

Wincote, Oxfordshire

Great Crested Newt Surveys

Prepared for Squire and Partners
by
Land Use Consultants

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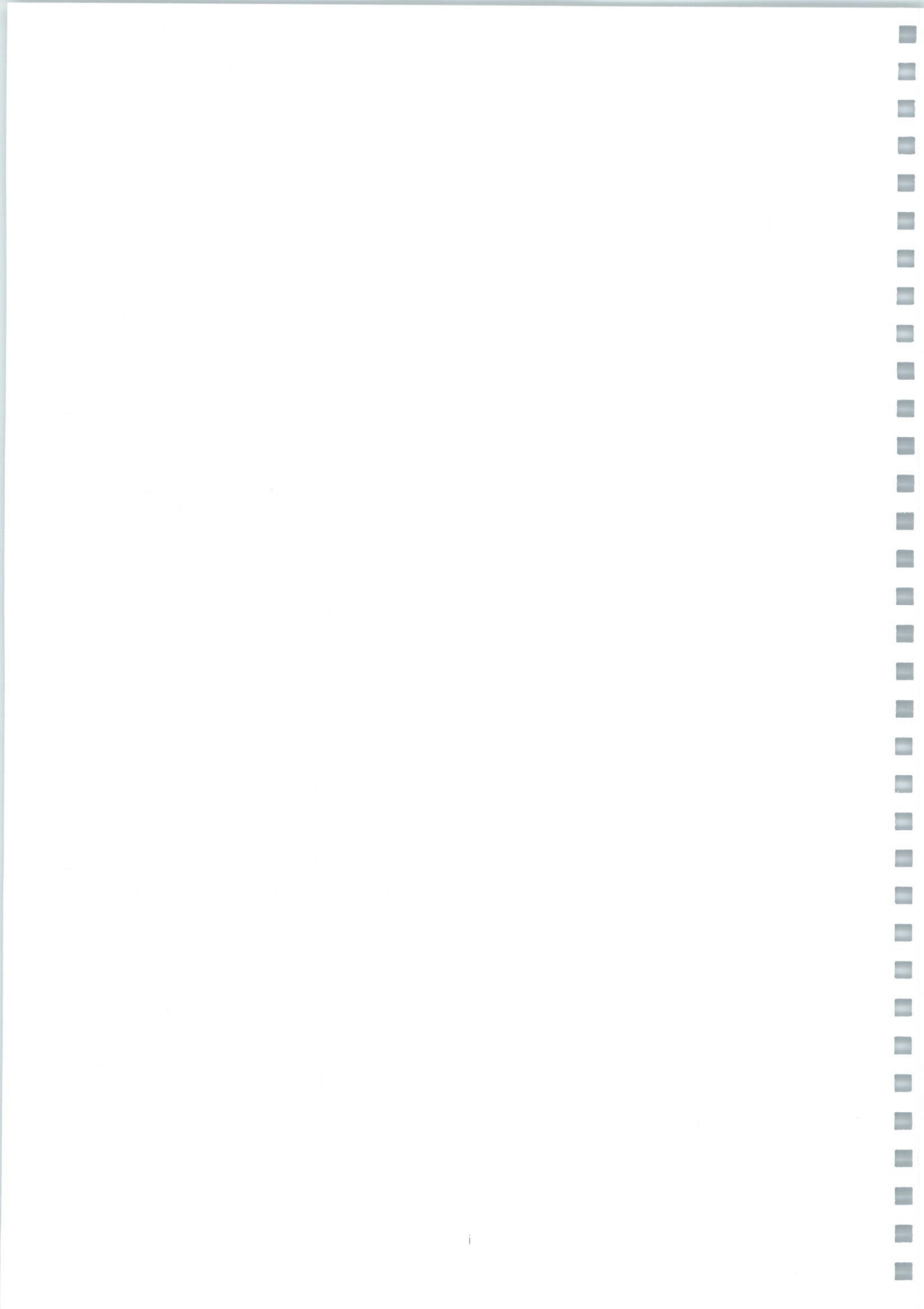
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CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTION	1
	Background	1
	Report Structure	1
	Legislation and Licensing	1
2	METHODOLOGY	2
	Terrestrial Habitat Appraisal	2
	Pond Habitat Suitability Index	2
	Pond Survey	2
3	FINDINGS	4
	Terrestrial Habitat Appraisal	4
	Pond Habitat Suitability Index	4
	Pond Survey	4
4	DISCUSSION	5
	Opportunities for Enhancement	5
5	REFERENCES	6

TABLES

Table 3.1: Habitat Suitability Index	4
Table 3.2: GCN Survey Results	4

FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Great Crested Newt Survey Pond Locations	3
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1 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Land Use Consultants (LUC) was appointed in 2011 by Squire and Partners to undertake surveys for great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* (GCN) at Wincote, Steeple Aston in Oxfordshire. The surveys were recommended following an ecological appraisal of the site in January 2011. The surveys were required to determine the presence/probable absence of GCN at the site to inform a planning application.

REPORT STRUCTURE

- 1.2 The survey methods and findings are presented in **Sections 2** and **Section 3** respectively. **Section 4** discusses the findings and outlines any implications for the scheme in terms of mitigation and licensing.

LEGISLATION AND LICENSING

- 1.3 The GCN is listed on the **Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981** (as amended) Schedule 5. It is an offence to deliberately kill, damage, take a GCN; to intentionally or recklessly disturb a GCN whilst it occupies a place of shelter or protection; or to deliberately or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a GCN breeding pond.
- 1.4 GCN is also listed on the **Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010**, Schedule 2 which offers a similar level of protection to the WCA. However, regulation 41 strengthens the protection of GCN receive against deliberate capture or killing, deliberate disturbance and damage or destruction of a resting place.
- 1.5 Any activity that may cause killing or injury of GCN or that would result in the damage, loss or disturbance of GCN habitat would require a **Natural England (NE) Mitigation Licence** (e.g. development or landscaping work). Licensed works require evidence that the works entailing detrimental impacts are unavoidable, as well as appropriate mitigation, which may include seasonal constraints, provision of alternative habitat and translocation of individuals from the area to be affected by development to a receptor site. A Mitigation Licence application can only be submitted on completion of surveys. In relation to development work a Mitigation Licence can usually only be granted by NE once planning consent has been obtained and any relevant planning conditions or agreements have been fulfilled. NE typically require six weeks to determine a licence. Licences are usually granted to the land owner or developer (although assistance for preparation may be provided by an ecologist), and once granted are a legally binding agreement with non-compliance constituting a legal offence.
- 1.6 Due to the distances ranged by GCN, current guidelines (English Nature, 2001) state that GCN terrestrial habitat (i.e. habitat being used as a place of shelter) can extend up to 500m from an aquatic breeding site.

2 METHODOLOGY

TERRESTRIAL HABITAT APPRAISAL

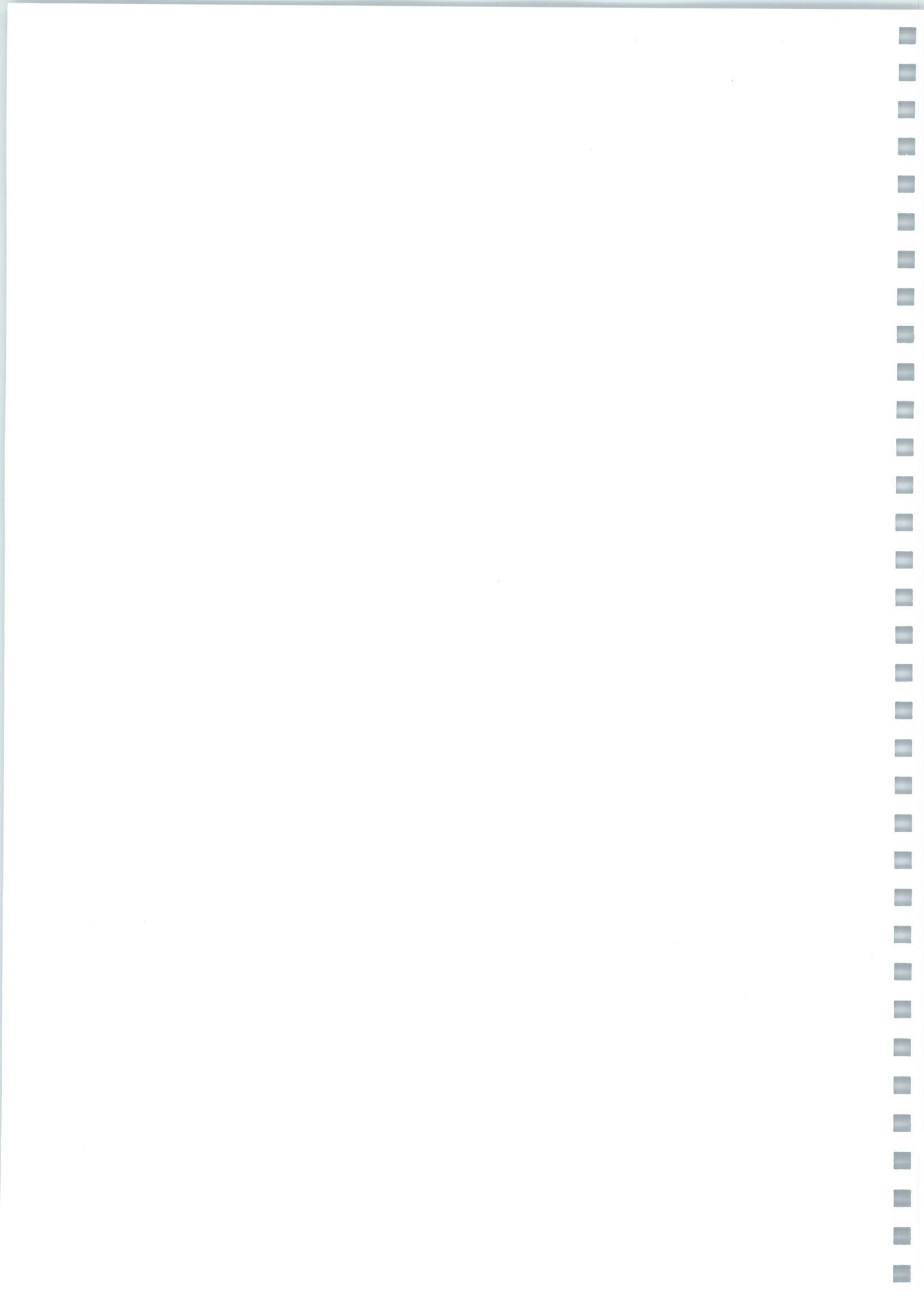
- 2.1 A site walkover (January 2011) included a general assessment of the suitability of terrestrial habitats for GCN within and immediately surrounding the development footprint. Suitability was based on professional judgement, by reviewing several factors including the potential for foraging, sheltering and overwintering, habitat connectivity and the presence of possible barriers to movement.

POND HABITAT SUITABILITY INDEX

- 2.2 Waterbodies within 500m of the development footprint were appraised for their potential to support GCN. A Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) was calculated for each pond using the methodology described by Oldham *et al.* (2000). Features of each waterbody, such as habitat connectivity, extent of shading and aquatic vegetation and structure, were examined in addition to hydrological features such as water clarity and depth.

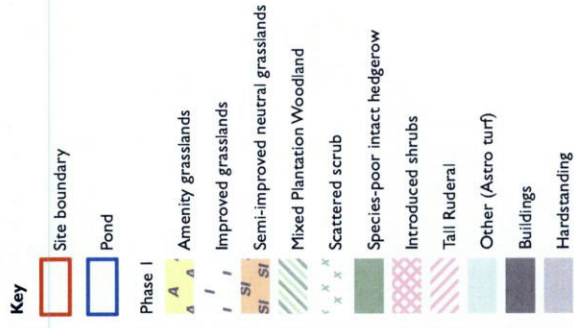
POND SURVEY

- 2.3 Full great crested newt surveys were undertaken on the pond situated just beyond the eastern boundary of the site (**Figure 2.1**)
- 2.4 The surveys followed standard guidance provided by Natural England in the Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines publication (Natural England, 2001). Four survey visits of the pond were completed in suitable weather conditions between mid April and May 2011. As required by the guidelines, at least two of these visits were undertaken in the core period of mid April to mid May 2010 (the core period for GCN breeding)
- 2.5 In accordance with the guidelines, three of the four recognised survey techniques were used during each survey. These included egg searching, torching, and bottle trapping techniques. Egg searches were conducted on dead and live aquatic vegetation within the ponds.



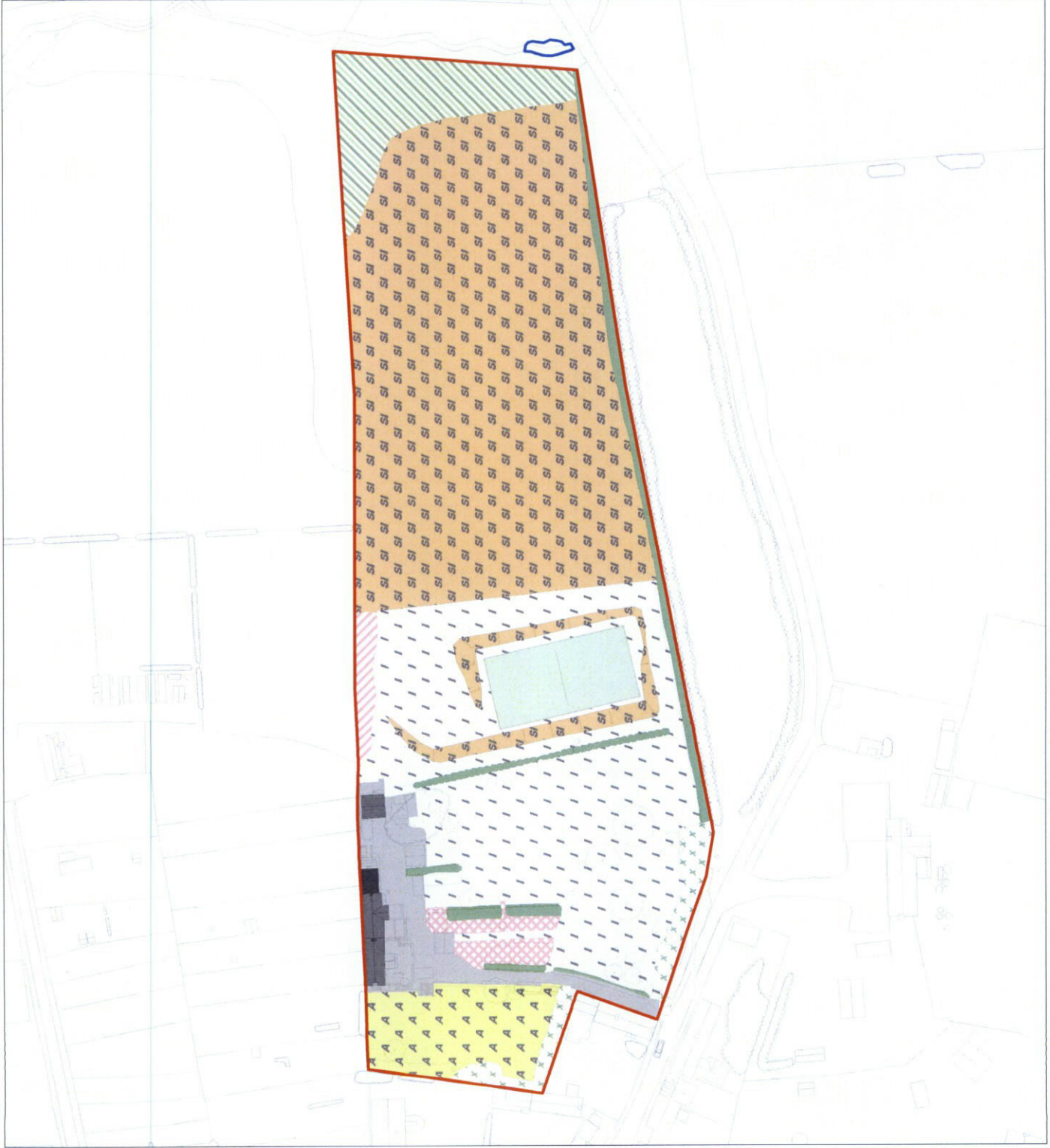
Wincote Ecological Appraisal

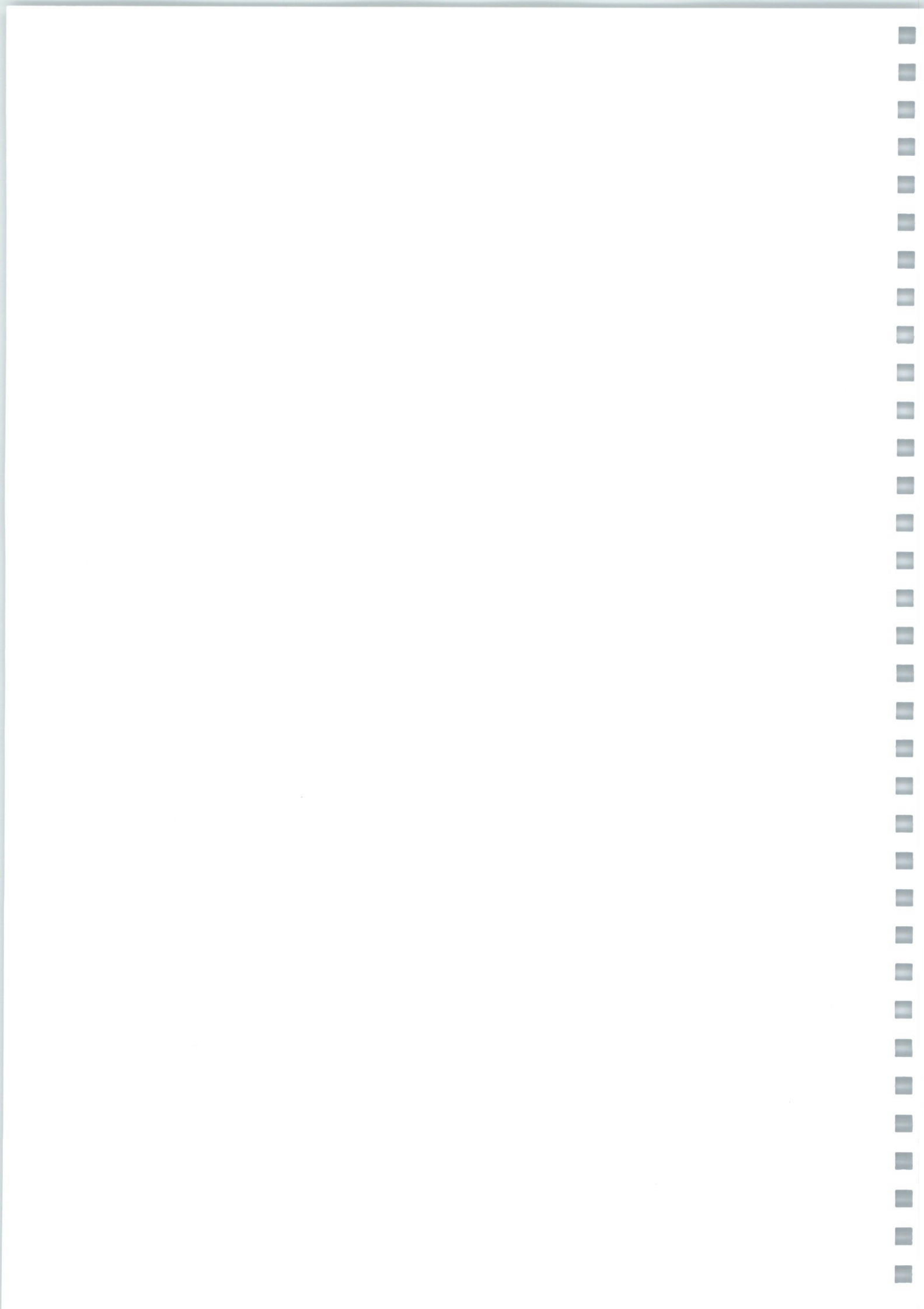
Figure 2.1: GCN Survey Pond Location



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3 FINDINGS

TERRESTRIAL HABITAT APPRAISAL

- 3.1 The site contains a mosaic of habitat types that provide suitable habitat for GCN. Scrub and hedgerow habitats around the margins of the site provide suitable hibernation sites for GCN and the rough semi-improved neutral grassland and tall ruderal habitats may provide cover and foraging habitat.

POND HABITAT SUITABILITY INDEX

- 3.2 The HSI scores are shown in **Table 3.1**. Results indicate that the pond provides good habitat for GCN due to excellent terrestrial habitats high water quality and extensive macrophyte cover.

Table 3.1: Habitat Suitability Index

Pond	HSI	Pond Suitability	Predicted presence of GCN prior to survey ¹
Eastern boundary pond	0.72	Good	79%

POND SURVEY

- 3.3 Survey results are summarised in Table 3.2. No GCN were recorded during the surveys. Other amphibian species recorded include occasional common frog and numerous common frog tadpoles.

Table 3.2: GCN Survey Results

Eastern boundary pond	Bottle trapping	Torching	Egg searching
1 – 18 th April	Tadpoles	Tadpoles	0
2 – 12 th May	Tadpoles	1 common frog and numerous tadpoles	0
3 – 19 th May	Tadpoles	Tadpoles	0
4 – 25 th May	Tadpoles	Tadpoles	0

¹ Based on a system developed by Dr Lee Brady. <http://www.narrs.org.uk/.naspack.htm>

4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1 No GCN were recorded during the surveys suggesting that they are absent from the site and surrounding habitats. No impact to GCN or constraint to the scheme in respect of this species is predicted.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

- 4.2 Recent tree work in the area has included the repollarding of several mature willow trees around the margins of the pond. The arising from this work have been left within the waterbody. Willow will regenerate from very small pieces of plant material, therefore if these arisings are not removed the pond will be completely covered by willow scrub within a few years. This could eventually lead to the disappearance of the pond altogether.

5 REFERENCES

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