

Innovative scheme to protect newts and promote sustainable development is rolled out across Lancashire

Great crested newts have seen dramatic declines in their populations over the last 60 years despite being legally protected. The new 'District Level Licensing' scheme (DLL) better protects this orange-bellied amphibian by using conservation payments from developers to create new ponds in locations that will benefit the species.

The scheme also benefits local people and authorities by avoiding costly delays for developers, helping to ensure homes are built and local authorities can deliver their plans.

The scheme will create a network of ponds providing vital habitat for our biggest native newt, helping to join up sometimes isolated populations and helping them to thrive.

Natural England, in partnership with Lancashire Wildlife Trust, will invest developer payments not only into creating or restoring new ponds but also taking care of and monitoring the ponds too, for the long term.

Previously, developers had to apply for a mitigation licence before building on or around the places where newts live. Seasonal restrictions on work in places where the newts were present led to delays and uncertainty over the costs and scheduling of planned development. This new 'landscape scale' licensing approach is better for both developers and newts. It provides a faster and more straightforward process than the traditional approach to licensing while helping to provide more homes for newts.

By the end of March this year, Lancashire Wildlife Trust will already have created or restored nearly 60 ponds across the county for the scheme.

John Lamb, Senior Conservation Officer, Lancashire Wildlife Trust said:

I am really encouraged by landowner enthusiasm to create new ponds for the scheme. Everyone recognises that the ponds will benefit a wide range of wildlife and Trust staff are looking forward to continuing this important work so that hotspots of newts can expand and populations can merge and flourish.

Marcus Hudson, Head of Planning, Lancashire County Council, said:

Lancashire is home to beautiful landscapes and habitats, a desirable place to live and work, and a hub for business and industry. We need to find ways to support growth whilst protecting

and enhancing our climate and environment. District level licensing offers an opportunity to reduce costly delays to developments, whilst targeting spending on practical conservation measures, such as pond creation, in the locations identified as having the maximum impact to bolster the resilience of Lancashire's great crested newt populations.

Ginny Hinton, Natural England Cheshire to Lancashire Area Team Manager, said:

District level licensing is transforming a difficult planning process into one that is a real conservation success story.

The rollout of this scheme in Lancashire represents a win-win for both local developers and the future of this iconic species. It's a fantastic example of working in partnership at a landscape scale.

More about district level licensing in Lancashire

- Details of how to apply for the scheme are online at this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-crested-newts-district-level-licensing-schemes>
- Lancashire is the latest area to launch a district level licensing scheme. Natural England is working to expand the initiative to 150 local authorities across the country, as part of a programme initially funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- 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.
- As part of the District Level Licensing project, Natural England has completed the largest ever survey of its type for great crested newts across England, funded by the MHCLG. The data is open and has been published to ArcGIS Online and is available at [Data.gov.uk](https://data.gov.uk).
- Individual site-by-site mitigation licences are still available; since 17 February 2020, there is now a charge for these licences. In areas where there is a DLL scheme, joining a scheme will be the quickest option to enable development that affects great crested newts.