

J10A Planning Meeting on 17 May 2017

I have set out below my reasons for asking the Inspector to agree that the Great crested newts (GCNs) that are being relocated from the site of J10A are located at the site originally identified for them in Highfield Lane (part of the Highfield Lane Roadside Nature Reserve) rather than the site now proposed next to Redburr in Kingsford Street.

Background

GCNs have declined dramatically in numbers and their distribution is patchy. Nationally the species is threatened. The decline is due to loss of habitat, especially the infilling of ponds. They need both aquatic and terrestrial habitat, favouring areas that contain medium sized ponds, rough grassland, scrub and woodland.

GCNs rely on waterbodies for breeding but otherwise they spend much of their lives on land. They over winter on land, normally hibernating underground and emerge soon after the first frost-free days in January or February to begin the migration to breeding ponds. Movement on land occurs almost exclusively at night and their progress is dependent on factors such as evening temperatures and rainfall, favouring wet or damp conditions with temperatures above 5 degrees Celsius.

GCNs require quite specific pond conditions for breeding. Ponds ideally need to have neutral to alkaline water (pH 6 or above) with areas of open water and well vegetated margins. Breeding ponds tend to be nutrient rich, not too shaded, free of fish with not too many waterfowl present. Males use open water to perform a complicated courtship dance. Females then lay the fertilised eggs individually on the leaves of submerged plants. Larvae hatch about April time onwards and stay in the pond to feed and complete metamorphosis from aquatic larvae to land-adapted juveniles. Adults usually leave the ponds before juveniles but the emergence is normally quite staggered and can last several months.

When on land, GCNs forage for prey among rank grassland, scrub and woodland, sometimes returning to ponds to feed during the summer. They require suitable refuges to use in extreme weather and during daytimes, such as large pieces of rotting deadwood, rubble piles or disused mammal burrows.

Although quite widespread in Britain, GCNs have suffered a substantial decline in recent years due to the loss of suitable breeding ponds. Many ponds have disappeared due to water table reduction, infilling for development, farming, waste disposal, neglect or fish stocking. GCNs actually spend most of their time on land and the management of the habitat that surrounds ponds is crucial to their survival. Unfortunately, the loss of ponds, has contributed to the dramatic decline of GCNs.

Photos illustrating the original site showing pond:



Proposed new site showing lack of water for breeding:



Reasons for preferring Highfield Lane rather than Kingsford Street.

Kingsford Street is very close to the motorway which will be a complete barrier to newts in the northerly direction. The surrounding habitat is of very poor grassland with large perennial plants which are not suitable for GCNs. The Kingsford Street site suffers repeated strikes from both Grey and Blue herons who nest to the north of the M20. There is no pond at the Kingsford Street site and it is impossible to assess the proposed pond and whether a pond would survive there.

Because GCNs are a protected species it should not possible to take them out and replace them out of their current habitat and relocate them into unsuitable grassland habitat.

Highfield Lane site already has a pond and already has GCNs, it is already a translocation site, so this site is obviously suitable for GCNs. The GCNs thrive there.

The Kingsford Street site seems very unsuitable and Highfield Lane already has a population so is therefore suitable.

In addition, there are notable records of the species present in Stour Park and Waterbrook and it is reasonable to assume they will be present on the J10A site. The site in Highfield Lane is expected to be used for the relocation of GCNs from Waterbrook.