

Reptile Survey Report



Project: Land at Mon Bank, Newport

Instructed by: Monmouthshire Housing Association

Reported by: Ecological Services Ltd
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1. Introduction

The applicant is seeking planning permission to create a residential housing scheme within a parcel of land off Mon Bank, Newport. The development proposals seek to create 42 affordable homes across the site boundary including; 16x one-bedroom apartments, 21x two-bedroom houses and 5x three-bedroom houses.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the development site has been completed by Ecological Services Ltd. The site was subject to a site visit on the 23rd November 2023. Habitats within the site boundary were assessed as being; species rich semi-improved grassland with wetter flushes, non-native hedgerow, bramble scrub and willow scrub. The habitats within the site boundary were considered suitable to support a reptile population. A reptile refugia survey of the development site was recommended to establish the presence or likely absence of reptiles within the site boundary.

A Reptile Refugia Survey was undertaken by Ecological Services in June and early July 2024 which yielded negative results for the presence of reptiles.

1.1 Site Description

The proposed development site is centred at NGR ST 30416 86815. The site is irregular in shape following the northern edge of Amberley Hall Road which is located on the northern outskirts of the Mon Bank housing development. The proposed development site is broadly flat but does slope steeply downwards along the northern boundary. A public footpath runs along the north and north eastern boundaries. The site adjoins an area of grassland along the eastern edge which extends eastwards.

The site is considered to sit in a suburban location, being immediately surrounded by housing to the south and north east, pocket of woodland to the north and railway line. Belle Vue Park is the closest extensive green area within the city, this is located to north east beyond the railway line and B4237 Cardiff Road. Photographs of the site can be found in Appendix 3.

1.2 Survey Constraints

Access was gained across all areas of the proposed development site. The reptile survey was carried out in June and early July which is outside the optimum time frame for such surveys. The weather during spring 2024 has been particularly wet, cool and breezy, however weather and temperatures improved to near average during early summer when this survey was undertaken.

Each survey visit was completed during suitable weather temperatures of 9°C and above and in favourable weather conditions when it was expected that reptiles would be present.

1.3 Surveyor Experience

Lee Gregory has been undertaking Ornithological surveys and species protection for 35 years, Lee is a fully trained A Permit Bird Ringer for the British Trust for Ornithology with several schedule 1 species permits, Lee has worked as Assistant Warden of Fair Isle and Dungeness Bird Observatories, Lee's ecological surveys cover a wide spectrum of taxa including; Botany, Mammals, Entomology, Reptiles and Amphibians.

All survey work is undertaken following guidelines in the Froglife Advice Sheet 10.

2. Reptile Survey

2.1 Legislation

Reptiles such as Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*), Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), Adder (*Vipera berus*) and Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) from killing injury and sale. All four common reptiles are also listed as 'Section 7' species in Wales. In Wales Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), Smooth Snake (*Coronella austriaca*), Adder, Grass Snake, Slow Worm and Common Lizard are listed in section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which makes them a key species to sustain and improve biodiversity.

2.2 Survey Methodology

A standard approach to presence/absence reptile surveys is to complete a minimum of seven site visits in suitable weather conditions and check artificial reptile refugia spread out across the survey site. Survey refugia for reptiles can be made from a variety of materials but the most common material used is roofing felt cut into squares measuring at least 0.5m by 0.5m.

Suitable weather conditions for reptile surveys are dry and cloudy or just after a period of rain. The weather conditions during these times must be between 9°C and 19°C which is optimal for reptiles to use the refugia as reptiles bask to gather heat from the sun and surrounding habitat or direct sun. Once animals are sufficiently warm they become very active and more difficult to observe during reptile surveys. Reptile surveys should ideally be completed in the early morning or late afternoon in Spring or Autumn.

50 reptile refugia were laid out across the proposed development site on the 18th June 2024. The refugia were placed across the site in areas thought suitable for use by reptiles such as the edge of different habitat types. The approximate location of the reptile mats can be found in Appendix 2.

The refugia were allowed to bed in for a minimum of 14 days. 7 survey visits were completed at site during suitable times of day when it is expected that reptiles would be present and also in favourable weather conditions. The survey started on the 18th June 2024 and finished on the 8th July 2024.

2.3 Survey Results

Full details of each survey visit and results are provided within Appendix 1. **No reptiles were detected on site during any survey visit.** Given the suburban nature of the development site and local area there were concerns that the refugia maybe tampered with. No indication of movement or disturbance of any refugia was noted during the course of the survey.

3. Recommendations and Mitigation Measures

No evidence of reptile presence was found during reptile survey work. However the species rich semi-improved grassland and scrub vegetation are suitable for reptile use. Although the habitats within the site boundary are suitable for reptile use, given the negative survey results from this 2024 survey it is considered that a low density population of reptiles may be present. No further survey work for reptiles is recommended.

Whilst no evidence of the presence of reptiles was found during the reptile survey completed, a precautionary approach to site clearance will be adopted as below.

- Vegetation clearance must be undertaken in two stages as below. Ground works should be undertaken during the summer months of April to September inclusive to ensure reptiles are active. The vegetation cut will aim to push any reptiles on site into adjacent retained vegetation to the north.
- The machinery to be used for cutting vegetation depends on the ground conditions and contractors. Owing to the small scale of the site ideally hand held strimmers and or brush cutters may be suitable and the tailings hand raked and removed from site. Alternatively a tractor and adjustable height flail maybe suitable.
- The hedgerow and scrub within and adjacent to the site have potential for use by nesting birds. Any tree or scrub removal must be completed outside of the bird nesting season of March to August inclusive. Cutting trees and scrub to a height of 0.5m during the winter months removes nesting bird potential. The grubbing up of roots can be undertaken during the summer months to avoid hibernating reptile impacts
- Tree and scrub removal can be undertaken during the summer months in some circumstances. An ecologist must inspect any vegetation with the potential for birds to be present for active birds' nests prior to removal works beginning. If an active nest is identified a buffer zone of at least 5m around the nest must be observed until the chicks have fledged. Only then can the vegetation be removed. Greater buffer zones around nests may be required depending on the species and habitat the nest is within.
- **First Stage Cut** - All vegetation including grasses and flowers are to be cut no shorter than 150mm. Strimming will start at the southern boundary of the site and will proceed northwards towards the retained habitat areas. The cut material will be raked and removed to an undisturbed area of the site. Once the cuttings have been collected and removed from site, the site must then be left for 24hrs.

- Any reptiles present should naturally move away of their own accord due to the disturbance from cutting. However if any reptiles or other fauna are encountered during this operation they will either be carefully collected and moved away onto the undisturbed areas of the site or allowed to do so of its own accord.
- **Second Stage Cut** - After 24 hours the grass should be cut to ground level to a maximum height of 50mm. Cutting will look to push any resident reptiles into adjacent habitats along the site boundary to the north and the arisings raked and removed to an undisturbed area of the site. Any reptiles or other fauna found will be treated as above.
- Any suitable refugia such as large fallen branches or building materials will be carefully lifted, inspected and removed under ecological supervision, for the presence of reptiles on or around this feature. Any which are found should be allowed to exit and disperse away from the site voluntarily, or should be carefully gathered up using gloved hands and taken for release in suitable habitat off the site.
- Once all vegetation has been cleared from within the site boundary, the construction site footprint must remain in a vegetation free state. This will help to reduce the likelihood of reptiles using the site while construction works are underway.

The below enhancement features will be incorporated into the development to enhance the development site for reptiles and other wildlife post construction completion.

- Any fencing used within the site boundary will allow the passage of small animals such as reptiles through the development site. This will allow reptiles to naturally recolonise areas of suitable habitat within the site boundary once development works are complete. Fencing will either be raised 13cm from the ground or will have 13cm by 13cm gaps cut into it every 3m.
- The provision of integrated bird boxes of varying design into buildings within the development site. Integrated boxes should be located as high as possible on the building and avoid south facing elevations to prevent overheating.
- The provision of integrated bat boxes into buildings within the development site. Integrated boxes should be located as high as possible on the building and be site at least 2m away from any external light source.
- The provision of a buffer zone around the periphery of the site. The buffer zone will be managed to benefit wildlife and ideally connect to adjacent suitable vegetation.

- Creating tree lined roads and footpaths which dissect the development site and connect to adjacent habitat help to increase habitat connectivity and provide green infrastructure features within the site. Green open spaces have a recreational and visual impact within development sites.
- On going long term management of hedgerow and any habitat buffer provided within and around the periphery of the development site can create a habitat enhancement. A suitable low intensity cutting regime for grassland habitat would help ensure the areas do not become scrub. Hedgerow and the wildlife that use them benefit from being cut once every two years between the months of November to February inclusive.

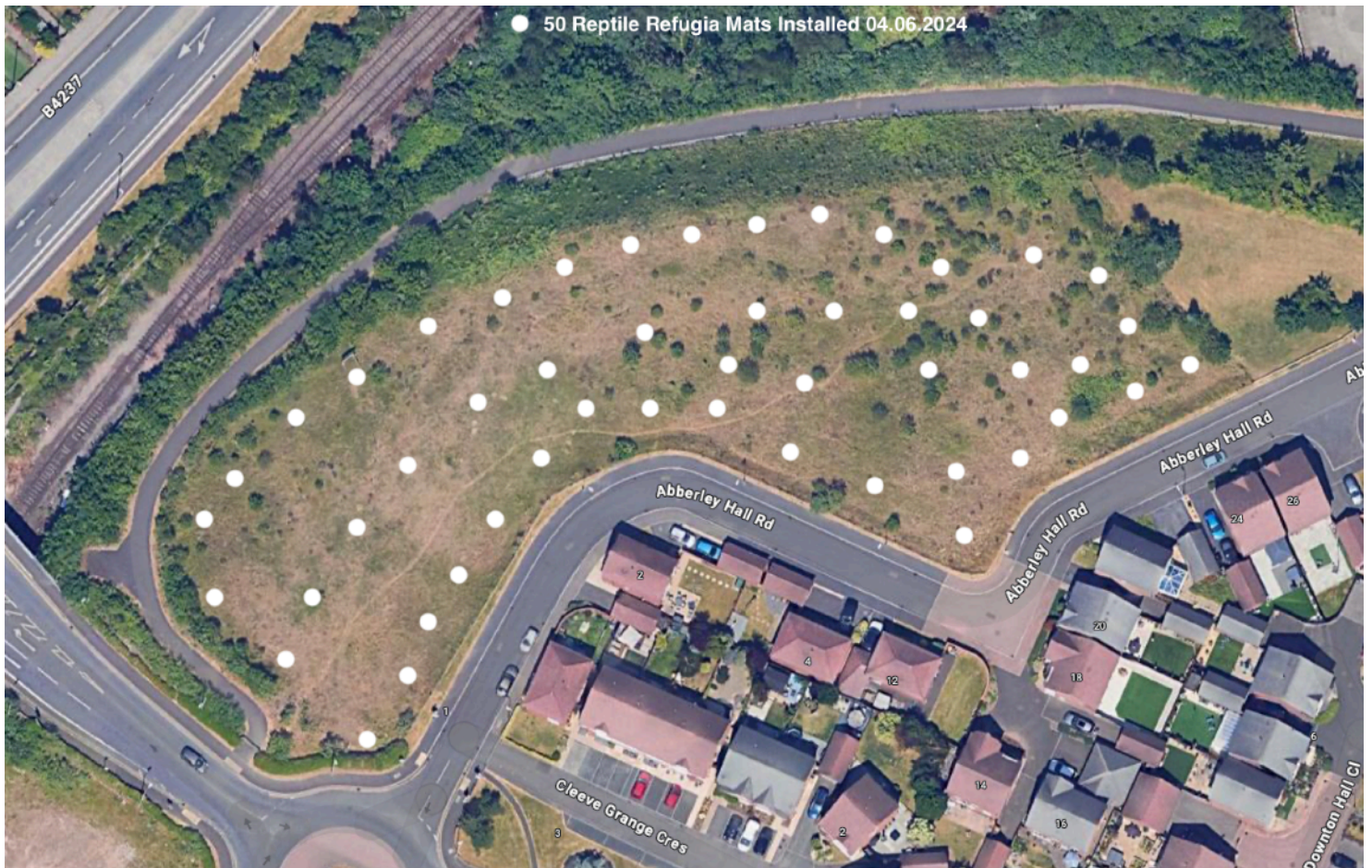
Reference List

- Ecological Services Ltd '*Preliminary Ecological Assessment: Land at Mon Bank, Newport*' dated December 2023

Appendix 1 - Reptile Survey Results

Date	Time	Conditions	Results	Comments
04/06/2024				50x Refugia mats set out across site
18/6/2024	09:00 - 09:30	15°C, 8mph NE, 10% high cloud, warm and sunny	0	Refugia warm
21/06/2024	09:15 - 09:40	16°C, 10mph W, 90% cloud, warm, sunny spells	0	
25/06/2024	08:00 - 08:25	17°C, 2mph NE, clear and sunny	0	
28/06/2024	08:30 - 08:50	15°C, 15mph W, 40% cloud and sunny periods	0	
01/07/2024	09:10 - 09:30	16°C, 10mph W, 100% cloud, warm	0	
03/07/2024	10:35 - 10:55	16°C, 14mph WSW, 100% cloud, light drizzle	0	Refugia warm
08/07/2024	08:55 - 09:30	14°C, 5mph SE, 50% cloud, sunny	0	50x Refugia collected

Appendix 2 - Approximate Refugia Locations



Appendix 3 - Site Photos



View north east across site from western end



View south east across site from centre of site



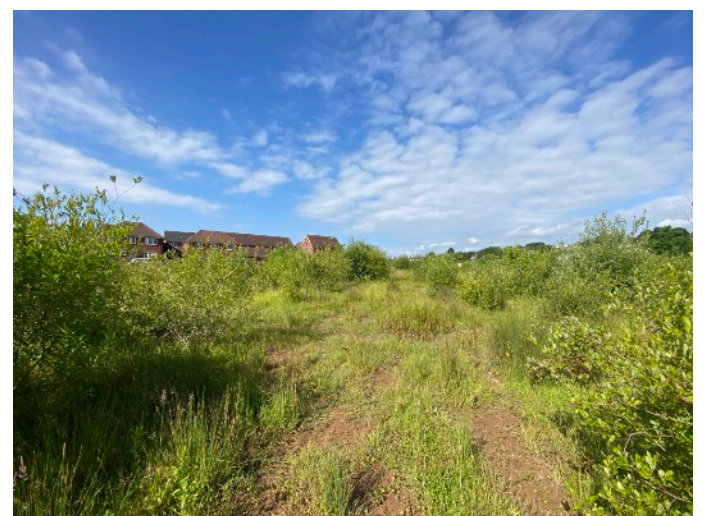
View north across site from centre of site



View south west across site from centre of site



View east across site along northern boundary



Scrub and damp area in north east corner of site viewing west



View north across site from southern boundary



View north west across site from southern boundary



View north west across site from southern boundary



View north east across site from southern boundary