

Our ref: P23-415 Hinckley 33kV Solar Park Report

Your ref:

19 June 2023

Kayleigh Leach  
National Grid  
Toll End Road  
Tipton  
DY4 0HH

BY EMAIL ONLY: kleach@nationalgrid.co.uk

Dear Kayleigh

**Re: Hinckley 33kV Solar Farm POC, LE9 8FT – Ecology Report**

It is understood that National Grid need to carry out works to connect a proposed new solar farm<sup>1</sup> to the grid at a site off Chapel Street, north of Barwell, Leicestershire, LE9 8FT.

It is understood from you that the proposals involve the installation of five new poles off an existing double pole to form a new tee-off from an existing 33kV line. The location of these works is at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference (OSGR) SP4451 9828. The location and scope of these works is shown on a plan attached to this letter. Access to the location of the works will be off Chapel Street through the proposed solar farm. A 4 by 4 lorry will be used to undertake the works, which will involve boring a 500 mm hole for each of the new poles.

I undertook a walkover survey of the area of proposed works on 17 May 2023. The weather was warm and dry with a light breeze. The walkover focussed on identifying evidence of invasive and protected species, on evaluating habitats that could be used by any protected species, and on identifying features or areas of habitat that may be of ecological value. The aim was to determine if there are any potential ecological constraints that would need to be considered in advance of the proposed works.

In addition to the walkover survey MAGIC<sup>2</sup> was reviewed for the presence of statutorily designated sites within a 2 km radius of the proposed works and their associated Impact Risk Zones (IRZ), to identify granted bat and great crested newt European Protected Species (EPS) licences and great crested newt licence return data, within 2 km of the proposed development site. Also, as part of the desk study, the ecology reports<sup>3</sup> produced by Midland Ecology for the solar scheme (planning reference 19/01379/FUL & 22/01217/DISCON) that are available on the Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council planning portal, and the consultee response from the County Ecologist dated 20 January 2020 were reviewed for relevant information.

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<sup>1</sup> Planning application (19/01379/FUL) submitted to Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council on 10/12/2019 for the "construction of a 32 hectare solar farm to include the installation of solar panels to generate electricity with access from A447 Ashby Road and associated substation building, switchgear building, inverter cabins, telecommunications mast, storage/communications building, battery containers, access tracks, fencing, gates, CCTV and landscaping", planning decision made on 22/10/2020.

<sup>2</sup> Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside.

<sup>3</sup> Ecological Impact Assessment, 2019; Great Crested Newt Report, 2019 and Badger Survey Report, December 2022.

## Desk Study

### Statutory designated sites

- There are no statutory designated sites of nature conservation interest within 2 km of the proposed development.
- The proposed development site is located within the Impact Risk Zone of four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The proposed development type does not fall into any of the categories for which the local planning authority may need to consider the risk of any effects to the SSSIs that would require formal consultation with Natural England.
- Given the geographical separation of the proposed development site from the SSSIs and the nature of the proposed development, no direct or indirect impacts on these SSSIs are anticipated. Statutory designated sites are not considered any further within this letter report.

### Non-statutory designated sites

- The Midland Ecology Report has identified two non-statutory, Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), within 2 km of the proposed development site. These LWS are Brockey Farm, a grassland site, and Kirkby Mallory, a woodland site, located 325 m and 470 m respectively from the proposed development site. Given the geographical separation of the proposed development site from the LWS, and the nature of the proposed development, no direct or indirect impacts are anticipated. Non-statutory designated sites are not considered any further within this letter report.

### EPS Licences

- There are no EPS Natural England Bat Licences within 2 km of the proposed development site.
- There is one EPS Natural England Great Crested Newt Licence (2018-36734\_EPS-MIT) within 2 km of the proposed development site, at a location 1.45 km to the east.

### Badger

Three badger sett entrances were identified on the southern boundary of the proposed solar farm. All were considered to be inactive based on survey work undertaken by Midland Ecology in December 2022. The proposed development is located 70 m from the nearest recorded sett entrance.

### Great crested newt

From a review of MAGIC, we have identified three ponds within 500 m of the proposed development site. One of these ponds, referred to as Pond 2 (OSGR SP 4458 9830) in the Midland Ecology Great Crested Newt Report, is located 82 m to the north-east of the proposed development site. This was assessed by Midland Ecology as being of “poor” suitability to support great crested newt. The other two ponds identified within 500 m of the proposed development site have been identified on MAGIC in a garden and field. They are located at OSGR SP 4479 9819 and SP 4421 9809, 311 m and 321 m respectively from the proposed development site. None of these ponds was surveyed as part of the work undertaken by BSG Ecology. as part of this survey work.

## Field Survey

### Habitats (Refer to Photographs 1 to 4)

The proposed development site and location of the proposed works are located partially within an area of set-aside located in the corner of an arable field and in the arable crop. The area of set-aside appears quite damp and species within this area include creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, cock's foot

*Dactylis glomerata*, hairy willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, field horsetail *Equisetum arvense* and dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* agg. The boundaries of the field are formed by hedgerows with mature trees. It is understood that the hedgerows will not be affected by the proposed development.

No invasive, non-native species were recorded during the survey.

#### Protected Species

- No evidence of badger was recorded within the proposed development site or within 30 m of the proposed development site. The proposed development is not anticipated to result in an impact on badger. No further recommendations or mitigation measures are recommended.
- No structures or trees are present within the proposed development site that could support roosting bats. Roosting bats are not considered to be a constraint to the proposed development. No further recommendations or mitigation measures are recommended.
- The proposed development site does not contain suitable habitat that is likely to support breeding birds, including ground nesting birds, due to the lack of suitable vegetation, such as trees and scrub, and the presence of the over-head power lines that would deter ground nesting species. An impact on nesting birds is considered to be highly unlikely, and as such no further recommendations or mitigation measures are recommended.
- The proposed development site does not contain optimum habitat to support reptiles. The presence of reptiles in the area of works is considered to be unlikely. No further recommendations or mitigation measures are recommended.
- The pond closest to the proposed development site (Pond 2) has been assessed by Midland Ecology to have “poor” suitability to support great crested newt. The other two ponds are located beyond 250 m from the proposed development site at, 311 m and 321 m respectively. The nearest known records of great crested newt are for locations over 1 km from the east and west of the proposed development site. The habitat to be affected by the proposed development (arable and set-aside) is considered to be sub-optimal to support great crested newt due to the lack of shelter and refuge opportunities. The likelihood of great crested newt being present within the proposed development site and affected by the works is considered to be negligible. No further recommendations or mitigation measures are recommended.

#### Conclusions and Recommendations

No further ecology survey work is recommended in advance of the proposed works, and the works are not considered to require an ecological watching brief.

The desk based study and walkover survey did not identify any ecology constraints associated with the proposals. No ecological impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed development.

Yours sincerely

*Katy Stiles*

Katy Stiles

Principal Ecologist

For and on behalf of BSG Ecology

***Photograph 1: View of the existing pole where works are proposed***



***Photograph 2: View of set-aside to the east of the proposed works***



***Photograph 3: View of the set-aside***



***Photograph 4: View of the arable farmland***

