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GREAT CRESTED NEWT IMPACT ASSESSMENT

At

Address Removed

Prepared for: *Client Removed*
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Approved by: Toby Hart, UES Managing Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toby Hart', is positioned below the 'Approved by' line.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is written by Mark Halliwell, Graduate Ecologist for United Environmental Services (UES) Ltd. It provides an assessment of the potential impacts on great crested newts (GCNs) *Triturus cristatus* as a result of the proposed development of a parcel of land between *Address Removed*. The proposed development on the site will involve the construction of a residential dwelling on a currently undeveloped plot of semi-improved, species-poor grassland with a short sward height.

A GCN impact assessment was undertaken on 24th September 2019 by Mark Halliwell and Declan Ghee. The objectives of the survey were to establish the suitability of the proposed development site for GCNs, and to provide an assessment of the likely impacts of the development and how they can be mitigated. All ponds and aquatic features on site and within 250m of the site boundary were assessed for their potential to support GCNs using the Habitat Suitability Index (HSI).

The proposed development site is dominated by a short sward of semi-improved species-poor grassland, although occasional patches of bramble scrub are also present. A species-poor hedge also surrounds the development boundary. The only feature within the development footprint which is to be affected by the proposed works and has the potential to support amphibians, is the presence of a discarded rubbish pile that may act as refugia. This refugia was searched during the impact assessment and no amphibians were associated with this feature.

Five ponds (Pond 1 – 4 and Pond 6) are located within 250m of the proposed development boundary, although no aquatic habitats are present within the development boundary. None of these ponds will be directly affected by the development proposals. There is an additional former pond which is no longer considered to hold water also present within 250m (Pond 5).

The five ponds were assessed for their suitability to support GCNs using the HSI. The survey found that Ponds 2 and 4 are of good suitability to support breeding GCNs. Ponds 1, 3 and 6 all have either a below average or poor suitability to support breeding GCNs. The five ponds within 250m of the development boundary are potentially connected to the site through hedgerows that surround the nearby fields.

However, due to the small scale of the proposed works and relatively poor quality of terrestrial habitat for GCNs, it is considered highly unlikely that GCNs will be affected by the works.

Based on the absence of any ponds within the development footprint, the scale of the works, and the lack of suitable amphibian habitat within the proposed development area, the works may commence without the need for a European protected species (EPS) mitigation licence from Natural England. However, it is recommended that a suite of reasonable avoidance measures are still carried out during the works in order to minimise the potential to impact common species of amphibians, as stipulated in section 5 of this report.

The report should be read in conjunction with appendices 1 to 5, which give visual representations of the survey results.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Author, surveyors and qualifications

This report is compiled and written by Mark Halliwell, UES Graduate Ecologist. Other surveyors include:

- Declan Ghee, BSc ACIEEM, UES Project Ecologist. Declan is licensed by Natural England to disturb, take and handle great crested newts under licence number 2016-26454-CLS-CLS (CL08).

All surveyors have the knowledge, skills and experience identified within CIEEM's "Competencies for Species Survey: Great Crested Newt" (2013), or were under the supervision of a surveyor with the required competencies.

1.2 Survey objectives

UES was commissioned in September 2019 to conduct site surveys which include the following activities:

- To assess the potential of the proposed development area for use by GCN
- Conduct an HSI assessment of ponds within 250m of site, where accessible
- Recommend further surveys, mitigation and compensation, where appropriate

1.3 Proposed development

The proposed development will involve the construction of a residential dwelling at a parcel of land that is dominated by semi improved species-poor grassland.

1.4 Structure of the report

This report sets out the methodology, results, and recommendations in relation to a specific GCN survey. Recommendations are in line with statutory legislation and planning policy objectives.

The report should be read in conjunction with appendices 1 to 5, which give visual representations of the survey results.



2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk study

Aerial photographs and Ordnance Survey maps were used to identify all water bodies on the site and within a 250m radius of the site boundary.

UES has not been commissioned to undertake a protected species record search at this point.

2.2 Field survey

A site visit was undertaken on 24th September 2019 by Mark Halliwell and Declan Ghee. All ponds and aquatic features on site and within 250m of the site boundary were assessed for their potential to support GCNs using the HSI. The HSI is a tool used to provide a numerical indication of the quality of a waterbody in terms of GCN breeding and associated habitat requirements on a scale of 0-1 (0 indicating unsuitable habitat, 1 representing optimal habitat).

HSI scores incorporate ten Suitability Indices (SIs), all of which are factors thought to affect GCNs, namely:

SI 1: Site location	SI 6: Waterfowl presence
SI 2: Size of pond	SI 7: Fish presence
SI 3: Pond permanence	SI 8: Number of ponds within 1km
SI 4: Water quality	SI 9: Terrestrial habitat
SI 5: Perimeter shading	SI 10: Macrophyte cover

In some cases, a net may be used to assess certain SIs, such as water quality. Once a measurement or category has been given for each SI this can then be converted to a figure between 0 and 1 for use in the HSI calculation. This figure is either translated from an assigned category or measurement or read from a graph in the case of a percentage or number.

The HSI is then calculated from the following formula:

$$\text{HSI} = (\text{SI1} \times \text{SI2} \times \text{SI3} \times \text{SI4} \times \text{SI5} \times \text{SI6} \times \text{SI7} \times \text{SI8} \times \text{SI9} \times \text{SI10})^{1/10}$$

This will give a final HSI result between 0 and 1, providing a measure of habitat suitability for GCN.

The information gathered from the survey was used to provide a likelihood of GCNs and other amphibians being present in the area, in both aquatic and terrestrial habitats.

The proposed development, based on the plans provided, was also assessed for the potential to cause harm to GCNs (if present) using the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool.

All ponds were noted on the pond plan (Appendix 1 – Pond Plan).

2.3 Survey limitations



Due to the gradient of the bank of part of Pond 6, the whole pond could not be safely accessed. However, the majority of the pond could be safely accessed and assessed. Therefore, this is not considered to be a significant limitation.



3 RESULTS

3.1 Terrestrial habitat assessment

3.1.1 The proposed development site

The land within the site boundary is dominated by semi-improved species-poor grassland with a very short sward (see Appendix 3 – Photographs, Photo 1). Species within the sward include perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* and occasional patches of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. A species-poor hedgerow runs along the western boundary adjacent to the road and mainly consists of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* although elder *Sambucus nigra* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* also occur to a lesser extent.

There are some potential amphibian refugia within the site boundary including discarded corrugated metal and other waste material, however, these were searched at the time of survey and no GCN or other amphibians were found sheltering beneath any refugia.

3.1.2 Surrounding habitats

All ponds are located outside of the development footprint. The surrounding area within 250m of the development boundary is primarily composed of pastoral and arable fields intersected by hedgerows and occasional mature trees. Scattered residential and farm buildings are also present within the local area. A small copse of woodland is situated approximately 150m north of the development boundary in which Pond 5 is situated. Ponds 4 and 6 are adjacent to this woodland.

In summary, six ponds are present within 250m of the proposed development site. The ponds are linked to the site through hedgerow and tree-lined pastoral and arable fields although the habitats on site provide limited opportunities for hibernating and commuting GCN and the habitats off site are of a higher quality.

3.2 Aquatic habitat assessment

3.2.1 Pond 1 – Grid reference: *Redacted*

This pond is located approximately 75m south-east of the proposed development (See Appendix 1 – Pond Plan). The pond measures approximately 80m². The majority of Pond 1 is choked with greater reedmace *Typha latifolia*, which is also shading the pond (Appendix 3 – Photographs, Photo 2). Extensive leaf litter is present in the pond from nearby alder *Alnus glutinosa* which overhangs the pond. The pond depth was only 5-10cm, despite recent heavy rainfall. The owner of the pond suggested that the pond dries annually and that it was previously subjected to regular dredging, but hasn't been undertaken for a number of years, resulting in the dominance of greater reedmace. Other aquatic vegetation is limited due to the growth of the greater reedmace however, other species include: white water lily *Nymphaea alba* and water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*.

The surrounding habitat includes stands of scrub composed of bramble and alder saplings as well as stinging nettle *Urtica dioica* and common hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*.



3.2.2 Pond 2 – Grid reference: *Redacted*

This pond is located approximately 90m south-east of the proposed development boundary. The pond measures approximately 475m² (Appendix 3 – Photographs, Photo 3). Originally built approximately 30 years ago, according to the landowner, the pond was stocked with fish and also supported waterfowl such as Canada geese *Branta canadensis* on the ponds central island. There was no evidence of fish found during the current assessment. Marginal and floating vegetation includes water mint *Mentha aquatica*, hard rush *Juncus effusus*, sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, water forget-me-not, ivy-leaved duckweed *Lemna trisulca*, broad-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans* and greater reedmace. Other vegetation surrounding the pond includes black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, willow species *Salix* sp., greater pond sedge *Carex riparia*, white poplar *Populus alba* and silver birch *Betula pendula*. The northern edge of the pond and the margins surrounding the central island are shaded by trees, which accounts for approximately 40% of the ponds margin in total.

3.2.3 Pond 3 – Grid reference: *Redacted*

Pond 3 is situated approximately 125m north-east of the development boundary within a residential garden. It is an amenity garden pond with a concrete base and paving slabs surrounding the margin (Appendix 3 – Photographs, Photo 4). The pond is approximately 30m² in size and lacks any marginal vegetation, with white water lily and a small patch of soft rush in the centre of the pond the only plant cover. Lastly, the pond is stocked with fish.

3.2.4 Pond 4 – Grid reference: *Redacted*

Pond 4 is a field pond situated approximately 200m north-west of the development boundary and surrounded by semi-improved species-poor grassland and occasional patches of scrub, which are mostly dominated by bramble. The pond is approximately 325m² in size and the marginal vegetation is limited to trees and shrubs around the boundary that shade approximately 10% of the ponds perimeter (Appendix 3 – Photographs, Photo 5). These species include English oak *Quercus robur*, goat willow *Salix caprea*, rose species *Rosa* sp., and hawthorn. Macrophyte cover is extremely limited and includes small, scattered patches of greater reedmace, common duckweed *Lemna minor* and broad-leaved pondweed. There is no evidence of fish although there was evidence of wildfowl presence based on droppings around the margin.

3.2.5 Pond 5 – Grid reference: *Redacted*

Pond 5 is situated within a depression in a copse of woodland approximately 200 north-west of the development boundary. The pond is now replaced with scrub and is completely dry and appears to have been for a number of years (Appendix 3 – Photographs, Photo 6).

3.2.6 Pond 6 – Grid reference: *Redacted*

Pond 6 is a former slurry pit that has not been used for approximately three years according to the landowner. It is situated approximately 225m north of the development boundary and has an area of 1100m². The water is of poor quality and is highly eutrophic (Appendix 3 – Photographs, Photo 7). Furthermore, the pond also lacks any marginal vegetation, with only occasional patches of bramble scrub surrounding the pond. Evidence of waterfowl was noted due to the presence of mallard ducks *Anas platyrhynchos*, though no evidence of fish was observed.



4 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.1 HSI results

There are six ponds present within a 250m radius of the proposed development site.

Pond 1 achieved an HSI score of 0.50, which indicates the pond is of 'below average' suitability to support breeding GCNs. SIs which particularly reduce the overall score include the pond area and permanence, and the low macrophyte coverage.

Pond 2 achieved an HSI score of 0.73, which indicates the pond is of 'good' suitability to support breeding GCNs. SIs which improved the overall score include pond area, permanence and low level of shading.

Pond 3 achieved an HSI score of 0.36, which indicates the pond is of 'poor' suitability to support breeding GCNs. SIs which reduced the overall score of the pond included the small pond area and the presence of fish.

Pond 4 achieved an HSI score of 0.79, which indicates the pond is of 'good' suitability to support breeding GCNs. SIs which improved the overall score include the macrophyte cover of the pond, good quality terrestrial habitat and relatively large pond area.

Pond 5 is now no longer a pond and is now just a depression filled with scrub. The pond is therefore not suitable to support breeding GCNs.

Pond 6 achieved an HSI score of 0.48, which indicates the pond is of 'below average' suitability to support breeding GCNs. SIs which reduce the overall score included the poor water quality and absence of macrophytes.

Detailed scores and calculations are included in Appendix 4 – HSI results.

4.2 Impacts

The following rapid risk assessment tool has been developed by Natural England in order to establish whether it is necessary to apply for a licence. It assumes that the pond(s) identified during the site visit are suitable GCN breeding ponds, which in some cases will not be the case. The closest suitable pond considered in this assessment is Pond 2, located 90m south.

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.3
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.01
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
	Maximum:	0.3
Rapid risk assessment result:	AMBER: OFFENCE LIKELY	



*"Amber: offence likely" indicates that the development activities are of such a type, scale and location that an offence is likely. In this case, the best option is to redesign the development (location, layout, methods, duration or timing; see **Non-licensed avoidance measures tool**) so that the effects are minimised. You can do this and then re-run the risk assessment to test whether the result changes, or preferably run your own detailed site-specific assessment. Bear in mind that this generic risk assessment will over- or under-estimate some risks because it cannot take into account site-specific details, as mentioned in caveats above. In particular, the exact location of the development in relation to resting places, dispersal areas and barriers should be critically examined. Once you have amended the scheme you will need to decide if a licence is required; this should be done if on balance you believe an offence is reasonably likely.*

The risk assessment indicated that an offence is likely. However, this does not take into account the relative quality of habitats on site and in the surrounding area. For example, the development proposals will primarily affect a very short sward, species-poor semi-improved grassland that is of very low suitability for GCN. The surrounding fields, hedgerows, scrub and gardens will provide higher quality habitat and it is likely that GCNs, if present, would be using these habitats over the relatively poor habitats in the development footprint. Furthermore, only a small corner of the site is located within 100m of the pond, the majority of the site lies within 100-250m of the pond, which would in isolation provide a "Green: Offence Unlikely" score on the impact assessment calculator.

It is therefore considered that the implementation of measures detailed in Section 5 of this report will enable the works to be undertaken in a manner which minimises potential impacts on amphibians, without the need for an EPS mitigation licence, as GCNs would be unlikely to be impacted by the proposed works.



5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the presence of GCNs on site is considered to be unlikely, works on site should still be completed under the following reasonable avoidance measures, in order to safeguard other common amphibian species which may be present on site:

- A toolbox talk will be given to contractors working on the site on GCNs, including identification, ecology, legislation and contractors' responsibilities when working on the site. The talk is to be given by an appropriately experienced ecologist and will take place prior to the commencement of works.
- The grassland is to be maintained at a sward height of less than 100mm. The mown / cleared area will then be maintained with a short sward until the works on site have been completed.
- Piles of refugia, for example discarded sheet materials or log piles, should be dismantled by hand, carefully, and if any common amphibians are found sheltering beneath, they should be transported to the site's south-eastern boundary.
- No excavations are to be left open overnight. If this is not feasible, a plank should be left within the excavation at a 45° angle to allow amphibians to escape. Any open excavations should be checked for amphibians in the morning prior to the start of works on site.
- Materials will be stored on pallets off the ground in order to reduce the risk of amphibians sheltering underneath them.

UES will remain on-call throughout the development, and if any suspected GCNs are encountered work on site is to stop immediately and UES are to be contacted. **UES can be reached on 01565 757788.**



6 CONCLUSION

The proposed development on the site will involve the construction of a residential dwelling on a currently well-grazed plot of semi improved species-poor grassland. Five ponds (Pond 1 – 4, and pond 6) are located within 250m of the proposed development boundary, although no aquatic habitats are present within the development boundary.

The proposed development site is dominated by semi improved species-poor grassland although occasional patches of bramble scrub are also present. A species-poor hedge also surrounds the development boundary. The only feature within the development footprint, which is to be affected by the proposed works, and has the potential to support amphibians, is the presence of discarded rubbish piles that may act as refugia.

There are no ponds within the development boundary, although the site is connected to ponds which have the potential to support breeding GCNs, primarily through hedgerows that surround nearby fields. However, given the scale of the development and the habitats that are to be affected by the proposed works, it is highly unlikely that GCN will be affected.

Based on the absence of any ponds within the development footprint, the scale of the works, and the lack of suitable amphibian habitat within the proposed development area, the works may commence without the need for a European protected species (EPS) mitigation licence from Natural England.

However, mitigation measures detailed in section 5 of this report must be followed as a precautionary measure to ensure that the potential for detrimental impacts on other common amphibians is minimised.



7 REFERENCES

Anon. (2001). *Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature.

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2013). *Competencies for Species Survey: Great Crested Newts*.

Department for Communities and Local Government (2012). *National Planning Policy Framework*.

Oldham R.S., Keeble J., Swan M.J.S. & Jeffcote M. (2000). *Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (Triturus cristatus)*. *Herpetological Journal* 10 (4), 143-155.



APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Pond plan

Redacted.



Appendix 2 – Aerial photographs

Redacted.



Appendix 3 – Photographs



Photo 1. The site boundary is a short sward of semi-improved species-poor grassland. Discarded material is also seen.



Photo 2. Pond 1, which is highly choked by greater reedmace.

Photo 3. *Redacted.*

Photo 4. *Redacted.*



Photo 5. Pond 4 is a field pond with good macrophyte cover and limited shading.



Photo 6. Location of Pond 5, which is now dried up and replaced with scrub.



Photo 7. Pond 6 is highly eutrophic and lacks any macrophytes.



Appendix 4 – HSI results

GCN HSI Calculations

	Pond number	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
	Grid reference	<i>Redacted</i>	<i>Redacted</i>	<i>Redacted</i>	<i>Redacted</i>	<i>Redacted</i>	<i>Redacted</i>
SI number	SI description	SI values					
1	Geographic location	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	Pond area	0.1	0.9	0.05	0.6	NA	0.925
3	Pond permanence	0.1	0.9	0.9	0.5		0.5
4	Water quality	0.67	0.67	0.33	0.67		0.01
5	Shade	1	1	1	1		1
6	Water fowl	0.67	0.67	1	0.67		0.67
7	Fish	1	0.33	0.01	1		1
8	Pond density	1	1	1	1		1
9	Terrestrial habitat	0.67	0.67	0.33	0.67		0.67
10	Macrophyte cover	0.3	0.5	0.8	1		0.3
HSI score:		0.50	0.73	0.36	0.79		NA
Pond suitability:		Below Average	Good	Poor	Good	N/A	Poor

HSI Score	Pond Suitability
< 0.50	Poor
0.50 - 0.59	Below average
0.60 - 0.69	Average
0.70 - 0.79	Good
> 0.80	Excellent



Appendix 5 – Statutory and planning context

Ecological assessments

Ecological assessments play an important part within the planning context; they include an initial assessment which highlights any specific interests of a site. From the initial site assessment, the surveyor assesses the suitability of habitats within the site to support protected species and makes recommendations for further survey works if required. The following paragraphs provide a brief interpretation of the legislative protection that is relevant to the findings of this report.

Great crested newts

Great crested newts (GCN) *Triturus cristatus* and their habitat (aquatic and terrestrial) are afforded full protection by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

If both national and international legislation are taken together, it is an offence to:

- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or capture GCN
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb GCN in such a way to be likely to significantly affect:
 - their ability to survive, breed, reproduce, rear or nurture their young
 - their ability to hibernate or migrate
 - their local distribution or abundance
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly take or destroy the eggs of GCN
- Damage or destroy breeding sites or resting places of GCN
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb sheltering GCN, or obstruct access to their resting place
- Keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange any live or dead GCN, any part of GCN or anything derived from GCN

Penalties for offences include fines of up to £5000, plus up to six months imprisonment, for each offence committed.

GCN are also protected by the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which prohibits cruelty and mistreatment. Releasing a GCN in such a way as to cause undue suffering may be an offence under the Abandonment of Animals Act 1960.

In addition to the above, there are various statutory provisions relating to the transport of animals, designed to ensure their welfare. GCN are also listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act.

It is important to identify the presence of GCN individuals and also to identify suitable habitat on sites so that legal obligations regarding this species can be observed. If a survey identifies the presence of GCN on the site, an assessment of the population size class is required. This can then inform a mitigation scheme, which would need to be developed in liaison with the local Natural England team, and which minimises direct threats to newts and compensates for any loss of habitat. A licence issued by Natural England is required for the legal implementation of a mitigation scheme.

A Natural England mitigation licence application requires a Mitigation Method Statement and a Reasoned Statement of Application. The Mitigation Method Statement contains details of the proposed mitigation works. The Reasoned Statement needs to provide a rational and reasoned justification as to why the proposed development meets the requirements of the Conservation (National Habitats & c.) regulations 1994, namely Regulations 44(2)(e), (f) or (g), and 44(3)(a).

Other amphibians

More common British amphibians, such as Common frog *Rana temporaria*, Common toad *Bufo bufo*, Smooth newt *Triturus vulgaris* and Palmate newt *Triturus helveticus* are protected only by

Section 9(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This section prohibits sale, barter, exchange, transporting for sale and advertising to sell or to buy.

The above named species are also listed as UK Species of Conservation Concern. Due to general declines in most British amphibian species in recent years, many local authorities require amphibian surveys as a planning condition, or as part of environmental information submitted as part of a planning application, even where the presence of GCN is ruled out.

Natterjack toad *Bufo calamita* and Pool frog *Pelophylax lessonae* are also offered the same level of protection as GCN, through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Natterjack toad, Common toad and Pool frog are also listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act.

Water bodies that support all five (more common) species of British amphibians in high numbers, may be afforded protection in local plans, as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), or a similar equivalent, for sites of local importance. A site may require statutory protection as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Planning policy

National Planning Guidance is issued in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF). The most relevant section is 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Key relevant principles stated in 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment are;

- 170.** Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
 - recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
 - maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
 - minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
 - preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
 - remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.
- 174.** To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:
- Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity⁵⁶; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and
 - promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

- 175.** When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:
- a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
 - b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
 - c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons⁵⁸ and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
 - d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.