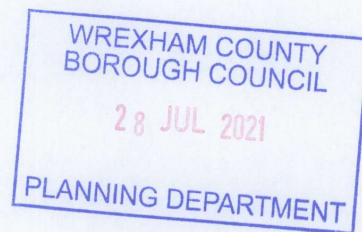


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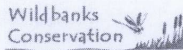


**Proposed Conversion of Outbuildings
at Fir Tree House**

Cloy Lane, Overton

**Great Crested Newt
Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement**

July 2021

Produced by  Wildbanks
Conservation

www.wildbanksconservation.co

Report Version	Date	Completed by:	Checked by:	Approved by:
Final	21/07/21	Clare Smith, Wildbanks Conservation	Mick Smith MCIEEM Director Wildbanks Conservation	Mick Smith MCIEEM Director Wildbanks Conservation
Accepted				

The information we have prepared is true and we confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional bona fide opinions.

DISCLAIMER

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Mr G. Mason commissioned Wildbanks Conservation to prepare a Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement (RAMS) for Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*) in regard to works planned to be carried out at Fir Tree House, Cloy Lane, Overton, Wrexham. Following on from an Ecological Assessment undertaken on 8th June 2021.
- 1.2 The Site visit and formulation of a RAMS have been conducted and prepared by Clare Smith, Wildbanks Conservation and Mick Smith MCIEEM (NRW GCN license S087617/1). This report gives details of the daytime visit conducted on the 8th June 2021 and the reasonable avoidance measures considered necessary in order to comply with relevant legislation and conservation objectives.
- 1.3 The application site is a proposed conversion of an outbuilding into a residential home adjacent to Fir Tree house with separate access and gardens created. The outbuilding is a two-story former storage and hayloft for the original Fir Tree Farm. The construction of the outbuilding consists of brick on the ground floor and then single skin corrugated steel cladding above. The roof is a barrel-vaulted corrugated steel construction with steel frame work. There is a single storey lean-to garage building attached to the northern gable end of building. The lean-to is constructed with brickwork elevations and asbestos roofing sheets and has a metal garage door for access. The habitat surrounding the development is mostly scrub and gardens with semi improved pasture for livestock, bordered by hedgerows, occasional mature trees with small lanes connecting dispersed rural properties.
- 1.4 This report outlines a great crested newt method statement providing appropriate recommendations for undertaking work in order to prevent any unlawful actions to be undertaken with regards to this protected species.
- 1.5 Great Crested Newts are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). Because of their rarity they are also protected under Annexes IIa and IVa of the Habitats and Species Directive and under the Berne Convention.

Langton *et alia* (2001) make the point that:

“The wording in the 1981 Act and 1994 Regulations is slightly different.” “Taken together, the Act and the Regulations (following the CROW Act 2000) make it illegal to:

- *Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill, or intentionally injure great crested newts.*
- *Deliberately disturb great crested newts or intentionally or recklessly * disturb them in a place used for shelter or protection.*
- *Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place.*
- *Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection.*
- *Possess a great crested newt, or any part of it, unless acquired lawfully.*
- *Sell, barter, exchange or transport or offer for sale great crested newts or parts of them.*

*Reckless offences were added by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which applies only to England and Wales”.

2.0 RATIONALE

- 2.1 This section provides a brief overview of the current status of GCN in and around the proposed application Site and provides reasoning for the recommendations within it.
- 2.2 The site consists of a two-story former storage and hayloft for the original Fir Tree Farm and a single storey lean-to garage building attached to the northern gable end of the hayloft surrounded by hardstanding with areas of ruderal vegetation and a hedge adjacent to Cloy Lane. There is a mix of terrestrial habitat within the wider property of Fir Tree House considered good for amphibians such as hedgerow, rough unmown grassland and marginal ruderal areas and shrub borders, as well as refugia such as dead wood and tree stumps. These habitats will not be affected by the development. Further afield, the surrounding habitat consists of mixed agricultural fields, scattered woodland and mature trees and occasional ponds.
- 2.3 A pond is present within Fir Tree Farm, approximately 43m to the south east of the Site. It is approximately 16m² in size and is in an open position in a garden setting within a mix of mown and unmown grass, bordered with scattered trees and hedgerow.
- 2.4 A Habitat Suitability Index assessment was carried out on the pond on the 8th June 2021. The pond scored Average for its suitability for GCN (HSI score of 0.63). There are nine ponds within 500m of the development site, the closest ones being 75m, 150m, 186m and 195m distant. The pond has not been surveyed to establish if GCN are present, however.
- 2.5 A data search to COFNOD confirmed historic GCN presence within 10 ponds within 1km of the Site. The closest being ponds 150m and 186m distant to the west of the Site in 2004. No more recent records were provided.
- 2.6 Although the pond does provide potential aquatic habitat for GCN, it is not optimal habitat as it is densely vegetated with less than 5% open water. Greater Reedmace, *Typha latifolia*, Floating sweet grass, *Glyceria fluitans* and Common Duckweed, *Lemna minor* dominates the water surface whilst Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* and Goat Willow *Salix caprea* form dense stands around the pond edges, with occasional stands of Yellow Flag Iris, *Iris pseudocorus*. The

water appeared to be clear, with Blue Damselfly present and likely no fish present due to the lack of water.

2.7 *Invasive alien species*

New Zealand pygmyweed (Australian swamp stonecrop) *Crassula helmsii* is present in the pond and makes up approximately 10% of the water coverage. This non-native invasive aquatic plant forms dense submerged and emergent carpets, choking out native plants, reducing light beneath the surface and depleting the oxygen levels in the water. Some verbal advice has been given to Mr. Mason with regards to controlling and ultimately eradicating the plant and further advice can be given with regards to safe disposal of the plant to avoid risk of spreading and contamination.

2.8 Development proposals for the Site are for the conversion of the barn into a residential property with a two storey extension built on the eastern aspect. An access track created through the existing hedgerow and associated parking and gardens created. The extension will be built upon existing hardstanding. The land surrounding the barn will be disturbed through the development, some small trees will be felled, ruderal vegetation cleared and a 10m section of hedge removed. Without protective measures these actions have the potential to harm GCN.

2.9 No works (prior to or proposed) will impact on any ponds themselves or their marginal habitats. Some works will destroy or disturb habitat within the Core Habitat Zone (50m zone around a pond) of the garden pond. All be it a small proportion, circa 20m². And the majority of this is currently hardstanding where the extension will be built.

2.10 It is considered unlikely that GCN would be present on the development Site or traverse it. The pond in closest proximity is heavily choked by vegetation and does not provide open water that is required by GCN for courtship displays in the breeding season. The pond scored average on HSI calculation, which does not remove the chance GCN could use it but does reduce its chance. Furthermore the majority of habitat on Site is building and hardstanding with only small areas of hedge, small trees and ruderal vegetation being present that could offer suitable habitat for GCN.

2.11 GCN disperse over land to forage for food and move between ponds; distances covered during dispersal will depend on habitat quality and

availability. It is acknowledged that most adult newts likely stay within 250m of breeding ponds (English Nature, 2001; Langton et al., 2001) but may travel up to 500m if required. Newts are more likely to travel greater distances from their breeding ponds if there is higher quality foraging and refuge habitat extending beyond their breeding pond. In the context of the Site (and from review of aerial images); high quality terrestrial habitat (woodland, rough / marshy grassland) is present around the ponds within the wider area.

- 2.12 There are good habitat linkages between all Ponds distant from the Site, with rough grassland and hedgerows predominant and it is likely that these terrestrial habitats will be used in preference to dispersal across the Site due to this route being over largely sub-optimal habitat. It is also considered that there is negligible need for GCN to traverse the Site as there is no pond or habitat feature of greater value than they already have access too present within the site or beyond the site that GCN individuals would aim for. It is documented that when the core habitat around a pond is of good/optimal quality GCN are less likely to venture away from their breeding pond as they do not need to and would waste energy to do so. Terrestrial habitat surrounding the ponds within 500m of the Site is good/excellent.
- 2.13 Provided that works within the development area adheres to the subsequent Method Statement, and that good terrestrial habitat around any ponds surrounding the Site are unaffected and that suitable mitigation measures listed below are implemented for great crested newts further surveys are not required. In addition compensation measures should be implemented in the form of improving the existing pond for GCN.
- 2.14 It should be noted that through the renovation of the existing building and during the construction phase it is possible the Sites value to GCN may increase through the presence of new features more 'attractive' to GCN, such as rubble piles, open excavations, stores of equipment or materials etc. The Method Statement below provides a number of measures that will have to be followed in order to minimise the chances of any individual GCN being killed or injured during the development.

3 PRECAUTIONARY METHOD STATEMENT

3.1 The objectives of this method statement are to:

- Ensure no harm to individual GCN occurs during the development
- Avoid committing an offence under the above-mentioned legislation; and,
- To ensure that favourable conservation status of GCN is maintained.

3.2 Any development related activities on the Site, such as vegetation clearance or excavations in areas of suitable newt habitat may potentially affect this species. As a result, safeguards must be implemented to protect this species and the Method Statement below details measures to be implemented to ensure an offence is not committed.

Toolbox talk

3.3 All site operatives will receive a briefing by a NRW licensed ecologist. The briefing would include details of the legal protection of Great Crested Newts, the precautionary methods of working (outlined in this document), tips on identification of Great Crested Newts and procedures to follow should the species be discovered during works. The briefing will form part of the Site induction process for each site operative. A GCN factsheet will also be pinned to the Site information board in the Site office.

Timing of Work

3.4 The construction phase will start outside of the overwintering period of newts (December – February). During this period the chance of disturbing GCN are minimal and the risk of disturbing hibernating newts is eliminated.

Hand Searching

3.5 Any areas that potentially offer refuge for GCN will require hand searching prior to disturbance. This will include but not be limited to concrete pads/foundations, log piles, vegetation, hedgerows, tree roots, rubble piles. Areas of vegetation will be cut 100mm in height and hand searched prior to being cleared. The hedge that is to be removed will be cut to 500mm in height and then the base hand

searched, the roots will be pulled out while a licensed ecologist is present. Any excavations will be back filled the same day or following a hand search. Any clearance work to these areas, inside the overwintering period of newts (December – February), will be carried out by hand and must not be carried out when outside temperatures are below 5C.

- 3.6 During the hand searching, any debris (e.g., wood and rubbish) would be lifted and removed from the working area. Hand searching would be timed for immediately prior (i.e., within 24 hours) to the onset of works. If any GCN are encountered work must stop and Wildbanks Conservation or Wrexham Council Ecologist contacted.

Working methods

- 3.7 Only light machinery or hand tools to be used for the excavation operations.
- 3.8 Ideally the method employed for excavation works would be dig and backfill on the same day to avoid any trenches exposed overnight. If this is not possible, hand searching of the excavated area should be carried out by someone who has been through the toolbox talk or by a licensed ecologist and would be carried out prior to filling. 'Ladders' (timber planks or branches greater than 15mm in diameter) must be installed overnight to allow amphibian and small mammals to escape.
- 3.9 No arisings from excavations should be stored within the development Site as this may provide resting opportunities for GCN. Any soil removed from the development Site will be stored in its final resting position. Alternatively, arisings can be stored within skips on Site.

Storage of materials and vehicle movements

- 3.10 All material storage will be within the development Site and be raised off the ground by 100mm so as not to create resting places for newts (e.g., on pallets). All vehicle movements will be restricted to within the development Site and the access tracks and areas of hardstanding.

Procedure if Great Crested Newts are found

- 3.11 If a Great Crested Newt is found at any time during construction, all works would cease immediately. If not present on Site, a licenced ecologist would be contacted to make an assessment of the situation, remove the individual and to determine whether a licence would be required before work proceeds. If considered necessary, further guidance would be sought from Natural Resources Wales.

Ecological Enhancement Measures

- 3.12 The pond within the garden of Fir Tree House should be reprofiled and extended by 50% to provide suitable breeding habitat for GCN. The pond should have a central minimum depth of 1.5m and have marginal shelves no more than 300mm deep for 6m of its edge.
- 3.13 A 10m section of hedge will be removed to provide access to the new property. A 35m length of hedge will be planted along the northern boundary of Fir Tree House property to compensate for this loss. The species composition will be 45% hawthorn, 25% hazel, 10% guelder rose, 10% holly, 5% crab apple and 5% blackthorn. Trees will be 40-60 cell grown trees protected with biodegradable tubex guards, planted at 5 per m density. Any losses within 5 years will be re planted.

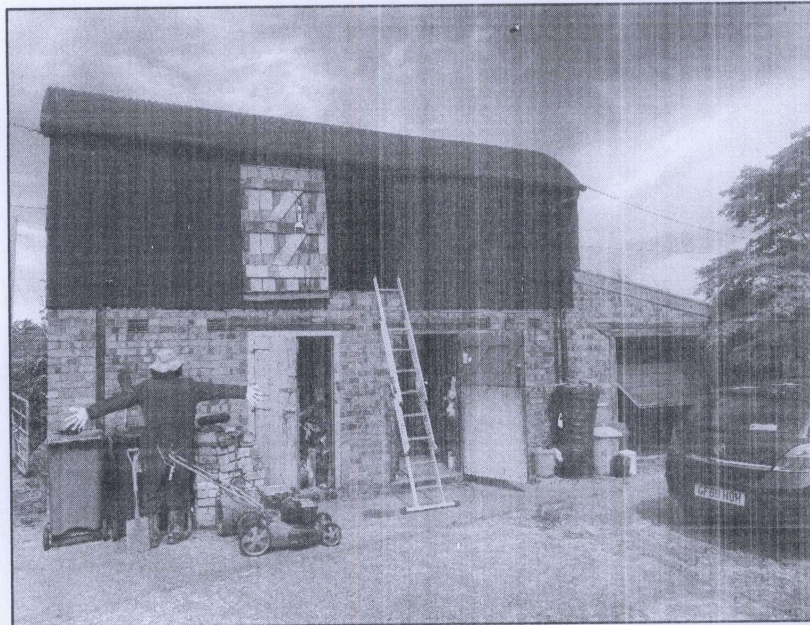
4.0 REFERENCES

English Nature (2001) Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines. English Nature.

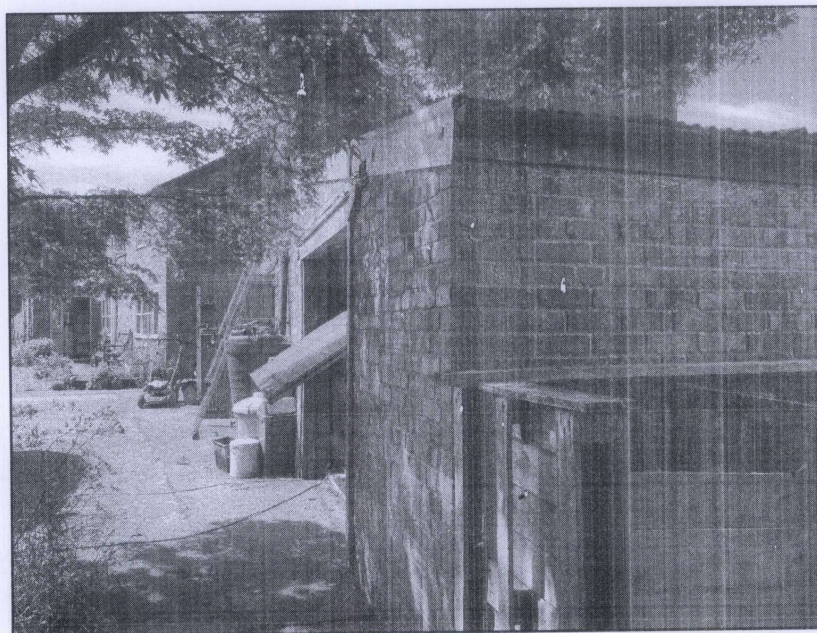
Langton, T.E.S., Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. (2001), Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, Froglife, Halesworth.

A1. Site Photographs

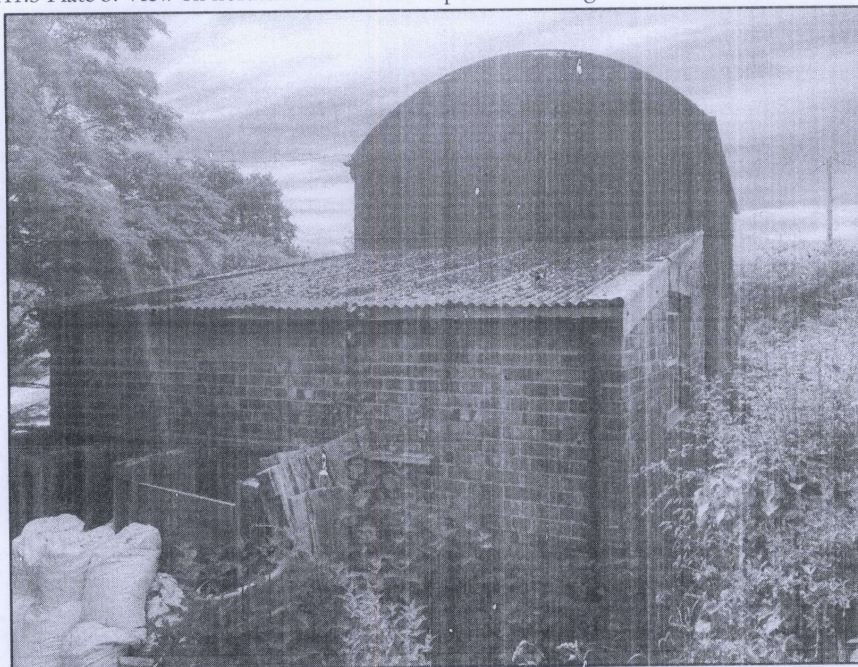
A1.1 Plate 1: View on eastern aspect of building



A1.2 Plate 2: View on northern aspect of building of the lean to garage



A1.3 Plate 3: View on northern and western aspect of building



A1.4 Plate 4: Pond within Fir Tree Farm gardens. Within 43m of barn



Figures

Figure 1: Site view with pond location and new hedge planting



Figure 2: Location of ponds in wider environment

