

GREAT CRESTED NEWT PROTECTION AND PRECAUTIONARY MITIGATION STATEMENT

Proposed Padel Court Development at Chalfont Park for Wokingham Borough Council

1. Introduction

This statement has been prepared in support of the planning application for the construction of four new padel courts and associated LED lighting on the site of three existing hard-surfaced floodlit netball courts within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough Council.

The proposed development is principally confined to an existing area of hardstanding used for recreational sport. The proposal therefore does not involve the development of an area of existing semi-natural grassland, woodland, scrub, wetland or other habitat of inherent ecological value.

There are no known records of great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) associated with the particular application site, however, there overall area ecological constraints have been identified. Given the legal protection afforded to great crested newts and the possibility that individuals could occasionally move through terrestrial habitat, the development will be undertaken in accordance with a precautionary approach to avoid harm.

This statement sets out the proposed approach to protecting great crested newts during construction and demonstrates that the proposal can be implemented without significant adverse effects on protected species.

2. Site and Development Context

The application site comprises three existing hard-surfaced netball courts. The proposed development will provide padel courts within the established recreational/sports use of the site, together with associated lighting.

The development is therefore largely contained within an existing intensively used and previously developed recreational area. The existing court surfaces provide very limited opportunity for great crested newts to use the site as terrestrial habitat.

Importantly, the proposal does not require the removal of a pond or other aquatic feature and, based on the information currently available, there are no known great crested newt breeding ponds within the development footprint.

The development will consequently avoid direct loss of aquatic habitat and will substantially limit the potential for impacts on terrestrial habitat.



3. Great Crested Newts – Legal and Planning Context

Great crested newts are a European protected species. They are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended.

The legal protection extends not only to individual animals but also to their breeding sites and resting places. Activities that deliberately capture, kill, injure or disturb great crested newts, or damage or destroy their breeding or resting places, may constitute an offence.

Natural England's current standing advice confirms that great crested newts are a material consideration in determining planning applications. It also makes clear that the absence of existing records does not, in itself, demonstrate that great crested newts are absent.

Natural England identifies ponds and slow-flowing water bodies within approximately 500 metres, where linked by suitable semi-natural habitat, as a potential trigger for consideration of great crested newts. Surveys are normally focused on water bodies within approximately 250 metres, with the survey area potentially extending to 500 metres where there are no obvious barriers to movement.

The approach proposed for this development is therefore based on avoidance, precaution and good construction practice.

4. National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires planning policies and decisions to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, including by protecting biodiversity and minimising impacts on biodiversity while providing opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.

NPPF paragraph 187 requires planning policies and decisions to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, including through minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains for biodiversity. Paragraph 192 requires plans to promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats and ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species. Paragraph 193 establishes the mitigation hierarchy, requiring significant harm to biodiversity to be avoided, adequately mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated.

The proposed development accords with these principles because:

- the development is concentrated on existing hardstanding;
- no known great crested newt breeding pond or resting habitat will be removed;
- the proposal does not require the loss of a known ecologically valuable habitat;
- construction precautions will be implemented to minimise any residual risk;
- an ecological watching brief or toolbox talk can be provided where considered necessary by the appointed ecologist; and



- the development provides an opportunity for appropriate ecological enhancements within the wider site where practicable.

5. Wokingham Borough Planning Policy

Wokingham Borough's adopted planning framework contains specific provisions relating to biodiversity.

Core Strategy Policy **CP7 – Biodiversity** seeks to protect important nature conservation interests and supports the incorporation of biodiversity features through development.

The Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Document includes **Policy TB23 – Biodiversity and Development**, which enhances Policy CP7 and addresses biodiversity within development proposals. The policy framework recognises the importance of habitats and species of principal importance and seeks to ensure that development protects biodiversity and incorporates opportunities for enhancement.

The emerging Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023–2040 also specifically addresses protected and priority species. Paragraph 14.16 identifies great crested newts among species receiving special protection under national legislation, while paragraph 14.17 states that where there is a reasonable likelihood that a protected or priority species may be present and affected by development, appropriate survey information should be provided and suitable avoidance, mitigation or compensation measures incorporated where necessary.

The Council is now commencing preparation of its Local Plan 2045. The Council confirms that the Local Plan Update is currently at examination and that adoption is anticipated in 2027. Consequently, the status and weight of emerging policies should be considered by the decision-maker at the time of determination.

6. Assessment of Potential Great Crested Newt Impacts

The principal potential impact on great crested newts would arise during construction rather than from the completed padel courts.

Potential construction impacts could theoretically include:

1. accidental killing or injury of an individual newt;
2. disturbance of an individual animal;
3. damage to terrestrial refuge habitat;
4. temporary storage of materials in areas that could provide shelter;
5. creation of temporary excavations or trenches into which amphibians could fall; and



6. indirect impacts arising from pollution or uncontrolled surface-water runoff.

The risk associated with these impacts is considered to be **low**, having regard to the existing condition and use of the site.

In particular, the three existing netball courts are hard surfaced and provide negligible opportunities for great crested newts to establish terrestrial refugia. The proposal also does not involve the removal of a known pond or other aquatic breeding feature.

Nevertheless, the precautionary measures set out below will be implemented.

7. Precautionary Construction Measures

Prior to commencement of works, the appointed contractor will be briefed on the potential presence of protected amphibians and the legal requirements applying to great crested newts.

The following measures will be adopted:

7.1 Site inspection

Before construction begins, the working area will be visually inspected by the contractor and, where appropriate, an ecologist for any evidence of amphibians or suitable refuges.

Particular attention will be given to any areas of vegetation, accumulated debris, stored materials, gaps around existing structures or other locations immediately adjoining the hardstanding.

7.2 Protection of surrounding vegetation

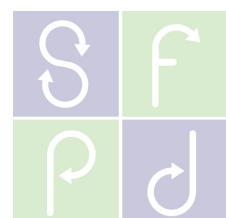
Construction activity will be confined to the approved development and working areas.

There will be no unnecessary encroachment into adjoining grassland, scrub, hedgerows, drainage features or other areas of potentially suitable terrestrial habitat.

7.3 Storage of materials

Construction materials, spoil, waste and other equipment will be stored in designated areas on existing hardstanding wherever practicable.

Materials will not be placed against vegetation or in locations that could provide temporary refuge for amphibians.



7.4 Excavations and trenches

Any open excavations, service trenches or similar features will be managed to prevent amphibians becoming trapped.

Where excavations cannot be closed overnight, suitable escape routes, such as sloping boards, will be provided.

Excavations will be inspected at the start of each working day and before being backfilled.

7.5 Construction debris

Waste materials, rubble, timber, plastic sheeting and other debris capable of creating temporary amphibian refuges will not be allowed to accumulate on site.

7.6 Vehicle movements

Construction vehicles will use the existing hardstanding and established access arrangements wherever possible.

Vehicle movements outside the existing court areas will be minimised.

7.7 Pollution prevention

Appropriate construction environmental controls will be implemented to prevent the release of oils, fuels, chemicals, concrete washings or contaminated runoff into any nearby drainage system, watercourse or pond.

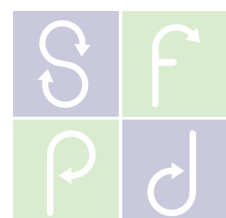
8. Ecological Watching Brief and Unexpected Discovery

Given the absence of known great crested newt records and the highly modified nature of the development footprint, a full great crested newt mitigation licence is not presently anticipated on the information available.

However, if a great crested newt is discovered during construction, works in the immediate vicinity will cease and the animal will not be handled unless this is undertaken by a suitably qualified person and is legally permissible.

The site manager will seek advice from a suitably qualified ecologist before works recommence in the affected area.

The discovery of a great crested newt, or evidence indicating the presence of a breeding site or resting place, will be treated as a potential change in circumstances requiring ecological review.



Natural England's standing advice confirms that where development is likely to affect great crested newts, appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures should be secured and, where necessary, a protected species licence obtained before relevant works commence.

9. Lighting

The existing netball courts are currently floodlit using eight 10.0m high columns and twelve 2Kw metal halide fittings.

The proposed padel courts will include artificial lighting but at a 6.0m mounting height and using four 320 watt fittings per court.

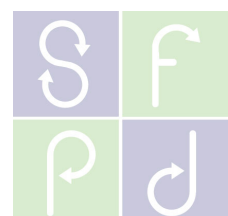
Lighting has been considered as part of the precautionary approach because excessive illumination of surrounding vegetation, potential wildlife corridors and water bodies could affect nocturnal wildlife.

Lighting will therefore be designed to illuminate the playing areas efficiently while minimising unnecessary light spill beyond the padel courts and wider existing netball court area.

Where practicable:

- luminaires will be appropriately directed;
- unnecessary upward light will be avoided;
- lighting will be restricted to the operational hours required for the facility;
- light spill onto surrounding vegetation will be minimised; and
- lighting will not be directed towards any pond, ditch, hedgerow or other potentially valuable ecological feature.

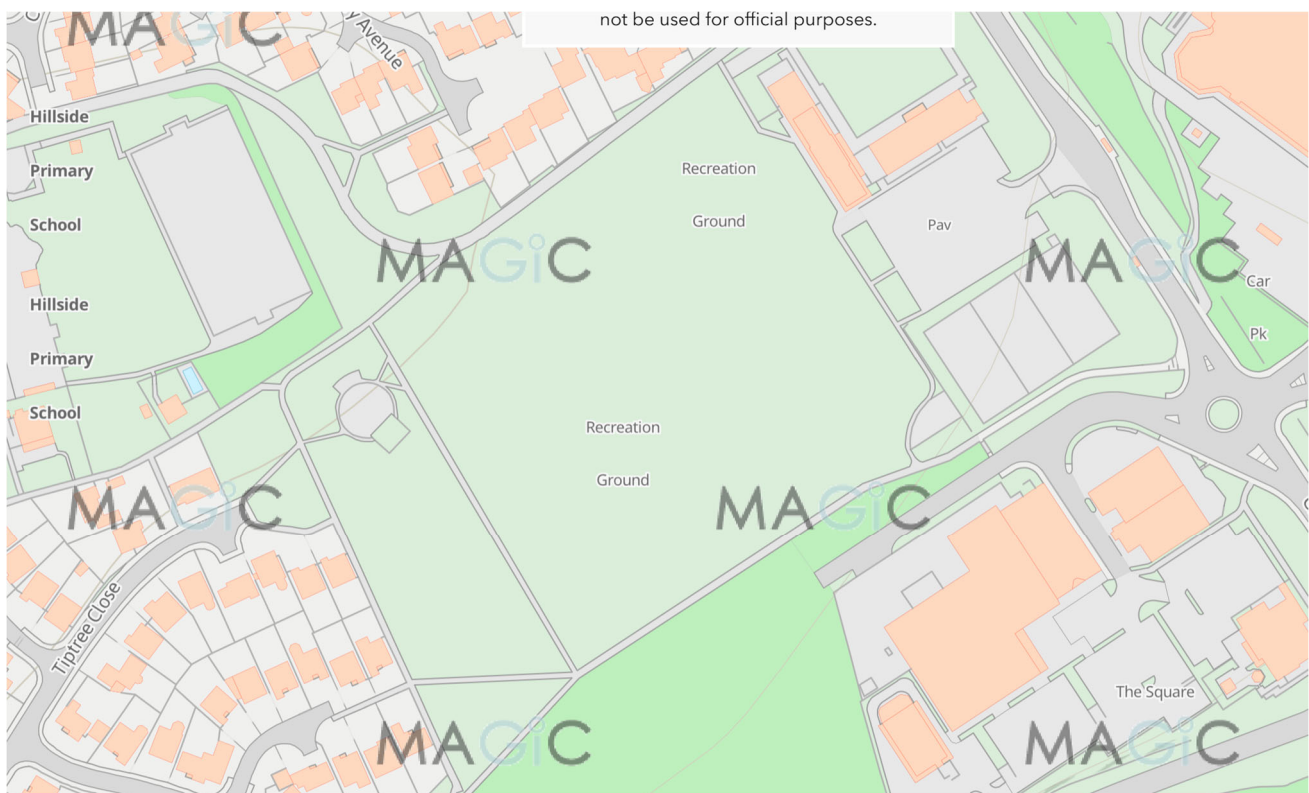
This approach will reduce the potential for artificial lighting to interfere with nocturnal movement of amphibians and other wildlife.



10. Survey Requirements and Precautionary Approach

The current information indicates that there are no known great crested newt records for the particular site application area, however, there are ecological constraints affecting the general site area with a pond 241m away on a school site (see map below).

The netball courts are currently fenced off with a 1.20m high timber board which provides a physical barrier to wildlife entering the area. The area is therefore considered to be low impact minor risk.



The applicant has decided to adopt District Licensing via NatureSpace and they have reviewed the site area and locality confirmed the area is Amber designation with no mitigation requirements necessary (see below).



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NatureSpace case ref.:	202607068
Development scale:	Low impact minor
Impact Risk Zone:	Amber
One-time fee:	£2000 (+VAT)
Mitigation during works:	None
Timescale options:	5 working days*
Quote valid until:	29/10/2026**

Accordingly, prior to commencement, the applicant will confirm that via District Licensing with NatureSpace:

- there are no suitable ponds within the relevant survey area that could reasonably be affected by the proposal;
- the proposed works will not disturb known great crested newt terrestrial habitat;
- the construction footprint remains confined to the existing hardstanding; and
- the precautionary measures contained within this statement are appropriate to the final construction methodology.

If subsequent ecological information identifies a reasonable likelihood of great crested newts being affected, the appropriate level of survey and/or licensing will be undertaken before the relevant works commence.

Natural England's advice states that surveys for great crested newts are normally undertaken during the appropriate seasonal period, with aquatic surveys generally undertaken from mid-March to mid-June and eDNA surveys from mid-April to the end of June, subject to prevailing conditions and current guidance.

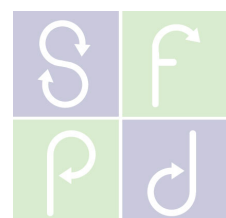
11. Biodiversity Enhancement

Although the proposal is located substantially on existing hardstanding, opportunities for ecological enhancement should be considered as part of the final landscape and site management arrangements.

Where practicable, enhancement could include:

- retention and improvement of existing vegetation around the site;
- use of native species within any new planting;
- creation or enhancement of areas of species-rich planting;
- avoidance of unnecessary artificial lighting of planted or vegetated areas;
- provision of suitable wildlife refuge features outside the construction footprint; and
- appropriate management of any existing grassland or planted areas.

These measures would be consistent with the NPPF objective of securing measurable biodiversity improvements through good design and with Wokingham Borough's biodiversity policies.



12. Conclusion

The proposed development comprises new padel courts and associated lighting on three existing hard-surfaced netball courts within Wokingham Borough.

The application site is already intensively developed and surfaced for recreational use. The proposal does not involve the loss of a known great crested newt breeding pond or the direct removal of known suitable terrestrial habitat.

There are currently no known great crested newt records or other identified ecological constraints affecting the site. Nevertheless, recognising the protected status of the species and the advice of Natural England, a precautionary approach will be adopted during construction.

The proposed measures will ensure that:

- construction remains concentrated on the existing hardstanding;
- adjoining vegetation and potential ecological features are protected;
- materials and construction debris are appropriately managed;
- excavations are managed to prevent amphibian entrapment;
- pollution risks are controlled;
- lighting is designed to minimise unnecessary ecological impacts; and
- any unexpected discovery of a protected species is dealt with appropriately and in consultation with a suitably qualified ecologist.

On this basis, the development is considered capable of being undertaken without significant adverse effects on great crested newts.

The proposal is therefore consistent with the relevant national and Wokingham Borough biodiversity policy framework, including **NPPF paragraphs 187, 192 and 193, Wokingham Core Strategy Policy CP7 and Managing Development Delivery Policy TB23**, subject to implementation of the precautionary measures set out above.

The development represents an appropriate reuse of an existing sports facility and, through the avoidance of sensitive habitats and incorporation of proportionate ecological safeguards, accords with the principles of biodiversity protection and enhancement.

DATE 11.08.2026

