**Don’t ‘Victimise’ the Newts - We Need Nature!**

**Sussex Charities Stand up for Protected Amphibian**

**Crested Newts are not to blame for house building delays and they deserve our protection, say countryside campaigners.**

This week the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson blamed ‘newt-counting delays in our system’ for ‘a massive drag on the productivity.’

His words were reminiscent of a speech made in the House of Lords by Mayfield Market Towns Director, Lord Jamie Borwick, who wants to build 7,000 new homes in Horsham district, near Henfield.

Lord Borwick called the newts ‘awful amphibians’ and accused objectors of ‘transporting them to controversial sites’ to delay development.’

However, CPRE Sussex Director, Kia Trainor says the newts are being unfairly used as a scapegoat for delays, and that we need Nature now, more than ever before.

‘The experience of lockdown has highlighted the importance of the natural world and the real value of publicly accessible green space,’ she says. ‘We must learn from the mistakes of the past and build with more biodiversity not less.’

‘Newts are being unfairly targeted anyway, there are loads of development sites across Sussex where there are no newts but the work has been at a standstill for years.’

One typical example is a brown field site in Court Road, Lewes, which is within South Downs National Park. The land has had full planning permission since 2016 and yet no building works have begun and the site appears abandoned (see attached photo).

‘It’s been over three and a half years and nothing has been developed here,’ says Vic Ient who is Policy Officer of the South Downs Society. ‘The government should be made aware of such cases and then perhaps then they wouldn't victimise our ever diminishing wildlife species’.

‘It's ridiculous that the government is using the excuse of wildlife stopping development – and now it's the turn of the poor old newts. The real problem is that developers are picking and choosing what they build and when they build it.’

Sussex Wildlife Trust Conservation Officer, Jess Price says the newts are often singled out because they have a high level of protection through the Habitats Directive.

‘The Great Crested Newt is a declining species across Europe that as a nation we all have a responsibility to protect,’ she explains. ‘Sadly ecological considerations usually make up a tiny fraction of a development budget and biodiversity is often the last thing considered.’

‘The reality is that conserving newts or ‘newt counting’ as Boris Johnson called it, rarely delays development and usually has huge benefits for other wildlife and people. Who wants to live in a concrete jungle?’

‘By conserving areas for newts within developments you also get areas of natural green space for people and other wildlife too.’

Ecologists surveying the site near Henfield where Lord Borwick wants to build his new settlement found the area supports a rare metapopulation of Great Crested Newts.

‘This landscape, with its abundant suitable habitat and connectivity between the ponds and wet ditches, may prove to support one of the best-known central Sussex populations.’ Says Wildlife Splash’s Jackie Thompson.

**Notes for Editors:**

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\*The Government’s own review on the implementation of the Habitats Directive in 2012 concluded that ‘*It was clear from the wide range of evidence and views submitted in the course of the Review that in the large majority of cases the implementation of the Directives is working well, allowing both development of key infrastructure and ensuring that a high level of environmental protection is maintained*’.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-build-out-final-report>

<https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/responding-to-new-deal-we-share-our-manifesto/>

**For more information please contact:**

Kia Trainor, Director, CPRE Sussex: 07964 894333

Vic Ient, Policy Officer of the South Downs Society: 07788720929