



**Land at Rookyard Farmhouse**

**Haughley**

**Stowmarket**

**Suffolk**

**Great Crested Newt;  
Precautionary Working Method Statement**

BRIGHT ARCHITECTURE

VERSION 2

Final

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# 1. Introduction

BiOME Consulting Ltd was commissioned by Bright Architecture to produce a Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* (GCN) Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS) in relation to proposed works to land at Rookyard Farmhouse, Haughley, Suffolk (National Grid Reference TM01463 63426), (Figure 1).

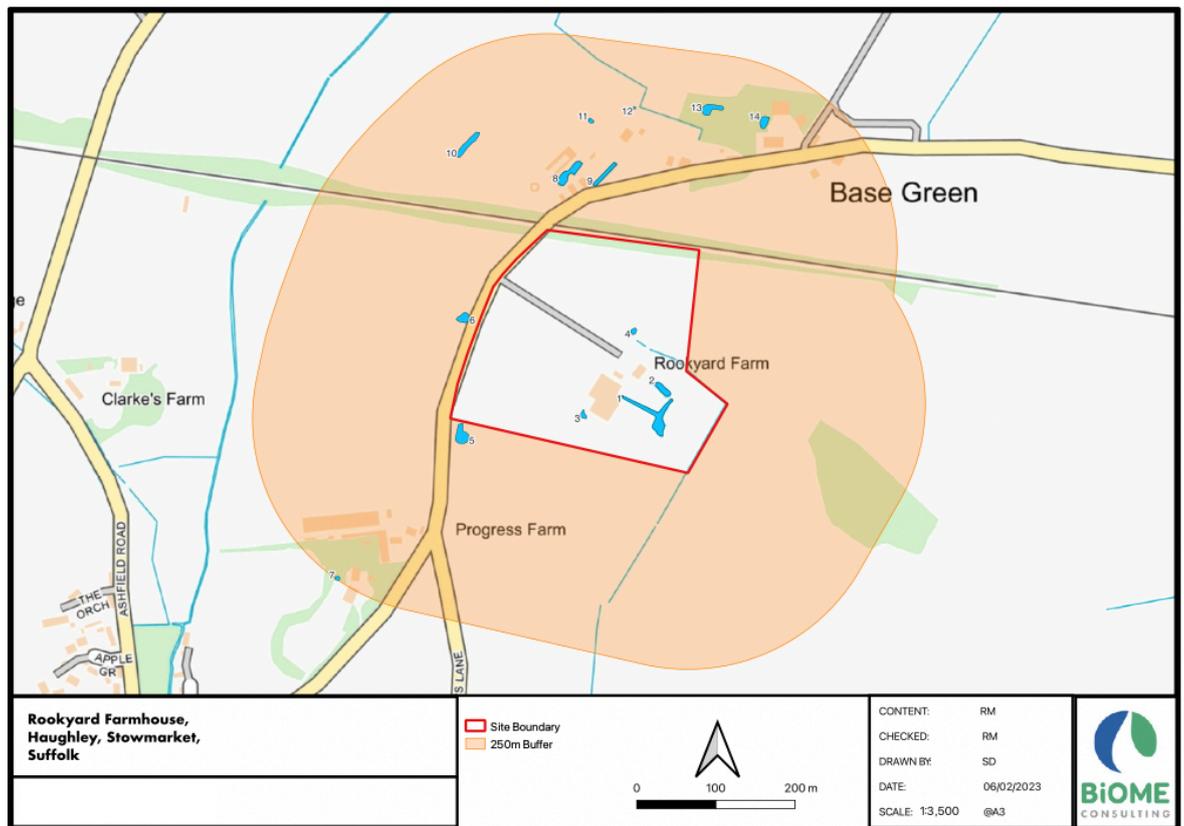
Figure 1. Site location



## 2. Background

Ecological work (completed in 2023<sup>1</sup>) identified 14 ponds within 250m<sup>2</sup> of the site (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ponds within 0.25km



1 BiOME Consulting Ltd (2023). *Land at Rookyard Farmhouse, Haughley, Stowmarket, Suffolk - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*; BiOME Consulting Ltd (2023). *Land at Rookyard Farmhouse, Haughley, Stowmarket, Suffolk – GCN\_Reptile Survey Report*

2 GCN typically have a maximum routine migratory range of 250m from breeding waterbodies during terrestrial phases<sup>2</sup> and further studies suggest that 95% of newt summer refuges are situated within 63m of breeding ponds<sup>2</sup>.

Five ponds were accessible (nos. 2, 3, 4, 6 & 10) and were subject to Habitat Suitability Index assessment<sup>3</sup>.

HSI assessment for GCN is a numerical index, between 0 and 1, and provides a measure of habitat suitability<sup>4</sup>. In general, ponds with high HSI scores are more likely to support GCN than those with low scores (**Table 1**). However, the system is not sufficiently precise to conclude that any particular pond with a high score will support GCN, or that any pond with a low score will not do so.

**Table 1.** Predicted presence of GCN based upon HSI results

HSI Score	Pond Suitability	Predicted Occupancy (%)
<0.5	Poor	3
0.5-0.59	Below average	20
0.6-0.69	Average	55
0.7-0.79	Good	79
>0.8	Excellent	93

HSI assessment indicated that ponds nos. 2 and 10 were of ‘average’ suitability for GCN, pond 4 had ‘good’ suitability and ponds 3 and 6 ‘poor’ suitability. Consequently, eDNA water sample analysis of pond nos. 2, 10 and 4 was completed and all were found to not support GCN.

No further survey work in relation to this species was considered necessary prior to works commencing. However, it was recommended that works on site were completed under a non-licensed Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS), to negate the potential for any harm to come to any individual GCN, which would constitute a breach in legislation (**Appendix A**).

3 Oldham, R.S., Keeble, J., Swan, M.J.S. and Jeffcote, M. (2000). *Evaluating the suitability of habitats for great crested newt (Triturus cristatus)*. Herpetological Journal 10 pp. 143-155.

4 Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom (2010). ARG UK Advice Note 5 – Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index

### 3. Potential Impacts

This section provides a brief assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed development to GCN. The potential impacts that are considered and the terminology used is consistent with English Nature's GCN Mitigation Guidelines<sup>5</sup>, which is considered best practice and provides the framework that underpins GCN impact assessments, mitigation strategies and licence applications.

#### 3.1. Pre- and mid-development impacts

##### Potential Harm to Individual Great Crested Newts

The majority of the works (including laydown areas) will be confined to habitats (predominantly arable) considered sub-optimal for GCN.

Populations of GCN, if present, within the non-surveyed ponds are considered unlikely to be present within the site due to the prevalence of optimal foraging habitats near the ponds (assessed from aerial imagery) and their distance from the site.

##### Loss/Damage to Aquatic Habitats

The development of the site will not lead to the loss of, or damage/impact to, any ponds, assuming environmental best practice during the construction period.

##### Loss of Foraging Habitat

Terrestrial habitat within the site to be impacted by the proposals is limited to a small area of semi-improved grassland that is proposed to be converted to an outdoor arena. Potential impacts to possible GCN foraging habitat are therefore considered limited. However, within the area of semi-improved grassland, the following precautionary methods of working will be adopted:

- A Pre-works assessment by a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) will be completed
- Clearance of logs, brash, stones, rocks or piles of similar debris (if present) will be undertaken carefully and by hand either by the SQE or under their supervision.

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<sup>5</sup> English Nature (2001). *Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines*.

- Clearance of tall/dense vegetation will be completed using a strimmer or brush cutter under SQE supervision with all cuttings raked and removed the same day. Cutting will only be undertaken in a phased way which may either include:
  - Cutting vegetation to a height of no less than 30mm, clearing no more than one third of the site in anyone day or;
  - Cutting vegetation over three consecutive days to a height of no less than 150mm at the first cut, 75mm at the second cut and 30mm at the third cut;
  - Following removal of tall vegetation using the methods above, remaining vegetation will be maintained at a height of approximately 30mm through regular mowing or strimming to discourage GCN moving into the site.

### Disruption to Dispersal and Migration

No disruption to dispersal/migration is anticipated.

### 3.2. Long-term Impacts

No long-term adverse impacts to the local populations (if present) of GCN are anticipated. The retention of suitable breeding and terrestrial habitats throughout the surrounding landscape will ensure the long-term favourable conservation status of GCN in the local area.

### 3.3. Post-Development Interference Impacts

The development is not considered to present any post-development interference impacts or threaten the surrounding ponds or suitable terrestrial habitat.

### 3.4. Summary of Impacts

It is considered that (assuming the proposed method statement detailed in Section 4 is adhered to) it will be possible to undertake the proposed works in a way which will not breach legislation. Therefore, a European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licence, issued by Natural England, is not considered necessary.

## 4. Reasonable Avoidance Measures

### 4.1. Introduction

The purpose of the Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) detailed in this section is to ensure that individual GCN are not harmed by works associated with the proposed development, and that if present, their favourable conservation status is maintained going forward. Based on the assessment detailed within the preceding sections of this report the risk to GCN is considered to be very low, and this Method Statement (MS) presents precautionary measures to allow the predicted level of risk to be reduced to negligible.

Taking into account the very low identified risk, no timing restrictions to the works are required.

### 4.2. Toolbox Talk/Poster

Prior to works commencing the SQE should provide a 'Toolbox Talk' to those personnel present on site. This talk should include details on GCN legal status, populations and distribution in the local area, identification and what they should do in the unlikely event that a GCN is encountered during works. A poster that incorporates the key messages of this talk will be made available on site and any new contractors that were not present at the talk will be required to make themselves familiar with the poster and its protocols. This poster is included as **Appendix B**.

### 4.3. Site Clearance Protocol

Potential impacts to possible GCN foraging habitat are therefore considered limited. However, within the area of semi-improved grassland, the following precautionary methods of working will be adopted:

- A Pre-works assessment by a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) will be completed
- Clearance of logs, brash, stones, rocks or piles of similar debris (if present) will be undertaken carefully and by hand either by the SQE or under their supervision.

- Clearance of tall/dense vegetation will be completed using a strimmer or brush cutter under SQE supervision with all cuttings raked and removed the same day. Cutting will only be undertaken in a phased way which may either include:
  - Cutting vegetation to a height of no less than 30mm, clearing no more than one third of the site in anyone day or;
  - Cutting vegetation over three consecutive days to a height of no less than 150mm at the first cut, 75mm at the second cut and 30mm at the third cut;
  - Following removal of tall vegetation using the methods above, remaining vegetation will be maintained at a height of approximately 30mm through regular mowing or strimming to discourage GCN moving into the site.

During the course of site clearance works, should any GCN be identified then works will cease and the SQE contacted immediately.

#### **4.4. Construction Phase**

Works will be restricted to the designated development area and the impact of works on adjacent habitats. Although it is recognised that the risk is low, it is recommended that compounds and laydown areas (for spoil and materials), are located on existing hardstanding surfaces/bare ground so far as practicably possible to avoid the potential to create features suitable for GCN to use for refuge.

If any excavations are required to be left open overnight, ramps will be left within them to allow fauna to easily exit. Open excavations will be inspected at start of each day to ensure fauna have not become trapped.

#### **4.5. Working Practices**

Workers/contractors should be made aware that the site and local area has the potential to support populations of amphibians and that although unlikely, there is a low risk of GCN being present.

Sympathetic working practices include:

#### Avoid creating potential refuges

- Amphibians will utilise stacked materials such as wood, stone, boards or metal sheets as refuges. Keep the site tidy and store materials off the ground – for example on pallets where possible.
- Should it be necessary to store materials on site then the stockpile should be smoothed to prevent access by amphibians into potential cavities.

#### Staff awareness

- All contractors should be made aware of the potential presence of amphibians and other wildlife on site during the initial site induction, Toolbox Talk and poster/s.
- Amphibians like to shelter under refuges such as those discussed above. Staff should demonstrate awareness when working and moving materials. Should an animal other than a GCN be found it should be gently moved to a suitable location within habitat/vegetation well away from the working area. It is important to note that all native amphibians are harmless and the best option if encountered is simply to leave the animal alone or, if it may come to harm, move it to a suitable location within nearby habitat/vegetation.

As a matter of general good ecological practice, an understanding of amphibians and the undertaking of sympathetic working practices will reduce the likelihood of an encounter with, and harm to, amphibians.

#### 4.6. Action in Response to GCN

Although an encounter with this species is considered unlikely, all contractors should be made aware of how to identify this species, the 'Toolbox Talk' and poster/s erected on site will assist with this.

Should GCN be recorded during the clearance or construction period, all works will cease and a licenced ecologist contacted immediately who will advise on

further action. The ecologist will liaise as appropriate with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) ecologist and Natural England.

#### **4.7. Post-development**

The extent of the works is limited and no long-term adverse impacts to GCN/other amphibian populations are considered likely to occur. As such, no post-development safeguarding measures are proposed. Should substantial numbers of GCN be discovered during the works and a Natural England licence be considered necessary, the need for post-development monitoring may need to be reviewed.

## Appendix A Great Crested Newt Legislation

GCN and the places they use for shelter or protection receive European protection under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (Habitats Regulations 2017). They receive further legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981, as amended. This protection means that GCN, and the places they use for shelter or protection, are capable of being a material consideration in the planning process.

Regulation 41 of the Habitats Regulations 2017, states that a person commits an offence if they:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a GCN;
- Deliberately disturb GCN;
- Deliberately take or destroy eggs of a GCN; or
- Damage or destroy a resting place or breeding site.

Disturbance of animals includes in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young, or in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.

It is an offence under the Habitats Regulations 2017 for any person to have in his possession or control, to transport, to sell or exchange or to offer for sale, any live or dead GCN, part of a GCN or anything derived from GCN, which has been unlawfully taken from the wild. This legislation applies to all life stages of GCN.

Whilst broadly similar to the above legislation, the WCA 1981 (as amended) differs in the following ways:

- Section 9(1) of the WCA makes it an offence to *intentionally* kill, injure or take any protected species.

- Section 9(4)(a) of the WCA makes it an offence to *intentionally or recklessly\** damage or destroy, or *obstruct access to*, any structure or place which a protected species uses for shelter or protection.
- Section 9(4)(b) of the WCA makes it an offence to *intentionally or recklessly\** disturb any protected species *while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection*.

\*Reckless offences were added by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

Great Crested Newts are listed as Species of Principal Importance on the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework (2012), and as such are material considerations in the planning process.

## Appendix B Toolbox Talk Poster

### Great Crested Newt (GCN) – Precautionary Working Methods

#### Legal Framework

GCN and the places they use for shelter or protection receive European protection under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (Habitats Regulations 2017). They receive further legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981, as amended. This protection means that GCN, and the places they use for shelter or protection, are capable of being a material consideration in the planning process.

Regulation 41 of the Habitats Regulations 2017, states that a person commits an offence if they:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a GCN;
- Deliberately disturb GCN;
- Deliberately take or destroy eggs of a GCN; or
- Damage or destroy a resting place or breeding site.



#### Key Contacts (BiOME Consulting)

Richard Moores	Project Ecologist	07789 655430
Martyn Owen	Ecologist	07736 286675

#### Project Background

Ecology surveys have identified the potential presence of GCN on site. To ensure that no GCN are harmed during the works precautionary working methods must be employed when GCN may be encountered.

#### Site Works

- Standard pollution control measures should be implemented during construction to protect habitats on/adjacent to the site.
- Management of the development area must continue in its current form to ensure that the sites potential value to foraging GCN does not increase.
- The work area must be clearly delineated and restricted to areas of hard-standing and bare ground; all vehicles/workers must adhere to defined work areas.
- Keep the site tidy and store materials off the ground – for example on pallets where possible. Should it be necessary to store materials (such as topsoil) on site then the stockpile should be smoothed
- Should any GCN be identified then works must cease and the Project Ecologist contacted (see below)

#### GCN Identification

GCN are the largest of the UK's three native species, growing up to 17cm in length.

They are dark brown or black in colour with a distinctive 'warty' skin. The underside is bright orange with irregular black blotches. In the spring, males develop an impressive jagged crest along their back and a white 'flash' along the tail. Females, particularly in the breeding season when they are swollen with eggs, are bulky in appearance but lack the crest of the male. GCN larvae are mottled with black spots and have a fine filament at the end of the tail.

