

Date: 5 January 2026
Application: 253111



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

WBC Ecology Newts

Development Management &
Compliance

P.O. Box 157

Shute End, Wokingham

Berkshire, RG40 1BN

Tel: (0118) 974 6000

Minicom No: (0118) 974 6991

Dear WBC Ecology Newts,

Householder Consultation

Application Number: 253111

Applicant: Ahluwalia

Site Address: Sonning Court, Thames Street, Sonning, Wokingham, RG4 6UR

Parish: Sonning

Grid Reference: Easting - 475769, Northing - 175754

Type of Development: Other Householder

Proposal: Householder application for the proposed erection of 1no. single storey detached outbuilding for use as gym plus formation of outdoor pool with associated works following demolition of existing pyramid building, pool structure and pool house.

Case Officer: Claire Moore

Development Management has received the above application, and we require your comments on the proposal using the recommended memorandum below. The documents associated with this are available to view in NEC DM using the application number 253111. Alternatively, public documents are available to view on the Council's planning application search page: [Wokingham Borough Council Online Planning](https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning).

Please index your response into NEC DM against the application. If you are recommending conditions, you should give a reason with reference to relevant policies. A list of standard conditions can be requested from the case officer.

Your observations are required in respect of this application by **26 January 2026**.

Yours sincerely,
Development Management & Compliance

MEMORANDUM

From:	District Licensing Officer NatureSpace		
Service	WBC Ecology Newts	App No:	253111
Address:	Sonning Court, Thames Street, Sonning, Wokingham, RG4 6UR.		
Proposal:	Householder application for the proposed erection of 1no. single storey detached outbuilding for use as gym plus formation of outdoor pool with associated works following demolition of existing pyramid building, pool structure and pool house.		
Type of Development:	Other Householder		
Site Visit Made:	No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
☐ No objection
☐ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
☒ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
☐ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

Summary

This planning application is for a Householder application for the proposed erection of 1no. single storey detached outbuilding for use as gym plus formation of outdoor pool with associated works following demolition of existing pyramid building, pool structure and pool house.

- The development falls within the red impact risk zone for great crested newts. Impact risk zones have been derived through advanced modelling to create a species distribution map which predicts likely presence. In the red impact zone, there is suitable habitat and a high likelihood of great crested newt presence.
- There are 12 ponds within 500m of the development proposal. This includes an onsite pond next to one of the structures that is proposed to be demolished.
- There are great crested newt records within 500m of the development site.
- There is direct connectivity between the development and ponds and suitable terrestrial habitat to the northeast of the site.

Ecological Information

The applicant has provided a GCN Habitat Assessment (John Wenman Ecological Consultancy, 2025), within this report it states that:

- An offence is highly unlikely using natural England's rapid risk assessment but does not factor in the demolition of the pyramid building directly adjacent to the on-site pond complex that has not been surveyed for the likely presence/absence of GCN. As such there is the potential to disturb GCN if present which would result in it being likely for an offence to be committed using this tool.
- The report identifies suitable sheltering and commuting habitat neighbouring the site with direct connectivity to other ponds in the landscape.
- The lack of emergent vegetation identified during the survey is likely due to the time of year the field survey was carried out as submerged and emergent vegetation are best observed in summer months. Emergent vegetation can also be identified in photographs within the design and access statement.
- Natural England Standing Advice guidance for planning authorities advises that surveys on ponds up to 500m from development sites should be requested. The ecological report does not include presence/absence survey data for the on-site pond or those within 500m.
- Whilst one of the tiers contains fish, whilst this does reduce suitability it does not guarantee absence. There are also the remaining 2 tiers of the pond which do not contain fish, thus have potential to support GCN given populations in the surrounding landscape.
- The report contains reasonable avoidance measures (RAMs) but given the proximity of the structures to be demolished, suitable refugia and the absence of survey data this would not be deemed sufficient to mitigate against potential impacts to GCN and there is a reasonable likelihood of impacting GCN.

Recommendations

I am not satisfied that the applicant has adequately demonstrated that there will be no impact to great crested newts and their habitat as a result of the development being approved. Despite the small scale of the development due to the presence of an onsite pond that has not been surveyed for the presence of GCN there is a potential impact to great crested newts.

Therefore, in line with the guidance from Natural England ([Great crested newts: District Level Licensing for development projects, Natural England, March 2021](#)), there is a reasonable likelihood that great crested newts will be impacted by the development proposals and therefore, the applicant must either:

- Provide further information relating to the potential presence/absence of GCN in line with Natural England's [Standing Advice](#), to rule out impacts to great crested newts, or demonstrate how any impacts can be addressed through appropriate mitigation/compensation proposals*; or
- Alternatively, the applicant may wish to join the NatureSpace district licencing scheme and submit a NatureSpace certificate to demonstrate that the impacts of the proposed development can be addressed through [add Council name] Council's District Licence.

*To do so, surveys to determine presence/likely absence and population size class assessments may need to be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist in accordance with the Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines (2001) (and if using eDNA surveys, the Great Crested Newt Environmental eDNA Technical Advice Note (Natural England 2014)). If GCN are identified, appropriate mitigation and compensatory measures will need to be identified to satisfy planning requirements and a site-based mitigation licence may be required. Surveys are seasonally constrained. Should this option be pursued the applicant may wish to withdraw and resubmit the application once relevant surveys have been carried out.

More details on the district licensing scheme operated by the council can be found at www.naturespaceuk.com

Wokingham Borough Council holds a Great Crested Newt Organisational (or "District") Licence granted by Natural England. This is administered by NatureSpace Partnership through their District Licensing Scheme as the council's delivery partner. A dedicated District Licensing Officer is employed by NatureSpace to provide impartial advice to the council and help guide them and planning applicants through the process. All services and arrangements are facilitated in an unbiased, independent and transparent manner. You can find out more at www.naturespaceuk.com

Reasonable Likelihood of Protected Species

Permission can be refused if adequate information on protected species is not provided by an applicant, as it will be unable to assess the impacts on the species and thus meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024), ODPM

Circular 06/2005 or the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). The Council has the power to request information under Article 4 of the Town and Country (Planning Applications) Regulations 1988 (SI1988.1812) (S3) which covers general information for full applications. CLG 2007 'The validation of planning applications' states that applications should not be registered if there is a requirement for an assessment of the impacts of a development on biodiversity interests.

Section 99 of ODPM Circular 06/2005 states:

"It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision. The need to ensure ecological surveys are carried out should therefore only be left to coverage under planning conditions in exceptional circumstances, with the result that the surveys are carried out after planning permission has been granted. However, bearing in mind the delay and cost that may be involved, developers should not be required to undertake surveys for protected species unless there is a reasonable likelihood of the species being present and affected by development. Where this is the case, the survey should be completed and any necessary measures to protect the species should be in place, through conditions and / or planning obligations before permission is granted."

Great crested newts and their habitats are fully protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Therefore, it is illegal to deliberately capture, injure, kill, disturb or take great crested newts or to damage or destroy breeding sites or resting places. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is illegal to intentionally or recklessly disturb any great crested newts occupying a place of shelter or protection, or to obstruct access to any place of shelter or protection (see the legislation or seek legal advice for full details). Local planning authorities have a statutory duty in exercising of all their functions to '*have regard, so far is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity,*' as stated under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended), as well as a duty under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) to have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive. As a result, GCN and their habitats are a material consideration in the planning process.

Date:	26/01/2025	Signed:	NatureSpace
--------------	------------	----------------	-------------