

HOGWOOD FARM, FINCHAMPSTEAD

DETAILED REPTILE MITIGATION STRATEGY – PARCEL 6

Prepared for Vistry Thames Valley

by

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HDA ref: 442.2

June 2025

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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 Parcel 6 of the development of approximately 110ha of land at Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead. The Parcel 6 development area comprises approximately 5.2ha of land, hereinafter referred to as 'the site'. The site centre is located by National Grid Reference SU767642. The study was commissioned by Vistry Thames Valley in January 2025.

1.1.2 The Parcel 6 site is located to the south of Arborfield Green, Berkshire. In general terms, at the time of the Phase 1 habitat survey in 2023 it comprised part of a former agricultural field dominated by modified grassland with a large area of bare ground in the centre associated with an construction track and material storage. The Parcel 6 site is bounded by areas of woodland, including ancient and aged woodland, in addition to native hedgerows with dry ditches. The Parcel 6 site is bordered to the south and east by the existing Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (delivered as part of the wider Hogwood Farm development); to the north by residential dwellings associated with a previous development phase; and to the west by a future development parcel which currently comprises tall ruderal vegetation and hardstanding. The location and boundary of the Parcel 6 site is shown in *Appendix A*.

1.1.3 The Parcel 6 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 and a construction site associated with previous phases 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. The south-eastern areas of the wider site comprise two fields of semi-improved grassland fields intersected by a ditch with associated scrub and scattered trees. A species-rich hedgerow with trees adjacent to Park Lane is present along the southern boundary. 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 Parcel 6 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. Subsequently, in April 2023 a Non-Material Amendment (NMA) application was submitted to WBC to vary the parameter plans approved as part of the Section 73 application (ref:181194).

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, 2024). During the 2023 surveys no reptiles were recorded within the site or wider site. However, during the 2021 survey, a low number of Slow-worm were recorded within the 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). No reptiles were recorded within the Parcel 6 site during the 2021 reptile survey.

1.4.2 This Detailed Reptile Mitigation Strategy for Parcel 6 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 Parcel 6 site and the wider site and the requirements of Condition 26, this document provides a Detailed Reptile Mitigation Strategy for Parcel 6 that has been produced to ensure impact avoidance, minimisation and mitigation measures for reptiles are implemented within the Parcel 6 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 Parcel 6 site in its entirety (HDA, 2024).

2 PARCEL 6 DETAILED REPTILE MITIGATION STRATEGY

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section describes the methodology that will be employed to ensure that the Parcel 6 development scheme complements the Site-wide Outline Reptile Mitigation Strategy (HDA, 2024) 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 Parcel 6 development unless otherwise agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

2.1.2 Although no reptiles were recorded at the site during the updated 2021 and 2023 reptile surveys, previously low numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard have been recorded within the site and wider site. In view of the areas of grassland within the site and the presence of woodland bordering the site, it is conceivable that small numbers of Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard may remain present at the site. Slow-worm, Grass Snake and Common Lizard are all common and widespread in Southern England and suitable habitat for these species is abundant in the wider site and the Parcel 6 site is therefore considered to be of no more than low local interest for these species. 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, 2024), as only very low numbers of Grass Snake, Slow-worm and Common Lizard are likely to be associated with the Parcel 6 site and the majority of suitable reptile habitat will be retained (including the woodland and hedgerow along the site boundaries), 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 areas of modified grassland. 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 Parcel 6 development area and wider site (HDA, 2024), 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. Limited further areas of suitable reptile habitat will however be created in other areas of public open space within the Parcel 6 site. The prescriptions for creation/enhancement of reptile habitats within the Parcel 6 site and the management of these areas are detailed within the Parcel 6 Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (HDA, 2025) and shown on the SANG Masterplan (RPS, 2018a) and Overarching Landscape Strategy (RPS, 2018b). Those relevant to the Parcel 6 development area are summarised below.

2.2.2 The Parcel 6 development area is currently dominated by bare ground which provided limited opportunities for reptiles and areas of modified grassland which up until recently has generally provided limited opportunities for reptiles. The grassland has however become outgrown in recent months due to cessation of grazing and only periodic cutting thereby increasing its suitability for this group. In addition to the substantial reptile habitat creation works within the SANG and other areas of informal open space, the following measures within the Parcel 6 site 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 southern, eastern and western site boundaries associated with the ecotone habitats proposed along the margins of the areas of woodland located within the wider site and a narrower band of meadow grassland will be established along the northern site boundary associated with the retained hedgerow. Prescriptions of benefit to reptiles include:

- A 15m to 25m wide strip of meadow grassland is proposed bordering the southern, eastern and western site boundaries associated with the ecotone habitats proposed along the margins of the areas of woodland located within the wider site and a 3-8m wide strip of meadow grassland is proposed bordering the northern site boundary associated with the hedgerow. In addition, sections of approximately 5m wide mixed scrub planting are proposed adjacent to the northern site boundary hedgerow and the southern and western woodland margins. The meadow grassland will be managed through cutting twice 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 and scrub*

- New native species-rich hedgerow will be planted along part of the western site boundary.
- Areas of native scrub planting are proposed adjacent to the northern site boundary hedgerow and the southern and western woodland margins. 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 along the woodland margin associated with the south-western corner of the site boundary 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 3 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 Parcel 6 development site. As indicated in the *Finchampstead Parcel 6 – Detailed Landscape Proposals For*

Public Open Space (Pegasus Group, 2025) this includes the maintenance/planting of corridors of semi-natural habitat along the southern, eastern, western and northern site boundaries. No new crossing points across the existing off-site woodland parcels or hedgerows are proposed and where appropriate 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 limited extent of suitable reptile habitat affected by the Parcel 6 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 Parcel 6 site are implemented prior to Stage 2 habitat manipulations works being commenced. Notwithstanding this, habitat enhancement works associated with the Parcel 6 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 Parcel 6 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 Parcel 6 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 Parcel 6 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, 2025). 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 Parcel 6 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, 2024), the development would protect individual reptiles currently occurring within the Parcel 6 site and ensure that the favourable conservation status of the local reptile population is maintained.

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HDA Document Control and Quality Assurance Record

Project Title: Arborfield Vistry
Project Reference: 442.2
Document Title: Detailed Reptile Mitigation Strategy – Parcel 6
Commissioning Party: Vistry Thames Valley

Issue	Description	Date of Issue	
1	Detailed Reptile Mitigation Strategy – Parcel 6	June 2025	

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APPENDIX A

Phase 1 Habitat Survey Plan (showing Parcel 6 development area and wider site)



- KEY**
- Parcel 6 boundary
 - Lowland mixed deciduous woodland - (w1f)
 - Other woodland - mixed - mainly broadleaved (w1h5)
 - Ancient Woodland - based on Natural England's Inventory of Ancient Woodland
 - Aged Woodland
 - Scattered trees (indicative)
 - Native hedgerow - (h2a)
 - Native hedgerow with trees - (h2a - 11)
 - Non-native and ornamental hedgerow - (h3b)
 - Mixed scrub - (h3h)
 - Scattered scrub
 - Ruderal - (81)
 - Developed land - sealed surface - (u1b)
 - Modified grassland - (g4)
 - Standing open water - (r1)
 - Wet ditch / Dry ditch - (50)
 - Bare ground - (510)
 - Buildings
 - Fence

CLIENT:
Vistry Thames Valley

PROJECT:
Hogwood Farm, Finchampstead

TITLE:
Parcel 6 - Phase 1 Habitat Survey Plan

SCALE AT A3:
NTS

DATE:
June 2025

442.2 / 13

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Landscape Architecture
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APPENDIX B

Parcel 6 – Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Plan



- KEY**
- Parcel 6 boundary
 - Hibernacula (indicative)
 - Log and brash pile (indicative)
 - Dropped kerb (Ecological use)*
 - Wildlife corridor features (comprising wildlife kerbs, offset gully pots and/or gully pot ladders with gully pots to be provided to avoid entrapment in the site drainage system).
 - Proposed Hedgehog access point (indicative)
 - New opportunity for nesting birds provided on new buildings and retained trees (indicative)
 - New opportunity for roosting bats provided on new buildings and retained trees (indicative)

* All kerbing types remain subject to detailed design and approval with WBC.

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Parcel 6 - Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Plan
SCALE AT A3:
NTS
DATE:
June 2025

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