Guidelines on Considerations if a New Development is Proposed Where Reptiles Are Present

The government, through Natural England, produce standing advice for planners to follow. This standing advice can give you ideas on how to frame an objection to a planning proposal.

Part of the Natural England Standing Advice has been reproduced below with annotations in red, which illustrates the types of situation that could impinge detrimentally on reptiles, These situations could make part of a planning objection The guidance from Natural England is reproduced in black and was taken from their webpage:

www.gov.uk/guidance/reptiles-protection-surveys-and-licences

Reptiles: surveys and mitigation for development projects

From: Natural England and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
Protected sites and species and Wildlife and habitat conservation

Standing advice for local planning authorities who need to assess the impacts of development on reptiles.

Contents

Survey reports and mitigation plans are required for development projects that could affect protected species, as part of getting planning permission or a mitigation licence. Surveys need to show whether protected species are present in the area or nearby, and how they use the site. Mitigation plans show how you'll avoid, reduce or manage any negative effects to protected species.

This is Natural England's standing advice for local planning authorities who need to assess planning applications that affect reptiles. These include smooth snakes and sand lizards, which are European protected species, and these species which are protected by UK law:

- adder
- grass snake
- common lizard
- slow worm

This information can be used to decide what is needed for surveys and planning mitigation measures for reptiles.

Ecologists need to decide which survey and mitigation methods are right for the project being worked on. If this standing advice can't be followed, they'll have to include a statement with the planning or licence application explaining why.

Where this guide says 'you' it means the applicant or their ecologist

Decide if you need to survey

You must be suitably experienced, eg a qualified ecologist, and licensed to survey for reptiles. Survey for reptiles if the development:

- site has habitat suitable for reptiles
  If the site is sunny and has long grasses, small trees/bushes, mature hedgerows it is very likely to have reptiles. In farmed areas in Sussex this is likely to be grass snake (especially near water) and slow worm. Mature woodland is less attractive because there are fewer basking sites, but even here sunny edges will be favoured.
- will alter the water levels of the site or surrounding area
  Reptiles do not generally like very wet sites. If a dry area is likely to become wetter through run-off from a development this needs to be investigated
- will break apart suitable habitat for reptiles
  Reptiles hibernate in winter and the hibernacula are often located away from summer feeding areas. For example grass snakes may hibernate under the roots of a fallen tree in woodland, which is on higher, drier ground and then move out into adjacent meadows during the summer, which would be too wet for hibernation, Other hibernation sites are disused burrows of mammals, base of old walls. Anywhere that is well hidden, dry and relatively protected from frost.
- distribution and historical records suggest they may be present

  Records can be obtained from the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (http://sxbrc.org.uk)

Survey methods

Acceptable methods for surveying most reptiles are:

- searching for basking animals on banks, piles of wood and edges of woodland
- laying out artificial refuges like corrugated iron sheets (this is the only method recommended for slow worms and smooth snakes)
- carpet tiles or roofing felt bedded down well into the vegetation

Survey for reptiles in April, May and September. Avoid July to August and November to February.

Combine daytime searches with artificial refuges, and look at hibernation sites as well as summer sites.

Look at suitable habitat within the home range of (the distance the animal normally travels from) the development site. Surveys should aim to establish the population size and distribution of reptiles on and near the development site.

Assess the impacts

Assess the impacts this development would have on reptiles if no mitigation measures were planned. Impacts to consider include:

- losing links between habitats
  The most likely link to be lost is between hibernation areas and summer quarters, or between two or more populations of reptiles, preventing animals from moving easily between populations and so reducing genetic diversity over time. Loss of linkage might be from the removal of a hedge or other strip of longer vegetation or a new road cutting through the site.

- reduction in habitat quality
  Examples are removing long grass or scrub and replacing by hard standing or short mown grass
- risk of fire
- If the area is to be used more by people as a result of the development then there will be an enhanced fire risk. The preferred habitat of long grass or low shrub is particularly susceptible to fire.
- effect of increased litter

  More people using an area will necessarily increase the risk of litter.

- **Additional Point**. Reptiles need to bask for extended periods at which time they are susceptible to human/dog disturbance. Development is likely to produce human/dog disturbance of reptiles. New housing is likely to increase the danger of cat predation in nearby (cat range 500m) reptile populations.