

Precautionary Method Statement: Great Crested Newts

Description:

Non-licensed Precautionary Method Statement to be implemented on site in order to mitigate potential impacts on Great Crested Newts with reference to planning application **DC/23/03826**
Rewilding project including provision of woodland, construction of a wetland lake and angling lake and erection of anglers boat house / tractor shed

Site:

Valley Farm, Valley Lane, Great Finborough, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 3BD

Report prepared by A Hart, Hartbuild Ltd

12 December 2023

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1 Introduction

Planning permission was granted on 7 December 2023. Condition 9 in the planning requires that a Great Crested Newt Non-Licensed Precautionary Method Statement is submitted and approved prior to commencement.

The purpose of this statement is to advise best working practices to avoid committing offences regarding protected Great Crested Newts *Tristurus cristatus* in support of approved planning proposal DC/23/03826 for Valley Farm, Valley Lane, Great Finborough, IP14 3BD (referred to in this document at 'the site').

As such this report is presented in a way as to encourage and ensure practical implementation of mitigation strategies relating to Great Crested Newts that have been proposed by qualified ecologists and agreed to as part of the planning process.

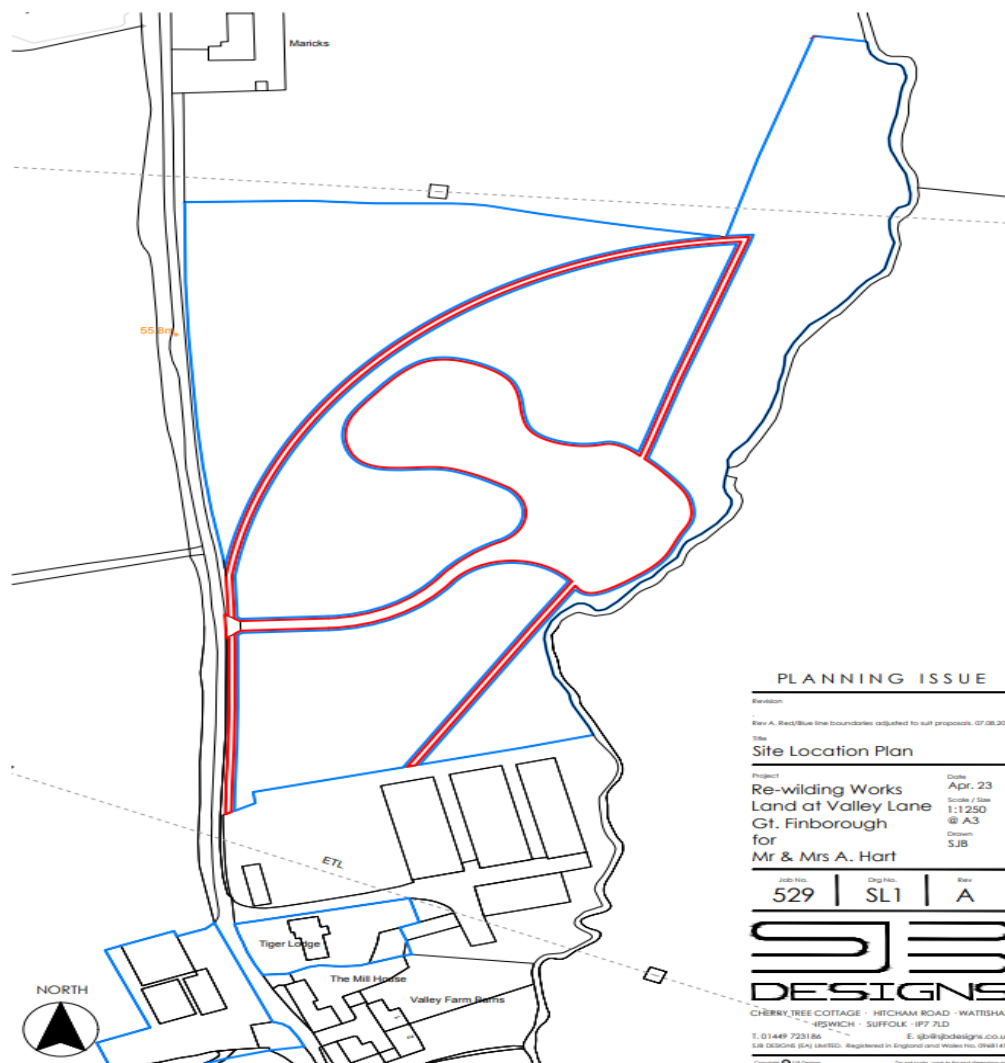
1.1 Site Context and Development and Relating Reports

The planning permission granted is for **Rewilding project including provision of woodland, construction of a wetland lake and angling lake, and erection of anglers boat house / tractor shed.**

The site context and development relating to matters of ecology has been extensively covered in the reports submitted as part of the planning application and undertaken by Tim Watts of Framlingham Environmental. These are easily accessible via the planning portal and will be available to view on site. Of particular relevance are:

- Ecology Appraisal 7 July 2023
- Biodiversity Supporting Statement 7 July 2023
- Ecology Appraisal (Supplementary Information) 24 October 2023

The red line area for planning purposes is shown in the Site Location Plan below. The wider context is within a 4.8ha agricultural field which is currently cultivated to a sterile seedbed.



1.2 Need for this statement

This statement has been developed in response to a condition of consent for planning application DC/23/03826 set out by Place Services (20th November 2023) in order to avoid contravening legislation ensuring the protection of Great Crested Newts.

Risk indicators for the site are:

- The site is in a Green but adjacent to an Amber Risk Zone for Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing. *Amber zones contain main population centres for GCN and comprise important connecting habitat that aids natural dispersal. Green zones contain sparsely distributed GCN and are less likely to contain important pathways of connecting habitat for this species.*
- There are six records for Great Crested Newt (GCN) within 2km of the site (Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service accessed under licence).
- The site lies adjacent to a tributary of the River Rat which may provide a suitable habitat for GCNs

2 Legislation and Planning Policy

Great Crested Newts are designated and protected as European protected species (EPS). EPS are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Under this law, it is an offence to:

- Deliberately kill, injure, disturb or capture them.
- Deliberately take or destroy their eggs.
- Damage or destroy their breeding sites and resting places – even if Great Crested Newts are not present.
- Possess, control or transport the (alive or dead)

This species is also protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Under this law, it is an offence to:

- Disturb Great Crested Newts while they occupy a structure of place used for shelter or protection.
- Obstruct access to a place of shelter or protection

This species is listed as a rare and most threatened species under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 under which its conservation must be addressed when considering planning decisions.

3 Habitats and Behaviour

The main factors in the decline of Great Crested Newt populations are:

- The deliberate filling in or destruction of ponds
- Pond loss through natural succession
- Introduction of fish
- Chemical pollution and nutrification of breeding sites
- Loss of terrestrial habitat
- Habitat fragmentation
- Habitat management which renders sites unsuitable for great crested newts
- Deterioration of ponds through neglect or misuse

Great Crested Newts are dormant on land from when night temperatures fall below 5C (generally late September to mid-October) with the majority of individuals dormant by the end of November. Preferred winter habitats include dense, pond-edge vegetation, leaf litter in woodland, animal burrows or tree stump crevices. They begin moving from over-wintering sites between February and April, usually in damp conditions when temperatures begin to rise above 4-5C. Movement over land only occurs at night. From this time, adult newts spend anything up to around seven months in an aquatic habitat (one or more ponds), with periods of foraging on land. Adults begin to leave ponds to breed between late May and July with most leaving by August, seeking shelter in crevices or refuges above ground. They feed at night on land on invertebrate prey including slugs, spiders, insects and earthworms, usually on warm, wet evenings.

4 Measures to avoid harm to Great Crested Newts

4.1 Timing of works

No aquatic habitat exists within the site. The site of the proposed development is within a cultivated agricultural field which is regularly sprayed with herbicide, representing poor potential habitat for Great Crested Newts. No potential hibernation habitat exists within the development area. No potential hibernation habitat at the periphery of the site will be destroyed or impacted by the development. During the breeding period between 1st February – 31st August, Great Crested Newts are likely to be active in aquatic habitats beyond the site. During this time, individuals will be mobile and able to disperse to more suitable habitats. This period is recommended for all construction works. In addition, and adopting an extremely precautionary approach, the following measures will ensure the safety of Great Crested Newts:

4.2 Before construction commences

- This statement must be supplied and explained to all construction site staff.
- Any temporary worker's accommodation must be restricted to existing hard-standing.
- Vehicles must enter/leave the site via existing driveway and remain on hard-standing where possible.
- A temporary amphibian fence Lotrack Silt fence or similar (500mm height) should be placed as per mapping (See Appendix 1) and installed in a way approved by the manufacturer to exclude amphibians and small mammals from entering the site from neighbouring hedge row and watercourse margin over the construction period.

- This fencing should be erected on bare land on the fringe of operations post an ecological assessment walk of the site by an experienced ecologist.
- The fencing should be broken/gapped as shown, to allow easy escape routes for larger mammals and birds, that may enter the site - jumping or flying from the open field areas. This to avoid stress and predation to species such as Brown hares and Partridges.

4.3 During construction works

- Until construction is complete vegetation should not be allowed to establish on site so that the site does not provide a suitable habitat for GCNs.
- Suspend all works if any Great Crested Newts are found on site (see appendix 2 for identification guide) and summon suitably qualified ecologist for advice.

At first instance contact Tim Watts at Framlingham Environmental

Tel 01728 638 495 / 07470 937763 tim@framlinghamenvironmental.co.uk

- Suspected Great Crested Newts should not be handled.
- All machinery operation/construction works should be carried out only in hours of day light. This to avoid disturbance of nocturnal wildlife activity.
- All machinery should be parked when not working on the South West corner of the site, to avoid visual disturbance of the river corridor.
- No excavations, soil storage or tracked compaction should take place within fifteen metres of the water course - River Rat. This to avoid damage to mature riverside trees roots or burrows of protected species
- Fencing with footpads can act as refuge sites for Great Crested Newts and should not be used. Where temporary fencing is required, a low-impact fence is recommended. Vegetation under any temporary fencing should be kept short to encourage dispersal to alternative habitats.
- Storage of any building materials brought onto the site and any building work waste should be restricted as far as possible to areas of hard-standing.
- Trenches and other excavations should be filled in before nightfall or, where this is impossible, ramps should be provided to allow the escape of any wildlife that has entered the excavation.
- Store all new building materials on pallets or in bags to avoid use as refuges.
- Place building waste (e.g. rubble, solid debris) directed into skips and remove from the site as soon as possible, to avoid waste piles attractive to reptiles.

Appendix 1 – Amphibian / small animal fencing

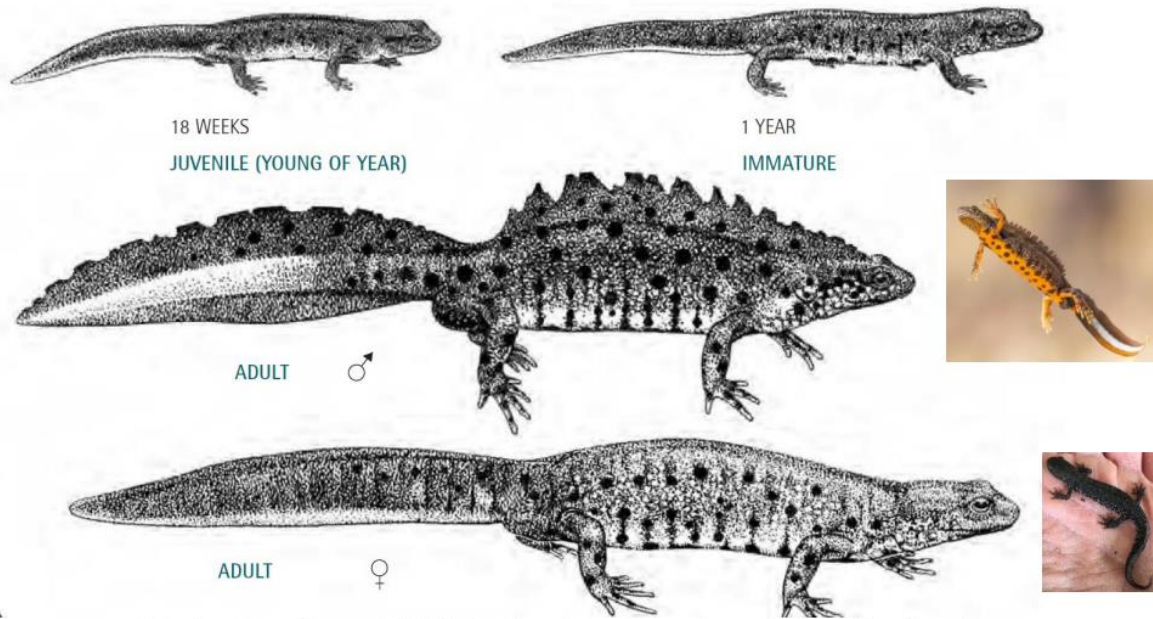


LAND AT VALLEY FARM, GREAT FINBOROUGH

TM 017569 - 24/10/2023

Proposal extent of Amphibian/Small mammal fencing marked on plan in green.

Appendix 2: Great Crested Newt Identification



From Langton, T.E.S., Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. (2001), Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, Froglife, Halesworth.