

ACO Climate Tunnel guides the way on new £10m business park

ACO provides Wildlife solution to Staffordshire County Council development



ACO WILDLIFE: CLIMATE TUNNEL AND ENTRANCE

When Staffordshire County Council began the development of a new £10m business park, the last thing it expected to find was a population of one of Europe's protected amphibious species. In order to carry on the project without impacting the area's biodiversity, the council turned to wildlife experts, ACO, to deliver an eco-friendly solution.

With a view to boosting the local economy and creating over 2,500 jobs, Staffordshire County Council identified a suitable site off the A43 just north of Stafford, to form a new enterprise hub for businesses in the research and technology sector.

However, during the development stage it emerged that a small part of the proposed site was home to a population of Great Crested Newts, a species which – along with their eggs, breeding sites and resting places – is protected under European law.

Staffordshire County Council has always been committed to protecting its natural environment and providing increasing biodiversity – with a wide programme of sustainable development taking place across the county. With natural habitats – especially for amphibians – decreasing over the past few decades, the council was determined to find a solution that would protect the remaining habitats and safeguard the species' survival in the locality.

Newt populations are dependent on the ability to travel between closely located ponds, linked by a suitable land habitat. Government guidance outlines that any building work which disconnects or isolates habitats by splitting them can cause great harm to Great Crested Newt populations. Obstructing access to sheltering or resting places can also result in unlimited fines or even prison sentences to offending developers.



In order to deliver a system that balanced the needs of the amphibians with the functionality of necessary road access to site, Greg Watkins, a Project Engineer for Staffordshire County Council, approached ACO about its wildlife-specific 'Climate Tunnels'.

The Climate Tunnel system is an enclosed series of polymer concrete tunnels which can be installed to sit flush with the road surface, to allow amphibians safe passage across potential 'risk' areas, such as roads and footpaths. What's more, in order to create the right climate for the amphibians, slots are included at the top of the tunnels to equalise ambient conditions between the tunnel and open air. This allows for consistent ventilation and a humid environment favoured by amphibians, and also eliminates the problem of the tunnels drying out and dehydrating the amphibians, which can occur with other tunnel systems.

The system provided the ideal solution for Staffordshire County Council as they could strategically locate the Climate Tunnels at known amphibian crossing points, so as not to disturb

their migratory routes. The tunnels would then provide a permanent road crossing solution, in line with the legislation and guidelines in place to protect the Great Crested Newt.

As ACO's Climate Tunnels could sit flush with the road surface, the council's contractors only needed to undertake minimal excavation to install the system. The system is manufactured using extremely tough polymer concrete material, which has been tested to withstand loads of 400kN and certified to Load Class D 400, to ensure it is safe for traffic to pass over it. What's more, it avoids the use of any metal components, eliminating the possibility of disorientating the amphibians with magnetic fields. The material itself is non-absorbent, with minimal thermal conductivity making the crossing more comfortable for amphibians.

Commenting on the use of ACO's Climate Tunnels at the site, Cllr Mark Winnington, Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Transport at Staffordshire County Council said: "When we discovered Great Crested Newts on our new multi-million pound Redhill Employment Site,

we knew we needed to find a solution to ensure their protection. After looking around at the products on offer, ACO's Climate Tunnels were chosen, as they offered a discreet option that was animal-friendly. The on-going support from ACO's technical team was also an added benefit."

Regarding the Climate Tunnels, Philip Windus, ACO Wildlife Product Manager, added: "Our Climate Tunnels are an ideal option for projects where the protection of amphibians and small animals is a paramount concern. Specifiers of the system are offered a range of options which can be tailored towards individual site requirements."

Staffordshire County Council are monitoring the use of the ACO Climate Tunnels by Great Crested Newts, along with Froglife, the national amphibian conservation organisation. Early results are encouraging, with four species of amphibian using the tunnels along with a variety of other wildlife.

For more information on ACO Wildlife's range of products, visit www.aco.co.uk/wildlife



Guide Wall front view showing anti-climbing barriers



Guide Wall rear view showing wall support



Slotted Climate Tunnel for installation flush with road surface



Climate Tunnel Entrance

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