

Tim Collins

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15th March 2021

To:

Tim Smith

Chair – North Luffenham Parish Council

Paul Boggust

Chair – Edith Weston Parish Council

Dear Tim and Paul

Reptile Survey at St.George's Barracks – Request for Support

As part of their preparations for redevelopment of the St.George's Barracks (SGB) site Rutland County Council (RCC) and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) funded a number of ecological surveys in 2018/19. These have now been published following a Freedom of Information request I submitted to RCC last year and are available on the [St.George's website](#).

A cursory inspection suggests there are gaps and errors in all of them (missed breeding bird species, overlooked wintering Short-eared Owls and poor mapping of the Common Lizard populations for example). I've not done a formal critique yet however it looks like there is the potential to find fault if RCC/DIO come forward with development proposals based on these surveys. In particular the reptile survey <https://www.stgeorgesrutland.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/St-Georges-Reptile-Survey-FINAL-Oct-2019.pdf> has been poor at recording Common Lizards (I know them to be much more widely distributed from my own casual observations) and, by its own admission (Para 4.1.1), is also likely to have under recorded snakes.

All the reptiles that occur at SGB (4 species) are protected by UK law and any development proposals will need to take account of their needs. Challenging any development proposals on protected species grounds requires robust, reliable evidence; one weakness with the case against the lorry trailer storage proposals was the lack of formally recorded evidence of reptile distribution within the proposed development area. This meant that RCC's ecological advisors didn't believe there was adequate grounds to object to the planning application on ecological grounds.

As explained above I've only ever undertaken casual observations of reptiles on the old airfield and made use of observations provided by others. If we are to challenge the results of the reptile survey work funded by RCC/DIO then it will help to have our own robust evidence gathered through a formalised survey. I am happy to do this over the coming year (the best survey periods are April/May and September) however to do so effectively I need to obtain some reptile survey refugia (<https://www.nhbs.com/corrugated-reptile-survey-refugia>). I have already procured 60 however I need at least 100 more in order to undertake an effective survey.

I'd like to ask Edith Weston and North Luffenham Parish Councils to consider jointly funding the cost of these - £403 including delivery. Note that there is a cheaper option for reptile surveys of using roofing felt squares (the approach used by the RCC/DIO survey) however these are known to under record snakes because they lack the warm cavities provided by the corrugated sheeting. I'd strongly recommend any further survey makes use of the recognised best practice approach in order to obtain the most reliable results.

My existing access permission from the army for the old airfield allows me to undertake any form of (legal) wildlife survey I choose. I confirm I will provide a report of my findings for the Parish Council at the end of the year.

I can also pull together information I already have on the birds, plants and butterflies at SGB to challenge the RCC/DIO survey should we need to do so.

If you require any further information in order to consider this request please let me know.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Tim Collins', with a horizontal line underneath.

Tim Collins