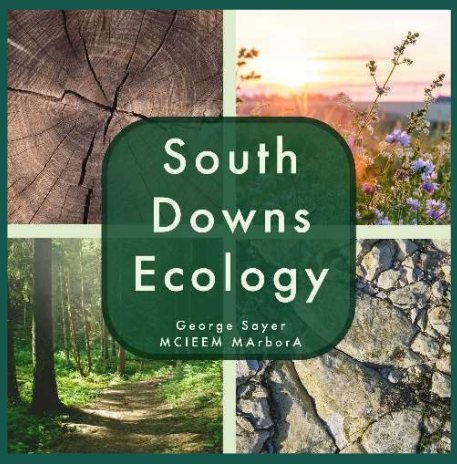
Great Crested Newt Precautionary Working Method Statement

Ebbsworth Cottage Nutbourne



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The applicant has commissioned a Precautionary Working Method Statement for Great Crested Newt for proposals for the erection of a two-bed annexe building providing ancillary residential accommodation in place of a previously demolished annexe building within the existing hard standing footprint. Comments on the application (DISC/24/0222) from Places Services were provided as follows:

We have reviewed the Great Crested Newt Precautionary Working Method Statement (submitted September 2024) which has been submitted in order to discharge Condition 4.

We are not satisfied that the submitted information includes the detail required by this condition. This is because the document should be prepared by a suitably qualified ecologist (SQE). Unfortunately there is no identification of the author, but it does not appear to have been drafted by an SQE.

Some information is correctly included, but we highlight that additional details are required, such as:

• 1.01 the location of the pond with confirmed GCN record in relation to the application site from a SQE

• 1.02 pre-works assessment by a SQE

• 1.02 a toolbox talk conducted by an SQE, including information on what to look for and identification of GCN

• 1.02 ensure that all workers understand that unlicensed handling of GCN is illegal

• 1.03 If a GCN is found on site seek advice from a SQE

• 2.02 correct procedure for maintaining a short sward within the construction zone from SQE.

• 2.02 timing and duration of the works as advised by a SQE

1.2 In response to these comments, to enable the discharge of Condition 4, the following Precautionary Working Method Statement has been completed by George Sayer (*BSc (Hons)* Environmental *Sciences, PgDip Endangered Species Recovery, MArborA, MCIEEM, NE Licence Holder – Bats Level 2 and Great Crested Newt Level 1 - Ecologist*). George has worked in GCN ecology since 2016 on a number of projects including translocations, pond enhancements and on projects working under Precautionary Working Method Statements.

2.0 Great Crested Newt Assessment

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

2.1 The preliminary ecological appraisal was undertaken on 10th November 2022 by Hayley Swann, an Ecologist at Lizard Landscape Design and Ecology. This identified that there is 1no. record of GCN located within 2.0km of the site. The site was recorded as being formed of concrete hard standing which is of negligible value to GCN. The PEA also identified that the modified grassland and tall ruderal habitats within the boundaries are more suitable, and these are to be retained. The pond with the recorded GCN is isolated from the construction area by habitats unsuitable for amphibians. Access for construction will be over bare ground which is also unsuitable for amphibians.

2.2 The construction area covers c.50 square metres. Whilst no local records centre search has been undertaken, a review of other sources has been undertaken which identified 1no. record of GCN at the time within 2.0 km. This is a historical record from 1985. A further record made by a member of the Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group has since been made in 2023.

2.3 Whilst neither record can be pinpointed to a specific pond, an approximate 100m radius around the records is provided below (in green), as well as the site area (in red) and the nearest notable offsite waterbody (in blue). The records are approximately 1.1 km west and 0.9 km north of the site. It is understood from the EcIA there is a small pond on-site as well, and a large pond is notable c.30.0 m east of the closest part of the construction zone.

Figure No. 01 – Site in location to waterbodies and records of GCN.



2.4 The proposals have been input into the Natural England Mitigation Licence, Rapid Risk Assessment tool as below, assuming that there is a breeding pond within 100.0 as a precaution. This indicates that loss of below 100sqm is highly unlikely to result in an offence.

Table No.01 – Rapid Risk Assessment for GCN

Component	**Likely effect** (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	**Notional offence probability score**
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	0.001 - 0.01 ha lost or damaged	0.05
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.05
Rapid risk assessment result:	**GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY**	

2.5 A Precautionary Working Method Statement is detailed below to ensure this risk is minimised and to ensure that GCN are not harmed in the highly unlikely event that one is present on-site.

3.0 Precautionary Working Method Statement

Potential Impacts

3.1 Given the findings of the PEA, the proposals might harm GCN through inappropriate storage and excavations, leading to amphibians being crushed or falling into excavations as they commute through the gardens, as well as harm during clearance or removal of hard surfaces and other materials. The possibility is considered of low overall likelihood, but sufficiently high that avoidance measures are necessary to minimise the risk and impact.

3.2 It is considered possible that such measures could be adopted without a licence, although should the homeowner wish to avoid any risk of an offence, an application under the District Licence Scheme could be made.

3.3 The proposals would not remove any suitable refuge habitat nor block access to any, with the construction area being within an area of bare ground surrounded by well-maintained amenity grassland.

Avoidance, Mitigation and Compensation

3.4 The following method shall adequately protect amphibians including GCN from harm during works. Given the presence of a moderate population of GCN within 50.0 m, measures must be accorded with strictly:

- Prior to any works being undertaken, a pre-works assessment must be undertaken by a Suitably-qualified Ecologist (SQE). This will look to confirm that the state of the site and potential for GCN has not altered, and will include a preliminary check for GCN in areas such as under debris, stones, in surrounding vegetation.
- A toolbox talk must be given to all groundworkers and contractors as to the strict protection afforded GCN; how to identify GCN; where GCN might occur; methods of works which would minimise risk of harm to any concealed GCN; and what to do should one be found during works.
- This will confirm that **unlicensed handling of GCN is illegal and that the SQE must be contacted immediately should a GCN be found, and works must cease until a course of action is agreed**. The SQE shall determine whether the newt is in immediate danger in which case the SQE shall move it out of immediate danger.
- There is no specific limit on the duration of such works, but works on open ground should be timed to avoid any periods when GCN might be traversing the site. Should all groundworks be undertaken and completed between mid November and mid February, or between mid-June and mid-August, the probability of GCN being encountered is very low and limited to impacts such as storage of materials.
- No works will be undertaken at night when newts are most active.
- All footings, excavations or other groundworks, when they are below-ground must be covered nightly in overlapping boards covered in plastic sheets, allowing GCN to traverse the area overnight without falling into excavations. These shall be checked every morning for any wildlife.

- Once footings are above ground, care must be taken not to leave any piles of debris, spoil etc. which GCN might crawl into overnight.
- Any pipework over 100mm must be capped overnight.
- No machinery shall park on grassland overnight. No construction vehicles shall be permitted within 5m of the on-site pond.
- All materials storage must be undertaken away from suitable habitats, especially the pond and the site margins, and using pallets, existing hard surfaced and dump bags or similar to prevent newt ingress.
- Any loose aggregates, blocks or timber can be placed onto plastic sheeting, which must be tied up at the top each night to prevent newt access. All rubbish must be stored in skips or bins.
- Any materials under which newts might hibernate such as small concrete slabs. timbers or logs should not be moved during the hibernation season (November – February inclusive) unless they have first been checked by the SQE and confirmed not to support any GCN.
- The site consists of bare ground surrounded by modified grassland. The surrounding grassland shall be kept well cut to ensure amphibians would not be sheltering within the construction zone, with no vehicle trafficking over long grass. Any grass over 100mm shall be cut to this height using a small push mower or similar when temperatures are at least 8 degrees Celsius and the grass is dry, to ensure no newts are hidden within. Following this the grass shall be mown weekly to ensure it stays no higher than 50mm sward height. GCN will commute over but not shelter in such a habitat. Arisings must be removed from the construction area.
- Any scrub, ruderals or other growth must be kept strimmed down to ground level immediately surrounding the construction zone to prevent suitable habitat forming. An initial cut of any such habitat shall take it to no lower than 100mm and the arisings manually raked-off with great care, and the habitat left for 24 hours to allow wildlife to disperse, following which it shall be taken down to ground level.
- **Should a GCN be found at any point during works, the works shall cease until a licenced ecologist confirms a course of action.**