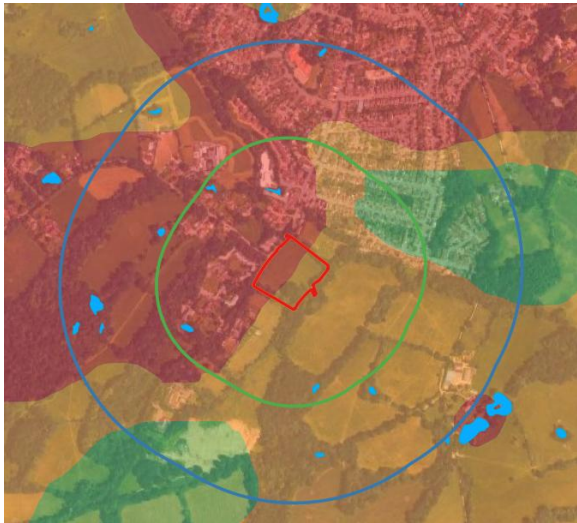


Consultee Response

Case Ref: DM/26/0073	Date: 09 February 2026
From: NatureSpace	Response: Further Information Required
This planning application is for: The erection of 44 new homes with access from West Hoathly Road, vehicle and cycle parking, landscaping, drainage, and associated infrastructure and highway works. Summary - The development falls within the red impact risk zone for great crested newts. Impact risk zones have been derived through advanced modelling to create a species distribution map which predicts likely presence. In the red impact zone, there is highly suitable habitat and a high likelihood of great crested newt presence. - There are 14 ponds within 500m of the development proposal, the closest of which are located 104m north, 170m east and 192m south west. - There is direct connectivity between the development and surrounding features in the landscape. - Natural England Standing Advice guidance for local planning authorities advises that surveys on ponds up to 500m from development sites should be requested.  Figure above: Outline of the site (red) in the context of the surrounding landscape, including the Impact Risk Zones for GCN. Ponds are shown in light blue, not all ponds shown on 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. Ecological Information The applicant has provided an ecological report, <i>Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Land at West Hoathly Road, Ecology Partnership, December 2025</i>. Within this report it states that: - “The site consisted of modified grassland, bordered with hedgerow and tree lines, with a woodland parcel in the south.” - “A species-rich native hedgerow was located along north-western site boundary, adjacent to West Hoathly Road”	

- *"No ponds are present on site, however six are present within 250m of the site, including several without any significant dispersal barriers."*
- *"Several of these ponds have been surveyed as part of previous applications. Pond 1 was subject to an eDNA survey in 2022 by The Ecology Partnership, which was negative for GCN. Pond 5 was surveyed in 2019 for a different application and the result was inconclusive; however, the HSI (Habitat Suitability Index) score was 'poor'"*
- *"The site contains hedgerows and deciduous woodland, and borders ancient woodland, which is considered suitable terrestrial habitat."*
- *"Taking this into consideration, it is considered that no further surveys are necessary so long as Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) are carried out when undertaking ground works on site. Currently, the habitats which are to be impacted upon by the proposals are sub-optimal for GCNs in their terrestrial phase and no impacts upon meta-population dynamics are predicted."*

Conclusion and recommendations

The above report has identified that there are several ponds located within 500m and 250m of the development site with direct connectivity. Whilst not optimal habitat, the grazed modified grassland onsite is still a land type utilised by great crested newts, which although often does not provide much shelter, is easily traversed by newts and provides night-time foraging opportunities (Froglife, 2001). Although retained, there is also highly suitable habitat onsite (i.e. woodland) which increases the likelihood of GCN being present onsite. Additionally a section of hedgerow is due to be removed according to proposals. No GCN surveys have been undertaken by the applicant, instead the above report has provided some eDNA survey results from two previous applications from 2022 and 2019, however this information is considered out of date in line with CIEEM Advice Note on the Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys (CIEEM, 2019).

There is therefore highly suitable habitat onsite (e.g. woodland, hedgerow) as well as modified grassland and several ponds directly connected to the site, however no information has been provided on the many ponds within the landscape. Given the large scale of this red zone development and the lack of survey effort, it is not considered that the risk of GCN using the site and being impacted by the development proposals has been appropriately assessed.

And so, we are not satisfied that the applicant has adequately demonstrated that there will no impact to great crested newts and/or their habitat as a result of the development being approved.

Therefore, in line with the guidance from Natural England ([Great crested newts: District Level Licensing for development projects, Natural England, March 2021](#)), there is a reasonable likelihood that great crested newts will be impacted by the development proposals and therefore, the applicant must either:

- Submit a NatureSpace Report or Certificate to demonstrate that the impacts of the proposed development can be addressed through Mid Sussex District Council's District Licence. This method of licensing often removes the need for survey work and onsite mitigation for great crested newts as it provides compensation habitats off site. This would provide certainty to the applicant, as their licensing route can be determined within 10 working days at any time of the year (more details can be found at www.naturespaceuk.com); or
- Provide further information (information on the ponds with ecological connectivity to the development site), in line with Natural England's [Standing Advice](#), to rule out impacts to

great crested newts*, or demonstrate how any impacts can be addressed through appropriate mitigation/compensation proposals**; or

- If following further information it is determined that there is no suitable habitat impacted on site and the likelihood of great crested newts is very low, then a precautionary working statement in the form of Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs)/Non-Licensed Method Statement (NLMS) strategy documents completed by a suitably qualified ecologist may be acceptable for the development.

*i.e., to show that any ponds within 500m are not suitable for great crested newts and/or show how any potential impacts can be avoided.

*To do so, surveys to determine presence/likely absence and population size class assessments may need to be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist in accordance with Natural England's Standing (Great crested newts: advice for making planning decisions – GOV.UK) (and if using eDNA surveys, the Great Crested Newt Environmental eDNA Technical Advice Note (Natural England 2014)). If GCN are identified, appropriate mitigation and compensatory measures will need to be identified to satisfy planning requirements and a site-based mitigation licence may be required. Surveys are seasonally constrained.

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 Mid Sussex District Council

Mid Sussex 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 'District Licensing 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, December 2024, section 15, 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:

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"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 as 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, 2017) 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"*.