

Reptile Presence/ Likely Absence and EDNA Assessment Report

Brookfield Farm
Old Wokingham Road
RG40 3BU



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Sylvatica Ecology Ltd

Company Registration Number: 07705793

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It should be borne in mind that the behaviour of animals can be unpredictable and may not conform to standard patterns recorded in scientific literature. Therefore, this report cannot predict with absolute certainty that animal species will occur in apparently suitable locations or habitats, or that they will not occur in locations or habitats that appear unsuitable.

In order to minimise the likelihood of adverse effects on protected animal species over time, it is accepted good practice, in accordance with Natural England (NE) (formerly English Nature) guidance for ecological surveys to be repeated should works be deferred for between 12 -18 months from the date of initial survey.

It is the duty of the landowner, developer and operations managers to act responsibly and to comply with current environmental legislation if protected species are suspected or found prior to, or during works.

The recommendations and information contained within this report are based on the information provided on the development works prior to the surveys being carried out. Should the development proposals change then the findings and recommendations contained within would potentially require revision.

The findings within this report do not constitute as legal advice. Should this be required, then a suitably qualified professional practitioner should be contacted.

Approved by	Signed	Contact
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1.0 SUMMARY

Background

- 1.1 A previous Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Arbtech 2026) identified the 5.24 ha site as supporting habitat with reptile potential — principally the horse-grazed other neutral grassland that forms the majority of the holding — and flagged a possible pond (Pond 1) within 30 m of the development footprint requiring further assessment. The scheme proposes a change of use of the land to a natural burial ground, including a chapel and ancillary buildings, car parking, new ponds and woodland-style planting for biodiversity. Reptile presence/likely absence surveys and an eDNA pond survey were therefore commissioned to inform the planning application.

Methodology

- 1.2 Surveys were led by Richard Law BSc (Hons) MRes CEnv MCIEEM FLS, following Froglife (2016) and CIEEM (2021) guidance. A total of 105 roof-felt artificial refugia (1.0 m × 0.5 m) were deployed across suitable ruderal/grassland habitat in 16th March 2026 — well above the recommended 10 per hectare — and left in situ to bed in before checks began. Eight survey visits were then carried out between 4th and 23rd April 2026 under suitable weather conditions (air temperatures 10–18 °C, dry ground, cloud cover 0–50%, wind Beaufort 0–3). An eDNA sample was also intended for Pond 1 using Surescreen Scientific kits.

Results

- 1.3 No reptiles of any species were recorded on any of the eight survey visits. Because presence was not established, no population-class estimate surveys were required. When the reported location of Pond 1 was visited it was found that the waterbody did not exist, so eDNA sampling for great crested newt was not possible.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.4 Reptiles are assessed as likely absent from the site and are not considered a constraint to the proposed natural burial ground development. Given the absence of Pond 1, the lack of connectivity to other ponds in the wider landscape identified in the PEA, and the continuously grazed character of the on-site habitats, great crested newt is also discounted as a constraint. No reptile-specific mitigation, trapping or translocation is required. As a precaution, if any reptile or great crested newt is encountered during site works, activity in that area should cease immediately and a suitably qualified ecologist consulted before works resume; otherwise, no further reptile/ great crested newt survey or mitigation is recommended.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Aim of this Study

- 2.1 This report. report presents the findings of a reptile presence/ likely absence surveys of Brookfield Farm, Old Wokingham Road, RG40 3BU. A previous preliminary ecological assessment was carried out (Arbtech 2026). This survey concluded that there was reptile potential habitat present within the development footprint. Therefore, reptile presence/ likely absence surveys were carried out. The PEA also highlighted the potential presence of a pond (Pond 1) within 30m of the development footprint. As a result, further assessment of this water body was recommended.
- 2.1 It is proposed that the site is converted to that of a natural burial ground. This would involve the installation of ancillary buildings (Chapel, toilet facilities etc), car parking and the planting of wildlife habitat to make the site into a more woodland type of setting. Some ponds are also to be installed, which will be managed for biodiversity.
- 2.3 Brookfield Farm (approximately 5.24 ha, centred on NGR SU 83705 66550) comprises four habitat types, all of which are common and widespread with no Section 41 habitats of principal importance present. The majority of the site consists of other neutral grassland (UKHab g3c), seasonally grazed by horses and supporting a diverse sward of Yorkshire fog, perennial ryegrass, common bent, white clover, yarrow, creeping buttercup, meadow buttercup, ragwort, ribwort plantain, hawkbit, curled dock and a range of occasional and rarer species, with more than ten vascular species per square metre and a dead wood pile in the north-west corner, achieving a “good” condition assessment. Scattered through this grassland are 51 non-native individual trees — predominantly Sawara and Lawsons cypress — which retain loose bark and provide ecological niches but achieve only a “moderate” condition score as none are native and fewer than half are mature. Along the western boundary runs a recently planted line of very young native hawthorn hedgerow (h2a), which is heavily grazed, gappy along roughly 60% of its length and assessed as “poor”. Finally, a small patch of other broadleaved woodland (w1g), approximately 0.05 ha, occupies the south-east corner and is comprised solely of silver birch over a bramble, common bent, Yorkshire fog, yarrow and ivy ground flora, with a single age class, only one storey and no veteran trees, giving a “poor” condition score.

2.4 **Figure 1: Location of Site and Pond**



Legal Status of Reptiles

- 2.4 All reptile species are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which make it an offence to deliberately or recklessly kill, injure or trade these animals. The common reptile species covered by this Act are slow worm, grass snake, common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and adder (*Vipera berus*). Other, rarer, native reptile species are offered greater levels of protection, but these are generally found in habitats that were not present within the Site or local surroundings.
- 2.5 There was potential for grass snake and slow worm to be present within the site. As a result of this, further survey was carried out in the form of reptile presence/ likely absence surveys.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Reptile Survey

- 3.1 A presence/ likely absence survey for reptiles was carried out across the site, notably around the grassland habitats. The survey methodology followed the guidance outlined in the Surveying for Reptiles (Froglife 2016) and CIIEM (2021). The surveys were carried out in April 2026 with the survey set up carried out in March 2026.
- 3.2 105 artificial refugia in the form of roof felt were placed within the ruderal vegetation area. The refugia was 100cm by 50cm in size. The recommended concentration is 10 per hectare, so the number used was above this minimum number. The refugia were installed and left *in situ* for three weeks prior to the first survey visit (set out on xx xx). This was to give a period of time between installation and surveys, which would enable any reptiles that may be present, time to locate the refugia.
- 3.3 Surveys would have to be carried out within suitable weather conditions at a suitable time of year, normally April to May, avoiding the heat of Jun, July and early August. Late August, September and October normally have suitable weather conditions for reptile surveys but November to early March is normally outside of optimum conditions. If reptile were present, then a trapping and translocation exercise would be required, with alternative habitat provided as the translocation site. The length of this trapping and translocation would depend on the numbers present, if found.

Pond Survey

- 3.4 An Environmental DNA survey was attempted at Pond 1 following recommendation from the previous PEA. The survey methodology followed that stipulated as part of the EDNA kits provide by Surescreen Scientific Ltd.

3.4 **Figure 2: Location of Refugia**



Lead Surveyor

- 3.5 The survey work and reporting has been led by Richard Law BSc MRes CEnv MCIEEM FLS. Richard has been undertaking ecological survey work within the last 20 years on a number of differing locations throughout the United Kingdom for a variety of protected species, including bats (Class 2 2015-12576-CLS-CLS) reptiles, amphibians including great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (Class 1 2016-20290-CLS-CLS) and terrestrial mammals including dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) (2015-13188-CLS-CLS) and birds including barn owl licence (*Tyto alba*) (CL29/00236). Richard is also qualified in track and sign and trailing *via* an international system of assessment (www.trackercertification.com).

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 This section provides an account of the results from the survey carried out on the buildings and provide the justification for any further recommendations outlined within this report.

4.2 **Table 1: Survey Data**

Survey Number	Date	Temp start and end	Cloud Cover	Ground conditions	Wind strength (Beaufort) and direction	Reptile Numbers and Species
1	06/04/26	14°C - 16°C	5%	Dry	Still	0
2	09/04/26	12°C - 16°C	30%	Dry	SW (1)	0
3	11/04/26	12°C - 14°C	30%	Dry	Still	0
4	13/04/26	14°C - 15°C	40%	Dry	S (2)	0
5	15/04/26	15°C - 16°C	Clear	Dry	SW (1)	0
6	17/04/26	13°C - 14°C	40%	Dry	Still	0
7	20/04/26	16°C - 17°C	20%	Dry	Still	0
8	23/04/26	17°C - 18°C	50%	Dry	W (3)	0

4.3 No reptiles were found during the presence/ likely absence surveys. As a result, population estimate surveys were not then carried out.

4.4 Pond 1 did not exist. Therefore, it was not possible to sample the water for EDNA.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary of Predicted Impact

5.1 No reptiles were found during the presence/ likely absence surveys. It can be concluded that reptiles are likely absence and are not considered as a constraint to the proposed development works.

5.2 Pond 1 was not present. The PEA identified a lack of overall connectivity between the other identified ponds within the wider landscape and the site. The habitats across the site were generally continuously managed through grazing and there were not any suitable waterbody's present on site. Therefore, great crested newt are not considered a constraint to this project.

5.3 In the unlikely event that a reptile/ great crested newt is found during the works, then works must cease and consultation with a suitable qualified ecological consultant made. Otherwise, no further recommendation or consideration for reptile/ great crested newt are made.

6.0 REFERENCES

CIEEM (2021) Competency Standard for Reptile Surveys, Mitigation and Management (Draft)

Froglife (2016) Surveying for Reptiles 1st Edition

Arbtech Ltd (2026) Preliminary Ecological Assessment. Brookfield Farm, Old Wokingham Road, RG40 3BU

Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) The Stationary Office, Norwich

7.0 PHOTOS OF POND LOCATION

Plate 1: View of Pond 1 Location (No Pond Present)



Plate 2: Other Potential Location with No Pond

