

Gavray Drive, Bicester

Ground Investigations – Non-licensed Ecological Method Statement

edp0124_r046_030221

Introduction

- 1.1 This Non-licensed Method Statement has been prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP) on behalf of L&Q Estates in respect of proposed ground investigations (localised intrusive works) within land north of Gavray Drive, Bicester (Bicester 13 housing allocation). This Method Statement summarises: the works to be undertaken; the ecological sensitivities that require consideration prior to during works; and the sensitive working practices that are to be adopted to minimise the risk of harm to protected species.

Proposed Works

- 1.2 The proposed ground investigations are entirely restricted to the land area that is planned for residential development and associated access and infrastructure, and thus no works are proposed within the River Ray Conservation Target Area (CTA) or Gavray Drive Meadows Local Wildlife Site (LWS) boundaries.
- 1.3 A summary of the investigations is provided below. This should be read in conjunction with the attached plan (**Appendix EDP 1**) showing approximate sample locations; however, it should be noted that locations will be adjusted on the ground where appropriate to minimise damage to habitats:
- The purple circles represent rotary boreholes (c.100mm diameter and up to 10m deep) made using a small tracked drilling rig;
 - The orange circles represent windowless sample boreholes (c.100mm diameter and up to 5m deep) made using a small tracked rig or a trailer mounted rig towed by a pickup truck; and
 - The blue and white squares are trial pits (c.2-3m long, 0.5-0.6m wide and up to 3.0m deep) excavated and then backfilled and compacted by a JCB.

Ecological Sensitivities

- 1.4 The north-western land area to be investigated is arable land under active cultivation. Boundary hedgerows and trees will be avoided, and therefore the ecological sensitivities in this area are minimal.



- 1.5 The south-eastern land area to be investigated comprises a mix of grassland, scattered scrub and dense scrub/outgrown hedgerow. Based on survey work undertaken by EDP over many years, including updated surveys completed in 2020, these habitats are capable of supporting legally protected species as set out below.

Birds

- 1.6 There is potential for birds to construct nests within scrub and trees and, to a lesser extent, in tall grassland, within the proposed working area during the bird breeding season. Works could therefore potentially cause direct harm or disturbance to birds, their nests and eggs.
- 1.7 All wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected under Section 1 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended), with certain species afforded additional protection measures.

Great Crested Newts

- 1.8 Great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) have been confirmed breeding in ponds within and around the site. There are no ponds within the proposed areas of works; however, the areas of dense scrub and tall grassland could potentially support great crested newts during their terrestrial phase. Great crested newts may use these habitats for hibernation over winter. Works could therefore potentially cause direct harm or disturbance to individual great crested newts.
- 1.9 Great crested newts are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended) and are a European Protected Species (EPS) subject to strict protection under the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017*. Offences under these laws include the following:
- To intentionally kill, injure or capture or take great crested newts;
 - To deliberately take or destroy eggs of great crested newts;
 - To possess or control a live or dead great crested newt;
 - To intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy, or obstruct access to, any structure or place which great crested newts use for shelter or protection;
 - To intentionally or recklessly disturb great crested newts while occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose; or
 - To damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place.



- 1.10 Activities that are likely to cause an offence under the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017* can be permitted under a derogation licence granted by Natural England. However, this relates to activities that already have planning consent or similar consent from a public body, which does not apply in this instance. Instead, this method statement sets out measures to avoid causing any such offence such that the activities can be completed without a derogation licence.

Reptiles

- 1.11 The site has been found to support a large population of common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and a small population of grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*). These species could potentially be present within scrub and grassland habitats within the proposed areas of works, and they may use these habitats for hibernation over winter. Works could therefore potentially cause direct harm to common lizards or grass snakes.
- 1.12 All species of common reptile (including grass snake) are protected from intentional or reckless killing and injury harm under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended).

Roles and Responsibilities

Site Contractors

- 1.13 Details of the landscape contractors responsible for undertaking sensitive vegetation clearance in advance of the ground investigations commencing are as follows:

Park & Landscapes Ltd
01386 423 518
www.parkandlandscapes.co.uk

- 1.14 The consulting engineers responsible for undertaking the ground investigations are as follows:

Hydrock
01454 619533
www.hydrock.com

Ecological Clerk of Works

- 1.15 Details of the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECow) responsible for advising the site contractors on the ecological sensitivities and supervising relevant works are as follows:

The Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP) Ltd
01285 740427
www.edp-uk.co.uk



Summary of Sensitive Working Practices

1.16 The following summarises the measures to be employed to avoid harm to the protected species described above and to avoid any infringement of the relevant legislation. The sensitive working practices is be summarised as follows:

- The ECoW has met the project engineers and the landscape contractor on site to fine-tune/adjust and mark out the sample locations and to define to appropriate routes for vehicular movement to minimise damage to habitats;
- Before the middle of February 2021, the landscape contractors will remove any vegetation (scrub and tall grass) taller than 150mm above ground level from within and around the sample locations and along the defined routes for vehicular movement. This will remove potential bird nesting habitat before the 2021 bird breeding season commences. However, the habitat will be checked for nesting birds by the ECoW prior to works as a precaution and carried out under the supervision of the ECoW;
- In late February, the ground conditions will be reviewed to establish whether the ground is sufficiently dry enough to allow machinery to access the site while avoiding churning up the ground. If the ground conditions are found to be unsuitable ground investigation work will be delayed;
- After the beginning of March 2021, the landscape contractors will cut vegetation down to ground level within the sample locations and to 50mm around the sample locations as well as along the defined routes for vehicular movement (if required). This will minimise the suitability of these areas for great crested newts and reptiles, whilst avoiding their hibernation period. These areas will be checked for great crested newts and reptiles by the ECoW prior to cutting; and
- Following completion of the above, the engineers will proceed with the ground investigations under the supervision of the ECoW, who will check areas for great crested newts and reptiles prior to tracking over by vehicles and/or digging boreholes and trial pits.

Method Statement

1.17 The method statement provided in **Table EDP 1** below sets out the detailed measures to be followed prior to and during the ground investigation (GI) works to minimise habitat impacts and protect nesting birds, great crested newt and reptile interests so that there is no infringement of relevant legislation.

Table EDP 1: Ecological Method Statement

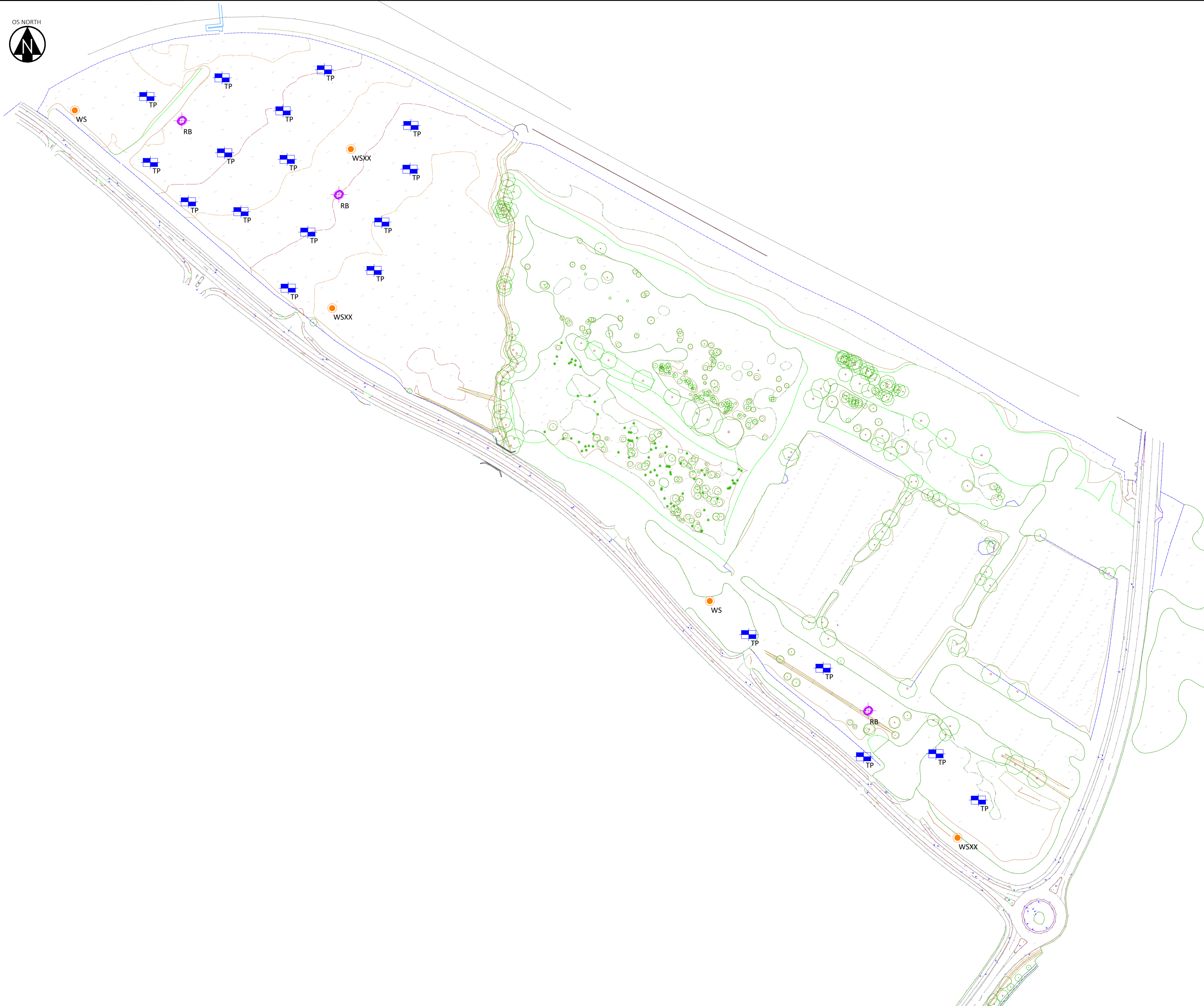
Timing	Methodology
Prior to the commencement of GI works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A site meeting will be held with the Applicant, GI contractor, Vegetation Clearance Contractor and Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) to discuss the timetable of works and pertinent ecological interests. • A tool box talk will be given to the contractors by the appointed ecologists (EDP) to notify them of scrub and grassland habitat and nesting birds, great crested newt and reptile interests. • The exploratory locations (see Appendix EDP 1), including machinery access route, and required working areas will be identified on the ground, broadly in accordance with the plan but at the discretion of the ECoW to minimise habitat impacts and target those habitats that are less valuable or likely to support nesting bird, reptile and great crested newt. • The vegetation within the working areas will be cut in two phases: (1) to 150mm; and (2) to ground level in the sample location and 50mm within the work area and access route (if necessary), in short sections at a time, at the discretion of the ECoW, to determine likely absence of nesting birds, reptiles and great crested newts in the surrounding habitats. • Any reptile refugia exposed will be inspected for reptiles and amphibians by the ecologist and dismantled by hand. • Sensitive vegetation clearance will include the access routes, as identified during the site meeting, that will be used by the excavation machinery. Such routes will be designed to utilise existing paths and minimise habitat degradation. • Although considered unlikely, any reptiles found will be relocated by the ECoW to an adjacent area of suitable habitat outside the area impacted by the works. Should nesting birds or great crested newts be discovered works will cease and be either: (1) amended to avoid the relevant location by at least 10m; or (2) delayed until the bird nest has ceased to be active or any great crested newts have dispersed from the affected area.

Timing	Methodology
During GI works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The explorations holes will be formed using excavators and drill rigs utilising existing accesses into the site and through cleared access routes across the site. Contractors will be briefed on adhering to such works areas to prevent further encroachment and degradation of adjacent habitats. • The works will be completed under the supervision of an ECoW where deemed necessary by the ECoW. • The top 150mm of turf and topsoil, where present, will be excavated and placed to one side of the exploration hole to ensure it remains separate to the subsoil. • Any subsoil will be excavated and placed in a separate location to the turf and topsoil. • Trial holes will not be left open overnight. • Prior to in-filing holes, an inspection of the trench bottom for trapped animals should be undertaken. • Each hole will be filled in with the excavated materials with the subsoil first and then the topsoil and turf to allow natural regeneration of the vegetation and to match adjacent ground levels. • Although considered unlikely, any reptiles found will be relocated only by the ECoW to an adjacent area of suitable habitat outside of the area impacted by the works. Should great crested newts be discovered, works will cease and be either: (1) amended to avoid the relevant location by at least 10m; or (2) delayed until any great crested newts have dispersed from the affected area.
Following completion of GI works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive timing of works and safe working practices will ensure natural regeneration of the vegetation and ensure long-term opportunities for use by nesting birds and great crested newts and reptiles.



Appendix EDP 1

Proposed Exploratory Hole Sketch Plan



KEY

WSXX

Hydrock Dynamic Windowless Sampler Borehole

TPXX

Hydrock Trial Pit

RB##

Hydrock Rotary Borehole

NOTES

1. All dimensions are to be checked on site before the commencement of works. Any discrepancies are to be reported to the Architect & Engineer for verification. Figured dimensions only are to be taken from this drawing.

2. This drawing is to be read in conjunction with all relevant Engineers' and Service Engineers' drawings and specifications.

3. This drawing has been based on the following drawings and information: Unreferenced drawing supplied by the Client.

PO1	FIRST ISSUE					
	SD	26/01/21	CA	26/01/21	JC	26/01/21
REV.	REVISION NOTES/COMMENTS					
	DRAWN BY	DATE	CHECKED BY	DATE	APPROVED BY	DATE

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Holdenby Road

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Northampton NN6 8LD

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CLIENT

L & Q Estates Limited

PROJECT

Gavray Drive, Bicester

TITLE

Proposed Exploratory Hole Sketch Plan

HYDROCK PROJECT NO. C-15114-C		SCALE @ A2 1:2000
PURPOSE OF ISSUE SUITABLE FOR INFORMATION		STATUS S2
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