

Background

A Preliminary Environmental Assessment incorporating an extended phase 1 Habitat Survey was commissioned from Arbtech Consultants Limited. This was carried out by Natalie Evans HND BA(hons), MA who inspected the site on 20 July 2015.

There were no confirmed sightings of reptiles during the site visit.

The report concluded that the site had MEDIUM habitat potential for reptiles because:

The habitat on site represents good foraging areas, basking areas and refugia for reptiles. The long unmanaged grass and scrub with the wooded tree line create a mosaic of habitats that offer a range of foraging and shelter potential. Adjacent woodland and grassland to the north provides further habitat. The site is linked to the wider habitat by tree lines and gardens. There are records of slow worms, grass snakes, adders and common lizards within a 2km radius of the site

Site Management

The four common British reptile species are Slow-worm, common lizard, adder and grass snake. These are protected by law against intentional killing or injury. Their habitat is not protected. Two other British reptile species exist and are more rare. Both those reptiles and their habitat are protected by law. The habitat here is not suitable for these rarer reptiles. The habitat is therefore not protected.

The ruderal and bramble growth had reduced the grassed area considerably so basking sites were limited to towards the southern end of the site.

Due to the dense bramble growth taking up much of the site inspection for refugia was severely limited. Mindful of the possibility of common reptiles on site a specialist, rubber tracked, disc flail was brought in to start clearance. This enabled the vegetation to be cut down and mulched without the disks or tracks cutting into the ground. This was so effective that a plastic corrugated sheet, and dumped charity bags, still in their wrappers, were left intact even after the machine had gone over them twice. In addition to choosing this machine margins were left uncut including areas where debris had built up which might harbour refugia.

In October 2017 the site was cut using a 4 wheel ride on brushcutter with the cutting height set at 150mm. This went at walking pace and the site was cleared over 3 days working from North to south. Possible refugia were inspected and dismantled by hand. Large tree trunks were removed by machine with spotters. The proposed open space area was left largely untouched other than bramble growth was removed.

In October 2018 the site has again been cleared by brushcutter working north to south.

Reptile Population Assessment

A report by Ecosa for Cala Homes in 2012 refers to a common reptile survey undertaken in 2012 over the Land East of Orchard Gardens and the substantially larger CALA Homes site which effectively fills the landscape between the east fringe of existing village and the Eastergate Rife. This survey was not carried out with the knowledge or consent of the owner of the Land East of Orchard Gardens. The results were not communicated to the landowner or registered with the Sussex Biodiversity Records centre when a records search was carried out by Arbtech in July 2015.

The site which is the subject of this Outline Planning Application is referred to by Ecosa as “the south western field”

The report states:

“2.2.7 Common Reptiles The common reptile survey undertaken in 2012 identified a peak count of three adult slowworm *Anguis fragilis*, four juvenile slow-worm, five adult common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and three juvenile common lizard were recorded from the tussocky grassland and scrub edge associated with the south-western field. The survey confirmed the presence of a breeding population of reptiles at the site, however the population supported is considered to be low. The reptile survey only identified reptiles within the south-western field as shown on Map 1. This field is becoming increasingly encroached by bramble scrub with fewer areas of open grassland present during the 2016 updating walkover compared with the 2012 survey. Left unmanaged this area would be eventually covered by dense scrub, resulting in the loss of this reptile habitat. “

Assessment of the reptile population was done by reference to Table 7 in the Froglife Advice Sheet 10 1999.

An updated survey by Ecosa in 2016 again of the entire CALA homes site recorded a site wide population with a peak count of 31 adult slow-worm and 5 adult common lizard. With >20 of one species that could make that entire area a key reptile site. There is however no widely accepted basis for calculating the area or range for any given number of reptiles.

Development Proposal

An Outline Planning Application is submitted with all matters reserved other than Access. The illustrative layout plan was informed by both the PEA and the surrounding land uses. It is underpinned by a desire to protect and enhance the Eastern treeline as separation from the wider countryside and for the enhancement/mitigation for wildlife. Locating the openspace adjacent to that treeline is a fundamental part of that.

The development proposal is for Residential development of a 1.77ha site including provision of open space. The proposal is for residential houses roads and gardens 13400 sq m (75%) and Open space 4425 sq m (25%).

Rear gardens can provide biodiversity with compost heaps as refugia. If rear gardens are taken into account the total green space is over 50% of the site.

Reptile impact Assessment

If nothing is done the bramble growth would quickly recover. Leaving the site to be covered by brambles would reduce basking sites and over time the site would become unsuitable for reptiles. Lawful clearance to boundaries would reduce refugia opportunities but allow basking sites.

Development without open space would remove both refugia and basking habitat and have a severe impact on the population. Development with open space connected to the eastern tree/ditch line would protect existing refugia in that part of the site and allow connectivity to other land it would therefore have a low to medium impact.

Construction work poses a risk of injury or killing which could have a severe impact.

Mitigation Proposal Principles

1. Prepare safe habitat holding area with artificial refugia and basking prior to construction work. Site to be reptile fenced to retain reptiles and to be heras fenced to restrict access and construction damage.
2. Provide additional artificial refugia on site, heras fenced, to allow safe zones for other reptile movement.
3. Clear site fully translocating any reptiles found to holding area.
4. Prepare remainder of proposed open space with managed margins for wildlife generally and reptile movement on and off site
5. On completion of work to open space enlarge holding area with reptile fencing to allow gradual movement north south over green space but restrict westward movement into newly constructed areas.
6. The principles are illustrated by the plan annexed to this statement.
7. Future management of the habitat for reptiles can be incorporated in the openspace management plan as part of the s106 draft

These principles were informed an updated report was prepared by Arbtech following site clearance and which is at Appendix 2A. This was on a precautionary . Since the presence of reptiles on site has now been established the layout has been changed to increase the green space along the east boundary. See November 2018 Mitigation Plan below.

Conclusion

This document demonstrates how the impact can be minimised during development and how the environment for reptiles can be enhanced and safeguarded for the future. Having established the principle, which is included in the draft s106 heads of terms, full details can be conditioned and agreed at detailed application stage.

Indicative Reptile Protection and Mitigation Plan November 2018



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