ECOLOGY PARTNERSHIP

Reptile Mitigation Strategy

Land at Hook Meadow, Westergate

The Ecology Partnership, Thorncroft Manor, Thorncroft Drive, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 8JB

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LIABILITIES:

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

The recommendations 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.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Ecology Partnership was commissioned by Redrow to produce a Reptile Mitigation Strategy for the land at Meadow Way, Westergate, PO20 3AQ, hereafter referred to as the 'site' (Figure 1).

1.2 As part of the mitigation strategy, the site and surrounding habitat were subject to presence/absence surveys between April and September 2022.

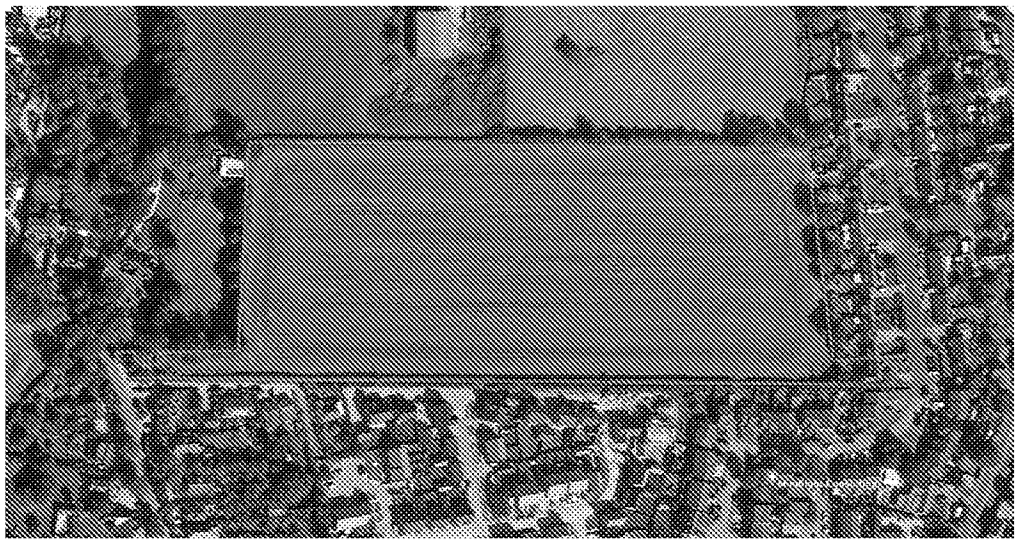

Figure 1: Location of the site redline boundary

1.3 As part of the mitigation strategy, the site and surrounding habitat were subject to presence/absence surveys between April and September 2022.

1.4 The site was granted outline planning permission at appeal APP/C3810/W/23/3323858 in December 2023. The appeal was with regard to planning application AL/178/22/OUT. As part of the appeal decision Condition 4 was issued which contained a number of parts with regards to landscape and ecology. This document has been put together to discharge section 7 of condition 4 with regards to a reserved matters application. The reserved matters application is for the appearance, landscaping, layout and scale (pursuant to outline permission AL/178/22/OUT) for the construction of up to 89 residential dwellings and open space and associated works. Section 7 of Condition 4 is detailed below:

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"(vii) A Reptile Mitigation Strategy which shall include the following:

(a) Purpose and conservation objectives for the development hereby permitted;

(b) Review of site potential and constraints;

(c) Detailed designs and/or working methods to achieve stated objectives;

(d) Extent and area of proposed works on appropriate scale plans;

(e) Type and source of materials to be used where appropriate;

(f) Timetable for implementation demonstrating that the Reptile Mitigation Strategy is aligned with any phasing of development;

(g) Details of persons responsible for carrying out the Reptile Mitigation Strategy;

(h) Details of initial aftercare and long-term maintenance of any Receptor areas.

(i) Details for any monitoring and remedial measures; and

(j) Details for disposal of any wastes arising from the Reptile Mitigation Strategy.

The Reptile Mitigation Strategy shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and all features shall be retained as approved thereafter."

1.5 The site was revisited on 9th April 2024 by The Ecology Partnerships Chris Jennings BSc (Hons) MSc MCIEEM. The field was found to be in a very similar condition to previous survey work. The majority of the field was under crop with thin grass margins running adjacent to boundary tree lines, hedgerow and gardens. Reptile habitat is limited to the site margins which are largely to be retained under proposals.

Purpose and Conservation Objectives

1.6 The purpose of this document is to ensure the protection of reptiles during the construction period of the proposed development. The overall conservation objective is to increase available habitat for reptiles, provide appropriate management of available habitat and to ensure the onsite populations long-term future within the red line boundary.

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2.0 Previous Survey Work and Review of Constraints

2.1 A terrestrial survey of the site for reptiles was carried out over 7 survey visits between 13th April and 16th September 2022. Prior to the commencement of the survey, the site was set up with artificial refugia (roofing felts) for reptiles on 31st March 2022. The field is cultivated as an arable crop field and as such suitable habitat for reptiles is only present on the field margins. The grassland margins of the field along with hedgerows offer suitable habitat for common reptiles such as slow worm, common lizard and grass snake. The crop field and the residential property at 24 Meadow Way were considered unsuitable for reptiles due to the heavy management and poor suitability of the habitats present within this area. As such the felts were located along the boundaries of the site covering all available suitable habitat for reptiles (Figure 2).

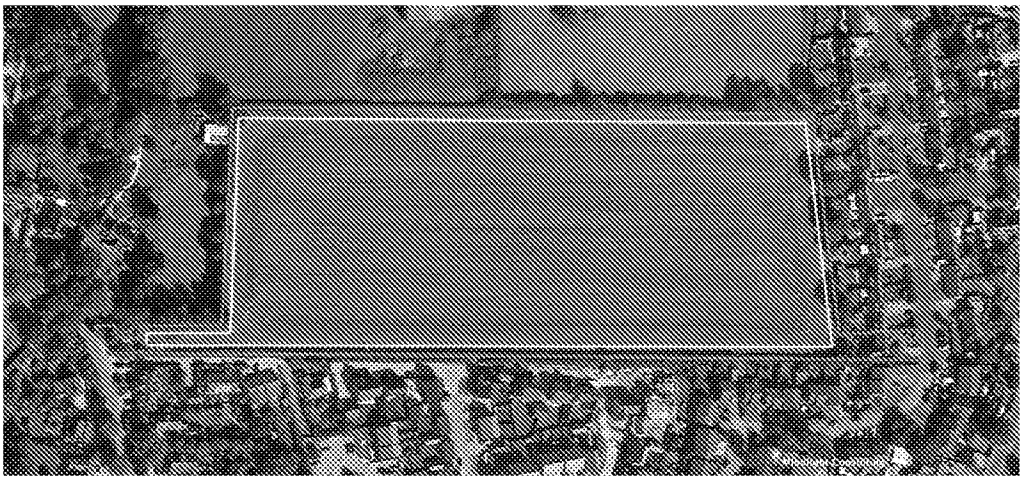

Figure 2: Location of reptile refugia (yellow line).

2.2 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 carried out 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.

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3.0 Results

3.1 The results of the survey are summarised in Table 1 below and Figure 3. The peak adult count is used to determine the population size.

3.2 Over the seven visits, a peak count of 20 adult reptiles was observed on the third survey visit (06/05/2022). During the time of the surveys, only slow worms and grass snakes were found.

Table 1: Reptile survey results between April and September 2022

Reptile survey Westergate				
Survey no.	**Date**	**Survey time**	**Weather**	**Reptiles**
1	13/04/2022	15:55-16:15	Sunny, 16 degrees, b:1, cloud 25%	5 x ad female SW 3 x ad male SW
2	25/04/2022	09:20-11	10-12 degrees, b:2, cloud 30%	8 x ad female SW 4 x ad male SW 1 x sub ad female SW 1 x juvenile SW
3	06/05/2022	09:20-11:20	15 degrees, b:1, 100% cloud	15 x ad female SW 5 x ad male SW 8 x juvenile SW
4	13/05/2022	09:00-09:25	14 degrees, b:2, 80% cloud	8 x ad female SW 2 x ad male SW 2 x sub ad female SW 4 x juvenile SW 1 x juvenile grass snake
5	24/05/2022	09:30-10:15	13-14 degrees, 40% cloud, b:1	12 x ad female SW 7 x ad male SW 3 x sub ad female SW 7 x juvenile SW 1 x juvenile Grass snake
6	01/07/2022	7:30-8.45	16 degrees, 50% cloud, b: 1	5 x ad female SW 5 x juvenile SW
7	16/09/2022	09:30- 10:15	12-13 degrees, 25% cloud, b:0	1 x ad male SW 2 x ad female SW

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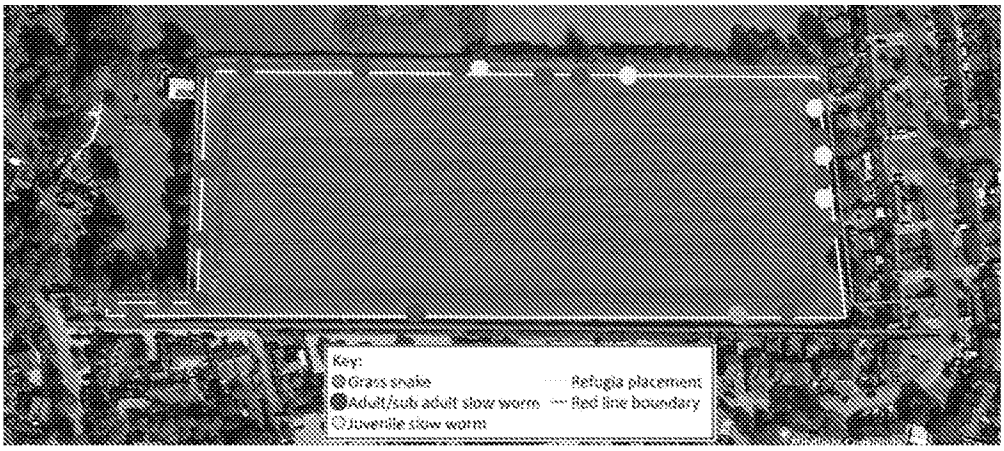

Figure 3: Survey Results

3.3 The peak counts of adult reptiles are highlighted in the above tables. Population classes are assessed using Froglife (1999) scoring system (Table 2). The site was determined to have an exceptional population class of slow worms.

Table 2. Population class assessment categories (Froglife, 1999)

	Low population (Score 1)	Good population (Score 2)	Exceptional population
Adder	<5	5 - 10	>10
Common lizard	<5	5 - 20	>20
Grass snake	<5	5 -10	>10
Slow-worm	<5	5 - 20	>20

3.4 The site supports 'good' population of slow worms, with a peak count of 20 adults on 6th May 2022. The site also supports juvenile grass snake, as no adults were recorded a population size is not given, although the species are known to be present on site. The site does not qualify as a key reptile site (one which supports three or more reptile species or an exceptional population of one type of reptile species).

3.5 The four widespread species of reptile are legally protected via part of Section 9(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) against "intentional killing and injuring".

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4.0 Mitigation

4.1 Following the survey work undertaken in 2022, as well as the update site visit and walkover undertaken in April 2024, it is considered that conclusions drawn about the distribution of suitable reptile habitat is consistent with previous survey work used to inform the outline planning consent. The field is still under heavy cultivation and management with the field under crop. In addition, the area within the residential property at 24 Meadow Way consists of short sward lawn, flower beds, buildings and hardstanding offering no suitable habitat for reptile species. Available reptile habitat is still present around the thin field margins, and it is considered that the previously recorded slow worm population is very likely still present.

4.2 The proposals will largely occur within the arable field which will not impact the majority of suitable reptile habitat (Figure 4). A thin strip of habitat on the western boundary will be incorporated into garden habitat. In addition, a small area of habitat will be lost within the southeastern corner of the site where access will be created and a small section within the southwestern corner. Please see Appendix 1 to see required clearance areas of reptile habitat.

4.3 The loss of these sections is considered not significant due to the size of area to be removed and the retention of suitable habitat adjacent to these areas on site and habitat connectivity with these areas to offsite suitable habitat. With the creation of large areas of suitable reptile habitat on site post development it is considered that there will be a large increase in habitat available to the species post development, secured with appropriate management.

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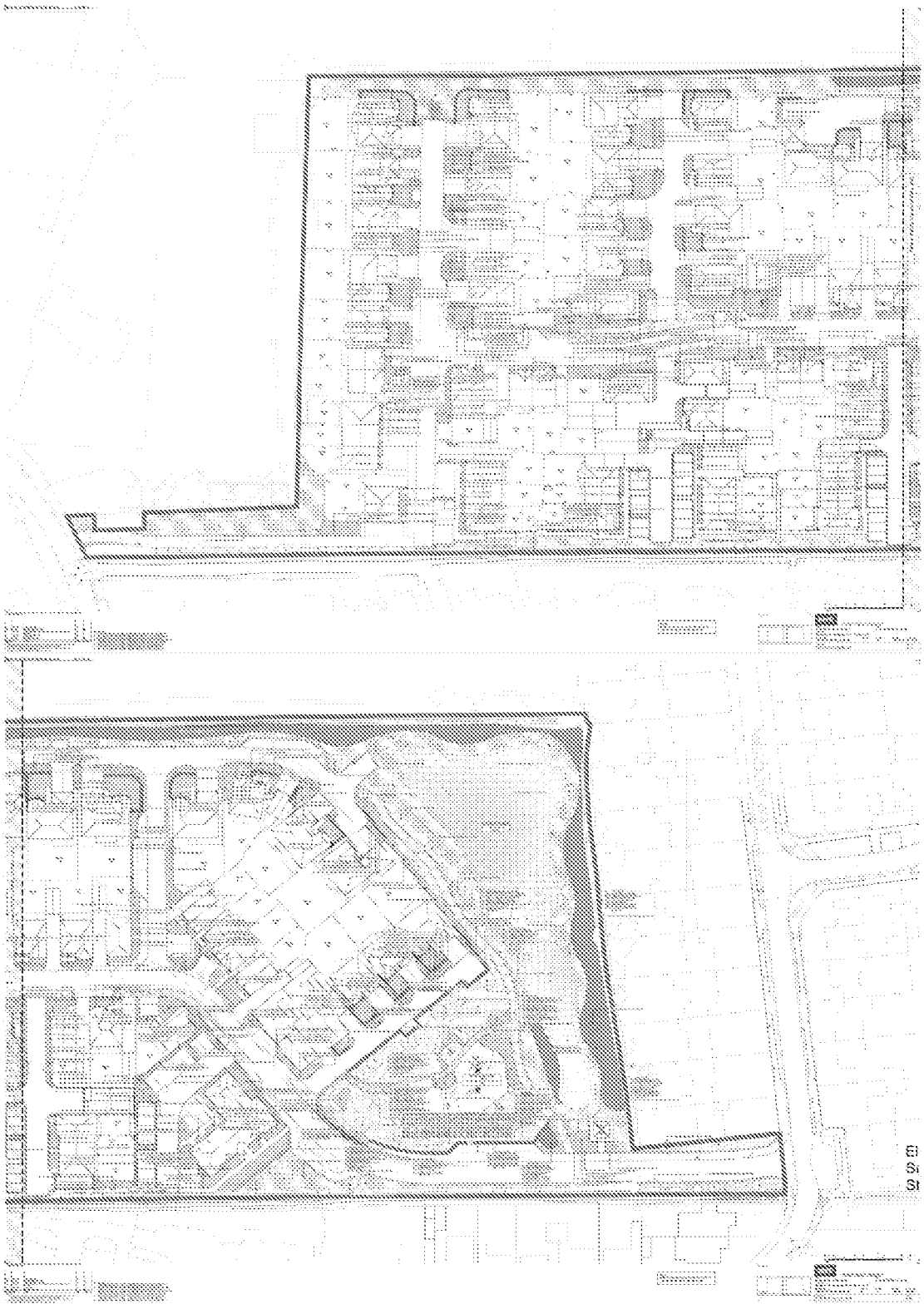

Figure 4: Site development proposals

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4.4 Due to the small amount of suitable reptile habitat to be removed, a full translocation is not considered necessary however the implementation of Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) on suitable areas of habitat will ensure no reptiles are harmed during site clearance. This approach was agreed as part of the outline consent.

4.5 In addition to the RAMs, the retained boundary features should be protected by Heras fencing which would serve as a visual and physical barrier to protect these features from construction related encroachment and consequent accidental impacts during the construction stage. This Heras fencing should also include signage detailing the protection of reptile habitat and any relevant TPZ's (tree protection zones) where necessary. Please see Appendix 1 for proposed Heras fence locations.

Figure 5: Yellow line indicating line of Heras reptile protection fence to protect field margin habitat

4.6 The RAMs for site include the way vegetation clearance and enhancements are undertaken, in order to avoid and/or minimise any disturbance impacts on local reptile

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populations. It is considered that these measures, whilst set out for reptiles, would also protect any amphibians and other species such as small mammals potentially on site.

Reasonable Avoidance Methods (RAMs)

Timings

4.7 Vegetation clearance work required in areas of suitable reptile habitat should be undertaken in order to encourage any reptiles to move outside of these areas. This must take place between March and October inclusive to avoid the hibernation season which will ensure reptiles are at their most active.

Prior to commencement of development works

4.8 Any suitable areas of grassland on site to be lost as part of the development proposals should be cleared in stages, making the site less suitable for reptiles. The first stage involves cutting vegetation to a height of 200mm, leaving at least overnight, with a second cutting down to a height of 100mm and again leaving overnight before the grassland is then removed.

4.9 Any areas of hedgerow and/or scrub to be removed, should be cut back (outside of bird breeding season or after a nesting bird check by a suitably qualified ecologist) initially to no lower than 100mm above ground.

4.10 After the above stages, relevant areas of suitable habitat should then be destructively searched under direct ecological supervision. Clearance of vegetation should start from the middle of an area and work outwards, to reduce the chance of any animals becoming stranded. This work should be undertaken with an excavator and toothed bucket in a sensitive manner under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist.

4.11 The location of the future work compound should be in an area of unsuitable habitat for reptiles, in any area of existing arable land. In addition, the boundary field margins should be protected from harm during work with the erection of Heras fencing to ensure that retained reptile habitat is not encroached upon during work.

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During development work

4.12 Habitat enhancements as detailed within the Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy and Biodiversity Net Gain documents will be implemented onsite.

4.13 Construction and demolition materials, as well as skips and pallets, should be stored on hardstanding or bare earth where possible and furthermore, should be elevated off the ground. This so that no features are created that reptiles or other species could potentially use as refuge habitat.

4.14 Where trenches and holes are dug, these should not be left open overnight. Reptiles (plus amphibians and mammals) may get trapped in vertical-sided trenches. Therefore, where there is a risk of this occurring, the holes should be refilled, or planks of wood / shallow graded edge should be placed so that any trapped animals may use these to escape.

4.15 The implementation of the agreed reasonable avoidance measures will be implemented and undertaken by the project ecologist and ecological clerk of works (ECoW) working on site. The maintenance and protection of the boundary features will be the responsibility of the technical and site managers of the development. The implementation of reptile enhancement features again is the responsibility of the technical and site managers undertaken the construction project, with any additional advice given by the project ecologist overseeing the works.

4.16 If a reptile is to be found during works, then it will be relocated to retained reptile habitat around the site perimeter. Post development neutral grassland, and scrub will be created as part of the landscape strategy. All suitable reptile habitats will be managed in a sensitive manner as detailed within the Biodiversity Net Gain and Landscape documents.

4.17 Any arisings brash or logs will be removed from site unless used to create log piles or habitat piles within the protected retained reptile habitat within the site boundaries.

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Or habitat creation areas. No arisings, brash or logs will be stored within the works area which may provide attractive habitat to reptiles or other wildlife.

4.18 The locations of log piles, which will be created are detailed within the Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy document.

4.19 With the mitigation strategy not requiring translocation and to save on the temporary use and then subsequent disposal of large amounts of plastic exclusion fencing, no specific disposal measures for mitigation materials are required.

4.20 If conditions on site significantly change in the period leading up to construction, with the field or garden turning to suitable habitat, then additional measures such as translocation may need to be undertaken. Similarly, if habitat is to be impacted which has not been foreseen, then appropriate additional mitigation will be undertaken. Any alteration to this strategy will be assessed by the project ecologist prior to the start of works or during the construction period itself.

5.0 References

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.

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

Internet resources:

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

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Magic Maps: www.magic.gov.uk

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Appendix 1: Reptile Mitigation Plan

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Reptile Clearance Areas
Reptile Heras Protection Fence
Red Line Boundary

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Title: Reptile Mitigation
Site: Hook Meadow, Westegate
Surveyor: CJ
Client: Redrow
Drawing Date 17/04/24

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