

Land off Church Road, Witherley

REPTILE SURVEY

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Site Details

Report	Reptile Survey
Site Address	Land off Church Road, Witherley, Leicestershire, CV9 3NA
Central OS Grid Reference	SP 32491 97419
Client	OS Holdings

Document Control

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Disclosure:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Croft Ecology was commissioned by OS Holdings to undertake reptile surveys at Land off Church Road, Witherley, Leicestershire, CV9 3NA (central grid reference: SP 32491 97419) in relation to the proposed construction of a single dwelling with detached garage.
- A series of presence/likely absence surveys of the Site for reptiles were undertaken by suitably experienced ecologists during March-April 2026, in accordance with the Froglife Advice Sheet 10 - Reptile Survey.
- The habitats on and immediately surrounding the Site, such as neutral grassland and bramble scrub, and the River Anker, were considered to offer suitable refugia, foraging, and basking habitat for reptiles, particularly grass snake, as this species can travel long distances.
- A single grass snake was recorded during three of the seven presence/ likely absence surveys. It is likely the same individual grass snake due to a consistent black marking within the yellow collar. As such a low population of grass snake as confirmed on Site, with the individual likely using the Site on occasion as part of its wider network.
- Given the low population, a translocation programme would be disproportionate. Instead, it is recommended that sensitive working practices, comprising phased and directional removal of vegetation under the supervision on an Ecological Clerk of Works, are implemented during the course of works to encourage any reptiles present out of the working area, ensuring no harm to reptiles. The ivy-covered area in the east of the Site, where the grass snake was recorded, and the scrub habitat in the west of the Site should be retained and protected during construction. Temporary Heras fencing should be installed prior to works to demarcate a no-go ecological protection zone. This will prevent accidental encroachment and retain a suitable refuge area for reptiles throughout the construction phase.
- Enhancement and compensation measures are recommended including the creation of log piles along the western scrub boundary, and within the ivy-covered bare ground in the east of the Site.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Croft Ecology was commissioned by OS Holdings to undertake a reptile survey at Land off Church Road, Witherley, Leicestershire, CV9 3NA (central grid reference: SP 32491 97419) in relation to the proposed erection of a single self-build dwelling and detached garage (Appendix A).

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) survey was undertaken in August 2025 by Learn Ecology. This assessment found the Site supported moderate potential for reptiles, due to the presence of well-established scrub, long sward grassland, and riparian habitat on the western boundary. Due to the determined moderate potential for reptiles, reptile presence/ absence surveys were recommended. The consultation response by Leicestershire County Council February 2026 outlined that reptile surveys were required to be undertaken at the Site, due to the suitable on-Site habitat and connectivity to the adjacent River Anker corridor.

This report details the results of the reptile survey and provides reasonable avoidance working methods and enhancements to be included within the proposals.

1.1 Aims

The aims of this report are to:

- identify the presence / likely absence of reptiles within the Site;
- identify any mitigation measures likely required for reptiles.

1.2 Site Location

The land within the red line boundary of Figure 1 below is hereafter referred to as the 'Site'.

The Site was located on the western edge of the village of Witherley in Leicestershire, approximately 400m north of the A5 and immediately east of the River Anker. The wider landscape included the town of Atherstone to the west, and arable and pasture farmland to the north, east, and south, shown in Figure 1. Aerial imagery shows the local landscape supports a network of rivers.



Figure 1 Site boundary in the wider landscape (Basemap: Mapbox)

1.3 Planning and Legislative Context

Both UK legislation together with national and local planning policies provide varying levels of protection to reptiles. In Britain, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 serves as the main tool for safeguarding wildlife. Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) deals with the protection of wildlife, including birds, animals, and plants.

In Britain there are four relatively widespread native species of reptile: the adder *Vipera berus*; grass snake *Natrix helvetica*, common lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, and slow worm *Anguis fragilis*. These species are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) against intentional killing and injuring; or selling, offering or exposing for sale. The remaining protected UK reptiles: smooth snake *Coronella austriaca* and sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* are not found in this area of England.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Personnel

The surveys and report preparation were undertaken by Liza Clift, Assistant Ecologist at Croft Ecology. Liza has a range of ecological survey experience including reptile surveys, badger sett monitoring and bat emergence surveys. Liza has written a variety of ecological reports, including protected species survey reports, reasonable avoidance measures reports, and PEAs.

The final survey was undertaken by Melissa Bell (PhD), Assistant Ecologist at Croft Ecology. Melissa has experience completing entomological surveys, baseline habitat surveys, and reptile surveys.

The technical review was undertaken by Katy Clark-Goddard, Senior Ecologist at Croft Ecology. Katy has 6 years of experience working in ecological consultancy and has undertaken and reviewed dozens of Preliminary Ecological Appraisals and Ecological Impact Assessments for projects of a range of scales.

The final review was undertaken by Anna Scott-Swift MCIEEM, Director of Ecology at Croft Ecology. Anna has over 20 years of experience working in ecology and has undertaken and reviewed dozens of reptile surveys, reports and mitigation and conducted a number of translocation exercises for reptiles for projects of a range of scales and habitats across England.

2.2 Data Search

Reptile records from within a 1km radius of the Site were provided by Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre. The data search was returned on 6 March 2026.

A review of statutory designated sites and notable habitats within a 1km radius of the Site was conducted utilising the MAGIC database on 20th April 2026.

Additionally, aerial photography was viewed to assess habitat connectivity around the Site's locale, which may be important to ecological features present on Site and for the consideration of suitable ecological enhancements.

2.3 Reptile Presence/Likely Absence Survey

A presence/likely absence survey of the Site for reptiles was undertaken by suitably experienced ecologists, in accordance with the Froglife Advice Sheet 10 - Reptile Survey. Each survey visit lasted approximately thirty minutes and weather conditions at the time of each survey were recorded. The survey dates and weather conditions are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Reptile survey dates and weather conditions

Visit	Date	Time	Temperature (°C)	Weather
Setup	10 March 2026	16:00	10	10°C, dry, overcast, BF1
1	30 March 2026	15:00	13	10°C, dry, scattered clouds, BF5
2	2 April 2026	15:00	11	10°C, dry, scattered clouds, BF2
3	7 April 2026	11:00	17	15°C, dry, clear BF3
4	9 April 2026	9:45	10	14°C, dry, overcast, BF2
5	13 April 2026	10:00	10	9°C, dry, scattered clouds, BF2
6	20 April 2026	10:30	11	11°C, dry, passing clouds, BF1
7	22 April 2026	15:00	15	16°C, dry, passing clouds, BF4

The visits were predominantly undertaken during suitable weather conditions (9-18°C, intermittent or hazy sunshine and little or no wind). The weather conditions were not ideal during survey visits 1 and 7 due to it being windier on Site those days. However, the mats were still sufficiently warm as the ambient temperature was warm on these days so they are still considered to be valid results.

Additionally, in the hours prior to survey 1, there had been scattered showers at the Site, and survey results can be improved by visiting soon after a shower, when reptiles are more likely to shelter under refugia for warmth. Therefore, visiting in this changeable weather may have identified reptiles that may otherwise have been missed and so a Site visit was still undertaken.

Prior to survey 4, there had been fine conditions with passing clouds, however on arrival of the Site, the sky became overcast. As there had been direct sun immediately prior to the survey, the mats were sufficiently warmed to conduct a suitable reptile survey.

Therefore, all surveys were still considered to provide a valid piece of survey information.

Each site visit included the use of two survey techniques during each visit. The first technique used was direct observation and the second technique was the use of artificial refuges. In addition, natural refugia at the Site were observed and checked during the survey visits. The recommended density of refugia for presence/likely absence surveying is 5-10/ha and 31 refugia measuring 0.5m x 0.5m were distributed through the 0.39ha Site on 10 March 2026 and left to bed in for approximately two weeks. The artificial refugia were predominantly placed in sunny locations close to cover.

Two different types of refugia were used as different materials appear to have differing success at attracting different reptile species (*pers. obs*). A combination of bituminous felt and onduline black profiled sheets were used as artificial refugia at the approximate locations illustrated on the map in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Locations of artificial refugia placed within the Site

2.4 Survey Limitations

All areas of the Site were readily accessed with no limitations to the survey, other than the weather discussed in section 2.3.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 Previous survey effort

The PEA by Learn Ecology in 2025 noted the following with respect to reptiles:

The site provided some suitability for reptiles and amphibians in the terrestrial phase of their lifecycle due to the longer sward length of the grassland and well-established scrub and riparian habitat to the western boundary.

*The terrestrial habitats within the site are of moderate value to terrestrial amphibians and reptiles due to the presence of the scrub and grassland and the proximity to the river increases the likelihood of their presence, particularly grass snake *Natrix natrix*.*

No records of reptile species were returned within a 2km radius of the site. However, the absence of records does not prove the absence of the species.

And the PEA therefore recommended the following:

- *Given the suitability of the on-site habitat and proximity to the important wildlife corridor of the River Anker which could support grass snake Phase II reptile surveys are recommended to determine presence/absence and, if present, species breakdown and population size(s) to determine appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures*

3.1.2 Habitat Connectivity

The Site was located in a rural environment at the western edge of the village of Witherley. The immediate surroundings of the Site were a mature residential garden to the north, a grassland field to the south and the village of Witherley to the east. Immediately to the west of the Site was the River Anker which was bordered with hedgerow and trees in both the north and south directions. The adjacent river is of ecological importance within the wider landscape and may represent important corridors for any local reptile populations if present. The provision of foraging, commuting, and refuge potential by these adjacent habitats enables good Site connectivity to further suitable habitat in the wider landscape, such as the arable field hedgerows and woodland edge habitats to the south, east and northeast.

A review of data available on MAGIC revealed there was no Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Local Nature Reserve (LNR) within 1km of the Site. The review showed the Site was well connected to a deciduous woodland located 10m northeast of the Site.

3.2 Reptile Presence/Likely Absence Survey

3.2.1 Site Description

The PEA by Learn Ecology (2025) described the Site to be dominated by other neutral grassland, with predominantly ruderal species. During the reptile surveys, common bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* were noted within the grassland, along the eastern and northern boundaries of the Site. A native hedgerow with trees was present along the western end of the northern boundary and along the western boundary. The eastern end of the northern boundary and eastern boundary comprised a line of trees, with species including pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, and field maple *Acer campestre*. A patch of bramble scrub was present along the west boundary and extended approximately two metres into the grassland. At the east end of the Site there was a patch of sparsely vegetated urban land with substantial ivy *Hedera helix* encroachment.

Habitat photos from the recent PEA survey undertaken by Learn Ecology in August, 2025 (Learn Ecology, 2025) are provided below.

At the time of the first reptile check, the grassland sward was longer, due to a lack of recent management.



Figure 3 Other neutral grassland on Site, looking west, with scrub in the background



Figure 4 Scrub at the west of the Site, looking south



Figure 5 Hedgerow with trees on the western boundary



Figure 6 Ivy covered bare ground in the southeast corner of the Site



Figure 7 Northern boundary line of trees



Figure 8 Onduline refugia within the ivy vegetation (Croft Ecology, March 2026)



Figure 9 Bitumen felt refugia within the scrub edge (Croft Ecology, March 2026)

3.2.2 Reptile Survey Results

A single grass snake was recorded during checks 2, 3, and 4. The grass snake was consistently observed under mat 3, within the ivy-covered bare ground in the east of the Site (Figure 10). It is likely the same individual grass snake observed each time, due to consistent markings of a dark spot within the yellow collar on the snake's head (Figures 11, 12, and 13).

Surveys were undertaken at different times of the day and during a range of suitable weather conditions to give a varied assessment of the Site and best capture any possible reptile activity at the Site; consequently it is considered a robust assessment.



Figure 10 Grass snake location (yellow star) during checks 2, 3 and 4



Figure 11 Grass snake underneath mat 3, during check #2



Figure 12 Grass snake underneath mat 3, during check #3



Figure 13 Grass snake underneath mat 3, during check #4

4 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2025 PEA by Learn Ecology recommended that reptile surveys should be undertaken to determine the presence/absence of reptiles on Site.

The seven presence / likely absence surveys for reptiles, carried out at the Site during March-April by suitably experienced ecologists, recorded a single grass snake during three of the surveys, therefore the Site supports a low population of grass snake with occasional use of the Site.

The Site is subject to a planning proposal for the proposed construction of a single dwelling and detached garage (Appendix A). These works will result in the removal of other neutral grassland. A 10m buffer zone from the river course will be enforced with a 1.5m high fence; this will protect the scrub vegetation along the west of the Site and maintain suitable habitat for passing reptiles. The ivy-covered bare ground in the east of the Site, where the grass snake was identified, is due to be retained under the current proposals. Given that the grass snake was consistently recorded within the ivy-covered area in the east of the Site, this habitat, and a corridor linking to the west of the Site, should be retained and protected during construction. Temporary Heras fencing should be installed prior to works to demarcate a no-go ecological protection zone. This will prevent accidental encroachment and retain a suitable refuge area for reptiles throughout the construction phase. The retained habitat will be enhanced through the provision of log and brash piles at its margins and sensitive maintenance.

As the three reptile sightings are likely to be the same individual grass snake, due to the marking within the yellow collar, the Site is considered to support a low grass snake population. Whilst the Site provides suitable habitat and connectivity to other suitable habitat in the wider landscape, the low population suggests that the grass snake observed likely uses the Site for occasional foraging and basking as part of its wider network, rather than as its main resource. Therefore, there is a reasonable likelihood that grass snake may be present during the works.

Due to the low population recorded on Site, translocation would be disproportionate. Instead, it is recommended that sensitive working practices, comprising phased and directional removal of vegetation under the supervision on an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECow), are implemented during the course of works to encourage any reptiles present out of the working area, ensuring no harm to reptiles. These sensitive working practices are outlined below.

4.1 Reasonable Avoidance Measures

Vegetation clearance of the grassland should be undertaken during the reptile active period (March-September inclusive, in conditions above 5°C to avoid encountering hibernating reptiles) and in a phased and directional manner (east to west towards the retained vegetation along the western Site boundary). This would allow any sheltering individuals to disperse and encourage them to enter the retained vegetation and river to the west of the Site which will be undisturbed by the works. Vegetation clearance should be supervised by an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW).

Vegetation clearance works should proceed in a phased clearance as follows:

- The grassland and vegetation outlined for removal should be cut to a height of approximately 150mm using handheld tools (strimmers etc.) under the direct supervision of an ECoW. No machinery which would impact the ground layer should be used at this stage of the works. This would allow a fingertip search by a competent person immediately prior to the next stage.
- Complete clearance of the works area to ground level should then be completed, again in a directional manner and supervised by an ECoW, leaving bare ground unsuitable for use by reptiles.

In addition, given that the grass snake was consistently recorded within the ivy-covered area in the east of the Site, the following additional precautionary measure will be implemented:

- The ivy-covered habitat, and a corridor linking it to the west of the Site, should be retained and protected throughout the construction period.
- Temporary Heras fencing (or similar) should be installed prior to works to demarcate this area as an ecological protection zone.
- This area should be treated as a no-go zone for construction activities, preventing accidental damage to a known refuge location.
- Where vegetation clearance is undertaken within approximately 5–10m of this retained area, this should be carried out with particular care, including a sensitive, staged approach and supervised hand-searching where necessary, to further reduce risk.
- If works are to be delayed or undertaken outside of the reptile active season, the vegetation should be cleared during the reptile active period and maintained at a short sward height of approximately 150mm until the development proceeds to ensure that the Site is not recolonised.

- Should reptiles or any non-protected species, including small mammals and common amphibians, be discovered on Site during works, these should be carefully moved by the ECoW from the construction area, unharmed, to the area of cover to be left undisturbed by the works in the west of the Site.

4.2 Compensation and Enhancements

To offset the minor loss of habitat and to provide enhanced opportunities for reptiles within the Site, the following measures are recommended.

- The provision of log piles and hibernacula (Figure 13), or other natural refugia, are recommended to provide hibernacula for reptiles on the Site, in particular along the western boundary scrub and within the ivy-covered bare ground in the east of the Site where the grass snake was identified. Such refugia must be in place prior to any vegetation clearance such that there is a safe area away from works that animals can be moved to if encountered or if in any immediate danger.
- The hibernaculum should have a minimum footprint of 1m² with a height of at least 0.5m and should comprise a mix of brash and dried leaves to create a stable pile that has a variety of nooks and crannies. This will also provide opportunities for invertebrates.

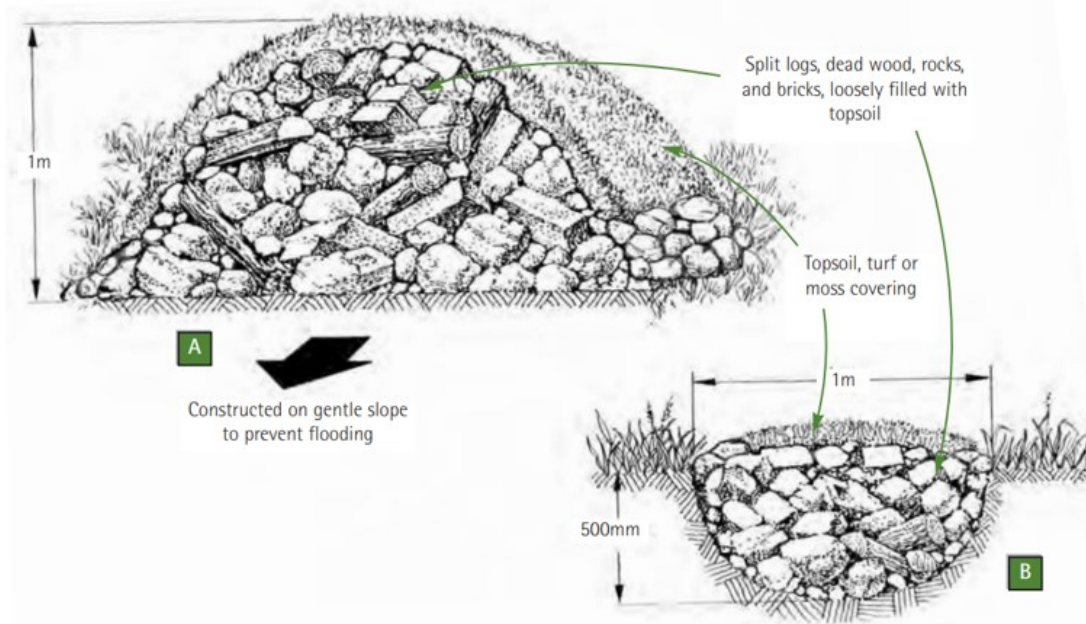


Figure 14 Diagram of structure and creation of log pile/hibernacula for (A) impermeable and (B) free-draining soils. (Source; Froglife, 2001)

- The ivy-covered area should be retained and managed to prevent complete dominance, maintaining edge structure and habitat heterogeneity.
- Strimming or cutting of the ivy-covered area should avoid the reptile active season of March-September, unless supervised.
- Hard landscaping and intensive garden management should avoid encroachment into retained habitat areas, specifically the western boundary by the river and the reptile refuge location in the ivy-covered area in the east of the Site.

5 REFERENCES

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Appendix A – Proposed Plan



Figure 15 Revised Site Layout with new refugia (orange) and Heras fencing (yellow) locations (drawing extract: Hayward Architects, 2025. drawing no: 25 89 07H)