During this field survey of the site, twelve habitat types were present. These are as follows (in habitat code order):

- **A1.1.1 –** Broadleaved Woodland
- **A2.2** – Scattered Scrub
- **A3.1** – Broadleaved Scattered Trees
- **A3.2** – Coniferous Scattered Trees
- **A4.1** – Recently Felled Trees
- **C3.1** – Tall Ruderal
- **J1.3** – Short Ephemeral
- **J2.4** – Fence
- **J2.5** – Wall
- **J3.6** – Building
- **J4** – Hard Standing Ground
- **J5** – Other (Waste Piles)

Some of these habitats were deemed to be of value to reptiles, namely broadleaved woodland, scattered scrub, and tall ruderal. It was concluded that the habitat mosaics at the site are conducive for the local reptile populations. Therefore, it was deemed possible that reptiles are present on the site. The habitats adjacent to the site are also deemed suitable for utilisation by the local reptile populations.

4. Impact Assessment

Based on the information gathered, the proposed scheme of works at Dower House, Harlington will have a **low** impact on the local reptile populations during the construction phase. This is because the terrestrial habitats at the site contain potential to support reptiles.

Therefore, mitigation measures will have to be implemented on site in case a reptile is encountered during the works.

This reptile method statement is only relevant to the habitats located on site and presents a best practice working approach to ensure that otherwise legitimate works do not inadvertently harm reptiles and/or cause a breach in the law.

5. Recommendations

Due to the potential for reptiles to be present, the following working methods should be adhered to. This will ensure that all herptiles that may be present are protected. The following methods should be adhered to.

5.1 General Methods

- On day one of the works, a toolbox talk will be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist. This will educate contractors in relation to the amphibians and reptiles that could be encountered and the legislation covering them. Associated documentation will be left with the site manager/project manager. This documentation will include contact details for Elite Ecology and the licenced ecologist appointed to the project. If reptiles are discovered during works the appointed ecologist should be contacted for further advice, and if necessary, on-site assistance.

- Prior to the commencement of the works, a walkover survey of the area will be undertaken to confirm that no alterations in baseline conditions have occurred. This will also search for the presence of any amphibian or reptile species on site, as well as considering the presence of other protected species such as nesting birds and badgers (*Meles meles*).

- All workers at the site will be inducted into the ecology constraints. This will include protocols to be adhered to should any reptiles or protected species be found during the works. This method statement and contact details will be left in the site office for the duration of the works.

5.2 Vegetation Clearance

- Passive displacement of reptiles is sufficient for this project. This is due to the relatively small size of the site, along with the suitable woodland habitat at the east of the site not causing a negative effect on any species that may be encountered.

- Passive displacement is required to be undertaken in suitable weather conditions and **avoid** a combination of the following conditions:

  - Temperature below 9ºC.
  - Rain or dense fog.
  - Strong winds/blustery conditions.

- Ecologists will be on hand to actively translocate any specimens, by hand, to the receptor site, should they not move on their own volition.

- Canopy removal of woody vegetation may occur to a height of 200mm above ground level. This is required to be undertaken during suitable conditions, following a precautionary pre-commencement inspection for other species, such as nesting birds.

- Vegetation clearance shall subsequently follow a strategic pattern. This must begin at west of the site, and progress eastwards, encouraging the reptiles towards suitable scrub and woodland habitat at the east of the site. This is done in an attempt to encourage any reptiles present to disperse of their own volition. Two ecologists will need to supervise this – one supervising the vegetation clearance and the second to ensure no reptiles go westwards, preventing any harm from vehicles.

- The vegetation clearance shall initially reduce vegetation to 200mm. This will then be followed by a second wave of vegetation clearance after a one-to-two hour gap, to reduce vegetation to 50mm.

- All arisings from vegetation clearance not used for the creation of new hibernacula/habitat piles must be removed from the working area immediately.

- Any existing hibernacula/habitat piles (features such as rubble piles, log piles, and tree/hedgerow roots) will then be removed by hand under the supervision of the ecologist. Any reptiles caught will be relocated to suitable habitat to be retained.

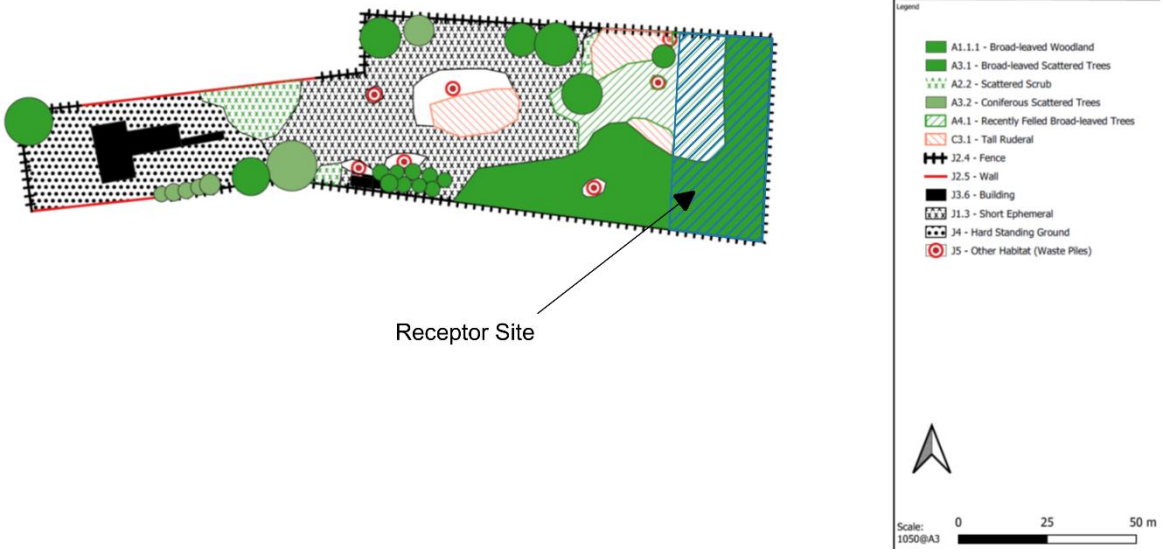
- All construction materials and products to be used at the site must be stored on pallets in a compound located away from any potential reptile habitat. This is to prevent any reptiles getting harmed during the construction phase.

5.3 Mitigation Strategy

Stage 1 – Habitat Creation and Receptor Site Selection

It is recommended that a section at the east of the site is used as the receptor site. This area consists of scrub and woodland providing ideal habitat for reptiles. Using this pre-existing habitat will lessen the risks of reptiles being isolated in fragmented sections of vegetation.

Figure 4: A Phase 1 Habitat Map of the site at Dower House, Harlington, showing the location of the proposed reptile receptor site (blue hash).



Stage 2 – Supervised Vegetation Clearance

Prior to the commencement of any works on site, a toolbox talk will be undertaken with contractors and a document left in the site office for contractors to read. Elite Ecology contact details will be located on this document if any workers encounter any reptiles.

Within the current scheme of works, the areas of scattered scrub, scattered trees, tall ruderal, and woodland will be cleared. Any vegetation clearance will need to be carried out with an ecologically friendly method and supervised by a suitably qualified ecologist. The ecologist will carry out a fingertip search prior to any clearance and safely remove any reptiles that are found.

Any vegetation that is of a height of over one metre will first need to be cut down to a height of 200mm before being fully cleared. This will allow the vegetation to be fully searched for reptiles by the supervising ecologist.

Vegetation clearance shall subsequently follow a strategic pattern. This must begin at west of the site, and progress eastwards, encouraging the reptiles towards the receptor site of scrub and woodland habitat at the east of the site. Two ecologists will need to supervise this – one supervising the vegetation clearance and the second to ensure no reptiles go westwards, preventing any harm from vehicles.

Once this has been done, the site can be declared vacant of reptiles and the works can commence without creating a negative impact. Clearing the vegetation in this way will ensure that the site becomes unsuitable to the local reptile populations and discourages their return to the site for the scheme of works. To avoid reptiles returning to the re-development area during the works, vegetation should be kept short, and reptile fencing should be erected at the west side of the reptile receptor site to ensure they do not disperse back into the development area. Following this process, a destructive search can be carried out, which involves careful and systematic excavation of the topsoil layers and searching for reptiles in the process.

Stage 3 – Reptile Fencing Installation

Reptile fencing will need to be put up around at the west side of the reptile receptor site, ensuring a minimum of a 1m buffer zone between this reptile receptor site and the development area. A suitably qualified ecologist will need to be on site during the installation of the fencing to ensure that no reptiles are harmed by this process. This fencing is required to remain in situ and without breaches for the entirety of the construction phase of the project. A suitably qualified ecologist will need to undertake compliance checks of the fence to ensure no breaches are occurring once a month.

Stage 4 – Habitat Restoration, Creation, and Enhancement

In addition to the receptor site, additional measures will be required to restore, create, and enhance the habitats within the development areas post-development for reptiles.

No perimeter fencing that could prevent reptiles passing through should be used around the reptile receptor site's north, east, and south boundaries, as this feature will potentially fragment the population and cause the species to decline within the area.

Hibernacula should also be scattered though the site. These hibernacula can be made of brash, bricks, building rubble, cut timber, inert hardcore, rocks, rubble, and tree roots. A minimum of two of these is advised for this project. The key design features include:

- A sunny location.
- A well-drained section of the site.
- One of the long sides faces south.
- Access for reptiles through openings.
- Locate within suitable habitat (woodland rides and/or glades in this scenario).
- Minimal anthropogenic disturbance.
- Measure at least 4m length x 2m width x 1m height, but the larger the better.

The proposed communal woodland area should also be enhanced to better support reptiles. This includes the creation of a shrubby woodland understory, and woodland glades and rides, which offer habitat transitional zones which create a range of microclimates and microhabitats that are favoured by reptiles.

Felling and Coppicing

Felling and coppicing will create variation in the woodland canopy and allow light to penetrate to allow for reptile basking and ground flora regeneration. The site should aim for densely stocked coppice with widely spaced standards (trees with no alterations). Felling and coppicing should be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season of March to August. Coppice should be cut in 1/3 sections offset by a year, and re-cut every five years, this will ensure the glades are maintained. This layer of shrub and young trees should be on rotation to prevent development into mature woodland. Deadwood should be retained where felled.

Woodland Ride Creation

Implementing woodland rides within and around the communal woodland will greatly benefit any reptiles on site. These rides should contain three zones of vegetation of grass (cut yearly at the end of summer with and longer grass areas to be cut on a two-or-three-year cycle), taller scrub vegetation (cut on rotation every four years to provide year-round low, dense shelter), and finally a layer of shrubs and young trees that transition into the mature trees.

Control of Aggressive Weeds

Any weeds which grow on site and are thought to be aggressive/invasive and pose an ecological threat to the reptile receptor site should be eradicated as soon as possible. The identification of any invasive species will take place within a plant identification survey undertaken twice yearly; one in March and one in July.

Stage 5 – Removal of Fencing

Once the site has been constructed, and adequate reptile habitat is present at the reptile receptor site, the reptile fencing can be removed, and the reptile species identified allowed to natural disperse into the site.

6. References

Countryside Rights of Way Act (2000)

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

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

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2003) Herpetofauna Workers' Manual.

Langton, T.E.S., Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. (2001), Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, Froglife, Halesworth

The European Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. HMSO.

Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

7. Appendices

Appendix A: Site Plans

Appendix B: Legislation and Policy

Appendix A: Site Plans

Appendix B: Legislation and Policy

Reptiles

All six native reptiles within Great Britain are legally protected, with the extent of protection varying dependent upon their rarity and conservation importance.

Those that receive full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) are the rare sand lizard and smooth snake. These species also receive protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (also referred to as the Habitats Directive). This means that they are protected from deliberate disturbance, killing, injury or capture and the habitat in which they live is also fully protected against damage or destruction. Any activity involving disturbance or damage to habitats utilised by sand lizards or smooth snakes would require a licence issued by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) following consultation with the statutory nature conservation organisation (Natural England).

The remaining four reptile species are 'partially protected' under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), with these species being slow-worm, common lizard, grass snake and adder. This means that these species are protected against intentional killing, injuring and against sale, but their habitat is not protected. In planning terms this means that the presence of these species is a material consideration and there is a requirement to ensure that any reptile interest is safeguarded. If a proposed development is likely to have an impact on these reptiles, then the statutory nature conservation organisation must be notified, particularly if capture and translocation is being proposed. In some parts of the UK, sites that support common reptile species such as common lizards and slow-worms can qualify as County Wildlife Sites. Sites of this designation may receive protection in planning policy.

8. Notice to Readers: Conditions of this Report

All reports are certified products and cannot be shown, copied, or distributed to third parties without the written permission of Elite Ecology. No liability is accepted for the contents of the report, other than to that of the client(s).

Elite Ecology agrees to supply ecological consulting services and advice of a preliminary or thorough nature as advised or commissioned. Upon commissioning Elite Ecology to undertake the work, the client(s) grant access to the site upon the agreed date. If no site access is available upon this date, Elite Ecology holds the right to charge the client(s) for lost staffing time and additional travel costs.

Elite Ecology undertake all site surveys with reasonable skill, care, and diligence, within the terms of the contract that has been agreed with the client and abiding by Elite Ecology's Terms and Conditions. The actions of the surveyors on site, and during the production of the report, were undertaken in accordance with the Code of Professional Conduct for the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

The latest good practice guidelines put in place by Natural England or the relevant statutory conservation bodies have been followed by the surveyors on site. If those methodologies fail to identify a protected species during the survey efforts, no responsibility can be attributed to Elite Ecology. If any of these guidelines are adapted between the date(s) of the surveys being undertaken and the submission of this report, then Elite Ecology takes no responsibility for this.

Should any equipment be damaged or lost on site at the fault of the client(s), then Elite Ecology withholds the right to charge 100% above the current market value for that exact product or the nearest similar product.

The survey results purport the current status of the site and its potential for protected species utilisation at the time of surveying. It should not be viewed as a complete list of the possible flora and fauna species that could be using the site at different times of the year.

Elite Ecology has been provided with full payment for this report and thus the product has been released to the client(s) for the purpose of their planning application. If any part of the report is lost or altered without the written permission of Elite Ecology, then the entire report becomes invalid. Due to the potential for continual change within the natural world, this report is valid for **2 years only** from the date of the last survey visit. If this report is submitted after the 2-year deadline, then a further updated inspection will be required to ascertain whether the site remains in the same condition as it was when initially inspected.

No reliance should be made on any such comments in relation to the structural integrity of the features located on the surveyed site. All information within the report is based solely on evidence that has been found on site during the service provided. No individual opinion or inference will be made other than that of the suitably qualified ecologist appointed to the project.