Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Planning Statement

Great Crested Newt Ponds

1.Introduction

The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is a delivery body for great crested newt (GCN) ponds under Natural England's District Level Licencing (DLL) Scheme, a mechanism to offset habitat loss from development through the creation of ponds in key areas. This planning statement will provide context and detail for the proposed creation of 2 of these ponds at Ravenhurst Farm, Minety, SN16 9RH. The ponds will be created in 2 separate areas and for the purpose of clarity will be referred to as the northern and southern ponds, as depicted in the plans included with this application.

2. Site and Surroundings

In general the sites and the wider surroundings of Ravenhurst Farm are indicative of the north Wiltshire landscape of smaller fields of permanent pasture, bordered by hedges with occasional hedgerow trees and woodland fragments. Historic mapping shows that ponds were common features in many fields, most of which have now been lost,

Both sites largely consist of species-poor improved grassland which is either grazed or cut for hay. There are also a number of trees of varying ages and species in the fields themselves and in the wider site. The ditch that runs north-south along the eastern margin of both sites is largely open at the northern pond with scattered, medium age willows (*Salix spp.*). At the southern pond the ditch is bracketed by a low-quality hedge on each bank which consists of low growing hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) with no understory growth and occasional gaps. The landowner is in the process of developing the land to more open parkland habitats through the planting of several hundred parkland trees across the farm. The construction of these ponds will support the biodiversity gains delivered from this change as well as further improving the landscape value and local character.

3. Proposal

The 2 proposed ponds will be constructed in accordance with the guidance published by Natural England, in particular;

- Surface area no greater than 500 Sqm
- Central depth of 1m (or up to 1.5m for the largest ponds)
- Variable bank gradients of 1:10, or ideally 1:20

- A range of depths across the pond

Each of the ponds will cover an area of 500 Sqm and dug to a central depth of 1.5m. This is deeper than recommended due to increased uncertainty for maintaining water levels in the light of climate change. A number of marginal shelves will be created to provide habitat for a range of aquatic plants and invertebrates.

The excavated soil from the works will be used to create low bunds (up to 1.5m high) around the margins of the ponds to create hibernacula for GCN and other species.

Access to the northern pond will be off the main farm drive and through a 5-bar gate to the south. Similarly access to the southern pond will via a track and 5-bar gate, close to the main farm property.

The single hedge along the western bank of the ditch at the southern pond will be removed where it borders the pond but the other hedge will be left in place to retain what limited habitat connectivity it provides.

4.Policy Context

The DLL scheme offers a new approach to mitigation licensing whereby developers pay into the scheme through the planning process based on the predicted impact of their development. The scheme operates a four to one ratio, whereby four times as much GCN habitat is created than lost. Through the targeted creation or restoration of GCN habitats the scheme helps create better and more joined up habitats in key areas.

As this proposal will be increasing the diversity and quality of habitats on site it satisfies the aims detailed in Sections 2 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The proposed ponds are also in keeping with the local character and heritage of the area in line with Section 16 of the NPPF.

The proposal does not involve the construction of housing or built structures so sections considering communities, transport, and housing are not relevant.

This proposal also fulfils the aims of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

5.Conclusions

The construction of these 2 ponds forms part of the nationwide effort to restore GCN numbers through Natural England's DLL Scheme in order to offset ongoing development. It satisfies the aims of the local and national planning objectives and will contribute to a local uplift in biodiversity.