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Ref: 1917

Date: 18th April 2024

Mr H Standley
Yew Tree Farm
Station Road
Laxfield
Suffolk
IP13 8HG

Dear Mr Standley,

Re: Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
Site: Land at Yew Tree Farm, Laxfield, Suffolk

Please find below the results of the Preliminary Ecological Assessment of land at Yew Tree Farm which is proposed for the erection of a modern agricultural building extension.

Scope

This letter report provides an assessment of the site with respect to its potential to support protected species or Species and Habitats of Principal Importance, as identified by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Where best practice guidelines exist, these have been used to assess the likelihood that individual species will be present, for example Bat Surveys: Good Practice Guidelines (Collins, J. 2023) and Habitat Suitability Index for Great Crested Newt (Oldham *et. al.*, 2000).

Surveyors

The survey was carried out by Liz Lord. Liz has been a professional ecologist since 2005, and holds current Natural England licences to survey bats - Class Licence Reg. No. 2015-13305-CLS-CLS; great crested newts - Class Licence Reg. No. 2020-44816-CLS-CLS; and barn owls – Class Licence Reg. No. CL29/00160. Liz is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

The weather at the time of the survey was overcast with a strong breeze (BF4-5) and a temperature of 9°C.

Methodology & Rationale

The survey was based upon the standard methodology for Extended Phase 1 Habitat Surveys (JNCC 2010) and the UK Habitat Classification system (UKHab Ltd 2023). The relative abundance of individual plant species was recorded, and habitats were classified according to the abundance of plant species present. Any evidence of invasive species such as Japanese knotweed was noted. The survey also used best practice guidelines to assess the likelihood that individual protected and / or notable

species would be present, with the existing building assessed in accordance with criteria outlined in Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (Collins, J. 2023).

The Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website was searched on 17th April 2024 for any records of European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licences that have been approved by Natural England within a 5km radius of the application site since late 2008. The website was also checked for any data from Natural England's great crested newt eDNA Habitat Suitability Index pond surveys for District Level Licensing 2017-2019 (last updated December 2023); and data from Natural England great crested newt Class Survey Licence returns (last updated December 2023) within a 5km radius of the site. No other desk top searches were undertaken due to the very low potential for any other species to be present on site.

Ordnance Survey maps at 1:10,000 scale and aerial photographs were used to search for the presence of water bodies within 100m of the site. In accordance with current guidance from Natural England (2020), for proposals of this scale consideration of ponds within 100m of the site (rather than 250m or 500m) is considered proportionate. The proposals will result in the loss of less than 100m² of land, which according to the current guidance, is unlikely to result in an offence under the relevant legislation i.e. it is 'highly unlikely' that an offence would be committed. Ponds at a greater distance from the site were not therefore considered to be of relevance to the proposals, and were not assessed.

Results

The site lies immediately to the west of an existing modern agricultural building. Half of the site comprises an area of disturbed, patchy bare ground with colonising ephemeral / short perennial vegetation including bristly ox-tongue *Helminthotheca echioides*, groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*, rosebay willowherb *Chamaenerion angustifolium*, herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*, cleavers *Galium aparine* and thale cress *Arabidopsis thaliana*. A small tank is present adjacent to the existing building, resting on a concrete plinth. Beyond here to the west, the remainder of the site supports a crop of oil seed rape.

The site does not provide suitable habitat for reptiles, water voles, otter or dormice; and no evidence of the presence of badgers was noted within 30m of the site. The vegetation provides low quality potential habitat for foraging bats and birds, and is not suitable for use by nesting birds. The existing adjacent building is very new, with a steel frame, metal sheet roof and upper walls, and concrete wall sections below. It is of negligible suitability for roosting bats and nesting birds.

The vegetation on site provides low quality potential habitat for GCN, with sparse vegetation cover at ground level and large areas of bare ground associated with both the ephemeral vegetation and the oil seed rape. A section of corrugated cement fibreboard sheet provides a potential feature for GCN shelter, with no GCN recorded beneath the sheet when lifted.

Three water bodies were identified within 100m of the site – WB1 at c.20m south west, WB2 at c.40m north west, and WB3 at 80m south east. WB3 is separated from the site by farm buildings and a concrete farmyard; and given that WB1 and WB2 are in closer proximity to the site with no obstructions, and that the site provides low quality potential habitat for GCN, WB3 was not deemed to be of significant additional relevance to the proposals and was therefore not assessed during the site visit. A fourth water body at c.40m west is more of a damp depression and unlikely to be functioning as a pond. WB1 and WB2 were subject to a Habitat Suitability Index assessment following standard methods described in Oldham R.S. *et al*, (2000), and both were deemed to be of 'average' suitability for GCN with scores of 0.66 and 0.64 respectively. The full results are provided in Appendix 2.

The MAGIC data search highlighted the presence of a GCN EPSM licence record located c.830m to the east of the site, a cluster of four GCN records c.3.5-4.5km east of the site, and a single class licence return at 2.8km north east. Six bat EPSM licences were also identified, with the closest at 1.6km south west for a non-breeding roost of common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, natterer's *Myotis nattereri*, brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus* and barbastelle bat *Barbastella barbastellus*. The remaining five licences are located over 2km from the site. No other European protected species records were returned.

The site is not located within potential influencing distance of any designated sites, and will not result in any indirect impacts such as increased recreational use of such sites. Whilst a desk top records search was not undertaken, the site is surrounded by arable fields and a farmyard, and is very unlikely to be located within potential influencing distance of any County Wildlife Sites.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Whilst the site is located within close proximity to two water bodies with 'average' potential to support GCN, the proposals are considered very unlikely to have any significant adverse impacts upon either individual GCN or any local population of GCN for the following reasons:

- The proposals will result in the loss of less than 100m² of low quality potential terrestrial habitat for great crested newts – semi-vegetated bare ground and an arable crop;
- The site is not located on a potential GCN commuting route between two ponds, since the existing adjacent agricultural building prevents this; and
- Natural England's (2020) rapid risk assessment tool indicates that the loss / damage of up to 0.01ha (100m²) of potential GCN habitat within 100m of a GCN breeding pond would be unlikely to result in an offence i.e. the notional probability of an offence is Green i.e. 'unlikely'.

The likelihood of GCN being present on site or adversely affected by the proposals is negligible, and can be further reduced by following the Precautionary Method Statement detailed in Appendix 3. No adverse impacts upon the Favourable Conservation Status of any local GCN population are predicted as a result of the proposals. The presence, or otherwise, of GCN in either WB1 or WB2 is very unlikely to affect the conclusions and recommendations of this letter report, and further detailed survey is not therefore recommended.

The location of the site in relation to WB1, WB2 and WB3 is shown in Appendix 1.

As detailed in the Precautionary Method Statement, in the event that a great crested newt is discovered on site at any point, all works must cease and an ecologist contacted for further advice. In this situation further detailed survey, licensing works and communication with Natural England may then be necessary.

No other protected species or Priority habitats are present on site or likely to be affected by the proposals. No further works are therefore required in either regard.

If you have any queries regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Liz Lord BSc (Hons) MCIEEM
Consultant Ecologist

References

Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edn)* The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

Natural England (2020) *Template for Method Statement to support application for licence under Regulation 53(2)e of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) in respect of great crested newts Triturus cristatus. Form WML-A14-2 (Version April 2020)*

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, pp. 143-155.

Site photographs



Photo 1: Site viewed from south looking north



Photo 2: Wider view of site, which extends into the oil seed rape field



Photo 3: Northern end of site, looking south



Photo 4: Southern end of site



Photo 5: Modern agricultural building to which the new extension will join



Photo 6: WB2, located c.40m north west of site



Photo 7: WB1, located c.20m south west of site

**Appendix 1:
Aerial Location Plan**



Fig.1: Plan showing location of proposed development site (outlined in red) in relation to WB1, WB2 and WB3, and the location of existing areas of buildings and hard standing. Image sourced from Google Earth Pro

**Appendix 2:
Habitat Suitability Index Assessment**

HSI Results

WB1

Habitat Suitability Index			SI value	
SI1. Map location	A/B/C	A	1.00	
SI2. Surface area	rectangle/ellipse/irregular	ellipse		
		length (m)	14	
		width (m)	11	
		OR estimate (m ²) if irregular		
		area (m ²) =	120.89	0.24
SI3. Dessication rate	never/rarely/sometimes/frequently	never	0.90	
SI4. Water quality	good/moderate/poor/bad	good	1.00	
SI5. Shade	% of margin shaded 1m from bank	10	1.00	
SI6. Waterfowl	absent/major/minor	absent	1.00	
SI7. Fish population	absent/possible/minor/major	minor	0.33	
SI8. Pond density	number of ponds within 1km	3.8	1.00	
SI9. Terrestrial habitat	good/moderate/poor/isolated	poor	0.33	
SI10. Macrophyte cover	%	40	0.71	
			HSI = 0.66	
Use provisional HSI value if above 0.75			provisional HSI = 0.64	
			Date undertaken 16.04.24	

WB2

Habitat Suitability Index			SI value	
SI1. Map location	A/B/C	A	1.00	
SI2. Surface area	rectangle/ellipse/irregular	ellipse		
		length (m)	16	
		width (m)	7	
		OR estimate (m ²) if irregular		
		area (m ²) =	87.92	0.18
SI3. Dessication rate	never/rarely/sometimes/frequently	frequently	0.10	
SI4. Water quality	good/moderate/poor/bad	good	1.00	
SI5. Shade	% of margin shaded 1m from bank	0	1.00	
SI6. Waterfowl	absent/major/minor	absent	1.00	
SI7. Fish population	absent/possible/minor/major	absent	1.00	
SI8. Pond density	number of ponds within 1km	3.8	1.00	
SI9. Terrestrial habitat	good/moderate/poor/isolated	moderate	0.67	
SI10. Macrophyte cover	%	85	0.95	
			HSI = 0.64	
Use provisional HSI value if above 0.75			provisional HSI = 0.61	
			Date undertaken 16.04.24	

Appendix 3:
Great Crested Newt Non-Licensed
Precautionary Method Statement

Non-Licensed Precautionary Method Statement

1.0 Timing of Works

Works to the small areas of potential GCN habitat (patchy ruderal vegetation, oil seed rape) will be carried out between March and mid-October inclusive to avoid the amphibian hibernation period.

No ground works will take place during temperatures of below 5°C, and no works will take place at night.

2.0 Toolbox Talk

Every contractor and site worker will be briefed by an experienced ecologist in possession of a Natural England GCN Survey Licence prior to commencement of works. They will be made aware of the legal protection of GCN, the reasons for this Method Statement, how to identify a GCN, and what to do if a GCN is found during works. All site contractors will be provided with a copy of this Method Statement, which includes an ID sheet for reference purposes.

3.0 Vegetation and Top Soil Removal

If not already harvested (oil seed rape) hand tools will be used to cut vegetation to c.150mm height with arisings removed from the site. The remaining vegetated areas will be checked for the presence of any GCN at ground level. Upon completion of checks, all vegetation and topsoil will be slowly and carefully stripped - either mechanically or using hand tools. Arisings will be removed from the working area or stored in skips.

The corrugated fibreboard sheet will be lifted with care, and the area beneath checked for GCN.

4.0 Construction Methodology

During works the following measures will be followed at all times:

- No building materials (rubble, wood, tiles etc) or excavated material (rubble, unconsolidated spoil) will be stored on site to avoid use of the piles by sheltering GCN. All such materials will be removed or stored in skips or on raised pallets;
- Wherever possible trenches or similar will not be left open overnight. Any trenches which are left open overnight will contain an angled plank of wood to ensure any GCN which may use the site do not fall in and become trapped. The trenches will always be checked the following morning for GCN;
- Wet cement will be covered at night to prevent contact with GCN.

5.0 Delays to Works

Wherever possible, works will proceed quickly and without delay, to minimise the duration of ground disturbance. If any delay is predicted following commencement of works, the site will always be left in a condition that is unsuitable for GCN i.e. following the measures detailed in section 4.0.

6.0 Discovery of GCN during works

If a GCN is found on site at any point during construction, all works will cease. An ecologist will be contacted for further advice, if not already present on site. Natural England will be informed, and works will not re-commence until either a development (EPSM), Low Impact or District Level licence has been secured or other provisions have been agreed with Natural England.

7.0 Great Crested Newt ID

Great crested newts: these newts are **noticeably black to very dark brown** in colour, with a warty texture to their skin. Some of the warts are white, accentuating the warty and slightly speckled appearance. In spring male newts have a white stripe along the centre of their tail, and females have an orange stripe at the end of their tail. The bright orange-yellow belly colouring extends fully to join with the dark upper skin tone.

By contrast, common or palmate newts are a lighter brown-green colour and are significantly smaller (up to 9cm in length, whilst great crested newts may be up to 15cm in length). **Both common and great crested newts have an orange-yellow belly with black spots**; however the orange colouring fades towards the edges of the belly of common newts. Both males have crests in the spring.



Female Great Crested Newt



Female Common Newt



Female Great Crested Newt & Smooth Newt



Male Great Crested Newt



Liz Lord Ecology

