

Land rear of 236 Reading Road
Winnersh
Wokingham
RG41 5AA

Great Crested Newt Statement

Report ref.: R2990_GCN_a

<i>Report Quality Control Information</i>	
<i>Author</i>	<i>Conor Watson ACIEEM</i>
<i>Reviewer</i>	<i>Vicky Potts MCIEEM</i>

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1 Diesel House, Honey Hill, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3BL
Telephone: 0118 3271810 Mobile: 07979 403099 E-mail: info@wenman-ecology.co.uk
www.wenman-ecology.co.uk

John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales with registered number OC339057.
Registered office: 100 New Wokingham Road, Crowthorne, Berkshire RG45 6JP where you may look at a list of members' names.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy was instructed by Mr Youell to prepare a Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) Statement for land rear of 236 Reading Road in Winnersh, Wokingham. The GCN Statement was commissioned to accompany a planning application to be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the construction of a new dwelling in the garden of 236 Reading Road.
- 1.1.2** A visual assessment of the site for its potential to support GCN was undertaken on the 15th July 2025 by John Wenman MCIEEM registered under Natural England GCN Survey Class Licence CL08.
- 1.1.3** The application site falls within an amber risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing), i.e. suitable habitat where Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) is considered likely to be present. Two ponds that could potentially support breeding GCN were identified within 250m (Ponds 1 & 2), and a further three up to 500m (Ponds 3, 4 & 5), of the application site boundary.
- 1.1.4** The site is a section of residential garden with no standing water, i.e. GCN breeding habitat, and primarily closely-mown garden lawn, i.e. a very low quality terrestrial habitat for GCN. The garden hedges and the compost heap could provide temporary refuge for individual GCN opportunistically traversing across the site.
- 1.1.5** Based on the assumption that all ponds (Ponds 1-5) support breeding GCN (i.e. the worst case scenario), the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN. The application site is approximately 0.05ha and the Tool indicates that the loss or damage to 0.01-0.1ha of land is highly unlikely to result in an offence.
- 1.1.6** 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 garden lawn on site. To avoid this, it is recommended that reasonable avoidance measures to minimise the risk of killing individual GCNs are implemented pre- and during the construction phase – as set out in **Section 7.1** below.
- 1.1.7** This report will likely be valid for up to 18 months; after which point a professional ecologist may need to review the report's validity (CIEEM 2019b).

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

2.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy was instructed by Mr Youell to prepare a Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) Statement for land rear of 236 Reading Road in Winnersh, Wokingham.

2.1.2 The GCN Statement was commissioned to accompany a planning application to be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the construction of a new dwelling in the garden of 236 Reading Road (see planning drawings in **Appendix 1**).

2.2 Site Location and Context

2.2.1 The application site is a circa 0.05ha section of the garden at 236 Reading Road in Winnersh, Wokingham (OS grid reference: SU 7903 6988).

2.2.2 The site is in a suburban setting characterised by residential properties and the M4 approximately 300m northwest. There is a small wooded area less than 50m southwest of the site, which includes a pond, and further woodland just over 200m away linking to the grounds of Reddam House School.

2.3 Report Objectives

2.3.1 For householder applications that are in a red or amber risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing) and within 50m of a known pond, a GCN Statement is required to either demonstrate that harm is unlikely (e.g. through non-licensable measures) or that the risk of harm needs to be mitigated through licensable measures (e.g. district licensing).

3 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY BACKGROUND

3.1 Relevant Legislation

3.1.1 In England and Wales, Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) 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 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 GCN; 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.

3.2 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 GCN 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 (DLL) 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.

3.3.4 Baseline survey information supporting EPS mitigation licence applications must be up-to-date and have been completed within the current or most recent optimal season. A suitably experienced ecologist will be required to undertake a site walkover/check within three months prior to application/registration submission to confirm that conditions have not changed since the most recent survey.

4 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

4.1 Desk Study

4.1.1 A desk-based study for Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) was undertaken to collate and review existing information about the site and the surrounding land. The study utilised the following open access resources:

- Google Earth and OS maps – satellite imagery and maps were used to identify potential breeding ponds and terrestrial habitat connectivity;
- MAGIC – examined to locate granted European Protected Species (EPS) licences; and
- Pre-existing ecology reports – any available reports were obtained from the client or relevant planning portal to provide background information for the site.

4.2 Site Walkover

Survey Details

4.2.1 A visual assessment of the site for its potential to support GCN was undertaken on the 15th July 2025 by John Wenman MCIEEM registered under 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).

Survey Limitations

- 4.2.5** 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.
- 4.2.6** This report will likely be valid for up to 18 months; after which point a professional ecologist may need to review the report's validity (CIEEM 2019b).

4.3 Impact Risk Assessment

- 4.3.1** A 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.

5 SURVEY RESULTS

5.1 Desk Study

- 5.1.1 The application site falls within an amber risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing), i.e. suitable habitat where Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) is considered likely to be present. Two ponds that could potentially support breeding GCN were identified within 250m (Ponds 1 & 2), and a further three up to 500m (Ponds 3, 4 & 5), of the application site boundary (see **Figure 1** below).

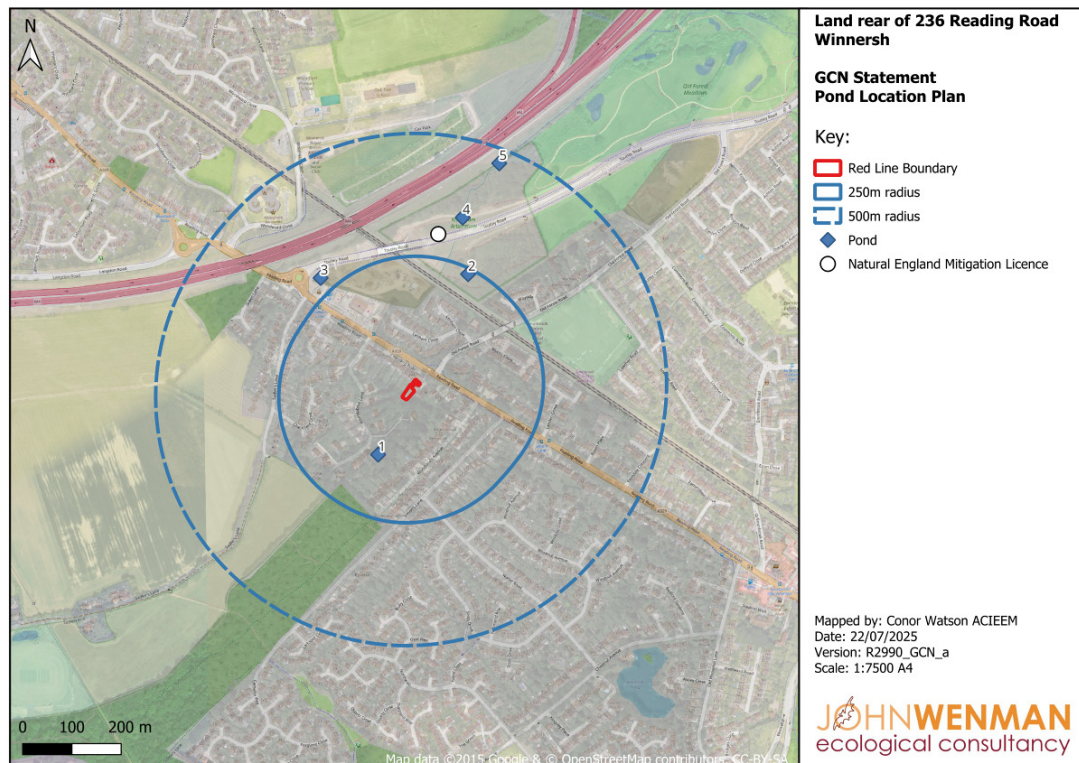


Figure 1. Pond Location Plan.

- 5.1.2 The linked residential gardens could provide some limited connectivity to the pond to the southwest of the site (Pond 1), but the migration of GCN from ponds located to the north (Ponds 2-5) is likely to be obstructed by the Reading Road.
- 5.1.3 One mitigation licence for GCN has been granted by Natural England inside a 500m radius of the application site, covering the damage and destruction of resting places (Case refs.: 2019-41221-EPS-MIT & 2019-41221-EPS-MIT-1) (see **Figure 1** above).
- 5.1.4 No pre-existing ecology reports in relation to GCN were available for the application site.

5.2 Site Walkover

5.2.1 The findings from the visual inspection of the application site are described with photographs, as follows:

5.2.2 The site was primarily closely-mown garden lawn featuring species tolerant of regular mowing (**Photographs 1 & 2**) such as common bent (*Agrostis capillaria*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*), selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), mouse-ear hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*) and springy turf moss (*Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*).



Photograph 1. Garden lawn viewed from southwest end of site.



Photograph 2. Garden lawn viewed from northeast end of site.

5.2.3 There were garden hedges along the site boundaries which were a mixture of native and ornamental woody species, such as privet (*Ligustrum* sp.), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Portugal laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*) (**Photographs 3 & 4**).



Photograph 3. Garden hedge on north-western boundary.



Photograph 4. Garden hedge on south-eastern boundary.

5.2.4 A few small ornamental trees, such as Leyland cypress (*Cupressus x leylandii*) and lilac (*Syringa* sp.), and an open compost heap were present at the end of the garden (**Photographs 5**). Two garden sheds stood on a concrete pad at the northern end of the site (**Photograph 6**).



Photograph 5. Open compost heap at end of garden.



Photograph 6. Garden sheds.

5.3 Impact Risk Assessment

5.3.1 Based on the assumption that all ponds (Ponds 1-5) support breeding GCN (i.e. the worst case scenario), the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN. The application site is approximately 0.05ha and the Tool indicates that the loss or damage to 0.01-0.1ha of land is 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)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.01
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.001
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
Maximum:		0.01
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 Rapid Risk Assessment Tool.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Assessment of Habitat Suitability

6.1.1 The application site falls within an amber risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing), i.e. suitable habitat where Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN) is considered likely to be present. Two ponds that could potentially support breeding GCN were identified within 250m (Ponds 1 & 2), and a further three up to 500m (Ponds 3, 4 & 5), of the application site boundary.

6.1.2 The site is a section of residential garden with no standing water, i.e. GCN breeding habitat, and primarily closely-mown garden lawn, i.e. a very low quality terrestrial habitat for GCN. The garden hedges and the compost heap could provide temporary refuge for individual GCN opportunistically traversing across the site.

6.2 Impact Assessment and Recommended Actions

6.2.1 The proposals seek consent for the construction of a new dwelling in the rear garden of 236 Reading Road (see planning drawings in **Appendix 1**).

6.2.2 Based on the assumption that all ponds (Ponds 1-5) support breeding GCN (i.e. the worst case scenario), the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk of the development proposals adversely affecting GCN. The application site is approximately 0.05ha and the Tool indicates that the loss or damage to 0.01-0.1ha of land is 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 garden lawn on site. To avoid this, it is recommended that reasonable avoidance measures to minimise the risk of killing individual GCNs are implemented pre- and during the construction phase – as set out in **Section 7.1** below.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Reasonable Avoidance Measures

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

Pre-commencement of construction activities

- Any removal of debris or leaf litter (e.g. compost heap) will be carefully searched by hand looking for amphibians; and
- The close-mowing of the lawn should be maintained prior to the commencement of site work to minimise the likelihood of GCN being present during excavations.

During construction activities

- 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, and efforts should be made to process and removed from site as soon as possible; and
- Excavation works will be avoided after dusk and any open excavations or trenches will be backfilled (after a check for GCN presence) or left with escape ramps to prevent GCN from becoming trapped.

- 7.1.2** In the unlikely event that a GCN is found during the course of 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.

Enhancement Opportunities

- 7.1.3** The value of the application site to wildlife could be enhanced by adding features suitable for sheltering and hibernating GCN, such as creating a wildlife pond and hibernacula.

8 REFERENCES

CIEEM (2019). *Advice Note on the Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys*. CIEEM, Winchester.

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.

APPENDIX 1 – PLANNING DRAWINGS

