

Appendix 9.10 – Draft Great Crested Newt - Method Statement

Introduction

1. Great crested newts (GCN) rely on waterbodies (typically ponds, but also slow moving small water courses) for breeding but otherwise they spend much of their time on dry land. They may enter a period of low activity as temperatures fall below 5°C. This generally begins in late September and by the end of November most amphibians are dormant for much of the time. Amphibians seek refuge over winter in sites similar to those sought during the day such as an underground crevice or crack, a void in a tree stump or bank or under refugia such as piles of rock or dead wood. Adult GCN migrate to breeding ponds in spring, and sometimes as early as the first frost free days, at the end of January.
2. On land amphibians engage in foraging, dispersing and resting. Foraging takes place mostly during hours of darkness over a range of habitats that support invertebrate species. Movement at night may reduce the risk of predation and desiccation.
3. Whilst on land, outside the over-wintering period, GCNs may require refuges from extremes of weather (i.e. high temperatures and dry periods) and may rest in areas of dense vegetation, under refuges or underground.
4. During the GCN surveys undertaken in May/ June 2013 'medium' sized populations of GCNs were found to be present within two ponds (Ponds P1 and P5) which are located within 500m of the site. Ordnance Survey Mapping indicates a third pond (Pond P6) within 500m of the site, but access to survey this waterbody was not granted. For the purposes of the impact assessment it was assumed that a GCN population is also present within Pond P6. In July 2014 the planning application boundary was amended to include a further parcel of land extending southwards along the eastern boundary to Wykham Lane. Whilst this brings another waterbody (P7) within 500m of the site boundary (P7 is located approximately 320m to the south of the site), it is located beyond 500m of the proposed foot-print of the on-site built development parcels. This waterbody is annotated as a reservoir on Ordnance Survey mapping and which are generally considered to have low potential to support GCNs. It is also located beyond 500m of other ponds surveyed connected within this assessment which were found to contain GCN.
5. There is a risk that a low number of GCNs could be disturbed or harmed by site

clearance works and construction activities undertaken in the hedgerows and associated field margin habitats. This risk is increased if these works are undertaken during the amphibian hibernation period as GCNs could potentially hibernate in the hedgerows.

6. Natural England's 'Rapid Risk Assessment' tool suggests that site clearance works on the parts of the site within 500m of Ponds P1 and P6 is 'likely' to result in an offence and 'highly unlikely' to result in an offence for the parts of the site within Pond P5 and P7 (reservoir) provided that no GCNs are harmed as a result of the works.
7. Of the part of the site which falls within 500m of Pond P5, only the southern hedgerow is considered suitable for GCNs and as this is being retained the risk of harm to GCN is likely to be extremely low and therefore no licence application in connection with Pond P5 is required. For parts of the site which falls within 500m of the reservoir (P7), 1.06 ha of arable land and 64m of hedgerow within the application boundary lies within 250 - 500m of the site and within this area of the site no built development footprint is proposed and the hedgerow will be retained. Provided that not GCN are a risk of harm from the site development, through the implementation of RAMs, then the likelihood of committing an offence is reduced and a licence from Natural England is not considered necessary.
8. For the parts of the site within 500m of Ponds P1 and P6 the risk of an offence being committed is considered to be 'likely'. It may be possible to reduce this risk by implementing what Natural England call 'Reasonable Avoidance Measures' which would be employed during site clearance works (including archaeological investigation works) and construction and landscaping works to decrease the risk of harm to GCN. Provided that no GCN are at risk of harm from the site development, through the implementation of RAMs, then likelihood of committing an offence is reduced and a licence from Natural England is not considered necessary.

Method Statement

9. The following Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) will be implemented prior to and/or during (A) archaeological investigation works and (B) site clearance / construction works:

(A) Archaeological Investigation Works

For operations such as archaeological investigations, the potential for disturbance to habitats will be temporary with habitats being reinstated soon after the investigations are complete and as such the following Reasonable Avoidance Measures will be

implemented ***within 250m from pond P1 and pond P6:***

- In order to prevent damage to retained hedgerows and trees, excavations near these habitats will be undertaken in accordance with BS5837:2012 – *Trees in relation to construction*;
- The required tree root protection zones along retained hedgerows will be clearly marked to prevent excavations from encroaching into this habitat;
- A 10m buffer along the hedgerows within 250m of Ponds P1 and P6 will be clearly marked. Where possible, the archaeological investigations should be designed to avoid excavations in this area in the first instance;
- Archaeological excavation works **will not** be undertaken within 10m of the hedgerows between 1st November and 28th February or outside these times when night time temperatures are consistently below 5 degrees Celsius i.e. when GCN can be expected to be hibernating / activity expected to be low or negligible;
- Archaeological excavation works which need to be undertaken within 10m of the hedgerows will only be able to proceed between March and October when night-time temperatures are consistently above 5°C. An Ecologist will be required to hand-search and undertake destructive searches of the proposed excavation area where it falls within the 10m buffer area. An Ecologist will then need to be present to check the edges of the backfill before it is used to infill the excavation if the excavations are left open overnight;
- If taller grassland vegetation and scrub is present in areas to be disturbed by the archaeological excavations, the vegetation will be cut to 150mm and a short sward maintained prior to any archaeological investigations works, in order to increase the area's unsuitability for GCN;
- The duration of time that the excavations will be left open will be kept to a minimum (as risk of harm to GCN is reduced the shorter the duration of the works); and
- Wooden planks will be positioned within any open excavations to allow any animals (including GCN) to escape.

(B) Construction Works

The construction operations will occur over a long time period and habitat loss will be permanent and as such the following Reasonable Avoidance Measures will be implemented ***within 500m from Ponds P1 , P6 and the P7 (Reservoir)***


- In order to prevent damage to retained hedgerows and trees, excavations near these habitats will be undertaken in accordance with BS5837:2012 – *Trees in relation to construction*;
- The required tree root protection zones along retained hedgerows will be clearly marked to prevent excavations from encroaching into this habitat;
- Site clearance works within 10m of the hedgerows in addition to uprooting and removing sections of hedgerow **will not** be undertaken between 1st November and 28th February or outside these times when night time temperatures are consistently below 5 degrees Celsius i.e. when GCN can be expected to be hibernating / activity expected to be low or negligible;
- Prior to site clearance and hedgerow removal works, any tall grassland vegetation and scrub scheduled to be cleared within the field margins will be cut to 150mm and a short sward maintained prior to any construction works, in order to increase the area's unsuitability for GCN;
- An Ecologist will undertake a watching brief of site clearance works where they fall within 10m of a retained hedgerow. A watching brief will also be undertaken during any hedgerow removal works where the ground is to be disturbed. This will involve a hand-search of the habitats to be cleared followed by a destructive search as the topsoil is stripped. The works in these areas will only be undertaken between March and October when the night-time temperatures are consistently above 5°C;
- Materials which could potentially be used by amphibians as refuges and which need to be stock piled on site will either be sited more than 500m from Ponds P1 and P6, or if this is not practicable will be temporarily stock-piled within 500m, but will be stored above ground (e.g. on wooden pallets) and wrapped in a suitable membrane or stored in bags to prevent use by GCN as hibernacula;
- The length of the site clearance works will be kept to a minimum (risk of harm to GCN is reduced the shorter the duration of the works);
- Wooden planks will be positioned within any open excavations to allow any animals (including GCN) to escape; and
- The earth within the areas of the site cleared for construction and landscaping works will be compacted to make these areas more unsuitable for GCN.

Time constraints

10. The following activities will be constrained by the GCN overwintering season (November to January inclusive) and bird breeding season (March to August inclusive).

Table 1: Timing of Activities												
Activity	Month											
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Hedgerow – cutting only. No ground disturbance.												
Hedgerow removal (after cutting)– uprooting hedgerow												
Hedgerow cutting & uprooting (if done together)												
Site clearance works*												

* within 10m of retained hedgerows and in the presence of an ecologist

 - Period in which activity can be undertaken