



Land at Halsnead Garden Village Phase 3

Whiston, Knowsley

Appendix 7.3 - Amphibians

Prepared For: Taylor Wimpey

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1.0 Introduction

Project Context

- 1.1 The Environment Partnership (TEP) was commissioned by Taylor Wimpey in May 2024 to carry out amphibian surveys to support a planning application for a Proposed Development of the site known as Land at Halsnead Garden Village Phase 3 in Whiston, Knowsley (hereafter known as ‘the Site’).

Site Location & Context

- 1.2 The Site is centred at National Grid reference 347329 (Easting), 389861 (Northing) and is within the administrative area of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. It is bound to the north by Halsnead Caravan Park, beyond lies a field and the under construction Land south of Lickers Lane residential scheme (under planning application reference 20/00399/OUT). To the east, the Site is bound by the consented and under construction Fox’s Lane residential scheme under planning application reference 20/00417/FUL, beyond which lies Fox’s Bank Lane and Blundell’s Hill Golf Club. The M62 Motorway bounds the south of the Site, beyond which lies Symmetry Park. To the west, the Site is bound by an area of woodland (with an associated pond known as ‘Big Water’), beyond which lies the consented and under construction land north of M62 motorway residential scheme under planning application reference 18/00283/HYB, with Windy Arbor Road and the M62 Motorway further west.
- 1.3 The Site is a disused arable field, now consisting of tall ruderal growth and modified neutral grassland in the north. Treelines and scattered broadleaved trees are present along the south and western boundaries with an area of semi-natural broadleaved woodland present in the southwest of the Site.
- 1.4 The wider area beyond the Site is predominantly residential in nature, further characterised by pockets of woodland, industrial development, the local and strategic road network, and open fields.

Ecological Context

- 1.5 There are no ponds present within the Site. However, seven ponds were identified within 250m of the Site boundaries and a further eight ponds were identified within 500m.
- 1.6 A review of mapping and satellite imagery identified the terrestrial landscape around the Site comprises arable land and grassland within the Site itself, with woodland to the far

west and north, as well as residential development and a golf course further to the east. Barriers to amphibian dispersal within / into the Site boundaries include the M62 motorway which lies on the southern boundary of the Site.

Legal Protection

- 1.7 All British amphibian species receive legal protection in the United Kingdom though the degree to which different species are protected varies. Great crested newts (GCN) *Triturus cristatus*, natterjack toad *Epidalea calamita* and pool frog *Pelophylax lessonae* and their habitats (places used for breeding and shelter) receive the highest level of protection in the UK under the combination of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended. While natterjacks and pool frogs have restricted distributions within the UK, GCN are relatively widespread.
- 1.8 Licences to allow derogation from the protection afforded to GCN (and NT and PF) may be granted under the provisions of the 2017 Regulations.
- 1.9 Further information relating to legal protection afforded to native amphibian species is presented in Annex A.
- 1.10 GCN, natterjack and common toads and the pool frog are listed as Species of Principle Importance (SPI). Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 imposes a Duty upon public authorities to conserve biodiversity. Commonly referred to as the 'biodiversity duty', this includes local planning authorities in their decision making for planning applications or other plans or projects which may affect SPI.

Survey Rationale

Survey Guidance

- 1.11 Amphibian survey follows best practice and published guidance, including:
 - Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) Assessment (ARGUK, 2010)¹
 - Great crested newt mitigation guidelines (English Nature, 2001)²
 - Great crested newt conservation habitat (Froglife, 2001)³

¹ ARG UK Advice Note 5 (May 2010) Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index

² English Nature (2001) Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines (Version August 2001), English Nature, Peterborough

³ Langton, T.E.S., Beckett, C.L., and Foster, J.P. (2001), Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, Froglife, Halesworth

Survey Design and Scope

- 1.12 The surveys were designed to determine whether or not great crested newts (GCN) *Triturus cristatus* are present within the Site boundaries or in ponds within ranging distance of the Site.
- 1.13 Table 1 sets out the rationale for ponds with potential influence (500m) of the Site. The location of these ponds is shown at **Figure 7.2**

Table 1: Survey Rationale

Waterbody ID	Distance	Survey Rationale	Scoped In
P1	Within 500m	SUDs pond which was dry at the time of survey, likely to fluctuate as drainage pond and so unsuitable for amphibians.	No - Dry
P2	Within 250m	Dry, not suitable for survey	No - Dry
P5	Within 250m	Large fishing pond next to a caravan park.	Yes
P9	Within 500m	Commercial fishing pond, unlikely to be suitable for amphibians. Access not granted at the time of survey.	No – Unsuitable
P10	Within 250m	Linked to Pond 5 so only one eDNA kit required.	Yes (see P5 details)
P12	Within 250m	Dry, not suitable for survey	No - Dry
P13	Within 250m	Dry, not suitable for survey	No - Dry
P14	Within 500m	Permission to access for survey was refused by the landowner	No Access
P15	Within 250m	Wet ditch adjacent to the new residential development	Yes
P16	Within 250m	Medium sized pond at the entrance of the housing estate	Yes
P17	Within 250m	Shallow or dry, not suitable for survey	No - Dry

Waterbody ID	Distance	Survey Rationale	Scoped In
P18	Within 250m	Small pond which backs on to the caravan park	Yes
P19	Within 500m	Small sized pond with trees surrounding the whole perimeter.	Yes
P23	Within 500m	Medium fishing pond at the side of the road.	Yes
P24	Within 500m	No access permitted from landowner but assured that it was dry. Previous planning application on portal also found this pond to be dry and therefore unsuitable for survey	No access

- 1.14 Of the 15 ponds identified within the study area, P1, P2, P12, P13 and P17 were scoped out as they were dry at the time of survey. Pond P9 was scoped out as it comprises a commercial fishing pond and is considered unlikely to provide suitable habitat for amphibians. Ponds P14 and P24 were scoped out due to access constraints.
- 1.15 Six ponds within 500m of the Site were subject to habitat suitability assessment and presence/absence (eDNA) survey only, where suitable and where access was permitted.
- 1.16 It was found at the time of survey that ponds P5 and P10 are joined and so for the purposes of this assessment they have been combined and will be referred to as P5.

Surveyor Qualifications and Competency

- 1.17 Amphibian surveys were undertaken by TEP Ecologists in possession of a Natural England GCN survey licence, with relevant training and experience. Further confirmation of survey competency can be provided upon request.

2.0 Methods

Data Search

- 2.1 An ecological desk study was completed in August 2024 to identify pre-existing records for GCN and other protected or SPI amphibians within 2km of the Site. The desk study, reported under separate cover (**Appendix 7.1**), included a data request to Merseyside Biobank records centre.
- 2.2 The data search also included a review of citations and site forms (where available) for statutory and non-statutory designated sites within 2km of the proposed Site where amphibians were mentioned.
- 2.3 Additional data searches using Natural England's open datasets for granted protected species licences and Magic Maps great crested newt class licence returns and pond survey data to confirm the presence of amphibian species records within 2km from the Site boundary. In brief, these records included:
 - Licences granted by Natural England for GCN⁴
 - Nearest GCN pond/record(s) distance/direction;
 - Other GCN ponds/records; and
 - Other amphibians recorded.

Aquatic Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) Assessments

- 2.4 Aquatic HSI assessment was undertaken at a total of six ponds within 500m of the Site, where access had been granted. HSI assessments were completed on 18th June 2024.
- 2.5 HSI is a standard measure of calculating the suitability of a pond to support breeding great crested newts, based on an assessment of 10 characteristics (indices), including size, shading, depth, and vegetation profile. The assessment generates a number between 0 and 1 for each of the indices which are combined to provide an overall assessment of a pond's suitability to support GCN on a categorical scale, as presented in Table 2. The assessment has not been designed for or tested on other waterbodies such as ditches.

⁴ *Granted European Protected Species Applications* – updated 13 January 2022 [Accessed August 2024]

Table 2: HSI Suitability Scores

HSI Score	Suitability	Predicted GCN Occupancy of Ponds in each Category
<0.5	Poor	3%
0.5 to 0.59	Below Average	20%
0.6 to 0.69	Average	55%
0.7 to 0.79	Good	79%
>0.8	Excellent	93%

- 2.6 Ponds with a score of below average, average, good or excellent were subject to a full survey. All ponds assessed to have a 'poor' suitability were reviewed and where sufficient justification⁵ could be made, these ponds were scoped out of further surveys.

Egg Search

- 2.7 Egg searches were undertaken during the HSI surveys. Newts lay their eggs on the leaves of submerged (live or dead) vegetation, folding the vegetation over the egg to form a protective 'purse'. Aquatic vegetation was searched by walking or wading the shoreline of a waterbody and looking for the characteristic shape of folded leaves.
- 2.8 The presence of eggs confirms the waterbody as a breeding site. However, it is impossible to obtain any reliable population estimate on the basis of a newt egg count. Unwrapping eggs (to identify the species) increases larval failure rates; therefore, egg searching in any waterbody was ceased as soon as a GCN egg was found.

Environmental DNA (eDNA) Sampling

- 2.9 Environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling was undertaken at a total of six ponds within 500m of the Site, where access had been granted. eDNA sampling was completed on ponds P5, P15, P16, P18, P19 and P23.
- 2.10 Sample collection was undertaken by TEP licensed surveyors. Sample kits and analysis was provided by ADAS. Both organisations followed the relevant sections of the method set out in the DEFRA funded study endorsed by Natural England. In summary the sampling protocol is as follows:

⁵ Factors considered may include pond history, recent or current land uses, barriers, and other contextual factors in addition to the suitability indices assessed as part of the HSI.

- 20 samples were taken from around the entire perimeter of the waterbody.
- The surveyor stayed out of the water while taking the samples (extension poles were used in situations where open/sufficiently deep water was at a distance from the dry banks.
- Survey locations were distributed around the pond perimeter, but micro-siting was used to select locations most likely to be used by GCN.
- At each sample location the water column was stirred prior to taking the sample but care was taken to avoid disturbing the sediment on the base of the pond.
- Once all 20 samples were taken, 15ml of the total sample were pipetted into each of the 6 sampling tubes, whilst ensuring that the water in the sample bag was mixed before taking each 15ml sample and that only one sample tube was opened at any one time.
- At all times the surveyor ensured that the risk of contaminating the sampling equipment was minimised by avoiding the placement of the ladle or pipette on the ground or on any otherwise potentially contaminated surfaces and by changing gloves between the initial sampling stage and the pipetting stages of the method.

Chain of Custody

- 2.11 On receipt from ADAS the sampling kits were registered on a central database using the unique bar codes. Immediately prior to survey, sampling kits were issued to surveyors with individual Sample Forms using the unique bar code as identification. The site name and date of issue was also recorded on this form (and on the central database). Once in the field and at the ponds, the surveyor confirmed that the appropriate field survey sheet was being completed by checking the bar code on the box and double checking the corresponding bar codes on the sample tubes. The surveyor then filled in the date of survey and the pond ID number (as well as other information relating to survey conditions) on the Sample Form.
- 2.12 On returning to the office the Sample Forms were signed to confirm for each sample who received the samples and checked them into the fridge and the temperature of the fridge. The pond IDs on each form were checked against a site map confirming which ponds had been sampled and this map was stored with the Sample Forms. All this information was also recorded on the central database. The sample preserving tubes were stored in a fridge until the morning of collection by the courier. The Sample Forms and the central database were updated to confirm the date of collection by the courier.
- 2.13 The unique bar codes were used by ADAS to report results. All results were recorded in the central database by one member of staff and cross checked by a second member of staff before issuing to the project leader for review.

Survey Limitations

- 2.14 Access was only taken where it was safe to do so. Estimates of the percentage of shoreline of each waterbody surveyed and other factors affecting torching were recorded where access was not possible around the entire water (refer to Table 3).
- 2.15 The results obtained are considered to show an accurate overview of the amphibian populations within the surveyed ponds.
- 2.16 Further information relating to factors which influence survey effectiveness is detailed in Annex A.

Survey Method Summary

- 2.17 An overview of the survey methods employed at each pond and dates of surveys is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Survey Method Summary

Waterbody ID	Zone	HSI	eDNA	Egg Search
		Date	Date	Dates
P5	<250m	18/06/24	18/06/24	18/06/24
P15	<500m	18/06/24	18/06/24	18/06/24
P16	<500m	18/06/24	18/06/24	18/06/24
P18	<250m	18/06/24	18/06/24	18/06/24
P19	<500m	18/06/24	18/06/24	18/06/24
P23	<500m	18/06/24	18/06/24	18/06/24

3.0 Results

Desk Study

- 3.1 The desk study confirmed habitats within, adjacent, and linking to the Site have the potential to support amphibians.
- 3.2 Data searches using Merseyside Biobank records centre, Natural England's open datasets for granted protected species licences, Magic Maps great crested newt class licence returns and pond survey data confirmed the presence of amphibian species records within 2km from the Scheme boundary. In brief, these records included:
- 7 records of GCN all of which are present south of the M62, which acts as a barrier for amphibian movement to the site.
 - Records of other amphibians within 2km of the site with no barriers for movement; common toad (9).
 - No records for granted species licences, class licence returns or pond survey data was returned within 2km.

HSI Survey

- 3.3 Detailed results of the pond surveys are presented in Appendix B. Table 4 summarises the HSI result recorded at ponds within 500m of the Site that were subject to survey.

eDNA Survey

- 3.4 Detailed results of the pond surveys are presented in Annex B. Pond survey results are illustrated on the pond survey results plan (**Figure 7.2**).
- 3.5 Table 4 summarises the eDNA result recorded at ponds within 500m of the Site that were subject to survey.

Table 4: Amphibian Results Summary

Waterbody ID	HSI Result	eDNA Result	Score (/12)
P5	Poor	Negative	0
P15	Good	Negative	0
P16	Average	Negative	0
P18	Poor	Negative	0
P19	Poor	Negative	0
P23	Poor	Negative	0

4.0 Evaluation

Aquatic Habitats

- 4.1 Aquatic habitat suitability was assessed applying the HSI method. Across all ponds assessed, HSI categories ranged from poor to good. While it is unlikely GCN breeding would be supported in ponds with poor suitability, this does not preclude GCN presence, or presence of other amphibians or aquatic species of note.
- 4.2 Of the six ponds accessed within 500m of the Site, two were found to be suitable for GCN breeding (below average HSI category or better). This broadly is 30% of the available aquatic habitat within the survey area.

Terrestrial Habitats

- 4.3 It is not possible to quantitatively score habitat quality, as this depends on the complexity, connectivity, and type of vegetation present between waterbodies, as well as the vegetation and water quality in the waterbodies themselves.
- 4.4 The terrestrial habitats are mapped in the habitat survey (**Figure 7.1**) and illustrated in the photographs in Table A.1: Pond Descriptions.
- 4.5 The terrestrial habitat quality is considered suitable for amphibians. Most ponds are surrounded by trees, saplings and some scrub, however some ponds have little bank vegetation due to waterfowl present.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 15 ponds formed the basis of the initial assessment, with no ponds located within the Site boundary, seven ponds present within 250m of the boundary and a further eight ponds within 250m to 500m of the Site boundary. Access was not granted to three ponds. Of the remaining 12 ponds, six (P5 and P10 forming a single pond due to connectivity) were subject to HSI assessment and sampled for GCN eDNA. The remaining five ponds were dry.
- 5.2 Out of the six ponds sampled, all tested negative for GCN eDNA. No further GCN surveys are required at this time.
- 5.3 GCN survey data are valid for a minimum of two seasons, potentially up to four seasons depending on the specific use of the data, local conditions and the potential impact predicted on GCN. When survey data become greater than two seasons old, advice should be sought from an appropriately experienced ecologist as to whether repeat surveys may be needed.

Annex A: Legal and National Policy Context

Annex A: Legal and National Planning Context

Disclaimer: This is a guide to legislation and procedure relating to biodiversity in England. It is general guidance, and it does not give specific advice in relation to any site, species, or project. It represents an interpretation of legislation and procedure as of July 2024. Readers should note that legislation and procedure changes continually and is interpreted on a case-specific basis. Nothing in this Annex should be construed as an offer of advice or legal opinion.

All British amphibian species receive legal protection in the United Kingdom though the degree to which different species are protected varies.

Great crested newts (GCN) *Triturus cristatus* and natterjack toads *Epidalea calamita* and their habitats (aquatic and terrestrial) are afforded full protection by a combination of national legislation.

They are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and under Schedule 2 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is the domestic implementation of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the Bern Convention) which was amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

In brief, this legislation makes it an offence to:

- deliberately capture, kill, disturb, or injure these species;
- damage or destroy a breeding or resting place of these species;
- deliberately or recklessly obstruct access to resting or sheltering places of these species (deliberately or by not taking enough care);
- possessing, selling, controlling, or transporting live or dead specimens of these species, or parts of them; or
- take eggs of these species.

This Act is the domestic implementation of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the Bern Convention). The Act has been amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 2017 Regulations), as amended.

The other more widespread British amphibians - common frog *Rana temporaria*, common toad *Bufo bufo*, smooth newt *Triturus vulgaris* and palmate newt *Triturus helveticus* - are not subject to such strict legal protection. These species are protected only against sale (Section 9(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981).

In all cases, the legislation applies to all life stages including spawn, eggs, juveniles, and adults.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 imposes a Duty upon public authorities to conserve biodiversity. Specifically, this Act states that *‘Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.’* Section 41 (S41) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The S41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional planning authorities, in implementing their ‘biodiversity duty’ imposed under Section 40.

Current amphibian species recorded on the list include GCN and common toad. Presence of S41 listed species, referred to as Species of Principal Importance (SPI) within influence of the Scheme may be considered by the planning authority as a material consideration, irrespective of the level of legal protection afforded to the SPI.

Annex B: Detailed Survey Tables

Detailed Survey Tables

Table A.1: Pond Descriptions

Waterbody ID	Grid ref (NGR)	Photo	Description
P5	SJ 46919 89841		Large fishing pond (Big Water) next to a caravan park. Lots of fish & waterfowl present. Water very disturbed due to this with water algae present. Water is shaded in parts with good terrestrial habitat present.
P15	SJ 47695 90031		Long slim shaped pond on the edge of a housing estate trees surrounding the pond making it shaded in parts. Water quality is poor with no pond vegetation. Some terrestrial foraging habitat present.

Waterbody ID	Grid ref (NGR)	Photo	Description
P16	SJ 47808 90032		Medium sized pond at the entrance of the housing estate. Reeds and rushes surround the pond making it good terrestrial habitat. Some invertebrates present within the water however lacking submerged plants.
P18	SJ 47433 90057		Small pond which backs on to a caravan park. With trees around the perimeter making it shaded. Water quality is poor with little invertebrates present.

Waterbody ID	Grid ref (NGR)	Photo	Description
P19	SJ 47745 90082		Small sized pond with trees surrounding the whole perimeter, tree saplings present within the water. No vegetation or inverts present water looking polluted.
P23	SJ 46920 90326		Medium fishing pond at the side of the road. Not likely to dry out due to size. Good water quality with lots of fish present. Terrestrial habitat is poor for amphibians due to lack of vegetation for shelter and public access.

Table A.2: HSI Assessment Results

Waterbody ID	SI1	SI2	SI3	SI4	SI5	SI6	SI7	SI8	SI9	SI10	HSI	
	Location	Area	Permanence	Water Quality	Shade	Waterfowl	Fish	Density	Terrestrial Habitats	Macrophyte Cover	Overall Score	Suitability Category
P5	A	>2000	Never	Good	80	Major	Major	>12	Good	50	0.36	Poor
P15	A	200	Rarely	Poor	50	Absent	Absent	>12	Moderate	15	0.72	Good

Waterbody ID	SI1 Location	SI2 Area	SI3 Permanence	SI4 Water Quality	SI5 Shade	SI6 Waterfowl	SI7 Fish	SI8 Density	SI9 Terrestrial Habitats	SI10 Macrophyte Cover	HSI	
											Overall Score	Suitability Category
P16	A	100	Never	Moderate	5	Minor	Absent	>12	Poor	0	0.62	Average
P18	A	150	Rarely	Poor	90	Major	Possible	>12	Poor	10	0.36	Poor
P19	A	100	Rarely	Bad	90	Absent	Absent	>12	Poor	0	0.39	Poor
P23	A	1500	Never	Good	40	Minor	Major	>12	Poor	0	0.47	Poor

Table A.3: Ponds found to be dry at the time of survey

Waterbody ID	Grid ref (NGR) and comments	Photo
P2	SJ 46913 89731 Dry ditch, likely to be overflow from Pond 5 if required.	

Waterbody ID	Grid ref (NGR) and comments	Photo
P12	SJ 46969 90006 Small pond within woodland, looks to have been dry for some time	
P13	SJ 47645 90039 Ditch adjacent to Fox's Clump woodland, dry for some time, likely to fill in case of heavy rainfall only	

Waterbody ID	Grid ref (NGR) and comments	Photo
P17	SJ 47049 90074 Ditch within woodland, access at a few points and water was either too shallow or dry and so unsuitable for survey	

Drawings

Figure 7.2 - Pond Locations and Survey Summary

Figure 7.1 - Habitat Survey



KEY

Site boundary

Site boundary - 250m buffer

Site boundary - 500m buffer

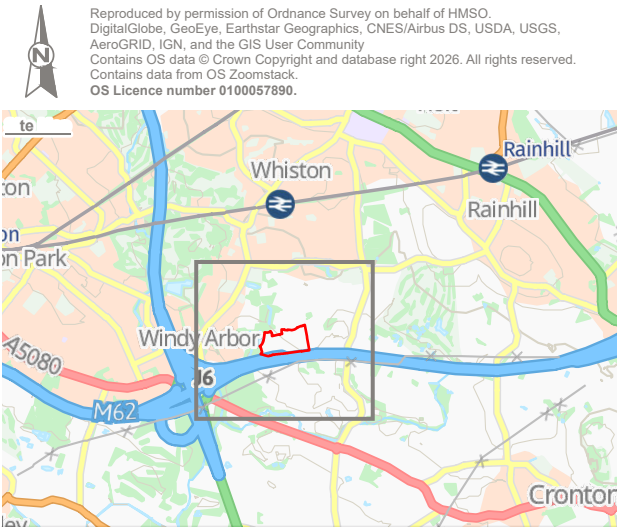
Great Crested Newt Survey

Pond with negative great crested newt result

Pond not suitable for survey - dry

No access acquired

Note:
The locations of habitats and habitat features are indicative.



Rev	Description	Drawn	Approved	Date

TEP

THE ENVIRONMENT PARTNERSHIP

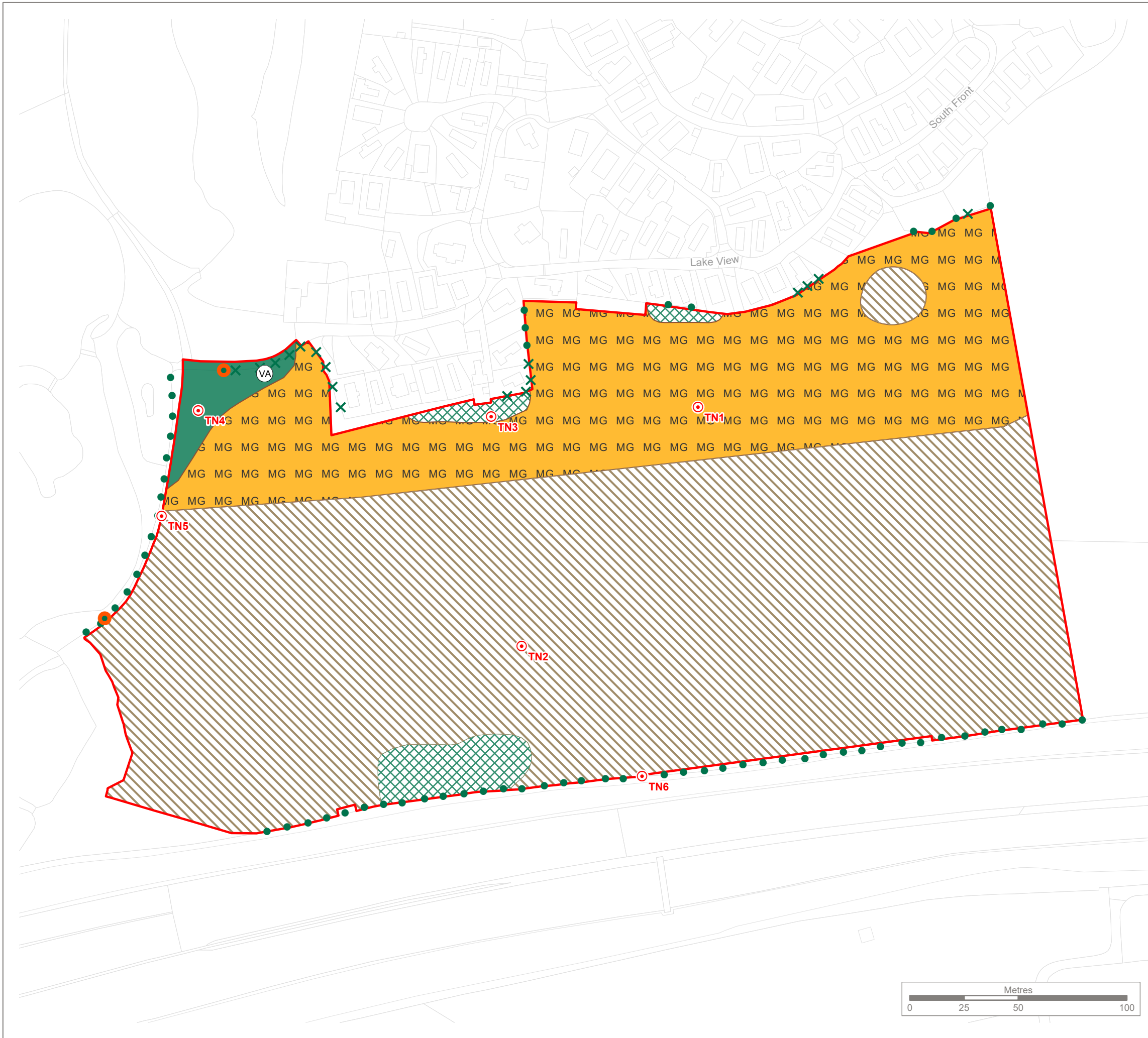
401 Faraday Street, Birchwood Park, Warrington, WA3 6GA
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Project
Halshead Phase 3

Title
Figure 7.2. Pond Location Plan and eDNA Results - Phase 3

Drawing Number
G10586.018

Drawn	Checked	Approved	Scale	Date
MW	OH	EH	1:5,500 @ A3	02/02/2026



KEY

- Site boundary
- Target note
- Variegated Yellow Archangel
- Scattered scrub
- Scattered broad-leaved tree
- PRF-M: Tree with potential roost feature suitable for multiple bats
- Semi-natural broad-leaved woodland
- Dense/continuous scrub
- Modified neutral grassland
- Tall ruderal

Note:
The locations of habitats and habitat features are indicative.



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A	Site boundary change	MW	EH	30/01/2026
Rev	Description	Drawn	Approved	Date



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Project
Halsnead Phase 3

Title
Figure 7.1 Phase 1 Habitat Survey - Phase 3

Drawing Number
G10586.004A

Drawn	Checked	Approved	Scale	Date
ET	OH	EH	1:1,750 @ A3	02/02/2026



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