



GREAT CRESTED NEWT IMPACT STATEMENT

LAND AT LONGMOOR LODGE, PARK LANE, FINCHAMPSTEAD, WOKINGHAM, RG40
4PT

FINAL REPORT

April 2026

Report conditions

<i>Report title</i>	Great Crested Newt Impact Statement - Longmoor Lodge, Park Lane, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 4PT		
<i>Client</i>	PM Services		
<i>Report status</i>	Final		
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Executive Summary

- This Great Crested Newt Impact assessment was undertaken to support the retrospective planning application for the creation of a solar array on land at Longmoor Lodge, Park Lane, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 4PT
- An assessment of the application site was undertaken on the 9th of April 2026 by Chris Lycett of Phillips Ecology.
- The survey area comprised a residential garden and attached woodland.
- A data search extended to a 2km radius for statutory designated sites and 1km radius for GCN.
- Longmoor bog SSSI and LNR was located adjacent to the site.
- No evidence of protected species was recorded, however, the site supports suitable terrestrial habitat for GCN and a number of ponds were located within 500m of the site. The site was considered to support moderate suitability for GCN in terms of terrestrial habitat which corresponded with its location within the District Licencing Area.
- Enhancements to the site were recommended to create areas of suitable terrestrial habitat, compensating for any potential habitat loss and increasing the extent of usable habitat within the site. These measures included the establishment of rough grassland and the creation of habitat piles.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Report purpose

This Great Crested Newt (GCN) impact statement has been prepared to support the planning application at Longmoor Lodge, Park Lane, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 4PT, Centred at SU 77817 65373. wokin

1.2 Description of proposal

The application is for a solar array that has been built on the land to the south of the house. This is a retrospective application.

1.3 Report context

Phillips Ecology has been instructed by the applicant to undertake an ecological survey of the site to assess the potential impacts of the solar array development on Great Crested Newt (GCN). The planning application (Ref: 260684) includes the following condition:

'The site is located with a red or amber risk zone modelled for the protected species 'Great Crested Newt' as identified on the Wokingham Planning Constraints map. It is important that the local planning authority considers the potential risk to the this species as a result of the proposal. Please supply a site specific 'Great Crested Newt Statement' to consider this risk and whether mitigation measures or a protected species licence would be required. It may help to seek specialist advice through an Ecological Consultant.'

1.4 Scope of assessment

An assessment was carried out on the 9th April 2026. The survey consisted of a field survey and desktop study in order to identify notable GCN records, or protected sites and habitats relative to GCN within the developments range of impact.

1.5 Survey area

The survey area consisted of a residential garden with the solar array occurring in the eastern end of the site. The area directly adjacent to this was also assessed, including wet grassland areas and woodland.

1.6 Survey conditions

Weather during the survey is described as dry, with 20% cloud, a light (F1) south-westerly breeze and 12°C. The weather conditions did not hinder the ecologist's ability to carry out the survey effectively.

1.7 Limitations

Limitations which are specific to each phase of the assessment are provided in the relevant sections, below. The primary limitation is the nature of the retrospective application providing an understanding of what habitat was previously there. Therefore, some assumptions have had to be made, guided by the evidence available.

2. Data search

2.1 Methodology

A desk-based assessment was undertaken by Phillips Ecology on the 14th April 2026 using the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC). The MAGIC database was consulted for records of statutory designated sites within a 2km radius and priority habitats and protected species within a 1km radius.

2.2 Limitations

The data search results are bound by the following statement contained within MAGICs general disclaimer: *“The materials contained on this website are of a general, informational, nature. We have used reasonable endeavours to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the contents of the pages on this site but the information does not constitute advice and must not be relied on as such”*.

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Statutory designated sites

The data search revealed that One site was located within a 2km radius of the application site. Details of these can be found in table 1.

Table 1: Details of Statutory designated sites within a 2km radius of the site

Site Name	Approx. distance and direction from the site	Reason for designation
Longmoor Bog SSSI, LNR	0km, E	Longmoor Bog SSSI is a ~14 ha biological Site of Special Scientific Interest located north of Finchampstead, partly within California Country Park. It comprises a mosaic of carr woodland, wet heath, and secondary mixed woodland, developed on deep peat soils. The carr woodland is particularly notable for its permanently wet, acidic conditions and moss-dominated ground flora, while the wet heath supports vegetation adapted to nutrient-poor, acidic environments. The site is sustained by a high water table and underlying peat deposits, with a small stream running through it. These hydrological conditions are essential for maintaining peat formation and supporting the characteristic wetland habitats. As a result, Longmoor Bog represents a rare remnant of lowland peatland and wet heath in southern England. Ecologically, the site is important for its diverse invertebrate communities, including species associated with wet, acidic habitats such as the bog bush cricket, silver-studded blue butterfly, and various dragonflies and moths. Its conservation value lies in its scarce habitat types, structural diversity, and role in carbon storage. However, it is sensitive to changes in hydrology, nutrient enrichment, and disturbance, all of which could degrade habitat quality.

2.3.2 *Relevance to GCN*

In terms of habitat suitability, the predominance of acidic, waterlogged conditions suggests generally low suitability for the Great Crested Newt, although marginal or transitional areas may provide limited opportunities where suitable refugia and nearby breeding ponds are present.

2.3.4 *Protected species*

The data search revealed no GCN records within 1km of the site boundary. The nearest record was 2km to the north-east.

3. Great Crested Newt assessment

The scope of works, data search and habitat assessment have informed the scope of the GCN assessment and the surveyed site has been assessed for its potential to support GCN based upon the criteria in Table 3.

Table 3: Protected species grading criteria

<i>Grading criteria</i>	<i>Justification</i>
<i>Negligible</i>	Site is entirely unsuitable for species. Presence of species highly unlikely.
<i>Low</i>	Minimal suitable habitat present or, if present, highly degraded/fragmented. Minimal linkage to suitable habitat beyond site. Presence of species unlikely.
<i>Moderate</i>	Presence of some suitable habitat features for species. Surveyed site within/close to known range or known occurrence but factors such as isolation/fragmentation may reduce potential. Presence of species is more likely than not.
<i>High</i>	Presence of optimal habitat features for species. Surveyed site within known range/close to known occurrence. Excellent connectivity to optimal habitat. No justification for discounting presence of species.
<i>Confirmed presence</i>	Species confirmed on site through direct sighting, presence of field signs (e.g. scat, hair, prints, nest, eggs, habitation etc.) or through desk-based assessment.

3.1 Methodology

Great crested newts are only present in their breeding ponds during the spring and early summer – for the rest of the year, they will be dispersed across the surrounding area, generally in grassland, scrub, woodland and hedgerows, although they may be found in gardens and brownfield sites. They can travel some distance from their breeding ponds, and as a general rule, developments within 500m of such a pond may have the potential to have an impact on GCN, although to a certain extent, this does depend on any intervening habitat or barriers to dispersal.

An assessment was made of any waterbodies and terrestrial habitat within the site for their suitability to support populations of amphibians. Suitable waterbodies will generally be characterised by the presence of good quality water, diverse macrophyte cover and an absence of fish. For the protected great crested newt, each waterbody is normally assessed using the Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) system (Oldham et al., 2000) and assigned a grading score between zero (poor suitability) and 1 (excellent suitability).

3.2 Limitations

The HSI for great crested newts is a measure of habitat suitability. In general, ponds with high HSI scores are more likely to support great crested newts than those with low scores. However, in isolation, the system is not sufficiently precise to allow the conclusion that any particular pond with a high score will support newts, or that any pond with a low score will not do so (Oldham et al., 2000).

3.3 Existing Records

No existing records were present within 1km of the site, with the nearest confirmed record occurring 2km to the north-east. The area appears in the orange zone in the Naturespace Partnerships risk zone mapping, suggesting 'moderate habitat suitability', however, red zones are within close proximity to this.

Longmoor Bog SSSI and LNR are located adjacent to the site, with the application boundary directly abutting these designated areas. No records of GCN were identified within the citation or in the available ecological data for this site.

Six ponds were recorded within 500m of the application area footprint, with a further three within 500m of the residential boundary of the site.

3.4 Results.

No evidence of GCN was recorded during the survey. Suitable terrestrial habitat for GCN within the application site is limited. The majority of the garden area comprises closely mown grassland that has undergone a high degree of landscaping, reducing its suitability for amphibians. Due to the retrospective nature of the application, it was not possible to confirm the original habitat composition; however, it is assumed that it was similar to the current condition, consisting largely of short-mown grassland. The presence of soft rush suggests that parts of the site may experience periodically wet conditions. Review of historical satellite imagery (Google Earth) indicates that prior to 2022 the site may have supported more vegetation, including scattered trees and potentially rougher grassland, although this could not be fully verified.

Adjacent to the application site is a section of woodland that connects directly to Longmoor Bog SSSI. This woodland features a dense understorey and is dominated by birch *Betula pendula*, holly *ilex aquifolium*, and rhododendron, *Rhododendron ponticum*. A substantial amount of deadwood is present on the ground, providing potential refugia for amphibians. This woodland extends around the southern boundary of the site, with scattered trees also present within the central garden area. In the southern section, deadwood has been intentionally piled into a large dead hedge using material cleared from the central part of the site, further increasing refuge opportunities.

To the east of the solar array, a wayleave for overhead powerlines supports wetter habitat conditions consistent with those of the adjacent bog. This area comprises rough grassland dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, with small areas of standing water observed in disturbed ground. These features may represent ephemeral pools, although this was not confirmed during the survey. Management of the wayleave has resulted in additional deadwood being present across the area.

Overall, the woodland and wet grassland habitats provide potential terrestrial habitat for great crested newts, offering opportunities for foraging and shelter. These habitats form part of a well-connected ecological network, linking to the wider landscape where suitable waterbodies occur.

3.5 Assessment

The site is located within a Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing area and is therefore considered to have moderate suitability. This is consistent with observations made on site, where suitable features were identified in the surrounding area, including high levels of deadwood within connected woodland and areas of rough grassland.

In addition, several waterbodies were identified within 500m of the site, with interconnected suitable habitat present throughout the wider landscape. This indicates that the wider area provides potential opportunities for terrestrial and breeding GCN.

The site is directly adjacent to Longmoor Bog SSSI, a small but ecologically valuable site characterised by peat-based carr woodland and wet heath, supporting specialised invertebrate communities associated with acidic, waterlogged conditions. These conditions are generally less suitable for GCN, which typically prefer more neutral to less acidic environments. However, surrounding areas exhibit less acidic conditions, and therefore the presence of GCN cannot be ruled out.

It is assumed that the habitat removed from the site was likely unsuitable for GCN, most likely consisting of short-mown grassland. However, there is a possibility that terrestrial GCN habitat may have been disturbed, as previous imagery indicates more structurally diverse vegetation. As such, any potential loss should be compensated for, either through on-site habitat enhancement or via the District Level Licensing scheme.

4. Enhancements

The delivery of biodiversity enhancement on development sites is promoted by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Where opportunities exist, it is considered best practice to provide enhancement features that encourage greater biodiversity within development sites, in accordance with the NPPF and Local Planning Authority responsibilities under the NERC Act. This is consistent with the planning condition for this project; however, as the site is located within a District Level Licensing area, this may also represent an appropriate delivery route.

For this site, the provision of suitable terrestrial habitat on-site would be appropriate to mitigate for habitat loss. This should include an area of rough grassland, connected to the surrounding woodland and the wetter grassland corridor located to the east. This would maintain habitat connectivity between these areas and enhance the available habitat on site.

The existing grassland should be allowed to grow longer, with the potential to improve its botanical diversity over time. Allowing this rough grassland to develop will provide suitable foraging habitat for GCN.

In addition to this, the client has agreed to install a shallow, natural pond that will take advantage of the wetter area within the agreed location. This will provide possible breeding opportunities for GCN and provide more foraging potential.

Three log piles should also be installed using material sourced on site to provide suitable refuge and hibernation features. These should be constructed using a range of branch and stem material of varying diameters, with larger woody material forming the base to create stable voids and smaller brash placed on top to increase complexity. Where possible, log piles should be located in semi-shaded, undisturbed areas and partially sunk into the ground to improve thermal stability and moisture retention, thereby enhancing suitability for amphibians.

An area of suitable habitat has been identified on site that could be used for these enhancements. It is suggested that this area is marked using low-level fencing to ensure it is protected and separated from the remainder of the garden area.

Suitable long-term management of this area would involve an annual cut of no more than one third of the total area, on rotation. This will ensure that succession does not lead to the loss of the grassland habitat while allowing a structurally diverse sward to develop. All arisings should be removed from the area following cutting.

5. Conclusion

The site supports terrestrial habitat for GCN, with woodland and rough wet grassland adjacent to the application area. It is therefore possible that suitable GCN terrestrial habitat was present. It is considered appropriate to provide an area of terrestrial habitat to compensate for this loss, and this has been outlined within this report.

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Appendix 1 – Site Layout





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