

# Approach for Ensuring Local Reptile Population is Maintained During Works

## (1) Enhance quality and condition of existing habitat at margins of the Site

The 5m buffer surrounding all existing wet ditches will be protected and enhanced in advance of the clearance of on-site habitats. During winter 2024, either 3 string electric fence or netlon/barrier mesh fencing (e.g. [Barrier Mesh - Terram](#)) will be erected on the boundary of the 5m buffers to prevent ponies accessing these areas. In addition, these areas will be enhanced through the creation of 8 no. log/brush piles (each measuring approximately 2m x 2m x 0.5m height) to further enhance structural diversity and provide shelter/hibernation habitat.

Removal of grazing pressure and the addition of hibernacula will enhance the structural diversity and carrying capacity of these areas and aid linear linkages to other areas of reptile habitat within adjoining areas.

Subsequently in spring 2025 when conditions are suitable for reptile activity, the areas of the main site (fields to the west of the site) will be cut back in two phases under ecological supervision. Initially areas will be cut to 150mm above ground level and then again at least 24 hours later to ground level, working in the direction of retained habitat. Potential reptile refugia within the site will be dismantled by hand under ecological supervision, and any reptiles captured transferred to the log/brush piles created on the margins of the Site.

Following completion of the clearance works [semi-permanent reptile fencing](#) will be erected on the boundary of the buffer strips surrounding the Site to minimise the risk of reptiles re-entering the works area during construction.

From summer 2025 onwards, a programme of ongoing management will be implemented for the retained habitats on site to ensure that these buffer strips continue to provide areas of good quality reptile habitat through periodic strimming of approximately 20% of the grassland/ruderal areas to ensure continued presence of some more open areas to aid overall structural diversity.

## (2) Enhance habitat connectivity with adjacent areas

See map below for approximate locations of adjacent land that could be further enhanced to improve connectivity and benefit reptiles.



Areas surrounding the existing sealing end compound, and land adjoining it to the north are currently regularly mown and managed under a short sward regime. They are in poor condition for use by reptiles (see photos 13-15 within attachment).

We would intend to relax the grass cutting regime in these areas to provide structurally diverse grassland that incorporates areas of longer sward managed throughout the year to maintain habitat connectivity. Management of this area could be captured by a management agreement funded by National Grid. This area could also be supplemented by dead hedging/dry hedging to further boost connectivity along this linear route.

These areas are well connected to our construction site and wider landscape but currently in poor condition for reptiles.

All to be carried out **prior** to the start of works.

### **(3) Enhance structural complexity of adjacent areas**

See map below for approximate areas of adjacent land that could be further enhanced to improve complexity and benefit reptiles.



Grassland habitat to the north of the existing Met Police firing range and to the east of the existing sealing end compound consist of areas managed as long sward grassland. These areas are of moderate quality for reptile foraging. However, overall, their value for reptiles is limited by the uniform nature of the habitat (long sward grassland), lack of structural variation (e.g. absence of more open areas suitable for basking); scarcity of suitable refugia providing suitable cover or places of rest.

We are in discussion with the landowner over the ability to implement a more complex grassland management regime within this area to increase its structural complexity and value for both invertebrates and reptiles. This would likely be achieved by increasing the cutting regime in some areas of the site to create scalloped paths of shorter sward grassland with a range of sward heights (e.g. short sward areas cut 4 times per year with 5m buffer from paths cut 2 times a year and remaining areas single annual cut). Grass cuttings would be cut, raked and stored to create grass snake egg laying piles. Further enhancement could be achieved by addition of further log/brush piles.

All to be carried out **prior** to the start of works.

#### **(4) Expected outcome**

It is expected that the improvements above could over convert approximately 1ha of habitat from poor to moderate condition (red areas) and a further 1ha of habitat from moderate (related to foraging opportunity only) to good condition (purple areas).

These measures will help to increase the overall carrying capacity such that any reduction in available habitat from losses within the development site are unlikely to detrimentally impact the conservation status of the local reptile assemblage.

**Full details of steps (1)-(3) above would be provided as part of a Reptile Mitigation Strategy to be approved via pre-commencement condition.**