

5<sup>th</sup> December 2022

## Homefield Holders Green Road Lindsell CM6 3QJ

### Additional Great Crested Newts Assessment - Response to Place Services letter of 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022

I have been forwarded a copy of ECC Place Services' comments dated 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 in response to the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) submitted to the previous application UTT/22/2172/OP by the Agent, Kieron Lilley. In the letter Place Services has stated that they are not satisfied that there is sufficient ecological information available for determination of the application as they did not consider impacts upon Great Crested Newts had been fully assessed.

I have reviewed the comments and undertaken a survey of the three ponds that were noted within the response letter. This letter report addresses the points raised.

Within their letter Place Services states that they have identified three ponds within 250m of the site. To address their concerns I undertook an additional survey of each feature on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022. The finding of this survey has not altered my professional opinion as to the likelihood of Great Crested Newts using the site.

#### Pond 1

The pond shown closest to the site (90m northeast) is immediately adjacent to a site that has been recently redeveloped (**building works have been completed by the new houses are unoccupied**) (Photo 1). An ecological assessment was undertaken in support of that application but the possible presence of Great Crested Newts was not raised as a concern as part of that scheme.

The site visit revealed that the new buildings and a widened, resurfaced access had been constructed between the pond and the Site forming a significant barrier for any potential GCN. The driveway to these houses extends to the top of the pond bank (Photo 1 & 2). A line of trees that could have provided some connectivity has been removed over time. It is to the east of the road, albeit it is a relatively quiet lane.

On the north side of the pond there is an arable field (Photo 3). Even in the unlikely situation that the pond was used by GCN there is better defined hedge and ditch links to the east of the pond.



Photo 1 – new housing and access near completion



Photo 2 – new development extends to the top of the pond bank





Photo 3 – Pond 1 and the adjacent arable field

## **Pond 2**

The OS mapping shows a small pond on the edge of an arable field approximately 130m south of the site.

The site visit showed that this feature is formed at the confluence of two field ditches and is approximately 5m by 4m (Photo 4). It was surveyed immediately following very heavy rain and so it contained water however there was a significant flow through the ditches. The feature is heavily shaded but there is some connectivity via the hedge bounding the intervening residential properties.

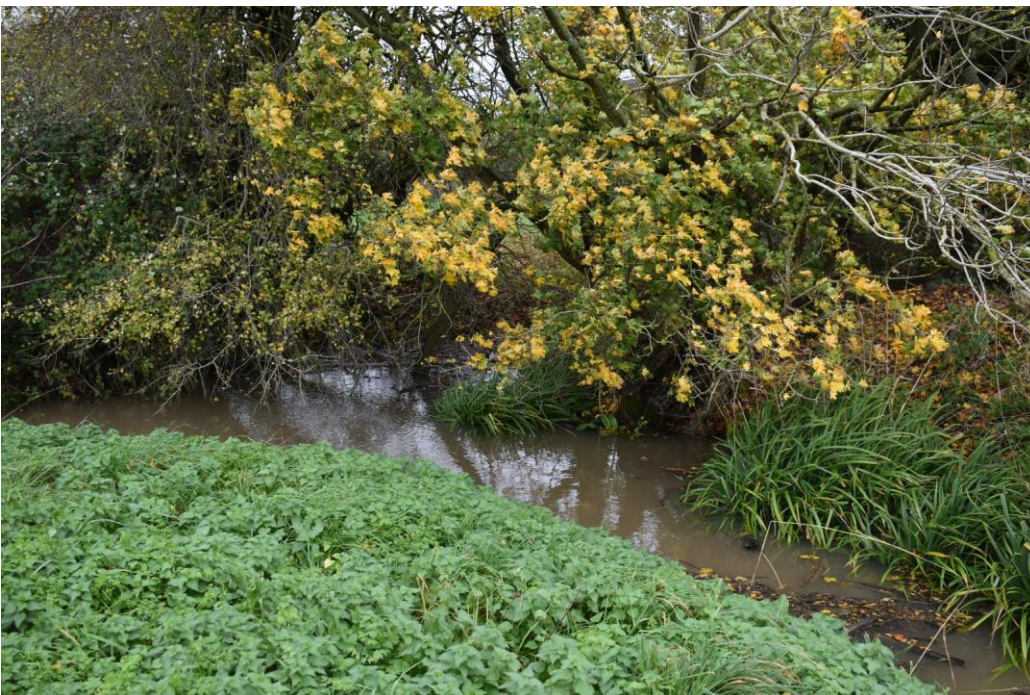


Photo 4 – ‘Pond’ 2 is a confluence of two flowing ditches



### Pond 3

The pond 230m from the site is separated from the site by pasture, existing residential properties and the lane. It is situated on the boundary of a small, wooded area and an arable field. Even following the heavy rain this feature contained little water.



Photo 5 – Pond 3

In their letter Place Services state that Habitat Suitability Index is not an appropriate survey technique for presence/likely absence for GCN. What the HSI does provide is a standard methodology for an experienced ecologist to determine the likelihood of GCN being present and is commonly used in this way. Having assessed all four of the water bodies within 250m of the site I consider each of them to be of below average to poor suitability. Moreover the links between the three additional ponds and the site are limited with most of the intervening land being residential properties with formal gardens and two are separated by the road.

As set out in the PEA, the site is currently managed as a private garden and horse paddocks. Having surveyed the site I feel that the main area is unsuitable for GCN; however the boundary hedges could have a limited potential to be used by GCN. The area of the proposed development therefore would not directly affect any suitable terrestrial habitat; that is confined to the boundary hedges that are to be retained and enhanced.

Adopting a precautionary approach suitable newt fencing can be installed around the hedges during construction to prevent any animals accessing the main site during building works. This fencing would be in addition to appropriate tree protection fencing which would be provided in accordance with BS5837:2012.

I note the comment that the hedges as Priority Habitats should be located outside the residential curtilage. While I totally sympathise with the sentiment that these hedges should be protected I would highlight that these hedges are part of existing residential curtilage of Homefield. The applicant however has confirmed that they are happy for there to be a management company to manage the hedges and any communal areas.

As stated in the PEA, the boundary hedges within the site are to be retained and enhanced as part of the scheme. As stated in the report the hedge on the western boundary is thin and will be reinforced with additional planting of native, broadleaved species.

The hedge on the eastern boundary comprises elm and ash with all the trees in poor condition due to Dutch Elm Disease and Ash Dieback. This will be replanted to create a good quality landscape and biodiversity feature.

I trust that this provides the additional information required to enable Place Services to remove their holding objection.

Yours sincerely,



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Director