

*Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)
Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs)
Method Statement*

at

Wilby Manor, Wilby,
Suffolk

Carried out for:

Lee Gooderham

c/o Beech Architects

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Abrehart Ecology was commissioned by Beech Architects, on behalf of Lee Gooderham, to produce a Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) Method Statement for the proposed building conversion at Wilby Manor, Manor, Suffolk (hereafter referred to as the Site).
- 1.2 This document outlines precautionary working methods and acts as a method statement for works and habitat maintenance at the Site. The Site is approximately 0.03 ha and comprised of a timber framed barn with brick/block lean-to and a single storey storeroom surrounded by amenity grassland, hedgerows, a pond, and scattered mature trees. Nearby habitats included hedgerows, ditches, and woodland.
- 1.3 The document is informed by the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and full great crested newt surveys carried out by Abrehart Ecology Ltd in 2021.
- 1.4 The great crested newt surveys carried (Abrehart Ecology Ltd, 2021a) found an exceptional population of newts using the ponds within 250m of the Site. **Condition 16 of the granted planning permission (DC/21/04312) states that “Prior to commencement of works, a Great Crested Newt Method Statement shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This will contain precautionary mitigation measures and/or works to reduce potential impacts to Great Crested Newts during the construction phase.”**
- 1.5 **This Reasonable Avoidance Measures Method Statement has been created to help the development discharge this condition and to minimise the risk of harm to individual newts or disturb breeding populations in the adjacent habitats to a negligible level.**
- 1.6 **Consideration also needs to be given to roosting bats. A Natural England Low Impact Class Licence (LICL) is required and is detailed as Condition 15 of the full planning permission.**

Legislative Context

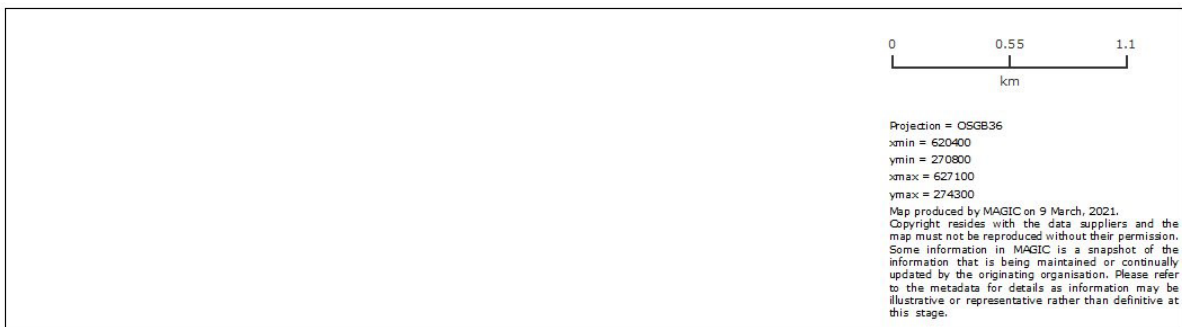
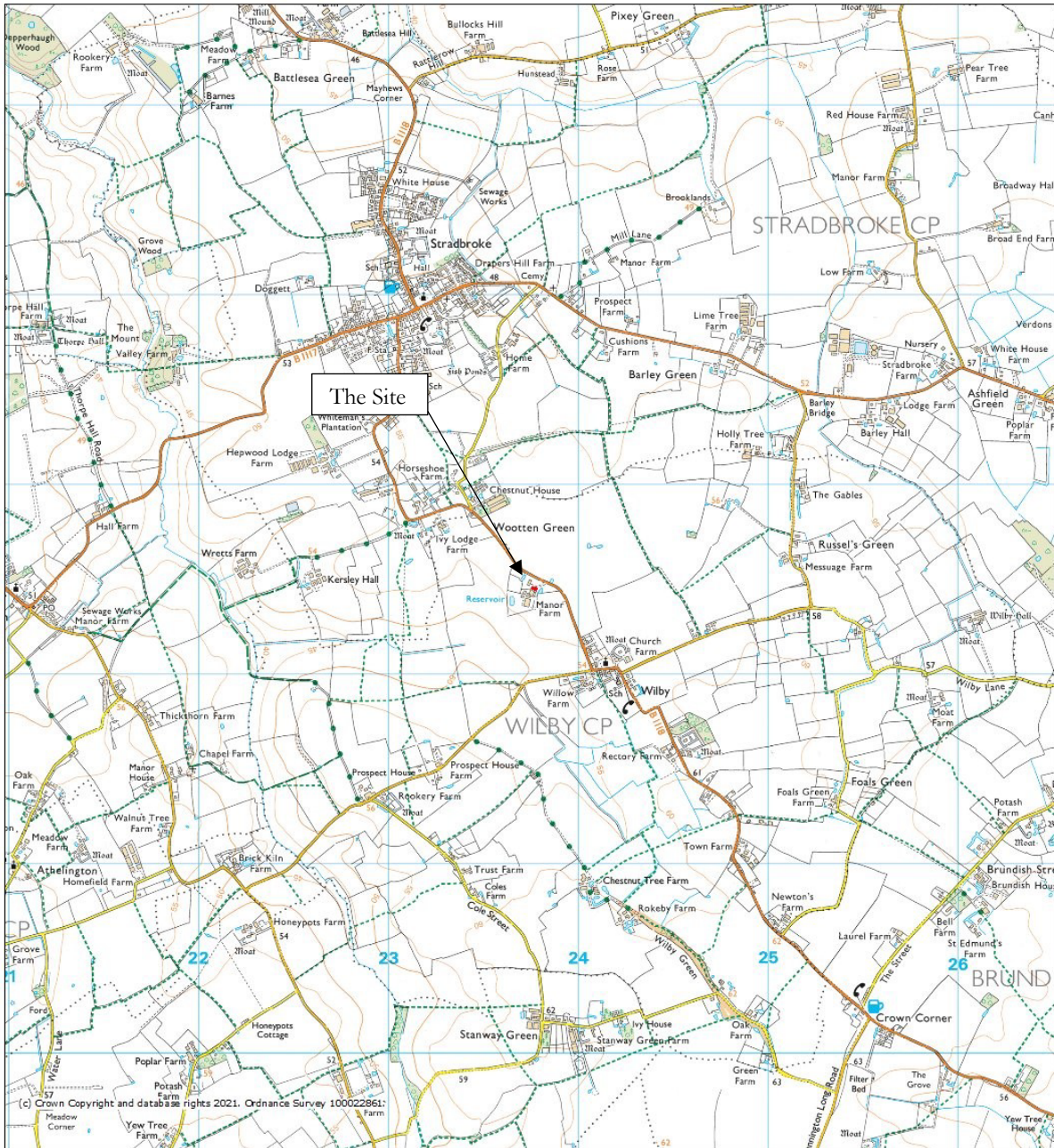
- 1.7 Great crested newts are a European Protected Species (EPS) and a Species of Principle Importance (SPI) in England under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006). They are fully protected under UK and European legislation, making it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly:
 - Kill, injure, or take great crested newts (or their eggs).
 - Possess, sell, transport, or control a live or dead great crested newt or any part of them.
 - Damage or destroy any breeding or resting place.
 - Obstruct access to a resting or shelter place.
- 1.8 Great crested newts are also listed on the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, as Suffolk is believed to be a stronghold for this species.

Site description

- 1.9 The Site is located at the The Site is located off the B1118, in Wilby, in Suffolk. The proposed construction zone is <0.1ha in extent comprising of two disused buildings surrounded by amenity grassland habitat, residential dwellings, mature trees, and a pond. The buildings were a disused timber/brick shed, and a brick outbuilding used for storage. Residential dwellings, mature trees, grassland, ponds, and hedgerows are found in the immediate surrounding landscape.
- 1.10 Beyond the residential habitats immediately surrounding the barns, the Site is surrounded by agricultural land (predominantly comprising arable fields and occasional grassland habitats), woodland blocks, and small villages (see Figure 1). A map showing pond locations can be found in Appendix I.

MAGIC

Magic Map



Site location

Great Crested Newt Ecology

- 1.11 Great crested newts are distributed throughout the UK but are absent from Ireland. Despite a wide distribution, populations have reduced or disappeared from sites across Europe as a result of habitat loss and changes in farming practices (Froglife, 2017).
- 1.12 The great crested newt is the largest newt in the UK, reaching a length of up to 17cm. Male great crested newts develop a jagged crest along their backs during breeding season with a break at the base of the abdomen and a silvery flash along the centre of the tail. Both males and females have dark skin, with a 'warted' appearance, and orange underside with irregular black markings and white speckling. During their terrestrial phase the male loses his crest, however the female retains her orange tail stripe (Froglife, 2017; Inns, 2009).
- 1.13 Like other UK amphibian species, great crested newts use suitable waterbodies for breeding (often between March and June). Large ponds, with egg laying substrate (weeds, aquatic plants, grasses etc.) and no fish are favoured sites (Froglife, 2017). Whilst in their aquatic phase, great crested newts feed on invertebrates and tadpoles, relying on smell and vision to find their prey (Beebee, 2013).
- 1.14 Courtship and mating take place at night and female newts lay eggs individually on plant leaves, which are folded to protect the egg. Adults leave breeding ponds in July, with young newts remaining within ponds until August (Inns, 2009).
- 1.15 During their terrestrial phase (late summer, autumn, and winter) great crested newts feed on invertebrates and spend the majority of winter months sheltering beneath rocks, buried in mud, or within compost heaps (Froglife, 2017). Favoured terrestrial habitats include deciduous woodland, mature hedgerows, and undisturbed grassland (Inns, 2009).

2 Previous Assessment Methods and Results

Desk Study

- 2.1 The Suffolk Biological Information Service (SBIS) returned nine records of great crested newts within 2km of the Site since 1999.

Habitat Assessment

- 2.2 Habitats on Site were assessed during a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) (Abrehart Ecology Ltd, 2021b).
- 2.3 Habitats recorded on the Site were suitable to support amphibians, including great crested newts (GCN), during their terrestrial and breeding phases. The hedgerows, bare ground, grassland, and accumulated piles of materials and rubble offered potential foraging, commuting, and shelter opportunities.
- 2.4 There were six potential breeding ponds highlighted within the local area during the desk study, including within immediate adjacent residential garden habitats.
- 2.5 **Pond 1:** Western of a set of three ponds within the middle of an arable field. It was surrounded by mature oak and ash trees with no macrophyte cover in the water, only small amounts of *Urtica dioica* were visible through the water.
- 2.6 **Pond 2:** Middle of the three ponds, heavily wooded as pond 1 and hence a very shaded pond that was drying at the start of the survey period and nearly dry at the end of the surveys. No aquatic macrophytes were present in the water.
- 2.7 **Pond 3:** Eastern of the three ponds, still with heavy woodland and scrubbed margin creating a fully shaded water body. No aquatic macrophytes and drying quickly. All three dry each year.
- 2.8 **Pond 4:** Large Pond to the north-west of the manor house. This had slight shading on the eastern and southern sides of the pond by large ash trees. The pond was deep with steeply shelving margins (used as a swimming pond by the family). There was good aquatic macrophyte cover across the pond never exceeding 20% of the water area. There were frequent marginal macrophytes for newt egg laying including *Mentha aquatica* and *Berula erecta*. Great crested newts were frequently seen in daylight.
- 2.9 **Pond 5:** Pond to the South-east of the development site. This was a steep sided pond with moderate turbidity, due to the high abundance of fish present there. There were no aquatic macrophytes, though there were some small stands of *Iris pseudacorus* scattered in stands around the edges of the pond
- 2.10 Full HSI results table can be found in the Appendix of the GCN survey report.

Great Crested Newt Surveys

- 2.11 Four survey visits were undertaken by ecologists Toby Abrehart (Natural England great crested newt licence WML-CL08) and Thomas Jordan BSc (Hons) on the 26th of April, the 6th of May and the 12th May, and the 1st of June 2021. The surveys were conducted following methods described by Natural England; Table 1 details the methods used during the surveys.
- 2.12 Great crested newt population estimates were classified following guidelines as described in Table 2.

Table 1: Great Crested Newt Survey Methods (Langton et al. 2001).

Method	Description
Aquatic Trapping	An overnight survey involving the setting of traps in the evening and collecting them early in the morning.
Torching	Slowly searching a pond by torchlight (using spot lamps of one million candlepower) after dusk.
Egg Searching	Examining submerged, folded, vegetation for newt eggs.

Table 2: Great Crested Newt Population Status (Langton et al. 2001).

Survey Method	Population Score		
	Low	Good	Exceptional
Seen or netted (day)	<5	5-50	>50
Counted at night	<10	10-100	>100

- 2.13 Great crested newts were recorded in one of the surveyed ponds (Pond 4). Adult newts and eggs were recorded.
- 2.14 A peak count of 147 adult newts was recorded whilst torching on the 6th of May 2021, indicating that an exceptional population exists in the local area.
- 2.15 Surveying was not continued beyond this, as it was not considered appropriate to risk harm / excessive disturbance to GCN as any further data gathered would not alter recommendations or metapopulation status within the ponds / local landscape.

3 Reasonable Avoidance Measures

- 3.1 Condition 16 of the granted planning permission states that the development shall only proceed under a Reasonable Avoidance Measures Method Statement – to reduce the risk of harm to newts.

Avoidance Measures / Working Practices

- 3.2 Immediately prior to the start of works, a suitably licensed and experienced ecologist (the ECoW) should provide a Toolbox Talk to all site workers. This will cover identification of protected and common amphibian species and work through safe working practices.
- 3.3 **Due to the presence of an exceptional population within the surrounding habitats, exclusion fencing will be erected to the east and west of the construction zone, connecting to the existing garden fencing to the south and the driveway to the north (with short returns) – an indicative location for the fencing is shown in Appendix I.** This will reduce the chance of GCN entering the construction zone and encourage movement back to ponds and grassland habitats.
- 3.4 **Works can only proceed during the active season for both great crested newts and bats – which is late March / early April. Any works to the building will also need to take place under a Low Impact Class Licence – as stated within the bat survey report (Abrehart Ecology Ltd, 2021c) and Condition 15 of the planning permission.**

Safe Working Practices

- 3.5 The Landowner / Developer / Site Manager will be responsible for performing a thorough site check each morning to assess the condition of the working practices listed below.
- 3.6 Exclusion fencing will be retained throughout the construction phase of the development. Any damage will be reported to the ECoW and repaired as soon as possible.
- 3.7 Heavy plant movement will be confined to hardstanding / bare earth habitats or habitats approved by the ECoW. Machinery will not enter ecologically sensitive areas – such as long grassland, scrub, or tall ruderal vegetation unless approved by the ECoW (likely following a hand search).
- 3.8 There are to be **no fires** on Site throughout the construction process. Materials stored for fires could attract amphibians as a refuge/shelter and fires may damage ecologically sensitive areas surrounding the construction zone.
- 3.9 Any works involving destruction of habitats or vegetation clearance will take place with a newt-licensed ecologist in attendance (the ECoW).
- 3.10 All materials will be stored on pallets. This will prevent places of refuge being created within the construction zone.
- 3.11 Any aggregates delivered to Site should be stored in bulk-bags and placed on pallets. Again, this will prevent places of refuge / hibernacula being created within the construction zone.
- 3.12 Any excavated soil will be placed on habitats/locations approved by the ECoW.
- 3.13 All waste should be stored in skips prior to removal from Site.
- 3.14 Any excavations (approved by the ECoW) should contain an escape ramp, made from earth or wooden sticks (or multiple ramps within large excavations – to be determined by the ECoW). The landowner/site manager will check the excavations each morning. Should common amphibians be found, then these animals will be moved to safe habitat outside the construction zone (this habitat will be identified during

the Toolbox Talk). If great crested newts are found within the excavations, then a suitably licensed ecologist will be contacted and discussions for future methods/works will take place.

- 3.15 Vegetation clearance should only be carried out following consultation with the ECoW. Vegetation should not be cut to below 150mm without ECoW presence and/or hand search, and should only be carried out using hand tools, such as brushcutters. **This clearance is also subject to nesting bird timings/restrictions.**
- 3.16 **To prevent infringing legislation which protects all nesting birds, it is recommended that works be carried out outside the breeding bird season (which runs from March to September) or following a nesting bird survey by a suitably experienced ecologist.**

4 Habitat Enhancement Opportunities

- 4.1 The Site could be enhanced for amphibians, including the known population of great crested newts within adjacent habitats. Habitat improvements could include the following:
- Low level shrub planting would provide valuable sheltering, foraging, and commuting habitat for amphibians. Low-growing shrubs would offer the greatest protection for amphibians. Any plants should be native species and of local provenance.
 - Incorporating log piles into landscaped areas, such as shrub beds, would add shelter and hibernation opportunities for amphibians.
 - Enhancement of the adjacent pond and or/creation of new wildlife ponds. Any works to ponds should take place following discussions with a suitably experienced and licenced ecologist.

5 References

Literature

Abrehart Ecology Ltd (2021a). Great Crested Newt Survey Report of Wilby Manor, Wilby, Suffolk. Carried out on behalf of Lee Gooderham.

Abrehart Ecology Ltd (2021b). Preliminary Ecological Appraisal for Wilby Manor, Wilby, Suffolk. Carried out on behalf of Lee Gooderham.

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Websites

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Appendix I – Indicative location of exclusion fencing

