Arborfield Trunk Main - Proposed New Site Entrance

Great Crested Newt Statement & Precautionary Method of Works

M Group

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Quality information

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

AECOM Ltd. was instructed by M Group to prepare a planning application for construction of a temporary vehicle access to a proposed site compound location, as part of the wider Arborfield Trunk Main works. The construction of the temporary vehicle access is hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Works'.

The new access will be located off Barkham Road (the B3349), between Barkham and Arborfield Green in Berkshire (approximate Ordnance Survey grid reference SU77540,66874). The planning application boundary (shown in drawing number L017-IL-XX-200-DR-CE-0001 in Appendix A) is hereafter referred to as 'the Site'. A waterbody is located adjacent to (approximately 35 m east) the Site. Therefore, as part of the planning application, a 'great crested newt statement' is required.

1.2 Description of the Proposed Works

The Proposed Works will comprise:

- Vegetation clearance of hedgerow and adjacent grassland (understood to be a total area of less than 25 m^2);
- Removal of an existing post and wire fence;
- Installation of a new dropped kerb; and
- Installation of concrete between the road and existing fence line to a depth of approximately 10 cm.

1.3 Purpose of this Document

This document includes a great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) statement which:

- Gives details of surveys that demonstrate harm is unlikely; and
- Explains what non-licensable measures will be used to avoid harm to great crested newt.

This document also includes details of a Precautionary Method of Works (PMoW) which will form the non-licensable measures that will be used to avoid harm to great crested newt, in the unlikely event that great crested newts are present within the Site.

2. Relevant Wildlife Legislation

Great crested newts and their habitat are afforded full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)[1] and the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)[2]. Together legislation makes it an offence to

- Kill, injure or disturb a great crested newt; and/or
- Damage or destroy great crested newt habitat, including terrestrial habitats that may be well separated from the breeding pond.

The great crested newt is also listed as a Species of Principal Importance within Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006)[3]. Best practice guidance[4] recommends that consideration is given to the potential for impacts on great crested newt within a 500 m radius of potential breeding ponds.

[1] Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. London: HMSO.
[2] The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. London: HMSO
[3] Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. London: HMSO.
[4] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/great-crested-newts-surveys-and-mitigation-for-development-projects

3. Great Crested Newt Statement

3.1 Survey Methodology

Two AECOM ecologists, one of whom is registered to use the Natural England WML-CL08 (Great Crested Newt Survey Level 1) Class Licence, completed an extended UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) survey of the Site on 18th August 2025. The UKHab survey was extended to include an evaluation of habitats relevant to the Proposed Works for their suitability to support great crested newt. This included terrestrial habitats within the Site, and between the Site and the waterbody known to be present approximately 36 m east of the Site. The surveyors also noted the condition of the waterbody itself.

A desk study was also completed to search Ordnance Survey maps for any additional waterbodies within 250m of the Site.

3.2 Importance of the Site for Great Crested Newt

A single waterbody is present within 250 m of the Site, comprising a balancing pond located approximately 35 m east of the Site at approximate grid reference SU77602,66878.

The waterbody was dry at the time of survey on 18th August 2025; however, the summer months of 2025 have had limited rainfall and high temperatures. Therefore, due to the status of the waterbody as a balancing pond a lack of water during August 2025 is not considered evidence that the pond does not hold water during the key breeding season for great crested newt (March to June inclusive). Plant species usually found in damp soil, such as bulrush (*Typha latifolia*) and common reed (*Phragmites australis*), as well as willow (*Salix* sp.) were present (Plate 1). Aerial imagery also indicates the presence of water.

However, due to the waterbody's status as a balancing pond it is considered likely that any water presence is temporary and sporadic, reducing its suitability to support great crested newt.

Terrestrial habitat within the Site comprises grassland comprising a field margin with a tall sward height, hedgerow, a verge of mown grassland and hardstanding (Plate 2). Gaps are present within the hedgerow, exposing the associated post and wire fence.

Habitats between the Site and the waterbody comprised grassland (considered likely to form part of a hay crop), associated uncut grassland margin, hedgerow, and sparsely vegetated urban land (Plate 3).

At the time of survey, grassland between the Site and waterbody considered likely to form part of a hay crop had been recently cut. However, the grassland was uncut and comprised a tall sward length during a site visit conducted by M Group in July 2025 (Plate 4).

While terrestrial habitats within the Site, and between the Site and the waterbody are considered suitable to support great crested newt they are limited in size within the Site, and the waterbody itself has reduced suitability. However, as the frequency at which the waterbody holds water is unknown, as a precaution great crested newt are considered to be potentially present within terrestrial habitat within the Site, limited to the hedgerow, and grassland immediately south of the hedgerow.

Plate 1. Waterbody approximately 35 m east of the Site

Plate 2. Grassland and hedgerow within and adjacent to the Site

Plate 3. Sparsely vegetated land between the Site and the waterbody

Plate 4. Photograph taken by M Group on 10th July 2025, showing long grassland present beyond the wooden post and rail fence, within the Site

3.3 Avoiding Harm to Great Crested Newt

A PMoW will be in place during works to remove the hedgerow and grassland habitat within the Site, detailed in Section 4.

3.3.1 Proposed Works Description

The Proposed Works will comprise construction of a temporary vehicle access, considered likely to be in place for a period of two years to facilitate a site compound to be installed by M Group for the wider Arborfield Trunk Main works. Only the temporary vehicle access is subject to the planning application.

The hedgerow, associated post and wire fence, and grassland habitat within the Site will be removed to facilitate the Proposed Works. These will be reinstated upon completion of the wider works, once the site compound is no longer required.

The Site is approximately 25 m^2 in size and it has been assumed that all habitats within the Site will required clearance to facilitate the works.

3.3.2 Assessment of Probability of Offence

Natural England considers risk of potential harm to great crested newt within three radii of a pond found to contain great crested newts[5]:

- 'Core zone' 0-50 m from pond;
- 'Intermediate zone' 51-250 m from pond; and
- 'Distant zone' 251 – 500 m from pond.

The Proposed Works will be entirely within the 'core zone', i.e. within 0-50 m from the waterbody.

3.3.2.1 Natural England Advice

Natural England offer detailed advice within the instructions section of their EPSML method statement template[6] with respect to identifying risk of an offence, and appropriate control measures. Within these instructions, Natural England state that:

'Newts tend to be present at increasingly low density the further one looks from ponds, and the task of detecting and capturing them becomes more problematic. Further from ponds, there is a corresponding reduction in the scale of impact on populations… the probability of an offence outside the core breeding and resting area is often rather small, and even if an offence takes place, the effect on the population may be negligible…

The domestic legislation protecting great crested newts arises largely from the Habitats Directive, which has a central aim to restore scheduled species to a favourable conservation status. A more proportionate approach to mitigation, addressing tangible impacts on populations whilst giving lower priority to negligible effects, is consistent with the aims of the Directive...

Licensable activities should ideally be designed out of developments during the early planning stages. This should result in avoiding harm to great crested newt populations, and can save developers the time and expense of licensed mitigation measures. Many potentially licensable activities can in fact be avoided by careful planning of the development combined with simple precautionary measures. In many cases, adopting such an approach may mean that no licence is required (as no offence would be committed).'

3.3.2.2 Rapid Risk Assessment

Natural England provides a risk assessment tool within the EPSML template, to determine the risk of an offence. Using this tool, when the proposed works are assessed in the absence of mitigation, they are unlikely to cause an offence based on the area of habitat affected. However, there is a risk that individual newts could be disturbed, or in a worst case killed or injured (see Table 1), which is highly likely to cause an offence.

[5] As outlined in the Natural England Method Statement for European Protected Species Mitigation Licences, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-crested-newts-apply-for-a-mitigation-licence (accessed 22/06/23), '*Newts tend to be present at increasingly low density the further one looks from ponds… Further from ponds, there is a corresponding reduction in the scale of impact on populations. Given that great crested newts can disperse over 1km from breeding ponds, the potential for offences may seem vast, yet the probability of an offence outside the core breeding and resting area is often rather small, and even if an offence takes place, the effect on the population may be negligible'*

[6] available from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-crested-newts-apply-for-a-mitigation-licence

Table 1. Natural England rapid risk assessment tool (prior to application of mitigation measures to avoid impacts on great crested newts during excavation works

Component	Likely effect	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.05
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	Killing or injuring newts	0.8
Maximum:		0.8
Rapid risk assessment result:	**RED: OFFENCE HIGHLY LIKELY**	

With respect to a rapid risk assessment result of '*Red: offence highly likely*' Natural England's advice is that '*the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that an offence is highly likely. In this case, you should attempt to re-design the development location, layout, timing, methods or duration in order to avoid impacts, and re-run the risk assessment*'.

Natural England suggests potential avoidance measures, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Measures to avoid impacts on great crested newts during construction works

Project Element	Suggestions for avoidance measures
Location & layout	a) Locate site as far as possible from potential breeding ponds and high quality terrestrial habitat. (b) Locate in areas subject to high pre-existing fragmentation. (c) Locate on hard, compacted ground with few fissures. (d) Design layout so that any hard landscaping is as far as possible from ponds, with retained habitat and soft landscaping toward ponds
Timing & duration	(a) Restricting works to the winter period (when newts are rarely active above ground) is sensible if the project would not harm hibernation habitat. Projects with temporary habitat disruption and reinstatement, such as some pipelines, could potentially be carried out without any licensable activity in this way. (b) Keep duration of groundworks as short as possible. (c) Undertake during the day works that might only affect newts above ground.
Construction methods and special precautions	(a) Backfill trenches and other excavations before nightfall, or leave a ramp to allow newts to easily exit. (b) Raise stored materials (that might act as temporary resting places) off the ground, e.g. on pallets. (c) For pipelines, use directional drilling to cross areas of core habitat and dispersal routes. (d) Avoid installing structures that act as barriers close to ponds, or include gaps at ground level where walls or fences are unavoidable.

Source: *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-crested-newts-apply-for-a-mitigation-licence*

When the rapid risk assessment is revisited with application of measures within Table 2 (specifically related to avoidance of disturbance, injury or killing of individual newts), the likelihood of an offence is considered to be highly unlikely (see Table 3).

Table 3. Natural England rapid risk assessment tool (with application of mitigation measures to avoid impacts on great crested newts during construction works)

Component	Likely effect	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.05
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
Maximum:		0.05
Rapid risk assessment result:	**GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY**	

The PMoW in Section 4 details the mitigation measures required to ensure that an offence is highly unlikely as a result of the Proposed Works.

Section 4 will therefore provide a document of the approved method of working, and will be available for inspection by Natural England or other consultees if required.

4. Precautionary Method of Works

4.1 Mitigation Measures

A suitably qualified ecologist (SQE) who is registered to use the Natural England level 1 class licence to take or disturb great crested newts should be commissioned to implement this PMoW.

The SQE will need to be present during vegetation clearance and removal of the post and wire fence. The SQE will:

- Check the area of the post and wire fence for great crested newt prior to removal;
- Remain present during the removal of the post and wire fence;
- Check the holes created by removal of the post and wire fence for great crested newt presence, prior to filling in;
- Be present during a two-stage clearance of vegetation, completing finger-tip searches as detailed below; and
- Be present during excavations, where these are within the area of the hedgerow.

Vegetation clearance and removal of the post and wire fence will be completed using hand tools.

This PMoW does not allow for great crested newts to be captured, or moved off site. This action would require a mitigation licence. In the event that a great crested newt is encountered during the works, works will cease and a licence will be required to be applied for.

4.2 Briefing

The contact details of the SQE will be provided to the contractors, and the SQE will be available “on call” if there are any questions.

Prior to works commencing, the SQE will provide a site ecology briefing to all contractors on the potential presence of great crested newts, and the measures contained within the PMoW document. Each contractor who receives the site ecology briefing will sign and date a list kept by the SQE, which will be forwarded to the client for their records.

A copy of this document will be kept on site.

4.3 Siting of the Works

The Site boundary subject to the planning application comprises an area totalling 25m^2 which includes hardstanding and a mown grassland verge of limited suitability for great crested newt. The remaining habitat comprising hedgerow and grassland within an assumed hay meadow is of higher suitability for great crested newt. Within the Site, the hedgerow includes gaps where the post and wire fence is exposed, and grassland has been recently cut with the exception of a field margin.

The post and wire fence may contain gaps appropriate for great crested newt to access for hibernation. This will require removal during the works.

Excavations are expected to be limited to 10 cm in depth to allow placement of the temporary vehicle access surfacing.

4.4 Other Amphibian or Reptile Species

In the event that any other amphibian or reptile species are encountered, they will be moved by the SQE to the closest available area of suitable habitat outside of the works locations.

4.5 Timing of Works

All excavation works will be undertaken during the day. There will be no working at night. Works will primarily affect areas of foraging habitat and for this reason vegetation clearance, removal of the post and wire fence and the excavation will be conducted when overnight temperatures are consistently above 5°C, when great crested newts will be active and not in hibernation.

4.6 Two-Phase Vegetation Clearance

Vegetation will be cleared in two phases using the following method:

- The SQE will conduct a check of the area to be cleared for the presence of great crested newt, including the presence of any features that could be used as hibernacula, such as piles of rocks or wood. If present, these will be carefully dismantled by the SQE to check for the presence of great crested newt;
- Vegetation will be cleared to a height of 150 mm using hand tools
- The SQE will conduct a second check comprising a finger-tip search of the area to be cleared for the presence of great crested newt;
- Once the SQE has declared the area free of great crested newt, a second cut to ground level will be completed including the removal of any stumps within the hedgerow.

4.7 Limited Working Area

All works will occur within the minimum possible working area. Vehicle movements, where required, across habitat will be minimised, using as direct route as possible and using existing routes such as established tracks (as directed by the ecologist).

4.8 Storage of Arisings

All arisings from vegetation clearance and excavation (that might act as temporary resting places) will be stored off the ground, e.g. on tarpaulins placed on pallets, to avoid attracting amphibians and reptiles to use arisings as refugia. These will not be stored long-term and will be removed from site as soon as possible (ideally the same day).

All other stored materials will be raised off the ground, e.g. on pallets.

4.9 Reinstatement

Holes left in the ground from removal of the post and wire fence will be filled in on the same day as removal, once the hole has been checked for absence of great crested newts or other rare or notable species by the SQE on site.

The excavation (expected to be 10 cm depth) will be filled the same day. If this is not possible, a small ramp will be installed to enable amphibians to escape. The excavation will be checked by a nominated member of site staff in the morning prior to filling of the excavation commencing.

Upon completion of the wider works, habitats will be reinstated once the temporary vehicle access is no longer in use.

Appendix A Site Boundary