



University of Reading Park House and Library Substation

Great Crested Newt Statement

1. INTRODUCTION

Scope of Work

- 1.1 Ecological Planning and Research (EPR) was commissioned by the University of Reading to provide a method statement for Great Crested Newt (GCN) *Triturus cristatus* in relation to a planning application for the building of an electrical substation and associated cable route east of the Library Building, Whiteknights Campus (SU 73478 71754).
- 1.2 The site lies within a red risk zone modelled for GCN, as identified on the Wokingham Planning Constraints Map. As such, Wokingham Borough Council require evidence that GCN have been considered in the planning application.

2. BASELINE ASSESSMENT

- 2.1 The site consists primarily of neutral grassland surrounded by native Beech *Fagus silvaticus* hedging. An existing substation stands in the northwest corner of the site. the proposed cable route runs along the existing road network north of the site connecting to Park House. The wider area of Whiteknights Campus is comprised mainly of regularly mown amenity grasslands and managed hedgerows with areas of ornamental planting and trees. These areas provide suboptimal terrestrial habitat for GCN but may serve as temporary refuge for commuting or dispersing individuals.
- 2.2 Guidance from Natural England (Great Crested Newt Licence Method Statement Template, April 2020) indicates that GCN can utilise terrestrial habitat within a 250m dispersal distance from breeding ponds, except in circumstances where large populations are present and there are no barriers to dispersal, in which case they could utilise habitat up to 500m from ponds.
- 2.3 There are three potentially suitable waterbodies located within 500m from the Site (**Map 1**), as identified by the Wokingham Planning Constraints Map;
 - Whiteknights Lake – a 4.23ha waterbody that lies approximately 300m northeast of the Site. The Lake was assessed as having poor suitability to support GCN under the GCN Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) in 2024, due mainly to the presence of waterfowl and algal blooms, and the lack of emergent vegetation. However, given the size of the waterbody, suitability is unlikely to be uniform across the entire Lake, and some areas may be deemed more suitable than others.
 - Balancing Pond – a 0.03ha waterbody approximately 33m north of Whiteknights Lake and approximately 365m northeast of the Site. This waterbody has not been HSI assessed,

though based on recent aerial imagery, it is unclear if it continues to hold water throughout the year.

- An unnamed pond south of Leighton Park School approximately 480m south of the Site. This waterbody has not been HSI assessed, though the road adjacent to the school, Pepper Lane, serves as a barrier to movement into the Site by GCN.

2.4 A fourth artificial pond lies within the footprint of the Urban and Regional Studies (URS) building approximately 200m southwest the Site, however due to its vertical sides, it is not accessible by GCN or other terrestrial species and is therefore not considered suitable for GCN.

2.5 A Review of the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) on 23rd May 2025, and data from Thames Valley Ecological Records Centre (TVERC) indicates that no GCN Class Survey Licences have been returned for the ponds present within 500m of the Site.

3. GCN RISK ASSESSMENT

3.1 GCN are afforded strict protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Works that would otherwise result in a legal offence (to kill, injure, capture, disturb GCN and/or to damage, destroy, obstruct access to breeding sites and resting places) require a mitigation licence from Natural England in order to proceed legally. Natural England's GCN licence method statement template includes a 'rapid risk assessment' tool. This evaluates the spatial extent of impacts on GCN habitat arising from proposed works and calculates a probability score to indicate the likelihood of a legal offence being committed.

3.2 Whilst there are no existing records of GCN within the Site or wider campus, the ponds and terrestrial habitats on site are suitable for this species, albeit sub-optimally. The rapid risk assessment tool can therefore be used to indicate the likelihood of an offence being committed as a result of the works, assessed on the basis that GCN may be present within any of the ponds located within the 500m Zol of the Site.

3.3 As described above, the works would not damage any terrestrial habitat within 500m of potential breeding ponds. The risk assessment tool reports that an offence is 'highly unlikely' based on the extent and location of habitat being affected.

3.4 Despite the absence of GCN records and the very low risk of an offence being committed even if GCN were present within nearby ponds, the works will follow a method of working that takes reasonable precautions to avoid harm or injury to GCN in the unlikely event that they are present within the Zol of the Site (see **Section 4**).

4. WORKING METHOD STATEMENT

4.1 The following general principles apply at all times during the works:

- Excavations must be filled in or otherwise covered overnight to avoid animals falling in and becoming trapped;
- Works must take place during daylight hours and noise should be kept to a minimum;

- Re-fuelling of plant and equipment must be carried out on hardstanding at least 10m from waterbodies, and spill kits must be easily accessible;
- Established vegetation must not be disturbed or tracked over with machinery unless the Site Ecologist has indicated that it is acceptable to do so;
- If a GCN is found at any stage in the absence of a Site Ecologist, then works must cease and the Site Ecologist must be contacted immediately;
- If this WMS is not fully adhered to, EPR will be duty bound to inform the Local Planning Authority and/or Natural England; and
- Deviation from this WMS must be approved by the Site Ecologist and confirmed in writing.

Phased Vegetation Clearance and Ecological Supervision

- 4.2 On the first day of the works the Site Ecologist with, or accredited under, a Level 1 Class Licence for GCN will provide a Toolbox Talk (**Appendix 1**) to all site personnel informing them of the protection afforded to GCN, what they look like, and what to do if they are encountered.
- 4.3 The Site Ecologist will reassess the site at the start of the works to check for any changes in condition that may have implications for this WMS. They will inspect and remove any natural or artificial refugia that are present within the works area or supervise the clearance of horticultural structures as required. They may conduct fingertip searches should any localised areas of taller vegetation be present, as deemed necessary.
- 4.4 Should any GCN be found, works must cease, and Natural England contacted to establish whether a Licence is required to continue the works.
- 4.5 Following their initial presence on site at the start of the works, the Site Ecologist will leave the area but remain 'on call' for the remainder of the works.

5. EPR CONTACT DETAILS

Project Manager

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Secondary Contact/Licenced Ecologist

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Maps & Appendix

Maps

Map 1 – Ponds within 500m Zone of Influence

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Toolbox Talk



MAP 1 Ponds within 500m of Site

KEY

Site boundary

500m linear distance from site boundary

Ponds

SCALE: 1:4,000 at A3

050100150200250

Metres

N



CLIENT: University of Reading

PROJECT: Park House and Library Substation

DATE: 10 July 2025

Appendix 1

Toolbox Talk

Site: Park House and Library Substation, Whiteknights Campus,
University of Reading

Task: Construction of new electrical substation

Project Ecologist: Liam Mayle BSc (Hons) MSc
Ecologist, EPR Ltd
Tel.: 07946 271 603

GREAT CRESTED NEWTS

What is a GCN and what do they look like?

- The GCN is an amphibian, like a frog or toad.
- The UK's largest type of newt (up to 16cm).
- Males have a **crest** and a silvery-white stripe towards the end of the tail.
- Both sexes have **rough, granular skin** which is **dark brown/black**.
- Have **orange bellies** with irregular black spots.
- The crest on females and juveniles is very small, often undetectable.



Where do they live?

When breeding in the spring, GCN live in ponds. For the rest of the year, newts live on land within grassland, scrub, woodland, log or rubble piles and even gardens.

Legislation

GCN and their breeding sites or resting places are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

It is an **offence** for anyone **intentionally to kill, injure or disturb** a GCN, to possess one (whether live or dead), or sell or offer for sale without a licence. It is also an offence to **damage, destroy or obstruct** access to any place used by GCN for shelter.

The maximum fine on conviction of offences is up to **£5,000** fine per offence, so fines may be imposed in relation to each offence committed, so operations involving many animals or repeated offences may result in a multiple fine. A custodial sentence of up to six months may be imposed instead of, or in addition to, a fine, and items of equipment involved in committing the offence may be seized and detained.

What activities can harm GCN?

GCN are small and slow-moving. Most will shelter underground in burrows, in **long grass and thick vegetation, and in debris piles**. They are therefore vulnerable to being crushed/injured by machinery or tools. Their **habitats** can also easily be damaged by site works such as vegetation clearance or the dismantling of rubble piles, which also constitutes an offence.

How can I help to protect GCN on site?

Follow the methodology set out in the Great Crested Newt Statement (EPR, April 2023). Liaise with the Project Ecologist regarding any wildlife/GCN related queries.

What to do if you find a GCN on site:

- Stop work as soon as it is safe to do so.
- Leave the newt where it was found, unless at risk of killing/injuring.
- Contact the Project Ecologist or EPR main office (01962 764720) and provide the following information:
 - Which site you are calling from;
 - Which Ecologist has been overseeing the activities;
 - Exactly what has happened and where; and
 - A description of the newt (including any injuries it had sustained)

Signature Sheet

Your name and signature on this document verifies that you have understood the information provided within this toolbox talk and that you will comply with the necessary method statements.

[illegible]