



Ecological Appraisal - Phase 2 Great crested newt Survey

Report for:

***Hampshire County Council –
Property Services***

St John the Baptist Primary School

Extension of School

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SUMMARY

- Following recommendations made by HCC Ecology in advising HCC County Planning, in line with best practice guidelines four Phase 2 great crested newt surveys were undertaken on during May 2013 at St John the Baptist Church of England Primary School, Abshot Road, Fareham, PO14 4NH. The proposals for the site include the construction of a temporary modular building within the south of the site.
- During the Phase 2 great crested newt surveys no great crested newts were recorded within the single on-site pond. However, abundant populations of smooth and palmate newts were recorded.
- Given that the Phase 2 great crested newt surveys confirmed that great crested newts are not breeding within the single on-site pond there is considered to be no reasonable likelihood of terrestrial great crested newts being affected by the proposed work.
- No mitigation recommendations are considered necessary, however, it is suggest that the ecological value of the on-site pond is enhanced through additional vegetation planting. Enhancing the on-site pond will be in line with NPPF and the LPA's duty under the NERC Act.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Description

Hampshire County Council Ecology Team (HCCET) have been commissioned to carry out a Phase 2 great crested newt survey of the single waterbody located within the grounds of St John the Baptist Church of England Primary School, Abshot Road, Fareham, PO14 4NH located at National Grid Reference (NGR): SU5223 0680.

1.1.1 Proposal

Hampshire County Council Property Services (HCCPS) have proposed the installation of a temporary modular classroom to relocate pre-school nursery facilities. The modular building will be located within a former wooded area.

1.1.2 Requirement for Ecological Survey/Assessment

Consultation by HCC County Planning with HCC Senior Ecologist Adam Eggesfield identified the requirement for Phase 2 great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* surveys. To support the planning application for the proposal. Great crested newts are afforded protection under the Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). The development of the modular classroom will require the removal of suitable terrestrial great crested newt habitat which, given the proximity of the proposed site to suitable breeding habitat, has reasonable likelihood of supporting terrestrial great crested newt. Its loss and disturbance would therefore result in a contravention of the legislation which affords protection to resting areas in addition to newts themselves. Recommendations were therefore made for Phase 2 great crested newt surveys to confirm the presence or likely absence of great crested newt at the site.

1.2 Site Description

The St John the Baptist Primary School site comprises a complex of buildings situated within moderately sized grounds. The immediate surrounds of the school buildings are dominated by hardstanding play areas and car parking. However, the grounds to the west of the school buildings comprise a majority of improved grassland which is bordered by a wooded belt. A single waterbody is located within the extreme north of the site. The wider area comprises a matrix of residential development and associated infrastructure. A small flowing ditch runs south past the western boundary of the school.

The proposed modular classroom footprint formerly supported a wooded area. However this has since been felled, with only a low level of ground flora and brash remaining.

2 METHODS

2.1 Introduction

This section details the methods used during the Phase 2 bat surveys undertaken at St John the Baptist Primary School, Fareham during May and June 2013.

2.2 Great Crested Newt Survey

The great crested newt survey was carried out of the single on-site pond located at SU 52183 06833 on four occasions during May 2013. Each survey involved a dusk visit and commenced with an egg search of all suitable submerged vegetation, followed by a torch search and careful netting of the pond, where necessary. Surveys were only undertaken in suitable weather conditions i.e. no heavy wind or rain, when the pond surface was unlikely to be disturbed and the torch survey would be most effective. Details of the Phase 2 great crested newt surveys are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Phase 2 great crested newt survey details

Survey Date	Survey Technique	Temperature and Weather Conditions
13 May 2013	Egg search, torching, netting	40% cloud cover, F2, 10°C and dry
16 May 2013	Egg search, torching, netting	50% cloud cover, F1, 11°C and dry
28 May 2013	Egg search, torching, netting	80% cloud cover, F1, 10°C and dry
30 May 2013	Egg search, torching, netting	20% cloud cover, F1, 14°C and dry

2.2.1 Egg Search Survey Methods and Equipment

The egg search surveys consisted of a methodical inspection of all suitable marginal vegetation for folded leaves that may indicate great crested newt egg laying activity. The pond supported very little vegetation therefore, any debris encountered within the pond such as plastic wrappers were also inspected. If great crested newt eggs were

encountered during the survey this methodology would be abandoned since exposure of eggs increases their risk of predation.

2.2.2 Torch Search Survey Methods and Equipment

The torch surveys consisted of slow walks around the waterbody by two surveyors using a 1 million candlepower torch searching for adult great crested newts. This was undertaken after sunset which light conditions were conducive to increased newt activity and higher detectability.

2.2.3 Sweep-netting Survey Methods and Equipment

The pond supported high water clarity with very little submerged or emergent vegetation. Netting was therefore only used to inspect certain more vegetated areas of the pond to avoid heavy disturbance. Given the ease of which all areas of the pond could be viewed, intensive sweep netting was not deemed to be necessary.

2.2.4 Refugia Search

This method was used as an additional technique whilst employing the other techniques outlined above. The pond is surrounded by an area of unmanaged grassland with log piles and branch debris distributed within. All loose logs were carefully lifted to inspect for terrestrial great crested newts, and replaced. In accordance with best practice guidelines, this technique was undertaken complimentary to the above mentioned techniques only and was not considered to be a primary technique.

2.3 Personnel

The Phase 2 great crested newt surveys were led by Izabel Phillips, a suitably experienced, qualified and licensed HCC senior ecologist (great crested newt class licence CLS 2045) who was assisted by other suitably qualified and experienced HCC senior ecologists.

2.4 Survey Limitations

No limitations were encountered during the course of the surveys.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

This section provides details of the results of the Phase 2 great crested newt surveys.

3.2 Great Crested Newt Survey

The site supports a single pond located north on the school buildings. The pond, which is concrete lined, supports very little submerged vegetation therefore offering limited egg laying opportunities. A low number of plastic wrappers and fallen leaves were recorded within the pond and whilst they are sub-optimal egg laying materials, in the absence of abundant optimal material they are likely to be utilised by newts. The terrestrial habitat which surrounds the pond is of high value, comprising tall grassland bordered by woodland. Numerous log piles and dead wood are located within this area which is fenced from the amenity fields associated with the school.

Four surveys were undertaken in optimal weather conditions during May 2013. The four surveys have confirmed the likely absence of great crested newt at the site. However, smooth *Lissotriton vulgaris* and palmate newts *Lissotriton helveticus* were recorded in abundance. It is estimated that between 200 and 300 common species were recorded on each survey. In addition, a search of surrounding refugia recorded small numbers of terrestrial juvenile common newts and common frogs *Rana temporaria*.

4 DISCUSSION AND ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

4.1 Introduction

This section provides a discussion of the status of bats at the site confirmed by the Phase 2 bat surveys and an assessment of likely impacts associated with the proposals.

4.2 Status of Great Crested Newt at the Site

Given that the surveys were undertaken during the peak of the newt survey season and in a pond with high water clarity, it is considered that great crested newt would have been highly detectable. It is therefore concluded that there is no reasonable likelihood of great crested newts occurring on site.

4.3 Potential Impacts of the Proposed Development

Given that the Phase 2 great crested newt surveys have confirmed that the single on-site pond does not support great crested newt and there are no further waterbodies within a 500m radius, there is no reasonable likelihood of impacts on terrestrial great crested newt associated with the proposed development works.

5 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT

5.1 Introduction

This section presents the recommended mitigation measures for avoiding, mitigating or compensating the impacts identified in section 4. In addition, this section also provides measures for enhancing the ecological value of the site, post development in line with NPPF and the LPA's duty under the NERC Act.

5.2 Mitigation

Given that great crested newt will not be affected by the proposals, no mitigation measures are considered necessary.

5.3 Enhancement

The on-site pond was found to support abundant populations of smooth and palmate newts. In order to further enhance the pond for these species it is suggested that additional egg laying opportunities are provided for these species. This would take the form of providing emergent and submerged vegetation species of local provenance such as:

- Water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*
- Lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*
- Water mint *Mentha aquatica*.

The addition of such species would benefit common newt species directly by providing egg laying substrate and also indirectly by benefiting other pond fauna. Planting will also improve the value of the pond for invertebrate prey species.

6 REFERENCES

Froglife (2001) Advice Sheet 11: Surveying for (Great Crested) Newt Conservation. Froglife, Halesworth.

Natural England (2001) Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines. Natural England, Sheffield