JAMES BLAKE ASSOCIATES

Updated Reptile Survey

of

Land at Buntingford West,

Hertfordshire

On behalf of

Vistry Group Ltd.

January 2022

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Job Number: JBA 17/316	JAMES BLAKE ASSOCIATES **Title:** Updated Reptile Survey of Land at Buntingford West, Hertfordshire

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Executive Summary

A reptile survey of land at Buntingford West, Hertfordshire was undertaken between the 22nd April and 4th August 2020.

The aim of the survey was to establish the presence or likely absence of reptiles across the site following Natural England approved guidelines (Froglife, 1999).

No reptile species were recorded using the site during the survey period. Therefore, no mitigation or constraints to the development apply to the site, with respect to reptiles.

If development does not begin within two years, then the surveys should be updated to ensure that reptiles have not colonised the site in the interim.

Enhancement recommendations have been included in the report.

1 Introduction

Background to the study

1.1 James Blake Associates Ltd. (JBA) were commissioned by Vistry Group Ltd. to carry out an updated reptile survey of land at Buntingford West Hertfordshire. Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference; TL 35849 28811, taken from the centre of site.

1.2 The site has no designated conservation status assigned to it.

1.3 All reptiles are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Appendix B). Reptiles such as grass snakes, common lizards and slow worms are also species of principle importance in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, and are a material consideration under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021).

Previous surveys

1.4 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was carried out by JBA in 2020; a 2km data search was requested from the Herts Environmental Record Centre which highlighted eight slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) records 210m south-east of the site boundary in 2013. These records relate to a reptile survey undertaken by JBA in 2013 which included a small area off-site to the south-east. However, this small area is now not included in subsequent development plans in 2017 or 2020 and therefore was not surveyed.

1.5 Previous surveys were undertaken by JBA in 2017 due to suitable boundary habitat on site and slow worm records identified 210 south east in 2013. However, no reptile observations were noted during the survey period.

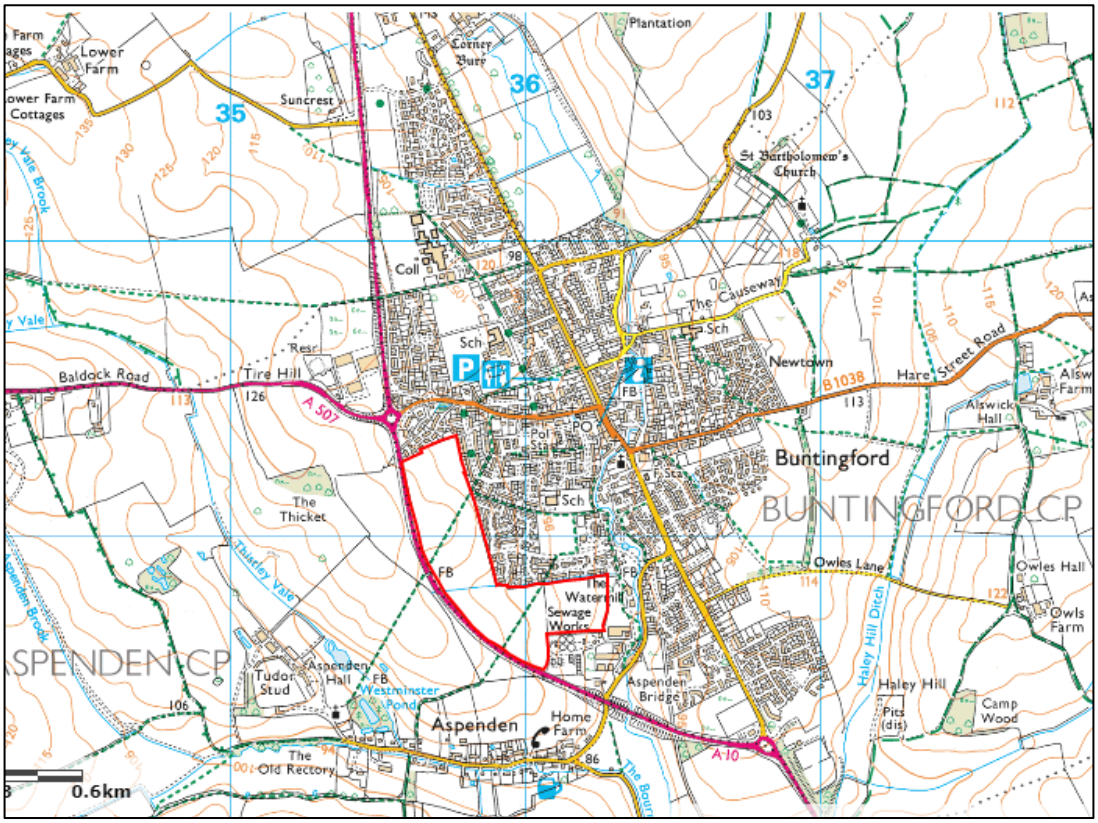
Site Description

1.4 The site is approximately 20 hectares in size and is located to the west of Buntingford and east of the A10. Residential housing and gardens are adjacent to the north and east boundaries of the site. The busy A10 is adjacent to the west and south boundaries of the site and a sewage treatment

works is adjacent to the site in the south-east corner of the site. The wider landscape includes the town of Buntingford, residential and commercial buildings and arable land (see Figure 1 below).

1.5 The majority of the site comprises improved grassland (for agricultural uses). Other habitats present on site are scrub, hedgerows, wet and dry ditches, boundary trees and semi-improved grassland.

Figure 1: Site location



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Aims and objectives

1.8 The aims and objectives of this survey were to;

- identify the presence of any reptile species using the site;
- advise of any implications their presence would have on the proposed development; and
- suggest appropriate mitigation methods where necessary.

2 Methods

2.1 The reptile surveys were undertaken between the 22nd April and 4th August 2020 on days with suitable weather conditions for finding reptiles (Froglife 1999).

2.2 To undertake the reptile survey, artificial refuges (roofing felt mats and corrugated metal sheets) were used. These increase the chances of observing otherwise elusive reptiles, which are attracted to these 'refuges' as they can bask on top or regulate their body temperature below the refuges, out of sight from predators.

2.3 One hundred and thirty five refuges, measuring approximately 0.25m^2, were laid down on the 22nd April 2020. The refuges were laid in all areas of suitable reptile habitat throughout the site (see Appendix A). A number of existing potential refuges were also present on the site. On each survey visit these items were also checked for reptiles.

2.4 The refuges were left for fifteen days prior to the commencement of the survey to allow any reptiles present to begin using the refuges and were surveyed on seven subsequent visits to the site.

2.5 On each visit, refuges were observed from a distance to record any reptiles basking in the sun. Following this, each refuge was approached cautiously and turned over to survey for reptiles sheltering beneath.

2.6 No constraints were encounters during the survey period.

3 Results

3.1 No reptiles were recorded using the artificial refuges during the survey period. Records from the seven survey visits and the weather conditions are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of results for protected reptile species

Visit	Date	Weather conditions	Reptiles observed
1	07/05/20	Temperature: 16°C Cloud Cover:30%	0

Visit	Date	Weather conditions	Reptiles observed
		Beaufort scale: 1	
2	27/05/20	Temperature: 18°C Cloud Cover:20% Beaufort scale: 1	0
3	10/06/20	Temperature: 17 °C. Cloud Cover: 100% Beaufort scale: 2	0
4	23/06/20	Temperature: 17°C. Cloud Cover: 0% Beaufort scale: 2	0
5	13/07/20	Temperature: 20 °C. Cloud Cover: 60% Beaufort scale: 1	0
6	30/07/20	Temperature: 20 °C. Cloud Cover: 0% Beaufort scale: 1	0
7	04/08/20	Temperature: 18 °C. Cloud Cover: 70% Beaufort scale: 1	0

4 Discussion

4.1 Survey visits were all carried out in suitable weather conditions at the optimal time of year for reptile surveys.

4.2 The density of refuges used was well above the recommended: one hundred and thirty five refuges were used across approximately 3.2ha of land (suitable for reptiles), whereas guidelines suggest ten per hectare. Given that the density of refuges used during this survey was higher than ten per hectare, the findings are not considered to be directly comparable, but provide an indicative representation of use of the habitats within the site boundary by reptiles. By using an increased survey density, reptile populations are less likely to be under-estimated and it provides a more conservative approach to preservation of the local population status of reptiles (See Appendix A for indicative location of reptile mats).

4.3 No reptiles were recorded using the artificial refuges during the survey period. Therefore, there are no constraints or mitigation requirements for the development, with respect to reptiles.

4.4 However, habitats on and adjacent to, the site were considered suitable for reptiles, and it is possible that if the site remains unchanged, reptiles could colonise in the future, especially as slow worms were found 210m south-east of the site in 2013.

4.5 If development has not commenced within two years from the date of the 2020 survey, then the survey may require updating or an ecological walkover undertaken to note any changes and assess the need for further surveys.

4.6 The habitats on the proposed development site were considered to be of a moderate suitability for reptiles. This was based on the presence of narrow field margins with a variable sward height ranging from 5cm to 15cm providing potential basking and shelter areas. The field margins were bounded by hedgerows providing further potential shelter opportunities as well as habitat edge. Habitat edges are defined as the edges of habitats where these meet such as the edge of tall grassland and hedgerows, and are commonly used basking areas.

4.7 As there have been records within 2km of the site, it is recommended that boundary vegetation be retained where possible.

4.8 If a reptile is found during any stage of the clearance work, the clearance work should stop and an appropriate mitigation strategy should be approved by the LPA and undertaken prior to works re-commencing (likely under ecological supervision).

5 Enhancement Recommendations

5.1 The following suggestions could enhance the value of the site for reptiles and other wildlife post-development.

- Landscaping should include native or wildlife attracting plants particularly a rough grassland area or wildflower meadow to attract invertebrates and foraging reptiles.

- Grass clippings and other vegetation could be collected and composted in a corner of the site. This may (in time) become suitable for breeding grass snakes and other wildlife.
- Log or rock piles located around the edges of the site could provide potential refuge habitat for reptiles and other wildlife.
- Proposed public open space (POS) areas could be networked to allow connectivity within the site and surrounding area.
- A man-made hibernaculum could be incorporated within POS or boundary vegetation. This can be created simply and cheaply, with no or minimal maintenance requirements.
- A grassland mosaic could be established: A low intensity management regime to promote a varied structure within the sward, providing a variety of thermal opportunities for reptiles.

6 Conclusion

6.1 An updated reptile survey was undertaken by JBA between April and August 2020. However, no reptile observations were made and therefore there is a likely absence of reptile species on site.

6.2 Therefore no mitigation or precautionary measures are necessary. Enhancements have been recommended.

7 References

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National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

8 Appendices

Appendix A: Indicative location of reptile mats