

Newt-tralising the impact of newts?

No developer likes the thought of great crested newts being found on plots it is proposing to develop. Great crested newts are a protected species under European legislation and as such have significant levels of protection under the Natural England licencing regime. This can cause significant frustration for developers and the system has long been recognised as cumbersome and slow.

Natural England is changing the way it issues licences in order to provide benefits for both wildlife and/or developers.

Four new policies are proposed. The reasoning behind them is that the current approach sometimes focuses on keeping individual species in locations where they are found, but where there might be little chance of them thriving in the long term.

Natural England states that the new policies will lead to:

- i Greater flexibility in relocating great crested newts from development sites.
- i Creation of new habitats away from development sites where it is more environmentally beneficial.
- i Wildlife benefiting from habitats that are found on development sites, such as where quarrying has created ponds suitable for great crested newts.
- i Flexibility in exceptional circumstances to reduce the amount of surveying where the impact can be predicted confidently.

The first policy will remove the need for relocation or exclusion, provided there is a programme in place to enhance and create sufficient habitat. This works alongside the second policy, which enables creation of a new habitat away from the development site, if this will

provide a greater benefit. The idea is that this will result in bigger, better and more joined up habitat.

The third policy will allow great crested newts to have access to brownfield and mineral working sites, such as quarries, provided there is a management plan in place. Such habitats may be attractive to great crested newts and provide a long term benefit. As long as the overall benefit to the great crested newts is assured, developers still will not be prevented from using this type of land.

The fourth policy offers increased flexibility in the level of surveys that need to be carried out. Where the impact of the development on the great crested newts can be predicted with sufficient certainty, then fewer surveys will be required.

These new policies are due to be formally adopted soon and the consultation report that led to them (Proposed new policies for European protected species licensing - December 2016) can be viewed on the Natural England website at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england.

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