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Hilland Road, Billingshurst

Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement

October 2025

CIEEM
REGISTERED PRACTICE 2024-2025

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Report Ref: DFA25080

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Derek Finnie Associates was commission by Roddy New Homes to provide ecological advice in relation to an area of land referred to 'Land east of Hilland Road, Billingshurst', herein referred to as the 'Site'. The Site benefits from planning permission for the construction of six new dwellings (Planning Ref: DC/24/1999) subject to certain conditions.

1.1.2 Condition 4 of the permission states:

Pre-commencement Condition: No development shall take place until a Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Statement, which will reflect paragraph 6.1.2 of the Ecological Assessment ref: DFA24094V2, shall outline a precautionary approach to works prior and during construction to mitigate potential impacts to protected species. The development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: To allow the LPA to discharge its duties under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended and s40 of the NERC Act 2006 (as amended) and Policy 31 of the Horsham Development Framework.

1.1.3 The following report, therefore, represents a Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement and has been produced to allow for the discharge of Condition 4 of DC/24/1999. The protected species in question relate to great crested newts.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Extended Phase 1 Survey

2.1.1 The Site comprises a small grassland field on the eastern edge of a wider residential development. From a review of historic aerial photography, the Site appears to have undergone re-profiling works as part of the wider scheme and was more or less bare ground until relatively recent. Part of the northern end of the Site was used as a contractor's car park and still supports hardstanding.

2.1.2 There are several broad-leaved trees the eastern boundary of the Site, outwith the application boundary. They are pre-dominantly oak *Quercus* sp., but ash *Fraxinus excelsior* were noted; the understorey is mainly bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. that is beginning to encroach towards the Site.

2.1.3 The following Phase 1 habitats were encountered within, and adjacent to, the Site:

- Semi-improved grassland; and
- Hardstanding

2.2 Great crested newts

2.2.1 There are no waterbodies within the Site or in the immediate vicinity. However, there are three new attenuation ponds within the new residential development to the west of the Site. Although there are no records of great crested newts for these ponds, with the nearest known record dating from 2016 some 600m to the south, the possibility of newts being present cannot be excluded. But when the sub-optimal habitats within the Site are taken into account, in conjunction with the immaturity of the attenuation basins and the road that separates them from the Site, the potential for great crested newts to be present within the Site is assessed to be low.

3 REASONABLE AVOIDANCE METHOD STATEMENT

3.1 Site Clearance

3.1.1 No amphibian have previously been recorded from within the Site and based on the condition of the sward, displaying little in the way of structural or species diversity, it represents poor quality amphibian habitat, hence the potential for newts to be present is low.

3.1.2 Prior to the start of any habitat manipulation within the Site, a hibernaculum will be created within the woodland buffer along the edge of the woodland, to provide enhance sheltering locations for any amphibians that may be within the Site. The vegetation within the buffer zone will also be managed in more ecological sympathetic manner to increase it suitability for newts.

3.1.3 During the amphibian active season, when temperatures are above 9°C, the vegetation within the Site will be cut to a height of approximately 150mm. Mowing will commence in the southside of the site and progress towards the north. These works will be over seen by a suitably experience ecologists.

3.1.4 A minimum of five days after the initial cut, the vegetation within the Parcel will be cut to ground level under the supervision of an experience ecologist. Again, this process will commence in the south of the parcel and progress towards the north. Any features, such as piles of debris of logs, encountered during this process will be carefully dismantle by hand. Any amphibians encountered during this period will be immediately transferred to suitable habitat within the woodland buffer areas.

3.1.5 After a minimum of five days after the vegetation has been removed to ground level, the topsoil will be stripped, leaving bare ground. If, for any reason, the topsoil cannot be stripped within a reasonable time after the vegetation has been reduced to ground level, then mowing will be undertaken on a regular basis to ensure the vegetation within the Site is maintained at less than 50mm, thus reducing the probability of newts entering the site until such times as the soil is stripped. Again, this process will be undertaken under ecological supervision with the direction of the works once again commencing in the south and moving towards the north.

3.1.6 On completion of the topsoil strip, any remain site clearance works, and construction activities can commence.

4 SUMMARY

4.1.1 The Site has been assessed as having a low potential to support great crested newts, hence, as precautionary measure, a habitat manipulation regime has been proposed as a suitable mitigation strategy. The vegetation within the parcel will be gradually removed over a two-week period, allowing any amphibians that may be present to move off of their own volition. On completion of the vegetation removal, the area will be subject to a topsoil strip to render it unsuitable for reptiles