

20 Frog Hall Drive
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 2LF

Great Crested Newt Habitat Assessment

Report ref.: R3143_GCN_a

Report Quality Control Information	
Author	Vicky Potts MCIEEM
Reviewer	Sarah Foot MCIEEM

April 2026


ecological consultancy

1 Diesel House, Honey Hill, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3BL
Telephone: 0118 3271810 Mobile: 07979 403099 E-mail: info@wenman-ecology.co.uk
www.wenman-ecology.co.uk

John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales with registered number OC339057.
Registered office: 1 Diesel House, Honey Hill, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG40 3BL where you may look at a list of members' names.

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2	INTRODUCTION	4
2.1	Project Background	4
2.2	Site Location and Context	4
2.3	Report Objectives.....	4
3	LEGISLATION AND POLICY	5
3.1	Relevant Legislation	5
3.2	Planning Policy.....	5
3.3	Mitigation Licensing.....	6
4	SURVEY METHODS.....	7
4.1	Desk Study.....	7
4.2	Field Survey	7
4.3	Risk Assessment.....	8
4.4	Survey Constraints	8
5	SURVEY FINDINGS.....	9
5.1	Desk Study.....	9
5.2	Field Survey	10
5.3	Risk Assessment.....	14
6	DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	15
6.1	Assessment of Habitat Suitability	15
6.2	Impact Assessment	15
6.3	Reasonable Avoidance Measures.....	16
7	REFERENCES	18
	APPENDIX 1 – PROPOSED SITE PLAN	19

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Ashley Dell to undertake a Great Crested Newt (GCN) habitat assessment at Lake House – a detached dwelling at 20 Frog Hall Drive in Wokingham, Berkshire.
- 1.1.2** The application site falls within an ‘Amber’ GCN Impact Risk Zone within the area covered by the Berkshire GCN District Level Licence and therefore the Council require a statement demonstrating how the proposals will safeguard against the risk of harming GCN. The aim of the GCN habitat assessment is to determine the suitability of the habitats on site and whether further survey and/or mitigation would be required for the proposals.
- 1.1.3** The survey methods comprise a desk-based study for GCN, site walkover survey, and an impact risk assessment. There were no significant survey limitations. The desk study revealed three ponds within 500m of the application site boundary that could potentially support breeding GCNs.
- 1.1.4** The site comprised a residential plot with a garden which comprised of patio, managed lawn, ornamental planting and scattered trees, i.e. terrestrial habitats of negligible - low value to GCN.
- 1.1.5** The development footprint is small and will impact on existing urban habitats, and managed lawn (i.e. terrestrial habitat of negligible - low value to GCN). The construction activities are limited to a two storey side extension and single storey extension replacing an existing conservatory and patio area.
- 1.1.6** The Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN and the proposed works were considered unlikely to result in an offence.
- 1.1.7** In the absence of precautionary avoidance and mitigation measures, there is a low risk that individual GCNs could potentially be injured and/or killed during the construction activities if a local population exists in the wider area. To avoid this, it is recommended that reasonable avoidance measures to minimise the risk of killing individual GCNs are implemented during the construction phase and can be secured via an appropriately worded planning condition – as set out in **Section 6.3**.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

2.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Ashley Dell to undertake a Great Crested Newt (GCN) habitat assessment at 20 Frog Hall Drive, Wokingham, Berkshire.

2.1.2 The survey was commissioned to accompany a planning application submitted to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for a two-storey side extension and single-storey rear extension (refer to proposed plan in **Appendix 1**).

2.1.3 The application site falls within an 'Amber' GCN Impact Risk Zone (see NatureSpace Impact Risk Maps) and therefore the Council require a statement demonstrating how the proposals will safeguard against the risk of harming GCN.

2.2 Site Location and Context

2.2.1 The detached house is located on the eastern side of Frog Hall Drive in Wokingham, Berkshire (central OS grid reference: SU 82495 68443).

2.2.2 The building is within a suburban setting with residential properties and their associated gardens along Frog Hall Drive. A playing field is situated approximately 300 metres to the west and a railway corridor bordered by parcels of woodland and grazing pasture is situated 430 metres to the south. Further surroundings are primarily agricultural to the south with suburban housing in all other directions.

2.3 Report Objectives

2.3.1 The aim of the GCN habitat assessment was to determine the suitability of the habitats for GCN on site and whether further survey and/or mitigation would be required for the proposed development.

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 31st 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 SURVEY METHODS

4.1 Desk Study

4.1.1 The DEFRA Data Services Platform was used to obtain geospatial datasets, such as GCN eDNA Pond Surveys for District Level Licensing and GCN Class Survey Licence Returns, for examination on QGIS. The Multi-Agency Geographical Information Centre (MAGIC) website was examined for nearby granted EPS licences; MAGIC was used in conjunction with Google Earth satellite imagery to identify ponds and assess the permeability of habitats within a 500m radius of the application site.

4.2 Field Survey

4.2.1 The application site was visually assessed for its potential to support GCNs, on the 16th March by Senior Ecologist Vicky Potts MCIEEM registered under the Natural England GCN Survey Class Licence CL08 (Licence no, 2025-83624-SCI-CL08).

4.2.2 GCNs require standing water for breeding and favour small to medium-sized ponds with surface areas ranging from 50m² to 250m². For larval development to take place and young newts to emerge from ponds, ponds must hold water until the end of August (Langton *et.al.* 2001).

4.2.3 GCNs require terrestrial habitats for feeding, movement from pond to pond and for hibernation. Habitats of greatest value to GCNs are those listed below that provide invertebrate prey and provide cover such as under logs or stones:

- Woodland;
- Rough grassland;
- Scrub;
- Hedgerows; and
- Waste ground.

4.2.4 Terrestrial habitats of highest value to GCNs are those rich in invertebrate prey, which provide cover during periods of cold and dry weather, such as under logs or stones for example. Open habitats, such as closely mown grassland, do not provide important habitats for feeding or shelter but can be traversed by GCNs moving between more preferable habitats (English Nature 2001; Langton *et. al.* 2001).

4.3 Risk Assessment

- 4.3.1** A rapid risk assessment of the impacts to GCN was carried out using the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool. The Tool takes into account the impacts of the development on GCN and determines the likelihood of effects on populations in the absence of mitigation.

4.4 Survey Constraints

- 4.4.1** There were no significant survey limitations because GCN habitat assessments can be carried out at any time of year under any weather conditions and the application site was fully accessible.

5 SURVEY FINDINGS

5.1 Desk Study

5.1.1 A European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences was granted for GCN 1655m to the north-east of the site in 2014, confirming the presence of GCN within 2 kilometres of the site. The licence was to destroy a breeding and resting area (Case reference number: 2014-915-EPS-MIT-2). GCN were reported to be absent from a pond 790m to the northeast in 2018 and 1930m to the northwest in 2018. MAGIC revealed a Great Crested Newt Class Survey Licence Return with GCN confirmed in a pond 725m southwest from 2017.

5.1.2 MAGIC and OS mapping revealed that there are three ponds that could potentially support breeding GCN within 500m of the site boundary (see **Figure 1** below); none of which have known GCN records.



Figure 1. Ponds present within 500m of the site – 20 Frog Hall Drive.

5.1.3 Three ponds were present within 500m from the site, with Pond 1 situated 260m to the south, Pond 2 situated 280m to the southeast and Pond 3 situated 365m to the southeast. These ponds were separated from the site by residential development. Other nearby ponds are over 630m to the north and are separated from the site by a busy main road. Individuals newts could opportunistically use the pockets of suitable

habitat to commute between the sites although it is unlikely based on the location of the nearby ponds all being to the south and southeast and the habitats are relatively fragmented.

5.1.4 The application site falls within an 'Amber' GCN Impact Risk Zone (see NatureSpace Impact Risk Maps) – these zones contain suitable habitat and great crested newts are likely to be present.

5.1.5 There were no pre-existing ecological survey reports held by the client or available for the property on the Wokingham Borough Council website.

5.2 Field Survey

5.2.1 The findings of the visual inspection of the site are described with photographs as follows:

5.2.2 The application site comprised a detached residential dwelling, two storage sheds, with urban habitats including a driveway along the western boundary of the site, car parking area, ornamental planting, managed garden lawn and patio to the rear eastern side of the house (**Photographs 1 - 6**).



Photograph 1. Front of the detached dwelling viewed from the west.



Photograph 2. Rear of the detached dwelling viewed from the east.



Photograph 3. Introduced shrubs and gravel driveway to the front of the house.



Photograph 4. Patio to the rear eastern side of the house.



Photograph 5. Shed adjacent to the rear eastern side of the house.



Photograph 6. Shed located on the eastern boundary of the site.

5.2.3 The frequently mown modified grassland was present to the east and west of the dwelling, featuring species such as: perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), daisy (*Bellis perennis*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), and spongy turf moss (*Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*) (**Photographs 7 & 8**). A mature apple (*Malus sp.*) tree was present in the rear garden. Introduced shrubs and scattered trees were present around the boundaries of the house and comprised *Rhododendron* species, bamboo (*Pseudosasa sp.*), *Forsythia*, *Photinia*, honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), spruce (*Picea sp.*), pine (*sp.*), and lawson cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*). Ground flora under the scattered trees included wood avens (*Geum urbanum*), primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), *Cyclamen*, cleavers (*Galium aparine*), pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*), ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*), *Geranium* species, and a *Iberis* species (**Photographs 9, 10, & 11**).



Photograph 7. Frequently mown garden lawn to the front of the house.



Photograph 8. Frequently mown garden lawn to the rear of the house.



Photograph 9. Introduced shrubs to the front of the house..



Photograph 10. Trees and introduced shrubs to the rear of the house.



Photograph 11. Trees and introduced shrubs to the rear of the house.

5.2.4 A couple of log piles and a compost heap was present along the southern boundary in the rear garden, offering potential refuge opportunities for GCN and other amphibians (**Photographs 12 & 13**). A log store was present adjacent to the shed and rear of the house on the southern boundary (**Photograph 14**).



Photograph 12. Log pile along the southern boundary of the rear garden.



Photograph 13. Log pile and compost heap in the south eastern corner of the rear garden.



Photograph 14. Log store present to the rear of the house.

- 5.2.5** There were gaps under a stone wall on the edge of the patio to the rear of the house as well as gaps under the two sheds (**Photographs 15 & 16**). The gaps between the stones offered some limited refuge and hibernating opportunities for GCN, and the gaps under the sheds offered refuge opportunities for GCN and other amphibians. However, they were surrounded primarily by bare ground, patio and managed lawn, and flowerbeds.



Photograph 15. Stone wall on the edge of the patio to the rear eastern side of the house.



Photograph 16. Gaps under the shed by the rear of the house.

- 5.2.1** To the rear of the house there was a concrete path present around the northern side of the house and a patio with some gravel was present around the southern side of the house (**Photographs 17 & 18**).



Photograph 17. Path present to the north of the house in the rear garden.

Photograph 18. Patio present to the south of the house in the rear garden.

5.3 Risk Assessment

5.3.1 Based on the assumption that the nearby ponds all support breeding GCN - the Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN.

5.3.2 The development footprint is less than 0.01ha and the Tool indicates that the loss of or damage to 0.001ha – 0.01ha of land within 250m and greater than 250m is highly unlikely to result in an offence – see **Figure 2** below.

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)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.0005
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.005
Rapid risk assessment result:	GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY	

Guidance on risk assessment result categories

"**Green: offence highly unlikely**" indicates that the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that it is highly unlikely any offence would be committed should the development proceed. Therefore, no licence would be required. However, bearing in mind that this is a generic assessment, you should carefully examine your specific plans to ensure this is a sound conclusion, and take precautions (see **Non-licensed avoidance measures tool**) to avoid offences if appropriate. It is likely that any residual offences would have negligible impact on conservation status, and enforcement of such breaches is unlikely to be in the public interest.

Figure 2. Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool

6 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Assessment of Habitat Suitability

6.1.1 A search on MAGIC revealed a granted EPS licence for the destruction of a breeding and resting place, at a site approximately 1655m to the north-east of the site in 2014, and a class licence return confirmed the presence of GCN within a pond approximately 725m to the south-west of the site in 2017.

6.1.2 The desk study revealed three ponds that could potentially support breeding GCNs within 500m of the application site boundary, with Pond 1 situated 260m to the south, Pond 2 situated 280m to the southeast and Pond 3 situated 365m to the southeast. These ponds were disconnected from the site by residential properties and roads. Other nearby ponds are over 630m from the site to the north and are separated from the site by a main road. A strip of trees was present along a footpath between the two ponds to the southwest but this is still fragmented from the site and unlikely to be significantly used by GCN based on suitable habitats in closer proximity to the ponds to the south and southeast. Individuals newts could opportunistically use the suitable habitat to commute between the sites although it is considered to be very unlikely.

6.1.3 The application site falls within an 'Amber' GCN Impact Risk Zone – these zones contain suitable habitat and great crested newts are likely to be present. However, the application site that will be impacted by construction activities comprised urban and managed garden habitats, that are of negligible to low value for GCN. The site had no ponds present and therefore offered no breeding GCN habitat.

6.1.4 The ornamental planting present on site provide low suitability habitat for commuting GCN. The log piles and sheds offered limited refuge opportunities for sheltering GCN, and the patio stones offered limited refuge and hibernating opportunities for GCN. However the largely managed garden habitats of the site make it less suitable overall, with GCN more likely to use the strip of trees 150m to the west linking to the ponds present to the south and southeast of the application site.

6.2 Impact Assessment

6.2.1 The development proposals include the construction of two-storey and single-storey extensions to the eastern side of the house following the demolition of the detached conservatory, the removal of a section of the patio and gravel to the

rear of the house (see proposed drawings in **Appendix 1**). The amenity grassland and terrestrial habitat in the garden will be retained and can be enhanced for newts.

6.2.2 The development footprint will only impact urban and vegetated garden habitats including patio, gravel, and introduced shrubs located to the rear eastern side of the house (i.e. terrestrial habitats of negligible value to GCN). The wider garden provided some sheltering opportunities for GCN within the ornamental shrubs, within log piles, and underneath the sheds. The majority of the ornamental planting is to be retained. The stone wall around the edge of the patio may need to be removed to facilitate the construction of the new extension, but these should be retained where possible.

6.2.3 The Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN and it was considered likely that the proposed works would unlikely result in an offence – see **Figure 3** above.

6.2.4 In line with the guidance contained in the Tool and the impact assessment presented above, the nature and scale of the proposed development is considered unlikely to breach legislation protecting GCN or their habitats, as the habitats to be impacted on are of negligible suitability i.e. urban and managed habitats. However, in the absence of mitigation, considering some suitable refugia that will have to be removed to facilitate the development, there is a residual risk that individual GCNs could potentially be injured and/or killed during the construction activities if traversing across the habitats on site or sheltering onsite.

6.2.5 To avoid contravening the legislation, it is recommended that reasonable avoidance measures to minimise the risk of killing individual GCNs are implemented during the construction phase – as set out in **Section 6.3** below. There will be no significant change to the use of the site post-development and the extent of development is only minor.

6.3 Reasonable Avoidance Measures

6.3.1 It is likely that any residual offences would have negligible impact on the conservation status of a local GCN population and the enforcement of such breaches is unlikely to be in the public interest. Therefore it is considered that a European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licence or coverage under a District Level Licence would not be required to allow the works to proceed lawfully, but

the following reasonable avoidance measures will be adopted to minimise the extremely low risk of harming individual GCNs and this can be achieved under precautionary measures in an appropriately worded planning condition:

Pre-commencement of construction activities

- The formal mowing of the lawn should be maintained prior to the commencement of site work to minimise the likelihood of GCN colonising the site.
- The careful removal of any required stones around the edge of the patio wall and log piles by hand prior to the commencement of any construction works, and outside of the hibernation period that runs from November to March (dependent on temperatures).
- If GCN are encountered during the removal of the refugia, then all works must be halted until written advice is provided by the ecologist. At this stage, a mitigation licence will be required.

During construction activities

- Any stored building materials or waste, such as bricks or debris etc., that might offer shelter for GCN will be kept raised off the ground on pallets or on existing hard standing, and efforts should be made to process and remove from site as soon as possible;
- Excavation works or piling works will not be undertaken after dusk and any open excavations or trenches will be backfilled (after a check for GCN presence) or left with escape ramps to prevent GCN from becoming trapped; and

6.3.2 In the unlikely event that a GCN is found during the course of construction when an ecologist is not present, works will stop immediately and a licensed ecologist will be called onto site to ensure the GCN is not harmed and provide further advice on how to proceed; work will recommence only once further written advice has been received.

6.3.3 The value of the application site to wildlife will be enhanced by replacing the features suitable for sheltering and hibernating GCN and other amphibians, such as creating rockeries along the boundary or permanent partially buried loggeries and creating additional natural unmanaged habitat along the eastern boundary to provide suitable commuting habitat across the site and between adjacent residential gardens.

7 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.

APPENDIX 1 – PROPOSED SITE PLAN

