



Reptile Survey 2021

**Land South of Chiswell Green
Lane, Hertfordshire**

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LIABILITIES:

Whilst every effort has been made to guarantee the accuracy of this report, it should be noted that living creatures are capable of migration and whilst protected species may not have been located during the survey duration, their presence may be found on a site at a later date.

The views and opinions contained within this document are based on a reasonable timeframe between the completion of the survey and the commencement of any works. If there is any delay between the commencement of works that may conflict with timeframes laid out within this document, or have the potential to allow the ingress of protected species, a suitably qualified ecologist should be consulted.

It is the duty of care of the landowner/developer to act responsibly and comply with current environmental legislation if protected species are suspected or found prior to or during works.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Ecology Partnership was commissioned by Alban Developments Limited and Alban Peter Pearson, CALA Homes (Chiltern) Ltd and Redington Capital Ltd to undertake reptile surveys at Chiswell Green, Hertfordshire. This is one of several surveys identified as needed during the scoping and Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA; The Ecology Partnership 2021).
- 1.2 The desk study for the PEA included the acquisition of species data from the Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC). This source identified the recent presence of slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) and grass snake (*Natrix natrix*) within 2km of the site and there were no records within the red line boundary. The PEA identified the scrub/woodland edge habitats and semi-improved grassland in the south of the site to have a moderate suitability to support reptiles.
- 1.3 This report presents the results of The Ecology Partnership's surveys in and around the site, which aims specifically to determine the presence/ likely absence of reptiles using the site between September and October 2021.

Site Context and Status

- 1.4 The site comprises four distinct areas of fields separated by mature treelines, with a collection of farm buildings in the north-eastern and north-western corners. Fields in the north of the site are intensively grazed by horses, whilst those in the south are currently unmanaged rank grassland. The site covers approximately 14.02ha in size and is located to the southwest of Chiswell Green, Hertfordshire (TL 131 042). The site is surrounded by residential areas, a small block of woodland and agricultural land (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Approximate location of the red line boundary and the wider landscape (Google Earth Pro, September 2021).

Proposed Development

- 1.5 The demolition of existing structures and construction of up to 391 dwellings (Use Class C3), the provision of land for a new 2FE Primary School, open space provision and associated landscaping and new access arrangements.

Legislation

- 1.6 In the UK, there are six native reptile species. The four widespread species are adder (*Vipera berus*), grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*). The two rare species are smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*) and sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*).

1.7 The widespread reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) against intentional killing and injuring and the sale of a wild reptile or any part of such animal. The rare reptiles also receive legal protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 against deliberate injury, killing, capture or disturbance of a rare reptile and damage or obstruction of any place used for shelter or protection.

1.8 All six reptile species are also listed as species of principal importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, which means local authorities have a legal duty to take their conservation into account.

2.0 Survey Methodology

2.1 A terrestrial survey of the site for reptiles (presence or absence) was carried out between the dates of 22nd September to 15th October 2021. Prior to the commencement of the survey, the site was set up with artificial refugia (roofing felts) for reptiles within the site on the 15th September 2021. Reptile mats were laid throughout the south of the site within areas of habitat suitable for reptiles (Figure 2), predominately along the field margins.

2.1 The refugia were placed onsite for a period of bedding, prior to the commencement of the reptile survey as recommended in the advice from Natural England. The timing and number of surveys completed were based on guidelines produced by Froglife (1999) and Gent and Gibson (1998). A total of seven survey visits were made to the site between September and October 2021, to check the refugia for the presence of reptiles. Visits were only carried out if the weather conditions were suitable for locating reptiles. On each visit to the site, a minimum of one circuit to check all refugia was carried out.



Figure 2: Locations (black dotted lines) where artificial reptile refugia were placed within the site boundary (red line).

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Over seven visits, no reptiles were recorded within the site. The survey dates, times and weather conditions are outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Survey weather conditions and timing.

Visit	Date	Survey Start Time	Weather
Refugia set-up	15/09/2021	-	-
1	23/09/2021	12:45	Degrees Wind beaufort 4 Cloud 80% Dry

2	27/09/2021	16:45	16 degrees Wind beaufort 2 Cloud 40% Dry
3	01/10/2021	14:30	16 degrees Wind beaufort 4 Cloud 40% Rain in the morning
4	04/10/2021	10:00	13 degrees Wind beaufort 2 Cloud 50% Dry
5	08/10/2021	11:30	14 degrees Wind beaufort 4 Cloud 70% Dry
6	11/10/2021	09:00	12 degrees Wind beaufort 1 Cloud 30% Dry
7	15/10/2021	15:30	17 degrees Wind beaufort 1 Cloud 10% Dry

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 It should be noted that during the seventh visit, grass management was taking place on site which destroyed several of the reptile mats in the northeast corner before the final survey could be conducted. However, this is unlikely to have had an impact on the survey results and no deceased reptiles were found upon further inspection.

4.2 It is considered that the site is not constrained by reptiles as no reptiles were identified within the site's boundaries after 7 visits in suitable weather conditions. As such, reptiles are considered likely absent from site, and no further surveys are needed at this time.

Enhancement Strategy

4.3 Whilst the site is not considered to be constrained by reptiles and a mitigation strategy is not required, there is potential for the site to be enhanced for reptiles, creating more opportunities for reptiles to move into the site. It is also recommended that the boundary

- vegetation and hedgerows are retained and enhanced to continue to provide wildlife foraging and commuting opportunities.
- 4.4 It is recommended that the boundary hedgerows are subject to enhanced management and any gaps filled to improve the level of diversity. Hedgerows help to provide a layering of different habitats that can be utilised by a wide variety of species. Species that can be planted include blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), alder (*Frangula alnus*), guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*), dog rose (*Rosa canina*) and dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*).
- 4.5 The use of wildflower mixes could be incorporated into the future proposals to create new species-rich grassland, which would enhance the ecological value of the site for a range of important invertebrates, upon which reptiles and amphibians predate. Scattered scrub planting in these areas would provide suitable cover and protection from predators.
- 4.6 It is recommended that log piles and hibernacula are also created to provide refuge and hibernation opportunities for amphibians, reptiles, small mammals and invertebrates. Log piles should be located in a variety of locations, such as damp places, with some situated in more sunny locations. These should be stacked, and some amount of leaf litter added. Planting around log piles with such species as honeysuckle or clematis can also add value. Examples of log piles can be seen in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Log pile and hibernacula can be created within the edges of the site or in the retained habitats on site.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The Ecology Partnership undertook reptile surveys on site between September and October 2021. These surveys did not record reptiles to be present within the site, as such, reptiles are considered likely absent from site.
- 5.2 Mitigation in relation to reptiles will not be required. However, habitat creation and enhancement should be undertaken to retain the habitats of high value within the site, including specifically the hedgerows and trees. This will help achieve a biodiversity net gain post-development.

6.0 REFERENCES

ARC. 2010. *Guidance on Building Development (England) With Respect to Amphibians and Reptiles*. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.

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

Gent, T. & Gibson, S. eds. (1998) *Herpetofauna Workers Manual*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

HGBI (1998) *Evaluating local mitigation/translocation programmes: Maintaining Best Practices and Lawful Standards*. HGBI advisory notes for Amphibian and Reptile Groups (ARGs). Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland, c/o Froglife, Halesworth.

Sewell, D. *et al.* 2013. *Survey protocols for the British Herpetofauna*. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.

The Ecology Partnership (2021) *Land south of Chiswell Green Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report*.

Internet resources:

Google Maps: www.maps.google.co.uk

Magic Maps: www.magic.gov.uk

The Ecology Partnership Ltd

Thorncroft Manor,

Thorncroft Drive,

Leatherhead,

Surrey

KT22 8JB

Tel. 01372 364 133

www.ecologypartnership.com

Approved by: Alexia Tamblyn MA (Oxon) MSc CEcol CEnv MCIEEM FRGS,

Managing Director

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