



GCN/ BIODIVERSITY STATEMENT

Householder Extension

Westwood Cottage, Sheerlands Road RG40 4QX

The purpose of this report is to accompany a householder planning application. It is a bridging document to be superseded by an onsite assessment by a qualified ecologist in the next 6 weeks.

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Setting Overview/ Context:

Westwood Cottage is a detached vernacular farmhouse located west of Sheerlands Road and east of the A327. It is situated south of the Arborfield Green and south west of the larger town of Wokingham. The site is heavily screened from the surrounding roads and the adjacent Listed Buildings by a dense belt of mature trees and can't be seen from the road.

The traditional farmhouse sits within a large parcel of land used for residential purpose but with a commercial yard and buildings situated at the end of the access track. The farmhouse is uninhabited due to its condition however its owners live on site in a static home maintaining residential purpose until the farmhouse is renovated and can be used again as a family dwelling. There is a large pond and large domestic garden to the left hand side of the access track on approach to the house. Parking for the property is a large gravelled area behind the house on the north side of the site between the farmhouse and the commercial yard. There is also a small private courtyard to the south side which is dilapidated in nature.

The house is described in the list entry as a late 16th century hall house, altered and extended in the 18th and 20th centuries. The building was added to the statutory list in 1986 and is Listed Grade II. It is a traditional two storey white painted brick property with a plain clay tile roof. It has been extended a number of times with the original central 'hall' part having an expressed timber frame with brick infills. The majority of the windows are painted timber although some have sadly been replaced with UPVC units.

There are a number of large outbuildings on the site which are in a poor condition and are currently suffering from structural failure and collapsing into the ditch behind them.

The setting was historically rural in nature and the buildings agricultural in form. Large quantities of modern housing development now surrounds it however changing its built context substantially.



Map taken from Historic England Listing Database. Property shown with a red dot.

2. BNG Applicability

Under the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024, householder applications are exempt from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain. Wokingham Borough Council nonetheless requires a proportionate biodiversity/GCN statement where ponds or potential amphibian habitat may be affected.

3. Ecological Sensitivities

- The site falls within a Great Crested Newt Habitat Zone
- The pond adjacent to the site underwent a great crested newt Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment⁸, to enable rapid assessment of how suitable the pond is for this species. Ponds with a score of 'below average' or lower are not routinely surveyed for great crested newt, as the species is unlikely to be present. The following assessment was recently carried out on the site:

Pond 1 is a garden pond located at National Grid Reference SU 76469 64633, which measures approximately 15m x 5m. It contains emergent vegetation and blanket weed covering approximately 30% of the water surface as macrophytes. The western half of the pond is fringed by pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., whilst the eastern half is surrounded by a mix of willow *Salix* sp., silver birch *Betula pendula*, oak *Quercus robur* and *leylandii* x *Cuprocyparis leylandii*. The pond is approximately 50% shaded as a result of this surrounding tree cover. No waterfowl were recorded on or adjacent to the pond during the survey, although these may be present from time to time, and the presence of fish cannot be excluded. Other species recorded at or immediately adjacent to the pond included blanket weed *Spirogyra* sp., flag iris *Iris pseudacorus* and fern species. Surrounding habitat comprises a well-managed lawn to the west and south, the driveway of hardstanding to the north and a tree line and road to the east.

Overall, the pond was assessed as suitable for great crested newt and a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment was completed following the methodology of Oldham et al. (2000) to evaluate its suitability for supporting great crested newt. The pond is classed as having 'average' suitability for great crested newt, shown in Table 3.

Table 3. HSI results

SI No	SI Description	SI Value
1	Geographic location	1
2	Pond area	0.2
3	Pond permanence	0.9
4	Water quality	0.67
5	Shade	1
6	Water fowl effect	0.67
7	Fish presence	0.67
8	Pond Density	1
9	Terrestrial habitat	0.67
10	Macrophyte cover	0.7
HSI Score		0.69
Pond suitability		Average

- No works are proposed within the pond or its banks.

The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside4 (MAGIC) online resource was accessed on 25th June 2026 to search for the following features:

- Internationally and nationally designated sites: SPAs, potential SPAs, SACs, possible SACs, Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) within 1km of the site
- European Protected Species (EPS) bat licences granted within 2km
- EPS hazel dormouse and great crested newt licences granted within 1km
- Natural England great crested newt class licence returns submitted within 1km
- Ponds shown on Ordnance Survey mapping within 500m of the site

4. Impact Assessment

Because of the location of the proposed extension away from the pond area the following is assumed to be correct. An ecologist visit has been booked in to confirm these findings and will be issued to the council upon receipt of the reporting. Based on the design and construction approach:

- **No direct impact** on the pond or aquatic habitat.
- **No loss** of semi-natural habitat above de minimis thresholds.
- **No severance** of amphibian movement routes.
- **No lighting spill** onto the pond (warm-white <3000K, downward-directed fittings).
- Construction access will use existing hardstanding only.

5. Avoidance & Mitigation Measures

To safeguard any amphibians potentially using the pond:

- **Timing:** Groundworks to avoid peak amphibian movement (Feb–Apr).
- **Contractor briefing:** Identification of GCN and stop-work protocol.
- **Materials storage:** All materials kept >5 m from pond edge.
- **Excavations:** Trenches left overnight will include escape ramps.
- **Lighting:** No new illumination directed toward the pond.

7. Conclusion

The proposal is a BNG-exempt householder development. We do not believe that the extension will adversely affect the pond or associated habitats however an ecologist visit has been booked in for a more detailed assessment and this reporting will be issued to the local authority as part of this application.

In addition the ecologist will be able to advise on voluntary enhancements in regards to BNG for the site.

With the avoidance and enhancement measures outlined above, the development will aim to maintain and modestly improve ecological value within the garden.