

Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy

at

Sunblest House, Station Road, Old Newton, IP14 4HQ

Carried out for

Mr T Sanger

1st



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Revision	Remarks	Author	Date	Checked	Authorised
1	First draft	DCS	26/10/2023	GK	
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The authors and surveyors used to undertake the work are appropriately qualified for the tasks undertaken. The work undertaken while preparing this report has been carried out with due care, skill, and diligence.

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1. Executive summary

1.1. Overview

DCS Ecology Ltd was commissioned by Mr T Sanger to produce a Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy and GCN method statement, to satisfy the Planning Officer of the ecological needs with reference a planning application for a small extension (ref DC/23/03671). The Site is proposed for a 1 m extension of a residential dwelling. During initial surveys, the site contained few features of note, and consisted predominately of cultivated garden, and hardstanding (driveway).

This Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy summarises the results gathered by a desktop survey effort, appropriate timings, and biodiversity enhancements necessary to avoid negatively impacting species and habitats of interest found within the site. This strategy and GCN method statement by DCS Ecology Ltd in 2023 is based upon previous professional experience and mitigation. It is concluded that works will have a neutral / negligible loss of habitat if unmitigated. No protected species were recorded onsite, although adjacent gardens had small ponds that could provide potential habitat wildlife, particularly for birds, amphibians and small mammals.

2. Introduction

2.1. Background

DCS Ecology Ltd was commissioned by Mr T Sanger to produce a Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy and GCN method statement for a small extension at Sunblest House, Station Road, Old Newton (central grid reference TM04986263, hereby referred to as 'the Site'). During the survey conducted by DCS Ecology (13/11/23), the site was an area of improved grassland, hardstanding (driveway) and bare earth (disturbed soil), calculated to be 15 m² in area. A planning application permission search of the post code, found four applications that was granted by Mid Suffolk and Babergh Planning Council on for similar or greater developments This report has been created to address an enquiry from the planning authority with reference to ecological concerns

Ecology searches undertaken by DCS Ecology in November 2023 have been reviewed recommendations have been taken into consideration for this document, particularly in regards to birds, small mammals and GCN.

The two ponds and mature trees in the surrounding properties from the site provide potential for breeding amphibians and nesting birds respectively. The site its self lacks potential of foraging and commuting habitat for small mammals such as hedgehogs.

Using the information from the above survey work, this report details information of a Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy.

1.1 Aims and objectives

The aims of this Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy and attached GCN method statement are to assist with discharging relevant concerns of the LPA; and to provide information for the provision of ecological enhancement and recommendations for GCN avoidance, including habitat creation for the life of the proposed development.

Conditions considered relevant to this Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy are as follows:

ACTION REQUIRED BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

Prior to approval of the application of hereby permitted development, a Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The enhancement measures shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and all features shall be retained in that manner thereafter. Reason - To enhance protected and Priority species and allow the LPA to discharge its duties under the s40 of the NERC Act 2006 (Priority habitats & species).

1.1 Site Description

The site is a section of improved grassland, hard standing and disturbed soil with hardstanding vehicular access (drive way) to the residential dwelling of Sunblest House, Station Road, Old Newton, IP14 4HQ, in the village of Old Newton, approximately 2.8km north of Stowmarket town centre. (Grid reference TM04986263, see figure 1). The site area is approximately 15m², and consists of improved grassland, hardstanding (pathway) and bare earth (disturbed soil). The site and adjacent areas are in a residential setting in the Suffolk village of Old Newton.

Features within 50m of the site boundary of note included an active Station Road adjoining the south of site, deciduous trees 40m north of site and a pond. The deciduous trees were surrounded by residential dwellings, making it less suitable for commuting bats.

Two ponds have been identified within 250m of site (see appendix), which provide good drinking and foraging habitat for a number of species, but are of particular interest regarding great crested newts (GCN), which require ponds for aquatic life-stages and breeding. These were discounted as no records of GCN and the ponds were surrounded by unsuitable habitat mainly residential dwellings, the size was small unsuitable for the typical breeding pond for GCN.

The wider landscape (outside the village envelope) is predominately arable fields with pockets of deciduous woodland (a BAP priority habitat), mixed species hedgerow (another BAP priority habitat) and residential housing and agricultural farms.



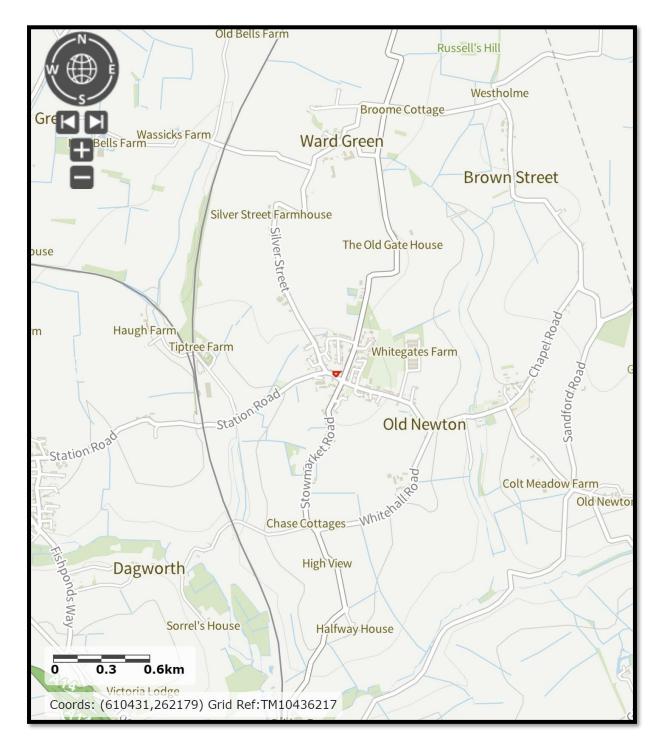


Figure 1. Site location outlined in red (1:25,000). Ordnance Survey - Crown Copyright under licence AC0000853931.



1.2 Relevant legislation

Protected species, as referred to within this report, are those protected under European Legislation (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, as amended) and UK legislation (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; Protection of Badgers Act 1992); and those of principle importance in England as listed in Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006).

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023) 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.

Appendix IV details legislation which protects species and groups relevant to the Site (bats, small mammals, and birds).

3. Previous surveys

3.1. Desk Study

A desk study was DCS Ecology Ltd on 13th November 2023, which showed records of protected species, which included data obtained from Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC). The search radius was 2 km for statutory and non-statutory designated sites, priority habitats and protected priority species.

The respective search radii were considered suitable for the scale and type of the proposed development.



3.2. Field Surveys

13/11/23- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal – DCS Ecology Ltd.

- PEA search was conducted on 13/11/23 to establish whether the extension was going to have any impacts to protected species.
- The survey found that much of the site remained as short vegetation / bare earth / hardstanding and was of low biodiversity value.
- Common bird species including Eurasian blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) and wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) were recorded using nearby in the trees adjacent the site. There were no direct observations of mammals or protected plant species. The neighbouring garden ponds were not suitable GCN breeding ponds because of their size and depth and both being isolated from suitable foraging habitat being situated in the middle of the village (built up area).

4. Compensation & Enhancement Strategy

There are a number of practices that can maximize biodiversity and are particularly relevant to this proposed small development. This can be achieved by minimizing practices such as pesticides, hedgerow planting, soft landscaping, and creating wildlife features such as artificial nesting sites for birds. The indicative positions of the proposed new features can be seen in Appendix III.

4.1 **Birds**

The addition of bird boxes, will create further nesting opportunities for birds that may be foraging onsite and enhance nesting opportunities adjacent to site.

Exact designs are amendable, but should include bird boxes designed for passerine birds such as:

• 1x Nest box suitable for robins, such as a Woodstone Barcelona Open Nest Box. To be placed on, a pole/fence post or trees approved by an ecologist.

Bird boxes should be cleaned out once a year after young birds have fledged. If a second brood follows, the nest box should be cleaned again in the late autumn.

Precise locations of boxes should be decided by a suitably experienced ecologist at the time of erection to ensure optimal situation and reduce effect of changing environmental conditions at the Site in the meantime.

Cleaning (as necessary) should be undertaken on an annual basis, ideally September-December as this is immediately after the birds nesting season and young birds are likely to have fledged.

If bird boxes are not to be erected by an ecologist, it is recommended that advice in Appendix V be followed prior to installation.

4.2 *Hedgehogs*

After works have been completed, if any new fencing has been erected it will either be wide enough to allow hedgehogs continued access around the whole site or have gaps (at-least 13cm x 13cm) provided at the base of fences in several locations to facilitate the movement of hedgehogs.

The placement of 1x hedgehog box / mammal house within the garden area land north of site would provide additional sheltering and hibernation opportunities for hedgehogs recorded within the local area (see Appendix II in appendices).

It is recommended to seek guidance on the exact positioning of the hedgehog box by a professional to ensure optimal chance of being successfully used. Additional guidance has also been provided in Appendix V.

4.3 Invertebrates

1x Bee house is recommended to provide habitat for invertebrates, such as solitary beehive house.

It is recommended to seek guidance on the exact positioning of the bee house by a professional to ensure optimal chance of being successfully used. Additional guidance has also been provided in Appendix V.

4.4 Landscaping

Soft landscaping surrounding the new extension to include structurally diverse areas of planting within the garden using species of known value to pollinators. For example, these may include species such as common honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), rowan (*Sorbus acuparia*), foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) or elder (*sambucus nigra*).

4.5 Amphibians

Amphibian enhancements were considered unnecessary for proposed works, due to the lack of sheltering, breeding and foraging opportunities onsite. (GCN RMS attached in appendix).



5. Time Frames for Implementation

5.1. This Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy will be implemented during and after the construction phase has been completed. The exact date of the completion of works is yet to be confirmed but enhancements will be implemented during the landscaping phase at the latest. The persons responsible for ensuring that the Enhancement Strategy is adhered to at each phase have been allocated.

Enhancement feature	Start date	End date	Responsible personnel
Erection of bird boxes & installation of bee house hedgehog shelters.	After Aug 2024	Before Aug 2028	Site manager/ Contractors/ DCS Ecology Ltd
Works extension construction	After Nov 2023	Before Aug 2027	Site manager/ Contractors

6. References

Cresswell, W.J. Birks, J.D.S, Dean, M., Pacheco, M., Trewhella, W.J., Wells, D. & Wray, S. (2012) UK BAP Mammals Interim Guidance for Survey Methodologies, Impacts and Mitigation. Eds. The Mammal Society, Southampton.

Gent, A.H. and Gibson, S.D., eds. (1998) Herpetofauna Workers' Manual. Peterborough, Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Mitchell-Jones, A. J. (2004) Bat Mitigation Guidelines. English Nature. ISBN 1-85716-781-3. http://naturalengland.communisis.com/naturalenglandshop/docs/IN13.6.pdf

Oldham R.S., Keeble J., Swan M.J.S. & Jeffcote M. (2000). Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). Herpetological Journal 10 (4), 143-155.

Web references

http://www.bats.org.uk/data/files/bats and lighting in the uk final version version 3 ma y 09.pdf

http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk/MagicMap.aspx



7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix I: Photos from 31st March 2023



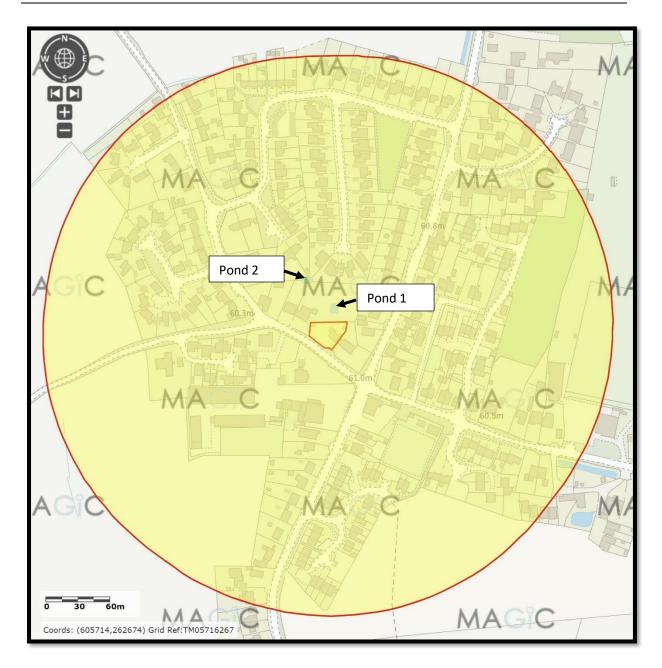


Photo reference 1: Hedgehog / Mammal House	Photo reference 2: Bee house
	Photo reference 4: Woodstone Barcelona Open

7.2. Appendix II: Compensation features examples:

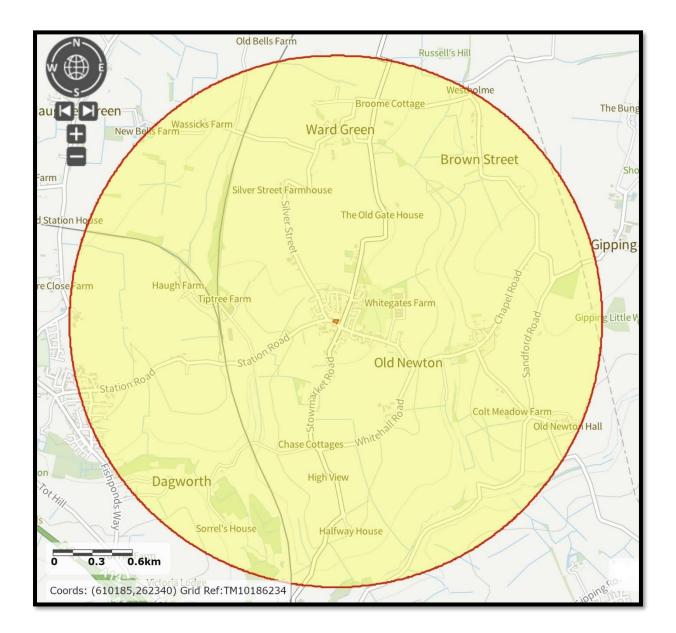


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Ponds with 250m of the site

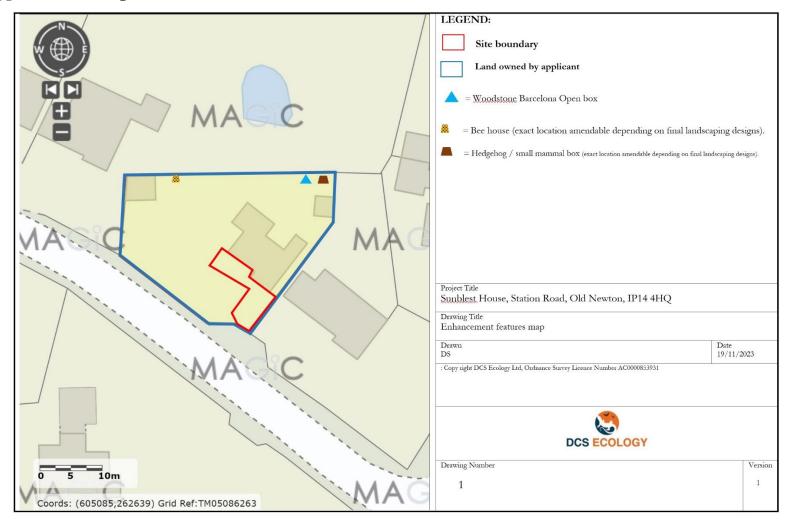




2km data search for GCN (no records found)

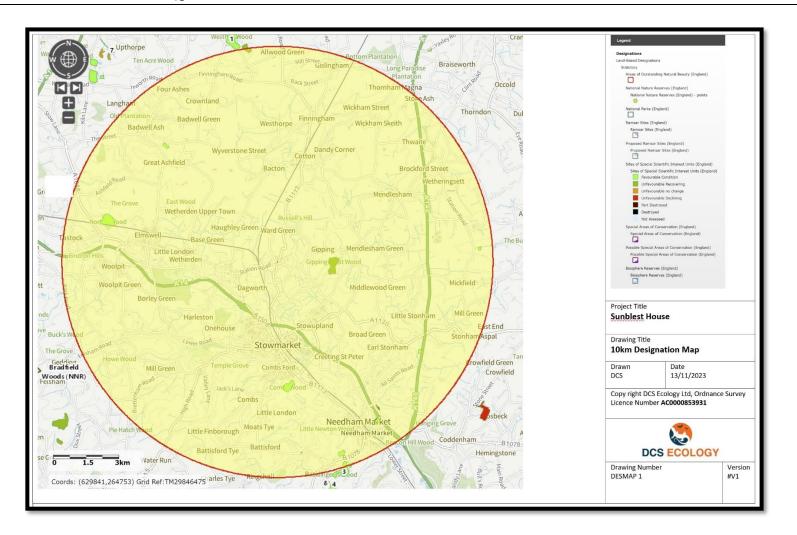


7.3. Appendix III : Figures



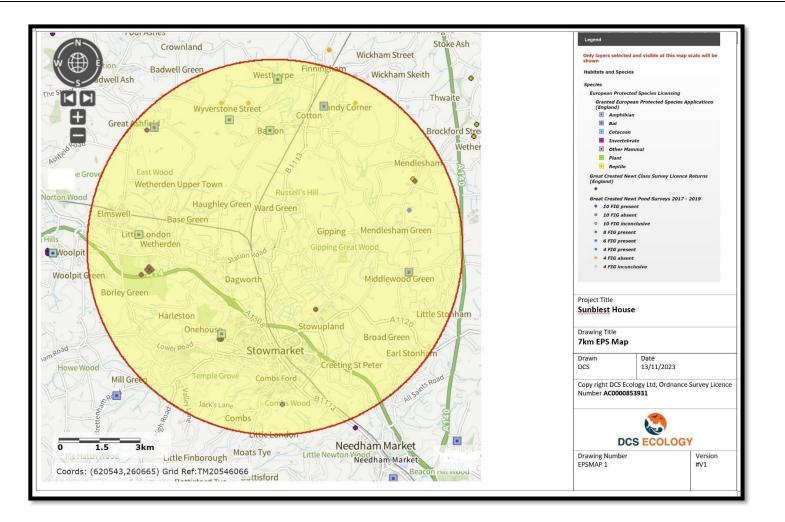
Location of enhancement features





10km Statutory Designations Map





7Km Protected species map



Species	Legislation	Protection
Bats (foraging / commuting) Birds	 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010) (as amended) Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) (1981), Schedule 5 (as amended) Wild Mammals Act (1996) Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) (1981 (as amended) 	 It is an offence to: Intentionally kill, injure or take any bat Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a bat roost. It is an offence to: Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird Intentionally take, damage or destroy nests in
		 use or being built Intentionally take, damage or destroy eggs Species listed on Schedule 1 of the WCA (1981) are afforded additional protection, making it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb such species at, on or near an active nest.
Great Crested Newts	 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010) (as amended) Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) (1981), Schedule 5 (as amended) 	 It is an offence to: Intentionally kill, injure or take a great crested newt Intentionally or recklessly disturb a great crested newt Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place used by a great crested newt for shelter or protection
Widespread Reptiles	Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) (1981), Schedule 5 (as amended)	It is an offence to: Intentionally kill or injure a reptile Sell, offer or expose for sale, have in possession or transport for the purpose of sale any live or dead reptile or any part of, or anything derived from, a reptile

7.4. Appendix IV: Relevant Protected Species Legislation



7.5. Appendix V: Supplementary information

Recommendations for installing bird boxes:

(Sourced from British Trust for Ornithology <u>www.bto.org</u> and Manthorpe <u>www.manthorpe.co.uk</u>) The highest priority when siting a nest box must be to provide a safe and comfortable environment in which birds can nest successfully. Tips for putting up a nest box:

• Boxes should be sited 1-3m from the ground, ideally on tree trunks but can be placed on the side of a shed or wall. Avoid areas where foliage obscures the entrance hole.

• Don't place boxes too close to another nest box of the same type, as this may promote aggressive behaviour between neighbours.

- Shelter your nest box from prevailing wind, rain and strong sunlight. The box should face between north and east, and angled vertically or slightly downwards to prevent rain entering.
- Make sure cats cannot get into the box.
- Keep nest box away from bird feeders.

• Use galvanized or stainless-steel screws or nails. If fixing boxes to trees, galvanised wire can be used to tie the box to the trunk or hang it from a branch. Make sure to regularly inspect these fittings (every two or three years) to ensure the box remains securely attached. Tips for putting up house sparrow terraces and swift bricks/boxes:

• Locate \geq 5m high on the gable wall of the property and above the level of the insulation zone.

• Where possible, install in locations that are unlikely to receive large amounts of direct sunlight during the hottest times of the day, ideal places include below the overhang of the verge and barge board.

Recommendations for installing a bee box:

Siting: Site in a visible warm place ideally oriented to face between southeast and south and to catch some sun. It is helpful to have soil nearby, and food sources such as flowers, orchards and fruit.

Recommendations for installing a Hedgehog box / mammal house

(References include <u>https://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/hedgehog-homes/</u> and <u>https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/homes-for-hedgehogs</u>)

- Avoid placing in direct sunlight, a sheltered area of the garden away from any prevailing winds is recommended, such as under dense vegetation.
- If you wish to clean to box out, only do so with non-harmful materials, ideally hot water and scrubbing brush, and only if the box is unoccupied by hedgehogs.
- Avoid frequently relocating or checking the box, particularly during the winter, as it may disturb any hedgehogs inside.



7.6. List of Abbreviations

Table 5: List of	abbreviations
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BCT	Bat Conservation Trust
BoCC	Birds of Conservation Concern
CHSR	Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
CIEEM	Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management
CRoW	The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000
CWS	County Wildlife Site
ECoW	Ecological clerk of works
eDNA	Environmental DNA
EIA	Ecological Impact Assessment
EPS	European Protected Species
GCN	Great crested newt
HPI	Habitat of Principal Importance
HSI	Habitat Suitability Index
HRA	Habitat Regulations Assessment
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LPAs	Local Planning Authorities
MAGIC	Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside
NBIS	Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service
NE	Natural England
NERC	Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NPPF	The National Planning Policy Framework
PEA	Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
PRA	Preliminary Roost Assessment
PRF	Potential (bat) Roosting Feature
RAMs	Reasonable Avoidance Measures
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SBAP	Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan
SBIS	Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Special Site of Scientific Interest
WCA	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
UKBAP	United Kingdom's Biodiversity Action Plan



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

at

Sunblest House, Station Road, Old Newton, IP14 4HQ



1 Introduction

1.1. Background

DCS Ecology was commissioned by Mr T Sanger to produce a Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) Method Statement for an application at the proposed small extension at Sunblest House, Station Road, Old Newton, IP14 4HQ (hereafter referred to as the Site).

The Site is approximately 15m², comprising improved grassland, hardstanding (driveway) and bare earth (disturbed soil) which were not suitable for GCN during both terrestrial and aquatic phases.

As the higher quality habitat adjacent the development, it was considered that the development could proceed under a precautionary approach/methodology.

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 great crested newts) to a negligible level as calculated by the rapid risk calculator for GCN. (See Below)

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)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.005
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	

Guidance on risk assessment result categories

"Green: offence highly unlikely" indicates that the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that it is highly unlikely any offence would be committed should the development proceed. Therefore, no licence would be required. However, bearing in mind that this is a generic assessment, you should carefully examine your specific plans to ensure this is a sound conclusion, and take precautions (see **Non-licensed avoidance measures tool**) to avoid offences if appropriate. It is likely that any residual offences would have negligible impact on conservation status, and enforcement of such breaches is unlikely to be in the public interest.

Should newts be encountered during works, then a licensed ecologist will be contacted and discuss future methods – including the possibility of applying for a Natural England European Protected Species Mitigation Licence.



1.2. Legislative Context

Great crested newts are a European Protected Species and a Species of Principle Importance 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 alive 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.

Great crested newts are also listed on the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, as Suffolk is believed to be a stronghold for this species.

If great crested newts are recorded within 500m of the Site, then a license must be obtained from Natural England prior to undertaking any work which may affect them.

1.3. Great Crested Newt Ecology

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).

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 'warty' 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).

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).

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).

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**

2.1 Desk Study

Data obtained from the MAGIC were used to conduct a standard data search for any information regarding statutory and non-statutory sites and records of protected and priority species (including great crested newts) within a 2km radius of the Site. Data were obtained on the 13th of November 2023.

2.2. Habitat Assessment

The Site comprised an area of cut grassland (lawn), hand standing (drive way and path) and bare soil (flower beds), which has negatable habitat to support GCN in the terrestrial or aquatic breeding stage of life.

3. Reasonable Avoidance Measures

3.1. Habitats to be Impacted by works

The development will include the disturbance of small areas of habitat grassland, and bare soil, which has little to no suitability of GCN foraging, sheltering, and hibernation habitats.

3.2. Avoidance Measures / Working Practices

Pre-construction

Sensitive vegetation clearance / a maintenance of very short sward height should be carried out prior to the start of works (at a height of <5cm). This will maintain the Site as sub-optimal / unsuitable for great crested newts and reduce the risk of harming animals when works commence. It was noted this was garden lawn

Immediately prior to the commencement of construction 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. Any site workers joining mid-project should receive a Toolbox Talk before starting work.

Safe Working Practices

The Site Manager will be responsible for performing a thorough site check each morning to assess the condition of the working practices listed below.

- All materials will be stored on pallets. This will prevent places of refuge being created within the construction zone.
- 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.
- All waste should be stored in skips prior to removal from Site.



- All excavations should contain an escape ramp, made from earth or wooden sticks (or multiple ramps within large excavations to be determined by the ECoW). The 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.
- All heavy plant movement will be confined to hardstanding / bare earth habitats. Machinery will not enter ecologically sensitive areas such as long grassland, scrub, or tall ruderal vegetation.



4 Habitat Advancement Opportunities

The Site could be suitable for amphibians, including populations of great crested newts, but the site is fragmented and isolated from suitable surrounding habitats.

Low level shrub planting would provide valuable sheltering, foraging, and commuting habitat for Amphibians and other wildlife species such as Hedgehogs. Low-growing shrubs would offer the greatest protection for amphibians. Any plants should be native species and of local provenance.

