

5 Grass Hill, Caversham Reptile Mitigation and Enhancement Plan

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SURVEY AND REPORT VALIDITY

It is important that planning decisions are based on up-to-date ecological reports and survey data. However, it is difficult to set a specific timeframe over which reports or survey data should be considered valid, as this will vary in different circumstances. In some cases there will be specific guidance on this (such as for the age of data which may be used to support an EPS licence application) but in circumstances where such advice does not already exist, the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) has provided the general advice set out below.

<i>Age of Data / Survey / Report</i>	<i>Validity</i>
Less than 12 months	Likely to be valid in most cases.
12-18 months	Likely to be valid in most cases with the following exceptions: • Where a site may offer existing or new features which could be utilised by a mobile species within a short timeframe; • Where a mobile species is present on site or in the wider area, and can create new features of relevance to the assessment; • Where country-specific or species-specific guidance dictates otherwise.
18 months to 3 years	A professional ecologist will need to undertake a site visit and then review the validity of the report. Some or all of the other ecological surveys updated.
Protected Species Licensing	Licence applications usually only possible using data less than 2 years old

The likelihood of surveys needing to be updated increases with time and is greater for mobile species or in circumstances where the habitat or its management has changed significantly since the surveys were undertaken. Factors to be considered include (but are not limited to):

- Whether the site supports, or may support, a mobile species which could have moved on to site, or changed its distribution within a site;
- Whether there have been significant changes to the habitats present (and/or the ecological conditions/functions/ecosystem functioning upon which they are dependent) since the surveys were undertaken, including through changes to site management;
- Whether the local distribution of a species in the wider area around a site has changed (or knowledge of it increased), increasing the likelihood of its presence.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	Purpose of Report.....	5
1.2	Ecological Context	5
1.3	Summary of Proposals.....	6
2	Mitigation and Enhancement Plan.....	10
3	Legal Protection	16

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Report

This reptile mitigation and enhancement plan has been completed in connection with the proposed construction of two residential dwellings at 5 Grass Hill, Caversham (OS Grid Reference SU 7036 7509). The location of the proposed development site is shown in *Figures 1* and *2* and the proposed development plans are shown in *Figures 3* and *4*.

This document should be read in conjunction with the previous survey report *TT3014-5 Grass Hill, Caversham-R01-PEA Report-Rev03* which was completed by Turnstone Ecology Ltd following site surveys completed in July 2020 and January 2021.

This document summarised the survey findings and provides methods and mitigation measures to offset any ecological impacts associated with the proposal and to satisfy national and local planning policies.

Figure 1. Location of proposed development



1.2 Ecological Context

The proposed development site is located at 5 Grass Hill, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7TJ which is situated just north of central reading and the River Thames. It is accessed from Grass Hill via a driveway from the north-west. The area of the development comprises areas of bare earth and rubble (where a

recently demolished building had previously been present) with ruderal vegetation that has encroached from the boundaries, as well as areas of overgrown amenity grassland. The peripheries and boundaries of the land ownership are lined with hedge to the north, trees to the east and scrub with trees to the south and west. The tree density increases adjacent to the site to form woodland along the east, south and west boundaries. The proposed houses will be built within the bare earth area and the surrounding areas will be subject to landscaping. The site is bordered by Grass Hill to the west, and residential dwellings with associated gardens on all other boundaries.

Figure 2. Overview of the site and surrounding area (the demolished building is still present within the overhead image)



1.3 Summary of Proposals

The proposed development involves the construction of two residential dwellings with associated garages and parking at 5 Grass Hill (*Figure 3*). The proposal will utilise the existing access track from Grass Hill and the footprint of a previously demolished building.

The proposed development will directly affect areas of bare ground, overgrown amenity grassland and ruderal vegetation, these represent suitable habitats for common species of reptile and during the July 2020 survey a small number of Slow-worms were identified using the site. *Plates 1, 2 & 3* show habitats on site and one of the Slow-worms which was found under a fallen Heras fencing panel.

[illegible]

Plate 1. Potential hibernacula in the bare earth area (looking east)



Plate 2. Sheet of black material-lined Heras fencing



Plate 3. Slow-worm found under a sheet of Heras fencing lined with black material



2 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT PLAN

Reptile presence was confirmed on site during the initial survey and as such reasonable avoidance and mitigation measures are proposed which will ensure that reptiles will not be impacted during site preparation and construction work. Enhancement measures are also proposed which will result in an increase in the extent and quality of terrestrial habitats available reptiles.

It is worthy of note that the construction will take place only on a large area of bare ground which is largely within the footprint of the previous building and is of low value for reptiles. This area will be fenced off using reptile exclusion fencing at the start of works to ensure that no reptiles will be able to move into areas where they would be at any risk from the proposed works once construction starts. The rubble piles which have potential for reptiles will be thoroughly searched by an ecologist during the active period for reptiles (March-October inclusive) before they are dismantled under a watching brief by a suitably qualified ecologist.

The following mitigation and Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) will be undertaken to minimise the risk of Reptiles being on site during works which will include:

- All methods are to be undertaken with regard to and within the requirements of any other species mitigation;
- Work will be undertaken with an experienced Ecological Clerk of Work (ECoW) present to search for reptiles prior to work and oversee all work that impacts potential reptile habitat and toolbox talks to be given to all site staff;
- Construction will only take place on existing areas of bare ground. Reptile proof fencing will be erected around the construction zone to ensure no reptiles are able to move into areas at which they may be at risk from works;
- Vegetation that will be removed will be cut down and maintained at 100mm prior to the commencement of the development and up to the start of construction. This will be undertaken using only hand tools;
- Prior to the commencement of any work that impacts reptile habitat directly (*i.e.* removal of the rubble piles and Heras fencing panels and supports) the ecologist will undertake a thorough search for reptiles and oversee the work at any stage that is likely to find or impact reptile species;
- During construction, any storage of piles of materials and excavated earth on the site will be kept to a minimum and away from the boundaries to deter reptiles from using them for temporary cover;
- No open excavations to be left outside the reptile proof fencing overnight (*i.e.* back filled or covered and all building materials to be stored away from site boundaries and raised on pallets);
- In the unlikely event of a reptile being found during works when an ecologist is not present, then an ecologist will be contacted, and an appropriate course of action agreed before works continue.
- To ensure the longevity of reptiles on site, areas in the south of the site and adjacent to the west of the site will be maintained as reptile habitats with rough tussocky grassland and the area

under the trees so the east of the site will be enhanced for wildlife with an improved understorey (Detailed further below and shown in *Figures 4 and 5*). There will also be three hibernacula and a basking area within the reptile habitat to the south and a grass cutting pile adjacent.

- Timings of reptile habitat management following the occupation of the property will reflect the calendar in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Reptile habitat management (post construction) calendar

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Mowing												
Scrub/tree cutting												
Stump treatment												
	Most effective and least damaging time to carry out work											
	Work <i>may</i> be less effective and/or require more care to avoid disturbance											

Mitigation and enhancements as part of the proposals, to ensure opportunities for reptiles to use the site and connectivity to the wider area, will include:

- Removing scrub in the south of the site and replacing it with tussocky/rank grassland (*Figure 4*).
- Removing and scrub on roadside verge immediately west of the site, but under the same ownership, as tussocky/rank grassland (*Figure 5*).
- Enhancing the extended wildlife area beneath the trees at the east of the site with understorey vegetation to provide an area maintained for wildlife (*Figure 4*).
- This work will be done whilst leaving existing trees in these areas in place.
- Scrub removal will begin concurrently with development and be done with hand tools to reduce impacts on the nearby badger sett.
- The sections to the south of the site and the one on the roadside verge, indicated by the dashed red line in *Figures 4 and 5*, respectively, will have dense scrub vegetation, but not trees, removed and replanted as grassland which will be allowed to grow out to a rank/tussocky stage.
- Grassland planting will include a mix of species detailed in *Table 2*, sown at a rate of 20kg per acre in both areas. Planting should occur in Autumn or Spring.
- Ongoing grass cutting will occur across the site annually in later summer, with arising being removed at the same time.
- The owners of the property, or contractors appointed by the owners of the property, will be responsible for ongoing management of the wildlife areas on site as well as the area on the roadside verge that is not within the development boundary but is under the same ownership.
- The areas indicated by dashed red lines in *Figures 4 and 5* will be managed in the same way.
- The roadside verge will be lined with bollards to ensure that it is not driven on.

- The wildlife area along the south of the garden will be separated from the amenity grassland by a change of ground level supported by a retaining wall and a post-and-rail fence, indicated by the dashed blue line in *Figure 4*.
- Three hibernacula are to be created within the area being maintained for reptiles, further increasing suitability and ensuring long-term opportunities for reptiles to utilise the site (*Figure 4*). Two of these will be set into the ground and the third will be built into the structure of the retaining wall.
- A grass cuttings pile will also be maintained near to the wildlife habitat to encourage Grass Snake egg-laying (shown in *Figure 4*).
- Hibernacula will be installed after the closure of badger setts in July.

Overall, the proposals will result in temporary loss of a small amount of suitable reptile habitat, however, the suggested mitigation and enhancements measures will ensure that the proposals will result in a minor positive impact on common species of reptile. Full timings of proposed works relating to reptiles are given in *Table 3*.

Table 2. The species mix for planting of the tussocky grassland areas.

Percentage (%)	Scientific Name	Common Name
2.5	<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>	Meadow Foxtail
20	<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>	Crested Dogstail
20	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cocksfoot
5	<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	Tufted Hair-grass
30	<i>Festuca rubra</i>	Strong-creeping Red-fescue
2.5	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire Fog
12.5	<i>Schedonorus arundinaceus</i>	Tall Fescue
7.5	<i>Schedonorus pratensis</i>	Meadow Fescue

Table 3. Schedule of works

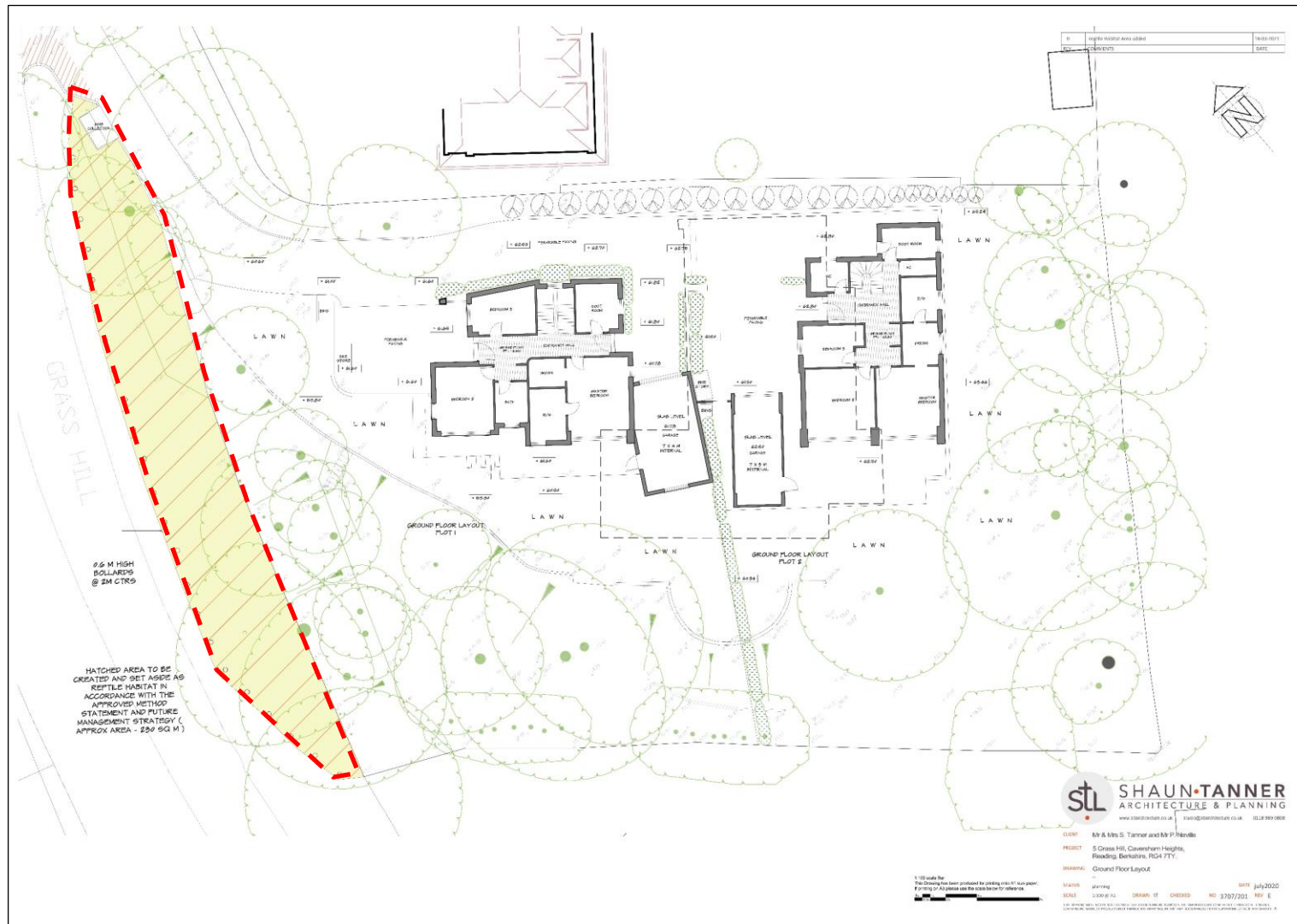
Task	Time of commencement	Responsible party
Erection of reptile fencing around development site	Before commencement of works	Developers under ecologist's supervision
Removal of rubble piles	Before commencement of works	Developers under ecologist's supervision
Scrub removal using hand tools in the reptile areas	Concurrent with works	Developers under ecologist's supervision
Planting of grassland in the reptile areas	Autumn following scrub removal	Developers

Planting of the understorey area under the trees at the east of the site	Concurrent with works	Developers
Erection of bollards, retaining wall and post and rail fencing to protect the reptile areas	Concurrent with works	Developers
Installation of hibernacula	After setts are closed in July	Developers under ecologist's supervision
Installation of grass cutting pile	After first cutting	Owners
Ongoing cutting and management of the grassland, including removal of arisings	Annually in late summer	Owners

Figure 4. The proposed landscape plan, red dashed line represents area to be given over to tussocky grassland, blue dashed line represents proposed post-and-rail fenceline. This figure will also be submitted separately, without the red and blue lines in a larger format, for ease of viewing.



Figure 5. Additional reptile enhancement area. This figure will also be submitted separately, without the red lines in a larger format, for ease of viewing.



3 *LEGAL PROTECTION*

Common Lizard, Grass Snake, Slow-worm and Adder are listed under *Schedule 5* of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended), in respect of *Section 9(5)* and part of *Section 9(1)*. This protection was extended by the CRow Act.

Under the above legislation, it is an offence to:

- intentionally or deliberately kill or injure any individual of such a species; or
- sell or attempt to sell any part of the species alive or dead.