Land at Wellcross Farm, Broadbridge Heath

Reptile Mitigation Strategy

Background

1.1 Planning permission for the development of a Continuing Care Retirement Community on land at Wellcorss Farm, Broadbridge Heath has been granted and has a specific condition relating to reptile mitigation[1]. The location of the Site is shown by **Figure 1.1**.

1.2 The condition states the following:

"No development within a phase shall take place until a Reptile Mitigation Strategy addressing the mitigation and translocation of reptiles in that part of the site, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority, to be guided by appropriate surveys and good practice guidance. The Reptile Mitigation Strategy shall include the following:

a) Results of presence / absence reptile surveys;

b) Purpose and conservation objectives for the proposed works;

c) Review of site potential and constraints;

d) Detailed design(s) and/or working method(s) to achieve stated objectives;

e) Extent and location/area of proposed works on appropriate scale maps and plans;

f) Type and source of materials to be used where appropriate, e.g. native species of local provenance;

g) Timetable for implementation demonstrating that works are aligned with the proposed phasing of development;

h) Persons responsible for implementing the works;

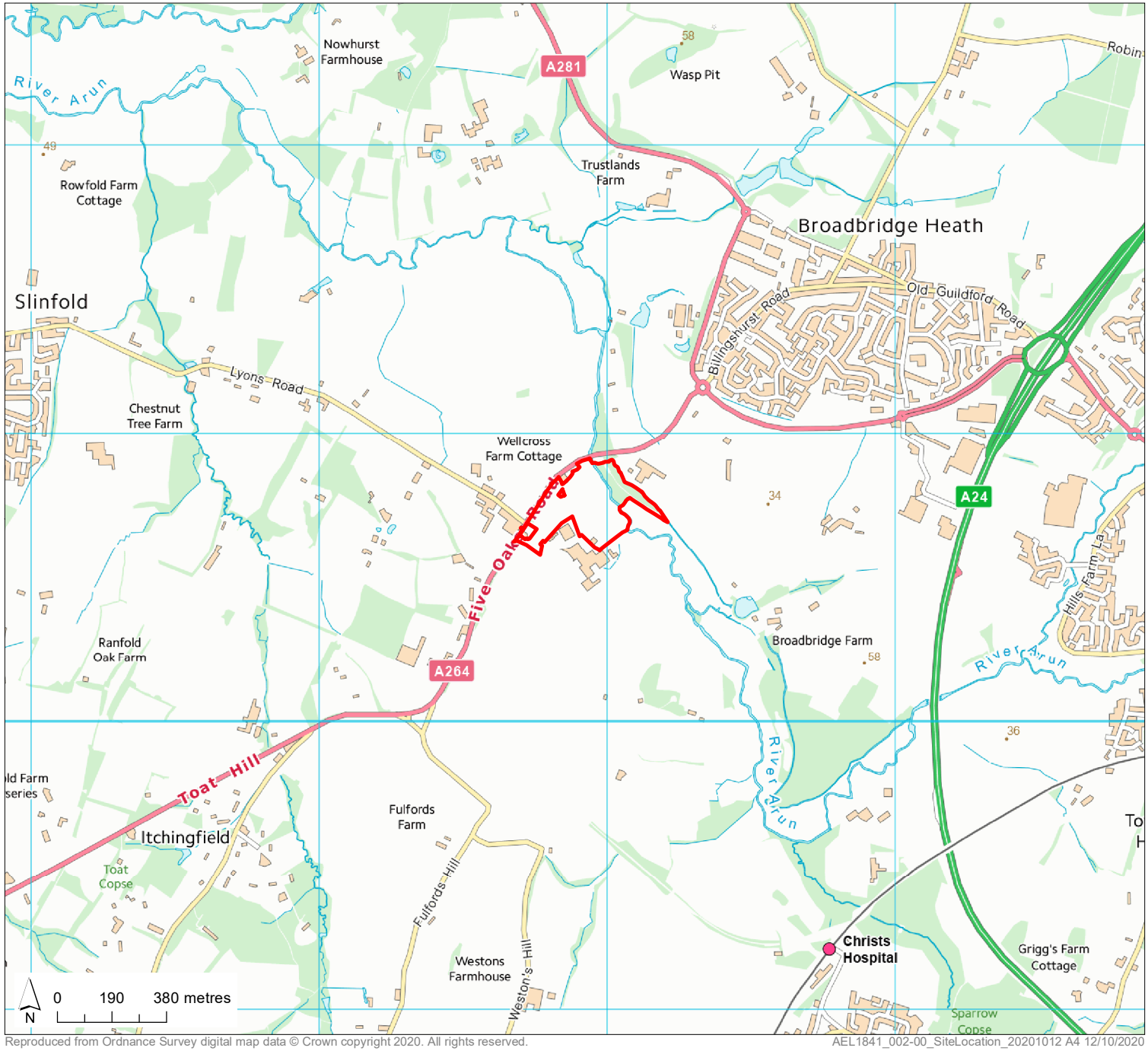
i) Details of initial aftercare and long-term maintenance of the Receptor area(s);

j) Details for monitoring and remedial measures;

k) Details for disposal of any wastes arising from works.

The Reptile Mitigation Strategy shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and all features shall be retained in that manner thereafter."

[1] Granted by appeal (APP/23825/W/20/3262938) – LPA ref: DC/19/1897



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AEL1841_002-00_SiteLocation_20201012 A4 12/10/2020

Broadbridge Heath

Site location

Site boundary

Figure 1

Map Scale @ A4: 1:20,000

Surveyed by: n/a	
Survey date: n/a	
Drawn by: RD	
Checked by: DP	
Status: Final	

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Legislative protection

1.3 Grass snake and other common species of reptile (adder, common or viviparous lizard and slow worm) are protected against intentional killing or injury under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Site clearance and ground investigation operations could result in the inadvertent killing and injury of any reptiles sheltering within the Site as a result of direct damage and disturbance of reptile suitable habitats.

Reptile survey

1.4 A reptile presence/absence survey of the Site was completed by BWB Consulting in September 2020[2] in accordance with best practice survey guidance using 150 artificial reptile refugia set out across the Site in potentially suitable grassland areas.

1.5 The survey verified the presence of a single juvenile grass snake *Natrix helvetica* within the proposed Core development site, and a single juvenile grass snake on land to the east of the River Arun. The majority of the core development area was horse grazed and unsuitable habitat for reptiles. The single juvenile grass snake in the Core site was present in a neglected former paddock area that was not grazed and supported a longer more rank grass sward.

1.6 A walkover survey of the Site by an experienced ecologist from Applied Ecology Ltd was completed in March and April 2022 to assess whether the suitability of the grassland areas within the Site had changed since the 2020 reptile survey. The 2022 survey found that the habitats had not changed significantly in extent, condition or distribution, and their likely value to reptiles was considered as reported in 2020[3].

Reptile habitat

1.7 **Figure 2.1** shows the parts of the Site that have the potential to support small numbers of grass snake based on the results of the previously referenced reptile survey in 2020 and follow-up habitat assessment completed in 2022.

1.8 Only habitat areas identified by **Figure 2.1** as having the potential to support grass snake will need to be subject to reptile mitigation provided the other grassland areas remain managed by grazing prior to site clearance and construction operations commencing.

Potential Development Impacts

1.9 Construction of the proposed development within the development area to the west of the River Arun will result in the disturbance and damage to all surface habitats and all of the "Core site" grassland identified by **Figure 2.1**. This could result in accidental killing or injury of any grass snake located in suitable reptile habitat.

[2] BWB (December 2020) *Inspired Villages Group – Land at Wellcross Farm, Broadbridge Heath – Reptile Survey 2020.* Document no. IVH-BWB-ZZ-RP-YE-0001_RTS

[3] Applied Ecology Ltd (19 April 2022) *Land at Wellcross Farm, Broadbridge Heath – Ecology Update*. A|EL1841_UpdateEcologyNote_v2.0_20220419



Key

Land areas with potential to support small numbers of grass snake

Figure 2.1

1.10 Construction operations on the land to the east of the River Arun could result in accidental killing or injury of grass snake in the "Off-core site" land area shown by **Figure 2.1**.

1.11 Mitigation measures, as set-out below, will be implemented to ensure that reptiles are not killed or injured in either land area identified with potential to support small numbers of grass snake on **Figure 2.1**.

Mitigation Approach

Background

1.12 The objective of the mitigation approach described below is to:

- Minimise the risk of site clearance and construction operations resulting in the death or injury of individual reptiles that could inhabit reptile suitable habitats within the Site.

1.13 As only relatively small areas of suitable reptile habitat will be affected by the development and reflecting that the number of reptiles within the Site is also very small, mitigation will be completed based on progressively making the habitat unsuitable and encourage the reptiles to move out of the works area of their own accord. This will be achieved by cutting the vegetation in stages down to ground level in the season when reptiles are active, working towards an adjoining area of suitable reptile habitat.

1.14 It is not considered necessary or reasonable to provide a specific receptor area managed for grass snake as the species can actively disperse across land and water and there is sufficient retained boundary habitats that are suitable for grass snake to shelter and commute through around the northern and eastern perimeter of the Core site.

1.15 Following the progressive grass cutting, the cut grassland areas would be checked by an ecologist for any potential reptile refugia and these would be removed by hand / small machine under the direction of the ecologist to ensure the cut areas are free of reptiles before site clearance and construction commences.

1.16 Provided that vegetation is kept short, the reptiles should not return.

Mitigation

Core Site

1.17 The land within the Core site with the potential to support reptiles as indicated by **Figure 2.1** will be subject to progressive grass cutting using a tractor mounted grass cutter with grass collection box or similar during the reptile active period (mid-April to mid-October).

1.18 The progressive grass cutting will only be completed in dry weather in air temperatures of 19^0C or higher to ensure that any grass snake present is fully active and can readily disperse.

1.19 The first cut (Day 1) will leave a sward height of 15 cm, with cutting taking place from south to north to encourage any reptiles present to move north towards the retained woodland northern edge of the Site. Grass cuttings will be removed from site.

1.20 The second cut (Day 2) also from south to north will leave a sward height of 8cm, and the third cut (Day 3) will be at ground level.

1.21 Following the Day 3 cut, the site will be checked by an ecologist and any remaining potential reptile refuge habitats dismantled by hand and/or with assistance from a small machine as necessary.

1.22 The grassland area within the Core site will be maintained as short turf habitat by regular mowing during the growing season until such time that site clearance/construction commences.

1.23 A report of the reptile mitigation completed will be provided.

Land east of River Arun

1.24 Habitats of potential suitability for grass snake on land outside the Core development area on land east of the River Arun will also be progressively mown or stimmed during the reptile active season following the same mitigation approach described above in advance of site clearance and construction commencing.

Monitoring

1.25 Given the very small population of grass snake recorded within the Site, and the need only to prevent these individual animals from being killed or injured, it is not considered reasonable or necessary to monitor grass snake numbers within the Site going forward.

1.26 If the commencement of the development is for whatever reason delayed and the grassland areas in the site fall into management neglect, however, a follow-up reptile presence/absence survey may be required to inform the scope of the reptile mitigation described previously.

1.27 Provided the grassland areas are maintained by grazing and, and/or by regular mowing they will be kept as unsuitable habitat for reptiles going forward and there will be no need for follow-up reptile survey.