

Cambridgeshire to benefit from sustainable development initiative

[Natural England's](#) district level licensing initiative helps put an end to the costly delays faced by developers building in areas where the iconic species is present.

In the past, landowners or housing developers in Cambridgeshire had to apply for a licence before building on or around the newts' pond habitat – on a site-by-site basis.

One simple application

Now, [licensing is applied at a district level](#). This 'landscape-scale' approach means that developers need only make a single application and payment to join their local, area-wide scheme.

The one-off payment covers the creation, restoration, maintenance and monitoring of ponds around the area for 25 years, in locations specially chosen to provide the best habitat and most benefit.

Quicker and easier

This [award-winning](#), evidence-based approach to licensing helps streamline regulation to better protect newts for the future, while enabling developers and local authorities to deliver on their investment and home-building plans.

Great crested newts are the UK's largest species of newt. But their population has seen dramatic declines over the last 60 years.

Despite being protected under UK and EU law, the species suffered the loss of around 50% of its pond habitat in the 20th century.

Halting newts' decline

[District level licensing](#) aims to halt that decline and enable developers to more easily contribute to '[Build Back Greener](#)' aspect of the government's [economic recovery strategy](#)

Bridget Smith, leader of [South Cambridgeshire District Council](#), said:

Protecting nature needs to be at the heart of the UK's and Cambridgeshire's recovery and growth. We need to find ways for both nature and business to thrive. District level licensing is a welcome, clear and straightforward approach that enhances habitats for this iconic species without needless delays to well-planned, appropriate development.

Aidan Lonergan, West Anglia area manager at Natural England, said:

This scheme is one example of how a fresh look at the relationship between species needs and the growth agenda might achieve more harmony. It is one that illustrates our ambition to find ways to work with development – at a landscape-scale – in order to restore nature and not merely slow its rate of loss, as well as ensure new developments are built greener from the outset.

Martin Baker, conservation manager at the [Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire](#), said:

I welcome the district licencing scheme which should produce better outcomes for great crested newts in the county, with more ponds created in the right places, allowing local newt populations to grow and recover. Developer financial contributions will become more certain and will be made knowing that they will better contribute towards the long-term conservation of our most impressive species of newt.

70 areas on board

Cambridgeshire is the latest area to launch a district level licensing scheme, joining 70 others including Kent, Cheshire, Essex, Shropshire and Greater Manchester. Natural England is working to expand the initiative to 150 local authorities across the country, as part of a programme funded by the [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#).

More about great crested newts

- Great crested newts are a European Protected Species. Under the Habitats Directive, it is an offence to capture, kill, injure or disturb them or their habitat without a licence from Natural England. Although rare across Europe, they can be locally abundant in England.

More about district level licensing

- This new licensing approach to authorising development affected by great crested newts is part of a larger programme to reform protected species licensing by focusing conservation effort where it will create maximum benefit. It aims to leave the environment in a better state than before.
- Previously, licences were only granted on a site-by-site basis. This missed opportunities to manage populations of great crested newts on a landscape scale and resulted in habitat for newts being squeezed around development, sometimes in disconnected patches.
- Individual site-by-site licences are still available. Since 17 February 2020, there is now a charge for these licences. In areas where there is a district level licensing scheme, joining it will be the quickest option to enable development that affects great crested newts.

- Natural England is working in partnership with [Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group for the Eastern Region](#), local authorities including South Cambridgeshire District Council, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Wildlife Trusts including that for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, and more.