

New funds to create new ponds in the South Midlands

Habitat creation scheme for Great Crested Newts - factsheet for landowners and land managers



District Licensing for newts – how does it work? From February 2018, developers in the South Midlands (see map overleaf) will be able to speed up the planning application process and save money by choosing to pay into a Great Crested Newt compensation fund, rather than going through the normal lengthy processes of newt surveys and mitigation. This is part of a new Government-approved approach to the conservation of Great Crested Newts called District Licensing.

A new organisation, the **South Midlands Newt Conservation Partnership (SMNCP)**, will use the funds from developers to create and manage high quality habitat for Great Crested Newts, including both ponds and terrestrial habitat. Landowners will receive an **annual payment** to maintain the ponds and the terrestrial habitat (the 'compensation sites') in the long-term. For further information about the whole scheme, visit Naturespace here: www.naturespaceuk.com. **SMNCP is now looking for newt compensation sites across the South Midlands.**

What kind of compensation sites? Sites which already have newts nearby (within 500m) are best, but good sites without newts could be used to receive animals moved from development areas. New ponds should have an unpolluted water source, be fish free, and 400-800 m² in surface area. We can also restore 'lost' ponds, or manage existing ponds to make them better for newts, for example by managing trees, removing fish or reprofiling margins.

The habitat around the ponds will need to be suitable for newts. Good newt habitat includes woodland, scrub or rough grassland. A good hedge network is also important to allow newts to move about the landscape. SMNCP can fund the creation of these habitats, and their management in the long term, as part of the scheme. **Good locations for compensation sites include wet areas on heavy clay land - often poor for farming.**

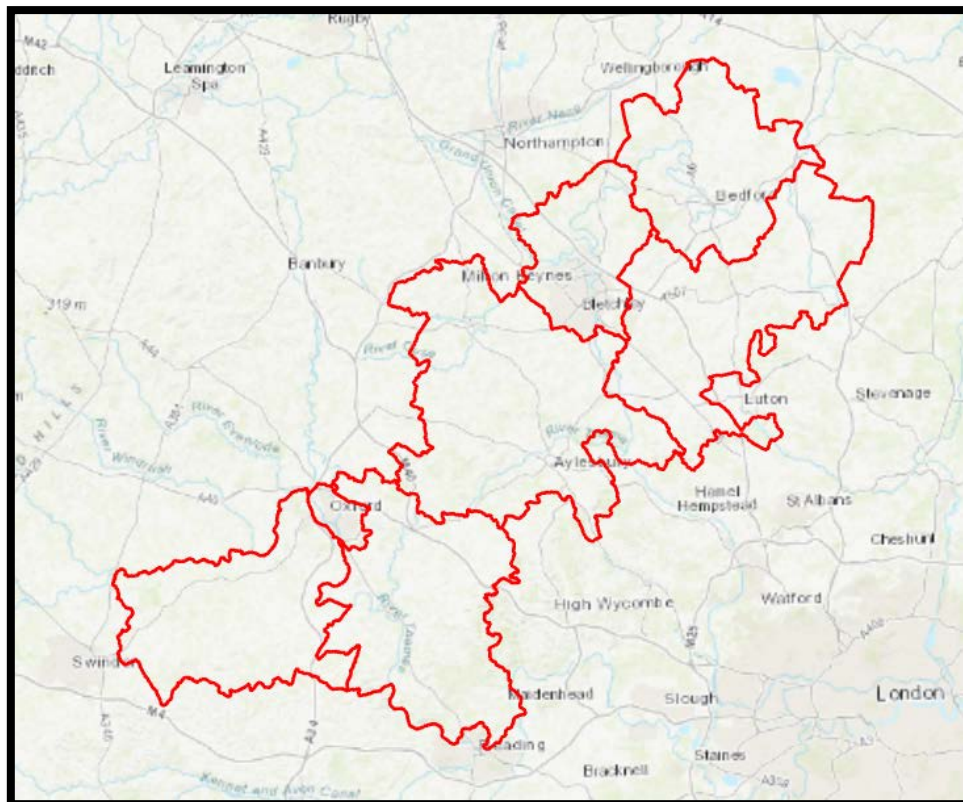
Who pays for habitat creation and management, and site management in the longer term? All the costs of habitat creation and management will be fully funded by SMNCP. Participating landowners will need to sign a 5-year rolling management agreement, for up to a 25-year period. The agreement will set out **annual payments to compensate for any income lost and to cover management costs**. The rate of annual payments to landowners is decided on a site by site basis. SMNCP staff will visit the site once a year for monitoring, and to assess the need for management.

What if you don't want the ponds anymore after they are created? The agreement between landowners and SMNCP is **reviewed every 5 years**, at which time landowners can opt out of the scheme completely.

What if you want to sell the land where ponds have been created or managed? There is **no restriction** on selling land including newt compensation sites as long as the buyer takes on the scheme for the remaining period of the agreement. If this is not the case, then the annual fee paid so far under the 5-year agreement may need reimbursing.

Will the presence of Great Crested Newts affect farming or other activities on your landholding as a whole? No. The purpose of this new approach is to ensure that newts are thriving across the South Midlands as a whole, and unnecessary bureaucratic restrictions are reduced. A thriving population of Great Crested Newts will be viewed as a positive sign of successful land management.

If you would like further information or to discuss a potential compensation site, please email info@newtpartnership.org.uk



The District Licencing area in the South Midlands includes: Aylesbury, Bedford Borough, Bedford Central, Milton Keynes, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire District Council, and Vale of White Horse District Council