

**Newton Lodge
Crosfields School
Shinfield Road
Shinfield
Reading
RG2 9BL**

GCN Habitat Assessment

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Report Quality Control Information	
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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	7
4.4	Survey Constraints.....	8
5	SURVEY FINDINGS	9
5.1	Desk Study	9
5.2	Field Survey.....	10
5.3	Risk Assessment	12
6	DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	13
6.1	Assessment of Habitat Suitability.....	13
6.2	Impact Assessment and Required Actions.....	13
6.3	Reasonable Avoidance Measures	14
7	REFERENCES.....	15

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Heath Potter to undertake a Great Crested Newt (GCN) habitat assessment at Newton Lodge within the grounds of Crosfields School in Reading. The survey was commissioned in connection with an application for a change of use from the existing residential dwelling to a nursery.
- 1.1.2** The application site falls within an 'Amber' GCN Impact Risk Zone within the Wokingham GCN District 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 was to determine the suitability of the habitats for GCN 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 two ponds within 500m of the application site, with one situated within the school site boundary, that could potentially support breeding GCNs.
- 1.1.4** The site comprised a detached house surrounded by amenity grassland with a few scattered trees, introduced shrub beds, a paved patio and driveway i.e. terrestrial habitats of negligible to low value to GCN. The development proposals is for internal works to the property only. Furthermore, a search on MAGIC revealed no granted European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licence applications for GCN and no class survey licence returns for GCN within a 1km radius of the application site.
- 1.1.5** 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 highly unlikely to result in an offence.
- 1.1.6** In the absence of precautionary mitigation measures, there is a very 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 – as set out in **Section 6.3**.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

2.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Heath Potter to undertake a Great Crested Newt (GCN) habitat assessment at Newton Lodge within the grounds of Crosfields School in Reading. The survey was commissioned in connection with an application for a change of use from the existing residential dwelling to a nursery.

2.1.2 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 house is in a suburban setting, within Crosfields School grounds, with further school buildings to the south of the site and open modified grassland present to the north (grid reference: SU 73291 69850).

2.2.2 The site is bordered by broadleaved woodland present along Shinfield Road to the north-east of the site and bordering the playing fields to the north and southwest. There is a pond present within the grounds of the school 165m to the west of the site and another pond is present 400m to the south of the site, within a residential cul-de-sac on the eastern side of Shinfield Road. Great Whitley Wood Coppice – a parcel of ancient and semi-natural woodland – is present 500m to the south-west of the site.

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 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 23rd April 2026 by Meghan Porter-Smith ACIEEM, an accredited agent under the Natural England GCN Survey Class Licence 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 No European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences have been granted for GCN within a 1km radius of the application site and no GCN Class Survey Licence Returns are within a 1km radius of the site.

5.1.2 MAGIC and OS mapping revealed that there are two ponds that could potentially support breeding GCN within 500m from the site boundary. The closest is situated within the school grounds, approximately 175m to the west of the site and is approximately 25m² in size. The second pond is located 390m to the south of the site, within a residential area on the eastern side of Shinfield Road – as illustrated in **Figure 1** below.

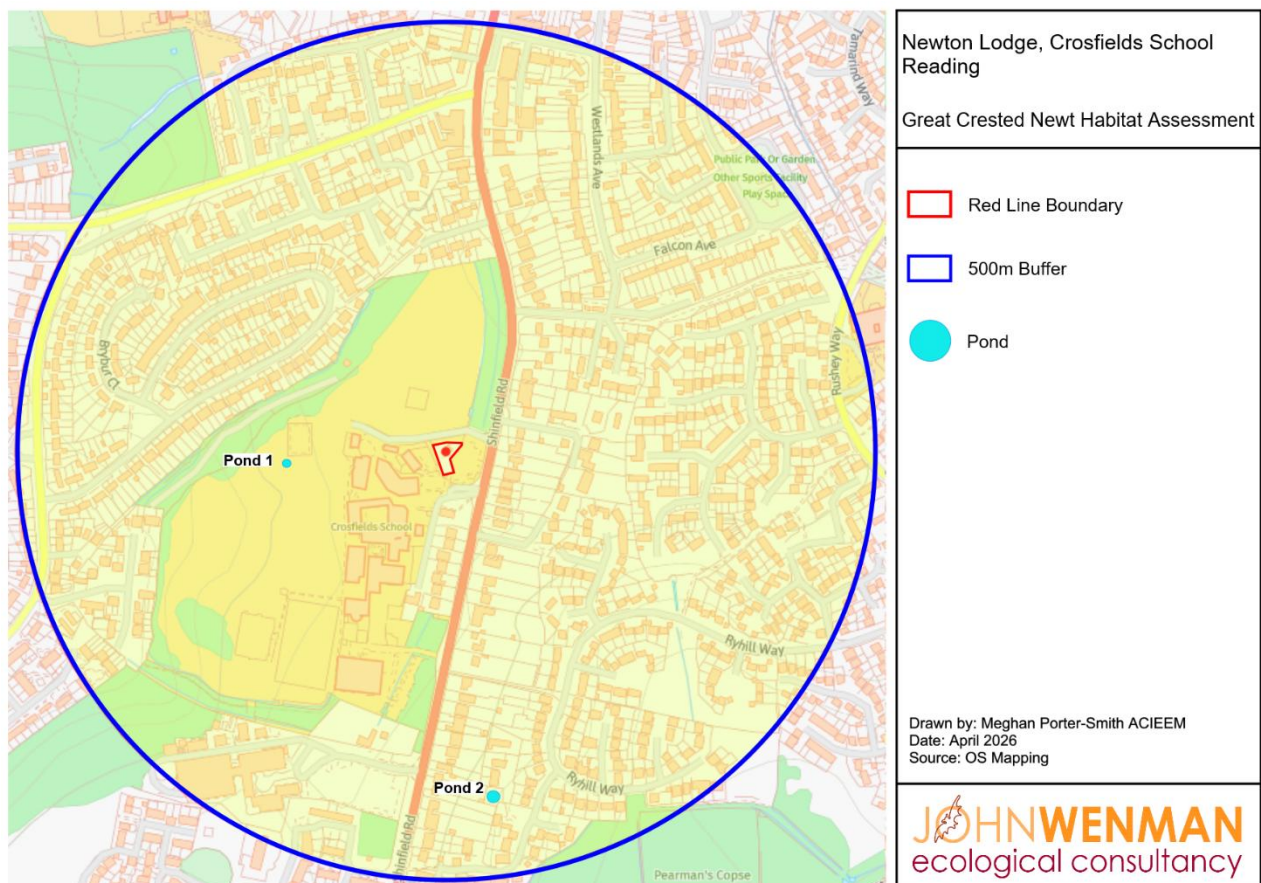


Figure 1. Location Plan.

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

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 chalet bungalow with a tarmac driveway to the south, paved pathways and patio surrounding the bungalow and with a garden mostly comprising formally managed grassland (**Photographs 1-4**).



Photograph 1. Chalet bungalow viewed from the north.



Photograph 2. Tarmac driveway and mown grassland to the south of the site.



Photograph 3. Paving and mown grassland to the east of the bungalow.



Photograph 4. Mown lawn, paving and area of woodchip to the south of the bungalow.

5.2.3 The grassland was shortly mown and dominated by perennial rye grass (*Lolium perenne*), with Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), fescue (*Festuca* sp.), common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), hawkbit (*Leontodon* sp.), daisy (*Bellis perennis*), dove's-foot crane's-bill (*Geranium molle*), speedwell (*Veronica* sp.), clover (*Trifolium repens*), and self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*).

5.2.4 There was a leylandii (*Cupressus × leylandii*) and yew (*Taxus baccata*) hedge present along the western and part of the northern boundary, with occasional introduced shrubs present around the fenceline boundary and very limited ground cover beneath the shrubs (**Photographs 5 - 7**). Species present amongst the flower beds included, *Choisya* sp., *Camelia* sp. and *Viburnum* sp.. A few scattered trees were present on site, including two eucalyptus trees (*Eucalyptus* sp.) on the western boundary and a conifer tree in the southern corner and a rowan tree in the northern corner.



Photograph 5. Leylandii hedgerow along the northern boundary.



Photograph 6. Occasional introduced shrubs along the northern boundary.



Photograph 7. Eucalyptus tree within leylandii hedgerow on western boundary.

- 5.2.5** There were drainage ditches present along the grass playing fields to the north of the site, with a strip of woodland present between the playing field and Shinfield Road. The drainage ditches were dry at the time of the survey, and anecdotal evidence from the client confirmed the ditches only contain water temporarily during periods of heavy rainfall (**Photographs 8 & 9**).



Photograph 8. Strip of woodland and dry ditch along the eastern side of the playing fields to the north of the site.



Photograph 9. Dry ditch within woodland strip, leading from the playing fields to Shinfield Road.

5.3 Risk Assessment

5.3.1 Based on the assumption that the on-site pond supports 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 involves internal changes to the bungalow only, with no increase in developed structures or hard standing within the site and with only temporary damage potential to the garden habitats during any required construction work. The tool indicates that the works are 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)	No effect	0
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 no granted European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licence applications for GCN and no class survey licence returns for GCN within a 1km radius of the application site.
- 6.1.2** MAGIC OS mapping revealed that there are two ponds that could potentially support breeding GCNs within a 500m radius of the application site boundary.
- 6.1.3** The application site falls within an 'Amber' GCN Habitat Zone (see NatureSpace Impact Risk Maps) – these zones contain suitable habitat where GCN are likely to be present. The site was a residential property with garden habitats including a closely mown lawn, scattered trees and sparse introduced shrubs, and hard standing (i.e. terrestrial habitats of negligible value to GCN).

6.2 Impact Assessment and Required Actions

- 6.2.1** The development proposals involve internal works only, with no additional construction of developed land to be added to the existing house. No habitats will be lost, however there could be temporary damage to the onsite habitats if used for storage of equipment or materials while the works are being carried out.
- 6.2.2** Based on the assumption that the pond present within the school ground supports breeding GCN, the Natural England GCN Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN. The Tool indicates that the works are highly unlikely to result in an offence.
- 6.2.3** In line with the guidance contained in the Tool and the impact assessment presented above, the nature and scale of the proposed development is highly unlikely to breach legislation protecting GCN or their habitats. However, in the absence of mitigation there is an extremely low risk that individual GCNs could potentially be injured and/or killed during the construction activities if opportunistically traversing across the habitats on site. To avoid this, 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.

6.3 Reasonable Avoidance Measures

6.3.1 The following reasonable avoidance measures should be adopted to minimise the extremely low risk of harming individual GCNs:

6.3.2 During construction activities

6.3.3 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 on the front driveway, and efforts should be made to process and remove from site as soon as possible.

6.3.4 In the unlikely event that a GCN is found during the course of the construction, 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.

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.