# Ecological Assessment & Precautionary Working Method Statement

# Waresley Hall, Manor Park Road, Waresley, Sandy SG19 3BX

**For Miss R Brack**

**December 2024**

Sound Ecology

**Report: SE2461**

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The interpretations and recommendations in the report represent my professional opinion, which was arrived at in accordance with accepted industry practices and based on current legislation at the time. No responsibility can be accepted for inaccuracies in the data supplied.

**Andrew Palmer BSc (Hons), DipLA, MCIEEM**
**Sound Ecology – December 2024**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Sound Ecology has prepared this report on behalf of Robyn Brack. It concerns the installation of an estate fence and gates at Waresley Hall, Manor Park Road, Waresley, Sandy SG19 3BX. The Site is located at OS grid reference TL246545.

The report fulfils Huntingdon District Council's requirement to provide a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. However, for a fence installation, it is considered more appropriate to concentrate on risk factors rather than provide a typical PEA, where much of the content would be irrelevant. Therefore, the report is abridged and concentrates on Great Crested Newts (while still considering other protected species and habitats).

The proposed works comprise the installation of a galvanised steel estate-type fence with matching gates. It is assumed that the small diameter posts are installed within excavated holes, not exceeding 300 mm diameter or a depth beyond 600 mm. Refer to Dixon Surveying and Design Services drawing JD/202418.1 for the proposed location and specification.

# 2 METHODOLOGIES

## 2.1 Surveyor

The survey was undertaken by Andrew Palmer (AP), an experienced ecologist meeting the requirements of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) in accordance with BS42020:2013. AP holds a Level 2 Bat Survey Licence since 2011 (Class Licence Registration Number: 2015-12285-CLS-CLS) in addition to holding a Great Crested Newt and Barn Owl Survey Licences (Class Licences 2017-32763 and CL29/0057).

## 2.2 Desk Study

A desk study was undertaken in December 2024 to provide an ecological context and inform an assessment of the potential ecological constraints to development. Prior to the site survey, MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside) was searched. Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photographs were used to identify features up to 500 m from the site, which might be used by protected or notable species.

Because of the proposal's discrete nature, data on biological records was not obtained. However, HDC's planning portal was searched for nearby ecological reports containing recent records searches, and these are referred to where pertinent.

## 2.3 Habitat and Protected Species Survey

The survey involved a site visit on 6 December 2024 to record and map habitat types and ecological features following the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (CIEEM, 2017).

The site was inspected for evidence of and assessed for potential to support protected and notable species with reference to the principal wildlife legislation pertaining to England. MAGIC was also accessed to identify any European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licences granted by Natural England within a 2 km radius of the site. The following protected and notable species were considered within the assessment:

- Bats
- Great Crested Newts *Triturus cristatus,* and other amphibians
- Badgers *Meles meles*
- Reptiles (Adder *Vipera berus*, Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis,* Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica)*
- Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*
- Birds

# 3 RESULTS

## 3.1 Desk Survey - Designated Sites and Habitats

Three Sites of Special Scientific Interest lie within 2 km:

- Gamlingay Wood SSSI
- Waresely Wood SSSI
- Weaveley and Sand Woods SSSI

A single non-statutory Site (Crimpledean Paddock County Wildlife Site) also falls within 2 km.

This modest proposal will have no impact on these sites of conservation interest and is not a consideration.

## 3.2 Desk Survey - Protected and Biodiversity Species

4.2.1 Protected Species

*Great Crested Newt* - The site lies within the Amber Risk Zone for GCN, although there are no records within 2 km (from MAGIC or data searches of nearby sites).

*Bats* – Bats are present in the landscape with records of Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus,* Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus,* Brown Long-eared *Plecotus auritus* and Barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*.

*Reptiles* – Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica* is known from a small number of local records.

*Badger* – Badger is present in the landscape from both records and the author's local surveys.

*Other species* – Hedgehogs are present in the landscape. Data searches also provided records of scarce plants and invertebrates along with a large number of bird species.

Potential impacts on all of these species were considered during the survey and evaluation.

## 3.3 Habitat Survey

The habitats along the route of the proposed fence are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Fence Route Habitats** (approximate route shown as a yellow dashed line)

#1 – Route extending immediately northeast from Waresely Manor. #2 – Continuing southeast from #1. #3 – Close-up of habitats shown in #2. #4 – Junction with the cricket ground access track at the most eastern point with old fence remains. #5 – Along the track leading to the cricket ground looking southwest. #6 – A continuation of #5 at the most southerly point near the entrance to the cricket ground, which looks northeast.




The prosed fenceline follows the edge of stone tracks and through a mixture of grass verge, bare (under the canopy), Bramble scrub and ruderal forbs. The species present were Common Nettle *Urtica dioica,* Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., Common Ivy *Hedera helix,* Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum,* Cleavers *Galium aparine,* Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius,* False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata.* No rare species were recorded, and no priority habitats would be impacted. No non-native invasive species were present.

A line of Lime *Tilia* trees was present for more than half of the route.

## 3.4 Protected and Notable Species Scoping Survey

### 3.4.1 Great Crested Newts

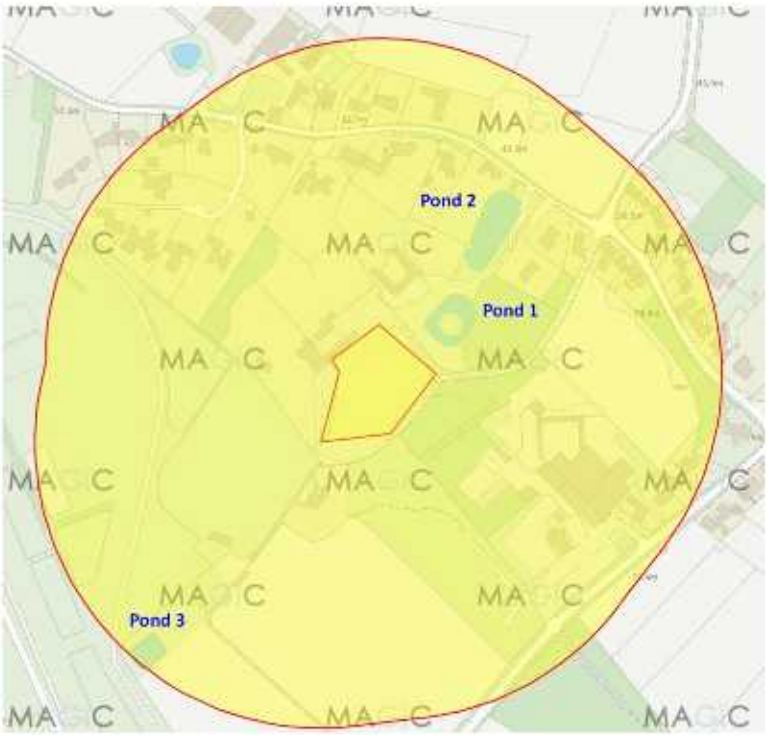
No direct evidence of Great Crested Newt was recorded. Suitable hibernation sites near the route were checked, including beneath logs, boards, and a stone pile.

Two of the three water bodies within 250 m were checked for suitability as Great Crested Newt breeding habitat (Figure 2). Ponds 1 and 2 were also referenced in another local ecological survey which had visited them.

Pond 1 (TL24705465) was viewed from adjoining land. MKA Ecology (for Manor Farm Waresley) also visited it in June 2019 and assigned a Suitability Index[1] of 0.63 (average). In the same survey, Pond 2 (TL24745473) scored 0.49 (poor) and 0.67 (average) for its two separate pools. Viewing from adjoining land, Pond 1 was seen to support a number of Mallard (with a duck house), abrupt wooded boarded edges with no marginal vegetation and a prominent fountain feature.

Pond 3 (TL244454350) was outside of MKA's area but was visited by the author. It was surrounded and shaded by tall conifers and supported no apparent aquatic vegetation. Its water quality was poor, and there was comparatively little suitable terrestrial habitat nearby. As a result, it scored a Suitability Index of 0.4 (poor).

**Figure 2: Ponds within 250 m of the proposed fence installation**




In the absence of local records and no waterbody near the works offering greater than average suitability, the risk to Great Crested Newts is considered to be low. In addition, this level of risk can be readily mitigated by precautionary working methods. No further survey effort will be required to assess potential impacts on this species.

[1] ARG UK (2010). Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index. Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom Advice Note 5.

3.4.2 Bats

*Roosts*—The installation of estate-type fencing will not impact bat roosts. While the adjacent Lime trees may support bat roosts, suitable features were not found at a height or distance from the fence where impacts would arise. No further assessment is required.

*Commuting and foraging*—Bats will almost certainly use the trees and hedgerows in the vicinity of the proposed fence line for behaviours involving flight lines. In almost all circumstances, the height of this behaviour will be well above the fence. Bats are also capable of avoiding new obstacles and minor changes in the landscape without issue, and the new open-style fence will not generate an impact of any significance.

3.4.3 Other species

No evidence of other protected or notable (S41) species was recorded. Specifically, there was no evidence of Badger activity inside or, where accessible, within 30 m of the Site. There was no evidence of Hedgehog activity (scats). Being open (widely spaced horizontal rails), the fence will not represent a movement barrier to either Badgers or Hedgehogs.

No evidence of Grass Snakes was recorded, and the site would not impact hibernation features or habitats important to reptiles. Nevertheless, precautionary working methods will be applied to ensure potential impacts are avoided.

A small area of Bramble scrub along the fence route holds potential value for nesting birds. With appropriate mitigation, risks to nesting birds can be readily avoided, and impacts are not anticipated.

# 4 DISCUSSION

## 4.1 Designated Conservation Sites

The proposed redevelopment is not close enough or of sufficient scale to raise risks to local sites of conservation value.

## 4.2 Potential Impacts on Biodiversity

The survey found no evidence of protected species and low to negligible suitability to support such species. Implementing a Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS), as provided below, can avoid risks to protected species.

## 4.3 Further Ecological Surveys

No further ecological surveys are required to assess the potential risks to protected or notable species.

# 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Precautionary Working Methods Statement (PWMS)

PWMS will apply immediately before and during construction. Therefore, a copy of this report should be retained on the Site during clearance and fence installation work. All site operatives should be made aware of its contents where they are relevant to the tasks they are undertaking. In addition, the contact details of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) should be made available

in case advice is required during the operations. The risks to protected species are sufficiently low that the SQE does not need to be present to supervise any aspect of the work. However, the client should designate a person responsible for ensuring compliance with the instructions set out below.

5.1.1 Protected Species

Construction personnel will conduct a brief site walkover and check of excavations before work commences each day to ensure no protected species have entered the site overnight. Work should proceed with caution. At any time, should protected species be found during site clearance, demolition, or construction, work will stop, and the SQE will be contacted immediately for advice. Protected species should not be handled unless they are an immediate and unavoidable danger (bats should only be handled with gloves so as not to injure the animal but also to avoid being bitten). If this arises, then the SQE should be contacted immediately, and the animal should be secured in an escape-proof ventilated container and stored in a shady location before being released by the ecologist.

5.1.2 Birds

All bird species are offered protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) when nesting or preparing nests (typically, but not exclusively, between March and August inclusive). As such, vegetation removal should be done outside of the breeding bird season (between September and February inclusive) to avoid disturbing or destroying active nests. Should this time frame be unfeasible, it is recommended that before the commencement of work, a nesting bird check is carried out by the SQE (although checks at all times of the year are recommended). If active nests are observed, vegetation/structures must be left alone until the SQE is satisfied that the young have successfully fledged.

**5.2 Great Crested Newt Specific PWMS**

5.2.1 Where Amphibians might be found when not breeding in ponds

Amphibians breed in ponds and other water bodies in spring, generally between February and June, with some variation due to weather conditions. They spend much of the rest of their time on land, travelling, in some cases, hundreds of metres from ponds. Amphibians need to find sheltered crevices in dense vegetation, under wood piles, in rubble, etc., for hibernation and to shelter during the day and in dry periods. They may be found lying up among brickwork and stone walls, at and near ground level, where crevices and loose joints are present. Toads, in particular, are frequently found in such places. Amphibians also will take shelter in cracks and cavities in the ground and may bury themselves in soft earth.

Great Crested Newts may be found in woodland, under hedgerows, marshes, and damp tussocky grassland habitats. They do not typically occupy short-mown grassland but may cross it to travel between suitable habitats.

5.2.2 Great Crested Newt Identification

The GCN is the largest of the UK's newt species, reaching a maximum length of 170 mm. Adults typically range from 110-130 mm long but can be as short as 85 mm. Adults are easily distinguished from other British species by size (being much bulkier) and colour (being darker, i.e. black or black-brown). Their skin is also granular in appearance, with fine white spots on the lower flanks (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Great Crested Newt Identification**



Comparison: Great Crested Newt (darker) & Smooth Newt



5.2.3 Timing and Responsible Parties

While Great Crested Newts are not at significant risk, particular attention needs to be paid to when animals are actively migrating and foraging (late winter, late summer, and autumn) and when hibernating (early winter).

As Great Crested Newts are most active at night, the work should be undertaken during daylight hours only. The duration of the work should be kept to a minimum and commenced at a time when it can be completed without significant pauses or delays.

A senior member of the construction team who is present on site most, if not all, of the time should take responsibility for ensuring compliance with the PWMS. In addition, the contact details of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) should be made available in case advice is required during the operations (see the final page of this report where the author's contact details are provided).

All workers should be informed before the commencement of the protected species that could potentially be found, their protected status, where they might be found, and methods to follow if they are discovered. They should also be made aware of the importance of maintaining a watch for Great Crested Newts and amphibians/reptiles during the works. The site workers should be shown Figure 3 to ensure that they can recognise a Great Crested Newt. In areas of higher risk, the ecologist should provide the toolbox talk. However, *in this instance and with such a low risk,* it is sufficient for this information to be shared informally.

*If a GCN is found*—If it is suspected that a Great Crested Newt has been found, work must be suspended, and advice from an SQE must be sought immediately. At no point should anyone handle a GCN or suspected GCN. Unlicensed handling may result in an offence, and untrained handling may cause unnecessary stress and injury. If the operative is confident that the newt species is not a Great Crested, the animal can be carefully moved out of the working zone and placed under a nearby hedgerow. Handling of any animal should be kept to a minimum.

5.2.4 Precautionary Working Methods

*Onsite Habitat Degradation*—At least 48 hours before construction commences, the vegetated habitats along the fence route should be cut back/mown to a height of 50 mm. This will discourage amphibians from taking refuge within the grassland. Mowing should be done by checking the area before commencement to ensure no amphibians are present.

*Fence post-excavation*—The following bullet points should be adhered to:

- Vegetation should be carefully inspected and cleared in the immediate working area.
- When digging, remain vigilant for the presence of wildlife.
- No unfilled holes should be left overnight.
- Soil arisings are anticipated to be minimal and likely spread to adjacent areas. However, where larger quantities of material have to be removed, do so each day and do not leave debris piles overnight.
- Avoid machine removal of any potential hibernacula (wood piles, debris, etc.) without a thorough hand search for amphibians, reptiles and Hedgehogs.
- Impact of vehicles/machinery on the ground must be minimised by undertaking work from hardstanding or agreed areas only.

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