

District Level Licensing Newtsletter

Welcome to the first edition of our [District Level Licensing](#) (DLL) newtsletter (excuse the pun).

This innovative, strategic and [award-winning](#) approach to licensing for great crested newts (GCN) is increasingly available and involving more and more valued partners, so we wanted to provide a round-up of the early progress and outcomes that we are bringing about for this special species. The benefits of the scheme are clear:

- Bigger, better and more joined up pond habitat for GCN;
- More resilient populations;
- Enables local authority plans for new homes to be delivered;
- Saves time and gives certainty to developers.

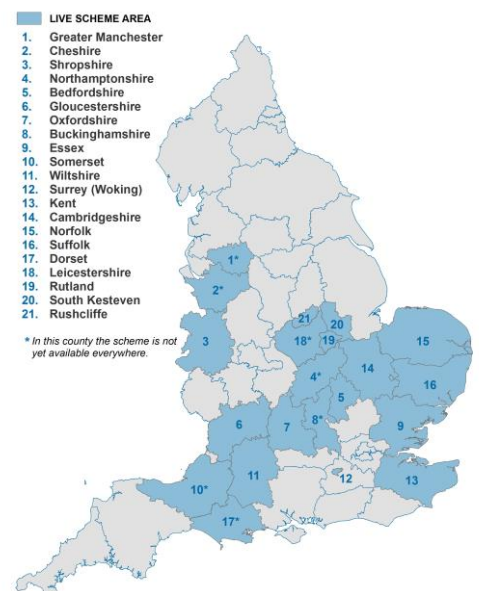
Time Saving

It currently takes, on average, **77** fewer days to receive a GCN licence by joining an NE-led DLL scheme compared to traditional mitigation licensing. This doesn't include the time delays often associated with seasonality for mitigation licensing, so the savings via the DLL route are typically even greater!

Celebrating 100

December 2020 marks a significant milestone for DLL for GCN. With the launch of the Natural England-led scheme across Leicestershire, Rutland, Rushcliffe and South Kesteven (see the [tweet](#)). This innovative, strategic approach to licensing for this protected species is now available and being used by developers across more than **100** local authorities (**103** to be exact!). Earlier launches this year included [Telford & Wrekin](#), [Cambridgeshire](#) and [Norfolk & Suffolk](#).

We are now working with local authorities and habitat delivery partners on new schemes across the north of England. The [NatureSpace Partnership](#) are also working on new schemes launching next year, and Dorset hope to launch their own organisational licenced DLL scheme very soon.



Dig for Victory

Our valued partners including local authorities, Wildlife Trusts and Farming & Wildlife Advisory Groups (FWAGs) created or restored **386** ponds across England last autumn/winter, despite the extensive flooding in early January and the pandemic hitting us towards the end of March.

This year we are aiming to create and restore more than **500** ponds to bolster GCN populations, service the needs of live DLL schemes and enable expansion of the approach into new areas.



Norfolk pond being created (Photo credit Carl Sayer)

Moving In

Great crested newt larvae from one of our DLL ponds near Bethersden, Kent:



Credit Sarah Harrington James, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

Money Well Spent

Natural England use **85%** of the developer payments to create/restore, monitor and maintain ponds for newts for **25** years.

We have recently reviewed the Conservation Payment to ensure we are fully recovering ours and our partners' costs.

Homes under the Hammer

Natural England (NE) partnered with EnTrade earlier this year as part of our DLL scheme to create auctions where landowners can bid to create new habitat for the newts away from land outlined for development. This is proving very popular with landowners. So far this year we have run **8** auctions and landowners have bid to collectively create **229** ponds through this approach.

Our partners work with landowners to ensure that the ponds are in the best location and built to an agreed specification with GCN in mind. Craig Thomas, Habitat Delivery Strategist at Natural England explains:

"We use the EnTrade platform as an engagement tool, allowing us and our local Habitat Delivery Bodies to build long-term relationships with landowners to positively manage and monitor the new ponds over the next 25 years to maintain healthy newt populations."

Here's one we made earlier!



Before



During



After

Photo credit – Pond created for our Cheshire NE-led scheme (Chester Zoo; credit Alun Evans)

Stronger Together



YOUR COUNTRYSIDE NEEDS YOU

At the beginning of December, across the 11 schemes in place, 47 DLL licences had been issued through NE-led schemes (cumulative). The total commitment made by developers (not yet all received) was **£3.65m**, **85%** of which goes directly towards habitat provision, management and monitoring.

We can all help each other to promote DLL and encourage both landowners to sign up for a new or newly restored pond and developers to use the approach by including some information on your website and signposting to the DLL gov.uk pages.

Please contact us – we're happy to help and can provide our infographic and other content to make it easier.

Welcome to Your Newt Home

Our DLL monitoring strategy requires that compensation ponds are subject to eDNA surveys every year for the first four years. We have analysed the results from the first round of eDNA testing and our longest running schemes, Kent and Cheshire provide the majority of the results to date.

GCN are moving in – Natural England's first year monitoring results have shown **34%** of ponds created or restored for DLL have been colonised, well above the expected colonisation rates. These are early, and very encouraging results, and we're looking forward to continuing our monitoring programme and seeing what next summer brings. A bit more detail – it was a relatively small sample of **134** ponds, **45%** of those ponds had a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) score of 'Excellent' and **31%** of 'Good'. Planning is underway to survey **584** ponds during the 2021 survey season.



Buried Treasure



ROB PEACOCK

New ponds created or restored for great crested newts through DLL schemes can also provide wider biodiversity benefits. For example pond restoration has been shown to expose seeds that have lain dormant in old ponds, helping rare wetland plants to [‘come back to life’](#). In July this year, a team from University College London (UCL) Department of Geography surveyed a pond restored as part of the Norfolk DLL scheme and the [Norfolk Ponds Project \(NPP\)](#). Six plants of an annual flowering species known as grass-poly *Lythrum hyssopifolia* were recorded – the first confirmed record in the county in over 100 years.

Norfolk Pond (Photo credit Carl Sayer)

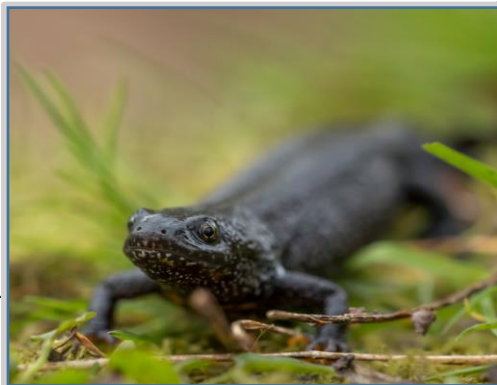


Habitat Delivery Bodies

We are currently working in partnership with **16** habitat delivery bodies across **82** Local Planning Authorities (LPA) areas where NE-led DLL schemes are available, and we are currently developing new partnerships in areas where we are working towards launching a new DLL scheme.

Our species distribution model predicts suitable habitat, which is combined with observations and surveys of GCN from Natural England and a range of stakeholders, to create maps. These are used to assess the impact of development on GCN, guide development away from locally important newt populations (Risk Zones) and to target pond creation/restoration to the areas where it will have the most benefit in increasing population and distribution of GCN, known as Strategic Opportunity Areas, (SOAs).

Our Habitat Delivery Bodies include Wildlife Trusts, Local Authorities and Farm and Wildlife Advisory Groups. They use the SOAs with their local partners, landowners and contractors to guide the placement of ponds and build a new pondscape in their counties.



An Improving Service

We have developed a [short questionnaire](#), for those that have recently held, or applied for a GCN Licence. This may have been a traditional mitigation licence, or a DLL, in any area. We would greatly appreciate it if you could share and encourage feedback from developers and consultants, so we can use the feedback on their decision-making and experience to improve our service.

Please let us know if there is anything you would like to see in the next edition and please feel free to send us any good news stories or photographs you would like to share.

Here's looking forward to a Happy Newt Year in 2021.