

GREAT CRESTED NEWT STATEMENT

Big Fella Brewing
Lockey Farm, Sindlesham Road, Arborfield Cross, RG2 9JH

Planning application	262403
Applicant	Big Fella Brewing Ltd
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Prepared by	Applicant

Submitted in response to Wokingham Borough Council's validation requirement for a site-specific Great Crested Newt Statement.

1. Purpose of Statement

This Great Crested Newt Statement has been prepared in support of planning application 262403 at Big Fella Brewing, Lockey Farm. Wokingham Borough Council has advised that the site lies within a red or amber risk zone modelled for Great Crested Newt and has requested a site-specific statement considering the potential risk arising from the proposal, together with whether mitigation measures or a protected species licence may be required.

The purpose of this statement is to describe the nature of the development, the existing condition of the land affected by the proposal, the extent of ground disturbance associated with the works and the precautionary measures that will be followed to minimise the risk of harm to Great Crested Newts.

This statement does not purport to be an ecological survey or an assessment prepared by a suitably qualified ecologist. It provides factual information concerning the site and the development so that the Local Planning Authority can consider the potential risk proportionately.

2. Description of the Site and Proposal

The application relates principally to the change of use of an existing commercial building at Lockey Farm to provide a commercial brewery and taproom. The proposal also includes the use of associated external land as an outdoor seating area and the erection of a pergola with associated external lighting.

The majority of the development therefore takes place within an existing building and does not involve the construction of a new principal building or extensive disturbance of previously undeveloped land.

The external area adjoining the building was already predominantly surfaced with gravel/shingle prior to the proposed use and does not comprise an area of woodland, scrub, rough grassland, wetland or other substantive semi-natural habitat.

The proposal does not involve:

- the infilling, draining or alteration of any pond;
- works to a watercourse or pond margin;
- the removal of trees or hedgerows;
- clearance of scrub or rough grassland; or
- substantial excavation or regrading of the external area.

3. Ground Disturbance

Ground disturbance within the external area has been very limited. The principal disturbance has comprised localised excavation for the installation of fence posts, which have subsequently been concreted into position.

The proposed timber pergola will utilise these existing fence posts as part of its supporting structure. Consequently, no additional excavation or separate foundations are proposed for the pergola.

Other elements of the external seating area consist principally of furniture, surfacing and lightweight external features which do not require substantive excavation. Accordingly, the

amount of terrestrial ground affected by the proposal is small in the context of the wider farm holding.

4. Existing Habitat within the Development Area

The external development area immediately adjoining the brewery consists predominantly of an existing gravel/shingle surface associated with the established commercial/farm complex.

Prior to the works, the area did not contain any known:

- ponds or standing water;
- dense scrub;
- rough unmanaged grassland;
- log or brash piles;
- substantial deadwood;
- hedgerows; or
- woodland habitat.

No such habitat has been cleared to facilitate the proposed brewery, taproom or outdoor seating use. The proposal therefore principally represents a change in the use of an existing building and an already disturbed external surface rather than development of an undeveloped or semi-natural site.

5. Nearby Ponds and Previous Ecological Information

The applicant is aware that ponds occur within the wider Locket Farm holding. No works are proposed to any pond or its immediate margins as part of this planning application.

The landowner has advised that ecological survey work has previously been undertaken within the wider farm holding. No reliance is placed upon the findings of any previous survey for the purposes of this statement.

No Great Crested Newts have been observed by the applicant within the application site. This observation is not relied upon as evidence of absence of the species.

6. Assessment of Potential Risk

Great Crested Newts can use terrestrial habitat surrounding breeding ponds and consequently the possibility of individual animals occurring away from a pond cannot be excluded solely on the basis that no pond lies within the immediate development footprint.

However, the potential for the proposal to result in harm is considered to be limited because:

1. the development principally comprises the change of use of an existing building;
2. no pond or waterbody is affected;
3. no trees, hedgerows, scrub, rough grassland or comparable semi-natural habitat have been removed;
4. the external customer area was already predominantly gravel/shingle surfaced;
5. ground disturbance has been confined to small, localised fence-post excavations;
6. the proposed pergola will utilise those existing posts and does not require additional foundations;

7. no substantial excavation or earthworks are proposed; and
8. precautionary working practices can be adopted for any remaining minor external works.

On the basis of the physical characteristics of the affected land and the very limited extent of terrestrial disturbance, the applicant considers that the development presents a low potential risk of killing, injuring or disturbing Great Crested Newts or damaging terrestrial habitat used by the species.

This conclusion relates specifically to the nature and extent of the development proposed and is not intended to constitute a finding that Great Crested Newts are absent from the wider Lockey Farm area.

7. Precautionary Working Measures

The following precautionary measures will be implemented during any remaining external works:

- Materials will, wherever practicable, be stored above ground or in a manner that does not create potential amphibian refuges.
- Building materials, timber, rubble and other loose materials will not be left unnecessarily in undisturbed piles on the ground.
- Any excavation that must remain open overnight will either be securely covered or provided with an appropriate means of escape, such as a gently sloping board or ramp.
- Any excavation will be visually checked prior to infilling.
- Care will be taken when moving materials that have been stored at ground level.
- Contractors undertaking external ground works will be made aware that Great Crested Newts are legally protected and will be instructed not to capture or move any animal believed to be a Great Crested Newt.
- Should a Great Crested Newt be encountered during works, works in the immediate area will cease and the animal will be left undisturbed. Advice will then be obtained from a suitably qualified ecologist and/or Natural England before relevant works recommence.

These measures are intended to minimise the already limited potential for accidental harm associated with the remaining works.

8. Licensing

On the basis of the very limited nature of the physical works described above, the applicant does not currently anticipate that the proposal will result in activities requiring a Great Crested Newt mitigation licence.

Should Wokingham Borough Council, its ecological adviser or another competent authority identify information demonstrating that the development presents a materially greater risk than is apparent from the existing site conditions and proposed works, the applicant will obtain appropriate ecological advice and address any necessary survey, mitigation or licensing requirements before undertaking any relevant potentially licensable works.

9. Conclusion

The proposal principally comprises the change of use of an existing commercial building to a brewery and taproom together with the use of an existing gravel/shingle surfaced external area for customer seating.

No ponds or watercourses will be altered or removed. No substantive areas of vegetation or semi-natural terrestrial habitat have been cleared. Ground disturbance within the external area has been limited to small, localised excavations associated with fence posts, and the proposed pergola will use those existing posts without requiring further foundations.

Having regard to:

- the existing disturbed character of the land;
- the absence of works to aquatic habitat;
- the absence of substantive terrestrial habitat clearance;
- the highly localised nature of the ground disturbance; and
- the precautionary working measures set out above,

the applicant considers that the likelihood of the proposal resulting in harm to Great Crested Newts is low.

The applicant will nevertheless continue to comply with the legal protection afforded to Great Crested Newts and will obtain specialist ecological advice should evidence of the species be encountered or should the Local Planning Authority identify a need for further assessment.

Prepared for submission with planning application 262403

Big Fella Brewing Ltd