Great Crested Newt Survey Report

Rectory Road, Bluntisham

for

Meadow Barn Developments

20 May 2025

greenlight
environmental consultancy

Client
Meadow Barn Developments

Planning authority
Huntingdonshire District Council

Time limit of reliance

Please note that the reported surveys were conducted on the date(s) stated in the report and that it represents site conditions at the time of the visit. The findings and recommended mitigation are based on these conditions. If site conditions change materially after the site survey, the original report cannot be relied upon and will need to be updated. Ecological reports and surveys can typically be relied on for 18 to 24 months from the date of survey.

Surveys supporting European Protected Species Mitigation Licence applications must be within the current or most recent survey season for bats (May to September), or within two survey seasons for great crested newts (March to June).

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Signed disclosure

The information, data, advice and opinions provided in this report which I have provided is true and has been prepared in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional bona fide opinions.

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SUMMARY

- Greenlight Environmental Consultancy Ltd. has been commissioned to carry out protected species surveys for great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* ("GCN"), relating to a proposed development at 37 Rectory Road, Bluntisham, Huntingdon, PE28 3LN (grid reference: TL 37183 74438).
- This report provides the results of the GCN survey and any potential effects of the proposed development on such species.
- The ecology report is required in support of a planning application for the extension of building one and the construction of three residential dwellings.
- The survey and assessment were completed by independent qualified and experienced ecologists with Natural England survey licences for the relevant protected species, and in accordance with the latest survey guidelines.
- The findings of the assessment are that there are no significant ecological constraints that would prevent the proposed works.
- If the following mitigation and enhancements are incorporated into the proposed layout, there will be a net gain for biodiversity, as is encouraged by the National Planning Policy Framework.

Protected habitats/species	Status	Potential effect	Recommended mitigation and enhancements
Great crested newts	Suitable terrestrial habitats on site. One pond within 250m of the site assessed as **average** suitability. eDNA survey conducted on pond one, returned a **negative** result for GCN.	GCN unlikely to be found on site and no impacts predicted.	<u>*Precautionary mitigation*</u> Cut and maintain vegetation short (maximum height of 10cm) on and around the site until the start of works. Rough sawn planks placed inside any open excavations. Construction materials will be stored off the ground on pallets and waste materials in skips. Two south facing hibernacula to be created in offsite BNG area to the southeast. Soft landscaping scheme as part of Biodiversity Net Gain measures to include: • The planting of new native species-rich hedgerows and trees around site. • Creation of broadleaved woodland offsite.

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal ("PEA") was carried out and issued by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy Ltd. (2024). The report recommended further GCN presence/ absence surveys prior to the commencement of the development.

1.2. The water features on and near the site were assessed for suitability for occupation by GCN, according to a Habitat Suitability Index (Oldham *et al.*, 2000) and reported in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report issued by Greenlight Environmental Consultancy Ltd. (2024).

1.3. In order to determine the presence/likely absence of GCN on site, an eDNA survey was conducted on pond one (Figure 1) on the 23rd April 2025, following the field sampling protocol provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ("DEFRA") and Biggs *et al.* (2014).

1.4. The eDNA method detects pond occupancy from GCN using traces of DNA shed into the pond environment. The water samples collected were sent to SureScreen Scientifics for laboratory analysis.

1.5. The results of the analysis are defined as follows by SureScreen Scientifics:

- **Sample Integrity Check ("SIC"):** Refers to quality of packaging, absence of tube leakage, suitability of sample (not too much mud or weed etc.) and absence of any factors that could potentially lead to results errors. Inspection upon receipt of sample at the laboratory. To check if the Sample is of adequate integrity when received. Pass or Fail.
- **Degradation Check ("DC"):** Analysis of the spiked DNA marker to see if there has been degradation of the kit since made in the laboratory to sampling to analysis. Pass or Fail.
- **Inhibition Check ("IC"):** PCR inhibitors can cause false results. Inhibitors are analysed to check the quality of the result. Every effort is made to clean the sample pre-analysis however some inhibitors cannot be extracted. An unacceptable inhibition check will cause an indeterminate sample and must be sampled again.
- **Result:**
  - **Negative:** Means that GCN eDNA was not detected or is below the threshold detection level and the test result should be considered as no evidence of GCN presence.
  - **Positive:** Means that GCN eDNA was found at or above the threshold level and the presence of GCN at this location at the time of sampling or in the recent past is confirmed.
- **Positive Replicates:** To generate the results all of the tubes from each pond are combined to produce one eDNA extract. Then twelve separate analyses are undertaken. If one or

more of these analyses are positive the pond is declared positive for the presence of GCN. It may be assumed that small fractions of positive analyses suggest low level presence but this cannot currently be used for population studies. In accordance with Natural England protocol, even a score of 1/12 is declared positive.

1.6. The eDNA survey was undertaken by Rosie Langton.

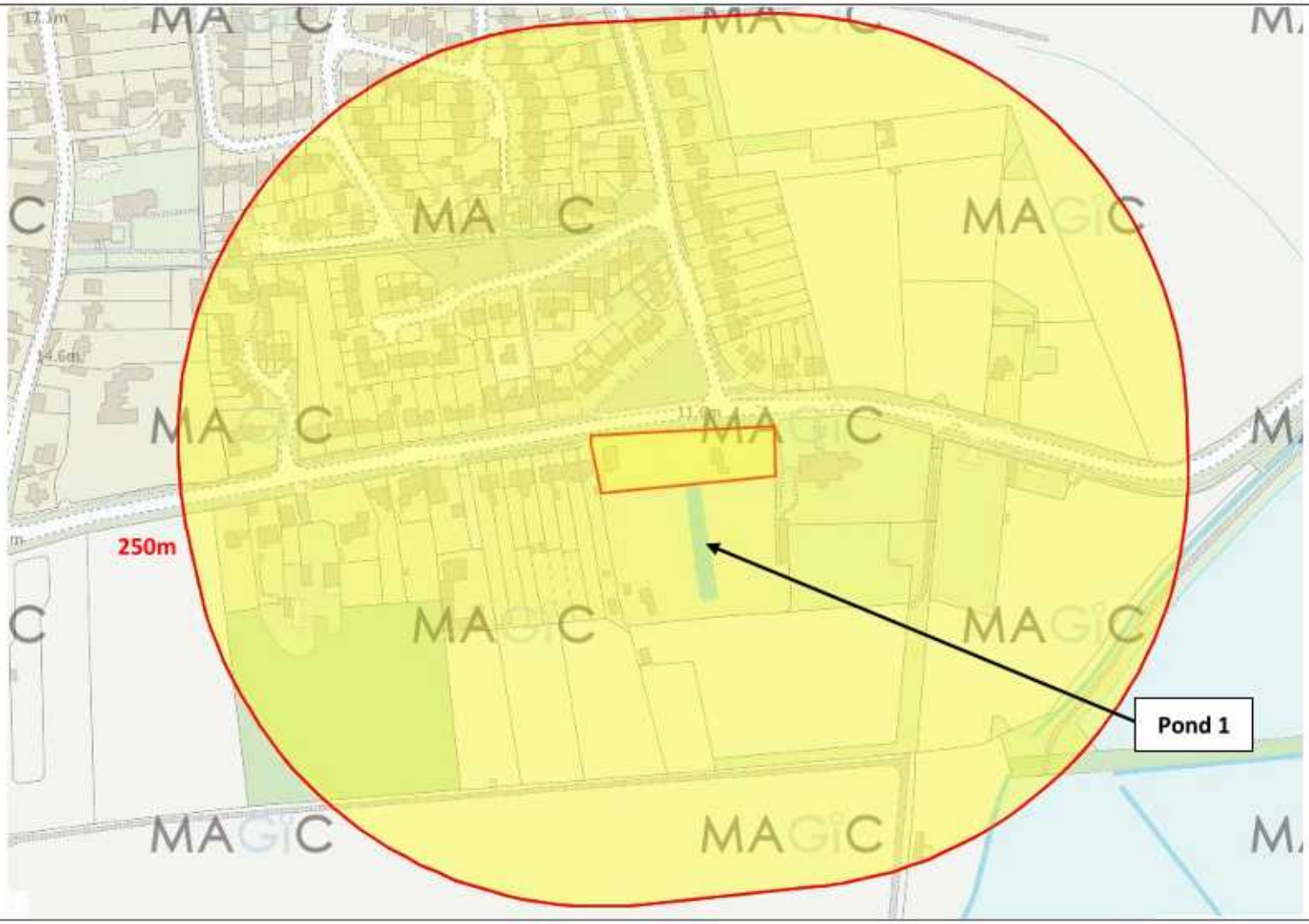


Figure 1
Ponds within 250m of the proposed site.
Image © MAGIC, date accessed 20/05/25

2. SITE CONTEXT

2.1. The site is situated on the southern edge of the village of Bluntisham, along the A1123, with the A141 located approximately 7.8km northwest. The closest town is St Ives, located approximately 5.5km southwest of the site.

2.2. The site is enclosed by residential dwellings and Bluntisham War Memorial to the north, St Marys Church to the east, arable land to the south and residential dwelling to the west. The wider surroundings are comprised of a mixture of residential dwellings, blocks of woodland and arable fields lined with mature trees and hedgerows.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT

3.1. The proposals are for the extension of building one and the construction of three residential dwellings.

4. FIELD STUDY

4.1. There are no ponds within the survey site and one further pond within 250m, which for the size of the development and nature of terrestrial habitat on the site, is a sufficient distance to consider for assessment (Figure 1).

4.2. The results of the eDNA survey indicated that pond one is not used by GCN, with a **negative** result and 0 positive replicates. The eDNA sample analysis provided by SureScreen Scientifics is shown in Table 2.

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SureScreen Scientifics

GCN eDNA Analysis

Summary

When great crested newts (GCN), *Triturus cristatus* , inhabit a pond, they continuously release small amounts of their DNA into the environment. By collecting and analyzing water samples, we can detect these small traces of environmental DNA (eDNA) to confirm GCN habitation or establish GCN absence.

Results

Lab ID	Site Name	OS Reference	Degradation Check	Inhibition Check	Result	Positive Replicates
GCN25 2330	Bluntisham Rectory Road - P1	TL 3713 74411	Pass	Pass	Negative	0/12

Matters affecting result: none

Reported by: Amy Bermudez Approved by: Lauryn Jewkes

Table 2, results of the eDNA survey as provided by SureScreen Scientifics.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. An eDNA survey conducted on pond one, located within 100m of the proposed development, provided a **negative** result for GCN.

5.2. The proposed works involve a risk of injuring or killing individual newts potentially present within the site, and a low scale loss of GCN terrestrial habitat (≈0.3ha of modified grassland and ≈15m of species-rich hedgerow). Aquatic habitats will be unaffected by proposed works.

5.3. Taking the results of the above eDNA test, impacts and risks into account, the risk assessment calculation (set out in the GCN method statement template provided by Natural England) indicates an "*offence highly unlikely*".

5.4. As a precautionary measure, the following mitigation will be implemented to avoid impacts on GCN from the proposed works:

i. Vegetation on site will be cut and maintained short (maximum height of 10cm) until the start of works, to discourage animals from using these areas.

ii. Construction materials will be stored off the ground on pallets and waste materials in skips, to prevent providing shelter for animals and subsequent harm when materials are moved.

iii. Any excavations will have a rough sawn plank placed inside to act as a ramp to allow any animals that have fallen in to escape. The excavations will be checked each morning works are scheduled for, to remove any animals trapped.

iv. The construction of two south facing bunds/hibernacula within the offsite Biodiversity Net Gain area to the southeast of the site (Appendix C), which are covered in low-nutrient soils.

v. A soft landscaping scheme as part of the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (to be issued under a separate cover) to include:

   a. The planting of new native species-rich (≥5 species), hedgerows and trees around the site (see Appendix B for suggested species).

   b. The creation of broadleaved woodland offsite, which will include a diverse range of tree and shrub species (see Appendix B for suggested seed mix).

5.5. After these precautionary mitigation measures, we predict no impact on GCN as a result of the development plans. We consider that a European Protected Species Licence will not be required, and no further surveys are necessary.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Appendix A
Legislation

European Protected Species

National Planning Policy - National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF): Conserving and enhancing the natural environment states that 'planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by … minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.'

Office of The Deputy Prime Minister ("ODPM") Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and their impact within the planning system.

Paragraph 98 of Circular 06/2005 states that 'the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat'.

Implications of legislation and policies

Without this ecological assessment, the potential developer would be unable to demonstrate due diligence in his responsibilities. Furthermore, the local planning authority would not have been provided with sufficient information for a planning decision to be made. This could result in non-determination or refusal of the application.

With legal responsibilities and planning implications, it is essential that any ecological assessment of a potential development site, including the area of this report, must determine the possible presence or absence of any protected species as part of any planning development consideration.

Where mitigation or compensation measures are required to ensure that no significant impacts will result on biodiversity from the development, the proposed measures may be secured through planning conditions or by EPS Mitigation Licences from Natural England.

Great Crested Newts

Great crested newts are protected under both English and European law. It is an offence to kill, injure, disturb or take great crested newts or to damage or destroy their places of shelter, whether the animals are present or not.

Natural England Licensing - EPS Mitigation Licensing

Licences can be obtained from the Wildlife Management and Licensing Service at Natural England to allow certain activities that would otherwise constitute an offence, for the purposes of development (e.g. destruction of a bat roost, loss of great crested newt aquatic and terrestrial habitat, etc).

Appendix B
Native species suitable for planting and sowing

Plants should be obtained from specialist nurseries and preferably be of local genetic stock.

Key: (f) – fruit and berry species; (e) – evergreen species; (se) semi-evergreen species; (d) – deciduous species

Trees	
Alder (d)	*Alnus glutinosa*
Apples (f; d)	*Malus spp.* (local varieties)
Ash (d)	*Fraxinus excelsior*
Beech (d)	*Fagus sylvatica*
Bird cherry (f; d)	*Prunus padus*
Elder (f; d)	*Sambucus nigra*
Elm (d)	*Ulmus procera*
Field maple (d)	*Acer campestre*
Pedunculate oak (d)	*Quercus robur*
Rowan (f; d)	*Sorbus aucuparia*
Pears (f; d)	*Pyrus spp.*
Silver birch (d)	*Betula pendula*
Small-leaved lime (d)	*Tilia cordata*
White willow (d)	*Salix alba*
Wild cherry (f; d)	*Prunus avium*
Walnut (d)	*Juglans regia*

Shrubs	
Blackthorn (f; d)	*Prunus spinosa*
Buckthorn (f; d)	*Rhamnus catharticus*
Crab apple (f; d)	*Malus sylvestris*
Dog rose (f; d)	*Rosa canina*
Dogwood (f; d)	*Cornus sanguinea*
Field maple (d)	*Acer campestre*
Guelder-rose (f; d)	*Viburnum opulus*
Hawthorn (f; d)	*Crataegus monogyna*
Hazel (d)	*Corylus avellana*
Holly (e)	*Ilex aquifolium*
Honeysuckle (f; d)	*Lonicera periclymemum*
Spindle (f; d)	*Euonymus europaeus*
Wild privet (f; se)	*Ligustrum vulgare*
Yew (f; e)	*Taxus baccata*

Flowering plants	
Bird's-foot trefoil	*Lotus corniculatus*
Black knapweed	*Centaurea nigra*
Common cat's-ear	*Hypochoeris radicata*
Common sorrel	*Rumex acetosa*
Common vetch	*Vicia sativa*
Cowslip	*Primula veris*
Field scabious	*Knautia arvense*
Foxglove	*Digitalis purpurea*
Lady's bedstraw	*Galium verum*
Meadow buttercup	*Ranunculus acris*
Meadow vetchling	*Lathyrus pratensis*
Oxeye daisy	*Leucanthemum vulgare*
Primrose	*Primula vulgaris*
Red clover	*Trifolium pratense*
Selfheal	*Prunella vulgaris*
Sweet violet	*Viola odorata*
Wild daffodil	*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*
Yarrow	*Achillea millefolium*

Grasses	
Common bent	*Agrostis capillaris*
Crested dog's-tail	*Cynosurus cristatus*
Meadow fescue	*Festuca pratensis*
Red fescue	*Festuca rubra*
Rough meadow-grass	*Poa trivialis*
Small timothy	*Phleum bertolonii*
Smooth meadow-grass	*Poa pratensis*
Sweet vernal-grass	*Anthoxanthum odoratum*
Yellow oat-grass	*Trisetum flavescens*

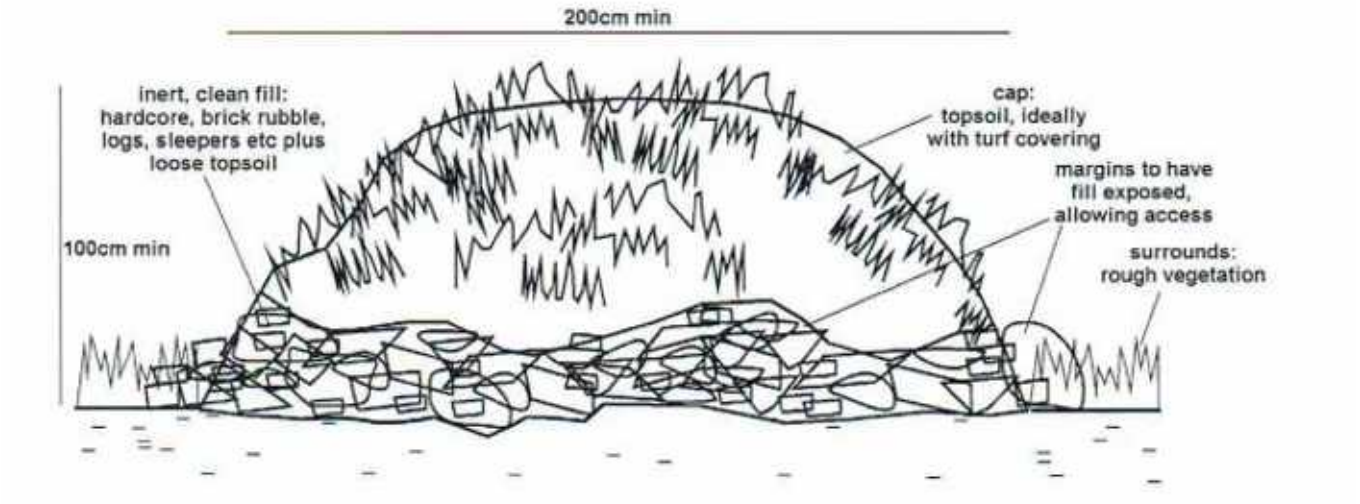
Flowering Lawn Mixture – EL1 Emorsgate Seeds
https://wildseed.co.uk/product/mixtures/complete-mixtures/special-habitat-mixtures/flowering-lawn-mixture/

Wildflower Meadow Mixture – EM3 Emorsgate Seeds
https://wildseed.co.uk/product/mixtures/complete-mixtures/general-purpose-meadow-mixtures/special-general-purpose-meadow-mixture/

Appendix C
Newt and reptile artificial hibernaculum design

Figure 3: Suggested hibernaculum design

This design mimics artificial and natural conditions in which great crested newts have frequently been found over-wintering. Dimensions should not be below 2m length x 1m width x 1m height. The illustrated design would be suitable for locating on an impermeable substrate. On free-draining substrates, the design is largely similar but the bulk of the fill is sited in an excavated depression in the ground. Hibernacula should ideally be positioned across a site, both close to and distant from breeding ponds, always in suitable terrestrial habitat and above the flood-line.



Source: English Nature (2001) *Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines*, Peterborough.