



Reptile Method Statement River Witham near Little Ponton

ISSUE RECORD

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	3
1.1	Scope of Report	3
1.2	Site Description	3
1.3	Development Proposals	4
1.4	Planning Context and Legislation	4
1.5	Historic survey data and habitat suitability	5
2	METHOD STATEMENT	6
3	REFERENCES	8
	APPENDIX A : Development Plan	10

TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1: Location Plan	4
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of Report

This method statement has been prepared by Peak Ecology Ltd on behalf of The Wild Trout Trust. It provides the details of how reptiles will be safeguarded during the proposed re-meandering of the River Witham near Little Ponton. The purpose of this report is to:

- Describe the existing habitat types present within the site;
- Provide an assessment of habitat suitability for reptiles
- Provide outline recommendations and a method statement for reptiles during the scheme of works;
- Highlight opportunities for ecological enhancement where appropriate.

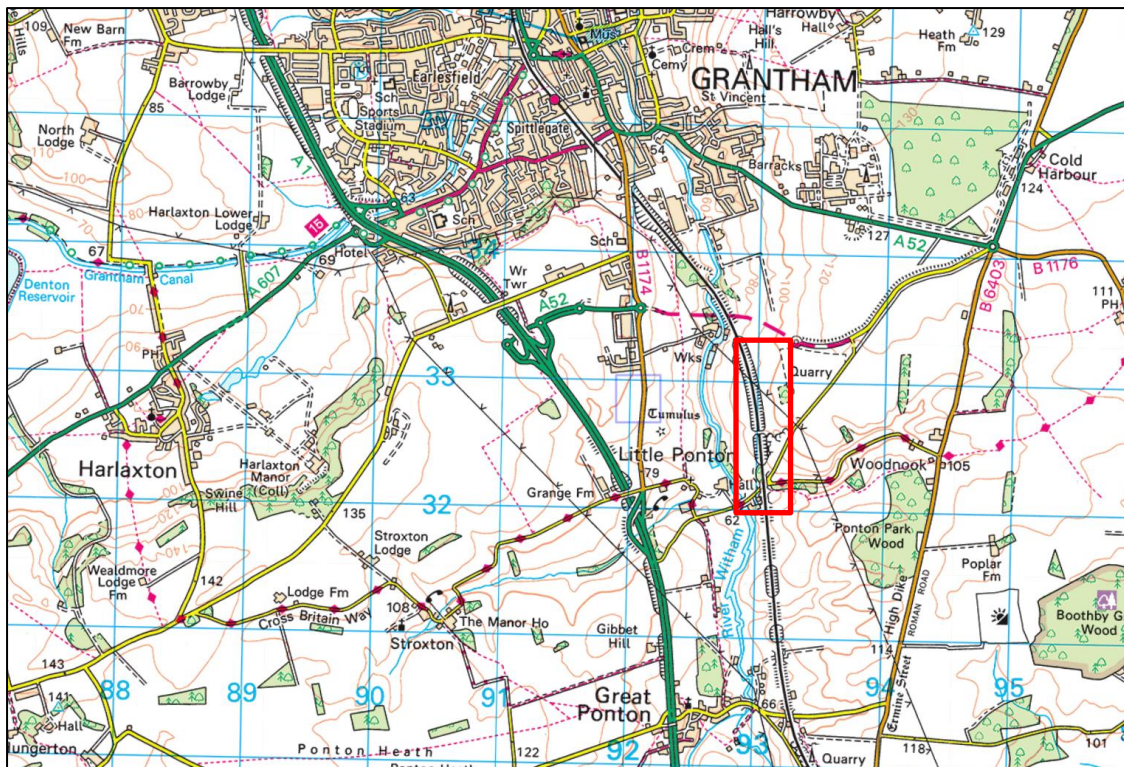
The approach to this ecological appraisal follows best practice published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM, 2013 & 2017) and the British Standards Institution (BSI, 2013). Details of individual survey methods and associated supporting information are provided in Section 2.

1.2 Site Description

The site comprises an approximately 1km stretch of the River Witham on the outskirts of Little Ponton, Grantham (central grid reference: SK 92686 32624) and the surrounding grassland areas. Surrounding land use is predominantly agricultural as well as being under private ownership of Little Ponton Hall.

The survey boundary is as per the details outlined on the plan provided by the client (drawing title: Whalebone Lane – Design Elements, date 06 May 2024). The site location is illustrated below.

Figure 1: Location Plan



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1.3 Development Proposals

The project aim is to re-meander and naturalise the channel which will involve the excavation of the new channel and backfilling of some sections of the existing channel. The full development plan can be found in Appendix A.

1.4 Planning Context and Legislation

The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 requires that when assessing a planning application all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must consider potential impacts on biodiversity that may result from the proposals. In addition to this, county and borough councils typically have biodiversity policies within their Local Development Frameworks that they must also comply with.

In practice, this means that potential impacts on designated sites, notable species and habitats such as those listed as habitats of principal importance in England (formerly the UK Biodiversity Action Plan) and species that receive legal direct protection (typically via the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and/ or the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)) are all material planning considerations.

In regards to reptiles the following legal protection is applied in the UK:

All native reptiles are protected from

- intentional killing; and
- injury

under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, while sand lizards and smooth snakes are also fully protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. For these species this additional law also makes it illegal to

- disturb their habitats,
- trade them; or
- obstruct their access to shelter.

1.5 Historic survey data and habitat suitability

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) report written by Chick, A (2023) of Andrew P. Chick Ecology highlighted the sites potential for reptiles during the preliminary survey, a single common lizard was also observed during this survey. There has also been further anecdotal sighting of reptiles – namely grass snake *Natrix helvetica* - on site since the original survey.

The site comprises the River Witham surrounded by calcareous grassland, neutral grassland, areas of damp grassland and some areas of scrub and broadleaved woodland, as per the report prepared by Chick, A (2023).

The grassland throughout the site is tussocky and has a varied structure and when combined with woodland/scrub edges, this provides valuable foraging and basking habitat whilst also providing more vegetated areas for sheltering. The riparian areas are most likely to be favoured by grass snake.

2 METHOD STATEMENT

The measures below are considered appropriate to ensure that all reasonable precautions have been taken to avoid the killing or injuring of reptiles during works. A copy of these Reasonable Avoidance Measures should be kept on site and should be easily accessible to all workers.

- Any clearance works (including vegetation and any potential hibernacula) should only be carried out in temperatures above 11°C, ideally in the late morning to afternoon, when reptiles are known to be active. In the event a reptile is seen during these works, they should be allowed to escape unharmed at their own pace. Only a trained ecologist should attempt to move reptiles by hand. If multiple reptiles are encountered, works should cease and an ecologist should be contacted for further advice;
- Vegetation clearance should be carried out in a methodical manner, to allow for the passive dispersal of reptiles towards adjacent suitable habitat, should they be present on site;
- Any taller vegetation to be affected (over 10cm in height), including tall herb/ruderal and scrub, should be carefully strimmed to a height of 10cm above ground in a directional manner across site. This shorter sward height will discourage reptiles from using the area;
- Following the strimming, the area should then be left for at least 24 hours, with suitable conditions for reptile movement in this time, before further work is undertaken in this area. All arisings will be removed from site in order to ensure no suitable cover for reptiles remains;
- The area should be managed to ensure that vegetation is maintained at less than 10cm above ground level until surface preparations are required;
- Storage of machinery and materials, particularly piles of building material, must be on pallets raised off the ground, or brought into site only when immediately required. This will lower the risk of reptiles and amphibians starting to use these artificially introduced habitats as places of refuge;
- It is possible that birds may use the scrub and tall ruderal vegetation on site for nesting. If the strimming of vegetation down to a height of 10cm is undertaken outside of the nesting bird season (March to September inclusive) ecological supervision is not required. However, should works need to be undertaken within the bird nesting season, a suitably qualified ecologist acting as an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) must check the site for the presence of active bird nests immediately prior (within 48hrs) of clearance works commencing. Any active nests must be protected by the use of an appropriate buffer to ensure no further disturbance takes place. No works should take place inside any such buffer, until a time that the young are shown to have fledged; and

- All operations will be undertaken by competent trained staff.

Summary

It is considered that, by undertaking the works under this Method Statement, with agreed avoidance measures in place, the risk of harming reptiles is minimal. If at any point the risk to reptiles appears to be higher than anticipated, and it is no longer considered appropriate to continue with the current method statement, the ecologist will amend the mitigation strategy where necessary and/or reassess the need for further survey.

3 REFERENCES

BSI. (2013) *BS 42020: 2013 Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development*. British Standards Institution Standards Ltd, London.

Chick. A MPhil ACIEEM (2023) *Preliminary ecological appraisal of the River Witham, Little Ponton, Lincolnshire*.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A : Development Plan 10

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