

# [Press release: New for newts: better for wildlife, business and people](#)

Developers in Kent can now apply for a licence under [District Level Licensing \(DLL\)](#) for great crested newts (GCN). It follows our announcement of a [nationwide roll-out](#) of great crested newt District Level Licensing in 2017.

GCNs are widely distributed throughout lowland England. However the species has suffered enormous declines, with approximately 50% of ponds in the UK lost in the 20th Century and 80% of current ponds in a poor state. The current licensing system is focused on management to prevent harm on individual development sites rather than addressing the wider health of GCN populations. Our new approach seeks to redress this balance, encouraging targeted efforts towards provision of GCN habitat in areas where surveys show it will most effectively connect and expand GCN populations.

This new approach will increase GCN populations at a county level. It will also reduce delays for developers. Under the current licensing approach, developers who want to build on land which is home to GCNs need to trap and relocate the species before starting work. Seasonal restrictions, where these are not effectively planned for, can lead delays and create uncertainty over the costs and scheduling of planned development.

Through the District Level Licensing scheme in Kent, developers no longer need to do this. Instead developers can make a conservation payment which will cover creating or restoring ponds in areas away from the development. These areas, mapped by Natural England, represent the best places for newts to thrive and habitat created here will be maintained and monitored for 25 years, all funded by developers.

As well as being good for GCN, it is estimated that District Level Licensing will reduce delays and costs for developers and regulators across England, saving hundreds of millions of pounds.

In Kent, several of the [Countryside Management Partnerships](#) have already begun successfully working with landowners to restore and create compensatory ponds for great crested newts in preparation for development commencing. Thirty-two ponds in Kent have been created and restored, and a further 30 are expected to be restored and created by end of March 2019. This means the scheme has a 'bank' of ponds before it opens and developers start getting involved. This new habitat will help join up existing newt populations, making them more healthy and resilient.

**Marian Spain, Natural England's interim chief executive, said:**

For over two years, Natural England's local and national staff have been working tirelessly with external partners on a new, more strategic approach to great crested newt licensing. This has

resulted in the opening of the District Level Licensing scheme in Kent – a victory for wildlife, business and people.

New compensatory habitat will be created in locations to best benefit great crested newts and, at the same time, developers can avoid costly delays to build homes for new communities. The launch of this scheme, a landscape-scale way of working championed in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, shows we are committed to ensuring environmental regulation better serves both the natural environment and the economy.

Natural England worked with a number of partner organisations to pull together existing data and surveys on the presence, absence and habitats of great crested newts in Kent, in addition to setting up an expert panel on great crested newts which will bring together expertise from NGOs, government and universities. This data was then used to develop the evidence-based model on which the scheme is based.

District Level Licensing is expected to replace around 77% of current site-based mitigation and organisational licensing for great crested newts. Funds from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and contributions from developers, including Berkeley Homes, Pentland Homes, Quinn Estates and Redrow, have been used to develop the project and to contribute to the initial creation of new habitat.

**Nick Fenton, from the Kent Developers Group, said:**

Having worked closely with Natural England over the past two years on the development of District Level Licensing for great crested newts we see the scheme as a major step forward as not only does it safeguard important environmental habitats it enables developers to play an active role in the process. Having a streamlined scheme in place will also help speed up the delivery of much needed development, whether it is residential, commercial property or infrastructure, and support economic growth.

**Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development at Maidstone Borough Council, said:**

We have worked closely with Natural England on the development of district level licensing for GCN in Kent for several years and are very supportive of the enterprising approach to bring planning and species licensing more closely together.

The new licensing scheme will enable strategically planned habitat creation to embed within Local Plans and Green Infrastructure Strategies and has the objective to create net gains in habitat in the most ideal locations for resilient populations.

## ENDS

For further enquiries please contact the Defra Group news desk on 0330 041 6560 or email [newsdesk@defra.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@defra.gov.uk). For out of hours please call 0345 051 8486.

### About Natural England

- Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment. Established in 2006, our work is focused on enhancing England's wildlife and landscapes and maximising the benefits they bring to the public.

### GCN and GCN DLL

- 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.
- Previously, licenses 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.
- Under the District Level Licensing approach the first step is the development of a licensing strategy for GCN in the area which identifies areas where development should be avoided, migration strategies such as green corridors, and areas for new and restored compensatory habitat.
- This new licensing approach to authorising developments affected by great crested newts is part of a larger programme to reform protected species by focusing conservation effort where it will create maximum benefit.
- Our scheme in Kent and Cheshire are interim and we will be moving to assessing NSA and IROPI at scheme level in the future to improve the approach.

For additional information and guidance on District Level Licensing for great crested newts please visit

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-crested-newts-district-level-licensing-schemes>