



HYBRID ECOLOGY LTD
joined up thinking

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South Woodham Ferrers
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CM3 5NG**

**Mr and Mrs Webber
Old School House
Church Road
Ashbocking
Suffolk
IP6 9LG**

19th October 2023

Dear Mr and Mrs Webber,

Re: Great Crested Newt Method Statement for The Old School House, Ashbocking, Suffolk

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Hybrid Ecology Ltd. was instructed by Mr. Webber to provide a great crested newt (GCN) method statement in connection with Babergh and Mid Suffolk Council planning reference DC/23/02431.

1.2 The application relates to an extension on the house. This report is written to discharge condition 4:

PRIOR TO DEVELOPMENT COMMENCEMENT: GREAT CRESTED NEWTS METHOD STATEMENT

Prior to the commencement of development, a Great Crested Newt Precautionary Method Statement shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

All works shall thereafter be undertaken in accordance with the approved Method Statement.

Reason - To conserve Protected and Priority species and allow the LPA to discharge its duties under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and s40 of the NERC Act 2006 (Priority habitats & species)

1.3 This report has been written by Gemma Holmes who is an Associate member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (ACIEEM) and licensed great crested newt and bat surveyor (Licence references: 2016-27305-CLS-CLS and 2015-19096-CLS-CLS).

2.0 Background ecological information

- 2.1 The site was subject to a site visit by Gemma Holmes in June 2023 in relation to a Preliminary Roost Assessment of the Old School House for bats. This visit included a cursory check for suitability/signs of other legally protected species, including GCN.
- 2.2 GCN breeding sites are mainly medium-sized ponds, though ditches and other waterbody types may also be used less frequently. Ponds with ample aquatic vegetation (which is used for egg-laying) seem to be favoured. Great crested newts do not require very high water quality, but are normally found in ponds with a circum-neutral pH. Broad habitat type varies greatly, the most frequent being pastoral and arable farmland, woodland, scrub, and grassland. There are also populations in coastal dunes and shingle structures.
- 2.3 Great crested newts can be found in rural, urban and post-industrial settings, with populations less able to thrive where there are high degrees of fragmentation.
- 2.4 The connectivity of the landscape is important, since great crested newts often occur in metapopulations that encompass a cluster of several or many ponds.
- 2.5 There are no ponds at the site, which is restricted to the existing built footprint only. There are maintained garden areas surrounding the house which may be utilised for access, parking, storage of building materials etc. Some of the more overgrown areas (off-site) could be used by terrestrial GCN between June and February approximately but they will be unaffected. Photographs from the site visit are provided in Appendix 1.
- 2.6 MAGIC identifies two ponds within 250 metres of the site, see Appendix 2 and a small number of ponds just beyond 250 metres. The pond to the north was dry at the time of the survey in June 2023. The second pond is approximately 35 metres to the south-east and is under third party ownership.
- 2.7 For the purposes of this assessment, we have assumed part of the maintained garden area will be used for access/parking/storage of building materials. This equates to approximately 0.01 hectares of maintained lawn.
- 2.8 The Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment tool has been used to demonstrate the risk of an offence being committed as a result of the temporary disturbance of 0.01 hectares of potential terrestrial habitat within 35 metres of a potential breeding pond. Please refer to Table 1. The result indicates that the risk of committing an offence is “highly unlikely”.

Table 1. GCN Rapid Risk Assessment

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)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.05
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.05
Rapid risk assessment result:	GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY	

2.9 Given the above, we consider it would be unreasonable and disproportionate to suggest that further surveys would be warranted. Paragraph 016 of the NPPG: Natural Environment – Biodiversity and Ecosystems states, “Local Planning Authorities should only require ecological surveys where clearly justified – for example if they consider a reasonable likelihood of protected species being present and affected. Assessments should be proportionate to the nature and scale of the development proposed and likely impact to biodiversity.”

2.10 Nonetheless, a method statement is included in the next section to ensure that the risk of harm is further minimised to negligible.

3.0 Legal protection

3.1 GCN are afforded full legal protection under schedule 5 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019 (the Habitats Regulations). This also applies to their habitat.

3.2 This legislation makes it an offence to deliberately, intentionally or recklessly:

- kill, injure or capture a GCN;
- damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter, protection or breeding by a GCN; and/or
- disturb a GCN while it is occupying such a structure or place.

3.3 Where a project or plan has been identified as impacting on this protected species, the appropriate authority (Natural England) can issue licences which make otherwise illegal actions lawful. Such licences can, however, only be issued for preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

3.4 In terms of licensing, as it relates to this proposed development, following the initial risk assessment it was concluded that these works would not likely require further survey or formal licensing, given the small area of habitat which would be affected and the negligible risk of harm to individual newts.

4.0 Precautionary Method Statement

- 4.1 All construction site personnel would be made aware of the ecological constraints identified in this RAMS. A licensed ecologist will be available to provide ecological support for the duration of the proposed works.

The following measures will be followed throughout mobilisation and construction:

- Prior to works all contractors will be shown this report and agree they understand its contents.
- All vehicle movements will be restricted to hard standing or mown grassland only.
- All waste material must be placed in a skip, not piled on the ground where it could be utilised as a place of refuge by amphibians and other wildlife.
- All construction materials must be stored on areas of hard standing (i.e. gravel track) or in areas of cut and managed short grassland. Materials must be stored on pallets where feasible.
- Care must be taken to prevent the formation of pools and puddles in the construction areas which could be utilised by amphibians.
- All works will be undertaken in daylight hours only.
- In the event that any excavations are to be left for any prolonged period (>24hours) then these would be checked for GCN immediately prior to impacting works.
- In the unlikely event that GCN is encountered, work will cease until an ecologist has been engaged to provide advice on how to proceed. An identification sheet is provided in Appendix 3.

General precautionary measures to protect all wildlife:

- If at any point during the works a badger sett is encountered all works must immediately stop and further surveys will be required at an appropriate time of year to determine if the sett is active.
- To avoid creating refugia which may attract reptiles or other animals to the working site, no materials will be left within 5m of the site boundaries, vegetation or hedgerows. Any materials that need to be stored will be done within the cleared area and on pallets.
- If at any point in the works an amphibian or reptile is found within the works area all works in the vicinity of the sighting must immediately cease. Common amphibians/reptiles should be moved from the working area by site workers (wearing gloves) and placed at a safe distance within the remaining eastern area of the site.
- Working areas should be kept to the minimum required.
- Should it be necessary to have any excavation left open these excavations should ideally be covered with plywood boards (or similar). The boards are to be bedded on sand to prevent small animals from taking shelter under exposed edges. If this is not possible, then these trenches must be thoroughly checked prior to back filling, or if leaving pits or trenches open is

unavoidable, a suitable ramp (such as a plank or branch) must be provided to allow animals to escape the pit. Ramps could be created by grading the slope at the edges or using scaffold boards.

- Trenches must be checked each morning (by site operatives) prior to works commencing to ensure that amphibians/reptiles etc. are not present.
- At the end of works each day, the site should be inspected by a responsible individual to ensure that the above protocols are being complied with.
- Any terrestrial mammals, for example badgers, seen must be allowed to leave the area on their own. If this is not possible e.g. the animal is injured or trapped then an ecologist must be called

Variation of works

- Should the scope of works change in any way then advice would be sought from Hybrid Ecology with any changes made to the working methodologies where deemed appropriate.

If you have any queries or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Gemma Holmes BSc (Hons) ACIEEM

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Appendix 1. Photographs



a) House to be extended, maintained garden to the east.

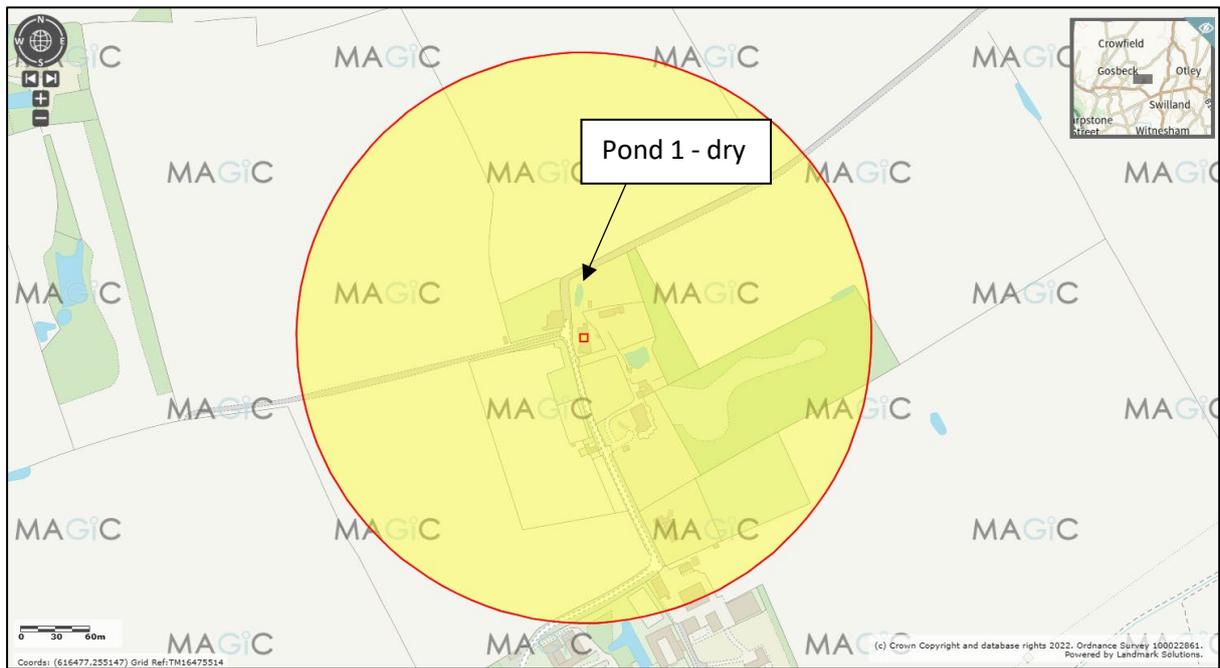


b) Car port and maintained lawn to the north.



c) Dry pond to the north.

Appendix 2. Ponds within 250 metres of the site



Appendix 3. GCN identification sheet



Above – Smooth newt, below – Great crested newt (Yorkshire Coast Nature)

Great Crested Newt	
	
1	2
<p>COLOUR: Black and dark brown body. Underside is bright yellow or orange with black spots that are unique to each individual.</p> <p>SIZE: 15cm. The largest newt.</p> <p>OTHER MARKINGS: Body has a warty appearance. Males have a distinctive crest and tail flash in spring. Females have an orange stripe on their tail.</p>	
Smooth Newt	
	
3	4
<p>COLOUR: Light brown with darker spots. Spotted bellies - with spots continuing under the throat.</p> <p>SIZE: 10cm. Smaller than the great crested.</p> <p>OTHER MARKINGS: Males develop a crest, but it is more rounded than the great crested. Some 'speckling' on face and shoulders but not as much as the palmate.</p>	
Palmate Newt	
	
5	6
<p>COLOUR: Olive brown. Spotted bellies, but spots do not continue under throat.</p> <p>SIZE: 10cm. Smaller than the great crested.</p> <p>OTHER MARKINGS: Females have pale nodules on feet. Males have webbed back feet and a filament at end of tail. More speckling along the face and shoulders compared to smooth newts.</p>	

Photo credits: 1 & 2 - Dave Kilbey, 3 - Matt Wilson, 4 & 5 - Jules Howard, 6 - Mark Rowe