

**SOUTH WOKINGHAM, BERKSHIRE**

**GREAT CRESTED NEWT  
2026 SURVEY REPORT**

**Final Document**

**August 2026**

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### ECOSA Quality Assurance Record

This report has been produced in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing 2017 (CIEEM, 2017a). The Ecological Impact Assessment and report has been prepared in line with the CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland (CIEEM, 2018) and survey work has been undertaken in line with references within CIEEM's Source of Survey Guidance (CIEEM, 2017b).

|                                 |                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ecological Survey and Assessment Ltd (ECOSA) have been appointed by Miller Homes to undertake great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* surveys as part of ongoing redevelopment works at South Wokingham, Berkshire.

The findings of the great crested newt survey are:

- Great crested newt were not detected by eDNA in any of the tested ponds and are therefore considered likely absent from these ponds,
- A moderate population of great crested newt was recorded in Pond 13,
- There are no significant barriers to dispersal for great crested newt between Pond 13 and the rest of the site, therefore it is assessed that great crested newt may be present in the terrestrial surroundings and may colonise other ponds within the site in the future.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Ecological Survey & Assessment Limited (ECOSA) have been appointed by Miller Homes to undertake great crested newt surveys as part of an Ecological Impact Assessment to support a planning application for the redevelopment of South Wokingham, Berkshire (hereafter referred to as the site).

Great crested newt eDNA surveys were carried out in 2022 which returned a positive result for Pond 12 and Pond 13 (ECOSA, 2026). All other ponds tested in 2022 returned negative results. Due to the time elapsed since these surveys, populations surveys and eDNA survey were carried out in 2026 to reassess the great crested population in the area around South Wokingham.

## **2.0 METHODS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This section details the methods employed during the great crested newt surveys. Any significant limitations to the assessment are also considered.

#### **2.1.1 Survey Methods**

##### *Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) Assessment*

Those ponds and waterbodies located within a 500-metre radius of the site, where access permitted, were subject to a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment (Oldham, et al., 2000). HSI is a numerical index between 0 and 1, derived from an assessment of ten habitat variables known to influence the presence of great crested newt such as geographical location, water body size and permanence, presence of predatory fish and wildfowl, availability of suitable terrestrial habitat and proximity to other ponds. Each factor is scored based on its level of suitability for great crested newt. An HSI of 1 is optimal habitat (high probability of occurrence), while an HSI of 0 is very poor habitat (minimal probability of occurrence). The HSI is calculated on a single-pond basis but takes into account surrounding terrestrial habitat and local pond density. If a pond has a very low HSI score (<0.5) there would typically be a minimal chance of great crested newt presence.

This score can then be used, with caution, to indicate whether further detailed investigations are necessary or whether a particular waterbody can be 'scoped out' as unsuitable for great crested newt. However, professional judgement should be used rather than simply relying on the HSI to eliminate ponds from further assessment. Further detailed investigations would involve targeted surveys carried out between mid-

March and mid-June to determine presence/absence of great crested newt and if present then an assessment of population status.

#### Environmental DNA (eDNA) Survey

The great crested newt environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling was undertaken following current best practice guidelines (Biggs, et al., 2014).

Given the presence of a number of waterbodies within 500 metres of the site boundary an eDNA analysis was undertaken to establish the presence / likely absence of great crested newt from within the ponds which were accessible.

The field sampling entailed the collection of 20 samples of 30 millilitres of water from pre-selected sub-sampling sites around the margin of each waterbody. Sub-sampling sites are chosen to include areas where great crested newt are likely to be present such as areas of vegetation where they may be egg laying and areas of open water where they may be displaying. The 20 samples are then mixed into a single sterile bag from which six samples of water of 15ml are taken, each of which is preserved in 35ml of ethanol. The samples are then refrigerated until analysis at the lab. The samples were analysed in line with current guidance (Biggs, et al., 2014). The samples were taken within the required season (mid-April to June) when great crested newt eDNA is likely to be present within the pond and therefore, the analysis result indicates the presence or likely absence of the species from a given waterbody.

#### Population Size Class Assessment Surveys

The great crested newt survey was undertaken in line with current best practice guidelines (English Nature, 2001).

In accordance with the guidelines, six survey visits were undertaken in order to undertake a population size class assessment. The survey methods employed were torch searches, egg searches, and sweep netting.

The torch searches consisted of an investigation of the ponds after dark using a one million candlepower torch to search for adult great crested newt. All amphibians encountered were counted and sexed, where possible.

The egg search consisted of a methodical inspection of all suitable marginal vegetation for folded leaves that may indicate great crested newt egg laying activity. If great crested newt eggs were encountered during the survey this methodology was abandoned since exposure of eggs increases their risk of predation. This survey technique is only used to confirm presence and therefore, once presence has been confirmed other methods are utilised in order to determine population size class.

The sweep netting survey consisted of an investigation of each waterbody using a long-handled net. All newts encountered were counted and sexed, where possible. This survey technique is only used to confirm presence and therefore, once presence has been confirmed other methods are utilised in order to determine population size class.

It was confirmed in 2022 that great crested newt were present in Pond 13, so population assessment surveys were carried out during 2026 (ECOSA, 2026).

## 2.1.2 Survey Details

### Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) Assessment

The great crested newt HSI assessment was carried out by Katie Watts, Assistant Field Surveyor of ECOSA (Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence No. 2025-81898-SCI-CL08) on 2<sup>nd</sup> June and Joseph Hunt, Field Ecologist of ECOSA (Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence No. 2025-82923-SCI-CL08) on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

### Environmental DNA (eDNA) Survey

The eDNA sampling was carried out by Katie Watts, Assistant Field Surveyor of ECOSA (Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence No. 2025-81898-SCI-CL08) on 2<sup>nd</sup> June and Joseph Hunt, Field Ecologist of ECOSA (Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence No. 2025-82923-SCI-CL08) on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

### Presence/Absence and Population Size Class Assessment Surveys

A total of six survey visits were undertaken between May and June 2026. **Table 1** provides details of each great crested newt survey.

**Table 1:** Great crested newt presence/absence and/or population size class assessment survey details

| Survey Date               | Survey Techniques             | Waterbodies Surveyed | Air Temperature (°C) | Weather Conditions                                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 18 <sup>th</sup> May 2026 | Torching, egg search, netting | Pond 13              | 11                   | Dry and overcast with 100% cloud cover and a light breeze. |
| 28 <sup>th</sup> May 2026 | Torching, egg search, netting | Pond 13              | 22                   | dry with 15% cloud cover and no breeze.                    |
| 29 <sup>th</sup> May 2026 | Torching, egg search, netting | Pond 13              | 20                   | Dry with no cloud cover and no breeze.                     |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2026 | Torching, egg search, netting | Pond 13              | 14                   | Dry with 20% cloud cover and no breeze.                    |

| Survey Date               | Survey Techniques             | Waterbodies Surveyed | Air Temperature (°C) | Weather Conditions                          |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 4 <sup>th</sup> June 2026 | Torching, egg search, netting | Pond 13              | 13                   | Dry with 5% cloud cover and a light breeze. |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> June 2026 | Torching, egg search, netting | Pond 13              | 13                   | Dry with no cloud cover and no breeze.      |

The great crested newt survey was led Hugh Turner, Principal Ecologist of ECOSA (Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence No. 2025-83070-SCI-CL08) and Joseph Hunt, Field Ecologist of ECOSA (Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence No. 2025-82923-SCI-CL08) and assisted by suitably qualified and experienced ECOSA surveyors.

### 2.1.3 Survey Limitations

It was not possible for several ponds to be surveyed. The details of each ponds limitations are in **Table 2**.

**Table 2:** Limitations to Surveys by Pond

| Pond No. | National Grid Reference | Location in Relation to Site Boundary      | Limitation                                              |
|----------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 5a       | SU 8275 6745            | Approximately 100 metres south of the site | Reported as unsuitable and unsafe by landowner in 2026. |
| 5b       | SU 8288 6747            | Approximately 15 metres south of the site  | Reported as unsuitable and unsafe by landowner in 2026. |
| 6b       | SU 8338 6774            | Approximately 15 metres south of the site  | Access denied in 2026.                                  |
| 10a      | SU 8258 6697            | Approximately 150 meters east of the site. | Pond was dry and unsuitable when visited in 2026.       |
| 10b      | SU 8269 6700            | Approximately 250 meters east of the site. | Pond was dry and unsuitable when visited in 2026.       |
| 12       | SU 8204 6793            | Approximately 35 metres north of the site  | Access denied in 2026.                                  |
| 17       | SU 8289 6780            | Located within the site boundary.          | Pond was dry and unsuitable when visited in 2026.       |

| Pond No. | National Grid Reference | Location in Relation to Site Boundary | Limitation                                        |
|----------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 21       | SU 8259 6756            | Located within the site boundary      | Pond was dry and unsuitable when visited in 2026. |

Pond 8, Pond 9, and Pond 15 are no longer within 500 metres of the site due to redline boundary changes and therefore were not surveyed. During the 2022 surveys Pond 4b, Pond 11b and Pond 14 were found to be filled in.

### 3.0 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Introduction

This section details the results of the HSI and eDNA surveys carried out on the ponds in the surrounding area.

##### Great Crested Newt HSI Assessment Results

The HSI survey results determined that only Pond 4a could be assessed as “Excellent”, only Pond 1 could be assessed as “Good”, and only Pond 15 could be assessed as “Average” suitability for great crested newt. All other ponds within 500 meters of the site were assessed as either below average or poor. **Table 3** contains further details about each pond, including their accessibility to the surveyors.

**Table 3:** Ponds within 500m of the Site Boundary - Details

| Pond No. | National Grid Reference | Location in Relation to Site Boundary       | HSI Score | HSI Suitability | Waterbody Notes                                                                                                                                                           | Access Possible                                      |
|----------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1        | SU 8251 6817            | Approximately 150 meters north of the site  | 0.7       | Good            | Dragonfly larvae found, multiple male banded demoiselles found. Duck house present in the centre of the pond. Filamentous algae found particularly in the middle of pond. | Yes                                                  |
| 2        | SU 8357 6850            | Adjacent to the site                        | 0.58      | Below Average   | Extensive duckweed cover, bamboo and rhododendron on banks.                                                                                                               | Yes                                                  |
| 3a       | SU 8244 6663            | Approximately 430 metres south of the site. | 0.39      | Poor            | Pond with litter and evidence of birds. Lots of mosquitoes.                                                                                                               | Only 30% accessible due to steep banks with bramble. |
| 3b       | SU 8248 669             | Approximately 85 meters south of the site   | 0.25      | Poor            | Large pond with reeds at edges. Moorhens seen. Thousands of toadlets present on the banks.                                                                                | 60% accessible – obstructed by reeds.                |
| 3c       | SU 82652 6687           | Approximately 225 meters south of the site  | 0.27      | Poor            | Large pond with large fish and birds. Fishermen observed at the pond.                                                                                                     | Yes                                                  |
| 4a       | SU 8258 6717            | Approximately 74 metres east of the site    | 0.83      | Excellent       | Large pond surrounded by grassy field.                                                                                                                                    | Yes                                                  |
| 6a       | SU 8330 6767            | Approximately 80 meters south of the site   | 0.51      | Below Average.  | Garden pond with algae and lily pads. Man-made stream at the top of the pond but dry at the time of survey.                                                               | Yes                                                  |
| 7        | SU 8347 6815            | Approximately 175 metres east of the site   | 0.55      | Below Average   | Landowner mentioned severe levels of waste from neighbouring yard deposited into pond over a number of years. He believes this has                                        | Yes                                                  |

| Pond No. | National Grid Reference | Location in Relation to Site Boundary      | HSI Score | HSI Suitability | Waterbody Notes                                                                                                                                                                 | Access Possible                                            |
|----------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
|          |                         |                                            |           |                 | caused a reduction in fish stock density. Moorhen and tadpoles known to be present.                                                                                             |                                                            |
| 11a      | SU 8258 6733            | Approximately 30 metres east of the site   | 0.46      | Poor            | Extensive duckweed cover.                                                                                                                                                       | Yes                                                        |
| 15       | SU 8102 6767            | Adjacent to the west of the site           | 0.63      | Average         | Ditch line containing water to the east of pond. Trees surrounding entire pond. Flag iris and rushes present. Scrub and grassland west, south and east. Litter present in pond. | 40% inaccessible. Scrub too thick/banks steep on one side. |
| 16       | SU 8185 6742            | Approximately 10 metres south of the site  | 0.32      | Poor            | Pond surrounded by trees and scrub.                                                                                                                                             | Yes                                                        |
| 18       | SU 8297 6792            | Within the site boundary                   | 0.47      | Poor            | Large drainage pond.                                                                                                                                                            | Yes                                                        |
| 19       | SU 8309 6793            | Within the site boundary                   | 0.48      | Poor            | Drainage pond, lots of reeds and aquatic vegetation present.                                                                                                                    | Yes                                                        |
| 20a      | SU 8287 6819            | Approximately 75 meters north of the site  | 0.44      | Poor            | Large pond with reeds at edges.                                                                                                                                                 | Yes                                                        |
| 20b      | SU 8285 6827            | Approximately 150 meters north of the site | 0.32      | Poor            | Large pond with reeds at edges.                                                                                                                                                 | Yes                                                        |

### Great Crested Newt eDNA Survey Results

The results of the eDNA sampling returned negative results for all ponds tested within 500 meters of the site. It is therefore considered that great crested newt are likely absent from any of these ponds. **Table 4** shows details of each pond tested and its result.

**Table 4: eDNA Results**

| Pond Number | eDNA Result |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1           | Negative    |
| 2           | Negative    |
| 3a          | Negative    |
| 3b          | Negative    |
| 3c          | Negative    |
| 4a          | Negative    |
| 6a          | Negative    |
| 7           | Negative    |
| 11a         | Negative    |
| 15          | Negative    |
| 16          | Negative    |
| 18          | Negative    |
| 19          | Negative    |
| 20a         | Negative    |
| 20b         | Negative    |

### Great Crested Newt Presence/Absence and Population Size Class Assessment Survey Results

**Table 5** presents the results of the great crested newt. At least two species of newt were present in the pond, including great crested newt and smooth newt. A peak count of 20 great crested newt were recorded within the pond. Peak counts of smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris* and common newt were 17 and 20 adult individuals respectively. In addition a number of juvenile great crested newt in their larval and eft stages were recorded within pond 13.

**Table 5:** Summary of Great Crested Newt Survey Results at Pond 13

| Date                      | Number of Individuals Recorded |             |              |                          | Other Amphibians |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------------|
|                           | Great Crested Newt             | Smooth Newt | Palmate Newt | Common Newt <sup>1</sup> |                  |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> May 2026 | 13                             | 6           | 0            | 8                        | 0                |
| 28 <sup>th</sup> May 2026 | 20                             | 2           | 0            | 18                       | 0                |
| 29 <sup>th</sup> May 2026 | 18                             | 0           | 0            | 20                       | 0                |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2026 | 10                             | 17          | 0            | 0                        | 0                |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> June 2026 | 7                              | 5           | 0            | 0                        | 0                |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> June 2026 | 9                              | 0           | 0            | 0                        | 0                |
| <b>Peak Count</b>         | <b>20</b>                      | <b>17</b>   | <b>0</b>     | <b>20</b>                | <b>0</b>         |

#### 4.0 EVALUATION

##### Population Class Size Assessment

It is difficult to establish the true size of a population of great crested newt, due to variations in sampling efficiency and the complex population dynamics involved. Hence, population estimation methods can only give an indication of whether the population is small, medium or large in terms of the number of newts present in the breeding pond.

In accordance with Natural England guidance (English Nature, 2001) survey results should be expressed as peak adult counts per pond per night gained through field survey methods, and a total site count, if appropriate.

Populations can then be classed as:

- 'small' for maximum counts up to 10;
- 'medium' for maximum counts between 11 and 100; or
- 'large' for maximum counts over 100.

<sup>1</sup> A "Common Newt" is an unidentified smooth or palmate newt identified by torch light but where it was not possible to distinguish between the two species

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### Evaluation

Pond 13 was subject to population assessment surveys. At least two species of newt were recorded in the pond; great crested newt and smooth newt. Additionally, high numbers of common newt were also observed. The peak count of great crested newt was 20, which indicates that Pond 13 supports a medium population of great crested newt. It was not possible to access Pond 12 in 2026; however it is considered likely that great crested newt are still present due to the continued presence of the species in neighbouring Pond 13. Due to the moderate population size supported by Pond 13 it is assessed that the pond is of local importance to great crested newt.

The results of the eDNA surveys indicate the likely absence of great crested newt within the other tested ponds within 500 meters of the site. There are no significant barriers to dispersal for great crested newt between Pond 13, Pond 12, and the rest of the site, therefore it is assessed that great crested newt may be present in the terrestrial surroundings and may colonise other ponds within the site in the future.

## 5.0 REFERENCES

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