

Date: 26 August 2025
Application: 251421



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

WBC Ecology Newts

Development Management &
Compliance

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Dear WBC Ecology Newts,

Full Planning Approval Consultation

Application Number: 251421

Applicant: C/O Agent

Site Address: Land At Old Forest Road Wokingham

Parish:

Grid Reference: Easting - , Northing -

Type of Development: Major Dwellings (10+)

Proposal: Full application for erection of 53 no. dwellings with associated landscaping, parking, drainage, open space and other associated works.

Case Officer: Benjamin Hindle

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 251421. Alternatively, public documents are available to view on the Council's planning application search page: [Wokingham Borough Council Online 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 **6 September 2025**.

Yours sincerely,
Development Management & Compliance

MEMORANDUM

From:	NatureSpace District Licensing Officer		
Service	WBC Ecology Newts	App No:	251421
Address:	Land At Old Forest Road Wokingham.		
Proposal:	Full application for erection of 53 no. dwellings with associated landscaping, parking, drainage, open space and other associated works.		
Type of Development:	Major Dwellings (10+)		
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 of further information requested

Either:

- Information regarding all ponds within up to 500m of the application site, including justification for why further surveys are not required, or details of the surveys and their results where they are required.
- Evidence that the proposed development is unlikely to impact great crested newts, including avoidance measures if required, or appropriate mitigation / compensation / licensing measures if impacts are unavoidable.
- If a Precautionary Working Method Statement is demonstrated to be appropriate, amendments to that currently proposed as detailed below.

Or:

- A NatureSpace report and/or certificate as evidence great crested newts will be dealt with through Wokingham Borough Council's district licence scheme.

The above information is requested prior to determination as great crested newts are a material consideration of planning decisions.

Detailed comments

The application site falls within a red impact risk zone, indicating highly suitable habitat for great crested newts and a likelihood of presence. There are multiple records of great crested newts on the northern side of Toutley Road which borders the application site.

According to a May 2020 newsletter for the North Wokingham Distributor Road (Toutley Road), the construction of the road in 2020 involved the translocation of at least 75 great crested newts from the construction area to the newly created Old Forest Meadows country park just north of the road, indicating a substantial local population.

Toutley Road is a relatively wide road with kerbs, gulley pots, and street lights. As such, it can be considered a barrier to newts dispersing into the application site from the north. Drainage plans for the road do indicate the presence of four overland culverts which may provide potential dispersal routes for newts between the northern population and the application site, though the extent to which newts disperse via culverts is currently poorly understood. Approximately 200m west of the application site, vegetation bordering the railway line provides a potential north/south dispersal route which bypasses the road.

There are at least 11 ponds within 500m of the application site, mostly north of Toutley Road, several of which were created as part of the road scheme. The nearest is approximately 100m north of the application site, and there is a pond 150m west of the application site which is connected to the site by woodland with no dispersal barriers. This pond may also be functionally connected to the great crested newt population north of Toutley Road by the adjacent railway line.

The applicant has provided an ecology report (Ecological Impact Assessment, AA Environmental Ltd, June 2025) which states that great crested newts are considered unlikely to be present within the application site but recommends a Precautionary Working Method Statement as a precaution. The impact risk zone is incorrectly reported to be amber, which is a lower risk zone than the actual (red).

This report does not provide sufficient information to assess the likely impacts of the proposed development on great crested newts. The report confirms that there are no ponds within the application site, but ponds within the vicinity of the application site are not discussed. Natural England standing advice for planners is that information on ponds up to 500m from the development site should be provided. It is usually expected that the location of ponds in relation to the application site would be mapped and reasons given for each pond requiring further survey or not. As off-site ponds have not been reported on, sufficient justification has not been given for the assertion that great crested newts are unlikely to be present within the application site. Therefore, it has not been demonstrated that a Precautionary Working Method Statement is appropriate and proportionate to the likely impacts.

Toutley Road was constructed relatively recently and a large population of great crested newts was recorded in the area at the time. It is possible that a population still exists south of the road (within the application site), potentially breeding in the pond 150m west of the site. It is also possible there is some connectivity north and south of the road via culverts and the railway line. These factors should be considered in an assessment of the likely impacts of the proposed development on great crested newts.

If a Precautionary Working Method Statement were evidenced to be appropriate, that provided within Appendix E of the report would require some amendments. One of the controls includes the statement *“areas of the pond bank to be affected by the works should be managed to reduce the sward height...”*. This should be removed as the development is not expected to affect any ponds / pond banks. *“In the unlikely event any species of herpetofauna are encountered, then any animals should be caught and released into nearby habitat that is outside the construction zone”* is confusing because it is contradictory to the specific advice for great crested newts, which should not be caught and relocated as described here, so this should be clarified. Controls should also include the use of animal escape ramps within excavations and appropriate measures for impacts to the higher-suitability habitats where risks of encountering newts are highest. Though as set out above, the information currently provided is insufficient to fully understand what an appropriate Precautionary Working Method Statement would entail, as the potential impacts of the development are unclear.

The applicant alternatively has the option of utilising Wokingham Borough Council’s district licence scheme for great crested newts. Further surveys would not be required, but the district licence scheme must be joined prior to determination of the application.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)			
Date:	27/08/2025	Signed:	NatureSpace