

HAWKESWOOD ECOLOGY

Specialists in Ecological Survey and Assessment

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REPTILE MITIGATION STRATEGY, LAND AT COED DARCY, NEATH PORT TALBOT.

ON BEHALF OF

COASTAL HOMES

January 2019

Ref: HE/73/2018

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We confirm that in preparing this Report we have exercised reasonable skill and care, taking into account the project objectives, the agreed scope of the work, prevailing site conditions and the degree of manpower and resources allocated to the project.

All habitat and protected species surveys present a ‘snapshot’ of conditions existing and species present, or considered having potential to be present, at the time of survey. Many species are mobile and distributions can vary across time. Results and findings presented in this report should be considered with these factors in mind.

Protected species surveys are recognised as having a ‘shelf life’ of two years maximum. Surveys older than this are unlikely to be accepted by a Local Planning Authority or Natural Resources Wales as viable documentation.

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1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Following discussions with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council regarding an application for a small development at Coed Darcy, Hawkeswood Ecology was instructed by Coastal Housing to produce a safe clearance methodology with respect to the possible presence of reptiles on Site. The approximate central Grid Reference of the Site is SS 71690 95557; it is proposed to develop the Site for residential purposes. The current application Site is part of a larger development area on which reptile presence absence surveys are proposed for this (2019) survey season.
- 1.2 Hawkeswood Ecology carried out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the wider Site in October 2018 reporting as '*Preliminary Ecological Assessment, Land at Coed Darcy, Llandarcy. Hawkeswood Ecology – November 2018*' which should be read in conjunction with this mitigation scheme. That assessment reported that the presence of reptiles was unlikely as the Site had been completely cleared of vegetation and topsoil within the last ten years. A search of historical data related to surveys carried out across the Coed Darcy development area also failed to find any reports of substantial reptile presence in the application area or locality.
- 1.3 Following submission of that report, The Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPT) Biodiversity Team flagged up data that was not in the public domain showing an area of land to the very near south west of the Site did support high reptile populations and expressed concern that re-colonisation of the Site may have occurred as suitable reptile habitat was present. As such, reptile surveys are to be carried out across the wider development Site. However, due to funding concerns, the small area of the current application Site is to be cleared prior to completion of reptile surveys with due caution and care not to harm any reptiles that maybe present. This Mitigation Scheme is prepared to facilitate this.
- 1.4 The reptile mitigation is to be undertaken in two stages. The first is to clear above ground vegetation at the earliest opportunity thus making the application Site less favourable to reptiles and encouraging them to move into adjacent habitats. Following this, the Site will be cleared of topsoil under ecological supervision and fenced against reptile re-colonisation.
- 1.5 This part of the Site largely comprises disturbed and bare ground with some low level re-colonisation of grasses and shrubby vegetation. It is adjacent to the already developed Crown Way and lies to the south of the wider development site.

2 MITIGATION STRATEGY

Phase 1 Habitat Manipulation

- 2.1 An Ecological Clerk of Works (ECW) will be retained for the period of the clearance project. A toolbox talk will be given to staff undertaking the works prior to commencement. This will offer advice on the habitat preferences for reptiles, identification, what to look for and the current legislation relating to them.
- 2.2 The approximate area to be cleared is shown by red line in Figure 2, photographs of the Site are given in Appendix 1.
- 2.3 Initial vegetation clearance works will consist of cutting above ground vegetation and can be undertaken at any time of year. The initial vegetation removal will be by brush-cutter/trimmer and consist of two phases. The first cut will reduce the height of the vegetation to ~10cm. A second cut will reduce the vegetation height to ground level. The initial cut will allow a closer inspection of the cut area by the operator for obvious above ground hibernacula before clearance to ground level takes place. If the operator has concerns about any features the ECW will be called to Site to offer advice.
- 2.4 Should the initial clearance works commence in the hibernation season (roughly end October to start March depending upon weather conditions) when the animals would normally be underground, any significant hibernacula identified on Site (such as piles of rubble, wood or other structures offering protection), will be isolated and no further clearance undertaken of them until the activity season when they can be carefully dismantled by hand during the phase 2 clearance operations in weather conditions outlined below.
- 2.5 If works commence in the activity season, they will only be undertaken in warm conditions. Temperatures should be above 10°C in preferably sunny conditions, works will not commence until 10.00am at the earliest. This will allow any animals present to warm up and become active following cooler night time temperatures.
- 2.6 The vegetation should be cleared in the direction shown in Figure 2, generally away from the already developed areas. The works will be undertaken slowly and the ground ahead regularly inspected for the presence of animals by the operator who will be informed of requirements and given instruction during the toolbox talk. This allows any animals that may be present to leave under cover of the remaining vegetation. Any animals found by the operator should be moved to a safe area on the wider development Site which will be designated by the ECW prior to works commencing.

Phase 2 – Topsoil clearance

- 2.7 Only following this stage will earthmoving machinery be allowed to work the Site surface. The removal of topsoil and remaining vegetation will only take place in the activity season (April – end September). If undertaken early in the season, i.e. April, the ECW will be contacted to advise if the weather conditions have been suitable for reptile activity before any works commence. All such clearance activities are weather dependent and will not take place in temperatures less than 10°C

and should be undertaken in dry conditions with at least sunny spells. As in paragraph 2.5, works will not commence before 10.00am to allow creatures time to bask and become mobile.

- 2.8 A 360 or similar machine should drag the surface clear of vegetation; a straight edged bucket is preferred. The removal of any piles of stones or other structures as described in paragraph 2.4, where animals may go into torpor (a physiological state of low activity) in cooler weather or rest in cooler days will be undertaken by hand. Should significant numbers of reptiles be found on Site at any time during the habitat manipulation works, they will cease immediately and the ECW contacted for advice on how best to proceed.
- 2.9 The cleared area will be fenced against recolonisation of reptiles as soon as practicably possible after clearance using suitable reptile proof fencing which will be checked daily and maintained as secure throughout the development period.

3 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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**FIGURE 1:
APPLICATION SITE**

Reptile Mitigation Strategy, Land at Coed Darcy.
Hawkeswood Ecology – January 2019

Figure 1: Application Site

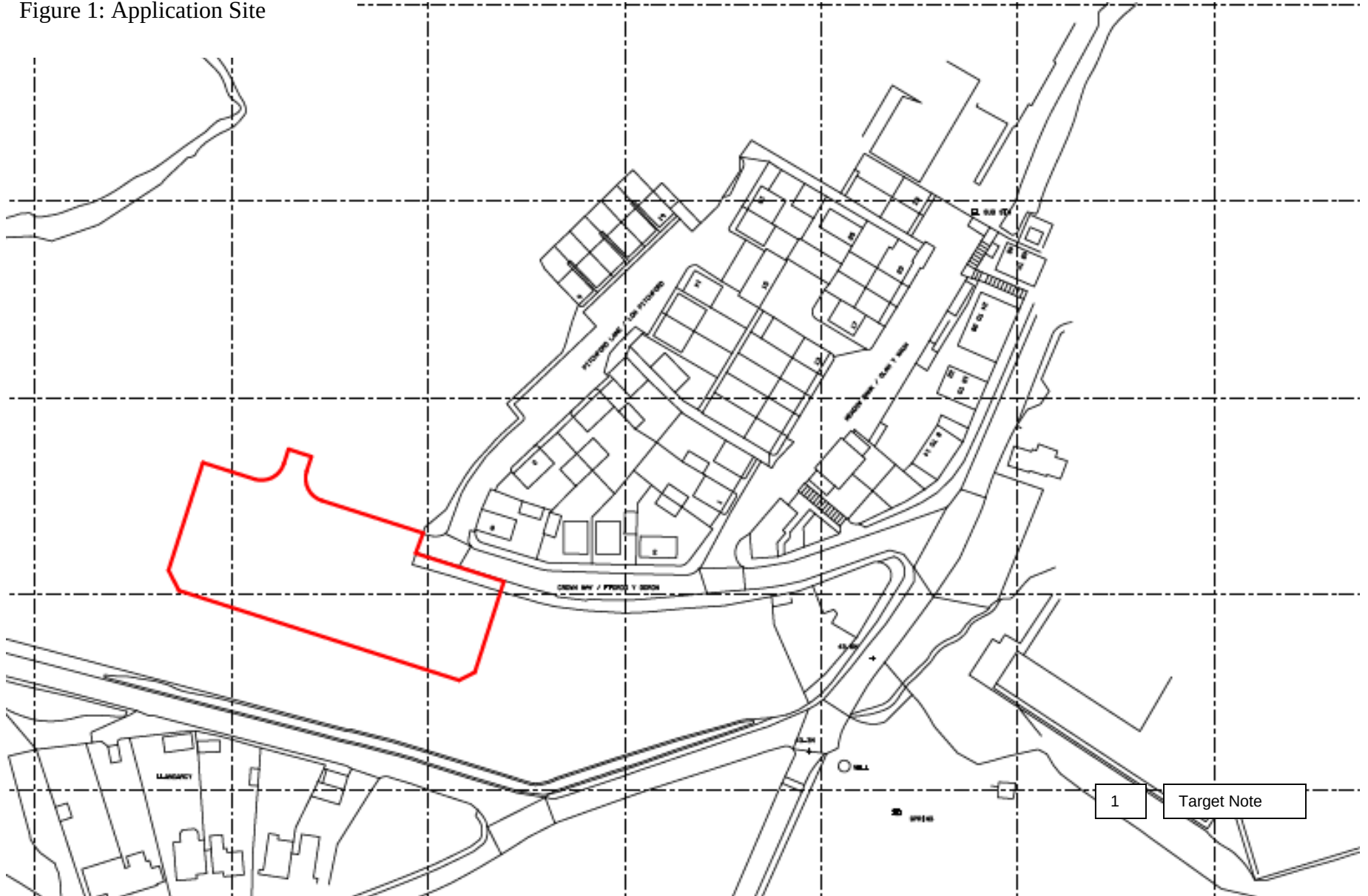
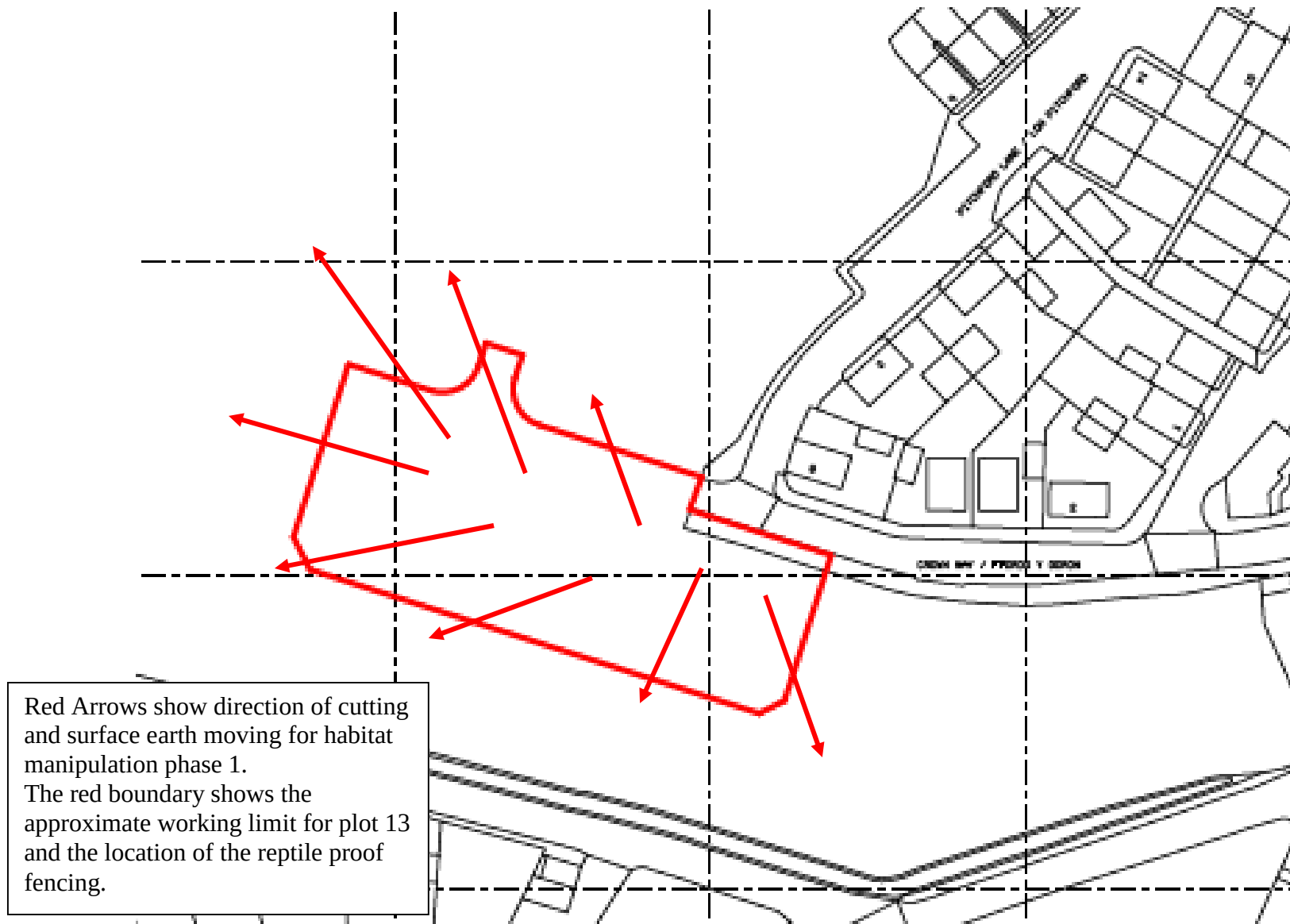


FIGURE 2
SITE CLEARANCE DESIGN

Figure 2: Site Clearance Design



APPENDIX 1
PHOTOGRAPHS

Reptile Mitigation Strategy, Land at Coed Darcy.
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Typical views of the application Site

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