

Property: Land at Duck Egg Farm adj to Highfield Park Wokingham Berkshire RG2 9PP

Application: Proposed change of use of the land for the standing of a static caravan for human habitation and ancillary works.

Planning Authority; Wokingham

Ref:

GREAT CRESTED NEWTS

1. Land in the vicinity of Highfield Park is identified by Natural England as not being suitable for Great Crested Newts in their national project that published its results in 2019. The project was funded by MHCLG. This is shown at **Tab 1**.
2. The same land in the vicinity of Highfield Park is identified by Wokingham Council as having a high probability of supporting populations of Great Crested Newts. This is shown at **Tab 2**.
3. The Wokingham impact risk zones appear to have been developed by an organisation known as Naturespace that relies upon volunteers for its information. This is shown at **Tab 3**.
4. Natural England identifies the ponds in the vicinity of Highfield Park. This is shown at **Tab 4**. The majority of these ponds do not exist (tinted red). There are ponds in the vicinity (tinted green). These were developed as balancing ponds to support development. Natural England further identifies that there have been no licences sought to enable Great Crested Newt surveys. This is also shown at Tab 4.
5. There has been detailed biological surveys of the area. This is shown at **Tab 5**. The surveys identify that the probability of Great Crested Newts being present is low.

6. There is a possibility that nature conservation organisations have sought to introduce the Great Crested Newt into the area, despite the available habitat being identifiable as not being suitable (lack of Great Crested Newts). This is increasingly common. There are substantial populations of Great Crested Newt (former Brick works) in areas of England, and it is known that these are often relocated by people licensed by Natural England.
7. Nature conservation data is often falsified by those involved in the decision-making process. This can be inadvertent. However, this means that there cannot be trust and confidence in the information that they make available.
8. The habitat on the land is suitable for Great Crested Newts that do not form part of a breeding population due to lack of suitable ponds. Any local population present is doomed to become extinct.

CONCLUSION

9. Finger tip searches of the land are to be undertaken prior to any development and in the unlikely event of Great Crested Newts being found a person holding a Natural England or District Newt Licence contacted to relocate any newts found.
10. There is comprehensive survey data available from DEFRA provided by Natural England and this identifies that the probability of Great Crested Newts being present is negligible, The proposed work to take account of great Crested Newts is in conformance with the **non-statutory** guidance published by Natural England and is proportionate. The guidance is shown at **Tab 6**.

Stuart H CARRUTHERS

January 2026

Natural England's Geoportal: England-wide data for great crested newts now available

[Natural England](#), 17 December 2019 - [Wildlife](#)

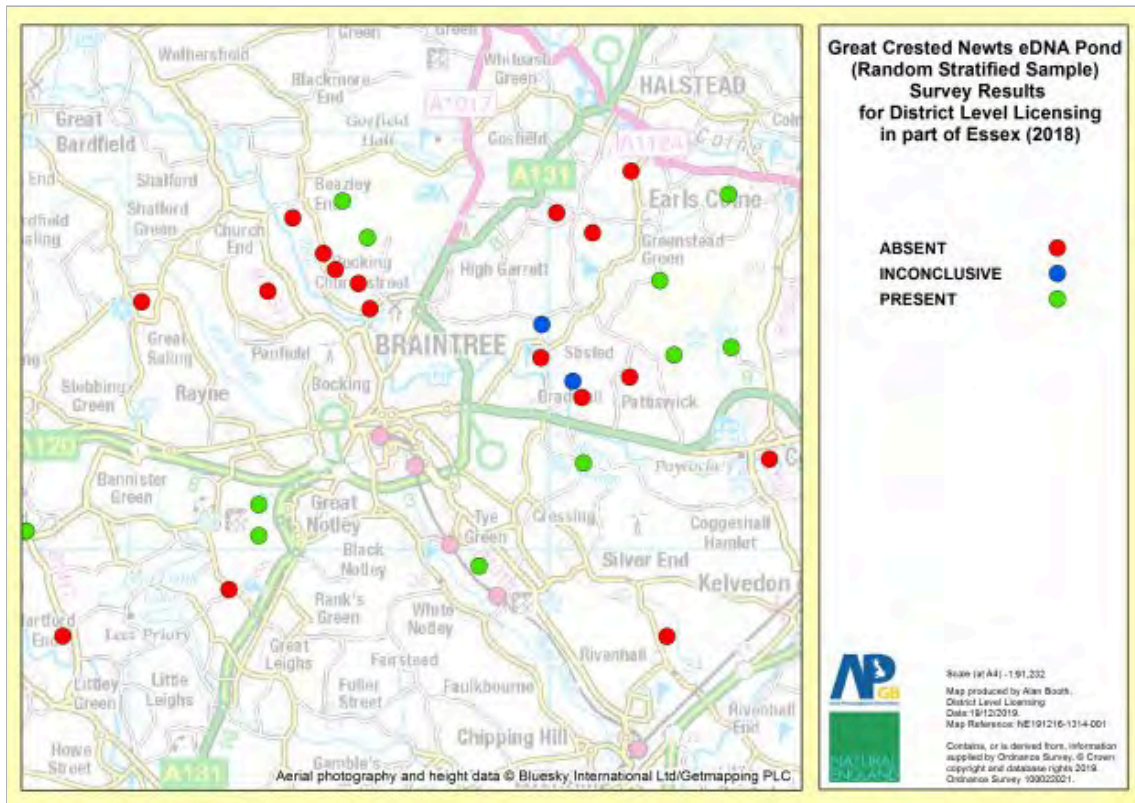
Jen Almond, Natural England's District Level Licensing Programme Manager, on the new data that will benefit great crested newts and developers alike.

Natural England has now [uploaded baseline survey data](#) on great crested newts (GCN) to make it available to all. The project – taking three years to complete – is the largest ever survey of its type for great crested newts across England, and was funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Why is the project important?

This England-wide survey data has enabled Natural England's district level licensing programme – without this data we couldn't have developed this significant new licensing option, an approach that better supports GCN populations, as well as reducing delays for developers.

We hope the data will bring other benefits: it is a fantastic resource coming out of the district level licensing programme, available to all. The data will mean that Local Environmental Record Centres and other groups such as the Wildlife Trusts can help better protect the species. Whilst only a sample of ponds were surveyed, the data will help inform conservation efforts. We hope making the data available will mean that GCN habitats can be better managed as well as linked-up on a landscape scale, helping the species to thrive.



A extract from Geoportal showing the location of GCN ponds

What did we do?

GCN are a visually striking but an elusive species, breeding in ponds and hibernating on land, typically in rough grassland, scrub and woodland. We worked with contractors, with permission from landowners, to survey more than 7,518 ponds using the relatively new environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling technique to establish the presence or absence of GCN.

The survey results are being used alongside mapped landscape features such as pond density to develop landscape scale licensing strategies for the species. We carefully ensured we surveyed a random stratified sample of ponds across a range of landscape and habitat types.

Central to the project are award-winning state-of-the-art species distribution models which predict suitable habitat for great crested newts. These spatial models incorporate all the pond survey data we collected plus existing records correlated with predictive geographic layers which are ecologically important for the species. The resulting model prediction maps of suitable habitat filter through to every part of the project. To find out more about the district level licensing approach read our [blog post on protecting great crested newts](#).



A male great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*). Its skin colour and crest is typical for breeding time.

Why should we protect great crested newts?

GCN are a European protected species. The animals and their eggs, breeding sites and resting places are protected by law. They are widely distributed throughout lowland England. However, the species has suffered enormous declines, with approximately 50% of ponds in the UK lost in the 20th Century and 80% of current ponds in a poor state. A [traditional](#) or a [district level licence](#) is required from Natural England if you're planning an activity and can't avoid disturbing them or damaging their habitats (ponds and the land around ponds).

Who can use the data?

As the data is available under an Open Government Licence absolutely anyone can use it. It is already being put to good use – the data will form part of the evidence used to update the 'Favourable Conservation Status' statement for great crested newts. The Conservation Status is considered 'favourable' when the population and range of the species is healthy and will be maintained into the long term. Monitoring this helps environmental managers, policymakers and scientists effectively protect habitats and species such as great crested newts.

What is the Natural England Open Data Geoportal?

The [Natural England Open Data Geoportal](#) was launched 2017 and provides free and open access to geographic products for download in multiple formats (CSV, KML, Shapefile and ESRI File Geodatabase), web services (ESRI REST and GeoJSON APIs), web applications and story maps. All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated.

A simple explanation of how to access the service can be viewed [here](#).

If you have and [ArcGIS Online](#) organisational or public account you can access and use our data on the [ArcGIS Online](#) platform. Sign in at the top right of the [Natural England Open Data Geoportal](#) home page and try it out, or register for a Public account [here](#). A subset of our geospatial open data layers are also published on the [ESRI Living Atlas of the World](#).

Updates to existing data and new content are released by the end of each month and you can view the latest releases on the [Geoportal home page](#). We [also tweet data and service updates, so please follow us to keep up with the latest news](#).

You can contact us at Data.Services@naturalengland.org.uk with any feedback.



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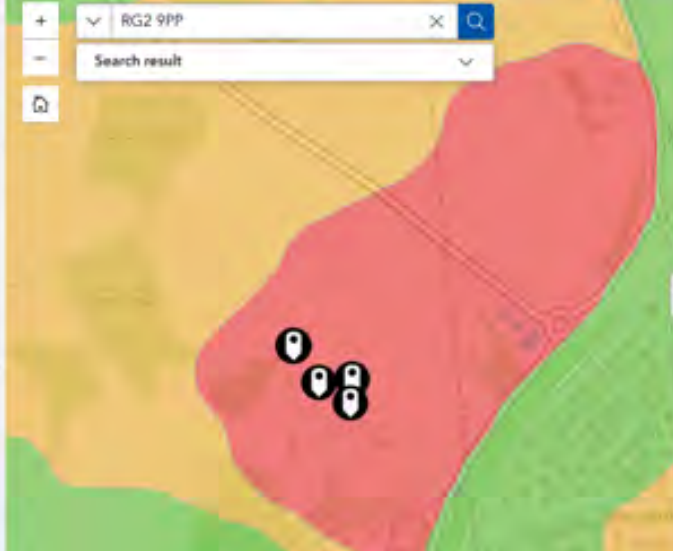
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- ☐ Air Quality Management Areas
- ☐ Bat Roost Habitat Suitability Model
- ☒ Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zones

- White
- Green
- Amber
- Red

- ☐ Landfill Gas Consultation Zones
- ☐ Local Geological Sites
- ☐ Local Nature Reserves



How to...

Layers:

- Layer visibility can be toggled on and off by checking and unchecking the box to the left of the layer in the map layers list to the left.
- Layer groups can be expanded and collapsed using the arrow to the left of the layer group in the map layers list to the left.
- Some layers will not be visible when zoomed out. These layers will appear grey in the map layers list to the left.

Legend (Styling):

- Layer styling can be shown and hidden using the 'hamburger' menu (triple line icon) to the right of the layer in the map layers list to the left.
- The layer must be toggled on (the box to the left checked) for the layer legend to be displayed.

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DELIVERING FASTER DEVELOPMENT ALONGSIDE NATURE RECOVERY

In 2013, DEFRA published a review of the standard licensing system for great crested newts in England. It wasn't optimistic – not only were developers being held-up, but millions of pounds were being spent on on-site mitigation with no evidence of conservation success (and often evidence of the contrary). We recognised the need to help the planning system deliver long-term, meaningful conservation for great crested newts, and NatureSpace was born. Regulated by Natural England, for the past 7 years we have been delivering strategic licensing that's faster for developers, easier for planners and, most importantly, better for newts.

In 2018, the NatureSpace **District Licensing Scheme (/district-licensing)** was launched, set up in partnership with expert freshwater and amphibian NGOs (**The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (https://www.arc-trust.org/pages/category/reptiles-amphibians)**) and **Freshwater Habitats Trust (https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/)**) as well as seven pioneering local planning authorities across the South Midlands.

The scheme has since grown from strength to strength and now operates across more than 70 planning authorities throughout England as well as almost the whole **Network Rail (/organisational-licence/network-rail/)** region. Since 2018, hundreds of developers have been approved to use the local planning authorities' District Licences – meaning over £7.1 million has been put directly into creating or restoring hundreds of clean water ponds and terrestrial habitat.

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OUR STORY IS TOLD IN THE VIDEO BELOW THROUGH OUR TRUSTED PARTNER, FREETHS LLP

A partnership to be proud of - Freeths X NatureSpace case study



BETTER FOR DEVELOPERS

The 'old' standard licensing route has gained great crested newts an unwelcome reputation. Applications through Natural England often take many months and the process is complex, resulting in delays to timescales and increased costs.

Using the latest science and technology, we develop **Impact Risk Zone maps** (</district-licensing/impact-map/>) to determine where newts are likely to be found, and our Natural England approved impact assessments ensure projects pay fair and proportionate fees for their proposed ecological impacts. This means money goes straight into habitat creation, delivered by our NGO partners off-site.

BETTER FOR NEWTS

Over the last 50 years, great crested newts have declined dramatically in the UK and although they are still widespread across lowland England they are no longer common. Despite protection under UK and European wildlife law, population numbers are still declining and habitat loss is sadly their biggest threat.

Together with our partners we have developed a long-term, landscape scale **conservation strategy** (**/conservation/**) for great crested newts, fully funded by our schemes. The compensatory habitats created are in strategic locations for newts, away from the pressures of development. The scheme also funds management and monitoring of these aquatic and terrestrial habitats for at least 20 years, ensuring a sustainable future for newts.

OUR PARTNERS



(<http://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/newt-partnership/>)



(<https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/>)

**amphibian and reptile
conservation**



(<https://www.arc-trust.org/pages/category/reptiles-amphibians>)

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NatureSpace Partnership
22 St Peter's Street
Stamford
Lincolnshire
PE9 2PF

 (tel:01865 688307)
(<https://www.linkedin.com/company/naturespacepartnership/>)
 info@naturespaceuk.com
(<mailto:info@naturespaceuk.com>)
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