

Heathlands Farm  
Honey Hill  
Wokingham  
RG40 3BG

# Great Crested Newt Precautionary Working Method Statement

Report ref.: R2910\_GCN\_a

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## **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was commissioned by William Hosking of the Hall Hunter Partnership to provide a Great Crested Newt (GCN) Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS) in order to discharge Wokingham Borough Council's Condition 7, in relation to planning consent granted for the erection of an extension to the existing pack house following demolition of existing structures (Ref Application: 251260).
- 1.1.2** The application site falls within a 'Red' GCN Habitat Zone and therefore the Council require a statement demonstrating how the proposals will safeguard against the risk of harming GCN. The aim of the GCN PWMS is to provide reasonable avoidance measures to be adopted, to minimise the risk of harming individual GCNs during construction works.
- 1.1.3** A GCN habitat assessment was carried out by John Wenman Ecological Consultancy in March 2025, following a site visit and desk study (Report ref: **R2910\_PEA\_a**). The report identified the risk of GCNs being onsite and affected by the proposed work was low, and therefore no adverse effects on this species are anticipated, if precautionary avoidance measures are undertaken (**see Section 4.2**).
- 1.1.4** This report will likely be valid for up to 18 months; after which point a professional ecologist may need to review the report's validity (CIEEM 2019b).

## **2 INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 Project Background**

- 2.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was commissioned by William Hosking of Hall Hunter Partnership to provide a Great Crested Newt (GCN) Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS) in order to discharge Wokingham Borough Council's Condition 7 in relation to planning consent granted for the erection of an extension to the existing pack house following demolition of existing structures (Ref Application: 251260).

*Prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority a Great Crested Newt Precautionary Working Methods Statement (GCNPWMS), which shall detail reasonable avoidance measures to safeguard individual great crested newts from harm during the development. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details within the GCNPWMS.*

*Reason: To minimise the impacts of development on biodiversity, in accordance with Policy CP7 of Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy, Section 15 of the NPPF, Circular 06/2005 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.*

- 2.1.2** The application site falls within a 'Red' GCN Habitat and therefore the Council require a statement demonstrating how the proposals will safeguard against the risk of harming GCN.
- 2.1.3** A GCN habitat assessment was carried out by John Wenman Ecological Consultancy in March 2025, following a site visit and desk study (Report ref: **R2910\_PEA\_a**). The report identified the risk of GCNs or other notable amphibians being onsite and affected by the proposed work was low, and therefore no adverse effects on this species are anticipated, if precautionary avoidance measures are undertaken.

### **2.2 Site Location and Context**

- 2.2.1** The application site covers an area of 0.15 hectares (ha) to the south east of Wokingham, Berkshire (Central OS grid reference: SU 82897 66341). The site comprises warehouse buildings, surrounded by hard standing, an access track, with a small area of modified grassland on the edge of a field of solar panel arrays, and a bund with bare ground separating the built up

areas and field. Large piles of rubble had been left along the bank which was partially covered in matting and a native hedgerow which had been recently cut to ground level.

- 2.2.2** The site is situated in a rural setting within Heathlands Farm, and is surrounded by fruit fields and polytunnels with established hedgerows and tree lines, and a field of solar panels to the south. Gorrick Plantation - a conifer plantation woodland - is situated 450 m to the southwest. Several patches of deciduous woodland and traditional orchards are situated within Heathlands Farm towards the east of the site including a patch 50 m to the east beyond static homes, which are Habitats of Principle Importance for conservation (HPI) as defined under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. The surrounding landscape consists of a series of ponds and ditches, and lakes.

## **2.3 Report Objectives**

- 2.3.1** For planning applications that are in a red or amber risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing) and within 50m of a known pond, a GCN Statement is required to either demonstrate that harm is unlikely (e.g. through non-licensable measures) or that the risk of harm needs to be mitigated through licensable measures (e.g. district licensing).

### **3 LEGISLATION AND POLICY**

#### **3.1 Relevant Legislation**

**3.1.1** In England and Wales, GCNs found in the wild are fully protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (WCA) and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended); the regulations are commonly referred to as the Habitat Regulations and hereafter referred to as such. The Habitat Regulations refer to European Protected Species (EPS) and the GCN is an EPS. Although the UK left the European Union on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 and is therefore no longer tied to European legislation, the Habitat Regulations have been retained in their current format.

**3.1.2** The legal framework underpinned by the WCA and Habitat Regulations makes these specific actions an offence as follows:

- Deliberately kill, injure, capture or take a wild GCN;
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb GCNs; in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, to rear or nurture their young, to hibernate or migrate, or to significantly affect local distribution or abundance;
- Damage or destroy a place used by a GCN for breeding or resting;  
and
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place used by a GCN for shelter or protection.

**3.1.3** The GCN is listed as a species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity (a.k.a. priority species) in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

#### **3.2 Planning Policy**

**3.2.1** The biodiversity duty imposed through the Environment Act 2021 states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must consider what action they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. Government planning policy, such as the ODPM Circular 06/2005, requires LPAs to account for the conservation of protected species when considering and determining planning applications.

**3.2.2** The ODPM Circular 06/2005 states that 'the presence of a protected species

is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat.’ This policy means that in instances where there is a reasonable likelihood of GCNs being present and affected by a development, surveys must be undertaken to inform a mitigation strategy to be agreed prior to granting planning permission.

### 3.3 Mitigation Licensing

**3.3.1** The government’s statutory nature conservation body, Natural England, is responsible for issuing European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences that would permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations. An EPS mitigation licence can be issued if the following three tests derived from Regulation 55 have been satisfied:

- (2)(e) – the derogation is for the purposes of *‘preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment.’*
- (9)(a) – there is *‘no satisfactory alternative’* to the derogation; and
- (9)(b) – *‘the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.’*

**3.3.2** LPAs have a statutory duty under Regulation 7(3)(e) of the Habitat Regulations to consider and determine whether these three tests are likely to be satisfied by planning proposals affecting EPS before granting planning permission. If an EPS mitigation licence is necessary, a licence can be sought once all the necessary planning consents have been granted. Natural England aims to issue a decision on licence applications within 30 working days of submission.

**3.3.3** The District Level Licensing (DDL) scheme is an alternative approach to traditional mitigation licensing which authorises developments that adversely affect GCNs. Instead of relying solely on site-specific mitigation and compensation, a ‘Conservation Payment’ can be made to fund a net increase in GCN habitat elsewhere. Please refer to the NatureSpace guidance for more details.

## **4 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 Assessment of GCN Habitat Suitability**

#### *Habitat Suitability*

- 4.1.1** The site falls within inside a red risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing) – these zones contain suitable habitat and are the most important areas for GCN (except areas that are nationally important sites designated for GCNs). However the modified grassland, bare ground and developed land it offers is unsuitable terrestrial habitat for GCN and other amphibians to move across.
- 4.1.2** The desk study data included no great crested newt (GCN – *Triturus cristatus*) records within a 1 kilometre radius of the application site. There are eight waterbodies within 500 m of the site, with the closest being 132 m north of the boundary of the application site of the application site. The application site itself had a deep sided drain, which was considered unsuitable for use by amphibians and therefore it is considered that the site is unlikely to offer breeding opportunities for amphibians, such as GCN. The site had some areas of rubble that could provide habitats of suitability for GCNs to shelter and hibernate.

#### *Impact Assessment*

- 4.1.3** The risk of GCNs being onsite and affected by the proposed work is low as although the bank provides sheltering opportunities, it is isolated from offsite ponds, woodlands and hedgerows by well used tracks and hard standing and heavily managed fields, and therefore no adverse effects on this species are anticipated, especially if precautionary avoidance measures are undertaken refer to **Section 4.2**.

### **4.2 Reasonable Avoidance Measures**

- 4.2.1** The following reasonable avoidance measures will be adopted to minimise the low risk of harming individual GCNs:

#### *Pre-commencement of construction activities*

- The area of modified grassland within and adjacent to the development site will be maintained as existing prior to commencement of the works to prevent reptiles, amphibians and small

mammals from colonising the site and

- The piles of rubble on the site should be removed carefully by hand and timed to take place outside of the winter (late October through to February) to minimise the chance of disturbing animals sheltering beneath materials during the hibernation season.

*During construction activities*

- Any stored building materials or waste, such as bricks or debris etc., that might offer shelter for amphibians, will be kept raised off the ground on pallets or on existing hard standing, and efforts should be made to process and removed from site as soon as possible; and
- Excavation works will be avoided after dusk and any open excavations or trenches will be backfilled (after a check for amphibian/reptile presence) or left with escape ramps to prevent amphibians from becoming trapped.

- 4.2.2** In the unlikely event that a GCN or reptile is found during construction, works will stop immediately and a licensed ecologist will be called onto site to ensure the GCN/reptile is not harmed and provide further advice on how to proceed; work will recommence only once further written advice has been received.

## 5 REFERENCES

English Nature (2001). *Great crested newt mitigation guidelines*. English Nature, Peterborough.

Langton, T.E.S, Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. (2001). *Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook*, Froglife, Halesworth.