

Application for the proposed erection of a single storey modular nursery building, following demolition of existing family centre modular building.

Planning Application Ref: 261021

Applicant: Orchard Learning Alliance

Site Address: Hawkedon Primary School, Hawkedon Way, Early, Reading, RG6 3AP.

Local Planning Authority: Wokingham Borough Council

1. Introduction

The Wokingham Borough Council Planning Policy and Constraints map indicates that the proposal site is within a Nature Space modelled, “Amber Impact Risk Zone” (defined as “suitable habitat – great crested newts are likely to be present”).

The WBC Development Management Local Validation List, dated September 2025, advises that for Full Planning Applications, where the proposal site is within a red or amber risk zone, a Great Crested Newt Statement is required to be submitted with the application.

This Statement is therefore submitted in support of the full planning application for the erection of a single storey modular nursery building, following demolition of the existing family centre modular building at Hawkedon Primary School, Wokingham.

2. Site and Development Description

The application site is within the established grounds of Hawkedon Primary School, located in Lower Earley, a suburb of the town of Earley, to the north of the M4 motorway in the Borough of Wokingham, in Berkshire.

Built in the 1970’s, the school is situated within a predominately residential area and surrounded on all sides by low density 1970s to 1990s detached and semi detached houses on the northern banks of the River Lodden.

The primary school grounds are also home to the Earleybird Pre-School, ‘Family Centre’ Nursery, housed in a modular building which has been in continuous use for some 33 years. The existing nursery building is located in the south west corner of the school grounds, on a hard surfaced paved area with a similar sized area of closely mown grassland to the south, which provides a suitable secure outdoor play space with age appropriate play equipment. The proposal is for the installation of a new modular nursery building to replace the existing family centre modular building, which is deemed no longer fit for purpose.



Existing nursery and hard surfaced play area

1. Legislative Background – Great Crested Newts

Great Crested Newts are designated as a European Protected Species under Annex IV of the European Habitats Directive and receive special protection under UK law.

In areas other than Special Areas of Conservation, GCN and their habitats are fully protected by the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

The legislation makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take a great crested newt or its eggs;
- Deliberately disturb a great crested newt;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a great crested newt; and
- Possess or transport any live or dead specimens.

2. Great Crested Newts- Habitat requirements.

Great crested newts require terrestrial habitats for feeding, movement from pond to pond and for hibernation. Habitats of greatest value to great crested newts are therefore:

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

GCN spend most of their lives within 500m of a breeding pond. The most populated areas are within 100m of their breeding site, however, a small proportion are also likely to forage for food and shelter in suitable habitats up to 250m from a breeding pond.

Terrestrial habitats of highest value to great crested newts are those rich in invertebrate prey, which will also provide cover during periods of cold and dry weather. Open habitats such as hard surfaced paved areas and closely mown grassland do not provide suitable habitats for feeding or shelter. Although GCN sometimes use garden areas as part of their range, conditions are often unfavourable and the use of the extensive optimal habitat around breeding ponds is more favoured.

3. Proposal Site Location - Habitat Assessment

The proposal site comprises a large area of closely maintained amenity grassland with a number of mature trees and shrubs and a smaller area of tarmac hard standing used as access to and as an external hard surfaced play space for the existing nursery.

The amenity grassland on the site is considered to be of low potential to support GCN as this area of grassland acts as a soft play area for the children and is therefore well maintained with a short sward of less than 100mm.

The immediate areas for use by surrounding the nursery site to the south and west comprise a large estate of residential dwellings with well-maintained private gardens and associated access roads, pavements and verges. The areas to the north and east of the site form part of the primary school site and comprise a tarmac car park and access road directly to the north and hard surfaced play area with a combination of tarmac and soft play surfacing by the pupils to the east. None of these areas are likely to provide suitable habitats for GCN to feed or shelter.

4. Potential local breeding ponds

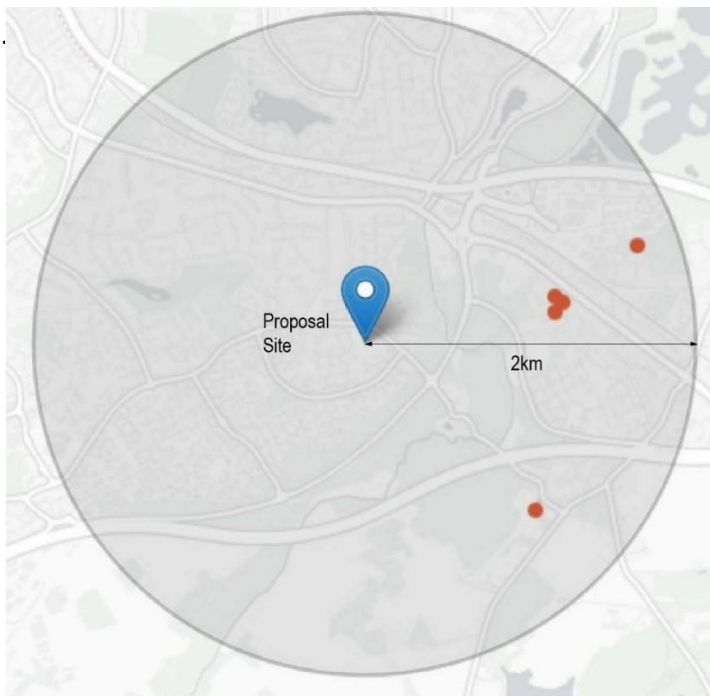
The School site has no standing water and therefore does not provide any suitable breeding opportunities for GCN. There are also no waterbodies or ponds within 250 or 500m of the site. The nearest pond to the application site, as identified on the DEFRA (Magic) Map, is the 'Marefield Dew Pond', which is located approximately 1km west of the site and is surrounded by residential properties, off Rushey Way. The next closest waterbody is the 'Maiden Erlegh Lake', situated a further 320m to the north west, within the Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve.



DEFRA - MULTI AGENCY GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE MAP (MAGIC)

5. The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas

A study of the National Biodiversity Network Atlas indicates that there are no Great Crested Newt presence records within a 1km radius of the proposal site and shows that a total of 16 records, determined by Class Licence Return documents have been identified at four sites within a 2km radius of the site, with no records of any Natural England licences close to the proposal site.



NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY NETWORK (NBN) ATLAS - Great Crested Newt Licence Return Records

6. Local statutory sites of importance for nature conservation

There is a single statutory site of importance for nature conservation within 1km of the application site - Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve – located approximately 900m to the north west. The reserve comprises a lake with surrounding woodland and grassland.

7. Conclusion

The proposed replacement of the existing modular nursery building will result in a small increase to the footprint of the existing modular building of less than 0.001ha. The Natural England Risk Assessment Tool suggests that where between 0.001ha and 0.01ha of land is affected, and the closest breeding pond is 50 metres away, there is negligible likelihood of the proposal having an impact on local GCN populations.

The absence of any suitable breeding ponds or watercourses either on, or within 500m of the proposal site, the closest pond being approximately 1km from the site, mean that it is extremely unlikely that any GCN will be affected by the application proposal.

In addition, the existing closely mown grassland and the tarmac play areas and hardstanding surrounding the existing nursery building are also unsuitable terrestrial habitats for GCN as they provide limited habitats for either feeding or places of shelter and protection.

It is considered that the proposal to remove and replace the existing modular nursery building with a new modular building in the same location at Hawkedon Primary School, will not have an effect on any breeding sites or terrestrial habitats likely to be used by great crested newts and is therefore extremely unlikely to have any impact on the local great crested newt populations.

8. Precautionary Method Statement

Although the likelihood of newts being affected by the proposed work is extremely low, there remains a small risk that individual newts could be present during the course of the work and therefore some precautions during the course of the development should be implemented:

Although excavation works and foundations required for the modular building will be limited, any open excavations and trenches for drainage or foundations should be backfilled overnight, or alternatively, escape ramps should be installed to allow newts or other animals to climb out, if they become trapped.

Any stored building materials that might offer shelter for newts should be kept raised off the ground on pallets and kept on the areas of existing hard standing, and any works to existing drainage and new connections to be observed and checked.

In the unlikely event that a great crested newt is found during the development, works should stop immediately and a licensed ecologist must be called onto site to move the newt to a safe place and liaise with Natural England. At this point, work should continue only once further written advice has been received and any appropriate licences obtained.