

102 Colemansmoor Road
Woodley
Berkshire
RG5 4DN

GCN Habitat Assessment

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Report Quality Control Information	
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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Laura Aldridge to undertake a Great Crested Newt (GCN) habitat assessment at 102 Colemansmoor Road in Woodley.
- 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 (including a TVERC data search), site walkover survey, and an impact risk assessment. There were no significant survey limitations.
- 1.1.4** The desk study revealed one lake within 250m but no ponds within 500m of the application site boundary that could potentially support breeding GCNs.
- 1.1.5** The site comprised a detached house and garage surrounded by amenity grassland with a few scattered shrubs, a paved patio, a swimming pool and driveway i.e. terrestrial habitats of low value to GCN. The development footprint is small with no terrestrial habitat being impacted. 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.
- 1.1.6** 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.
- 1.1.7** 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 (i.e. The Moor lake approximately 10m to the east of the 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**.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

2.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was instructed by Laura Alridge to undertake a Great Crested Newt (GCN) habitat assessment at 102 Colemansmoor Road in Woodley to accompany a planning application to be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council for a garage conversion.

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, with neighbouring residential properties and their respective gardens to the north, south and west and The Moor Lake to the east (Garage grid reference: SU 76977 72240). A parcel of broadleaved woodland is present beyond the lake which links to Dinton Pastures Nature Reserve comprising a mosaic of habitats including lakes, ponds, pasture, and mixed woodland.

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 DEFRA Data Services Platform was used to obtain geospatial datasets, such as GCN eDNA Pond Surveys for District Level Licensing and GCN Class Survey Licence Returns, for examination on QGIS. 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 22nd October 2025 by Vicky Potts MCIEEM, registered 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. There are records for the presence of GCN in a pond at Dinton Pastures just over 1200 m to the southeast of the site, with records from between 2014 and 2017 for a GCN Class Survey Licence Return.

5.1.2 MAGIC and OS mapping revealed that there is one lake that could potentially support breeding GCN within 500m from the site boundary, The Moors lake which is located on the eastern boundary of the site – 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 was a garden with formally managed grassland with beds of introduced shrubs around the boundaries and towards the front of the house (**Photographs 1 & 2**). There was very limited ground cover beneath the shrubs and the flower beds were raised along the side of the garage (**Photographs 3 & 4**). A few vegetable patches were present within the grassland to the front of the house (**Photograph 5**). A few scattered trees were present in the rear garden including a cherry tree (*Prunus sp.*) next to a plastic storage shed to the rear of the garage (**Photographs 6 & 7**).



Photograph 1. Rear garden.



Photograph 2. Shrubs along southern side of rear garden.



Photograph 3. Shrubs and vegetable patches present in the front garden.



Photograph 4. Bare soil under the shrubs along the southern boundary.



Photograph 5. Raised flowerbeds along the southern side of the garage.



Photograph 6. Cherry tree to the rear of the garage.

5.2.3 A paved patio was present around the side of the house and garage, and a small wall was present around the southern side of the rear garden, separating the patio from the amenity grassland, which were all fully cemented with no crevices (**Photographs 7 & 8**). A paved patio was also present around a swimming pool in the rear garden which did have some gaps between the slabs (**Photograph 9**). A driveway was present to the front of the house (**Photograph 10**).



Photograph 7. Wall around the rear garden and patio.



Photograph 8. Patio to the rear of the house.



Photograph 9. Covered swimming pool with a patio around the edge.



Photograph 10. Driveway to the front of the house.

5.2.4 A timber shed was present in the rear garden which had some gaps of limited extent underneath (**Photograph 11**).



Photograph 11. Small gaps under a shed in the rear garden.

5.2.5 The grassland was shortly mown and dominated by perennial rye grass (*Lolium perenne*), with Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), fescue (*Festuca sp.*), daisy (*Bellis perennis*) and moss. Species present amongst the flower beds included, bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), vervain (*Verbena*), carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*), rose (*Rosa sp.*), foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), choisya, fern, *Magnolia*, *Camelia*, *Fuschia*, *Geum* and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), and the vegetable patches had planted carrot (*Daucus carota*), cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) and wall flower (*Daucus carota*). Scattered trees included a cherry (*Prunus sp.*), an oak (*Quercus robur*) and apple (*Malus sp.*).

5.2.6 The house backed onto a lake, The Moor which was surrounded by shortly cut grassland and scattered trees (**Photograph 12**).



Photograph 12. Offsite lake and grassland with scattered trees.

5.3 Risk Assessment

5.3.1 Based on the assumption that The Moor 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 footprint is 0ha as it involves a conversion of a garage and there will be no effect on land 100m – 250m from a breeding pond. 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
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)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
Maximum:		0
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 The Moor (approx. 10m east) is the only standing waterbody 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 and hard standing (i.e. terrestrial habitats of negligible value to GCN). There were some gaps in the mortar around the swimming pool which could provide some sheltering opportunities however the risk is low as it was surrounded by shortly mown managed grassland.

6.2 Impact Assessment and Required Actions

- 6.2.1** The development proposals involve a conversion of a garage with no impact or changes to the existing footprint. No habitats will be impacted.
- 6.2.2** Based on the assumption that The Moor 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 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.

6.3.5 The value of the application site to wildlife could be enhanced by adding features suitable for sheltering and hibernating GCN, such as creating rockeries and allowing areas of grassland to grow tall and diversify.

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.