St Modwen Developments

Blythe Bridge, Staffordshire Moorlands

REPTILE SURVEY REPORT

July 2017

FPCR Environment and Design Ltd
Registered Office: Lockington Hall, Lockington, Derby DE74 2RH
Company No. 07128076. [T] 01509 672772 [F] 01509 674565 [E] mail@fpcr.co.uk [W] www.fpcr.co.uk

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The following report has been prepared by FPCR Environment & Design Ltd. on behalf of St Modwen Developments Ltd. and details the results of reptile surveys undertaken during 2015 on a site at Blythe Bridge in the Staffordshire Moorlands. The need for reptile surveys was identified during the initial habitat survey carried out in May 2014.

Site Location and Context

1.2 The site boundary is indicated on Figure 1, although the survey area extended to the east as shown. The survey area is located to the east of Blythe Bridge village, situated between the A50 and the A521. It is flanked by roads to the north, south and west with arable and pasture land extending to the east.

1.3 Compartments comprised semi-improved grassland, which varied in management and species diversity. Fields were bound and divided by native species hedgerows. Other habitats within the site comprised ruderal vegetation, scattered scrub and trees. A number of waterbodies and two buildings were also contained within the survey area.

2.0 LEGISLATION

2.1 All common reptile species, including slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and grass snake *Natrix natrix*, are partially protected under Sections 9(1) and 9(5) of Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This legislation protects these animals from:

- Intentional killing and injury;
- Selling, offering for sale, possessing or transporting for the purpose of sale or publishing advertisements to buy or sell a protected species.

2.2 This partial protection does not directly protect the habitat of these reptile species. Where these animals are present on land that is to be affected by development, the implications of legislation are that providing that killing can reasonably be avoided then an operation is legal. Guidance provided by Natural England (English Nature 2004) and the Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (Herptofanual Groups of Britain and Ireland 1999) recommends that this should be achieved by ensuring that:

- The animals are protected from injury or killing;
- Mitigation is provided to maintain the conservation status of the species;
- Population monitoring is carried out subsequent to operations.

2.3 All reptile species are Species of Principle Importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Desktop study

3.1 In order to compile existing baseline information, relevant ecological information was requested from both statutory and non-statutory nature conservation organisations including:

- Staffordshire Ecological Records
- Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website (http://magic.defra.gov.uk)

Field survey

Reptile Survey

3.2 A strategic reptile presence / absence survey was undertaken at specific locations identified as offering potential habitat within the area of survey. The survey was undertaken based on methodology detailed in the *Herpetofauna Workers Manual* (Gent and Gibson, 1998) and *the Froglife Advice Sheet 10 - Reptile Survey* (Froglife 1999). Methods involved a search for basking reptiles on / under naturally occurring and strategically positioned artificial refugia. The artificial refugia used were 0.5m^2 sections of roofing felt with a black upper side. These were placed in locations that offered the most suitable habitat for common reptiles i.e. on the ephemeral margins between the hard standing and woodland. 30 artificial refugia were placed on the site. The location of refugia is shown in Figure 1.

3.3 All of the surveys were undertaken between late May and June 2015 by suitably experienced FPCR ecologists. The surveys were carried out in appropriate weather conditions i.e. air temperature between 10-20°C, no strong wind or heavy rain.

3.4 In addition, the surveys also followed the guidelines recommendations by:

- Approaching refugia from downwind and avoiding casting a shadow and with care so as to not disturb basking animals when checking;
- Lifting and replacing tins, to check for the presence of reptiles underneath in hot weather is undertaken with care, to avoid potential harm to any animals underneath;

4.0 RESULTS

Desktop study

4.1 No sites designated for their populations of reptiles were identified within the search area.

4.2 No records of reptiles were identified within the site or within 1km of the boundary.

Habitat Assessment

4.1 A number of habitats within the survey are were considered suitable to support reptiles. Areas of long grassland, hedgerows and waterbodies are likely to provide habitat for commuting and

foraging, while piles of manure, hay bales and the mosaic of scrub/grassland noted in the east of the site were considered to provide suitable basking habitat.

4.2 Previous surveys undertaken by Thomson Ecology in 2007 found reptiles to be absent, however only the western area of the current survey area (i.e.current application site) was surveyed.

4.3 Reptile surveys were consequently undertaken during optimal weather conditions. No reptiles were recorded, however, amphibians including great crested newts, common frog and common toad were observed under the artificial refugia. Table 1 presents the full survey conditions and reptile results.

Table 1: Reptile Survey Results

Survey	Date	Time	Weather	Reptile Sightings
1	21.05.2015	10.05am	Sunny, light breeze, 13°C	None
2	27.05.2015	11:38am	Sunny, cloud cover, 14°C	None
3	31.05.2015	10.30am	Sunny spells with intermittent showers, 11°C	None
4	05.06.2015	7.30am	Sunny, 20% cloud cover, 12°C	None
5	15.06.2015	16.00pm	Sunny, cloud cover, 17°C	None
6	18.06.2015	9.15am	Sunny, cloud cover, light breeze, 12°C	None
7	23.06.2015	9.45am	Sunny, cloud cover, 17°C	None

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 No reptiles were recorded during the surveys undertaken in 2015 and although the on-site habitats appear suitable for reptiles, it is likely that the isolation of the site and survey area by surrounding roads has prevented colonisation.

Site Boundary

Artificial Reptile Refugia Locations 2015

FPCR Environment and Desgin Ltd, Lockington Hall, Derby, DE74 2RH t:01509 672 772 f:01509 674 565 e: mail.fpcr.co.uk w: www.fpcr.co.uk
masterplanning environmental assessment landscape design ecology architecture arboriculture

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Reptile Refugia Location Plan

Scale: 1:640,169 RCO/ MRG 28/7/2017

Figure 1 **6249-E-01**