



The Hopkiln, Bury Court
Bentley, Farnham GU10 5LZ
office: 01252 449512
email: info@darwin-ecology.co.uk
www.darwin-ecology.co.uk
Company No. 07654823

16th January 2026

Dear Sir/Madam,

Further Information Regarding Great Crested Newt at 424-426 Reading Road, Winnersh, Wokingham, RG41 5EP

Introduction and Background

In December 2025, Darwin Ecology Ltd were instructed to undertake an assessment of the potential of the habitats at 424-426 Reading Road, Winnersh, Wokingham, RG41 5EP to support Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*. The assessment was required to support a planning application for the demolition of the existing two-storey commercial building on site, and the subsequent construction of a 2.5-storey mixed-use property with associated areas of soft and hard landscaping. The assessment was informed by a habitat walkover survey and a desk study.

Wokingham Borough Council requested further information to support the application in December 2025. The request was as follows;

8. The site falls within a Great Crested Newt (GCN) Habitat Zone (Red) and therefore developers are required to demonstrate how it is proposed to safeguard against the risk of harming newts. For more information on this, please see the NatureSpace Partnership website:

<https://naturespaceuk.com/>

Please complete a GCN statement and email it to us at the address below.

METHODOLOGY

Habitat Walkover

A walkover of the site was carried out by Licensed Ecologist Eleanor Kemp BSc (Hons) MSc and Assistant Ecologist Maddy Simmonds BSc (Hons) on 15th January 2025 to assess the suitability of the habitats on site at 424-426 Reading Road to support GCN. Signs of protected species and invasive non-native plants were also checked for.

The weather was overcast with a light breeze and a temperature of approximately 8°C.

Limitations

Ecological surveys are limited by factors that affect the presence of plants and animals, such as the time of the year, weather, and migration patterns. The survey was undertaken in January and therefore represents a valid sample of ecological evidence present on that date/season. The report is not designed, nor is it required to present a completed inventory of flora/fauna. The site comprises a commercial property, and only a very small area of natural habitat is present on site. As such, the timing of the survey is not considered to be a significant limitation to the validity or reliability of the results.

This report remains valid for 18 months from the date of the survey; however, a walkover survey within this period may be required to demonstrate whether or not the habitats have remained as described.

RESULTS

Desk Study

MagicMap returned four records of EPS licence for works impacting great crested newt within 2km of the site boundaries. These are detailed in **Table 1** and **Figure 1** below.

Table 1: ESPL granted for GCN within 2km of the site

Case Reference	Licence dates	Licensable Impact	Approximate distance from site
EPSA2013-6712-A-AD2-3	08/06/2016 - 30/06/2020	Damage and destruction of a resting place	640m north
2014-718-EPS-MIT	16/05/2014 - 30/04/2015	Damage and destruction of a resting place	1.10km northeast
2015-14054-EPS-MIT	08/09/2015 - 31/10/2015	Damage and destruction of a resting place	1.10km northeast
2019-41221-EPS-MIT-1	25/02/2020 - 31/12/2025	Damage and destruction of a resting place	1.20km southeast

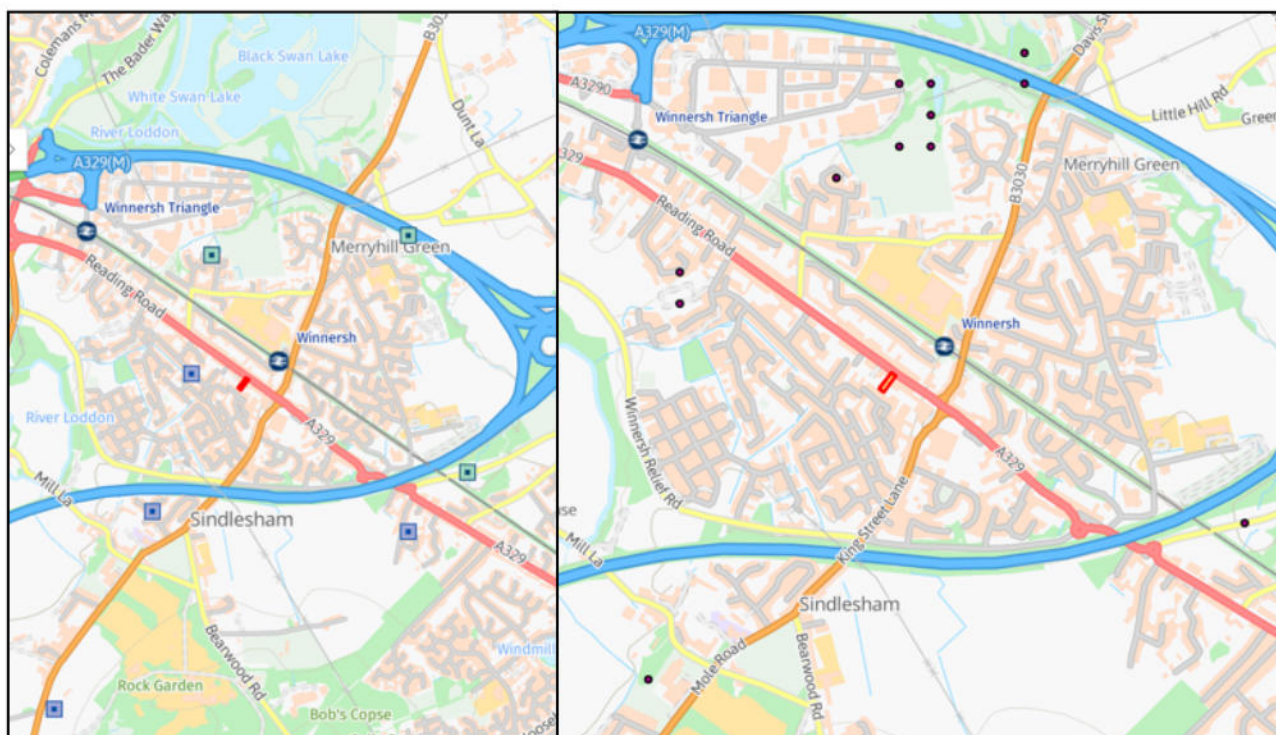
All EPS licence sites are divided from the application site by either the M4 (2019-41221-EPS-MIT-1) or a railway line (EPSA2013-6712-A-AD2-3, 2014-718-EPS-MIT and 2015-14054-EPS-MIT). It is anticipated that these manmade linear features would present a significant barrier to dispersal for

GCN. As such, it is considered significantly unlikely that GCN would be able to commute between these sites and the application site.

MagicMap returned no records of GCN pond surveys 2017-2019 with positive results within 2km of the site boundaries (see **Figure 2**).

MagicMap identified 12 sites which were reported to support GCN within GCN Class Survey Licence Returns within 2km of the site boundaries. The most recent records were from May 2017. The majority of these sites (six sites) were located within Winnersh Meadows, located 510m north of the site. Three of the sites were located within Dinton Pastures Country Park, situated to the north of the A329, 1.10km north of the site. Two of the sites were located to the south of the M4, located 1.25km east and 1.15km southwest of the site. A further two sites were located 705m and 740m northwest of the site. The majority of the sites are divided from the application site by a trainline or a major road (M4 or A329) or a railway line. It is anticipated that these manmade linear features would present a significant barrier to dispersal for GCN. As such, it is considered significantly unlikely that GCN would be able to commute between these sites and the application site.

The two sites to the northwest of the site are divided from the site by dense residential developments and roads. As such, it is not anticipated that GCN would be able to commute between these sites and the application site.



Figures 1 and 2: Location of EPS Licences for works impacting GCN (left - green squares) and GCN Class Survey Licence Returns (right) within 2km of the site boundary (red line)

Wider Landscape Terrestrial Habitat Assessment

The site is surrounded by a dense urban mosaic of residential and commercial properties with areas of hardstanding and amenity grassland (see **Figure 3**). These habitats offer only a few low-value foraging, commuting, and resting opportunities for amphibians. Due to the site's urban location, the wider landscape contains habitats which are considered suboptimal to support amphibians. It is considered significantly unlikely that the habitats surrounding the site support significant populations of amphibians. However, as amphibians are known to inhabit urban landscapes on occasion, it is anticipated that small populations of amphibians may be present within the landscape surrounding the site.

The site is bounded on the southern, eastern, and western aspects by intact timber panel fencing. The fencing is in a good condition, with low levels of superficial damage recorded. A couple of small gaps in the fencing were recorded along the southern boundary. No other gaps in the fencing were noted. Additionally, the site is bounded on the northern aspect by a road. As such, it is considered that the site has very limited connectivity to the wider landscape.

Due to this lack of connectivity to the surrounding landscape, it is considered significantly unlikely that individual GCN would be able to access the site, should they be present within the wider landscape.



Figure 3: Location of the site in relation to the local landscape (Google Earth Pro, January 2026)

Assessment of Waterbodies

There are no waterbodies within the application site, however MagicMap identified two ponds within 500m of the site. These waterbodies were located 235m (P1) and 265m (P2) northwest of the site (See **Figure 4**).

A search of historical aerial imagery identified that P2 dried out between 2014-2017, and has remained dry since this point. High levels of grassland and scrub vegetation now fill the pond.

The waterbodies are divided from site by roads and dense residential developments, comprising detached, semi-detached and terraced properties situated within areas of hardstanding and amenity garden.

Due to the presence of significant dispersal barriers between these waterbodies and the site, in combination with the intact fencing which bounds the site, it is considered significantly unlikely that GCN would be able to commute between these waterbodies and the site.

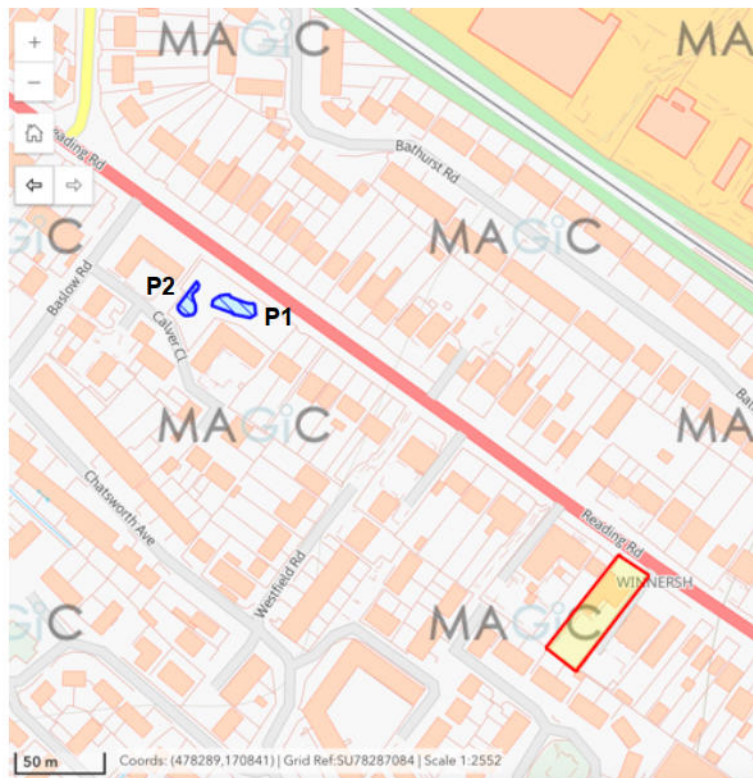


Figure 4: Location of waterbodies (blue) within 500m of the site in relation to the site (red).

On-Site Terrestrial Habitat Assessment

The habitats on site comprise areas of building footprint, developed land; sealed surface, and bare ground. These habitats were all assessed for their suitability to support GCN.

Building Footprint

A two-storey commercial building, totalling 0.0301ha in size, is present on the western boundary of the site.

Areas of building footprint do not provide any suitable foraging, commuting, or resting opportunities for GCN. As such, this habitat has negligible potential to support individuals or populations of GCN.

Developed Lane; Sealed Surface

The site is dominated by an area of developed land, comprising a tarmac carpark. This area of developed land is in moderate condition, with numerous areas of superficial damage recorded throughout the habitat. No areas of significant damage and no encroaching vegetation was recorded.

Developed land; sealed surface does not provide any suitable foraging, commuting, or resting opportunities for GCN. As such, this habitat has negligible potential to support individuals or populations of GCN.

Several piles of construction material are present throughout the tarmac carpark. These materials are all raised on pallets, and as such, offer limited refugia or hibernacula opportunities.

Bare Ground

Areas of bare ground are present along the western, eastern, and southern boundaries of the tarmac car park. These areas comprise predominantly bare earth (which accounts for 85% of the ground cover), with scattered patches of hardy vegetation. The vegetation is sparse in character and is low-lying, with an average height of 20cm-30cm recorded during the survey. Recorded species include bramble *Rubus fruticosus* (approximately 75% of the species composition), garden privet *Ligustrum ovalifolium*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, caper spurge *Euphorbia lathyris*, ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, common ivy *Helix hedera*, and Oregon grape *Berberis aquifolium*.

Whilst the vegetation may offer some low-value foraging opportunities for GCN, the sparse character and short sward height of the vegetation limit the opportunities presented by this habitat. It is considered that the areas of bare earth would not provide suitable protective cover to allow amphibians to commute through this habitat.

Overall, it is anticipated that the areas of bare earth do not provide suitable foraging, commuting, or resting opportunities for GCN. As such, this habitat has negligible potential to support individuals or populations of GCN.

Individual Trees

Six individual trees are present on site, comprising a young ash, two young ornamental cypress, two ornamental semi-mature cherry, and a young sycamore.

The trees on site do not offer any suitable foraging or commuting opportunities for GCN or common amphibians. However, amphibians are known to hibernate or rest in the ground around tree roots. As such, should individual amphibians be able to access the site, they may utilise the root systems of the trees to hibernate.

The trees on site are located within areas of bare ground. Given the sparse and low-lying nature of the vegetation surrounding the trees, it is anticipated that there is significantly limited connectivity between the trees on site and areas of suitable habitat within the wider landscape to support

individuals or populations of amphibians. As such, it is considered unlikely that amphibians would be able to access the root systems under the trees.

Overall, it is considered that the trees on site have very low potential to support individual GCN.

Potential of the site to support GCN

Due to the lack of suitable waterbodies on site, in combination with the lack of waterbodies within the wider landscape with connectivity to the site, it is considered significantly unlikely that the land within the site curtilage supports a breeding population of GCN.

Due to a lack of suitable habitat on site to support GCN and the lack of connectivity to areas of suitable habitat within the wider landscape, it is considered significantly unlikely that individuals or populations of GCN would be present on site. Additionally, it is not anticipated that individual GCN would access or utilise the site on occasion for commuting, foraging or resting purposes.



Image 1: Southeastern corner of the site, facing southeast



Image 2: Southwestern corner of the site, facing southwest



Image 3: Two of the three medium trees along the western boundary



Image 4: The third medium tree on the western boundary



Image 5: Southern elevation of the building on site, facing north



Image 6: View of the southern half of the site, facing south



Image 7: Area of developed surface within the northern half of the site, facing west



Image 8: Area of developed surface within the northern half of the site, facing south

Potential Impacts

Under the current proposals, the habitat to be impacted comprises 0.1129ha of developed land; sealed surface, 0.0010ha of bare ground, and all six individual trees. The habitats to be impacted by the proposals are considered to be of negligible-low value to GCN. Due to the low value of the habitats on site, in combination with the lack of connectivity to areas of suitable habitat within the wider landscape, it is considered significantly unlikely that GCN would be present on site.

As such, it is not anticipated that the proposed works would result in any direct impact to individual GCN, or result in a loss of suitable habitat to support GCN within the local landscape.

The total area of very low value habitat to be removed due to the proposed development is less than 0.01ha and is located 100-250m from the closest pond (P1). The Natural England "Rapid Risk Assessment" matrix, used to assess the need for GCN mitigation licences, calculates that a removal of 0.001-0.01ha of "land" within 100-250 metres of a breeding pond as "offence highly unlikely" (**Table 2**). However, it stipulates that this should be checked for sound reasoning in the context of the application site and that avoidance mitigation measures should be undertaken where appropriate.

Table 2. Natural England "Rapid Risk Assessment" matrix using information from proposals at 424-426 Reading Road.

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.005
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.005
Rapid risk assessment result:	GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY	

Overall, it is considered likely that there will be no residual impacts on GCN, or common amphibians, as a result of the proposed works.

Recommendations

Due to the small scale and localised nature of the proposals, in combination with the low value of the terrestrial habitats to be lost, it is anticipated that there should be no negative impacts to GCN on site. As such, it is considered that further surveys or licensing would be disproportionate to the scale of the works.

As the site falls within a GCN Habitat Zone (Red), reasonable avoidance measures should be implemented during the construction phase to ensure that, in the unlikely event GCN are able to access the site, they are not injured by the works. Reasonable avoidance measures which should be implemented in this case include:

- A *toolbox talk* will be delivered by a GCN licensed ecologist to the Site Manager and all site operatives prior to commencement of work within the site. The toolbox talk will detail the protection measures required during construction, and will induct contractors on the potential to encounter GCN and other protected species such as reptiles, amphibians, birds and hedgehogs, where they may be found, what they look like, the legal protection afforded and best practice methodologies.
- A laminated summary of the identification of GCN will be provided for the Site Office with contact numbers of a licensed GCN ecologist to contact if any are found.
- All works which may impact great crested newt should be undertaken during the day and in suitable weather conditions (above 10°C, light breeze, and dry).
- No existing hibernacula (deadwood, fallen trees, brash piles etc) with the potential to support hibernating GCN can be disturbed during the months of November to January. Hibernacula that fall within the designated works area will either need to be fenced off during this period, or they will need to be identified, dismantled and moved off-site under ECoW supervision outside of these critical months to ensure that hibernating individuals are not disturbed. No potential hibernacula were identified on site during the habitat walkover survey.
- Should any tree removal take place during the amphibian hibernation period (November - February inclusive), this should be supervised by a suitably qualified ECoW. When removing trees, once the main part of the tree has been cut down, the base of the trunk should be carefully lifted using a digger with an ecologist present to check under the roots to ensure no amphibians are present. If they are, the ecologist will be able to move the individual(s) to a more suitable habitat away from the works.
- In order to prevent creating suitable refuges for amphibians during construction, all stored materials should be raised off the ground on pallets or skids. Aggregates, such as gravel or sand, must be delivered in bulk bags and stored on pallets;
- Any vegetation on site will be maintained at a short sward height (sward <100mm) until construction commences to maintain the sub-optimal nature of the habitats on site for amphibians. Should the vegetation grow to longer than 30cm in height, they will be cleared via a two-stage cut under supervision by a suitably qualified ecologist. This will involve strimming under the careful supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist during temperatures above 10°C.

The strimming will be carried out in a two-stage cut, with the first cut to 15 centimetres and the second to ground level. This cut will take place in one direction from north to south, towards the retained areas of on-site habitat in order to give any newts a chance to leave the area and disperse to the wider landscape.

- All arisings from the strimming and clearance will be immediately removed from the works area to prevent any newts sheltering within it.
- Any excavations or trenches on site must be covered whilst works are paused (such as overnight), or a ramp should be provided in order to prevent animals from becoming trapped;
- **In the unlikely event that great crested newt or common amphibians are found within the development area during the works, all works should be stopped and the project manager should contact an ecologist to supervise the removal and release of these individuals.**

Overall, Darwin Ecology Ltd. assesses that any likely impacts to newts within the local area are low and that due to the small amount of habitat removal an offence is unlikely.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



Eleanor Kemp BSc (Hons) MSc

Licensed Ecologist, Darwin Ecology Ltd