Ecology Response
Rough grassland, barn owl box and great crested newts

Document schedule

Item	Detail
Application	P/2026/0466, Land west of Lower Lanes Farm, Lower Wych
Responds to	Wrexham County Borough Council ecology comments, 15 September 2026
Document	Ecology Response, 7 October 2026
Issued with	Landscape Plan A1.7; drawing LW-EC-01; Greywater Design Report

The County Ecologist made two comments on the application, passed on by the planning officer on 15 September 2026. This note answers them. The first asked whether part of the site could be kept as rough grassland for barn owls, with a nest box to Barn Owl Trust specifications. The second noted that new ponds near the existing pond P1, which holds great crested newts, may be colonised, and asked for the implications for future work to be fully considered and clearly set out.

1 Rough Grassland and Barn Owl Nest Box

1.1 Rough grassland

Barn owl is among the COFNOD records for the area, and the Management Plan already provides the habitat: the managed meadow and scrub-grassland mosaic (H6, 6,683 m²) is described in the Green Infrastructure Statement as rough meadow, flowering grassland and tussock structure with scrub pockets, hibernacula and log piles, and Management Plan Table 5-10 keeps areas of it rough, tussocky or scrubby for overwintering structure. Landscape plan A1.7 now labels the parts of H6 that are managed as rough grassland for barn owls, west of the orchard and north of the growing area; LW-EC-01 shows them hatched. These are indicative extents of about 810 m² west of the orchard and about 590 m² north of the growing area and south of the wildflower meadow, 1,400 m² in all, measured on LW-EC-01.

The proposed management follows Barn Owl Trust guidance. The areas are left to build up a tussocky litter layer, then topped rather than mown, cut high and in alternate blocks in late summer so that standing tussocky grass always remains. Arisings are removed where cut, and no fertiliser, herbicide or anticoagulant rodenticide is used on or beside them; there is no grazing, or light conservation grazing only, as Management Plan Table 5-10 allows.

Late-summer topping is habitat maintenance, done in blocks after a walk-over check for nesting birds and amphibians. It is distinct from the clearance of scrub, hedgerows or trees, which is avoided in the bird breeding season. Timing and cutting heights follow Barn Owl Trust guidance. Condition is recorded at the annual winter walkover already required by Management Plan Table 5-13.

1.2 Nest box

One nest box will be erected at the position marked on A1.7 and LW-EC-01 (E 347850, N 343985), on a mature retained tree on the woodland edge north-west of the drainage field, with a clear view over the rough grassland. The position is indicative: another mature retained tree beside the rough grassland may be used if that tree proves unsuitable.

Table 1-1: Nest box to Barn Owl Trust specification

Item	Specification
Box	Barn Owl Trust tree box, or a box built to the Trust's published tree-box plan: 9 mm exterior-grade plywood, sealed vertical joints, roofing-felt roof, rust-proof fixings, front access panel for clearing pellets; photographs of similar boxes on LW-EC-01
Entrance	Square hole 100 to 150 mm (130 × 130 mm optimum), set so that the drop from the bottom of the hole to the nest floor is not less than 450 mm
Floor	Nest floor not less than 0.2 m²; an exercise platform below the entrance with a raised edge, sheltered and drained so that rain is not deflected into the box

Item	Specification
Fixing	Not less than 3 m above ground, fixed with the Trust's hanging kit and rust-proof fittings, or on a batten held round the trunk with adjustable straps so that the living tree is not nailed; entrance facing open rough grassland and away from the prevailing south-westerly weather; visible to a passing owl when the tree is in leaf
Timing	Erected before first occupation of the dwelling, in an October to February window, before the breeding season
Hazards	Steep-sided water troughs near the box fitted with a float or ramp, as the Trust advises; no anticoagulant rodenticides on or beside the rough grassland, and elsewhere trapping and proofing in preference to poison; the clean-water ponds have shallow planted margins
Records	Box checked each winter (November to January, dry calm weather) and cleared when nest debris exceeds about 75 mm, normally every two to three years, as the Barn Owl Trust advises

Barn Owl Trust: nest-box criteria and tree-box plan; how to manage land for barn owls; Barn Owls and Rural Planning Applications (2015), topping not before 15 July and not below 125 mm.

2 Great Crested Newts and the New Ponds

2.1 The ponds now proposed

The comment refers to three new ponds. The greywater scheme has since changed (Greywater Design Report): the open 6 m polishing pond is replaced by a lined, reed-planted sub-surface gravel cell, PC1, whose water stands 100 mm below the gravel surface. PC1 has no open water and is not a pond. Two new open-water ponds remain, the clean-water irrigation and attenuation ponds C1 and C2, each 10 m across, 26 m from the existing pond P1 at their nearest point and 11 m from the dwelling. P1 itself is 32 m from the dwelling. PC1 is about 75 m from P1 at its nearest point.

P1 returned a positive eDNA result for great crested newts (eDNA survey, 2025, reported in the Management Plan). C1 and C2 will be within the species' normal dispersal range of P1, with planted margins, no fish and clean water, so they may be colonised. They will be managed precautionarily, as if newts may be present, rather than waiting for a record.

2.2 Implications for future work

No works beyond those applied for are envisaged. The construction phase is already covered by the Great Crested Newt Mitigation Plan submitted with the application: a 50 m awareness zone and a 10 m protection zone around P1 with no storage, spoil, fuel, chemicals, washout or machinery parking inside it; a single controlled access route with a protective barrier and silt-control edge where it passes close to P1; trenches and excavations covered overnight or fitted with escape ramps and checked each morning; no routine external lighting within 25 m of P1, with dark corridors to the hedgerows, ponds and woodland edge; higher-risk groundworks programmed for April to October where practicable, after the working footprint has been checked and kept as short vegetation or bare ground; and a stop-work rule, with specialist advice before recommencement, if a newt or suspected newt is found. The implications of C1 and C2 being colonised are that the same precautions would extend to them. They are set out below.

Table 2-1: Implications of newts colonising C1 and C2, and how each is dealt with

Activity	Implication	How it is considered and set out
Building the ponds and the works around them	Newts from P1 may use terrestrial habitat near the works	Covered by the submitted Mitigation Plan: the P1 protection and awareness zones, the controlled access route, covered trenches, groundworks timed for April to October where practicable, and the stop-work rule
Pond maintenance: desilting, liner repair, replanting, margin cutting	Work in a pond used by newts could harm eggs, larvae or adults	In-pond work kept outside the breeding and larval season; the Mitigation Plan's stop-work rule applies
Irrigation abstraction from C1 and C2	Abstraction would need to take account of newts in the breeding season	Screened intakes set above the ecological minimum of about 20 m³ held across the ponds, as Management Plan Appendix J already provides
Grass and scrub management near the ponds	Newts use rough grass, log piles and hibernacula around breeding ponds	Rough grass, log piles and hibernacula within the H6 mosaic kept as Management Plan Table 5-10 provides; pasture, meadow and hedgerows managed as the Management Plan already sets out
Any future new building, track or pond on the holding	Colonisation of C1 and C2 may affect the location, timing and methods of future work	The Mitigation Plan's zones and rules would apply around C1 and C2 as they do around P1, with any assessment or licence then needed; we do not envisage such works
Water quality	Newts need clean water	No greywater, roof runoff from treated surfaces or livestock access to C1 and C2; the greywater system is contained and its only discharge is the drainage field, 67 to 86 m from the ponds
Fish, wildfowl and non-native plants	Predation and loss of habitat	No fish stocking or introduced wildfowl on C1 and C2; only native marginal and aquatic planting, sourced to avoid invasive species
Records	The precautions need to be recorded	Pond condition and any newt records noted in the OPD annual return

2.3 How these will be set out

These measures rest on the submitted Mitigation Plan and the Management Plan. The Management Plan's open-water polishing pond entries (Tables 5-19, 6-10, 6-12 and 7-3) no longer apply, since that pond is no longer proposed; the planted gravel cell PC1 takes its place.

The greywater works themselves involve no pond works; the drainage field is 67 to 86 m from P1, C1 and C2. Removing the open polishing pond from the wastewater route takes away one open-water attraction close to the dwelling and the working areas.

3 Summary

- Rough grassland for barn owls is retained within the H6 mosaic, labelled on A1.7 and hatched on LW-EC-01, and managed as the Barn Owl Trust advises: topped not mown, cut high in alternate blocks, no anticoagulant rodenticides on or beside it.
- A nest box to Barn Owl Trust specification will be erected at the marked position, not less than 3 m up, facing the rough grassland, before first occupation of the dwelling.

- Two new open ponds are proposed, not three; the polishing stage is a planted gravel cell with no open water. C1 and C2 may be colonised and are managed precautionarily; the implications are set out in Table 2-1, on the basis of the submitted Mitigation Plan and the Management Plan. No further works are envisaged.