

Project name:	Oakstone Farm: Summary Report	Project No:	01.132.006.02 – Building Extensions
Site/work location:	Building Extension Applications - Oakstone Farm, Bratton Road, West Ashton, Trowbridge BA14 6AX		
Issue Date:	07 July 2025	Author:	Genevieve Labram- Senior Ecologist

Introduction
<i>Project Details</i>
Halpin Robbins were commissioned to conduct a walkover survey of Oakstone Farm, Bratton Road, West Ashton, Trowbridge, BA13 4NJ, the hereafter referred to as “The Site”, to determine if licensing for works on site for great crested newt (GCN) would be appropriate. This follows a PEA survey by Acorus and subsequent eDNA survey of the pond for Great Crested Newts in April 2025. According to Nature Space Partnership data, the majority of the working site is within an Amber impact risk zone, with the remaining site located within a Green risk zone. The farm operation would like to extend a number of sheds, install a new biomass boiler, relocate the gas cylinder supply and to build new sheds, comprising a site office/welfare area and a new storage area. This Summary report refers only to the plans to extend several of the poultry sheds. A separates summary report will detail the requirements for the remaining proposed works (Report Ref: 01.132.006.02- Welfare Unit).
<i>Objectives</i>
• To assess whether the criteria for a low impact class licence would be triggered based on the field assessment and information from the client. • To propose suitable mitigation measures to ensure that the conservation status of great crested newts are not impacted by the proposals and no offence is committed during the proposed.

Methodology
<i>Site Survey</i>
A site visit was undertaken on the 18 June 2025 by Jonathan Cranfield MCIEEM, BSc, PGcE to The Site to assess the suitability of the habitats located on the site. An inspection of the plans for each part of the extension plans was cross referenced with habitats on site (Proposed plans provided below in the Appendix: Figure 1). To help illustrate the planned mitigation recommendations to the farmer who will be constructing the shed extensions, photos and mitigation instructions are also provided. Further details of the site are supported by the PEA previously conducted on site by Acorus in November 2024.

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<i>Further Information Assessment</i>
The pond on site was described as an attenuation pond for the farm. A Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment assesses the pond based upon a number of factors including the size, water quality, permanence, shading, presence of fish, the number of nearby ponds and macrophyte cover. A score between 0 and 1 is given; where 0 represents poor suitability and 1 represents excellent suitability for the pond to support GCN. The PEA report by Acorus returned a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) Assessment score of “poor” based on a score of 0.00. As this is not possible in the HSI metric, an error as suspected and this pond was subject to an updated HSI Assessment by Halpin Robbins. An eDNA survey was conducted and received by the Sure Screen laboratory on the 17 April 2025. It is unknown who conducted the eDNA survey. The results revealed that the presence of great crested newt DNA was found on the on-site pond based on a positive score, with an indicator of 1/12. The eDNA score is to be scrutinised by Jon Cranfield based on a visual assessment of the pond and surrounding habitat and his professional experience.

Results
Site Assessment
The main habitats for amphibians on the site are located around the boundaries of the site including extensive hedgerows, young woodland and other scrubby habitats located around the on-site pond, all due to be retained. The farm buildings are bordered by mown grassland, hardstanding and bare soil- unsuitable terrestrial habitat for amphibians. The proposed works to install a extend the sheds is all located within this unsuitable habitat. No further surveys are required.
<i>Further Information Assessment</i>
The on-site pond was found to be “good” Habitat Suitability for GCN, based on a score of 0.7583. A table of these workings is presented in Table 1. No other ponds were assessed due to access constraints. The “good” score of the HSI, means further surveys are required, in the form of “traditional” direct observation survey techniques or Environmental DNA surveys (eDNA). The positive result from the eDNA survey has a low replicate score (1/12), which indicates a very low presence of GCN, or contamination from another source.

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As detailed within the PEA (Acorus 2025), data from MAGIC regarding Natural England DLL survey 2017 – 2019, shows a pond surveyed for GCN located over 300m away from the works on site returned a strong positive for GCN (replicate score of 12/12) in 2018.

Recommendations

Mitigation

Given the low replicate score from the pond, and the impact of the proposal on low quality, unsuitable terrestrial habitat, it is considered that the proposals have low/negligible risk of causing direct harm to GCN or damaging existing suitable habitat. As no GCN habitat will be affected, these proposals will not trigger the need for a GCN license, however a non-licensed method statement is required (detailed below) and enhancement measures are provided. A CEMP may be appropriate to ensure works, access and storage are restricted to identified low suitability habitat areas on site.

Works should be undertaken in a manner which minimises impacts to amphibians including:

- Toolbox Talk to be provided to works team prior to breaking ground to ensure they can identify GCN and understand their legal protection.
- The mowing regime currently employed will be continued until works begin (grass maintained at 5cm sward length or less).
- Removing the minimum amount of vegetation required to complete the works.
- Soil scraping in summer to completely ensure that the absence of newts prior to building starting.
- Pollution prevention measures to avoid damage to pond from excessive earth spill into the water, machinery fuel spills etc.
- Construction materials should be stored on pallets, and in bags when not in use to prevent them being used for shelter.
- In the unlikely event that a GCN or other legally protected species is found within the site, works must **Stop** and an ecologist contacted.

Enhancements to the site for GCN would include:

- Reducing the mown areas on site following completion of the works, - allowing more of the site to become suitable GCN habitat.
- Construction of a log/rubble pile hibernacula near the existing pond suitable for use by GCN and other common amphibians.

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Conclusions
The development proposals do not harm the conservation status of great crested newts – all the suitable habitats will be retained and enhanced – including the woodland areas, hedgerows and the onsite pond means that the local amphibian population will be maintained in the area. There are predicted to be no newts within these areas and so there is no requirement to obtain a mitigation licence – either traditional mitigation or joining the strategic licensing. Licensing is not mandatory, and any impacts are considered to have been designed out in this instance. Precautionary mitigation and enhancements have been provided.

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Photos	
	
Image 1: Shed extension will be over hard standing and will not impact on any newt habitat	Image 2: The attenuation pond which takes land drain flows
	
Image 5: Extension area – The area where the extension is situated is located within close mown grassland and does not have any opportunities for any amphibians	Image 4: The grassland area to the back of the sheds is regularly mown removing any structure which amphibians would tend to use – the main habitat is located around the boundary

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Appendix

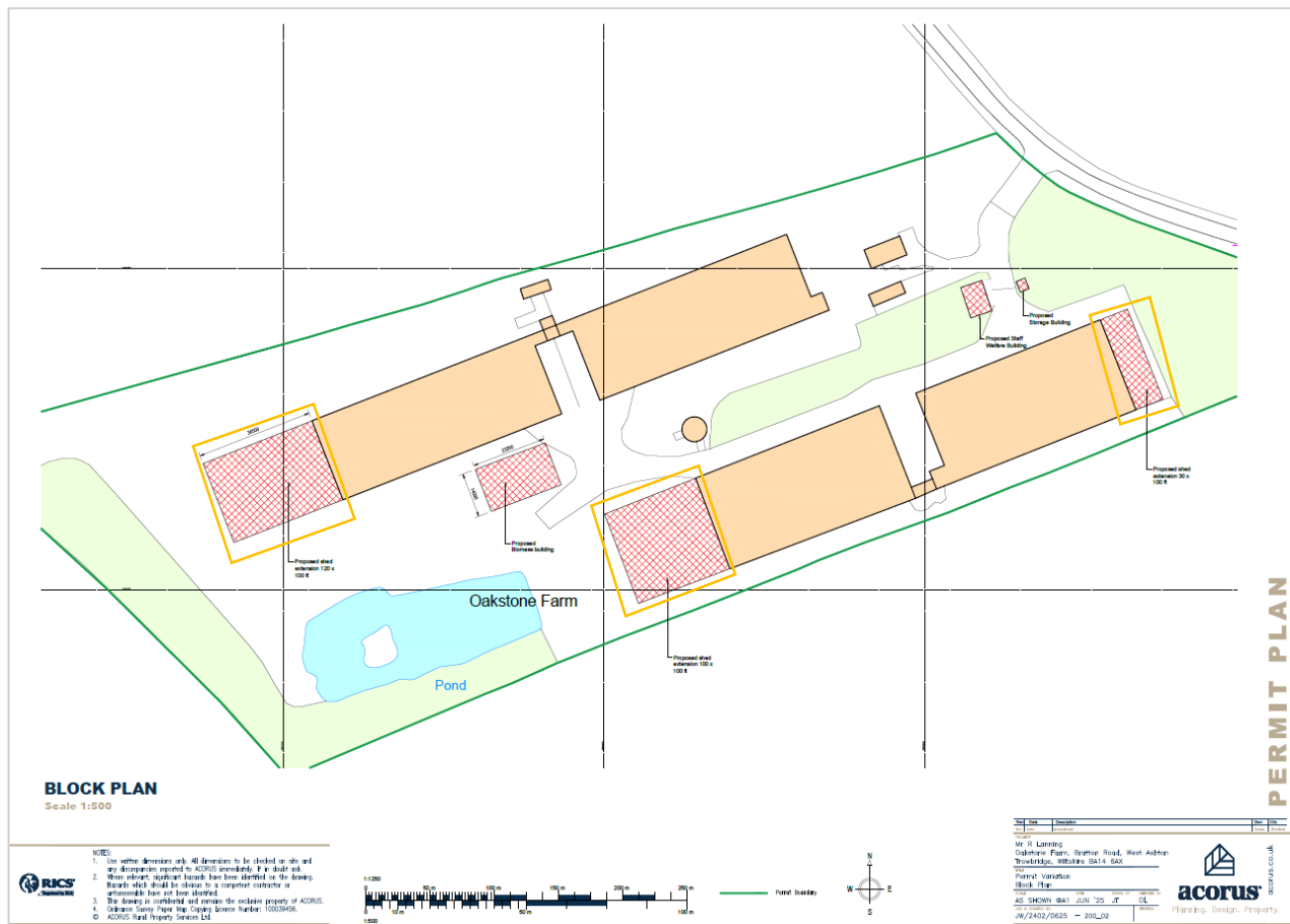


Figure 1: Proposed plans, showing works proposed under both planning applications. Works related to this report are highlighted in orange.

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Table 1: Updated HSI Score - As conducted by Halpin Robbins based on the site visit in June 2025.

Sl ₁	Location	Zone A
	Score	1
Sl ₂	Pond Area	1600m ²
	Score	0.865
Sl ₃	Pond Drying	Never Dries
	Score	0.9
Sl ₄	Water Quality	Moderate
	Score	0.67
Sl ₅	Shade	0-60%
	Score	1
Sl ₆	Fowl	Minor
	Score	0.67
Sl ₇	Fish	Possible
	Score	0.67
Sl ₈	Ponds	>12
	Score	1
Sl ₉	Terrestrial Habitat	Moderate
	Score	0.67
Sl ₁₀	Macrophytes	6-10%
	Score	0.4
Product		0.06275059
HSI		0.7581616
Suitability		Good

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Folio No: 333-2025

Purchase Order: Oakstone

Contact: Acorus Rural Property Services

Issue Date: 28.04.2025

Received Date: 17.04.2025



GCN eDNA Analysis

Summary

When great crested newts (GCN), *Triturus cristatus*, inhabit a pond, they continuously release small amounts of their DNA into the environment. By collecting and analyzing water samples, we can detect these small traces of environmental DNA (eDNA) to confirm GCN habitation or establish GCN absence.

Results

Lab ID	Site Name	OS Reference	Degradation Check	Inhibition Check	Result	Positive Replicates
GCN25 0933	Oakstone Farm P1	ST 897 540	Pass	Pass	Positive	1/12

Matters affecting result: none

Reported by: Chelsea Warner

Approved by: Chelsea Warner

Figure 2: Copy of eDNA scores for the pond on site.

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Figure 3: Images of the site and their locations