

HOGWOOD FARM, FINCHAMPSTEAD

DETAILED REPTILE MITIGATION STRATEGY – LAND SOUTH OF PARCEL 15 (SPORTS HUB LAND)

Prepared for CALA Homes Thames Ltd

by

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location and summary description

1.1.1 This report describes a Detailed Reptile Method Statement in relation to the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) area of the development of approximately 110ha of land at Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead. The Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development area comprises approximately 7.12ha of land, hereinafter referred to as 'the site'. The site centre is located by National Grid Reference SU 775 639. The Detailed Reptile Method Statement was commissioned by CALA Homes Thames Ltd in May 2024.

1.1.2 The Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development parcel is located to the north-west of the village of Finchampstead, Berkshire. In general terms, it comprises part of two modified grassland fields with small areas of scrub, intersected by a track and ditch with associated scrub and scattered trees. In addition, the site includes a line of scrub and trees with a dry ditch bordering Park Lane. The Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site is bordered to the south by Park Lane with fields beyond; to the east by Park Lane, industrial units, grassland fields and woodland; to the north by a construction site associated with Parcels 14 and 15; and to the west by ancient woodland and a grassland field associated with a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and farmland. The location and boundary of the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site is shown in *Appendix A*.

1.1.3 The Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site is part of a larger area covering a total of 110ha, hereinafter referred to as the 'wider site'. The wider site includes residential properties associated with Parcel 1 and a construction site associated with Parcel 2 in the north-west and a SANG in the south which comprises a mix of wetland, species-rich grassland, scrub and woodland habitats. In general terms, the western area of the wider site is comprised of three fields of disturbed ground dominated by short ruderal vegetation with scattered areas of tall ruderal vegetation and large spoil heaps bordered by mature trees and woodland with scrub field margins. The central and eastern areas of the wider site are comprised of areas of hardstanding and construction/disturbed ground bordered by mature treelines and woodland. Woodland shaws and copses are located in the northern, western and central areas of the wider site, including mixed, broadleaved and broadleaved plantation woodland types, some of which are included on Natural England's Inventory of Ancient Woodland. Wetland habitats within the wider site include drainage ditches and small streams associated with the field boundaries and several ponds in poor condition are located across the wider site. The wider site is bordered to the north by a construction site, the Bohunt School and the Hogwood Industrial Estate; to the east by Park Lane beyond which lie residential dwellings and park homes; to the south by Park Lane and farmland; and to the west by A327 Reading Road

and Sheerlands Road beyond which lie farmland and woodland. The wider area is dominated by agricultural land interspersed with woodland and residential properties.

- 1.1.4 Further information on the extent and composition of habitats across the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site and the wider site is provided in *Appendix A*.

1.2 Background and legislative context

- 1.2.1 Four species of reptile are widespread in England: Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, and Adder *Vipera berus*. The Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca* are restricted to certain sand dune and heathland sites.

- 1.2.2 Reptiles can be found in a range of habitats and typically require a mosaic of vegetation types. Habitat interfaces are important, with reptiles requiring woodland, scrub or hedgerow for shelter, longer vegetation for hunting and patches of sheltered short turf, bare ground or log piles for basking areas. Areas that catch the sun (i.e. those with a southerly aspect) are preferred over those where direct sunlight is absent for most of the day. In addition, Grass Snakes favour damp habitats such as those associated with still and running water, grazing marshes, mires etc.

- 1.2.3 All species of reptile are protected through Sections 9(1) and 9(5) of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). It is an offence to:

- Intentionally kill or injure any reptile; and/or
- Sell, offer for sale, possess or transport for the purposes of sale or publish advertisements to buy or sell any reptile.

Due to their rarity, Sand Lizards and Smooth Snakes have additional protection.

- 1.2.4 Reptiles across the UK have undergone significant declines in recent years and all species of reptile within the UK are listed as priority species on the UKBAP and listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. Section 40 of the Act requires that these species are a material consideration in the planning process.

1.3 Development proposals

- 1.3.1 Planning permission (O/2014/2179 and 140764) was granted in January 2017 for a hybrid application. This comprises:
- Outline permission for demolition of all existing buildings on site; up to 1,500 new dwellings; employment floor space; a Neighbourhood Centre; a primary school; sports pitches and associated pavilion building; highways infrastructure; associated landscaping, public realm, open/green space and sustainable urban drainage systems; and

- Full permission for a 29.7ha Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) in the south of the site.

The hybrid planning permission was subsequently amended by a Section 73 application (181194) which was approved in November 2018.

1.4 Scope and purpose of the report

1.4.1 Reptile surveys of the site and wider site were conducted by HDA in 2017 (HDA, 2018), 2021 (HDA, 2021) and 2023 (HDA, 2024b). During the 2023 surveys no reptiles were recorded within the site or wider site. However, during the 2021 surveys, a low number of Slow-worm were recorded within the site and wider site and the presence of Grass Snake was identified within the wider site in 2017 and 2021. These update previous surveys of the site and wider site undertaken by Entec in 2008 and Amec in 2012 which identified 'low' populations of Common Lizard, Slow-worm and Grass Snake (Royal Haskoning DHV, 2014). Reptiles recorded within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site during the 2021 reptile survey was limited to up to three Grass Snakes located in the southern corner of the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site in association with the boundary hedge/scrub.

1.4.2 This Detailed Reptile Mitigation Strategy for the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) area of the proposed development has been produced as a result of Planning Condition 26, which states:

"Prior to submission of any Reserved Matters applications other than pertaining to the Nine Mile Ride Extension South an outline reptile mitigation strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. All sub phases of the development shall thereafter be designed to incorporate the requirements identified in the approved outline reptile mitigation strategy. All Reserved Matters applications for any sub phase of the development shall include a detailed reptile mitigation strategy that demonstrates how the relevant sub phases have been designed to incorporate the provisions of the outline reptile mitigation strategy and the detailed mitigation strategies shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise approved in writing by the local planning authority."

1.4.3 In recognition of the historic presence of reptiles within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site and the wider site and the requirements of Condition 26, this document provides a Detailed Reptile Mitigation Strategy for the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development area that has been produced to ensure impact avoidance, minimisation and mitigation measures for reptiles are implemented within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) scheme. The measures identified are in keeping with the *'2023 Reptile Survey and a Site-Wide Outline Reptile Mitigation*

Strategy’ prepared for the wider site and Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site in its entirety (HDA, 2024b).

2 LAND SOUTH OF PARCEL 15 (SPORTS HUB LAND) DETAILED REPTILE MITIGATION STRATEGY

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section describes the methodology that will be employed to ensure that the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development scheme complements the *Site-wide Outline Reptile Mitigation Strategy* (HDA, 2024b) to maintain compliance with nature conservation legislation afforded to reptiles and maintain the favourable conservation status of the local reptile population. This methodology will be employed during construction of the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development unless otherwise agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

2.1.2 Although no reptiles were recorded at the site during the updated 2023 reptile survey, previously low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard have been recorded within the site and wider site. On this basis it is conceivable that very low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard may remain present at the site. The site is therefore considered to support very low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard and as such does not qualify as a SSSI, SINC or Key Reptile Site. The site is considered to be of no more than site value for Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard. Notwithstanding this, the legal protection afforded to all reptiles still applies.

2.1.3 In accordance with the *Site-wide Outline Reptile Mitigation Strategy* (HDA, 2024b), as only very low numbers of Grass Snake, Slow-worm and Common Lizard are likely to be associated with the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site and the majority of suitable reptile habitat will be retained (including habitat corridors along the southern, western and eastern site boundaries and bisecting the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development area) a full translocation exercise is not proposed for this phase of the development. Instead, a cautious approach to site clearance will be employed where suitable reptile habitat is to be lost, including sections of treeline/scrub along the vegetation line bisecting the site from north to south for access, scrub/trees to install the bridleway and any areas of scattered scrub and ruderal vegetation and refuge opportunities such as rubble piles located around the site boundaries. This will involve manipulation of habitats to displace reptiles present into areas of contiguous and improved habitats, following the stages set out below:

2.2 Stage 1: Habitat enhancement works

2.2.1 In accordance with the outline reptile mitigation strategy for the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development area and wider site (HDA, 2024b), the creation/enhancement of reptile receptor habitat focuses on the SANG which has been constructed and supports areas of grassland bordered by hedgerows and areas of woodland. Further areas of suitable reptile habitat will however be created in other areas of public open space within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site, especially where these have good habitat connectivity to the off-site SANG or suitable habitat elsewhere within the site or wider area. The prescriptions for creation/enhancement of reptile habitats within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site and the management of these areas are detailed within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (HDA, 2024c) and shown on the SANG Masterplan (RPS, 2018a) and Overarching Landscape Strategy (RPS, 2018b). Those relevant to the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development area are summarised below.

2.2.2 The Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development area is currently dominated by modified grassland which provided limited opportunities for reptiles. In addition, limited areas of hedgerow, trees, scrub and ditch habitats will be lost from the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site. In addition to the substantial reptile habitat creation works within the SANG and other areas of informal open space, the following measures within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development area are proposed to maintain opportunities for reptiles within this area of the site:

2.2.3 *Meadow grassland*

Areas of meadow grassland with a species-rich native sward will be established along the western, southern and part of the northern site boundaries; the proposed bridleway along the southern and eastern site boundaries and the two SuDS basins in the south of the site. Prescriptions of benefit to reptiles include:

- A 2m to 70m wide strip of meadow grassland immediately adjacent to hedgerows, scrub and woodland habitats, will be managed through cutting once per year. Of which, on rotation selected areas (10%) will be left during each mowing period in order to provide additional refuge habitat for reptiles, small mammals and invertebrates, and to encourage a more diverse flora; and
- Some of the grass cuttings will be used to create 'habitat piles' which will provide further opportunities for egg laying Grass Snakes.

2.2.4 *Hedgerows, woodland and scrub*

- Retained hedgerows and treelines will be strengthened through complementary scrub planting and infilling of existing gaps. New native species-rich hedgerows

will be planted along the southern, northern and western boundaries of the allotments in the east of the site; the western boundary of the bridleway bisecting the centre of the site from north to south; and bordering the SuDS pond in the south-western corner of the site.

- Woodland and scrub planting is proposed in association with the retained central hedgerow bordering the bridleway, along the western and part of the northern site boundaries and around the SuDS basin and pump station in the south-eastern corner of the site. Once established selected areas of scrub will be coppiced on a short rotation of approximately 5 years in order to prevent succession into woodland. No more than 20% of the scrub will be coppiced in any one year. Arisings from the management would be used to create and maintain habitat piles (see below). Excess cuttings would be removed from site.

2.2.5 *Hibernacula and Refugia*

One hibernaculum will be constructed in the south-eastern corner of the site between the proposed allotments and the treelined bridleway to provide refuge and hibernation opportunities for reptiles. Construction measures will include:

- The hibernacula will have a minimum area of 200cm x 250cm.
- The hibernacula will be constructed on elevated ground to prevent flooding, with a thin layer of gravel along the base to aid drainage.
- A pit will be excavated and filled with rocks, logs, dead wood and other suitable rubble to an above ground height of 50-100cm.
- The mound will be capped with a layer of topsoil, turf or moss at a thickness of 5-10cm.
- The addition of a geotextile membrane beneath the capping layer may be used to prevent soil or other loose material from collapsing into the void below.
- Gaps will be left in the capping material at ground level to allow reptile access.

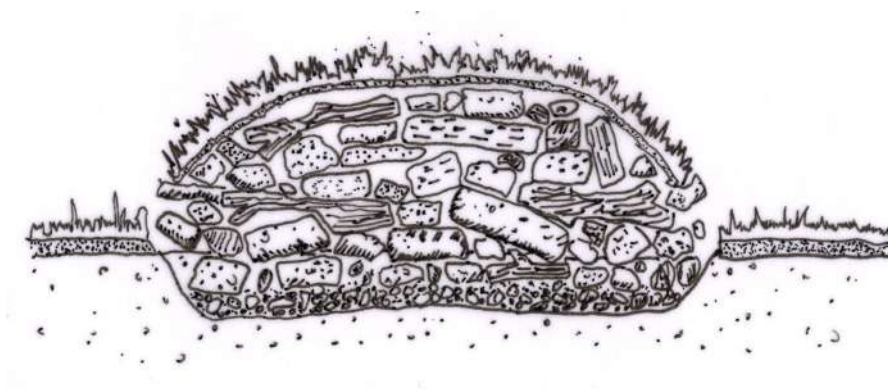


Figure 1: Example cross-section through hibernaculum

- In addition, a minimum of 2 log and brash piles will be created using arisings from construction clearance works. These will be maintained by adding the arisings from ongoing site maintenance, and piles of grass clippings from the mowing regime will provide further opportunities for egg laying Grass Snakes. The locations of the proposed hibernacula and log and brash piles are shown in *Appendix B*.

2.2.6 *Connectivity*

The development proposals have been designed to maintain a network of habitats suitable for the movement of wildlife, including reptiles, around the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development site. As indicated in the *Sports Hub Land Masterplan* (CSA, 2024) this includes the maintenance of corridors of semi-natural habitat around the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site boundaries. The number of crossing points across hedgerows and treelines has been minimised and measures such as off-set gully pots and dropped kerbs will be provided to maximise connectivity and reduce risk of mortality.

2.2.7 *Timing of habitat creation and enhancement works*

Due to the very limited extent of suitable reptile habitat affected by the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development works and the very low number of reptiles expected to be present, it is not considered necessary that habitat creation and enhancement works within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site are implemented prior to Stage 2 habitat manipulations works being commenced. Notwithstanding this, habitat enhancement works associated with the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development should be undertaken as early as possible within the development programme. In addition, the habitat creation works within the SANG have already been carried out.

2.3 **Stage 2: Habitat manipulation**

2.3.1 Prior to development affecting areas of suitable reptile habitat within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site, the following habitat manipulation measures will be undertaken under an ecological watching brief by a suitably experienced ecologist, in order to encourage the movement of reptiles from the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site into suitable habitats in the surrounding area.

- Firstly, vegetation cover will be reduced to minimum height of 150mm. This will take place at a time of year avoiding the bird breeding season (typically between March and September inclusive) or otherwise be preceded by a check of suitable habitat for active nests immediately prior to commencement of works by a suitably qualified ecologist or appropriate other.

- Where potential for reptiles to be present remains, a minimum period of 5 days with daytime temperatures of >12°C will then be allowed to elapse prior to the second stage of vegetation clearance (see below).
- The second stage will involve clearance of all suitable vegetation to ground level (i.e. <75mm) by hand during mild temperatures (>14°C) at a suitable time of year when reptiles are likely to be active (mid-March to early October inclusive). At this time any potential hibernacula or refugia encountered will be carefully dismantled by hand. This stage of clearance will be undertaken under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist who will capture and relocate any reptiles encountered to areas of retained habitat on the margins of the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site or pre-established refugia in the wider site.
- Where potential for reptiles to be present remains, a further 5 days with daytime temperatures of >12°C will then be allowed to elapse to enable any remaining reptiles to disperse from the area of works, prior to the destructive search.
- Following clearance of vegetation to ground level and removal of any refugia by hand, no suitable reptile habitat would remain and it is expected that any remaining reptiles would disperse from the area of works into adjacent habitat on their own accord.
- In order to be certain that no reptiles are present within the area of works, topsoil will then be progressively stripped from the area of works under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist, if required.
- In the event that the destructive search is delayed, the vegetation will be maintained at ground level until the destructive search is carried out. Similarly, following the destructive search, the land will be maintained as unsuitable for the recolonisation of reptiles prior to and throughout the proposed works.

3 MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING

- 3.1 The ongoing maintenance of the areas of public open space, including retained and newly created reptile habitat, are detailed within the Detailed Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) (HDA, 2024c). The LEMP will be implemented to ensure the long-term integrity of the newly created and enhanced areas of habitat for reptiles in the long-term, and includes monitoring to ensure the successful establishment and continuity of habitat for reptiles described in *Section 2.2* above.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Through implementation of the mitigation measures outlined above, the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development would avoid injury or killing of any reptiles present. Although the loss of limited areas of reptile habitat is highly unlikely to be significant within a local context, the described measures for the creation and enhancement of new areas of reptile habitat contiguous with the proposed development

area would ensure long-term opportunities for reptiles within this area of the wider Hogwood Farm site. Through the implementation of these measures it would be expected that current reptile interest of the site could be maintained and increased.

- 4.2 It is therefore concluded that subject to employment of the approach outlined above in line with the *Site-wide Outline Reptile Mitigation Strategy* (HDA, 2024b), the development would protect individual reptiles currently occurring within the Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site and ensure that the favourable conservation status of the local reptile population is maintained.

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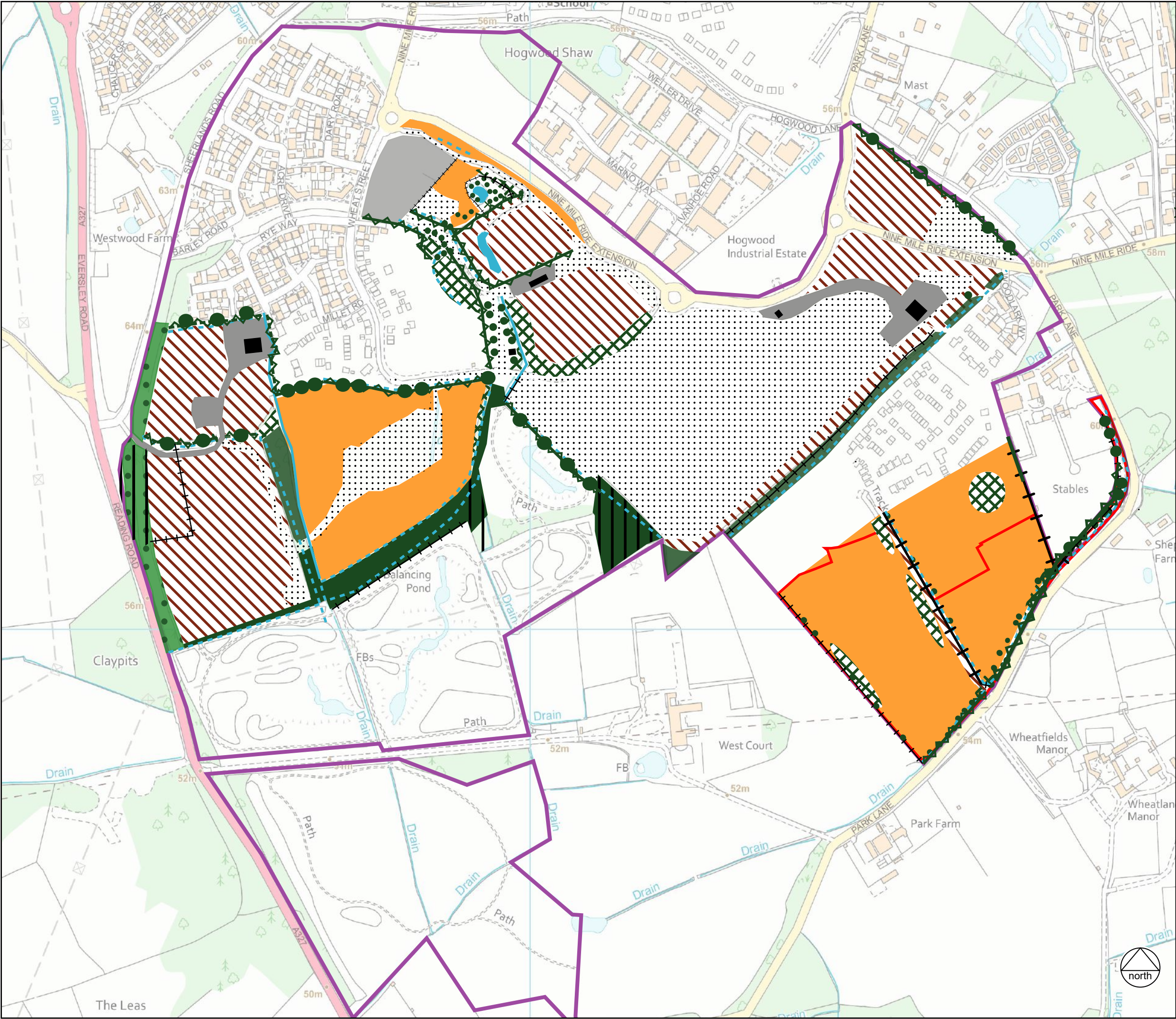
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APPENDIX A

Phase 1 Habitat Survey Plan (showing Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) development area and wider site)



KEY

- Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land) site boundary
- Wider site boundary
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (w1f)
- Other woodland - mixed - mainly broadleaved (w1h5)
- Other woodland - mixed - mainly broadleaved (w1h5)
- Scattered trees
- Native hedgerow (h2a)
- Non-native and ornamental hedgerow (h3b)
- Mixed scrub (h3h)
- Ruderal (81)
- Modified grassland (g4)
- Standing open water (r1)
- Wet ditch / dry ditch (50)
- Fence
- Building
- Developed land - sealed surface (u1b)

CLIENT:
CALA Homes (Thames) Ltd

PROJECT:
Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead

TITLE:
Phase 1 Habitat Survey Plan - Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land)

SCALE AT A3:
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APPENDIX B

Land South of Parcel 15 (Sports Hub Land): Species Enhancement Plan

