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7216: CHALCROFT NURSERY, CHARLCRAFT LANE, WEST BERSTED

BRIEFING NOTE: REPTILE MITIGATION STRATEGY

Introduction and Background

1. In order to inform an outline planning application for new residential development at Chalcroft Nursery, Charlcraft Lane, West Bersted (application reference BE/81/20/OUT), Ecology Solutions undertook a series of ecological surveys at the application site in 2016 and 2020. The results of the surveys and assessment are presented within the report entitled '*Ecological Assessment*' (dated July 2020) that was submitted as part of the application.
2. Subsequently a consultation response was received from the Environment Officer at the Arun District Council (dated 12 August 2020) which specifically addresses the need for a reptile mitigation strategy:

'As detailed within the Ecological Assessment (July 2020) there are reptiles onsite. Due to this mitigation is required. Unfortunately, no mitigation has been included within the report. We require that prior to determination a mitigation strategy is submitted detailing the timings of the works, methodology of the works, fencing and enhancements to the translocation site.'

3. For clarity, reptile surveys undertaken in 2020 identified small populations of Slow-Worm *Anguis fragilis* and Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica* within slightly rougher grassland habitats within the northern part of the application site.
4. The following outlines the key 'heads of terms' for a reptile mitigation strategy for the site, in order to provide further comfort to the Environment Officer that reptiles shall be safeguarded post-development.

Reptile Mitigation Strategy

5. Prior to the commencement of any works affecting suitable reptile habitat, a translocation exercise shall be undertaken. The exercise shall be undertaken with regard to best practice guidelines produced by the Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland (HGBI¹).

¹ Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland (1998). *Evaluating Local Mitigation / Translocation Programmes: Maintaining Best Practice and Lawful Standards*. HGBI Advisory Notes for Amphibian and Reptile Groups (ARGs)

6. As outlined previously, it is considered that the site supports a small population of both Common Lizard and Grass Snake. As such a translocation strategy is proposed on this basis. Should significantly greater numbers of reptiles be found during the translocation process, then the strategy may need to be adapted accordingly, although this is considered unlikely on the basis of the surveys completed at the application site.
7. In the first instance, a suitable receptor site shall be identified where reptiles shall be moved to. The receptor site may be situated either on-site (for instance within areas of proposed open space on western boundary of the site), or alternatively in an 'off-site' location within the same landowner ship (i.e. within the forthcoming 'Nursery Fields' site). The receptor site will comprise or be managed in order to provide optimal habitats for foraging and hibernating reptile species, including long tussocky grassland, areas of scrub and/or hedgerows. In order to increase the carrying capacity of the receptor site, enhancements may be required such as the provision of a hibernacula, as well as other features such as log piles.
8. Where appropriate, specialist reptile exclusion fencing will be used to secure the site and / or the reptile receptor area.
9. The receptor site shall be secured with the agreement of the landowner that this area will not be subject to planning, and shall be managed in the long term for the benefit of reptile species. The size of the receptor site should ideally be at least as large as the area of suitable reptile habitat within the site (approximately 0.1 hectares), if not larger.
10. The aim of the translocation exercise will be to remove a significant number of reptiles from the site. The HGBI guidelines suggest that a density of 50 tins per hectare should be checked once daily for 60 days to carry out a successful translocation of a low population. It is proposed that a density of 100 tins per hectare would be deployed, and that more than one check would be undertaken each day to achieve the required trapping effort. Moreover, habitat manipulation, under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist would be utilised to further enhance trapping effort.
11. The translocation exercise would proceed until a period of five clear days of no capture during suitable weather conditions is achieved. Given the higher number of survey visits and greater tin density to be undertaken, and that surveys of the translocation site identified a low population of both reptile species, it is anticipated that this will be achieved in fewer than the specified 60 days. On the basis that twice the minimum required effort would be employed (increased tin density and two daily checks of refugia), it is considered that a minimum of 30 days of trapping would be applicable in this instance, however the results of the ongoing exercise will inform the final duration of the exercise.
12. Tins would be checked in the morning as they are heating up, and as they cool down in the afternoon / evening, but before they become cold. All reptiles encountered would be captured by hand and placed in cloth bags, providing a dark environment in which they will be held whilst the trapping round is

completed. Once completed, they will be transferred to a vivarium filled with grass or other suitable vegetation before being transported to and released at a suitable location within the receptor site.

13. Habitat manipulation will be employed where appropriate during the translocation exercise, at the discretion of the supervising ecologist. This will consist of the removal of refugia and debris by hand, as well as stepwise strimming or cutting of grassland and vegetation under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist.
14. Following the completion of the trapping exercise (after five clear days of no capture), the exercise will proceed to a destructive search, a further capture method designed to locate and capture any remaining reptiles. Any features which may provide refuge for reptiles (including rubble piles identified on site) will be teased apart by hand or by appropriate machinery and thoroughly searched to ensure no reptiles are present. All areas of suitable reptile habitat will be stripped in a systematic manner with the use of machinery, with all site arisings to be thoroughly searched for the presence of reptiles prior to their removal from the site. A supervising ecologist will be in place during these works in order to capture any reptiles.
15. Following the completion of the destructive search, there will be no suitable habitat for reptiles to return to and it will be considered that the translocation exercise has been successfully completed.
16. The translocation exercise and destructive search would be undertaken during the active period for reptiles (from April to September / October inclusive), during suitable weather conditions (temperatures above 9°C, avoiding heavy rain and strong winds). Works will be overseen by suitably qualified ecologists who have experience in undertaking reptile surveys and translocation exercises.
17. It should be noted that the planning application for this site has been submitted in outline, with the final planning scheme to be confirmed at the detailed stage. As such, precise details (such as the location and size of a receptor site) will be finalised at the reserved matters stage. It is therefore considered that the final details of the reptile mitigation strategy may be secured via an appropriately worded planning condition, should this be desired by the Environment Officer.

Summary

18. It is considered that the information set out in this note, alongside the information already detailed within the previous reports produced by Ecology Solutions, establishes a sufficient and robust ecological baseline upon which the development proposals can be assessed from an ecological perspective.
19. In light of this baseline it is the view of Ecology Solutions that the development proposals for the site will more than mitigate for any adverse impacts on habitats and species and indeed will realise a range of ecological enhancements over the existing situation, as is clearly desired in legislation and planning policy of relevance to nature conservation.