

Patricxbourne road, Bridge, Kent

Proposed Reptile Receptor Site Enhancement Strategy and Management Plan

9th November 2021 / Ref No 2021/05/17



Prepared by Katia Bresso CEnv MIEEM
Trading as 'KB Ecology Ltd' (Reg 7595382)
42, Douglas Road
Lenham, Kent
ME17 2QP
Tel: 07810 412 773
Email: katia.bresso@kbecology.co.uk

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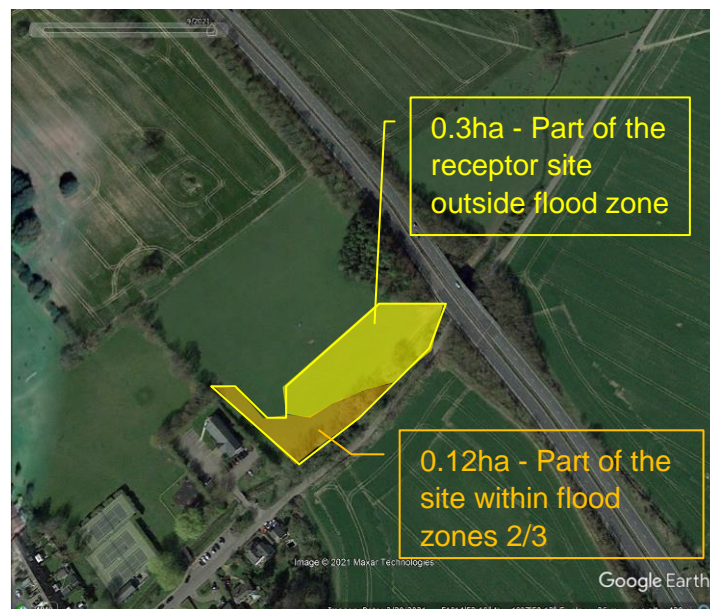
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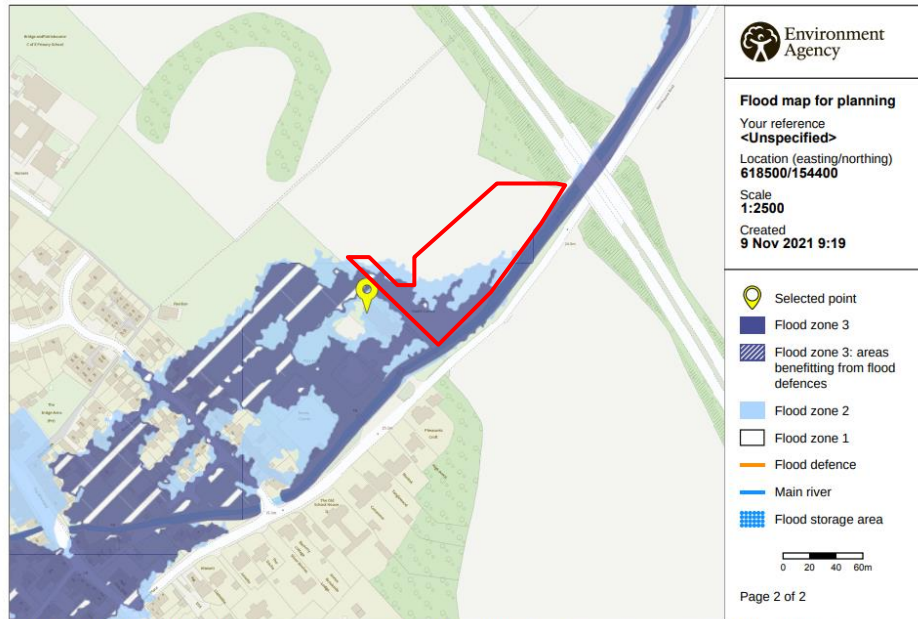
This document presents the biodiversity enhancement strategy and management plan for a field present along Patribourne road, Bridge CT4 5BL (TR185544), with the aim to use it as a receptor site for reptiles.

1 Site Description

The site is currently part of a sheep-grazed field. The Integrated Habitat System (IHS) classification of the Kent Habitat Survey 2012 describes the site as: *'Improved grassland'*. The receptor site comprises two parts:

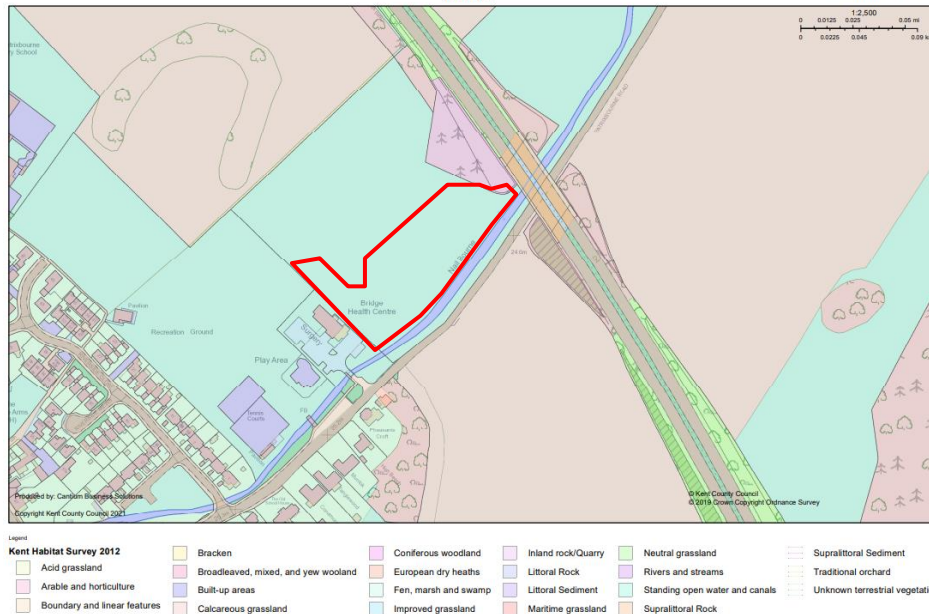
- 0.3ha is outside the flood zone and will provide the bulk of the receptor site, being suitable year-round;
- 0.12ha is within flood zones 2 and 3 (flood zone 2 have a medium probability of flooding; medium risk means that each year this area has a chance of flooding of between 1% and 3.3%. flood zone 3 have a high probability of flooding; high risk means that each year this area has a chance of flooding of greater than 3.3%). This part will thus provide additional habitat during the dryer months.





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The site has been and is currently short grazed by sheep and thus reptiles are not expected to be present. But the site is along the Nail Bourne stream and adjacent to the A2, which provide good connectivity to other reptile habitat locally.

2 Enhancements

Once the grazing pressure is removed (with a stock-proof fence), it is expected that, with enhancements, the site will provide good quality reptile habitat. The following enhancements will take place:

- creation of two hibernacula¹;
- creation of six brash/log piles².

Once the grazing pressure has been removed, it is expected that the site will become suitable for reptiles (i.e. with suitable vegetation growth to provide enough foraging and sheltering opportunities for reptiles) after at least three months of the growing season (April-September); i.e. the site will not be suitable until late June 2022 at the earliest. An ecologist will need to establish whether the vegetation growth is acceptable by the end of June 2022, prior to allowing reptiles to be released on this site.³

3 Management Recommendations

The owner agrees that the receptor site will be subject to long-term security from future development. In addition, the site will be managed for the benefit of reptiles in the long-term with sufficient funding secured to secure the implementation of the management in the long-term.

The aims of the management plan are:

- To provide enhanced opportunities for local wildlife;
- To provide suitable habitat for reptiles in the long-term.

Management will aim to achieve a good mosaic of sub-habitats, including areas of short turf, bare ground and long grass. It is important to ensure not all the site is cut at once, as a variety of animals depend on this vegetation for food and shelter. Areas should be left uncut for them. Ideally a mosaic of different vegetation height could be created via considerate cutting.

The management will thus consist of a yearly cut and rake of one third of the site in end August-September (after wildflowers have set seed), so the site is cut in its entirety only once every three years as shown on the figure below. The initial mowings should be left in situ for a few days to allow seeds to drop to the ground but then it is important to collect mowings to reduce soil fertility. A few piles of cut grass should be kept on the edges of the site (some in the shade, but most in sunshine) to provide habitat for invertebrates and egg-laying habitat for grass snakes.

Cutting can be carried out with a variety of tools. This will depend on the size of patches to be cut. On a small area, in medium to long grass, hand sythes or a power strimmer can be used. On a larger area long grass can be cut for hay using a power sythe or a tractor drawn grass cutter. In all cases, due to the presence of reptiles on site, it is recommended not to cut lower than 15cm off the ground to ensure no animals are harmed in the process.

A 1m buffer of uncut grass will be left around the brash and log piles and the hibernacula.

¹ to meet the minimum specifications as per Pg 42, in the GCN mitigation guidelines (2m length x 1m width x 1m height), and capped with topsoil

² Brash and log piles will be at least one meter high and two metres in diameter. They will comprise a mix of large and small diameter material. The centre of the pile will be compacted, but the outer part will be un-compacted. They will be located in sunny positions. They will be topped up periodically (for example every five years) with further material.

³ The Abandonment of Animals Act 1960 (as amended) applies and care must be taken to ensure that any receptor sites are suitable for the species in terms of habitat and carrying capacity in order that minimal stress and suffering is imposed upon the reptiles concerned.

The management regime will be reviewed after three years and then every five years, to take into consideration the changes in the vegetation.

Information panels explaining the sensitivity of the habitat and species would be installed to discourage public from accessing this land.

Management

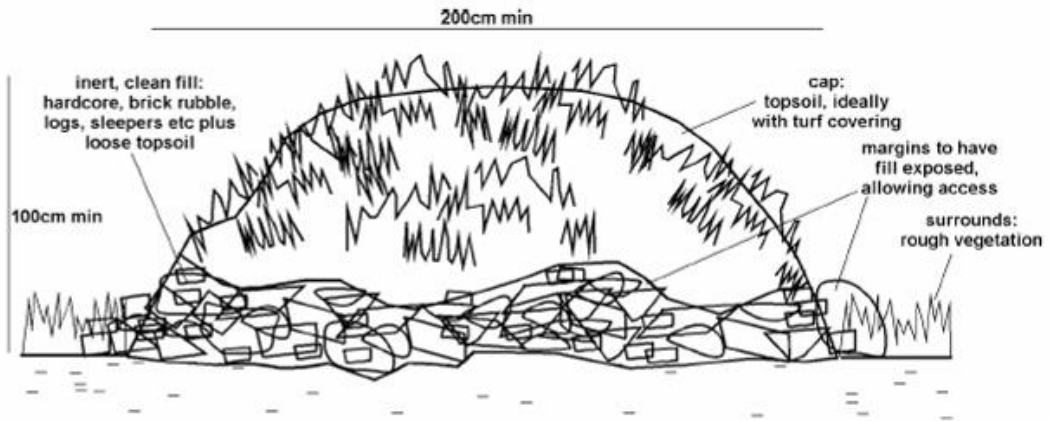
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APPENDIX A: HIBERNACULUM DESIGN

Figure 3: Suggested hibernaculum design

This design mimics artificial and natural conditions in which great crested newts have frequently been found over-wintering. Dimensions should not be below 2m length x 1m width x 1m height. The illustrated design would be suitable for locating on an impermeable substrate. On free-draining substrates, the design is largely similar but the bulk of the fill is sited in an excavated depression in the ground. Hibernacula should ideally be positioned across a site, both close to and distant from breeding ponds, always in suitable terrestrial habitat and above the flood-line.



Photos of Site on 2nd Novembers 2021



IMG_2485



IMG_2486



IMG_2487



IMG_2488



IMG_2489



IMG_2492



IMG_2495