FAO Chloe Walker
Melton Borough Council,
Burton Street,
Melton Mowbray,
Leicestershire,
LE13 1GH

Planning Application Ref: PP-09530148

25nd March 2021

Dear Chloe,

Re: Proposed construction of two ponds at Lower Grange Farm, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire: Ecology Letter Report

This letter report provides the results of a site visit conducted on 6th November 2020, to assess any potential ecological impacts associated with the proposed pond construction as detailed below. The proposed location and size of the two ponds is shown on the site plan on the appended sheet. A desk study of designated sites and protected/priority species within 1km of the proposed pond locations was also undertaken, and relevant records provided by Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre (LRERC)[1] are included within the text.

Proposals
Creation of two ponds is proposed within semi-improved grassland (P1-046 and P1-047, as shown on Figure 1 in Appendix 1). The two ponds are each proposed to measure approximately 150m^2 with a depth of up to 1.5m, but with a variety of different depths and shallow areas and gradually sloping banks. A swath of terrestrial vegetation will be retained in a 3m wide buffer zone surrounding each pond. Fencing will be installed around the northern edge of the buffer zone surrounding P1-047 to prevent encroachment of agricultural practices. The proposals also include creation of a bund on the south-western bank of P1-046, and on the southern bank of P1-047. The bunds with be created using material from the pond excavation and will be allowed to vegetate naturally. The proposed location and size of the ponds, bunds, fencing, and access route are shown on the figures in Appendix 1.

Initial ground vegetation clearance will be supervised by an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW). Access for machinery will be from Gibson's Lane and an existing lane leading onto the farm to the east of the proposed pond locations. A tracked digger will be used to construct the ponds, to minimise damage to surrounding field margins and arable

[1] A full copy of the desk study can be provided upon request.

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land. If it is not possible to use a tracked digger, track mats will be used where it is necessary for the machinery to track over vegetation.

Site Location and Description
The proposed ponds are to be located on semi-improved grassland used for grazing livestock and recreation to the east of Wymeswold off the Old North Road, at grid references SK 65455 22344 (P1-046) and SK 65482 22377 (P1-047). The land is flat and the soil is predominantly clay; at the time of the site visit the locations of the proposed ponds were largely damp with high water retention.

P1-046
The proposed location for P1-046 is within a small paddock of semi-improved grassland, immediately east of a residential property. The land is not agriculturally managed, however the sward is mown regularly throughout the summer months. The semi-improved grassland comprises dominant[2] perennial rye (*Lolium perenne*) with abundant dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale agg*), occasional broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), white dead-nettle (*Lamium album*), and creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), and rare silverweed (*Argentina anserina*) and Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*). The semi-improved grassland is interspersed with young scattered broadleaved trees and bordered by three dense hedgerows to the north, west, and south. The tree species comprised silver birch (*Holcus lanatus*), crack willow (*Salix fragilis*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), wild cherry (*Prunus avium*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*) and quince (*Cydonia oblonga*). The hedgerow species comprised spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and hazel.

[2] DAFOR Scale has been used to describe the abundance of floral species.

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Above: Proposed location of P1-046, within a parcel of semi-improved grassland and surrounded by scattered broadleaved trees and dense hedgerows. View east (left) and south-east (right).

P1-047

This pond is to be located approximately 50m to the north-east of P1-046 and set within a large parcel of semi-improved neutral grassland used for grazing livestock. The sward is closely cropped through intensive grazing and comprises predominantly perennial rye, Yorkshire fog, and red and white clover (*Trifolium* sp.). This area of the field is largely damp for the winter months and is heavy clay loam. The main residential garden and property is located less than 20m to the south and a small amenity orchard is positioned immediately south of the proposed pond. Species comprise apple (*Malus domestiac*) and tall ruderal species including common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), broad-leaved dock and willow herb species (*Epilobium* sp.). The proposals involve the removal of the fence surrounding the orchard so that this habitat can be incorporated into the pond buffer. The pond will be positioned immediately north of the orchard within the semi-improved grassland.

The surrounding landscape is made up largely of residential gardens, arable fields, and grazing pasture and is within a rural setting. There are existing waterbodies scattered within the grazing landscape and connected via hedgerows and rough field margins.

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Above: Proposed location of P1-047, within a parcel of semi-improved grassland (*right*) used for grazing livestock with an amenity orchard to the south (*left*). View south-east (left) and south (right).

Designated Nature Conservation Sites

There are no designated nature conservation sites within 1km of the site, although the data search returned several records of potential Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). These vary from important hedgerows to mature trees and ponds, the nearest of which is located approximately 200m to the south-west of the site, namely Old Dalby Paddy's Lane Ash. Due to the small scale and nature of the works no impact will be caused to any potential LWS, and as such no mitigation is necessary.

Habitats

Machinery will access the pond locations via Gibson's lane to the east, and a tracked digger, or track mats where necessary, will be used to limit damage to the ground (shown on Figure 1 in Appendix 1). As such, there will be minimal impact to grassland field margins or other vegetation outside of the excavation area. No seeding of the bunds or buffer zone will be undertaken, and the vegetation will be left to regenerate naturally. It is expected that this will occur over the next growing season.

Floral Species

There are no protected or priority plant species within the site or the surrounding study area and as such no mitigation is required.

There are no records of invasive plant species within 1km of the site, and none were noted during the site visit.

Faunal Species

The desk study revealed records of protected/priority species within 1km of the proposed pond locations, including bats, birds, amphibians, and badgers (*Meles meles*).

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Where the proposed works have potential to impact these species, this has been discussed below.

No trees will be impacted by the works, therefore there will be no disturbance to any potential bat roosting features or barn owl roost sites.

The excavation works for P1-047 will require removal of tall ruderal vegetation, which is suitable habitat for nesting birds. If vegetation removal is to be conducted between March and August (the bird breeding season), the ECoW will undertake a search for nesting birds within 24 hours immediately prior to vegetation clearance to ensure no active nests will be disturbed. If active nests, or nests under construction, are found then the ECoW will establish an appropriate buffer around the nest/s, and the vegetation clearance works within the buffer will cease until all chicks have fledged.

Neither pond area is currently suitable for breeding amphibians due to lack of any standing water. The grassland in both areas of works (P1-046 and P1-047) offers some, albeit limited foraging and sheltering opportunities for amphibians, such as common frog (*Rana temporaria*) and common toad (*Bufo bufo*), as well as some potential to provide shelter for grass snake (*Natrix natrix*). As such, under ECoW supervision any vegetation to be cleared will be first cut to a height of 15cm, after which the ECoW will conduct a fingertip search of the ground and remaining vegetation. Under ECoW supervision the turf of the proposed pond locations will be removed reduce its suitability for amphibians and reptiles. Any common amphibians or reptiles found will be moved out of the working area to suitable nearby habitat by the ECoW. If any great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) are found they will be moved by an appropriately qualified ECoW to suitable terrestrial habitat within 20m of where they were found (under a licence to disturb issued by Natural England, reference WML–OR59).

Although no evidence of badger was noted within the site during the visit, the habitat surrounding the proposed pond locations offers suitable habitat and the desk study revealed records of badger within 1km of the site. As a precaution the ECoW will conduct a search for badger setts within 30m of the proposed access tracks and pond locations prior to the start of works. If any setts are found, a 30m exclusion zone will be established to exclude machinery for the duration of the works. As the ponds are designed to have gradually sloping sides the excavations will not pose a trap risk to mammals, as any mammals will be able to climb out.

Conclusions

It is concluded that any potential ecological impacts will be minimal, as the works will be undertaken over a short time period and an ECoW will conduct checks for breeding birds, reptiles, amphibians, and badgers prior to works.

Once the ponds are established, the habitats in the area will be enhanced for a variety of fauna. The ponds will have a range of shallows and deeper areas of open water, and areas

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of well-developed emergent vegetation to enhance the waterbodies further. The ponds will provide opportunities for breeding amphibians, including great crested newt, as well as invertebrates, such as dragonflies and damselflies, and the surrounding marginal vegetation will provide shelter and foraging habitat for reptiles and opportunities for pollinators. The bunds (to be created using the excavated materials) will be south- and south-west-facing providing warm, sunny banks for basking fauna. These will reduce the likelihood of the ponds over flowing onto the adjacent land after periods of heavy rainfall. The bunds will also incorporate brash from cleared vegetation and will form hibernacula within the buffer zone to provide hibernation and shelter habitat for a variety of fauna, including great crested newt.

I trust the above meets with your approval. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the contact details below.

Yours sincerely,

Greg Gilmore
Ecologist
EMEC Ecology

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APPENDIX 1: SITE LOCATION AND PLANS

Figure 1. Site Plan

Site Plan for Lower Grange Farm, Melton Mowbray Leicestershire

Legend

Planned ponds
Fencing
Land boundary
Access route
Ponds
Spoil Banks

Project: Great Crested Newt District Level Licencing Ponds

Drawing: 11202/GG/P1-046-P1-047

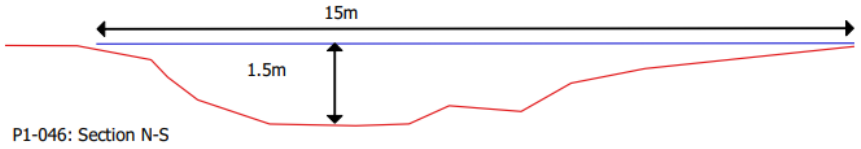
Client: Natural England C/N:11202

Drawn By: GJG Date: 04 Feb 2021

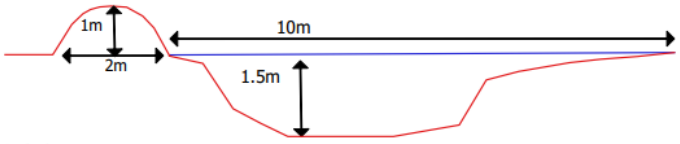
Issue Number: 1 Scale: @A3

Figure 2. Pond Cross-Section Plans

Cross section drawings of P1-046 at Lower Grange Farm, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire



P1-046: Section N-S



P1-046: Section W-E

Project: Great Crested Newt District Level Licencing Ponds

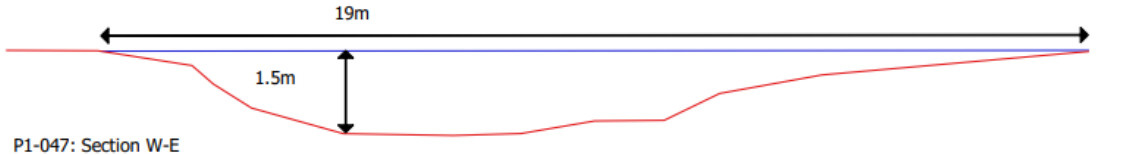
Drawing: 11202/GG/P1-046

Client: Natural England C/N:11202

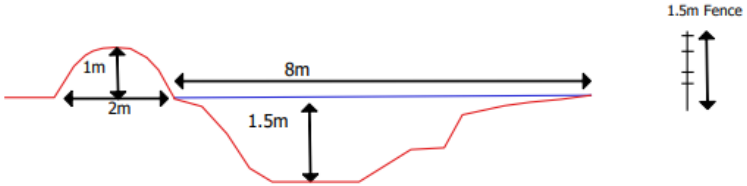
Drawn By: GG Date: 2021/01/19

Issue Number: 1 Scale: 1:100 @ A4

Cross section drawings of P1-047 at Lower Grange Farm, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire



P1-047: Section W-E



P1-047: Section S-N

Project: Great Crested Newt District Level Licencing Ponds

Drawing: 11202/GG/P1-047

Client: Natural England C/N:11202

Drawn By: GG Date: 2021/01/19

Issue Number: 1 Scale: 1:100 @ A4

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