



**LAND NORTH-WEST OF
SOUTHWATER, HORSHAM**

**ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT,
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CHRISTS HOSPITAL_2025 REPTILE
SURVEY REPORT**

FEBRUARY 2026

LAND NORTH-WEST OF SOUTHWATER, HORSHAM: CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

2025 REPTILE SURVEY REPORT

Prepared for Berkeley Strategic Land Ltd

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CONTENTS

	Page
1 Introduction	1
2 Methodology	3
3 Results	4
4 Site Evaluation	5
5 Recommendations	6
6 Conclusion	8
7 References	9

HDA Document Control and Quality Assurance Record

APPENDICES

A 2025 Reptile Survey Summary Plan – Christ’s Hospital

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location and summary description

1.1.1 This report describes a reptile survey of approximately 1.35ha of land at Christ's Hospital, West Sussex, hereinafter referred to as 'the site'. The site centre is located by National Grid Reference TQ 14898 29179. The study was commissioned by Berkeley Strategic Land Ltd in April 2025.

1.1.2 The site is located to the north of Christ's Hospital railway station, and comprises part of a grassland field. The site is bordered to the north by woodland; to the east by the remainder of the grassland field; to the west by a public right of way and access road with residential properties and Christ's Hospital Station car park beyond; and to the south by residential properties.

1.1.3 The location and boundary of the site are shown in *Appendix A*. A more detailed description of the habitats present and plans showing the distribution of habitats across the site are given in the *Christ's Hospital: Ecological Appraisal* (HDA, 2026a).

1.2 Background and legislative context

1.2.1 Four species of reptile are widespread in England, Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica*, 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 hedgerows for shelter, with adjacent longer vegetation for hunting and patches of sheltered short turf, bare ground or log piles for basking. Areas which 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 native reptile species are listed as priority species on the UKBAP and identified 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 In conjunction with approximately 116ha land to the east, the Christ's Hospital site is to be subject of part of a wider outline planning application, with all matters reserved (except for primary access to the highway) for a phased development comprising: the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of residential dwellings (including affordable housing) (Use Classes C2 and C3); a mixed-use neighbourhood centre (Use Classes E and F); education facilities (Use Class F1(a)); business and employment floorspace (Use Classes B2, B8 and E(g)); redevelopment of existing agricultural buildings including construction of a building for community use (Use Class F2); improvements to public rights of way; sports pitches; gypsy and traveller pitches/plots; public open space; landscaping, and associated infrastructure.

1.4 Scope and purpose of the report

1.4.1 The desk study carried out in 2025 identified records of Slow-worm, Grass Snake, Adder and Common Lizard within 2km of the site. The closest records to the site relate to a Common Lizard and a Slow-worm recorded approximately 650m to the north of the site, dating from 2007. Although the UK Habitat Classification survey identified that the semi-improved grassland that dominates the site provides poor habitat for reptiles, potential habitat for reptiles is provided by the scrub habitats found around the site boundaries.

1.4.2 A reptile survey of the site was previously undertaken in 2022 during which a low population of Slow-worm were recorded within the site (HDA, 2022).

1.4.3 In recognition of the continued presence of suitable habitat within the site, the time that had passed since the 2022 reptile survey was carried out and the legislative context set out in *Section 1.2* above, an updated reptile survey was undertaken to identify the presence/ likely absence of reptiles within the site. This is the subject of this report. Specifically, the aims of the updated reptile survey were:

- i. To establish the presence/ probable absence of reptiles;
- ii. To assess the relative importance of different parts of the site for reptiles; and
- iii. To predict likely impacts potentially arising from the proposed development of the site on reptiles and give recommendations for impact avoidance, minimisation and mitigation.

1.4.4 It should be noted that the wider area of land subject of the outline planning application (see *Section 1.3* above) has also been subject to an updated reptile survey, which is subject of a separate report (HDA, 2026b).

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The methodology has been devised to accord with the requirements of all relevant legislation and good practice guidance, including the Herpetofauna Worker's Manual (JNCC, 1999) and Reptile Survey guidance (Froglife, 1999).

2.2 The site was surveyed on a total of seven occasions by Ed Seares of HDA. Surveys were generally carried out during optimum temperature and weather conditions (intermittent or hazy sunshine, temperature between 9°C and 20°C and low winds). Dates of survey visits, with survey timings and weather conditions, are shown in *Table 1* below:

Table 1: Survey times and weather conditions

Survey visit	Date	Time of visit	Weather conditions	Temp (°C)
1	11.09.2025	11.00 – 11:15	Occasional periods of light drizzle, 85% cloud cover, light breeze.	16
2	14.09.2025	13:00 – 13:15	Dry, 100% cloud cover, gentle breeze.	17
3	16.09.2025	12:30 – 12:45	Dry, 65% cloud cover, gentle breeze.	17
4	18.09.2025	14:30– 14:45	Dry, 100% cloud cover, moderate breeze.	19
5	19.09.2025	10:00 – 10:15	Dry, 0% cloud cover, gentle breeze.	21
6	21.09.2025	13:00 – 13:15	Dry, 80% cloud cover, gentle breeze.	15
7	22.09.2025	10:00 – 10:15	Dry, 0% cloud cover, gentle breeze.	12

2.3 Two methods of surveying were used. Firstly, artificial refugia (squares of roofing felt 0.5m x 0.5m) were placed, in advance of the survey commencing, at potential basking areas throughout the survey area. A total of 20 refugia were placed across the site, giving a total density of 11.8 refugia per hectare. In the context of the Christ's Hospital site, 11.8 refugia/ha is above the recommended density of 5 to 10 refugia per hectare of suitable reptile habitat and was intended to increase the chance of encountering reptiles and, if present, provide a more accurate indication of their distribution within the site. Locations of refugia are shown on the map in *Appendix A*.

2.4 During each of the seven visits, each refugium was inspected for any reptiles basking on the upper side, then lifted and checked for sheltering animals before being carefully replaced. A different route was taken each time to ensure that there was no bias due to the time of the survey.

2.5 The second survey method involved transect searches across suitable habitats within the survey area. This ensured that all areas were represented in the survey, and that the survey was not biased towards those reptiles more likely to use refugia. Transect searches involve walking slowly around the survey area, visually searching potential basking areas and marking the locations of any reptiles observed on a map. Potential

reptile refuges already present within the survey area such as fallen deadwood were also lifted to check for the presence of animals.

2.6 The following information was recorded for each reptile survey: species seen, the number of animals seen, location, date, start and finish times, temperature and weather.

2.7 Limitations

2.7.1 The reptile survey was carried out at a time of year when reptiles are active during suitable weather conditions. On one occasion temperatures exceeded 20°C but it has been HDA's experience that minor exceedances do not significantly change rates of detection, and in some instances may improve detection of reptiles. It is therefore considered that no significant limitations were encountered during the survey and the survey findings form a robust basis for an assessment of the impact of the proposed development on reptiles and the identification of recommendations for impact avoidance, minimisation and mitigation.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Habitat assessment

3.1.1 The majority of the survey area comprises a close grazed grassland field supporting generally poor-quality reptile habitat. However, field margins and woodland edge habitats along the northern boundary provides moderate-quality reptile habitat.

3.2 Refugia and visual searches

3.2.1 Grass Snake was recorded within the site during the reptile survey. The survey results are summarised in *Table 2* below and the locations at which reptiles were recorded are shown in *Appendix A*.

Table 2: Reptiles recorded at the site

Date of survey	Reptiles observed
11.09.2025	No reptiles recorded
14.09.2025	No reptiles recorded
16.09.2025	No reptiles recorded
18.09.2025	No reptiles recorded
19.09.2025	No reptiles recorded
21.09.2025	No reptiles recorded
22.09.2025	1 x Grass Snake (Juvenile)

3.2.2 During the course of the survey, a maximum count of one Grass Snake was recorded on any one visit. This related to one individual juvenile recorded on a refugium on the north-western site boundary during the seventh visit.

4 SITE EVALUATION

4.1 A number of guidelines are used to evaluate the importance of a site for reptiles, based on both the population density and number of species present, in addition to historical factors.

4.2 The Guidelines for Biological Selection of SSSIs (JNCC, 2022) identifies that for the more common and widespread species of reptile (Adder, Grass Snake, Common Lizard and Slow-worm) the following criteria should be considered for candidate SSSIs:

- The best 5 locations supporting established populations of Adder in any area of search; and/or
- The best localities in which three or more common and widespread reptile species occur.

The presence of populations of one or two common and widespread reptile species, should also count positively in the evaluation of potential SSSIs chosen largely on other grounds, especially where populations are large, located in areas where the species concerned is rare or at the geographical limits of its range.

4.3 The Herpetofauna Workers' Manual (JNCC, 1998) suggests that sites falling outside of the SSSI selection criteria should be designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) if they meet the following criteria:

- Any site with a large population of a single species;
- Any site with a moderate population of two species;
- Any site at the edge of the geographical range of a species; and
- Any site with a long documented history.

4.4 The Key Reptile Site register is a mechanism designed to promote the safeguard of important reptile sites. To qualify for the register, the site in question must meet at least one of the following criteria (Froglife, 1999):

- Supports three or more reptile species;
- Supports two snake species;
- Supports an exceptional population of at least one species (Table 2);
- Supports an assemblage of species scoring at least 4 (Table 2); and
- Does not satisfy the above criteria but is of particular regional importance due to local rarity (e.g. in the East Midlands, Adders are very rare so even "low" populations should be designated as Key Sites).

4.5 The criteria for scoring populations of the four common reptile species for the purposes of the Key Reptile Register are given in *Table 3* below.

Table 3: Population parameters for the Key Reptile Sites register

Reptile species	Low population Score 1	Good population Score 2	Exceptional population Score 3
Adder	<5	5-10	>10
Grass Snake	<5	5-10	>10
Common Lizard	<5	5-20	>20
Slow-worm	<5	5-20	>20

Figures in the table refer to the maximum number of adults seen by observation and/or under tins (placed at a density of up to 10 per hectare) by one person in one day.

4.6 Using these criteria, the survey area supports a 'low' population of Grass Snake. However, due to the high density of reptile refugia placed at the site, relative to the suitable habitat available, it is likely that the results have been exaggerated to indicate a higher population of Grass Snake, and that a 'very low' population of this species is more likely to be present.

4.7 In addition, the presence of a low population of Slow-worm was identified within the site in 2022 (HDA, 2022). On this basis, it is conceivable that the site may support very low populations of Slow-worm and Grass Snake on at least an occasional or transitory basis. The Christ's Hospital site is therefore extremely unlikely to qualify for consideration as a SSSI, SINC or Key Reptile Site. Both Slow-worm and Grass Snake are relatively common and widespread reptile species and suitable habitat for these species are relatively abundant in the wider area. The Christ's Hospital site is therefore considered in its entirety to be of no more than low local value for Slow-worm and Grass Snake.

4.8 Notwithstanding the limited reptile interest of the site, nature conservation legislation afforded to all reptiles will apply which includes the protection of individuals and consideration of reptile populations in the planning process. Measures to safeguard individual reptiles and maintain and enhance the reptile interest of the site through the proposed development are therefore identified in *Section 5* below.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The site is considered to support 'very low' numbers of Grass Snake and Slow-worm and as such does not qualify as a SSSI, SINC or Key Reptile Site. The site is considered to be of no more than low local value for reptiles and similar habitat for these species are relatively abundant in the wider area. Notwithstanding this, all reptiles should be afforded the protection provided under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). In addition, development proposals for the site should also seek to maintain and, where possible, enhance opportunities for this group in accordance with the 2006 NERC Act and planning policy and guidance. Measures by which this can be achieved are identified below.

5.2 Protection of Individuals: Sensitive approach to site clearance

5.2.1 Although both the Grass Snake and Slow-worm were recorded from the field boundaries, it is conceivable that these species also occurs in very low numbers in other areas of suitable habitat across the site including woodland edges, scrub and rough grassland field margins. Where it is unavoidable that areas of suitable reptile habitat are lost as a result of the proposed development, measures to protect reptiles should be implemented.

5.2.2 In view of the limited number and distribution of Grass Snake and Slow-worm recorded, assuming that management of the site remains the same and that the distribution or character of habitats does not change significantly prior to construction, a full reptile translocation exercise is not currently recommended in this instance prior to development commencing.

5.2.3 Instead, it is recommended that a controlled approach is taken to site clearance in those areas where potential habitat is to be lost in order to displace any reptiles present into retained areas of contiguous habitat within the site and/ or wider area. This would require the following:

- Firstly, vegetation cover should be reduced to minimum height of 150mm. This would ideally take place at a time avoiding the bird breeding season (typically between March and August 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.
- Where the potential for reptiles to be present remains, a minimum period of 5 days with daytime temperatures of >12°C should then be allowed to pass prior to the second stage of vegetation clearance (see below).
- The second stage would 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 (generally mid-March to early October inclusive). At this time any potential hibernacula or refugia encountered should be carefully dismantled by hand. This stage of clearance should be undertaken under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist who would capture and relocate any reptiles encountered to areas of retained habitat on the margins of the site.
- Where the potential for reptiles to be present still remains, a further 5 days with daytime temperatures of >12°C should 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, where any potential for reptiles to be present still remains a destructive search should be carried out. This would involve the progressive stripping of topsoil from the area of works under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist.
- In the event that the destructive search is delayed, vegetation should be maintained at ground level until the destructive search is carried out. Similarly, following the destructive search, the land should be maintained as unsuitable for the recolonisation of reptiles prior to and throughout the construction works.

5.2.4 It is recommended that the approach to mitigation outlined above is reviewed at an appropriate stage prior to works commencing in order to allow consideration of any changes to management of habitats at the site which may have affected their ability to support reptiles since this report was produced.

5.3 Maintaining & Enhancing Opportunities for Reptiles

5.3.1 In accordance with the 2024 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and 2006 NERC Act, development proposals should seek to maintain and where possible enhance opportunities for reptiles at the site. This could be achieved through the retention, enhancement and creation of reptile habitats as part of the landscape strategy for the site. Consideration should be given to:

- Enhancement of woodland/scrub/hedgerow edge habitats through creation of ecotones (a gradation from woodland/hedgerow to scrub to rough grassland habitats);
- Creation of new waterbodies in order to provide improved habitats favoured by Grass Snake;
- Inclusion of other high quality reptile habitats within the landscape scheme in the form of rough and meadow grasslands, scrub, wetland and woodland habitats;
- Provision of opportunities for hibernation and refuge through provision of log/brush piles and purpose-built hibernacula; and
- Securing the long-term integrity of new and retained reptile habitat through inclusion within a long-term management plan.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Subject to the implementation of the measures outlined above to protect individual reptiles and ensure that suitable habitat remains following development at the site, the proposed development is unlikely to result in adverse effects on the local reptile population. Furthermore, through habitat retention, enhancement, creation and management, development at the site could in fact provide opportunities to safeguard and

enhance its value for reptiles in the long-term in accordance with the 2024 National Planning Policy Framework and the 2006 NERC Act.

7

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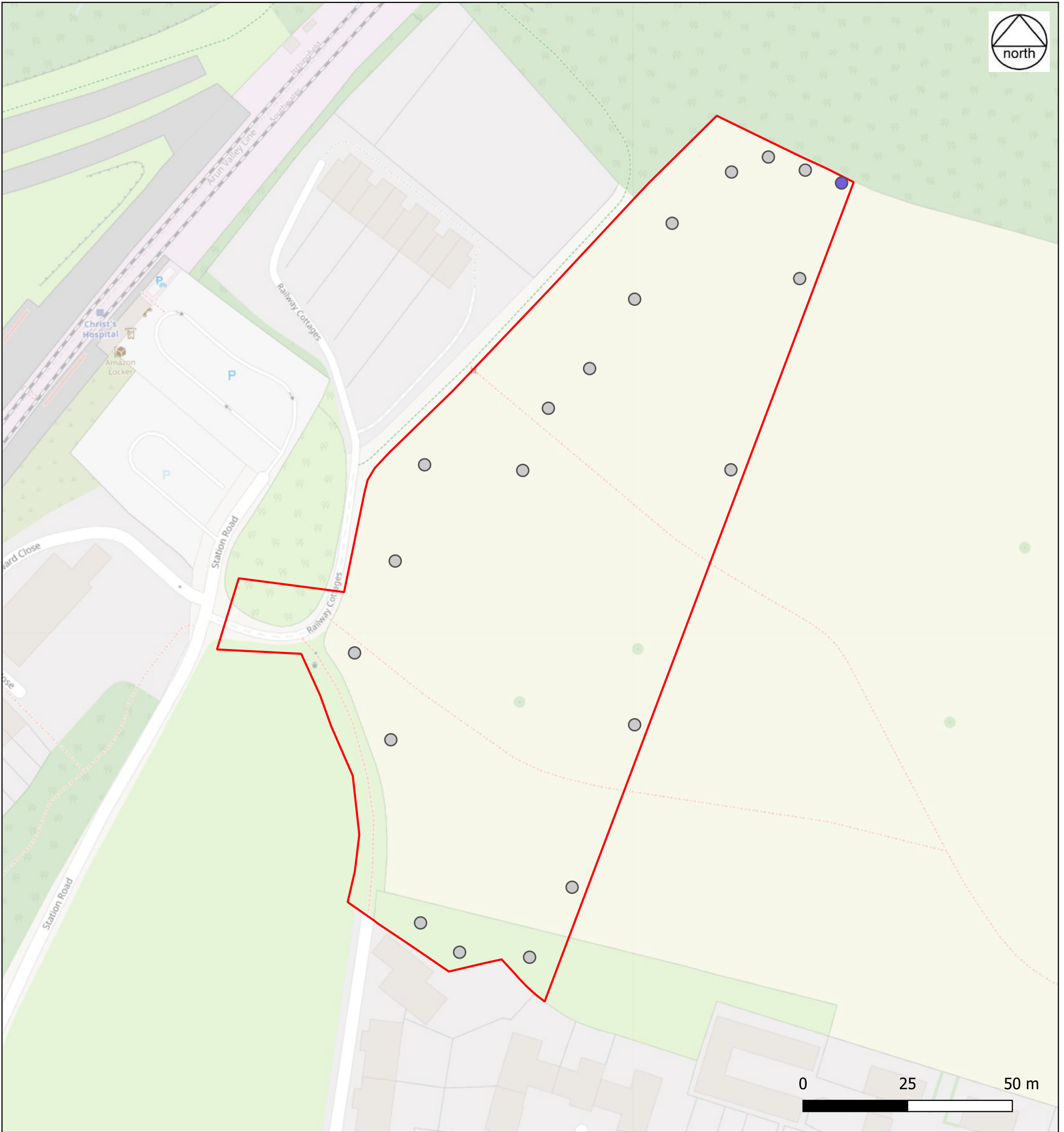
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APPENDIX A

2025 Reptile Survey Summary Plan



KEY

- Site boundary
- Grass Snake Recorded
- Reptile Refugia

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PROJECT:
Land North-West of Southwater, Horsham

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