Case Ref: DC/25/0117	Date: 16/04/2025
From: NatureSpace	Response: Holding objection - Further Information Required

Recommended Actions:

- An ecological report has been submitted as part of the application, however, has not taken into consideration all the ponds and habitats within 500m of the proposed development site.
- In order to fully assess the impacts of the development on great crested newts, it is recommended that additional surveys are undertaken on the habitats on site and within the wider landscape. This should ideally include eDNA surveys on ponds within 500m.
- Alternatively, should the applicant not wish to undertake further surveys, Horsham District Council have a District Licence scheme that the applicant can join to negate the need for delays associated with additional surveys.

These comments are in relation to DC/24/1342|Erection of commercial building (Class E light industrial) and associated parking|Thornhill Works Billingshurst Road Coolham Horsham West Sussex RH13 8QN
Ecological Summary:

The development is situated in the red impact risk zone indicating that highly suitable habitat is present in the surrounding landscape.

Site context:

- There are 12 ponds within 500m of the site boundary, the closest of which is within 20m.
- There is good connectivity with the wider landscape.
- Suitable habitats on site appear to include grassland, woodland, and scrub, however, this can only be determined through arial imagery.
- There are 9 modern positive records of great crested newts within 500m.

Conclusion:

The applicant has submitted an ecological report [Ecological Appraisal, Deepdene Ecology Ltd., July 2024] alongside their planning application. This report only acknowledges 2 ponds within a 500m radius, when there are 15 ponds within 500m, the closest of which is 70m from the proposed development boundary. These ponds are both used as fisheries and are managed, therefore unlikely to support great crested newts, however, the other ponds in the landscape do have the potential to support populations of great crested newts that could disperse, in their terrestrial phase, through the proposed development site.

Therefore, there is not enough information to mitigate or rule out any potential impacts to great crested newts and/or their habitat. The applicant must provide further ecological information on the site, particularly the ponds, to evidence how there is no risk to great crested newts from the proposed development, in the form of a report from a suitably qualified ecologist. It is preferred that eDNA surveys are undertaken, as it is currently the season for these to be conducted. Should surveys return a positive result for great crested newts, or not provide ample evidence to prove absence of the species, then a licence would need to be obtained for the development. There are 2 licensing

options available, Horsham District Council's District Licence scheme operated by NatureSpace, or European Protected Species Licensing with Natural England.

Should the applicant not wish to undertake further surveys, use of Horsham District Council's District Licence can negate the need for this and can be applied for without additional survey effort, providing certainty through planning. If the applicant chooses to use this route, a valid NatureSpace report or certificate must be submitted to planning.



Figure above: Outline of the site (red) in the context of the surrounding landscape, including the Impact Risk Zones for great crested newt. Ponds are shown in light blue – not all ponds are visible on this map. A 250m buffer is shown around the site in green and a 500m buffer in blue. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

More details on the District Licensing Scheme operated by the council can be found at www.naturespaceuk.com

Contact details: info@naturespaceuk.com

Relationship between NatureSpace and the Local Authority

Horsham District Council holds a Great Crested Newt Organisational (or "District") Licence granted by Natural England. This is administered by NatureSpace Partnership through their District Licensing Scheme as the council's delivery partner. A dedicated Newt Officer is employed by NatureSpace to provide impartial advice to the council and help guide them and planning applicants through the process. All services and arrangements are facilitated in an unbiased, independent and transparent manner. You can find out more at www.naturespaceuk.com

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

Reasonable Likelihood of Protected Species

Permission can be refused if adequate information on protected species is not provided by an applicant, as it will be unable to assess the impacts on the species and thus meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021), ODPM Circular 06/2005 or the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). The Council has the power to request information under Article 4 of the Town and Country (Planning Applications) Regulations 1988 (SI1988.1812) (S3) which covers general information for full applications. CLG 2007 'The validation of planning applications' states that applications should not be registered if there is a requirement for an assessment of the impacts of a development on biodiversity interests.

Section 99 of ODPM Circular 06/2005 states:

"It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision. The need to ensure ecological surveys are carried out should therefore only be left to coverage under planning conditions in exceptional circumstances, with the result that the surveys are carried out after planning permission has been granted. However, bearing in mind the delay and cost that may be involved, developers should not be required to undertake surveys for protected species unless there is a reasonable likelihood of the species being present and affected by development. Where this is the case, the survey should be completed and any necessary measures to protect the species should be in place, through conditions and / or planning obligations before permission is granted."

Great crested newts

Great crested newts and their habitats are fully protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Therefore, it is illegal to deliberately capture, injure, kill, disturb or take great crested newts or to damage or destroy breeding sites or resting places. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is illegal to intentionally or recklessly disturb any great crested newts occupying a place of shelter or protection, or to obstruct access to any place of shelter or protection (see the legislation or seek legal advice for full details). Local planning authorities have a statutory duty in exercising of all their functions to '*have regard, so far is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity*,' as stated under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural

Communities Act 2006 (as amended), as well as a duty under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) to have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive. As a result, GCN and their habitats are a material consideration in the planning process.

Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys

Validity of ecological reports and surveys can become compromised overtime due to being out-of-date. CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing (CIEEM, 2019) states, if the age of data is between 12-18 months, "*the report authors should highlight whether they consider it likely to be necessary to update surveys*". If the age of the data is between 18 months to 3 years an updated survey and report will be required and anything more than 3 years old "*The report is unlikely to still be valid and most, if not all, of the surveys are likely to need to be updated".*

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