

BICESTER MOTION LIMITED



**ECOLOGY**SOLUTIONS

Part of the ES Group

BICESTER HERITAGE HOTEL

## **Reptile Mitigation Strategy**

**Pursuant to Discharge of  
Condition 13 of Planning  
Reference 18/01253/F**

February 2022  
7884M.RMP.vf

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

1.1.1 Ecology Solutions was commissioned on behalf of Bicester Motion Limited in 2022 to complete a Reptile Mitigation Management Plan for land at proposed Bicester Heritage Hotel, hereafter referred to as 'the Site'.

1.1.2 The development proposals are for the provision of a new hotel, including associated access, parking, and greenspace (planning ref 18/01253/F).

1.1.3 As part of the pre-commencement works, Condition 13 states:

*'No development shall take place until a Reptile Mitigation Strategy including clearance methodology and a habitat manipulation exercise has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall proceed in accordance with the agreed Strategy.'*

1.1.4 This document outlines the management prescriptions for the Site with regards to reptiles, commensurate to the discharge of Condition 13.

### 1.2 Purpose of this Document

1.2.1 This document will outline measures to safeguard reptiles throughout the construction phase of the development.

1.2.2 The contents of this document have been written with reference to published guidance from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and with regards to guidance produced by Natural England (NE) in relation to protected species.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

### Background and Baseline

- 2.1.1 An initial assessment to identify areas of suitable reptile habitat within the Site was undertaken by Ecology Solutions on 13 June 2018. In order to provide an update on the habitats present within the Site, an updated walkover was undertaken at the Site on 21 January 2022.
- 2.1.2 The vast majority of habitats within the Site are considered unsuitable for reptile species. This includes areas of semi-improved calcareous grassland. The 2018 and 2022 walkovers of the Site found the grassland to be routinely managed as a close mown sward. Both of the surveys indicate these areas of grassland are routinely managed throughout the year and thus provide unsuitable habitat for reptiles.
- 2.1.3 Very limited areas of longer grassland along the hedgerow in the west of the Site are considered to have potential to support low numbers of reptile species. Given these areas will be largely retained within the proposals, it is considered there is little scope for impacts upon reptiles as a result of the proposals.
- 2.1.4 Areas of suitable habitat in the wider site were subject to reptile surveys in 2018. Areas of suitable habitat included patches of rough grassland found throughout the Stratton Audley Quarry and Bicester Airfield. The results of these surveys indicated low to medium populations of Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* were found within the quarry, and a very low population of the same species within the surveys undertaken in the airfield. These reduced numbers were likely recorded in the airfield given the grassland present within this area is of a close routinely managed sward, with limited variation in its overall structure.
- 2.1.5 As above, the habitats contained within the Site are largely unsuitable for reptile species. However, given the presence of reptiles within the wider area, appropriate measures to safeguard them during the construction phase are detailed below.
- 2.1.6 **Background Information.** The desk study undertaken with Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) returned a number of reptile records from the local area. The closest of these was that of a Common Lizard, returned from a location approximately 500m to the south of the Site at its closest point, from 2017. Further records of Grass Snake were returned from a location approximately 930m to the north-east of the Site, from 1991 to present.

### Reptile Mitigation Strategy (Sensitive Management and Clearance)

- 2.1.7 Given the unsuitable nature of the Site for reptiles at present, it is recommended, in order to ensure reptiles are not harmed throughout the construction phase, the grassland is maintained in its current state through regular mowing.

- 2.1.8 Regular (approximately twice monthly during the growing season) mowing will aim to maintain the height of the grassland at no more than 5cm. This will ensure the habitat is maintained in its current state and that no reptiles will utilise the Site, nor be in any way reliant on the habitats present.
- 2.1.9 Noting the absence of any significant suitable reptile habitat, it is not considered the construction works at the Site would have the potential to give rise to adverse impacts on local reptile populations.
- 2.1.10 Nonetheless, noting the presence of reptiles in the wider area, and the potential for the suitability of habitats to change within a relatively short timeframe, consideration is given to appropriate management safeguards on a precautionary basis.
- 2.1.11 Should the current and prescribed management cease or be put on hold and areas of suitable reptile habitat establish (i.e. grass sward > 10cm), it will be necessary to adopt a sensitive habitat manipulation strategy prior to construction works commencing.
- 2.1.12 Should a sensitive habitat manipulation strategy be required, the following approach is recommended:
- Firstly, a two-stage, stepwise cut of the grassland shall take place. The first cut will be undertaken to a height of 10cm and the second to ground level.
  - Cutting will be directional, encouraging any reptiles present to disperse away from the work area (and into suitable habitats in the wider area). This exercise will ensure no 'islands' of suitable habitat are created (within which reptiles may otherwise remain). Where required, arisings will be carefully removed alongside the cutting regime.
  - Habitat manipulation works will be overseen by a suitably qualified ecologist and will only commence during suitable weather conditions within the main active season for reptiles (typically mid-March to October, but weather dependent). Works should be undertaken in dry, sunny conditions with a minimum temperature of around 10°C.
  - Following the completion of this cut, habitats within the development areas (i.e. to be lost to) will be maintained as unsuitable for reptiles (i.e. through a turf strip or spray) in order to prevent any potential for recolonization during construction. Should this maintenance not be practical, herpetofauna fencing may instead be installed along the relevant boundaries of the Site in order to exclude reptiles from active construction areas until the completion of relevant works.
  - The above methodology will ensure potential adverse impacts on reptiles will be fully avoided.

- 2.1.13 It is not considered a translocation exercise will be required, given there will be no significant loss of suitable habitats and that the Site is within close proximity of significant areas of suitable habitat within the wider area ensuring individuals can readily disperse.
- 2.1.14 As above, on the basis the habitats present within the Site are maintained as unsuitable for reptiles throughout the construction phase, it is considered reptile fencing will not be required within the Site.
- 2.1.15 Subject to the adoption of the above measures, it is considered reptiles will be fully safeguarded as part of the development proposals, as required by legislation and planning policy.

### **Consideration of Mitigation and Enhancement Opportunities**

- 2.1.16 Whilst it is not within the remit of this report or Condition 13 to provide enhancement opportunities within the Site, a Landscape and Ecology Landscape Plan (LEMP) will be provided in due course and will allow for such opportunities to be delivered.
- 2.1.17 The LEMP is anticipated to include for the provision of extensive areas of calcareous grassland to be managed as meadow, allowing a significant net gain in opportunities for reptiles within the Site.

### **3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.1.1 Ecology Solutions was commissioned on behalf of Bicester Motion Limited to complete a reptile mitigation management plan for land at proposed Bicester Heritage Hotel, Bicester.
- 3.1.2 The purpose of this work was to outline the management prescriptions for the Site with regards to reptiles, commensurate to the discharge of Condition 13.
- 3.1.3 The management prescriptions detailed within this report will aim to maintain the habitats within the Site in its current form, with routine mowing of the grassland. This will ensure the Site does not develop any areas of suitability for reptiles, and they are safeguarded prior to and during construction activities at the Site. Should these management measures cease or be halted, and areas of suitability develop, suitable mitigation measures through the use of habitat manipulation are also recommended.
- 3.1.4 Subject to the management prescriptions detailed within this report, it can be assumed reptiles within the Site and wider area will be safeguarded throughout the construction of the Site, thus Condition 13 can be formally discharged.





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