

HAWKESWOOD ECOLOGY

Specialists in Ecological Survey and Assessment

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REPTILE MITIGATION SCHEME, BRYN PRIMARY SCHOOL, BRYN, NEATH PORT TALBOT.

ON BEHALF OF

STAR BUILDERS

November 2018

Ref: HE/90/2017

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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.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction and Background
2. Mitigation Strategy
3. Bibliography

FIGURES

- Figure 1 Application Site
Figure 2 Site Clearance Design

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 Photographs

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Hawkeswood Ecology carried out reptile presence-absence surveys at the former Bryn County Primary School, Bryn Neath Port Talbot, following consultation with the Local Authority Biodiversity Team. The surveys showed the Site to support a population of slow worm and common lizard. The approximate central Grid Reference is SS 81459 92466; it is proposed to demolish the school building and redevelop the Site for residential purposes. The initial application is based on Plot 13 (Figure 1) although the survey considered the Site as a whole. The survey was part of a wider series of survey which included Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and bat surveys.
- 1.2 Reptile concentrations were found to vary across the Site. Although there are clear limitations as to the amount of information that can be drawn from a presence-absence survey, there was a definite bias of positive results on the southern half of the Site where the building platform was raised above original ground level. The full survey results are listed and discussed in the report '*Preliminary Ecological Assessment and Protected Species Surveys, Bryn Primary School. Hawkeswood Ecology – October 2018*' which should be read in conjunction with this mitigation scheme. Site Photographs are given in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 The proposed works will require the demolition of the former school building which supports roosting bats; a European Protected Species Derogation Licence will be necessary for those works to go ahead, however, reptile habitat manipulation and translocation can proceed with no impact upon roosting or foraging bats.
- 1.4 The reptile mitigation is to be undertaken in two tranches. The first level is to clear the current application Site by Habitat manipulations, i.e. making the area unsuitable for reptile occupation by clearing the existing vegetation and then fencing against reptile recolonisation. The reptile survey report shows that the current application Site showed largely negative results with small numbers of slow worm and common lizard found on the boundaries of that area.
- 1.5 This part of the Site largely comprises of the schools garden area which contains a variety of small habitats, a failed pond, raised beds and formal gardens. It has been abandoned since the school closure but the low level of reptiles in the northern part of the Site generally may be due to two factors, the recent heavy management of parts of that area and the cut for the building platform resulting in possible poor below ground opportunities due to compacted soils.
- 1.6 Proceeding with some caution, it is likely as the survey was undertaken over a lengthy period, that the actual population in this part of the Site is low and if so a translocation exercise may not be appropriate as small numbers of animals can be very difficult to capture and give false negative results; hence the use of habitat manipulation to move animals from this area.
- 1.7 Following clearance of this area the larger part of the Site will be subject to application for residential development at a later date and a translocation of animals to a suitable receptor Site must take place before any development works can commence. Thus the mitigation strategy below considers both parts of this operation to safely clear the Site of reptiles for the development to proceed in accordance with the current legislation.

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 in Phase 1 is shown in Figure 2.
- 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 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 (such as piles of rubble, wood or other structure offering protection), they will be isolated and no further clearance undertaken of them until the activity season.
- 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, from the west to the east of the Plot. 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 Site which will be designated by the ECW.
- 2.7 Only following this stage will earthmoving machinery be allowed to work the Site surface. A 360 or similar machine should drag the surface clear of vegetation and remove any potential hibernation areas. A straight edged bucket is preferred. 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.
- 2.8 The cleared area will be fenced against recolonisation of reptiles using suitable reptile proof fencing which will be maintained throughout the development period.

Part 2, Reptile Translocation

- 2.9 Prior to translocation works, the vegetation over the Site will be maintained by mowing to a height of approximately 6 – 10 centimetres. At this stage it is unclear when an application will be made to develop this part of the Site but it can be expected to be in a short timescale. Preparatory works will allow a more complete capture effort to take place when necessary.
- 2.10 A suitable Site must be identified as a receptor site for the translocated animals. Best practice calls for a receptor site to be as close as possible to the development Site; at this stage no receptor site has been identified. Currently, Neath Port Talbot Biodiversity Unit has been asked if they have or know of any suitable local sites and they are helpfully assessing the situation of land in their ownership for suitability. Hawkeswood Ecology has been warned that it is unlikely they have a suitable site currently.
- 2.11 Hawkeswood Ecology continues to search for a suitable receptor site alongside this and will be looking to translocate as close to the development Site as possible. It is probable, however, that the animals will need to be taken out of county. Hawkeswood Ecology currently monitors a site in Powys which is safeguarded from future development and we will investigate this site. We are not happy with the current site management however and as a result this may not be a suitable receptor site. Ongoing discussions with the landowner will hopefully improve this situation.
- 2.12 Irrespective of the above, prior to any translocation works commencing, the receptor site will be agreed with the NPT Biodiversity Unit.
- 2.13 Before works commence reptile proof fencing along lines identified on Site by the ecologist will be erected under the supervision of the ECW.
- 2.14 Refugia mats for capture will be laid out at a density higher than recommended in the acknowledged literature to shorten capture time. Refugia will be left in place for a minimum of 14 days before capture begins.
- 2.15 The survey results considered the Site to support a ‘good’ population of slow worm and a low population of common lizard. On the basis of a good population being present, the guidance calls for a minimum of 100 refugia per hectare to provide a suitable number of refugia for capture.
- 2.16 The whole Site is approximately 1.5 hectares, following the earlier habitat manipulation and the area of built and hard-standing, the remainder requiring translation is approximately 0.4 hectares. It is proposed to use a minimum of 200 refugia per hectare on Site which is approximately 4 times the recommended minimum amount of mats.
- 2.17 The capture and translocation process is described below:
- Capture of animals under/on felts for a minimum period of 20 visits. The Site will be considered cleared when five consecutive negative checks have occurred. This could result in a longer capture period;
 - Twenty days capture effort is the absolute minimum number of days. If five consecutive days without capture are not achieved, or animals are caught after day 15 to 20 a longer capture period than 20 days will be necessary until five clear days is achieved.

- The best periods for capture are between April and June and from Late August to late September;
- Captured animals will be moved to the agreed receptor site within a maximum period of three hours from capture;
- Final clearance of surface vegetation to bare ground following clearance of reptiles can then take place under supervision of the ECW in appropriate weather conditions. Consideration to the possible recolonisation of the Site by reptile species at some future point should be given in the landscape design.

3 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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**FIGURE 1:
APPLICATION SITE**

Reptile Mitigation Scheme, Bryn Primary School.
Hawkeswood Ecology – November 2018

Figure 1: Proposed Site Plan

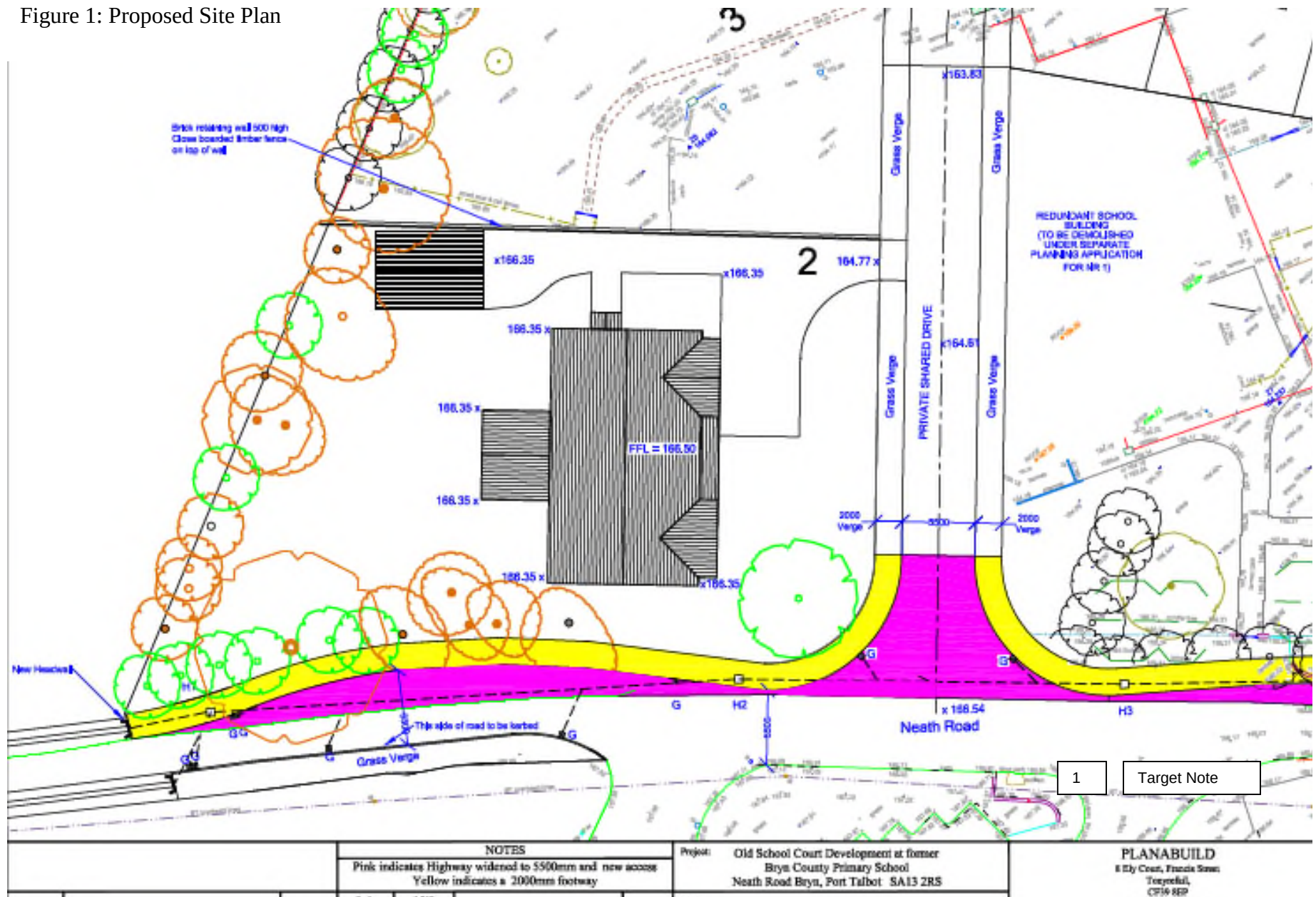
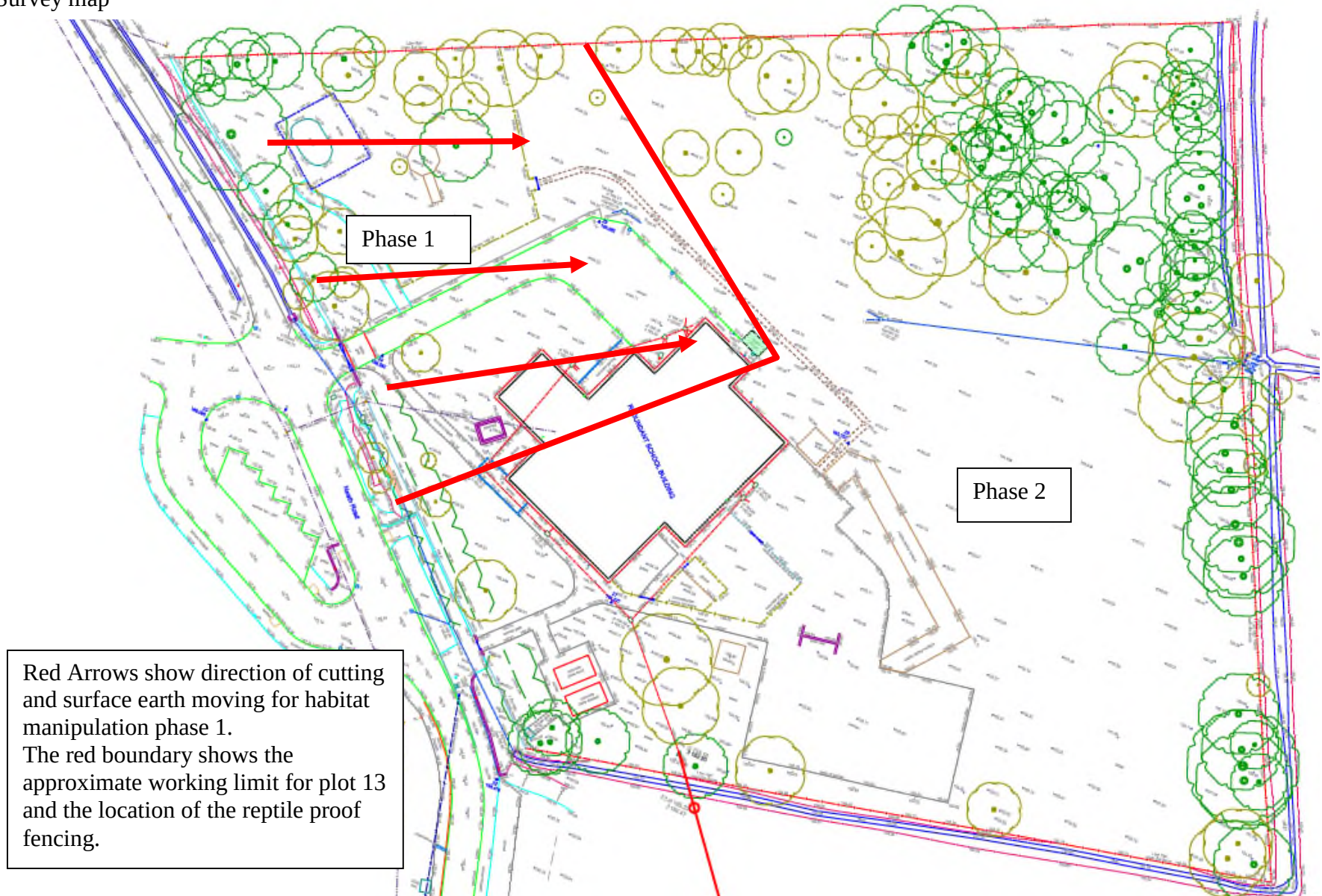


FIGURE 2
SITE CLEARANCE DESIGN

Figure 1: Phase 1 Habitat
Survey map



APPENDIX 1
PHOTOGRAPHS

Reptile Mitigation Scheme, Bryn Primary School.
Hawkeswood Ecology – November 2018

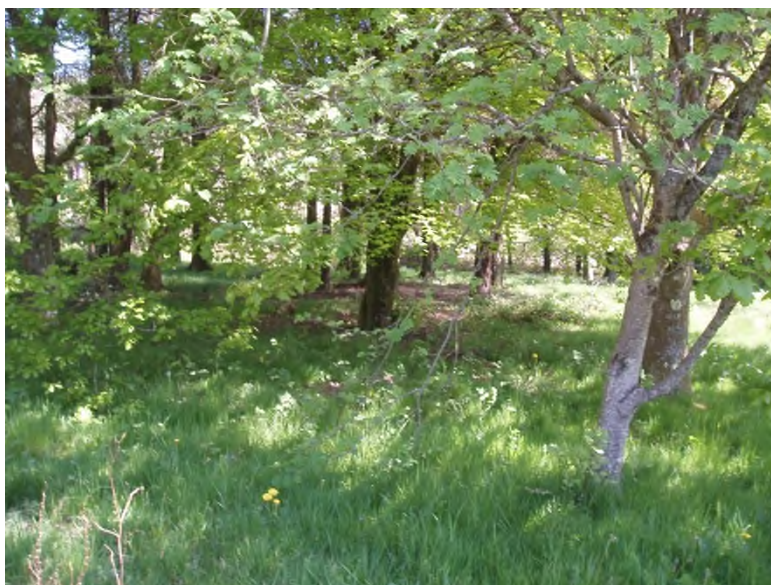


Typical views of Plot 13, the current application site)

Reptile Mitigation Scheme, Bryn Primary School.
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Looking north across the Phase 2 translocation area



The plantation woodland, considered to be of low value for reptiles

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