

File Note – Great Crested Newt Statement

Site Address: Hatchgate End, Hatchgate Lane, Cockpole Green,
Wargrave, Berkshire, RG10 8NE
Client Name: Nicholas Hart
Author: Dr James Fielding, Consultant Ecologist
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Background

Arbtech Consulting Limited was instructed by Nicholas Hart to undertake ecology surveys at Hatchgate End, Hatchgate Lane, Cockpole Green, Wargrave, Berkshire, RG10 8NE (hereafter referred to as “the site”). The surveys were required to inform a planning application for demolition of existing dwelling and construction of replacement dwelling (hereafter referred to as “the proposed development”). A plan showing the proposed development is provided in Appendix 1.

The site falls within a Great Crested Newt Habitat Zone (Amber) and therefore developers are required to demonstrate how it is proposed to prevent impacts to great crested newts as a result of the proposed development.

Great Crested Newt Statement

The site is characterised by a residential dwelling and associated garden which is dominated by amenity grassland, managed to a short sward length through mowing. This grassland could provide some limited foraging and commuting value to great crested newts during their terrestrial phase, but the lack of species and structural diversity results in an absence of refuge opportunities and the garden is unsuitable to support great crested newts for prolonged periods. There are no water bodies on site that could represent breeding opportunities.

A review of the MAGIC database returned no granted EPSL records or licence returns for great crested newts within 2km of the site. Great crested newts exist in metapopulations and are known to utilise ponds and their connecting terrestrial habitat during their life cycle; great crested newts are typically found within terrestrial habitats up to 500m from breeding ponds (Langton et al. 2001). A review of aerial imagery indicates the presence of one pond within one is within 500m of the site: a pond 400m to the south west. This pond is separated from the site by human infrastructure including tarmac roads, buildings and managed grassland, which is either grazed or regularly mown resulting in a short sward length. These landscape features are suboptimal for great crested newts due to a lack of refuge from predation. These combined landscape features are assessed to represent a significant barrier to dispersal: eliminating connectivity to the site for great crested newts from ponds within 500m. As such, it is considered highly unlikely that great crested newts would be present on site during their terrestrial phase.

Even if the site was suitably connected to a breeding pond within 500m, the assessed risk to great crested newts as a result of the development would be significantly low. The existing dwelling has a footprint of 123.28m². The new footprint of the new proposed dwelling is 205.26m². The development will involve the loss of approximately ~80m² of suboptimal grassland. The loss of such habitats is likely to be inconsequential to local amphibian populations owing to their low value and the presence of more extensive habitat locally. When completing the Natural England rapid risk* assessment in accordance with this habitat loss, the anticipated risk produces a notional offence probability score of 0.0005, “Green = Offence Highly Unlikely” as shown in Figure 1.

*Although note that the risk assessment tool assumes there are breeding ponds with good connectivity to the removed habitat, which is not the case for this site. The risk assessment has been completed out of an abundance of caution and to further demonstrate the low risk of this development.

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 score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.0005
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.0005
Rapid risk assessment result:	GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY	

Figure 1: Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment tool.

Given these three factors discussed above (lack of connectivity to nearby ponds, low suitability of habitat on site and the low amount of habitat removed in the development) it is assessed that the development is highly unlikely to cause impacts to great crested newts. However, some common amphibians (such as common toad) demonstrate greater mobility than great crested newts, and are therefore more likely to access the site. To protect these common amphibians against harm, a precautionary working method is suggested, as detailed below.

Mitigation:

Owing to the nature of the proposed development and the low potential for impacts to great crested newts, further surveys are considered to be disproportionate. A precautionary working method will be implemented to safeguard common amphibians during construction, including the following measures:

- A toolbox talk will be given to contractors regarding the possible presence of amphibians, including great crested newt, at the site.
- A pre-commencement inspection of the site will be undertaken for amphibians.
- A staged approach will be adopted for vegetation clearance, whereby the vegetation will be trimmed to 15cm and left overnight to allow any amphibians to disperse. The vegetation can then be cleared to ground level and must be maintained at this level for the duration of construction to deter amphibians from the working area.
- Any rubble piles will be dismantled by hand and debris and brash will be stored on pallets or removed from the site to prevent amphibians from utilising these areas.
- Best practice pollution prevention measures will be implemented to minimise impacts to retained habitats that amphibians could use.
- Any chemicals or pollutants used or created by the development should be stored and disposed of correctly according to COSHH regulations.
- If any common amphibians are found in the working area these should be moved by hand to a vegetated area along the site boundaries or in retained habitats away from disturbance.
- In the unlikely event that a great crested newt is identified, works must cease and advice must be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist.

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Reviewer

Jonathan Stuttard

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Appendix 1: Proposed Development Plan

