

# **Non - licensed Avoidance measures for Great Crested Newts**

**Paddock View**

**Honey Hill**

**Wokingham**

**Berkshire**

**RG40 3BB**

**Prepared for M. Ferrar**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

## Introduction

This report has prepared this report on behalf of Ms M. Ferrar.. It concerns the demolition of an existing rear conservatory and the erection of a rear 2 storey extension in the same position ( albeit slightly wider and deeper). The remainder of the proposed footprint for the extension is an existing large patio area. ( see photos 2 and 3 below)

## Context and Objectives

The proposal involves works apparently within proximity to habitats capable of supporting the European-protected Great Crested Newt (GCN) *Triturus cristatus*.

Statement from Wokingham Borough Council Planning:

1. *The site is located within an amber risk zone modelled for the protected species “Great Crested Newt” as identified on the Wokingham Planning Constraints map. It is important that the local authority considers the potential risk to this species as a result of the proposal. Please supply a site specific “Great Crested Newt Statement” to consider the risk and whether mitigation measures or a protected species licence would be required. It may help to seek specialist advice through and ecological consultant.*

Advice was sought from our ecologist who prepared the bat survey for this site, Chase Ecology. They considered the risk to be low and I also spoke with “Nature Space”as they lead the GCN District licensing for this area and they agreed that a license would not be required due to the low risk.

The report provides a method statement to eliminate potential harm to individual Great Crested Newts during the work. It should be noted that a suitable breeding site and the reason for the amber zone status may be the raised reservoir on Heathlands farm which is used to irrigate polytunnels for soft fruit. This reservoir does have a large fish population, and

is some 308m from the proposed development. (see photo 1 ).

Furthermore, the small footprint of the proposed extension ( 8.1m x 5m) sits at the rear of the property which is currently a conservatory and a large patio area, so not grass or any foraging land suitable for great crested newts anyway, so the risk of encountering Great Crested Newts is considered low.

Please Note: (The red building blocks in photos 2 and 3 mark the corners of the proposed extension, so it can be seen that this entire area is already patio/ conservatory).



Photo 1



Photo 2



### Photo 3

#### **Legislation**

The primary protection afforded to Great Crested Newts (GCN) relevant to the proposal is that it is illegal to:

- deliberately kill, injure or capture (or take) GCN
- deliberately disturb GCN
- recklessly disturb GCN while it is occupying a structure or place which is used for shelter or protection or obstruct access to their places of shelter or protection;
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of GCN.

Other amphibians (Common Frog, Common Toad, Smooth Newt, and Palmate Newt) are not offered the same legal protection, but it is good practice to try to avoid harming these species. The Common Toad, listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, is a species of principal importance (SPI) for conserving biodiversity and thus must be regarded by the planning authority in exercising any of its functions.

#### **Great Crested Newt Identification**

The GCN is the largest of the UK's newt species, reaching a maximum length of 170 mm. Adults typically range from 110-130 mm long but can be as short as 85 mm. Adults are easily distinguished from other British species by size (being much bulkier) and colour (being darker, i.e. black or black-brown). Their skin is also granular in appearance, with fine white spots on the lower flanks (Figure 2).

#### **Figure 2: Great Crested Newt Identification**



Comparison: Great Crested Newt (darker) & Smooth Newt



### Where Amphibians might be found when not breeding in ponds

Amphibians breed in ponds and other water bodies in spring, generally between February and June, with some variation due to weather conditions. They spend much of the rest of their time on land, travelling, in some cases, hundreds of metres from ponds. Amphibians need to find sheltered crevices in dense vegetation, under wood piles, in rubble, etc., for hibernation and to shelter during the day and in dry periods. They may be found lying up among brickwork and stone walls, at and near ground level, where crevices and loose joints are present. Toads, in particular, are frequently found in such places. Amphibians also will take shelter in cracks and cavities in the ground and may bury themselves in soft earth.

Great Crested Newts may be found in woodland, under hedgerows, marshes, and damp tussocky grassland habitats. They do not typically occupy short-mown grassland but may cross it to travel between suitable habitats.

## PRECAUTIONARY WORKING METHOD STATEMENT

### Timing and Responsible Parties

Given the site's short grassland habitat ( rear garden laid to lawn), Great Crested Newts are not at significant risk. However, particular attention needs to be paid to when animals are actively migrating and foraging (late winter, late summer, and autumn). As Great Crested Newts are most active at night, the work should be undertaken during daylight hours only.

The duration of the work should be kept to a minimum and commenced at a time when it can be completed without significant pauses or delays.

The PWMS applies leading up to, immediately before and during construction. Therefore, a copy of this report should be retained on-site during clearance and construction work. All site operatives should be made aware of its contents where they are relevant to the tasks they are undertaking (see toolbox talk below).

The client or a senior member of the construction team who is present on site most, if not all, of the time should take responsibility for ensuring compliance with the PWMS. In addition, the contact details of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) should be made available in case advice is required during the operations.

### **Non - licensed Avoidance measures for Great Crested Newts.**

There is only a low risk that individual great crested newts could be present in the garden so the works could go ahead lawfully. In order to minimise the small risk of harming great crested newts, the following avoidance measures will be adopted.

At least 48 hours before construction commences, the grassland leading to and within the development area should be mown to a height of 50 mm. This will discourage wildlife from entering this area and discourage amphibians from taking refuge within the grassland. Mowing should be done by checking the area before commencement to ensure no amphibians are present.

### Site Induction/Toolbox Talk

All workers should be made aware via a 'toolbox talk' before commencement of the protected species that could potentially be found, their protected status, where they might be found, and methods to follow if they are discovered. They should be made aware of the importance of maintaining a watch for Great Crested Newts (GCN) and amphibians/reptiles during the works. The site workers should be shown Figure 2 to ensure that they can recognise a Great Crested Newt. In areas of higher risk, the ecologist should provide the toolbox talk. However, *in this instance and with such a low risk*, it is sufficient for the client to deliver this talk, and it may be kept informal.

### If a GCN is found

If it is suspected that a Great Crested Newt has been found, work must be suspended, and advice from a SQE sought immediately. At no point should anyone handle a GCN or suspected GCN. Unlicensed handling may result in an offence, and untrained handling may cause unnecessary stress and injury. If the operative is certain that the newt species is not a Great Crested, the animal can be carefully moved out of the working zone and placed under a nearby hedgerow. Handling of any animal should be kept to a minimum.

### Soil stripping and excavation

Before the commencement of work each day, a brief site walkover and check of excavations will be undertaken by construction personnel to ensure no protected species have entered the construction site overnight. Before commencing excavation or soil stripping, the area marked out will be thoroughly inspected to ensure no animals are present and at risk. The following bullet points should be adhered to:

- Trenches and other excavations should be backfilled before nightfall. If this is not possible, ramps must be left to allow all wildlife to exit easily.
- All debris, rubble, etc., collected during site clearance should be placed directly into

skips or removed from the site immediately to prevent it from becoming a refugia for amphibians and reptiles.

- Avoid burning or machine removal of any potential hibernacula (wood piles, debris, etc.) without a thorough hand search for amphibians, reptiles and Hedgehogs.
- All new building materials should be stored on pallets or in bags to prevent them from becoming used by terrestrial newts, amphibians and reptiles.
- Impact of vehicles/machinery on the ground must be minimised by undertaking work from hardstanding or agreed areas only.

### **Optional Biodiversity Enhancements**

Turf and soil dug from the foundations could be reused to create a small amphibian hibernaculum and refuge. This is a simple process of burying stones, bricks and logs under soil/turf with entrance holes to provide a sheltered resting place from newts, frogs and toads. A shady location, such as near a hedge base, would be ideal. Details are available online at: [www.naturexplorer.co.uk/articles/creating-reptileamphibian-hibernacula-and-refuges/](http://www.naturexplorer.co.uk/articles/creating-reptileamphibian-hibernacula-and-refuges/).

### **Conclusion**

The risk of disturbing Great Crested Newts by carrying out this proposal are considered low. However, the report sets out the method statement and good working practices should an animal be found that must be adhered to should this project go ahead. If the Local Authority Ecologist has any additional suggestions or conditions to add to this report, we are happy to work with them on this.