

O a k M e a d

Golly,
Burton Green,
Rossett,
Wrexham,
LL12 0AL

**Great Crested Newt
Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement**

Report Version	Date	Completed by:	Checked by:	Approved by:
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Accepted				

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

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Mr Tom Cliffe 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 Oak Mead, Golly, Burton Green, Rossett, Wrexham. Following on from an Ecological Assessment undertaken on 24th November 2022.
- 1.2 The Site visit and formulation of a RAMS have been conducted and prepared by Joe Hark and Mick Smith MCIEEM (NRW license S087617/1). This report gives details of the daytime visit conducted on the 24th November 2022 and the reasonable avoidance measures considered necessary in order to comply with relevant legislation and conservation objectives.
- 1.3 The application Site is comprised a small section of a grazing paddock used for horses, a stone track and a single stable block unit of a three-unit stables. The site includes the access track, which extends south to join with an A-road. Adjacent to the site is the wider horse paddock to the south and west, a species poor hedge leading into arable fields to the east and an A-road to the south, at the end of the track. The western side of the access track also borders a short stretch of residential gardens. Adjacent to the northern border is a line of trees on the bank of Pulford brook. Additionally, a shallow, fast-flowing ditch runs west to east through the horse paddock, and through a shallow pool approximately 60m south-west of the Site.
- 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 small portion of a grazed horse paddock, a stone track and a single stable unit of a larger three-unit stable building. (Plates 1-3). The paddock is dominated by semi-improved grassland, and has been heavily grazed for an extended period of time, but also contains a small patch of dense bramble scrub. The northern border of the site sits alongside the line of trees that borders Pulford brook.. Further afield, the surrounding habitat consists of mixed agricultural fields, hedgerows, minor roads and occasional ponds. Terrestrial habitats within the Site were considered largely sub-optimal for amphibians given their heavily grazed nature.
- 2.3 Development proposals for the Site are for the placement of two small glamping pods, the resurfacing of the existing track and a track extension to meet the two glamping pods. Foundation works for the glamping pods will either consist of ground screws, or two small concrete strips per pod. Additionally, the section of stables included with the development site will be reroofed and converted into a bicycle store.
- 2.4 No ponds are present within the Site. Two ponds exist within 250m of the site boundaries. These have been named ponds 1 & 2. Neither pond has been surveyed directly for GCN. Pulford brook runs west to east, parallel to the northern site boundary, at a distance of 5m. Another unnamed shallow, fast flowing watercourse runs south-west to north east through a small flush approximately 25m south-west of the site, and joins Pulford brook 10m to the east of the site.
- 2.5 The wider habitat surrounding the site boundaries predominantly of arable fields with mixed hedge boundaries.
- 2.6 Pulford brook (Plate 2) is a shallow, fast flowing watercourse with steep, vegetated banks and a line of mature trees upon the top of each bank. Flowing water is considered to be a barrier to GCN movement (Langton et al., 2001), therefore, the likelihood of GCN being found within the watercourse is

negligible and the watercourse can be considered to represent a significant barrier to GCN movement.

- 2.7 The shallow, fast flowing watercourse (Plates 3 & 4) that runs north-east to join Pulford brook passes through a culvert underneath the access track element of the Site. The watercourse passes through a small, heavily vegetated, flush area approximately 50m south west of the location of the new glamping pods. The flush has a fast-flowing centre and with a reduced flow rate in the margins, which are heavily vegetated and dominated by *Typha latifolia* and *Epilobium hirsutum*. Due to the fast flowing nature of this watercourse, it is considered to have negligible potential to support GCN, and to represent a significant barrier to their movement.
- 2.8 Pond 1 is located 215m south of the most southern point of the site (the intersection between the access track and A-road). Pond 1 has a small amount of high quality terrestrial habitat, being immediately surrounded by mature trees, which give way to arable field. A hedge leading north from the pond provides a corridor of high quality habitat, but this connectivity with the Site is broken by the A-road first, then by the shallow, fast flowing watercourse. It is considered unlikely GCN would commute using this route.
- 2.9 Pond 2 is located 220m south-east of the most southern point of the site (the intersection between the access track and A-road). Similarly to pond 1, pond 2 has a small amount of high quality habitat immediately surrounding the waterbody, in the form of a ring of mature trees, past which lies low quality arable field habitat. A hedge along the side of the A-road provides a high quality linking corridor between the pond and the start of the access track, which could be used by GCN to access the site. However, the presence of higher quality habitat, including small woodland blocks and hedges, towards the north-east would indicate that it would be unlikely for GCN to commute towards the site from this waterbody.
- 2.10 No ponds have been surveyed to establish if GCN are present as no access has been available for ponds as they lie outside of the applicant's landownership. GCN may not be present in any pond surrounding this development site, although it is known GCN are in the wider area.

- 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 around 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 surrounding ponds 1 and 2 and in closer proximity to the ponds than the Site.
- 2.12 No works (prior to or proposed) will impact on any ponds themselves or their marginal habitats. No works will destroy or disturb habitat within the Core Habitat Zone (50m zone around a pond) of any ponds. **All works are within unfavourable habitat (i.e., buildings & heavily grazed grassland).**
- 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.
- 2.14 It is considered unlikely that GCN would be present on the development Site. However, through 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 or suitably experienced assistant. 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 clearance work where materials such as wood, rubble or piles of vegetation will be disturbed 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. It is considered unlikely GCN will be encountered with the Site but as an additional precautionary approach the following methods will also be employed.
- 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 licensed ecologist, 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 if excavations are open overnight.
- 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/tonne bags etc on Site or can be compacted to ensure they do not become a useable feature for GCN.
- 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.

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 of the Site from the south, note the stone track and westernmost section of the stables building, which is the only part of the building included with the development.



A1.2 Plate 2: View of Pulford brook and associated steep, vegetated banks.



A1.3 Plate 3: View of the flush.



A1.4 Plate 4: View of the fast-flowing watercourse that passes through the flush.



A1.5 Plate 5: View of the rear of the stables, with refuse that has the potential to harbour GCN and will need moving under the RAMS.



Figures

Figure 1: Aerial image of Site at 1:1700

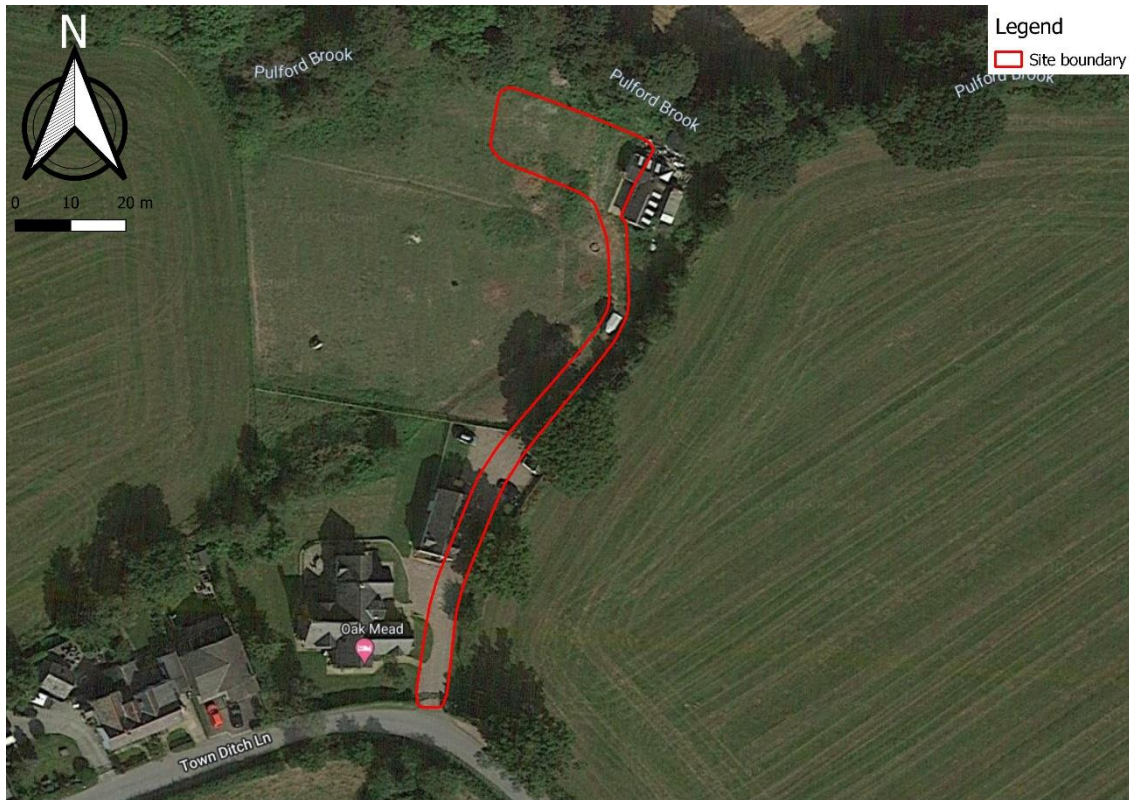


Figure 2: Aerial image of Site at 1:8300, with pond locations.

