



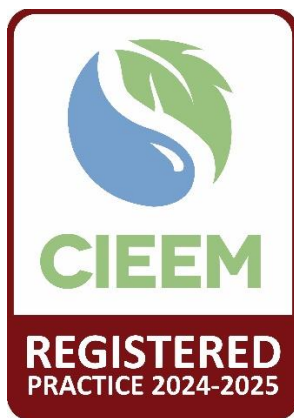
PRECAUTIONARY METHOD STATEMENT FOR GREAT CRESTED NEWTS

Client: Craig Mortimer-Zhika

Site: Highwood House, Arborfield

24.05.2024

Version 001



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DOCUMENT HISTORY AND STATUS

Document Control			
Project Title		Highwood House, Arborfield	
Author		Martin Roche BSc (Hons) ACIEEM Senior Ecologist Accredited Agent, NE Bat Class Licence: WML-CL18 Registration Reference: 2017-32546-CLS-CLS NE Great Crested Newt Class Licence: WML-CL08 Registration Reference: 2018-33257-CLS-CLS NE Hazel Dormouse Class Licence: WML-CL10a Registration Number: 2019-39316-CLS-CLS	
Approver		Sarah Lyne CEnv BSc (Hons) MCIEEM Managing Director and Principal Ecologist NE Bat Class Level 2 Licence: WML-CL18 (Registration Reference: 2022-11232-CL18-BAT) European Protected Species Possession Licence (Registration Reference: 2022-60725-SCI-SCI) NE Great Crested Newt Licence: WML-CL08 (Registration Reference: 2016-2132-CLS-CLS)	
Revision Details			
Version	Date of Issue	Pages affected	Comments
001	24.05.2024	N/A	Issued to client.
Life Span of Survey Data and Report			
Report	This report remains valid for 12 to 18 months from date of issue. The report, conclusions and recommendations are valid for current development plans only. Should this change, the report should be reviewed and, if necessary, further survey work and desk study review undertaken.		
Survey Data	Survey data are valid for 12 to 18 months from the date the survey was undertaken.		

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The information which we have prepared and provided is true and has been prepared and provided in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct.

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1. Introduction

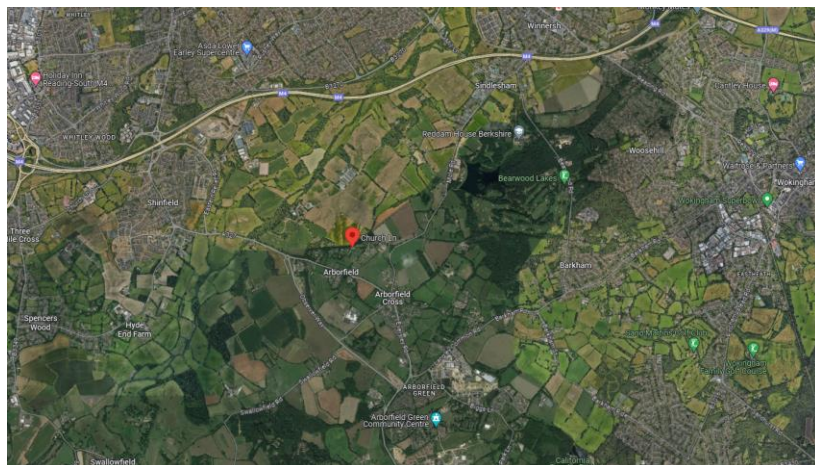
1.1 Site Details

Table 1 provides details on the site, intended as a summary of key features. Table 1 and Table 3 have been derived from Magic (Natural England, 2013).

Table 1. Site Details

Site Name	Highwood House, Arborfield
Site Address	Highwood House, Church Lane, Arborfield, Reading, RG2 9JA
OS Grid Reference	SU 7551 6764
Approximate Total Area of Site	1 ha (10,000 m ²)
Approximate Area to be Affected by Development	400 m ² (0.04 ha)
Landowner and Local Authority	Craig Mortimer-Zhika, Wokingham Borough Council
Geology and Soils	Loamy soils with naturally high groundwater
Hydrology	Naturally wet
Nature Conservation Designations	None on site
Other Designations	None on site
The Woodland Trust Ancient and Notable Tree Inventory	None on site
Biodiversity Opportunity Area	None on site
National Habitat Network	None on site
Current Land Use	Occupied dwelling and garden space with ornamental shrubs and ornamental pond
Surrounding Habitats and Land Use	Rural location, comprising a mixture of arable and grazed fields, hedgerows, and woodland. Numerous waterbodies are located within 1 km of the site, including one on site. The wider landscape is characterised by scattered residential and light industrial buildings, farmland, and further areas of woodland
Urban Context / Locality	The site is located off Church Lane on the northern edge of Arborfield village, which is located between Arborfield Cross and Shinfield. The M4 motorway is located approximately 1.8 km to the north of the site
Connectivity to Wider Landscape	The site had good connectivity via existing lines of trees to areas of woodland to the north-east and north-west, and the River Loddon located approximately 850 m to the north-west, which are likely to be key foraging habitats for bats

An aerial plan showing the location of the site is provided below.



Site Location (© Google Earth Pro, accessed 21st May 2024).

1.2 Description of Pond

Table 2 provides a description of the pond.

Table 2. Pond Description

Pond Reference	Description of Ponds	Description of Surrounding Terrestrial Habitats (within 250m)
P1	This is small ornamental pond, measuring approximately 140 m ² . Both native and non-native plant species are present. Common species include pointed spear-moss (<i>Calliergonella cuspidata</i>), yellow flag-iris (<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>), and yucca (<i>Yucca</i> sp.). It is surrounded by a small fence. Fish are present in the pond.	Surrounding habitats include those on site to the north, east, west and south of the pond. These consist of modified grassland, other developed land, buildings, and ornamental shrubs. The site is surrounded by dwellings with associated garden space to the east, south, and west, and agricultural fields to the north. There is a parcel of deciduous woodland located approximately 200 m from Pond 1. There is a pond offsite located approximately 115 m from Pond 1.

1.3 Site Context

Table 3 provides details on the context of the site in terms of habitats, land use and connectivity to the wider landscape.

Table 3. Site Context

Priority Habitats within 1 km	• Ponds • Deciduous woodland • Traditional orchard • River/stream • Lowland fen • Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh • Woodpasture and parkland
Ancient Woodland within 1 km	At least six areas, the nearest being approximately 135 m to the north-west of the site, one at 296 m to the north-east of site and one approximately 403 m to the south-west of site
Statutory Designated Sites within 1 km	None
European Designated Sites within 5 km	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), approximately 4.3 km to the south of the site
EPSLs within 2 km	Fourteen granted EPSLs for roosting bats including: • Destruction of a resting place for common pipistrelles (<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>), soprano pipistrelles (<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>), and brown long-eared bats (<i>Plecotus auritus</i>), for the main house on site. • Destruction of a resting place for common pipistrelles and soprano pipistrelles, located approximately 1 km to the south. • Damage to a breeding site for Daubenton's (<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>) and soprano pipistrelles, located approximately 1.8 km to the north. • Five destructions of resting places for common pipistrelles, soprano pipistrelles, and brown long-eared bats, located approximately 1.8 km to the north-west. • Destruction of a resting place for common pipistrelles and brown long-eared bats, located approximately 2 km to the north-west.

	• Five destructions of resting places for common pipistrelles, soprano pipistrelles, Daubenton's, noctules (<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>), and brown long-eared bats, located approximately 2 km to the north-east.
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1.4 Ecological Background

1.4.1 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) & Ground Level Tree Assessment (GLTA)

aLyne Ecology Ltd. were commissioned by the client to undertake a PEA and GLTA of the site (aLyne Ecology Ltd., 2024).

Thames Basin Heaths SPA was identified as located approximately 4.3 km to the south of the site. Seven types of Priority Habitats were identified within 1 km of the site, namely deciduous woodland, ponds, rivers/streams, woodpasture & parkland, traditional orchards, lowland fens and coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, and there are six parcels of ancient woodland located within 1 km of the site.

The habitats recorded on site include modified grassland, other standing water, buildings, other developed land, artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface, non-native and ornamental hedgerow, line of trees (w1g 33) and line of trees (w2c, 33).

The site was assessed as having potential to support great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*), common toads (*Bufo bufo*), nesting birds, roosting/foraging/commuting bats, and hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*). All trees on site were surveyed for their suitability to support roosting bats. This resulted in three individual trees being assessed as PRF-M (Potential Roosting Feature-Multiple).

Recommendations include the following:

- Trees should be retained and protected. Should any trees assessed as having suitability for roosting bats need removal, further survey will be required.
- An Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) should be present on site during any site clearance activities, which are likely to involve the removal/disturbance of any vegetation. This removal of vegetation should be carried out carefully by hand, to ensure any common toads or hedgehogs, which may be present, can escape unharmed.
- Any removal of vegetation should be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season (March to August inclusive) to avoid destruction/disturbance of nesting birds.
- A Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) should be prepared, demonstrating how features of ecological value will be retained and protected during construction, particularly the buildings and trees that have suitability to support roosting/foraging/commuting bats.
- A sensitive lighting plan should be adopted, to ensure that outside lighting does not adversely affect adjacent habitats and wildlife, particularly bats when foraging and commuting.
- The pond on site should be retained, protected, and enhanced.

Further survey for great crested newts (GCN) were recommended.

1.4.2 GCN eDNA Analysis

aLyne Ecology Ltd. were commissioned by the client to carry out a GCN eDNA analysis of the pond on site to determine the presence/absence of GCNs at Highwood House, Arborfield, as recommended in aLyne Ecology Ltd.'s report (aLyne Ecology Ltd, 2024).

The results of the great crested newt eDNA analysis for pond 1 are: 2/12 (GCN positive), i.e., great crested newt DNA was confirmed to be **present** (Sample ID: ADAS-2551).

GCN eDNA was detected in the pond, confirming the pond provides suitable GCN habitat. High to medium impact on great crested newts and their habitats is expected for groundworks (habitat removal/excavations/habitat manipulation) within 250 m of the pond.

Further survey for GCNs of Pond 1 has been assessed as not possible for the following reasons:

- The pond is small in size (140 m²) and lined with pond liner meaning that using bottle traps would not be possible without damaging the pond liner.
- Netting will cause distress to the fish and amphibians present in the pond and be disturbing to the vegetation and sediment.
- There is no emergent aquatic vegetation to carry out egg searches.

Therefore, in accordance with Natural England's Standing Advice on GCNs (Natural England, 2022), a Precautionary Method Statement for GCNs was recommended. The Precautionary Method Statement will detail the locations of proposed works, the impacts of the works, habitat compensation areas, mitigation areas, and a Habitat Maintenance and Management Plan.

Pond 1 should be retained and enhanced for amphibians.

1.5 Proposed Development

The development proposals are for the construction of new single storey outbuilding of a similar construction to the existing buildings on site, which will serve as a pool house and gym. The proposed outbuilding will be situated adjacent to the existing main house and garage. The approximate area affected by the works will total 0.04 ha. The works area is located approximately 1 m from Pond 1. Modified grassland, other developed land, and artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface habitats will be lost to facilitate the development. The existing pond (see Pond 1 on Figure 1) and the associated aquatic vegetation will be retained and left untouched.

1.6 Brief and Objectives

1.6.1 Precautionary Method Statement for GCNs

The purpose of the Precautionary Method Statement for GCNs is to provide details on the following:

- Location of proposed works.
- Impacts of the works.
- Mitigation areas.
- Habitat compensation areas.
- Habitat Maintenance and Management Plan.

2. Relevant Legislation and Planning Policy

GCNs and their habitats are fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (HM Government, 1981). GCNs are also included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (HM Government, 2017), which defines "European protected species of animals" and are afforded further protection through the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act, 2000 (HM Government, 2000).

The combined legislation makes it illegal to:

- Intentionally kill, injure, or capture great crested newts.
- Deliberately disturb great crested newts.
- Damage, destroy great crested newt habitat.

Furthermore, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC Act) 2006 (HM Government, 2006), requires due consideration be given to biodiversity and its potential enhancement when considering proposed developments. The great crested newt is a Priority Species listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act (HM Government, 2006).

The National Planning Policy Framework, 2023 (NPPF) (HM Government, 2023) sets out government policy on biodiversity in planning decisions. Under the NPPF, the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal.

3. Evaluation

The development proposals will involve the removal of the following habitats within the Development Boundary (see Figure 1), totalling approximately 0.04 ha, which is located approximately 1 m from Pond 1:

- Modified grassland.
- Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface.
- Other developed land.

The other developed land habitat has been assessed as having negligible potential to support GCNs in their terrestrial phase and negligible potential to support hibernating GCNs. The modified grassland and artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface have been assessed as having low potential to support GCNs in their terrestrial phase and hibernating GCNs as the modified grassland habitat is closely mown and lacks diverse, tussocky grassland vegetation and the artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface is sparsely vegetated, comprising mostly bare ground, and supports non-native species.

GCN DNA was detected in Pond 1, confirming the pond provides suitable GCN habitat (aLyne Ecology Ltd., 2024). Pond 1 is proposed to be retained and untouched.

4. Precautionary Working Method Statement

The following measures must be adhered to, to ensure GCNs are not harmed or injured during the works (if present) and committing an offence under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (HM Government, 2017) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended) (HM Government, 1981) is avoided.

4.1 Timing of Works

The timing of the works will avoid the hibernation period for GCNs from November to February, inclusive, within the Development Boundary (see Figure 1), when GCNs are most vulnerable.

The duration of groundworks will be kept as short as possible, and the works will be undertaken during daylight hours only as GCNs are most active at night.

4.2 Toolbox Talk

A toolbox talk will be given by the licensed ecologist to all contractors working on site. A paper copy of the toolbox talk and this Precautionary Working Method Statement will be provided to contractors and kept on site for the duration of the construction works. All contractors will sign the toolbox register, to confirm they have read and understand the toolbox talk.

Any contractors that are not present at the toolbox talk will need to sign the toolbox register, to confirm they have read and understand the toolbox talk and Precautionary Working Method Statement.

The toolbox talk and register are provided in Appendix 1.

4.3 Fencing and Signage

Orange mesh barrier fencing with clear signage will be erected around the pond and remain in situ throughout the construction phase of the development to avoid any encroachment into the pond.

4.4 Method of Works

All works will be carried out in the knowledge that individual GCNs are present in the pond (Pond 1), and, therefore, works will be carried out as quietly and as quickly as possible. Pond 1 will be retained and protected. A 10 m exclusion zone should be in place around Pond 1, except from the area where the proposed works is located approximately 1 m from Pond 1, marked out by orange mesh barrier fencing. No materials will be stored within 10 m of the pond (Pond 1).

Prior to the vegetation clearance, an extensive fingertip search will be undertaken by the licenced ecologist to search for GCNs and other amphibians. **In the unlikely event GCNs are found works will cease immediately and Natural England will be contacted to seek advice on how works can proceed.**

Removal of the vegetation within the Development Boundary (see Figure 1) will be carried out sensitively with a licenced ecologist present throughout the groundworks who will be checking for GCNs. All vegetation will be placed directly into skips and removed from site to prevent creating refugia for GCNs. No vegetation will be burned. Removed vegetation should be replaced with native species of local provenance.

Excavation of soil will be dragged away from the pond to prevent any soil from encroaching into the pond. Any ditches/trenches will be covered or backfilled overnight to prevent any GCNs and other amphibians from being trapped inside. If this is not possible, then a ramp will be left in place to allow

GCNs and other amphibians a means to escape. Construction machinery will not be stored or transported within the 10 m exclusion zone.

The site will be kept tidy.

4.5 Report

Following completion of the works, the licensed ecologist will re-visit site to confirm that the works have been carried out in accordance with this Precautionary Working Method Statement for GCNs and the licensed ecologist will prepare a brief report, confirming the works have been carried out in accordance with this Precautionary Working Method Statement for GCNs.

4.6 Persons Responsible

Persons responsible and contact details are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Persons Responsible

Name	Role	Email Address
Craig Mortimer-Zhika	Client	craigmortimer@btinternet.com
Chris Medland	Director of One-World Design Architects	chris.medland@one-worlddesign.co.uk
TBC	Contractor Site Manager	TBC
Sarah Lyne	Licensed Ecologist	sarahlyne@alyneecology.co.uk
Martin Roche	Licensed Ecologist	martinroche@alyneecology.co.uk

4.7 External Lighting

Recommendations to minimise the potential impacts of artificial external lighting on GCNs, are provided below (Bat Conservation Trust, 2023):

- Security lighting should be on a motion sensor and short duration timer (1 minute).
- Lighting that is required for security or safety reasons, should use a lamp of no greater than 2000 lumens (150 Watts) and should comprise sensor activated lamps.
- Red light bulbs should be used, where possible.
- LED luminaires with a warm white spectrum (<2700 Kelvin) are the preferred option and should be used where possible. Luminaires should feature peak wavelengths higher than 550 nm to minimise disturbance to GCNs. All luminaires should lack UV elements, metal halide and fluorescent sources should not be used.
- Lighting should be directed to where it is needed with minimal light spillage. This can be achieved by limiting the height of the lighting columns and by using as steep a downward angle as possible and/or a specialist bollard that directs the light below the horizontal plane (<90°).
- Internal luminaires should be recessed where installed in proximity to windows to reduce glare and light spill.

- Artificial lighting should not directly illuminate on the pond (Pond 1).

5. Management and Monitoring

5.1 Pond

Barley straw should be used when algae growth forms. Just Add Water (Froglife, 2021) provides further details on how to manage wildlife ponds. The Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook (Langton, et al., 2001) should be consulted when managing the pond and surrounding habitats.

6. References

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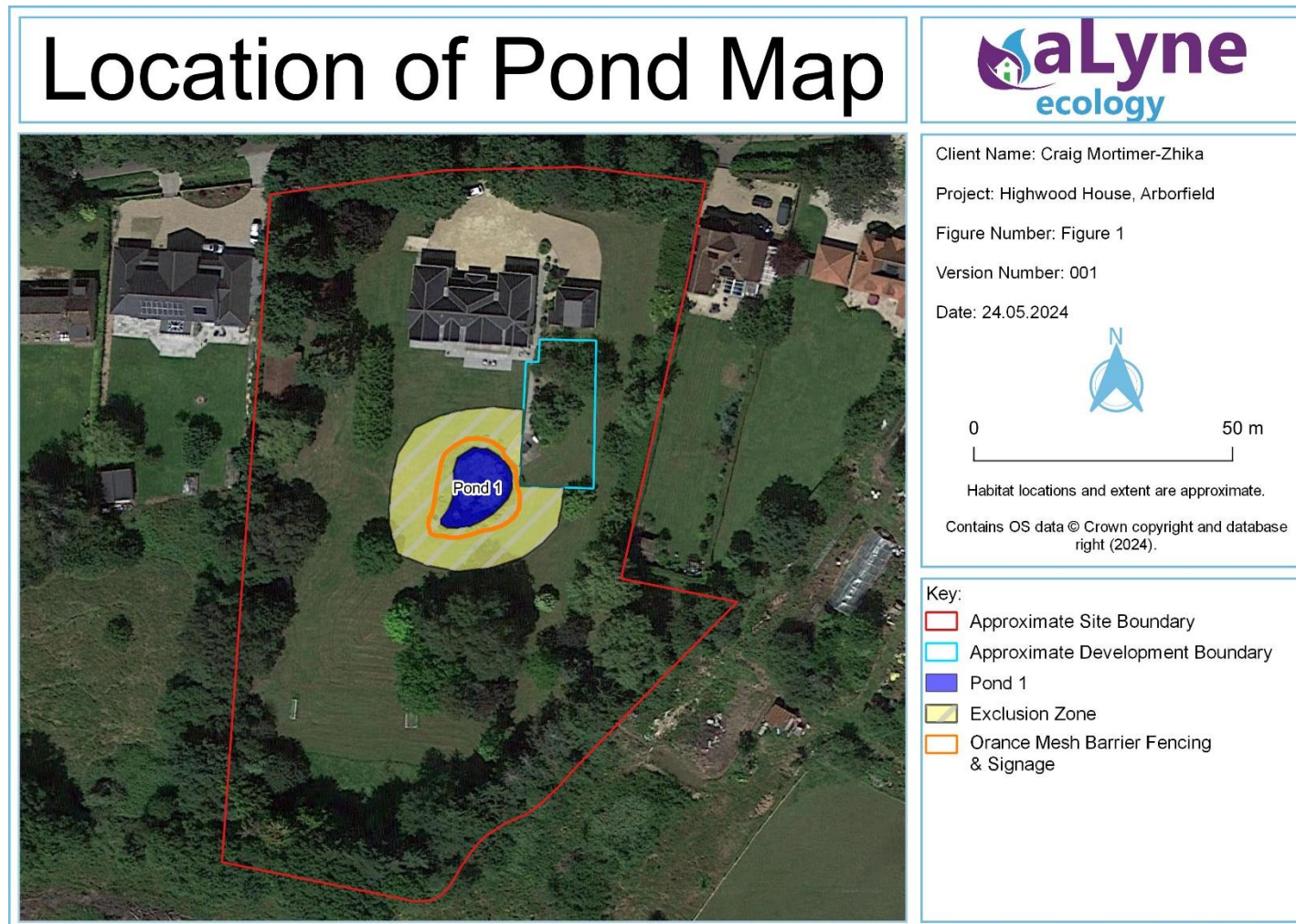
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7. Figures

7.1 Figure 1: Location of Pond



8. Appendix 1 – Toolbox Talk

8.1 Site Details and Brief

Why do I need to read this? You need to be aware of your legal obligation concerning great crested newts (GCN) and know what to do if GCNs are found. The pond (Pond 1) has been confirmed as support GCNs through eDNA Analysis.

In order to safeguard GCNs on site and to prevent an offence being committed, this Precautionary Working Method Statement for GCNs must be adhered to.

8.2 Protection of GCNs

GCNs and their habitats are fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (HM Government, 1981). GCNs are also included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (HM Government, 2017), which defines "European protected species of animals" and are afforded further protection through the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, 2000 (HM Government, 2000).

The combined legislation makes it illegal to:

- Intentionally kill, injure, or capture GCNs.
- Deliberately disturb great crested newts.
- Damage, destroy GCN habitat.

Furthermore, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC Act) 2006 (HM Government, 2006), requires due consideration be given to biodiversity and its potential enhancement when considering proposed developments. The GCN is a Priority Species listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act (HM Government, 2006).

The National Planning Policy Framework, 2023 (NPPF) (HM Government, 2023) sets out government policy on biodiversity in planning decisions. Under the NPPF, the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal.

8.3 GCN Identification and Ecology

GCNs are amphibians, like frogs and toads, that are semi-aquatic. GCNs breed in ponds in the spring and spend most of the rest of the year out of water in woodlands, scrub, hedgerows, marshes, and tussocky grasslands. The GCN hibernates underground amongst tree roots, under logs, brash, and stones.

GCNs are more active at night, and they feed mainly on invertebrates and tadpoles.

The yearly cycle of a GCN is provided below (Froglife, 2024):

Spring

Adult newts emerge from their overwintering sites in spring (March/April) and head to a pond to breed. Males perform an elaborate courtship dance before the eggs are laid. Females lay individual eggs on plant leaves and carefully wrap them up to protect them. Depending on local weather conditions, two to four weeks later larvae (sometimes called newt tadpoles) will hatch out. The larvae have feathery gills around the head, distinguishing them from frog and toad tadpoles; they have a mottled appearance and a tiny filament at the end of the tail. A couple of months after they hatch the larvae start to grow

their front legs (again, different from frogs and toads), followed by the back legs. At this time of year adult newts will hang around in and around the pond and will hunt frog tadpoles.

Summer

When the larvae have fully absorbed their gills, they leave the water as newtlets (or eft), around August.

Autumn

Autumn is spent preparing for winter. Newts feed on various invertebrates.

Winter

GCNs spend the winter sheltering under rocks, in compost heaps or buried down in mud. They don't hibernate as such and may take advantage of milder patches of weather to come out and forage.

Here are some ways of recognising a GCN:

- GCNs are the biggest newts in the UK, measure approximately 15 cm from tip to tail.
- The skin is black or dark brown and appears warty or bumpy that sometimes has white tips.
- The belly is bright orange with irregular black blotches.
- The males have a large, jagged crest running from their neck and down their back and along their tail, with a break at the base of the tail. The crest is more pronounced during the breeding season.
- The crest flops over and is not immediately obvious when the GCN is out of water.
- The males have a bright silvery-white streak running along their tails, which is more pronounced during the breeding season.
- The toes often have orange tips.

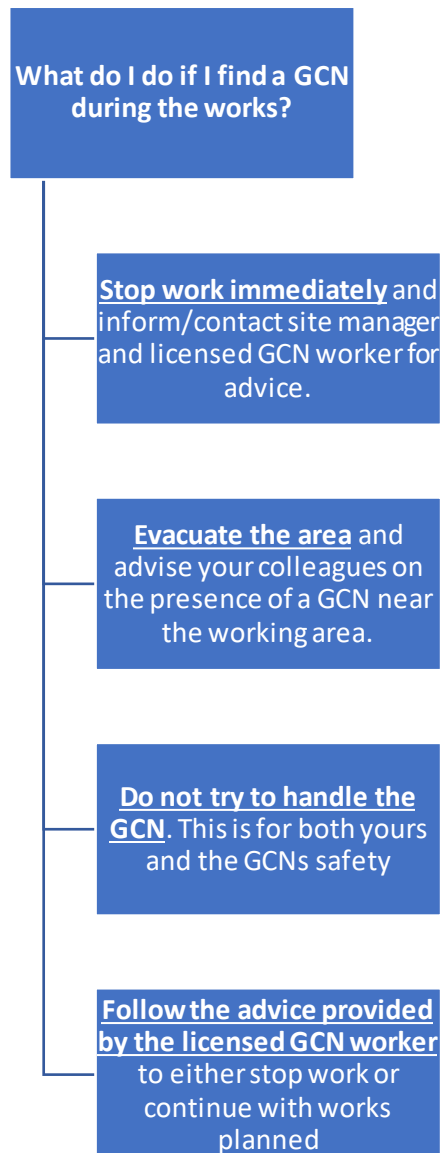


Male GCN in water with crest running from neck, along back and down tail, with a break at the base of the tail (photograph taken by aLyne Ecology Ltd).



GCN out of water with the crest not being immediately obvious (photograph taken by aLyne Ecology Ltd).

8.4 Finding GCNs during Works



8.5 Contact Details

Licensed GCN Workers:

Sarah Lyne
aLyne Ecology Ltd.
Managing Director and Principal Ecologist
T: 07443 652988
E: sarahlyne@alyneecology.co.uk

Martin Roche
aLyne Ecology Ltd.
Senior Ecologist
E: martinroche@alyneecology.co.uk

8.6 Toolbox Talk Register

I have read and understood the toolbox talk for GCNs.

Name and Role	Signature	Date