Land to the North of Mill Lane, Sindlesham

Ecological Information to Inform Planning

Introduction

1.1 Ecological Planning & Research Ltd (EPR) was instructed by Elizabeth Rose Homes Limited to provide ecological advice in relation to the Proposed Development at Land to the North of Mill Lane, Sindlesham (the 'Site').

1.2 The Proposed Development comprises the delivery of three detached custom build houses on the Site, as shown at **Appendix 1**.

1.3 The following note sets out the ecological baseline of the Site, and where necessary mitigation measures to ensure legal compliance. EPR's approach takes account of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's (CIEEM) advice in Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland (2018, updated September 2024) and Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2017).

Legislation and Policy

1.4 The key planning policy documents of relevance include the National Planning Policy Framework (2024), The Wokingham Borough Council Adopted Core Strategy: Development Plan Document (2010), and The Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040 (2025).

1.5 Key legislation relating to the protection of wildlife and nature conservation includes: The Environment Act 2021; The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended); The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended); The Protection of Badgers Act 1992; and The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (as amended).

1.6 Consideration has also been given to the following guidance of relevance to biodiversity: Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services; and the draft Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Ecological Baseline

1.7 As part of a wider survey programme, ecological surveys have been undertaken on and adjacent to the Site between 2022 and 2024. A full list of surveys completed within proximity of the Site can be found in **Appendix 2**, alongside a summary of results. Survey metadata can be found **Appendix 3**.

1.8 An update walkover of the Site was completed by Katherine Luckhurst BSc (Hons) MSc on 13th August 2025.

Habitats

1.9 The Site lies within a wider grassland field, which has been utilised for storage and domestic horticulture in recent years. Whilst species-poor, the grassland is considered to be representative of an Other Neutral Grassland (g3c), with species recorded including: Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*; Yarow *Achillea millefolium*; Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*; Meadow Soft-grass *Holcus lanatus*; White Clover *Trifolium repens* and Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*.

1.10 Habitats within the Site itself comprise of unmanaged tussocky grasslands (**Plate 1**), short mown grasslands with bare ground (**Plate 2**) and ruderal vegetation (**Plate 3**).

Plate 1: Southern boundary of the Site

Plate 2: Proposed Development Site taken from northern boundary

Plate 3: South-western boundary of the Site

1.11 The habitats themselves are considered to be of low botanical value but may provide opportunities for protected species.

Great Crested Newt

1.12 A Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment and eDNA surveys were completed on the pond located adjacent to the northern boundary of the Site.

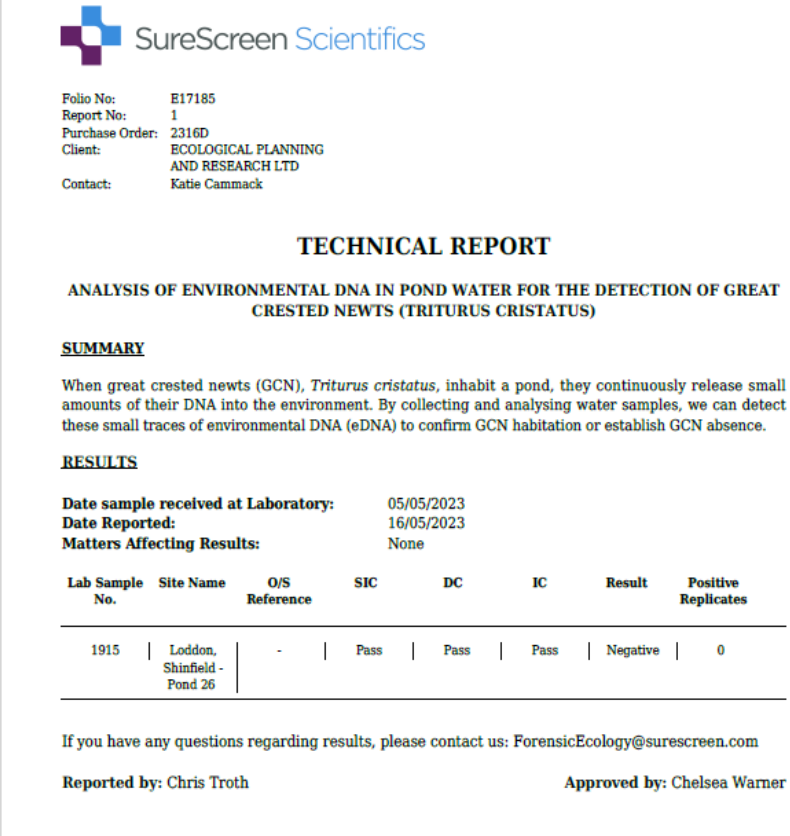
1.13 The HSI assessment found the pond to be of Poor suitability to support Great Crested Newts *Triturus cristatus* (**Table 1**), and the eDNA results were negative for their presence (**Plate 4**). However, the pond located at Nirvana Spa, approximately 165m from the Site, is known to support a breeding population of Great Crested Newt.

Table 1: Habitat Suitability Index Results

HSI Factor	**Pond 26**	
Location	A	1.00
Surface area (m^2)	180	0.36
Desiccation rate	Frequently	0.10
Water quality	Moderate	0.67
Shade	100	0.20
Waterfowl	Minor	0.67
Fish population	Absent	1.00
Pond density	6	1.00

Terrestrial habitat	Moderate	0.67
Macrophyte cover (%)	0	0.31
Pond Suitability	**Poor**	**0.48**

Plate 4: eDNA Survey results



SureScreen Scientifics

Folio No: E17185
Report No: 1
Purchase Order: 2316D
Client: ECOLOGICAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH LTD
Contact: Katie Cammack

TECHNICAL REPORT

ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DNA IN POND WATER FOR THE DETECTION OF GREAT CRESTED NEWTS (TRITURUS CRISTATUS)

SUMMARY

When great crested newts (GCN), *Triturus cristatus*, inhabit a pond, they continuously release small amounts of their DNA into the environment. By collecting and analysing water samples, we can detect these small traces of environmental DNA (eDNA) to confirm GCN habitation or establish GCN absence.

RESULTS

Date sample received at Laboratory: 05/05/2023
Date Reported: 16/05/2023
Matters Affecting Results: None

Lab Sample No.	Site Name	O/S Reference	SIC	DC	IC	Result	Positive Replicates
1915	Loddon, Shinfield - Pond 26	-	Pass	Pass	Pass	Negative	0

If you have any questions regarding results, please contact us: ForensicEcology@surescreen.com

Reported by: Chris Troth **Approved by:** Chelsea Warner

1.14 Suitable terrestrial habitats for Great Crested Newt are present within the Site boundary, including tussocky grasslands and refugia opportunities.

1.15 Great Crested Newt are legally protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and is further afforded protection as a European Protected Species under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). This protection extends to their habitats, including terrestrial habitats.

1.16 As such, it will be necessary for a suitable mitigation licence to be obtained in order for works to be undertaken legally. It is the intention for the Proposed Development to sign up for the District Licence, and liaison is underway with NatureSpace as the holder of Wokingham Borough Councils district licence.

1.17 Once available, the licence certificate will be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council. No works shall take place on the Site until a suitable licence has been obtained.

Reptiles

1.18 Records from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) show low numbers of reptile records within the local area. The closest being that of a Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica* approximately 800m to the south of the Site.

1.19 Habitats on the Site include tussocky grasslands, transitional interfaces and natural refugia which may support low numbers of common and widespread reptile species such as Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis*.

1.20 Therefore, suitable reptile habitats shall be subject to a phased clearance to prevent harm to individuals. Vegetation clearance will include a first cut to approximately 15cm above ground to avoid potential direct harm to reptiles and allowing them to disperse into surrounding unaffected habitats. After a period of 1 week, a second cut to ground level will be conducted.

1.21 A suitably experience ecologist will hand-search any potential refugia (to include rubble piles), prior to vegetation clearance.

1.22 Works to suitable reptile habitats must be undertaken during the active reptile period (April to September inclusive) and during weather conditions suitable for promoting reptile movement.

1.23 Only once an ecologist is satisfied that all potential reptile habitat has been removed may construction works commence.

Birds

1.24 Bird surveys were undertaken across the Site and wider area in 2022 in line with the Bird Survey Guidelines, with four update visits completed in 2024 (Bird Survey & Assessment Steering Group, 2025).

1.25 Species recorded within the vicinity of the Site included common and widespread garden species including Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* and Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* were also recorded and are likely to be nesting in nearby homes.

1.26 With short grasslands and largely ruderal vegetation, the Site does not provide suitable nesting habitats for the majority of species recorded in the area, although ground-nesting species such as Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* may be present.

1.27 Therefore, where vegetation taller than 50cm is proposed to be removed during the bird nesting season (March – August inclusive), a nesting bird check must be undertaken by a suitably experience ecologist no more than 24 hours prior to works. Should a nest be identified then a suitable exclusion zone must be implemented and no works shall take place within the exclusion zone until an ecologist has confirmed that the nest is no longer active.

Bats

1.28 The Site forms part of wider bat activity surveys undertaken in 2022 and 2024, in line with relevant guidelines published at the times of the survey (Good Practice Guidelines 3rd and 4th editions respectively).

1.29 The assemblage of bats recorded across the wider survey area comprised; Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*; Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*; Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*; Serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*; and Myotis species *Myotis sp*.

1.30 No bats were recorded within the Site boundary itself, however Common and Soprano Pipistrelle were occasionally recorded within close proximity and may utilise the Site and immediately adjacent land for foraging.

1.31 Given the low levels of activity recorded within the local vicinity, habitat loss as a result of the Proposed Development will not impact upon the local bat assemblage.

1.32 If required, street lighting will be directional and utilise a 'warm white' LED luminaire, with louvres and cowls to reduce light spill. No lighting is to be directed towards the retained pond and woodland parcel to the north of the Site.

Biodiversity Net Gain

1.38 The Proposed Development includes the provision of 3 custom-build houses, on a plot of land less than 0.5ha. Under The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024, the Proposed Development is therefore exempt from the requirement to complete a biodiversity net gain assessment and demonstrate a 10% net gain.

Enhancements

1.39 Whilst the Proposed Development is not required to provide a biodiversity net gain, enhancement measures will be incorporated to increase opportunities for local biodiversity in line with the aspirations of the NPPF and local planning policy. Such measures will include:

- Tree planting will include fruit or berry bearing trees to provide foraging resources for birds, Badger and small mammals.
- Greenspaces outside of residential curtilages will comprise of species-rich lawn mixes/turf such as Emorsgate EL1 Flowering Lawn mix (or similar).
- New residential dwellings will each include an integrated bat or bird box, such as the Vivara WoodStone House Sparrow Nest Box, Vivara Build-in WoodStone Bat Box (or similar).

Summary

1.40 The Site provides a small area of habitats suitable to support Great Crested Newt, common reptile species and ground-nesting birds. With the mitigation measures as outlined above the Proposed Development will ensure compliance with the relevant legislation and Policy.

1.41 The provision of enhancement measures will provide roosting/nesting opportunities for the local bird and bat assemblages, whilst new planting will provide a range of foraging for local biodiversity.

Document Prepared By: Katie Cammack BSc (Hons) MSc MCIEEM
Document Dated: 17 October 2025

2. REFERENCES

Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom (ARG UK) (2010) *Advice Note 5: Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index*.

Bat Conservation Trust (2024). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines 4th edition – Amendments and Q&A.*

Bird Survey & Assessment Steering Group. (2025). *Bird Survey Guidelines for assessing ecological impacts.* https://birdsurveyguidelines.org

CIEEM (2018) *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine version 1.3 updated September 2024.* Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Ampfield

Collins, J. (ed). (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists - Good Practice Guidelines. 3nd Edition*. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) (1981) *Wildlife and Countryside Act*. HMSO, London

HMSO (1992) *Protection of Badgers Act*. HMSO, London

HMSO (2006) *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act*. HMSO, London.

HMSO (2017) *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017*. HMSO, London.

HMSO (2018) *The Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018*. HMSO, London.

HMSO (2019) *The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019*. HMSO, London.

HMSO (2021). *Environment Act 2021*. HMSO, London.

HMSO (2024). *The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024.* HMSO, London.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024). *National Planning Policy Framework.*

Appendix 1

Proposed Block Plan

Drawing Key
BS - Bike Store
EV - Electric Vehicle Charge Point
V - Visitor Parking
UA - Unallocated Parking Space

PROPOSED BLOCK PLAN

SITE ADDRESS - Land North of Mill Lane, Sindlesham Wokingham, RG41 4DF
DRAWING REF - PL-01
DRAWING SCALE - 1:500@A3
DRAWING REV - P1

Scale 1:500
5 0 5 10 15 20 25m

Appendix 2

Summary of Wider Ecology Surveys

Survey Type	Month	Year	Summary
Habitat Survey	April	2022	Habitats on Site of low ecological value.
	July	2024	Habitats on Site of low ecological value.
[redacted]			
Breeding Bird Survey	April – July	2022	Common and widespread species recorded within proximity of the Site.
	April, May & July	2024	Common and widespread species recorded within proximity of the Site.
Bat Static Detector Surveys	April – October	2022	Common and widespread species identified within proximity of the Site.
	April – October	2024	Common and widespread species identified within proximity of the Site.
Bat Activity Surveys/Night-time Bat Walkover Survey	April – October	2022	Low level activity by Common Pipistrelle identified within proximity of the Site.
	May, July & September	2024	Low level activity by Common and Soprano Pipistrelle identified within proximity of the Site.
Hazel Dormouse Presence/Absence Survey	September – November	2022	No Dormice identified within proximity of the Site
	April – July	2023	No Dormice identified within proximity of the Site
Winter Bird Surveys	Jan & Feb, Nov & Dec	2023	Common and widespread species recorded within proximity of the Site.
Ground Level Tree Assessment for bats	April	2023	No trees suitable to support roosting bats identified within proximity of the Site.

Great Crested Newt eDNA	May	2023	No Great Crested Newt identified within the pond to the north of the Site.
Great Crested Newt Population Assessment	May	2023	No Great Crested Newt identified within the pond to the north of the Site.
Veteran Tree Survey	April	2023	No Veteran Trees identified within proximity of the Site
Update Walkover Survey	August	2025	Walkover of Site boundary to confirm habitats and changes since previous surveys.

Appendix 3
Survey Methodologies and Metadata

UK Habitats Classification

The initial field survey was completed by Jodie Southgate BA (Hons) MSc MCIEEM on 23rd April 2022. The core of the Site and wider survey area was walked, recording habitats and features of potential value to wildlife and any evidence of, or potential for, protected or notable species or habitats, in accordance with the methods described below. An update survey, following the same methodology was undertaken in July 2024.

Within the study area the land use, habitat types and landscape features (such as hedgerows and veteran trees) were described and mapped. For each main habitat type the dominant vegetation communities were recorded, along with any notable or indicator plant species, (including invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed where present). A preliminary evaluation of the structure, quality and likely management of each habitat or feature was also carried out.

The survey method used to record this information was based on the most up to date UK Habitat Classification System at the time, which included v1.1 in 2022, and v2.01 in 2024 (UK Hab, 2023) (**Table A2.1**).

Table A2.1: Metadata for UKHab Survey

Survey Type/Purpose	Broad habitat mapping
Surveyor name(s)	Jodie Southgate BA (Hons) MSc MCIEEM
Survey date(s)	23/04/2022, 2 11/07/2024
UK Hab Edition	Professional Edition v1.1 (2022) and Professional Edition v2.0 (2023-)
Minimum Mapping Unit (areas)	25m2 (5m x 5m)
Minimum Mapping Unit (lines)	5m
Primary Habitat Level recorded	Level 4
Secondary codes recorded	Essential and some Additional
Map projection and units	British National Grid, metres

Great Crested Newt

Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) evaluation is a means by which to assess the quantity and quality of freshwater habitat to support GCN. For each waterbody, scores are allocated to describe the quality of 10 habitat features. These figures are then entered into a calculation, producing an overall index between 0 and 1. HSI values close to 0 indicate unsuitable and those nearer to 1 optimal habitat conditions for GCN. Categories ranging from poor (HSI <0.5) to excellent (HSI >0.8) have been defined to assign approximate pond suitability from an overall HSI score (**Table A2.2**).

HSI surveys were undertaken in April 2023 on the pond adjacent to the Site, and results are shown in **Table A2.3** below.

Table A2.2 Categorisation of Habitat Suitability Index Scores

HSI Score	Pond Suitability
<0.5	Poor
0.5-0.59	Below average
0.6-0.69	Average
0.7-0.79	Good
>0.8	Excellent

To compliment the HSI, eDNA samples were taken from the pond. eDNA sampling involves taking water samples from the pond, which are then processed by a laboratory to detect the presence of Great Crested Newt DNA. The eDNA samples were taken on 3 May 2023, within Natural England's approved sample window (15th April - 30th June).

The eDNA results were analysed by SureScreen Scientifics, and were negative for the presence of Great Crested Newt (**Plate A2.1**).

Birds

EPR carried out breeding bird surveys across the Site between April and July 2022. Update surveys were undertaken in April, May and July 2024.

Surveys were undertaken in accordance with methods set out in Gilbert et al. (1998), Bibby et al. (2000) and by the Bird Survey & Assessment Steering Group (2025). Surveyors walked the Proposed Scheme at a slow pace, covering all areas within 50m of an internal or external boundary, to enable birds to be identified and located. All birds seen or heard were recorded on large-scale maps using standard codes to denote species and behaviour.

The Bird Survey Guidelines (Bird Survey & Assessment Steering Group, 2022) recommends that six visits are undertaken over the breeding season, between late March and early July. It is considered that six visits are sufficient to demonstrate an understanding of the species assemblage within more complex habitats, and therefore can be applicable to most terrestrial habitats. Six visits were completed as part of the original surveys completed in 2022. Only four visits were completed in 2024, due to the nature of the surveys intending to update the original results. Based on the previously recorded assemblage, and habitats present on the Site, four visits were considered sufficient to determine an understanding as to whether the assemblage on Site had changed.

Birds recorded during the survey period (the core bird breeding season) are those that are likely to be breeding, with different levels of evidence enabling breeding to be classed as Proven, Probable or Possible.

Surveyors walked through the site at a slow pace during suitable weather conditions (principally in the absence of strong wind and persistent rain), to enable all birds to be identified and located. All birds seen or heard were recorded on large-scale maps using standard BTO codes to denote species and behaviour. Routes were varied during each survey visit so that different parts of the site were surveyed at different times of the day.

Survey dates and metadata can be found in **Table A2.4.**

Table A2.4. Breeding Bird Survey Metadata

Date of survey	Start Time	Temperature (°C)	Wind (Beaufort scale)	Rain
20/04/2022	06:30	(not recorded)	(not recorded)	(not recorded)
22/05/2022	05:15	10	0	None
16/06/2022	07:30	16	0	None
23/06/2022	05:05	10	0	None
11/07/2022	19:35	28	1	None
19/04/2024	06:00	9	2	None
09/05/2024	05:30	9	0	None
04/07/2024	20:20	18	4	None
11/07/2024	05:18	13	1	None

Automated Static Detector Surveys

Automated bat detector surveys were undertaken in line with the best practice guidelines in force at the time of survey (Collins 2016 & Collins 2023). Automated static detectors were deployed to sample different habitats across the Site and gather further information on the bat assemblage and relative bat activity. Two automated static detectors were deployed for each transect route.

Automated static detectors were deployed once a month within the Site for a minimum of five consecutive nights between April and October 2022 inclusive. These detectors recorded from 30 minutes before sunset until 30 minutes after sunrise. Deployment dates can be found in **Table A2.7** below.

Bat calls were recorded in Full Spectrum and were analysed using Kaleidoscope software. Bats were identified to species/species group as far as possible. Analysis of bat calls used parameters to aid identification based on Russ (2012) and Middleton *et al.* (2014).

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Table A2.7 Static Detector Deployment Dates

Year	Deployment Date	Collection Date
2022	25/04	30/04
	18/05	23/05
	14/06	19/06
	19/07	24/07
	24/08	29/08
	19/09	24/09
	17/10	22/10
2024	14/04	24/04
	09/05	14/05
	04/06	09/06
	02/07	13/07
	02/08	07/08
	03/09	08/09
	01/10	06/10

Bat Activity/Night-time Bat Walkover Surveys

The night-time bat walkover surveys were designed to determine the use of the Site and adjacent habitat by bats, their distribution across the area, and identify any potential key locations for bat activity. Surveys were undertaken in line with best practice guidelines in force at the time of the surveys (Collins, 2016 & 2023).

A transect route was devised to encompass most features within and adjacent to the Site that have the potential to support bats in terms of foraging, commuting, and roosting habitat. The transect route was walked by a pair of surveyors equipped with full spectrum bat detectors with recording capabilities. Surveyors walked pseudo-randomised routes across the Site to reduce bias in sampling particular habitats or features. Each survey commenced at sunset and continued for a total of at least two hours after sunset.

Each transect route was walked once a month from April to October 2022. In August 2022 transect routes comprised of a dusk and pre-dawn transect survey within one 24-hour period. Following the update to the guidance in 2023, three surveys were undertaken in 2024 with one visit during each core window of the active bat season (spring, summer and autumn). In addition to walking the transect route in 2024, fixed point surveys were undertaken at the start of the transect for no less than 30 minutes after sunset.

During each survey, details such as species/species group, numbers of bats and direction of flight (where observed) and behaviour, e.g. commuting, foraging and social calling were noted.

On each occasion (unless otherwise stated) at least one suitably experienced ecologist equipped with a handheld bat detector (Batlogger M1, Batlogger M2, Anabat Scout, Batbox Duet or Peterson D200) walked a pre-defined route. The starting location along each route and direction the transect was walked was changed across the surveys to reduce sampling bias as far as reasonably possible. Each dusk

survey commenced at 15 minutes prior to sunset and continued for approximately 2 hours or from two hours before sunrise until sunrise for the pre-dawn surveys.

Surveyors walked each transect at a steady pace recording bat activity (as described above) along the route of each transect. The number of 'bat passes' per species/species group were recorded in addition to bat behaviour. In this report a bat pass is defined as 'the number of echolocation registrations within a 10 second interval'. For example, this could be a single registration, such as a bat flying past a 'stopping point' whilst commuting elsewhere, to repeated registrations, e.g. associated with foraging'. On this basis, a maximum of 6 bat passes can arise from an individual bat per minute.

Bat Echolocation recordings were analysed using Kaleidoscope.

Survey dates and metadata can be found in **Table A2.8**

Table A2.8 Bat activity/night-time walkover survey metadata

Date	Start Time	Sunset	End Time	Start Temp (oC)	End Temp (oC)	Cloud Cover (%)	Wind	Rain
17/05/2022	20:52	20:52	22:52	22	18	80	1	Heavy at start
29/06/2022	21:09	21:24	23:24	17	13	100	1	None
25/07/2022	21:09	21:24	23:24	20	18.5	60	3	None
17/08/2022	20:08	20:23	22:23	19	17	100	3	None
18/08/2022	03:54	05:54	05:54	17	19	100	1	None
20/09/2022	18:55	19:08	21:08	17	15	90	1	None
12/10/2022	18:02	18:17	20:17	16	14	100	2	None
20/04/2023	19:55	19:55	22:08	9	8	100	3	None
02/05/2024	20:29	20:29	22:30	11	10	100	1	None
02/07/2024	21:33	21:33	23:36	17	15	40	0	None
03/09/2024	19:45	19:45	22:12	18	17	90	1	None

[redacted]