

**BRYNRORIN
ABERMULE, NEWTOWN
POWYS**

**HABITAT ASSESSMENT
&
GREAT CRESTED NEWT
MITIGATION STRATEGY**

FOR

MR & MRS R. JONES

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Brynrorin Farm is located at SO 141 952, approximately three miles north-east of Newtown, Powys.
- 1.2. A planning application has been prepared seeking permission from the local planning authority to develop a field at Brynrorin Farm with a free range chicken unit. The proposed unit would be located alongside an existing unit that was granted planning permission five years ago (Plan 1). The fields proposed for the free range chickens associated with the new unit are currently utilised by chickens associated with the existing unit (Plans 2 & 3). As such there would be no increase in land given over to free range chickens; just an increase in the number of birds.
- 1.3. Six ponds are located within 500m of the proposed chicken unit. Survey work undertaken in 2009 confirmed that four of these ponds support great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* (see Ecology Services report *Brynrorin, Abermule, Newtown, Powys. Great Crested Newt Survey & Mitigation Strategy for Mr & Mrs R. Jones July 2009*). The closest of these ponds is 160 metres from the proposed development site (Plan 1). A maximum count of eight great crested newts was made at this pond in 2009. The next nearest pond is located 290 metres from the proposed development site and as such is well outside the normal home range of the great crested newts that will be associated with this pond.
- 1.4. This report sets out mitigation measures to ensure that great crested newts are safeguarded at the construction stage of the development. No habitat enhancement measures are considered necessary because extensive habitat enhancement measures were undertaken following the previous application in 2009. These included the fencing off of woodland and hedgerows.

2. LEGISLATION

- 2.1. The great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* is protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. This means that great crested newts are protected from deliberate killing, injury or capture with their habitat, including a breeding site, resting place or any structure or place used for 'shelter or protection' also protected against damage or destruction. It is also illegal to disturb great crested newts and their eggs are protected from taking or destroying.

3. ECOLOGY

- 3.1. The great crested newt is our largest species of newt and can reach over 15cm in length. Like other British amphibians it is terrestrial and is normally only present in water during the breeding season. It is a long-lived species and in captivity has been reported to reach 27 years of age. It feeds on a range of small invertebrates.
- 3.2. Typically great crested newts use terrestrial habitats within 250 metres of their breeding ponds. Ideal terrestrial habitat will contain a high proportion of semi-natural habitats such as woodland, scrub, hedgerows and rank grassland. A range of different standing water bodies are used for breeding.

4. MITIGATION PROPOSALS & ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS ON GREAT CRESTED NEWTS

Introduction

- 4.1. The site of the proposed chicken unit is dominated by heavily grazed improved pasture and adjoins an existing chicken unit (Plan 1). This habitat type is of **extremely limited value to great crested newts and provides no cover or refuge opportunities**. This habitat type is also of extremely limited ecological interest and as such its loss is not considered to be ecologically significant.
- 4.2. Habitat **enhancement measures are not considered necessary because extensive habitat enhancements were undertaken following the previous application in 2009**. Nevertheless, because of the relative close proximity of a great crested newt breeding pond a precautionary approach will be adopted to ensure newts from this pond are not harmed at the construction stage of the development.

Ecological clerk of works

- 4.3. Ecology Services has been appointed as ecological clerk of works. The ecological clerk of works will consult with the site manager/contractors throughout the duration of development works. All Ecology Services staff hold a Natural Resources Wales great crested newt licence.

'Soapbox' talk to contractors/builders

- 4.4. The ecological clerk of works will conduct a 'soapbox' talk prior to the commencement of development works. The talk will set out the life history of the great crested newt and its habitat preferences. The talk will include identification of the great crested newt. Special emphasis will be placed on the importance of the nearby breeding pond and the adjoining terrestrial habitat. This will ensure contractors are aware of these areas importance and as such minimise the risk of 'accidental' damage.

Protection of the breeding pond

- 4.5. The development works will not impact on the breeding pond. No building materials or waste will be stored on the road next to the pond or on the adjoining grassland.

Storage of building materials and waste materials

- 4.6. The development site is currently short cropped grassland that offers no cover opportunities for great crested newts. In order to avoid creating potential 'habitat' for great crested newts (such as piles of stored material like stone, rubble etc.) all building materials will be stored beyond 250m of the great crested newt breeding pond (in the open field away from existing hedgerows). If building materials are stored within 250m of the breeding pond they will be stored on wooden pallets. This will ensure that potential refugia/cover suitable for great crested newts is not inadvertently created.

Foundation trenches

- 4.7. If foundation trenches or similar holes are to be left unfilled overnight one side/end will be gently sloped to allow any wildlife that falls in to escape.

Timing of works

- 4.8. There are no timing limitations to the development works.

Unexpected discoveries

- 4.9. In the unlikely event that great crested newts are unexpectedly discovered following the commencement of development works then all works will stop and the ecological clerk of works and NRW will be consulted immediately for guidance.

Assessment of impacts on great crested newts

- 4.10. Plan 2 shows the foraging range of chickens associated with the existing unit. **The woods and hedgerows within this area have been fenced off to allow natural regeneration and to provide terrestrial cover for great crested newts.** All these fenced off areas border/adjoin land that does not form part of the existing or proposed chicken foraging area. There will be **no change in the area of land set aside for foraging chickens**, the **new unit will utilise existing fields that are already used by chickens** (Plan 3).
- 4.11. There will be **no direct damage to terrestrial habitat that could be used by great crested newts.** Extensive areas of woodland and hedgerows were fenced off from sheep and chickens in 2009. As such **no direct impact from predation by chickens is anticipated.**
- 4.12. There will be **no adverse impacts on the local water bodies used by great crested newts.** Only clean water runoff from the roof of the chicken unit will be directed towards water courses. In any event the closest great crested newt breeding pond is 160m away and as such there is most unlikely to be any significant water run-off into this area as rain water will be absorbed by the surrounding ground.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1. Great crested newts will not be impacted on by the development proposals because the development site comprises poor quality habitat that lacks cover and refuge opportunities. The development proposals will not impact on the nearby great crested newt breeding pond or terrestrial habitat.
- 5.2. There will be no loss of terrestrial great crested newt habitat. The fields that the chickens will utilise are already used by chickens associated with an existing unit.
- 5.3. Extensive mitigation and enhancement measures were undertaken following a previous planning application. This resulted in the fencing off of woods and hedgerows. This will have benefited great crested newts and a wide range of other wildlife.
- 5.4. The mitigation measures set out in this report adopt a precautionary approach and will ensure that there are no impacts on great crested newts at the construction stage of the development.

Plan 1

Location of closest pond and location of proposed unit alongside existing unit.



Plan 2

Location of existing land utilised by free range chickens

The chickens associated with the new unit will be restricted to the northern half of the site. The chickens associated with the existing unit will be restricted to the southern half of the site, see Plan 3 below



Plan 3

Location of land proposed for new free range chicken unit

No change over the current situation except an increase in the number of chickens.
All adjoining woods and hedgerows have been fenced off.

