

Amphibian Method Statement

Project: Chapel Farm, Whitewell, Whitchurch, SY13 3AL

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Appendix 3 : Precautionary amphibian method statement

Summary of the site's ecological significance

This method statement has been prepared following the comments received by Natural Resources Wales Ref P/2021/0640 to address concerns in relation to the likelihood of encountering notable species of amphibians such as great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) during the works.

The proposed works area is considered to be of low ecological merit for amphibians notably great crested newts comprising of shortly mown improved grassland. Suitable terrestrial habitat was noted however adjacent to the boundaries of the site.

A single waterbody was identified within 250m of the site, located 159m to the south west of the site beyond Whitewell Lane. Access to the waterbody was not available during the extended Phase 1 survey, therefore a formal Habitat Suitability Index was not undertaken.

Studies involving capture-mark-recapture and radio tracking of Great crested newt populations have shown that the large majority of a population remain within the first 50m of the breeding pond. Presence drops significantly as distances increase up to 100m from the breeding pond (Mullner 2001, Jehle 2000)¹ hence the likelihood of encountering newt beyond 100m from their breeding ponds is significantly reduced.

English Nature Research Report 576 published the findings of research into mitigation schemes (Cresswell and Whitworth, 2004)² which mirrors the findings of the studies above *“The most comprehensive mitigation, in relation to avoiding disturbance, killing or injury is appropriate within 50m of a breeding pond. It will also almost always be necessary to actively capture newts 50-100m away. However, at distances greater than 100m, there should be careful consideration as to whether attempts to capture newts are necessary or the most effective option to avoid incidental mortality. At distances greater than 200-250m, capture operations will hardly ever be appropriate”*.

The likelihood of encountering this species during construction is considered very low, when acknowledging;

- The distance from neighbouring water bodies (beyond the 100m core habitat)
- Poor suitability of terrestrial habitat within the main body of the site
- The boundary features which do provide suitable opportunities for amphibians can be fully retained therefore no net loss of suitable terrestrial habitat
- Small scale and short duration of works

¹Müllner, A. (2001) *Spatial patterns of migrating Great Crested Newts and Smooth Newts: The importance of the terrestrial habitat surrounding the breeding pond*. Rana

²Cresswell, W. & Whitworth, R.(2004)) *An assessment of the efficiency of capture techniques and the value of different habitats for the great crested newt Triturus cristatus*. Report no 576.English Nature

Impacts of the works

The proposed works will require localised excavation to construct an internal access route, utilities and base for the caravan pitches.

Licensing requirements

The likelihood of encountering, killing, injuring, or disturbing notable amphibians such as great crested newts during the construction phase is considered unlikely. This is due to the localised nature of the proposed works and distance from neighbouring ponds. Further survey work to support a European Protected Species licence (EPS) issued from Natural Resource Wales is not considered necessary, subject to the level of risk being further minimised, a position which has been suggested within NRW most recent comments REF P/2021/0640

To further negate the risk to great crested newts, RAMs have been proposed below and overleaf, which are to be adopted during the construction phase. These sensitive working methodologies will ensure a precautionary approach is adhered to during the implementation of construction activities.

Reasonable Avoidance Measures

The following sensitive working methodologies (referred to as Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) are recommended to ensure impacts upon amphibians such as great crested newts (where present), are avoided during the period of the proposed works:

Pre-construction

- Prior to the commencement of works, the ongoing management of the improved grassland within the site will continue to ensure connectivity of the site and suitability of terrestrial habitat does not inadvertently increase.
- The developer will appoint an experienced Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) to undertake a walkover of the work area to determine any changes in status of the habitats on site prior to the commencement of construction activities.
- A hand search for protected species of any debris or vegetation proposed for removal should be undertaken by the ECoW prior to removal of surface vegetation.
- Protective 'heras' type fencing will be installed prior to the commencement of the works. The purpose of the fencing will be to define the working area whilst ensuring protection to all off site habitats and boundary features; meeting the requirements of the Tree Protection Plan which accompanies the application.
- The installation and maintenance of such fencing is the responsibility of the developer, which should be checked by the appointed ECoW for its suitability and location.
- The protective fencing should demarcate a minimum of a 2m buffer between the development footprint and suitable terrestrial habitat.
- A tool box talk will be given to all personnel on site to make them aware of the possibility of encountering a great crested newt (albeit very low), the statutory protection afforded to the species and the course of action to take in this unlikely event (i.e. leave it in situ, stop works and contact the ECoW).

Timings

Ground work and landscaping

- The duration of works will be limited to daylight hours when amphibians are less active.
- Excavation will be undertaken in as short a time period as possible, excavating and infilling only the length which can be achieved within 24 hours before the next length is started, or alternatively covering any excavation with boards to prevent amphibians/animals inadvertently falling into excavations.

During construction works

- All excavations should be filled in on the same day as excavated or covered daily. The ECoW will check excavations immediately prior to backfilling.
- All materials will be palletised and kept on areas of hardstanding or bare earth within a secure site compound. All hazardous materials should be stored within an area determined by the ECoW.
- Following completion of the works the sensitive landscaping of all disturbed areas will be undertaken, including the planting of, hedgerows and trees incorporating native species of local provenance, thereby ensuring no net loss of suitable terrestrial habitat.

In the unlikely event a protected species is encountered during the proposed works; all works will temporarily cease, and further advice sought from a suitably qualified ecologist.

Subject to the implementation of the RAM's described above no significant impacts upon protected species 'potentially' utilising the site are considered likely to arise

