

The Old Vicarage
Church Lane
Grazeley
Wokingham
RG7 1LD

Great Crested Newt Statement

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Author	Conor Watson ACIEEM
Reviewer	Sarah Foot MCIEEM

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 **JOHN WENMAN**
ecological consultancy

1 Diesel House, Honey Hill, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3BL
Telephone: 0118 3271810 Mobile: 07979 403099 E-mail: info@wenman-ecology.co.uk
www.wenman-ecology.co.uk

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Registered office: 100 New Wokingham Road, Crowthorne, Berkshire RG45 6JP where you may look at a list of members' names.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy was instructed by Mrs Kim Gozzett to prepare a Great Crested Newt (GCN) Statement for The Old Vicarage, Church Lane in Grazeley, Wokingham. The GCN Statement was commissioned to accompany a householder planning application to be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the construction of a proposed garage and studio building.
- 1.1.2** A visual assessment of the site for its potential to support GCN was undertaken on the 3rd June 2025 by Conor Watson ACIEEM registered under Natural England GCN Survey Class Licence CL08.
- 1.1.3** The wider application site falls within a red risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing) but the location of the proposed garage and studio building and associated driveway extension falls within an amber impact risk zone, i.e. suitable habitat where GCN is considered likely to be present. A pond with GCN presence (Pond 1) and one other pond that could potentially support breeding GCN (Pond 2) were identified within 250m of the application site boundary.
- 1.1.4** The site is a residential property with no standing water, i.e. GCN breeding habitat, and the proposed development footprint comprises only closely-mown garden lawn, i.e. a very low quality terrestrial habitat for GCN.
- 1.1.5** The Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN and the Tool indicates that the loss or damage to 0.01-0.1ha of land is likely to result in an (amber) offence. However, the site-specific risk assessment found that the proposed development footprint impacts only closely-mown garden lawn which resembles very low quality terrestrial habitat that GCN are considered unlikely to use.
- 1.1.6** In line with the guidance contained in the Tool and the impact assessment presented above, the nature and scale of the proposed development is highly unlikely to breach legislation protecting GCN or their habitats. However, in the absence of mitigation there is an extremely low risk that individual GCNs could potentially be injured and/or killed during the construction activities if traversing across the garden lawn on site. To avoid this, it is recommended that reasonable avoidance measures to minimise the risk of killing individual GCNs are implemented – as set out in **Section 7.1**.
- 1.1.7** This report will likely be valid for up to 18 months; after which point a professional ecologist may need to review the report's validity (CIEEM 2019b).

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

2.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy was instructed by Mrs Kim Gozzett to prepare a Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) Statement for The Old Vicarage, Church Lane in Grazeley, Wokingham.

2.1.2 The GCN Statement was commissioned to accompany a householder planning application to be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the construction of a proposed garage and studio building and associated driveway extension (see planning drawings in **Appendix 1**).

2.2 Site Location and Context

2.2.1 The Old Vicarage (i.e. the application site) is a circa 1-hectare residential property located adjacent to the former Holy Trinity Church along Church Lane in Grazeley, Wokingham. The location of the proposed garage and studio building and associated driveway extension is in the garden to south of the swimming pool (OS grid reference: SU 7001 6696).

2.2.2 The application site is in a rural setting characterised by arable farmland, rural residential properties and the A33 less than a kilometre eastwards. The local area features hedgerows, rural trees, small pockets of broadleaved woodland and traditional orchards, one of which is located on the property. There are also a couple of ponds nearby and the Foudry Brook, which is approximately 230m east of the property.

2.3 Report Objectives

2.3.1 For householder applications that are in a red or amber risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing) and within 50m of a known pond, a GCN Statement is required to either demonstrate that harm is unlikely (e.g. through non-licensable measures) or that the risk of harm needs to be mitigated through licensable measures (e.g. district licensing).

3 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY BACKGROUND

3.1 Relevant Legislation

3.1.1 In England and Wales, Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) found in the wild are fully protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (WCA) and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended); the regulations are commonly referred to as the Habitat Regulations and hereafter referred to as such. The Habitat Regulations refer to European Protected Species (EPS) and GCN is an EPS. Although the UK left the European Union on the 31st January 2020 and is therefore no longer tied to European legislation, the Habitat Regulations have been retained in their current format.

3.1.2 The legal framework underpinned by the WCA and Habitat Regulations makes these specific actions an offence as follows:

- Deliberately kill, injure, capture or take a wild GCN;
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb GCN; in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, to rear or nurture their young, to hibernate or migrate, or to significantly affect local distribution or abundance;
- Damage or destroy a place used by a GCN for breeding or resting; and
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place used by a GCN for shelter or protection.

3.2 Planning Policy

3.2.1 The biodiversity duty imposed through the Environment Act 2021 states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must consider what action they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. Government planning policy, such as the ODPM Circular 06/2005, requires LPAs to account for the conservation of protected species when considering and determining planning applications.

3.2.2 The ODPM Circular 06/2005 states that '*the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat.*' This policy means that in instances where there is a reasonable likelihood of GCN being present and affected by a development, surveys must be undertaken to inform a mitigation strategy to be agreed prior to granting planning permission.

3.3 Mitigation Licensing

3.3.1 The government's statutory nature conservation body, Natural England, is responsible for issuing European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences that would permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations. An EPS mitigation licence can be issued if the following three tests derived from Regulation 55 have been satisfied:

- (2)(e) – the derogation is for the purposes of *'preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment.'*
- (9)(a) – there is *'no satisfactory alternative'* to the derogation; and
- (9)(b) – *'the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.'*

3.3.2 LPAs have a statutory duty under Regulation 7(3)(e) of the Habitat Regulations to consider and determine whether these three tests are likely to be satisfied by planning proposals affecting EPS before granting planning permission. If an EPS mitigation licence is necessary, a licence can be sought once all the necessary planning consents have been granted. Natural England aims to issue a decision on licence applications within 30 working days of submission.

3.3.3 The District Level Licensing (DLL) scheme is an alternative approach to traditional mitigation licensing which authorises developments that adversely affect GCNs. Instead of relying solely on site-specific mitigation and compensation, a 'Conservation Payment' can be made to fund a net increase in GCN habitat elsewhere. Please refer to the NatureSpace guidance for more details.

3.3.4 Baseline survey information supporting EPS mitigation licence applications must be up-to-date and have been completed within the current or most recent optimal season. A suitably experienced ecologist will be required to undertake a site walkover/check within three months prior to application/registration submission to confirm that conditions have not changed since the most recent survey.

4 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

4.1 Desk Study

4.1.1 A desk-based study for Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) was undertaken to collate and review existing information about the site and the surrounding land. The study utilised the following open access resources:

- Google Earth and OS maps – satellite imagery and maps were used to identify potential breeding ponds and terrestrial habitat connectivity;
- MAGIC – examined to locate granted European Protected Species (EPS) licences; and
- Pre-existing ecology reports – any available reports were obtained from the client or relevant planning portal to provide background information for the site.

4.2 Site Walkover

Survey Details

4.2.1 A visual assessment of the site for its potential to support GCN was undertaken on the 3rd June 2025 by Conor Watson ACIEEM registered under Natural England GCN Survey Class Licence CL08 (Registration no.: 2018-36455-CLS-CLS).

4.2.2 GCNs require standing water for breeding and favour small to medium-sized ponds with surface areas ranging from 50m² to 250m². For larval development to take place and young newts to emerge from ponds, ponds must hold water until the end of August (Langton *et.al.* 2001).

4.2.3 GCNs require terrestrial habitats for feeding, movement from pond to pond and for hibernation. Habitats of greatest value to GCNs are those listed below that provide invertebrate prey and provide cover such as under logs or stones:

- Woodland;
- Rough grassland;
- Scrub;
- Hedgerows; and
- Waste ground.

4.2.4 Terrestrial habitats of highest value to GCNs are those rich in invertebrate prey, which provide cover during periods of cold and dry weather, such as under logs or stones for example. Open habitats, such as closely mown grassland, do not provide important

habitats for feeding or shelter but can be traversed by GCNs moving between more preferable habitats (English Nature 2001; Langton *et. al.* 2001).

Impact Risk Assessment

- 4.2.5** A risk assessment of the impacts to GCN was carried out using the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool. The Tool takes into account the impacts of the development on GCN and determines the likelihood of effects on populations in the absence of mitigation.

Survey Limitations

- 4.2.6** There were no significant survey limitations because GCN habitat assessments can be carried out at any time of year under any weather conditions and the application site was fully accessible.
- 4.2.7** This report will likely be valid for up to 18 months; after which point a professional ecologist may need to review the report's validity (CIEEM 2019b).

5 SURVEY RESULTS

5.1 Desk Study

- 5.1.1** A Great Crested Newt Initial Assessment report by Species Ecological Consultancy (20th January 2023) accompanied an approved planning application with Wokingham Borough Council for the change of use from a meadow to part small-scale private solar array of 36 panels for personal generation of electricity (Planning application no.: 223363). The report concluded that if the works proceeded under the mitigation strategy detailed then *'the favourable conservation of Great Crested Newts will be maintained at this location.'*
- 5.1.2** A GCN Impact Assessment Report by John Wenman Ecological Consultancy in November 2023 (Report ref.: R3582/a) accompanied an approved householder application with Wokingham Borough Council for the proposed erection of a part single, part two storey side/rear extension including roof terrace, following the demolition of existing side/rear coach house and garage (Planning application no.: 232667). The report included a TVERC data search which found at least three breeding ponds within a 1km radius of the site (~25m southwest, ~290m west and ~780m north respectively). However, the report concluded that the nature and scale of the proposed development was highly unlikely to breach the legislation protecting GCN and their habitats; and recommended reasonable avoidance measures to minimise the extremely low risk of killing individual GCN during the construction.
- 5.1.3** The wider application site falls within a red risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing) but the location of the proposed garage and studio building and associated driveway extension falls within an amber impact risk zone, i.e. suitable habitat where Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) is considered likely to be present (see **Figure 1** below). A pond with GCN presence (Pond 1) and one other pond that could potentially support breeding GCN (Pond 2) were identified within 250m of the application site boundary (see **Figure 1** below).

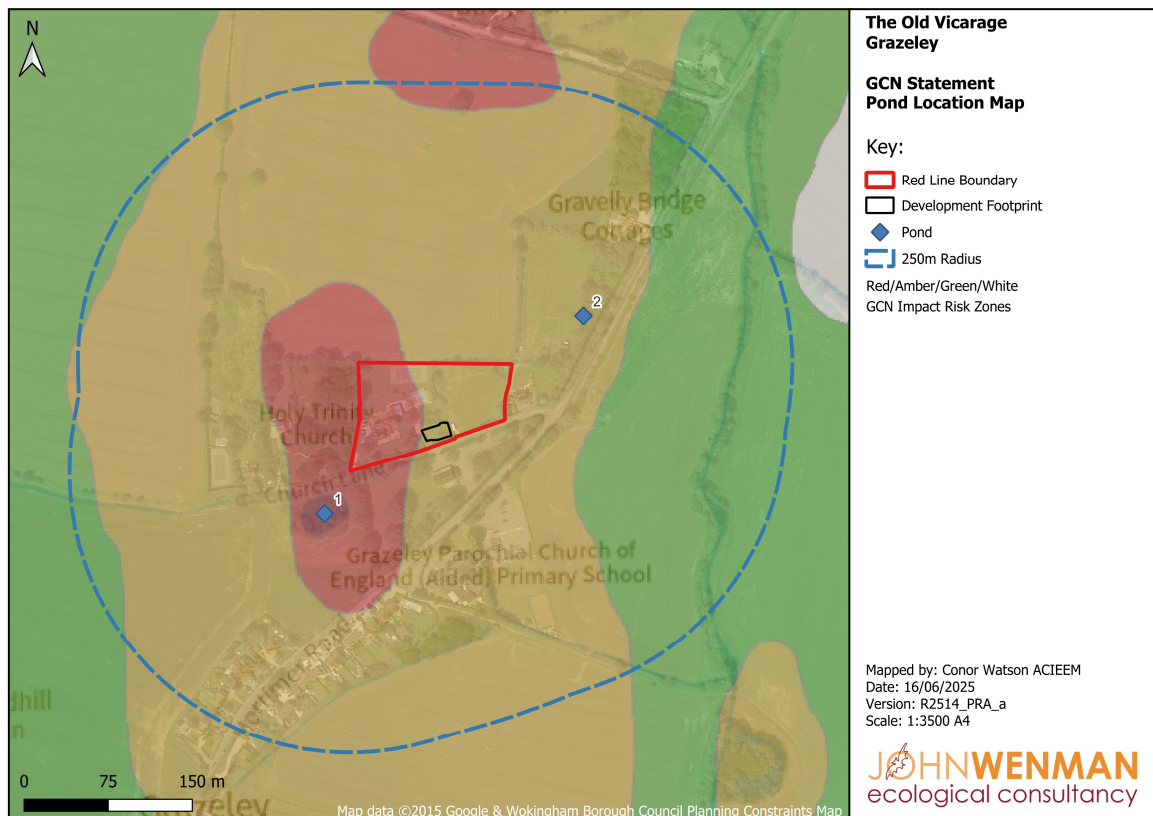


Figure 1. Pond Location Map.

- 5.1.4** No GCN mitigation licences have been granted within the last 10 years inside a 2km radius of the application site.
- 5.1.5** The location of the proposed garage and studio building and associated driveway extension, and including the part of the garden that is an existing swimming pool, is included in the Traditional Orchards Priority Habitat Inventory (i.e. a priority habitat identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and listed as being of principal importance for the purpose of conserving or enhancing biodiversity, under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006).

Site Walkover

- 5.1.6** The findings from the visual inspection of the site are described with photographs, as follows:
- 5.1.7** The location of the proposed garage and studio building and associated driveway extension comprised closely-mown garden lawn (**Photographs 1 & 2**). The species assemblage was primarily plants tolerant of regular mowing, such as creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*) and springy turf moss (*Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*).



Photograph 1. Location of proposed garage and studio building viewed from west.



Photograph 2. Location of proposed garage and studio building viewed from north.

- 5.1.8** There were at least two trees likely falling within the proposed development footprint, including a small apple (*Malus x domestica*) and a multi-stemmed walnut (*Juglans regia*) (**Photographs 3 & 4**).



Photograph 3. Small apple tree likely within development footprint.



Photograph 4. Multi-stemmed walnut likely within development footprint.

- 5.1.9** The garden hedge to the south of proposed development footprint had been trimmed and was predominantly blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and ivy (*Hedera helix*). Ornamental beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) hedges had been planted elsewhere on site, including along a fence-line that demarcated the garden from a field to the east of the property (**Photographs 5 & 6**).



Photograph 5. Ornamental beech planted along fence-line.



Photograph 6. Field to east of property (within land ownership).

- 5.1.10** The field had recently been cut and the arisings piled on an open compost heap in the northeast corner of the site. The grassland was tussocky and dominated by Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), with occasional meadow forbs such as common knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*).

Impact Risk Assessment

- 5.1.11** Based on the knowledge that Pond 1 supports breeding GCN and the assumption that Pond 2 and other ponds over 250m away also support breeding GCN (i.e. the worst case scenario), the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN. The development footprint is approximately 0.0275ha and the Tool indicates that the loss or damage to 0.01-0.1ha of land is likely to result in an (amber) offence (see **Figure 2** below).

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.3
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.01
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.001
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
Maximum:		0.3
Rapid risk assessment result: AMBER: OFFENCE LIKELY		
"Amber: offence likely" indicates that the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that an offence is likely. In this case, the best option is to redesign the development (location, layout, methods, duration or timing; see Non-licensed avoidance measures tool) so that the effects are minimised. You can do this and then re-run the risk assessment to test whether the result changes, or preferably run your own detailed site-specific assessment. Bear in mind that this generic risk assessment will over- or under-estimate some risks because it cannot take into account site-specific details, as mentioned in caveats above. In particular, the exact location of the development in relation to resting places, dispersal areas and barriers should be critically examined. Once you have amended the scheme you will need to decide if a licence is required; this should be done if on balance you believe an offence is reasonably likely.		

Figure 2. Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool.

- 5.1.12** The risk assessment tool does not factor in the terrestrial habitat quality and in this case, the site-specific risk assessment found that the proposed development footprint impacts only closely-mown garden lawn which resembles very low quality terrestrial habitat for GCN. The garden lawn would only feasibly be used by individual GCNs traversing between preferable adjacent habitats such as the garden hedge and field to the east; however, even this is considered unlikely because there is adequate connectivity between the two preferable habitats for GCN to avoid the lawn completely.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Assessment of Habitat Suitability

6.1.1 The wider application site falls within a red risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing) but the location of the proposed garage and studio building and associated driveway extension falls within an amber impact risk zone, i.e. suitable habitat where Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) is considered likely to be present. A pond with GCN presence (Pond 1) and one other pond that could potentially support breeding GCN (Pond 2) were identified within 250m of the application site boundary.

6.1.2 The site is a residential property with no standing water, i.e. GCN breeding habitat, and the proposed development footprint comprises only closely-mown garden lawn, i.e. a very low quality terrestrial habitat for GCN.

6.2 Impact Assessment and Recommended Actions

6.2.1 The proposals seek consent for the construction of a proposed garage and studio building and associated driveway with a circa. 0.0275ha development footprint (see planning drawings in **Appendix 1**).

6.2.2 The Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN and the Tool indicates that the loss or damage to 0.01-0.1ha of land is likely to result in an (amber) offence. However, the site-specific risk assessment found that the proposed development footprint impacts only closely-mown garden lawn which resembles very low quality terrestrial habitat that GCN are considered unlikely to use.

6.2.3 In line with the guidance contained in the Tool and the impact assessment presented above, the nature and scale of the proposed development is highly unlikely to breach legislation protecting GCN or their habitats. However, in the absence of mitigation there is an extremely low risk that individual GCNs could potentially be injured and/or killed during the construction activities if traversing across the garden lawn on site. To avoid this, it is recommended that reasonable avoidance measures to minimise the risk of killing individual GCNs are implemented pre- and during the construction phase – as set out in **Section 7.1** below.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Reasonable Avoidance Measures

- 7.1.1** The following reasonable avoidance measures should be adopted to minimise the extremely low risk of harming individual GCNs:

Pre-commencement of construction activities

- Any removal of debris or leaf litter will be carefully searched by hand looking for amphibians; and
- The close-mowing of the lawn should be maintained prior to the commencement of site work to minimise the likelihood of GCN being present during excavations.

During construction activities

- Any stored building materials or waste, such as bricks or debris etc., that might offer shelter for GCN will be kept raised off the ground on pallets or on existing hard standing, and efforts should be made to process and removed from site as soon as possible; and
- Excavation works will be avoided after dusk and any open excavations or trenches will be backfilled (after a check for GCN presence) or left with escape ramps to prevent GCN from becoming trapped.

- 7.1.2** In the unlikely event that a GCN is found during the course of construction, works will stop immediately and a licensed ecologist will be called onto site to ensure the GCN is not harmed and provide further advice on how to proceed; work will recommence only once further written advice has been received.

Enhancement Opportunities

- 7.1.3** The value of the application site to wildlife could be enhanced by adding features suitable for sheltering and hibernating GCN, such as creating a wildlife pond and hibernacula.

8 REFERENCES

CIEEM (2019). *Advice Note on the Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys*. CIEEM, Winchester.

English Nature (2001). *Great crested newt mitigation guidelines*. English Nature, Peterborough.

Langton, T.E.S, Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. (2001). *Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook*, Froglife, Halesworth.

APPENDIX 1 – PLANNING DRAWINGS

