

Armed forces to defend newts – with 21 ponds

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PLANS to create a newts' paradise as part of the planned £12bn Defence Technical College look set to be approved tomorrow.

The future of the great crested newt is under threat in Britain and a colony of the creatures has been discovered on the site for the massive Defence Technical College at the former RAF St Athan site.

But the Ministry of Defence is determined to live up to its name and defend the amphibians, submitting plans for a "necklace" of 21 ponds around the development site where the great crested newts can exist unmolested.

The scheme will be put before Vale of Glamorgan councillors tomorrow.

The scheme submitted by the site's developers is part of an environmental protection plan included in the college development, which includes five bat houses.

The 24 habitats comprise land at and next to the proposed college site, including land at Picketston, Castleton and Batslays Farm. Land will also be set aside for nature conservation.

The Countryside Council for Wales has raised no objections to the plan.

Peter Hill, conservation officer for South and West Wales Amphibian and Reptile Group, said: "The great crested newt has very specific habitat requirements.

"In other words, it is a good deal fussier about where it lives than the other two British species of newt.

"The specific habitat niche that the great crested newt naturally occupies also supports a remarkable diversity of plant and invertebrate life that is integral to the eco system or bigger ecological picture.

"So, if you look after the great crested newt and its habitat, you also look after a good deal else in the process."

In his report to tomorrow's meeting of the Vale planning committee, chief planner Rob Thomas said: "The importance of ecological mitigation, especially on protected species, has been recognised since an early stage of the development.

"The 21 ponds proposed by this application are intended to create a 'necklace' of additional breeding ponds around the outer peripheral areas of the site as part of the overall ecological mitigation strategy."

He recommends approval of the scheme.



The Great Crested Newt is found across Europe and parts of Asia.

It is the biggest and least common of the three newts found in the British Isles and is one of only three amphibians which are protected by the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Since the 1940s, populations of Great Crested Newts have declined in most of Europe due to loss of habitat. It is a protected species under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is also a European Protected Species.

In Britain, the habitat of the Great Crested Newt has diminished due to land development pressure from population growth.

Great Crested Newts normally live on land but breed in ponds and pools.



Great Crested Newt