

## Check land for pond life before you buy

Sir, Despite its diminutive size, the great crested newt causes a significant amount of disruption to developers and projects across the country (professional, 25.01.13).

Although widely distributed across Europe, with an estimated UK population of 400,000, the species is protected by UK and European law as numbers are thought to have declined significantly over recent decades, largely because of loss of habitat and breeding ponds.

Recent examples of the impact of newt populations on developments include the £1.1m "newt superhighway" tunnels being built under a dual carriageway in Peterborough, a nine-month delay caused to works to repair flood banks protecting 1,500 homes in Doncaster, and a similar delay to completion of a Northamptonshire primary school.

Most recently, amorous newts have delayed the £90m Monks Cross



shopping centre in York.

Although the Peterborough project aims to safeguard an estimated population of more than 30,000 newts, Monks Cross had an initial population of just nine.

Developer Oakgate was granted a licence to translocate the animals in August 2012, but the wet summer caused numbers to jump to around 300 by the autumn, meaning the rehoming was incomplete before the newts hibernated for the winter, and must now be completed in the spring.

Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, it is

illegal to disturb, capture or kill European protected species. It is also an offence to damage or destroy their habitats or breeding sites.

All works that affect populations of protected species require a licence, and for newts, the situation is further complicated as surveys and trapping must be timed appropriately, avoiding the hibernation period.

The presence of newts is a factor that planning authorities are required to consider in determining applications, and mitigation of development impacts on newt populations may be included in section 106 agreements or planning conditions.

With 2,358 licence applications recorded in 2011/12, the issue is of concern to many, and we would advise developers to check for newts as early as possible, and preferably before land purchase.

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