

Biodiversity Enhancement Statement and Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) Method Statement for GCN, and Reptiles

for

The Gardeners Arms, Moats Tye,

Suffolk

Rev A

Carried out for:

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Issue/revision	1	2
Remarks		Revisions following discussions with client
Prepared by	TWJ	TWJ / AJK
Date	July 2023	July 2023
Checked	AJK	AJK
Authorised	TRA	TRA

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Abrehart Ecology was commissioned by Johnny Beales to produce a Biodiversity Enhancement statement and Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) Method Statement concerning great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) and reptile species for an application at the land adjacent to The Gardeners Arms, Moats Tye, 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 document also outlines biodiversity enhancement measures that will be incorporated into the final development.
- 1.3 Proposals include the creation of one residential dwelling and one outbuilding with associated infrastructure.
- 1.4 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) carried out in May 2023 (Abrehart Ecology Ltd) found habitat suitable for supporting herptiles including great crested newts (GCN), and widespread reptile species. The works described within this document outline safe working methods (to minimise risk of harm to amphibians and reptiles).
- 1.5 Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) detailed within this report will be followed before and throughout the construction process. This will reduce the likelihood of harming animals (including GCN and reptiles) to a negligible level.

Legislative Context

- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 Common/widespread reptiles (adders, grass snakes, common lizards, and slow-worms) are listed as species of Principle Importance in England under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006). Widespread reptiles are also partially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended). This protection makes it illegal to:
 - Intentionally kill or injure widespread reptiles; and
 - Sell a living or dead reptile or any part of them.

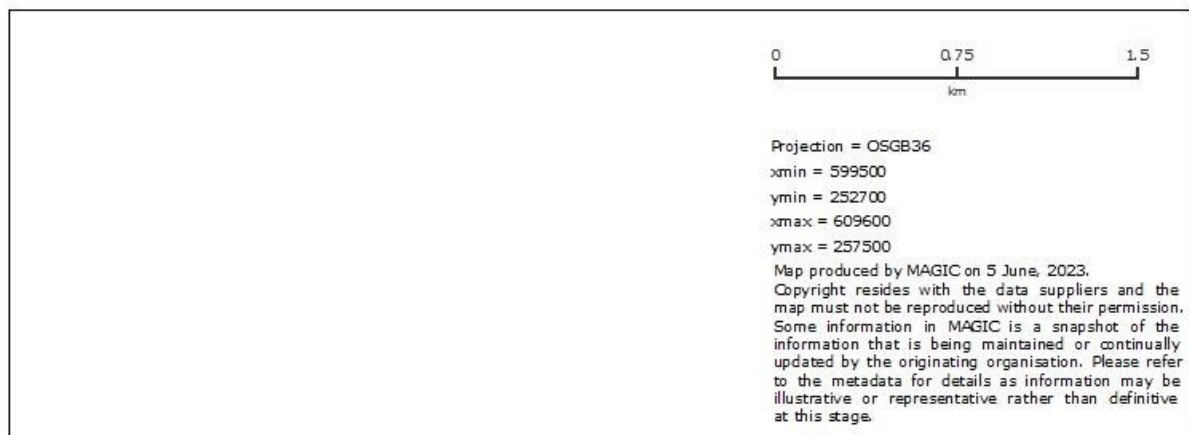
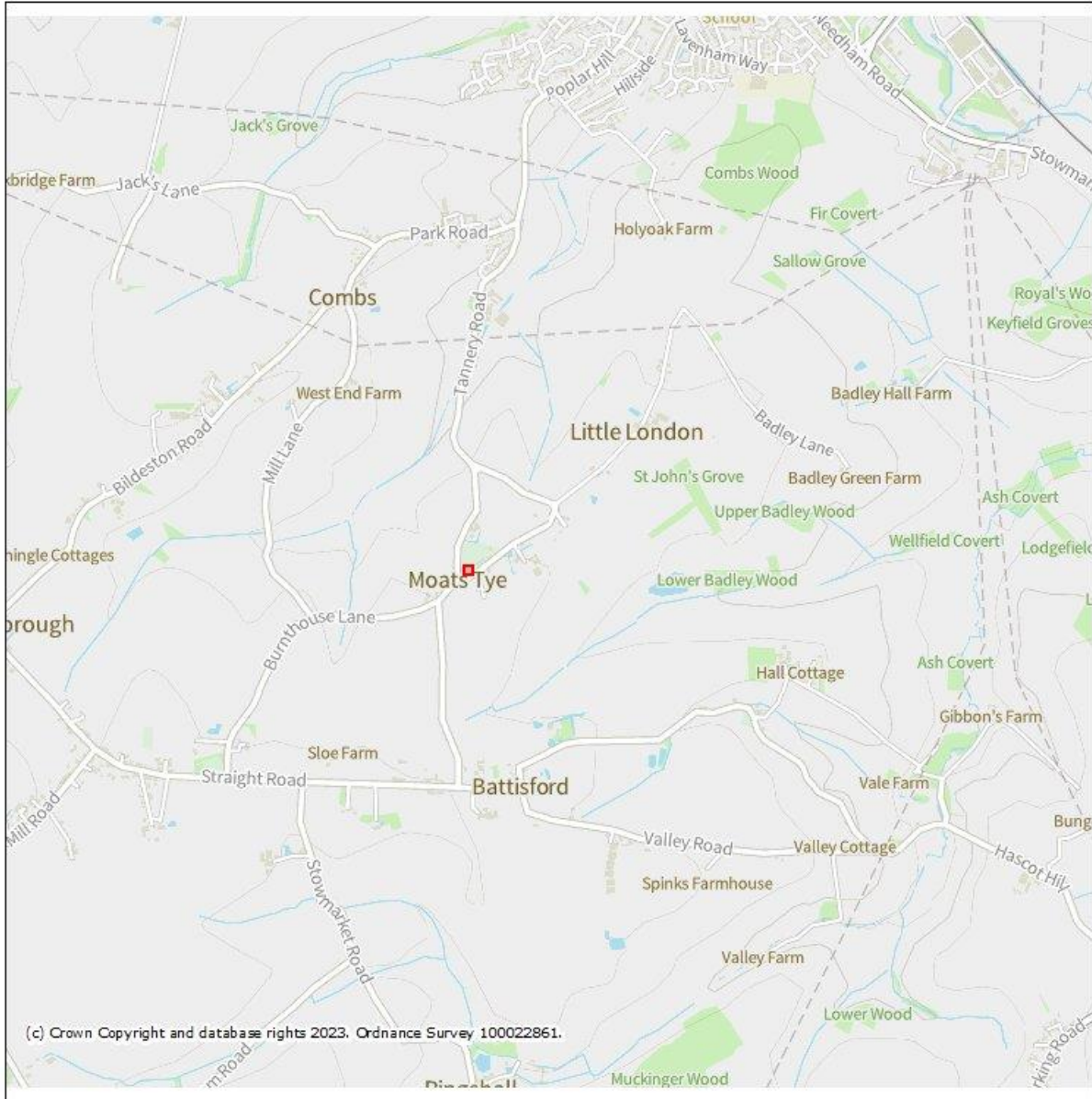
The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018 places responsibility on Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity in and around developments. Section 40 of the NERC Act requires every public body to “have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”. Biodiversity, as covered by the Section 40 duty, is not confined to habitats and species of principal importance but refers to all species and habitats. However, the expectation is that public bodies would refer to the Section 41 list (of species and habitats) through compliance with the Section 40 duty.

Site description

- 1.8 The Site is located in Moats Tye, Suffolk, to the rear of the former Gardeners Arms pub off Dedman's Lane. It is approximately 0.1ha in extent comprising a single storage building surrounded by well-managed other neutral grassland. Within and near to the boundaries of the Site were a dry ditch, mature trees, tree-lined roads, post and wire fences, amenity grassland and residential gardens.
- 1.9 Along the western boundary of the Site were residential dwellings and associated gardens, beyond these was a small road and arable fields. To the north and east of the Site was land used and amenity space (cricket ground) – which included planted/mature trees, close mown grassland, and rough grassland at the boundaries. South of the Site was a small lane, with agricultural land and residential dwellings beyond. Outside the immediate surrounding habitat, the landscape is dominated by agricultural land, pockets of woodland, and small villages (see Figure 1).

MAGiC

Magic Map



Site location

2 Previous Assessment Methods and Results

Desk Study

- 2.1 Data obtained from the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) was used to conduct a standard data search for any information regarding statutory and non-statutory sites and records of protected and priority species within a 2km radius of the Site. The data were received on the 25th of May 2023.
- 2.2 The Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) returned 8 records of great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) within 2km of the Site with the nearest being from approximately 800m south-east of the site. The nearest of these records was from approximately 800m north of the site. The data search also returned 8 records of grass snakes (*Natrix helvetica*) and a single record of adder (*Vipera berus*).

Habitat Assessment

- 2.3 Habitats on Site were assessed during a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Abrehart Ecology Ltd (2022).

GCN and Reptiles

- 2.4 Habitats recorded within the Site boundary appear frequently disturbed due to regular management leaving a consistent short sward length, this grassland alone is unlikely to support great crested newts (GCN) (*Triturus cristatus*) during their terrestrial phase or reptiles. The grassland offered potential basking opportunities only; however, better opportunities are recorded outside the Site boundary, including an area of long grassland within the cricket grounds. The boundary ditch with ruderal vegetation and the hedgerow offers potential commuting and foraging habitat.
- 2.5 The floor of the building was well-sealed concrete and stored materials appeared regularly used/disturbed, reducing the likelihood of GCN and reptiles using the building for sheltering or hibernation.
- 2.6 There were several potential breeding ponds highlighted within the local area (500m proximity of the Site, see Appendix II) during the desk study – these were not accessible at the time of survey and so were not assessed for their potential to support breeding GCN. The dry ditch and rough grassland habitats (outside the Site boundary) could provide suitable commuting routes for amphibians using these ponds or other waterbodies within the local area.

Impacts

- 2.7 Surveys were not considered necessary due to the overall size of the works area and the low abundance of suitable habitat. It was considered that risk of harm to individual herptiles will be negligible if works are conducted under the supervision of an Ecological Clerks of Works (ECoW) and carried out following methods set out within this RAMs.

3 Reasonable Avoidance Measures

- 3.1 The works, described below include the preparation of the Site as part of proposed works and clearance of small areas of vegetation within the works areas.
- 3.2 The avoidance measures and safe working practices listed in this document are recommended to ensure that no individual widespread reptiles, or amphibians (including GCN) are harmed throughout the clearance of the small or isolated areas of suitable habitat. Any individual animals (not including GCN) found during works will be safely removed and translocated to adjacent areas of suitable habitat. If GCN are found at any point throughout the development, then works must be stopped immediately and a Natural England licence will be required.

Avoidance Measures / Working Practices

- 3.3 Immediately prior to the start of vegetation clearance and ground-breaking construction works, a suitably licensed and experienced ecologist (the ECoW) should provide a Toolbox Talk to all site workers. Following completion of the talk, the signed document will remain on site for reference throughout the construction process.
- 3.4 The toolbox talk will cover-
- Identification of hedgehogs, widespread reptile species, and protected/common amphibian species.
 - The legal status and protection of all species covered in the RAMs.
 - Safe working methods, which all site workers should adhere to.
- 3.5 The role of the ECoW will include-
- Advising on protecting biodiversity features of value within the works areas.
 - Provide practical assistance on how the site workers and client can complete works while remaining compliant with legislation.
 - Provide an ecological watching brief throughout works. If protected species are found, then this will include the temporary stopping of works and the translocation of the species to an area of suitable habitat outside of the works area.

Safe Working Practices

- 3.6 The Landowner/Site Manager will be responsible for performing a thorough site check each morning to assess the condition of the working practices listed below.
- 3.7 Current management retains the grassland below 150mm. It is recommended that this continues prior to and throughout construction, as this is unfavourable habitat for reptiles, amphibians, and hedgehogs. The vegetation should be maintained at approximately 50mm height.
- 3.8 Any remaining long vegetation will be cleared with a newt-licensed ecologist in attendance (the ECoW) - this can be carried out concurrently with the Toolbox Talk.
- 3.9 Should reptiles or amphibians be found following the fingertip search or throughout works, then these must be translocated to an area of suitable habitat. Reptiles should only be handled by a suitably experienced ecologist and be bagged before they are moved.

- 3.10 There are to be **no fires** on Site throughout the construction process. Materials stored for fires could attract amphibians, hedgehogs, and reptiles as a refuge/shelter.
- 3.11 Habitat suitable for breeding birds was found within the Site. **To prevent infringing legislation which protects all nesting birds, it is recommended that vegetation clearance 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.** The nesting bird survey should be undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist and conducted close to the time of sunrise. The check will include the areas of suitable habitat being observed for 2hrs. If no nesting behavior is observed then a thermal imaging camera will be used to confirm no hotspots, following this the area will be hand checked for nests by the ecologist. If the check confirms there are no nests present, then works can commence. The nesting bird check will be valid for 48hrs after the survey end.
- 3.12 Vehicles will stay on concrete/hardstanding areas or areas declared safe working zones by the ECoW.
- 3.13 All materials will be stored on pallets. This will prevent places of refuge being created within the construction zone.
- 3.14 Any aggregates delivered to Site should be stored securely to discourage places of refuge / hibernacula being created within the construction zone. This could be within bulk bags or separated off using wooden boards or similar.
- 3.15 Any excavated soil will be placed on adjacent habitats (or other habitats/locations approved by the ECoW during the Toolbox Talk).
- 3.16 All waste should be stored in skips prior to removal from Site.
- 3.17 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). This will allow reptiles, amphibians, or mammals (including GCN and reptiles) to exit excavations.
- 3.18 The landowner/site manager will check the excavations each morning. Should common amphibians or mammals 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.

4 Compensation and Enhancements for Biodiversity

Native planting

- 4.1 New planting – in the form of bushes, shrubs, and trees – will provide opportunity to increase foraging and sheltering potential for a range of wildlife, including birds, invertebrates, and mammals. Any planting should be of local provenance and of native species.
- 4.2 Trees and shrubs can provide year-round habitat for wildlife; the dense canopy formed by shrub beds offer protection from predators and foraging opportunities for butterflies, birds, and mammals; and trees provide additional nesting and foraging for birds – including resident and migratory bird species.
- 4.3 Planting shrubs at the boundaries of the Site will retain marginal habitat for commuting, foraging, and breeding animals. Features described below (such as bug, houses, log piles, and hedgehog homes) could be incorporated into the planted areas to further increase their value for wildlife.
- 4.4 Trees – these should be planted 2-3m apart and avoid planting within 4m of buildings. Further details on planting can be found online (such as the RSPB website (<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/plants-for-wildlife/garden-trees/>) or from the supplier of the trees. Trimming should be avoided throughout the bird nesting season (March to end of August) to prevent disturbing nesting birds or harming eggs/young birds.
- 4.5 Shrubs – should be planted 0.5-1.2m apart and to specifications/details provided by the supplier or found on the RSPB website (<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/plants-for-wildlife/shrubs-for-gardens/>). Management of shrub growth should take place in winter months – both avoiding the nesting bird season and ensuring greatest benefit to local wildlife, as species detailed below will provide berries and seeds for animals to forage on.
- 4.6 Suitable species for shrub beds and tree planting include:
 - Birch (*Betula* sp.)
 - Holly
 - Rowan
 - Crab apple
 - Berberis
 - Spindle
 - Dogwood
 - Guelder rose
 - Hawthorn
 - Cornelian cherry

Invertebrates

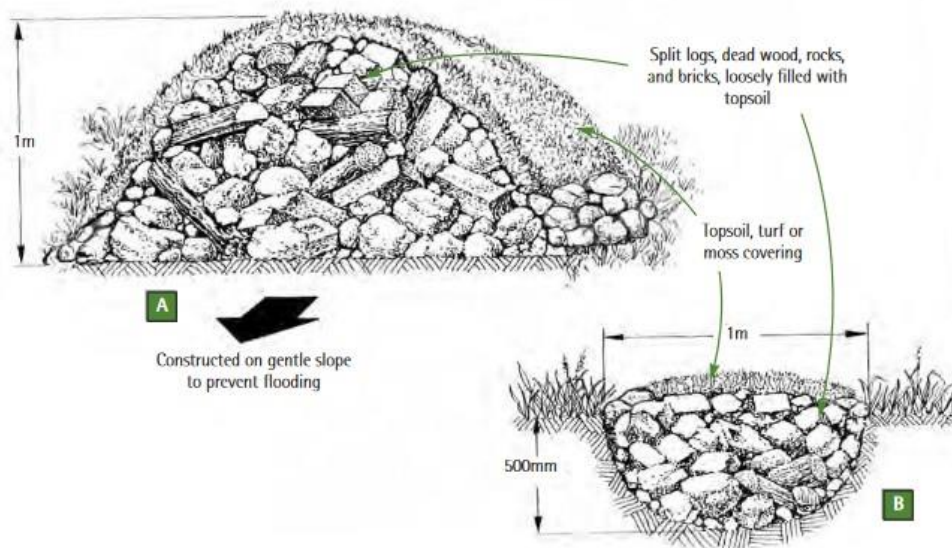
- 4.7 New planting – in the form of bushes, shrubs, and trees – detailed above would increase opportunities for a range of invertebrates, including pollinator species. Increasing numbers of invertebrates in the garden area will also provide additional food sources for a range of species including bats, birds, hedgehogs, and amphibians.
- 4.8 The addition of a ‘bug hotel’ within garden areas will provide excellent sheltering opportunities for invertebrates, along with small mammals and amphibians. Made from garden waste and excess from construction, this will be constructed on site to recommendations/guidelines on the RSPB website (<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/build-a-bug-hotel/>).



Herptiles

- 4.9 The creation of a hibernaculum and refugia piles would provide overwintering and sheltering opportunities for reptiles and amphibians, should they be present but under-recorded in the local area. Refugia heaps can be constructed from fallen dead wood, leaf litter/mulch, stone, or clean rubble (without cement), the spoil heaps should then be placed in shallow excavations and covered with loose soil and turf. Further advice on refugia creation can be found on the Froglife website at (https://www.froglife.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/GCN-Conservation-Handbook_compressed.pdf). An example of a refuge (taken from the guidance) is shown below. This could be sited within boundary vegetation or new planting, to provide refuge for animals using these natural corridors or foraging within the Site.

Fig. 8 Great crested newt refuges on (A) impermeable and (B) free-draining soils



Special Newt Conservation Measures



5 References

Literature

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6 Appendix I – Figures

Indicative Location of Enhancement Features and Reasonable Avoidance Measures

