

## Comments by Laura Lucas on Eastfield House and Newts, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Good evening all,

I believe most of you are aware of my petition for SODC to request a newt survey from the Developer of Eastfield House, Whitchurch-on-Thames.

<https://www.change.org/protectGreatCrestedNewts>

I am aware that as planning is "approved", there is currently no requirement for the developer to carry out a Great Crested Newt (GCN) survey on the site. However, I spoke to Natural England who were very supportive and advised me that SODC can still request a GCN survey of the site before development starts and they were very disappointed that they weren't doing so – Natural England advised me to start the petition.

The newt method statement paid for by the Developer isn't worth the paper it's written on, in my opinion. My very large pond (not mentioned) is literally just a few metres from the development site and could quite well be one of the network of ponds that GCNs use on the village, given that GCNs have been found in a pond 325m to its east at Oakfield and are locally known to visit a pond 200m to its west at Walled Garden House (comments on P22/S3901/FUL). I also find it absurd that the statement claims that the property isn't suitable terrestrial habitat for GCNS – it absolutely is, especially as they attracted to unkempt land and the grass hasn't been cut for over 6 years. GCN terrestrial habitats vary from grassland to scrub to woodland. To claim that the land at Eastfield House doesn't fit the bill, is ludicrous. It's worth noting that it was originally claimed that Oakfield wasn't a suitable habitat for GCNs too...laboratory tests proved that wrong.

GCN are [listed as rare and most threatened species](#) under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) and Local Planning Authorities need to take account of the conservation of Section 41 species as part of their planning decisions. An LPA should consider if a developer has taken appropriate measures to avoid, mitigate and, as a last resort, compensate for any negative effects on GCN.

[Great crested newts: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

An LPA should ask a developer for a survey if any of the following criteria apply:

- distribution and historical records suggest GCN may be present
- there's a suitable water body such as a pond or ditch up to 500 metres of the development, even if it only holds water for some of the year
- the development site includes refuges, such as log piles, rubble, grassland, scrub, woodland or hedgerows up to 500 metres of suitable aquatic habitats (static or slow moving water body)

When an LPA assesses a planning application, they must look at other GCN habitats within 500m because GCN move and are unlikely to stay in one place.

Clearly, if this planning was submitted now, a GCN survey would be required.

Why isn't the LPA requesting one now given all this please?

Kind regards,

Laura