Precautionary Method Statement: Great Crested Newts, Reptiles and other Amphibians.

Land at Wild Rose Cottage, Dyffryn Lane, St Nicholas

April 2023

Contact:
Glyn Lloyd-Jones glyn.igecol@gmail.com 07973 685423
Iestyn Evans iestyn.igecol@gmail.com 07733 214829
Office office.igecol@gmail.com

Development of two rental cabins, 4 pods, a camping area and associated infrastructure.

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Description:
Non-licensed Precautionary Method Statement to be implemented onsite to mitigate potential impacts to great crested newts and other common amphibians & reptiles in relation to the development proposal. This document is to be read in conjunction with the Reptile Mitigation Method Statement produced by I&G Ecological Consulting Ltd 2022.

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In order to limit the potential for committing an offence with respect to great crested newts, and to ensure the protection of common amphibians and reptiles, the following advice is given:

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Legislation

The basic protection afforded to great crested newts is listed below: It is

illegal to:

- deliberately kill, injure or capture (or take) great crested newts
- deliberately disturb great crested newts
- deliberately take or destroy the eggs of great crested newts
- recklessly disturb great crested newts while it is occupying a structure of place which is uses for shelter or protection or obstruct access to their places of shelter or protection;
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of great crested newts;
- possess or transport a great crested newt or any part of a great crested newt, unless acquired legally;
- sell (or offer for sale) or exchange great crested newts or parts of great crested newts.

Common reptile species (slow worm, grass snake, adder, common lizard) are protected against killing, injuring and sale under UK legislation.

Other amphibians – common frog, common toad, smooth newt and palmate newt, are not offered the same legal protection but it is good practice to try to avoid harm to these species.

1.2 Need for this Precautionary Method Statement

Based on local records it was concluded that GCN are present in surrounding habitats. Although their presence within the short-mown grassland that makes up most of the site is unlikely, there is a low risk of GCN in close proximity to working areas as the site is bordered by hedgerows, which are to be unaffected by the works. Individuals of common amphibian species, including common toad and smooth newt, are present in the area as there were records in the surrounding habitats.

In the opinion of the surveyor, the level of survey is sufficient to conclude that the risk to great crested newts from the proposal is negligible and can be further reduced through implementation of this Precautionary Method Statement under the direction of a suitably qualified ecologist.

1.3 Where Amphibians might be found

Amphibians breed in ponds and other water bodies in spring, generally between February and June, with some variation with weather conditions. They spend much of the rest of their time on land, travelling, in some cases hundreds of meters from ponds. Amphibians need to find sheltered crevices and crannies in dense vegetation, under wood piles, in rubble etc. for hibernation and to shelter during the day and in dry periods. They may be found lying up among brickwork and stone walls, at and near ground level, where crevices and loose joints are present. Toads, in particular are frequently found in such places. Amphibians also will take shelter in cracks and cavities in the ground and may bury themselves into soft earth.

1.4 Where Reptiles might be found

Reptiles are found in a mixture of habitats; grass snakes are often found in damp habitats associated with ponds, streams, ditches and wet grassland but can be found in drier areas too. Adders are generally associated with heathland and heathy woods whilst slow worms are found in a variety of habitats including grassland, scrub, gardens and allotments. Lizards are generally found in heathland and grasslands. Reptiles are shy and will try to escape if disturbed. Similarly, to amphibians, reptiles may use fissures in walls, or rubble for hibernation or shelter.

Hibernation:

Normally reptiles will try to escape if disturbed by works, though amphibians may stay put in crevices and risk being entombed or squashed. During hibernation, or periods of cold weather, reptiles and amphibians become torpid and are unable to escape, so they are particularly vulnerable to harm. If disturbed during hibernation they are likely to die as no food is available in winter months.

2.0 Avoidance Measures: Protecting Amphibians and Reptiles

2.1 Location and Layout

- Although defunct hedgerows that bound the site could serve as terrestrial habitat for amphibians and reptiles, these are to remain unaffected by the development works and will be subject to post-development enhancement.

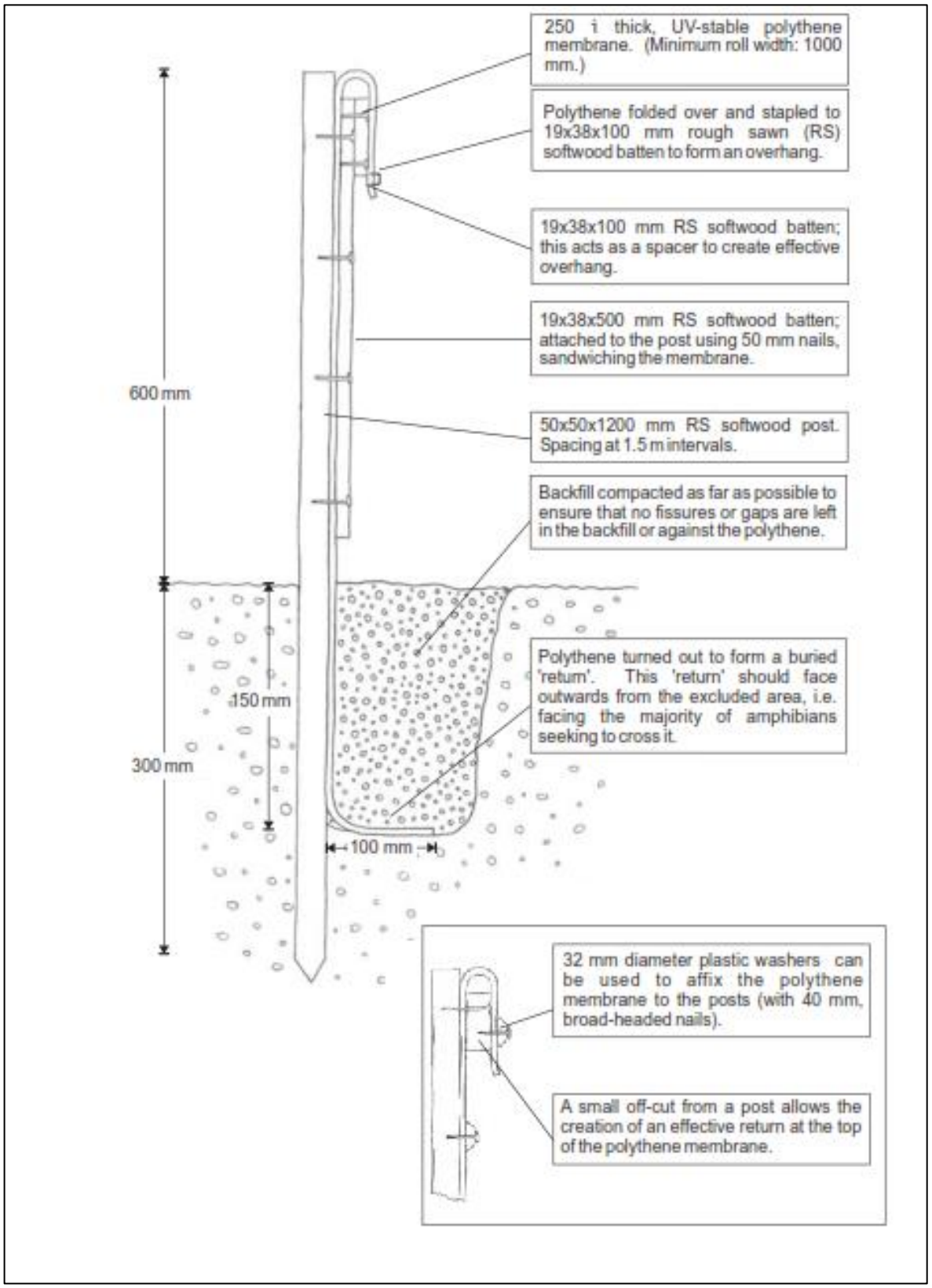
- **Temporary Reptile Fence.** This is a standard temporary fence design which can be utilised in situations where it is necessary to create a reptile-proof barrier for periods usually not exceeding a single season. Although this design will effectively prevent the passage of reptiles in either direction, the 'returns' on the fence should face outwards, i.e., facing the direction from which the majority of any reptiles are expected to approach. It can be constructed from relatively inexpensive materials, but is easily damaged or vandalised, and will degrade over time. Fences of this type are less appropriate in windy situations where damage will be more frequent. Also, if placed close to areas where plant operate regularly and/or earthworks are taking place, a membrane fence of this kind is usually best protected by a more robust fence, for example a wooden paling fence.

- Care needs to be taken when undertaking the necessary maintenance works to ensure that vegetation does not grow over the fence. If undertaken mechanically, this can easily damage the membrane.

- The use of a nail gun is recommended to attach the battens securely to the posts. Not only is this advantageous for speed, but prevents any loosening of the posts which can be associated with the repeated impacts of a hammer.

- Some practitioners prefer the use of flexible plastic washers to hold the membrane in place, as an alternative to softwood battens. The result is similar in strength and durability to that of the previous design, but precludes the use of a nail gun, as the washers require a large headed nail and cannot withstand the force produced by the gun.

- See diagram below showing the construction of the fencing.


250 i thick, UV-stable polythene membrane. (Minimum roll width: 1000 mm.)
Polythene folded over and stapled to 19x38x100 mm rough sawn (RS) softwood batten to form an overhang.
19x38x100 mm RS softwood batten; this acts as a spacer to create effective overhang.
19x38x500 mm RS softwood batten; attached to the post using 50 mm nails, sandwiching the membrane.
50x50x1200 mm RS softwood post. Spacing at 1.5 m intervals.
Backfill compacted as far as possible to ensure that no fissures or gaps are left in the backfill or against the polythene.
Polythene turned out to form a buried 'return'. This 'return' should face outwards from the excluded area, i.e. facing the majority of amphibians seeking to cross it.
600 mm
150 mm
300 mm
100 mm
32 mm diameter plastic washers can be used to affix the polythene membrane to the posts (with 40 mm, broad-headed nails).
A small off-cut from a post allows the creation of an effective return at the top of the polythene membrane.

2.2 Timing and Duration

- March to June are good periods for reducing risk of encountering amphibians as they are more likely to be in ponds.

- The project is of short-term in nature, and the duration of groundworks will be kept as short as possible.

- Works will be undertaken during daylight hours only as GCN are most active at night.

- A large area has been identified for retention as a Reptile Mitigation & Receptor Area (see Reptile Mitigation Method Statement for information). Before the site clearance commences, this area will be made known to all operatives and marked as such on the ground (cordoned off with Heras Fencing or similar barrier which is still permeable to reptiles). Any piles of debris or scrub in this area should be retained as habitat.

- Once the Reptile Fencing has been installed the fence will be inspected by an ecologist from I&G Ecological Consulting to ensure the work has been undertaken correctly.

- Once the ecologist is happy with the fencing the process of clearing Reptiles and Amphibians as set out in the Reptile Mitigation Method Statement can be undertaken.

- A suitably qualified and experienced ecologist from I&G Ecological Consulting Ltd will be available to undertake any work which will require the handling of species.

Great Crested Newt

Identifying great crested newts (Information taken from the Great Crested Newt Handbook)

- The great crested newt is the UK's largest newt, reaching a maximum adult overall length of up to about 170mm.
- Mature female length ranges from 90 - 170mm, typically reaching 110-130mm.
- Male newts may mature at a length of only 85mm (normally more), and grow to an adult maximum of about 150mm, though more typically 110-120mm.
- Adults are easily distinguished from the two other native newt species, the smooth and palmate newts, by size and colouring; these two smaller species reach a maximum of around 100mm.
- **The skin of adult crested newts is granular in appearance. It has a black or dark brown background colour with darker spots that in males extend onto the crest. It has very fine white spots on the lower flanks.**

- The male (below) has a jagged crest along the back that dips at the rear of the abdomen, and a smoother edged crest above and below the tail. The crest decreases in size outside the breeding season. There is a white, silver or grey stripe running from the tail tip along the central, fleshy section of the tail that fades as it approaches the abdomen.

- Females (below) lack a crest and white tail stripe, but have a yellow-orange stripe running along the bottom edge of the tail. Both sexes have a vivid orange or yellow belly with an irregular pattern of dark black spots or blotches.

- On land, the great crested newt appears virtually black, and in males the crest shrinks back against the body. Males of all newts have a relatively more swollen cloaca (vent).

Comparison: Great Crested Newt (darker) & Smooth Newt

- On leaving the water, great crested newt juveniles are similar in appearance to adults, apart from lacking the black spots/patterns that develop on the orange belly as they grow. The pattern becomes 'fixed' as the adults approach maximum size.