

District level licensing for great crested newt

District level licensing is an alternative to the site by site great crested newt (GCN) licensing process which has been used for development up till now. It involves district wide survey of the distribution of GCN and assessment of impacts on GCN from all planned development in the district over the whole local plan period. GCN records and other environmental data are used to map zones which indicate where there are highest risks to the local conservation status of GCN and where GCN pose highest risks to development.

Avoidance and mitigation are secured by advice to the Local Authority (LA), based on the mapped zones. The district wide overview of GCN allows development of a conservation strategy which shows: where it is a priority to retain habitat in green infrastructure corridors as mitigation and improve habitat as compensation for development impacts; and where development can proceed with little or no risk to (or from) GCN.

Compensatory habitat is provided and managed by the LA at strategic locations and at a sufficient scale to address the likely impact of all planned development. This habitat is established on a time profile ahead of development, before the point at which development could have an impact on GCN. Wherever possible it will be located so that GCN will colonise it by natural dispersal.

Developer participation in district level licensing is voluntary (though in some cases LA's may vary this approach). Participating development projects would be expected to make a contribution towards the LA's compensatory habitat, according to the number of ponds they may impact upon and the zone that they are in.

The local authority is entitled through an organisational licence from Natural England (NE) to authorise operations which may affect GCN on development sites. This authorisation is provided at the same time as planning permission.

Developers who participate in the pilot will be able to avoid the normal requirement for carrying out GCN surveys on their sites. Furthermore, as the compensatory habitat will itself ensure a net benefit to GCN and will be populated by natural dispersal, it is intended that developers who participate in the scheme will not be required to trap and translocate GCN from their sites.



Who does what?

Task	Leader
Field survey and collation of records	NE
Impact assessment and formulation of impact zones map	NE
Advice to LA on avoidance, mitigation and compensation	NE
Putting in place habitat compensation (and recouping of costs from development)	LA
Granting of organisational licence to LA and subsequent review	NE
Authorisation of development site clearance	LA
Monitoring	LA
Funding of habitat compensation	Developers

What are the benefits?

Better outcomes for great crested newts

Increased focus on Favourable Conservation Status
 Increased habitat provision
 Better choice of sites for new habitat
 Better protection of the most important existing sites
 Habitats Regulations seen to be working

Better process for development

Reduced survey and mitigation costs
 Greater certainty
 Avoidance of seasonal delays
 GCN don't need to be planned into the development footprint

Better delivery for the districts

Enhance viability of development
 Lower risk in the development timetable
 Improved offer to developers
 More investment in local environmental enhancement