

Wychwood Golf Club – Precautionary Working Method Statement for Great Crested Newts

Prepared for Snell Holdings by
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Project: Wychwood Golf Club, Lyneham

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Introduction and Site Description

Windrush AEC Ltd was commissioned by Snell Holdings in November 2023 to prepare a Precautionary Working Method Statement for Great Crested Newts, in relation to proposed development at Wychwood Golf Club, Lyneham, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, OX7 6QQ (hereafter referred to as 'the Site').

The proposals are for the erection of an extension to an existing detached golf teaching studio and the construction of a replacement driving range.

The Site is an active golf course, situated on the outskirts of the village of Lyneham in West Oxfordshire. The development footprint comprises an area of short mown amenity grassland with a single semi-mature Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* tree. A hardstanding pathway is also present within the Site.

Legislation

Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and also under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), affording it the status of a European Protected Species. As such, both Great Crested Newt and the habitats that this species utilises are protected, and it is an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a Great Crested Newt;
- Deliberately disturb any Great Crested Newt;
- Deliberately take or destroy the eggs of a Great Crested Newt;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a Great Crested Newt;
- Obstruct access to any structure or place that is used by a Great Crested Newt for shelter or protection;
- Possess or transport a Great Crested Newt or any part of a Great Crested Newt; and,
- Sell (or offer for sale) or exchange Great Crested Newts or parts of Great Crested Newts.

Site Visit and Evaluation of Site

A site visit was undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist on Friday 1st December 2023. A number of ponds are present within 250m of the development footprint; however, these are all understood to contain populations of fish, reducing their suitability for Great Crested Newts. Indeed, the two ponds nearest to the development footprint were subject to a Habitat Suitability Index survey on the 1st December 2023 and these were found to be of 'poor' suitability for Great

Crested Newts. No ponds are present within the development footprint, and no ponds will be directly impacted as a result of the proposed development.

The terrestrial habitats within the development comprises short mown amenity grassland (maintained at <5cm all year round), which is utilised as part of the amenity area surrounding the existing driving range facility. This habitat is considered sub-optimal for Great Crested Newt. A hardstanding pathway is also present within the development footprint and this offers negligible opportunities for Great Crested Newts. There are no refugia such as log piles, rubble or longer areas of grassland within the development footprint, such that sheltering, resting, and hibernating opportunities are negligible. More optimal habitats such as rough grassland and scrub are present within the wider golf course, and these are more likely to be utilised by Great Crested Newt, if present in the area. The high level of human activity and footfall in the development footprint, further reduces the suitability of this area of the Site for Great Crested Newts.

Overall, the proposed development, given its nature and scale, is considered highly unlikely to negatively impact Great Crested Newts. However, as suitable habitat is present within the surrounding area, and a number of ponds (albeit of poor suitability for Great Crested Newt) are present nearby, there remains the possibility for Great Crested Newt to pass through the development footprint on occasion. As such, a number of precautionary mitigation measures are proposed to ensure that Great Crested Newts are safeguarded during the development works.

Precautionary Mitigation Measures

1. Firstly, the amenity grassland within and adjacent to the development footprint will continue to be mown to a short height (<5cm), with no areas allowed to grow tall prior to the construction works commencing. This will reduce the risk of the grassland becoming more suitable for Great Crested Newts before the development works begin.
2. No rubble or wood piles or other forms of hibernacula are currently present within the development footprint and no such features should be created prior to the development works to avoid providing hibernating / sheltering opportunities for Great Crested Newt.
3. The proposed development works should take place within the winter months when Great Crested Newts are most likely to be hibernating within hedgerow bases, woodland, or tussocky grassland. The risk of this species being active and moving through the development footprint will therefore be reduced, minimising the risk of this species being present during the construction works.
4. Finally, in the highly unlikely event that a Great Crested Newt is encountered during the development works, all activity on-Site should stop and a suitably qualified ecologist should be contacted for further advice.

Conclusion

The development footprint within the Site is considered to be of very limited suitability for Great Crested Newts and the likelihood of this species being negatively impacted by the proposed development is small. However, a number of precautionary mitigation measures has been proposed to ensure that any risk to Great Crested Newts is minimised. Subject to the implementation of these mitigation measures, it is considered that Great Crested Newts will be fully safeguarded under the proposed development.