
From:
Sent: 22 November 2021 08:45
To:
Cc:
Subject: SMD/2021/0682 Land at Tickhill Lane
Attachments: EIA_Screening_Matrix Land at Tickhill Lane, Sheepwash 22 Nov 21.docx

Ref number SMD/2021/0682

Application Location Land at Tickhill Lane, Sheepwash, Caverswall, Staffordshire, ST10 2PX

Application description Screening opinion for a photovoltaic park

Site size 75 hectares (approximately)

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been asked to review the above application as part of a service level agreement with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to provide ecology advice regarding planning and development management functions.

SUMMARY – The development may require an EIA due to the potential cumulative impact to farmland priority birds - see attached screening matrix.

However, there are ecological considerations that need to be addressed regardless of whether an EIA is required.

If an EIA is not required, the following requirements will still apply:

- Consult Forestry Commission - development within 500 m of ancient woodland.
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the proposed sites and surrounding habitats where potentially affected, including existing and potential Local Wildlife Sites, irreplaceable and priority habitats.
 - o Any additional phase 2 surveys identified by the initial PEA.
 - o Any other requirements identified e.g. species mitigation, compensation.
- Species surveys/enhancements (in addition to any identified during the PEA)
 - o Ground nesting bird surveys.
 - o Great crested newt surveys of ponds.
 - o Otter and water vole surveys.
 - o Badger surveys.
- Detailed landscaping plan with habitat enhancements/creation to secure a net gain.
- Long-term management plan.
- Tree survey/arboricultural impact survey/adequate Root Protection Areas.
- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
- Sustainable drainage plan (if additional drainage is proposed).

Documents reviewed:

- Screening Opinion

EIA Screening Criteria

We feel that the development falls under a Schedule 2 development; 3(a) "Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water". It also meets the threshold criteria: "The area of the development exceeds 0.5 hectare."

With regards to potential significant ecological impacts, we feel that the development could have significant impacts on ground nesting priority farmland birds, given its size and the presence of these birds in the area, along with parts of the site being highlighted as important for grassland bird assemblages by DEFRA. Without knowing the populations on site and any cumulative impacts to birds in the area it is difficult to tell whether an EIA would be required.

However, there are ecological requirements that will need to be addressed, regardless of whether an EIA is required or not. A full assessment of the ecological impact is needed. A preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) with phase 1 habitat survey is required. The PEA will need to assess the fields proposed for development, the boundaries of the site, surrounding habitats where possible, any areas where excavations are needed such as for pipework for drainage or wiring, and proposed access. The PEA should identify any further surveys required.

DESIGNATED WILDLIFE SITES & WIDER ECOLOGICAL NETWORK

Statutory Designated Sites

The development falls within the Churnet Valley SSSI impact risk zone. However, the type of development does not trigger the need to consult with Natural England.

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

Cresswell's Piece SBI, located adjacent to the site, bordering a large portion of the western boundary.

Dilhorne Wood (BAS and ancient woodland), an area of ancient woodland located adjacent to the site to the south/west.

Heywood Grange Wood BAS, bordering part of the site to the east contains an area of ancient woodland.

Suitable buffer zones and other measures will be required to protect ancient woodland sites and LWS. The development should aim to expand, link and enhance LWS to strengthen ecological networks.

Potential impacts need to be assessed as part of the PEA.

Potential LWS

Many areas of potentially high value habitat exist that have not yet been assessed for LWS status, either through lack of funding or access restrictions. If potential high value habitats, identified through survey or other data are to be impacted it is important to establish their status.

We have records showing that A small section of the development site, a field directly to the north of Oak Tree Farm is recorded as a historic wildlife site 'Newhill (south-west of), Tickhill Lane'. 'Historic' sites area areas previously identified as important during early surveys in the 70's and 80's, but that have not been assessed to the current LWS criteria. Therefore they have no official status, but can indicate where priority habitats may still exist. The records can also be helpful to inform restoration proposals. We recommend obtaining the data for these sites from SER as part of any data search.

Any diverse habitats as identified during the PEA should be assessed against the LWS criteria- Guidelines for the Selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Staffordshire Version 6 (December 2017) available here http://www.staffs-ecology.org.uk/html2015/index.php?title=Site_Monitoring

Other designations/considerations

Parts of the site appear to be in Countryside Stewardship (middle tier). This could indicate priority habitats are present such as arable field margins.

HABITATS

Irreplaceable habitats

As previously mentioned, a number of ancient woodlands are present adjacent the site. Other smaller remnants of ancient woodland may be present that are not on the national inventory and this should be born in mind when assessing woodland areas.

Hedgerows within the site need to be considered and assessed for ancient status using best practice methodology to determine whether they may be irreplaceable and therefore require greater protection.

Priority Habitats

Depending on the exact site boundary, there may be small areas of marshy grassland present which could potentially meet Staffordshire priority habitat status. Field margins could have the potential to support diverse flora. To be assessed as part of the PEA.

Hedgerows -It is likely that a tree survey/arboricultural impact assessment will be required, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that impacts will be avoided. Root Protection Areas (RPAs) may need to be secured during the construction/installation process.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Policy NE1 in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Adopted September 2020, expects that 'all development where possible seeks to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In circumstances where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable, developers will be required to ensure that

impacts are appropriately mitigated, with suitable compensation measures towards loss of habitat used only as a last resort where there is no alternative'

There are very good opportunities for net gain across the site, for example, through grassland and hedgerow enhancement, as well as species orientated enhancements. The PEA may identify further opportunities. A net gain needs to be made clear within the landscaping proposals, in particular habitat creation and enhancement. A biodiversity net gain metric would be a positive inclusion but optional, providing the PEA does not reveal any valuable habitats that will be impacted and that an adequate landscaping plan can be approved.

A long-term management plan will also be required, covering the life of the development.

Surface drainage, SuDS

Any sustainable drainage should be designed to include wildlife habitat.

SPECIES

Bats

Bats are likely to commute and forage along the stream, hedgerows and woodland edges. They may also roost in any over mature trees and nearby buildings. Direct impacts are unlikely providing these features are protected. There may be opportunities for enhancements.

Great Crested Newts, Amphibians

There are several ponds within, immediately adjacent, or within close proximity to the site. One is located immediately adjacent to the red line boundary (SJ 96123 46171). There is also a possible pond within the red line boundary adjacent to the stream that intersects the site (SJ 95955 45631). Other ponds exist within 250 - 300 m of the site, some examples include: SJ 96024 46627, SJ 96132 46740, SJ 96261 46677, SJ 96331 45691, and SJ 96256 44995. This is not an extensive list, and others could be listed if the range is extended to 500 m. Several drainage ditches also intersect the site, which may be used by amphibians. Due to the potential of disturbance and harm during the installation phase of the development, great crested newt surveys of the water bodies will be required to assess potential impacts and any mitigation required.

Otter and Water Vole

A stream intersects the northern portion of the site, which later feeds into the River Blythe. Records of otter do exist in the nearby area. Impacts to otters and water voles need to be assessed for this area of the site.

Birds

The size of the fields mean they are suitable for ground-nesting birds such as priority farmland species etc. A number of species including skylark, lapwing, snipe and curlew have been recorded in the area. Parts of the site are noted on MAGIC as being important for priority birds Lapwing and Curlew as well as general grassland bird assemblages

Photovoltaic parks impact negatively on these species through displacing birds from breeding areas, as they require open habitat and will no longer nest with panels present. Therefore, a ground nesting bird survey will be required, and potentially off-site mitigation should impacts be predicted.

Reptiles

Potential reptile habitat/presence should be assessed during the PEA.

Badgers

Due to numerous records within the area and suitable habitat, a badger survey will be required.

Brown Hares

There are records of brown hare within the area, due to this impacts to this species need to be considered. Due to the grassland being retained, potential impacts may be limited. However, densities of grazing animals (if proposed) will need to be low, possibly with areas of grassland reserved for wildlife via fencing.

Careful consideration is needed for any boundary treatments to ensure that mammal commuting routes are not severed (e.g. badgers, hare, hedgehogs).

Invertebrates

Due to the size of the site, there is a great opportunity to link up nearby habitats and wildlife sites by creating wild corridors along south-facing areas with habitat suited for insect foraging/commuting/nesting. This could greatly benefit many insect species such as beneficial bees and butterflies, as well as other species (such as birds and mammals) that rely on them. This could be integrated alongside the solar panels, or along designed wildlife corridors.

Regards,

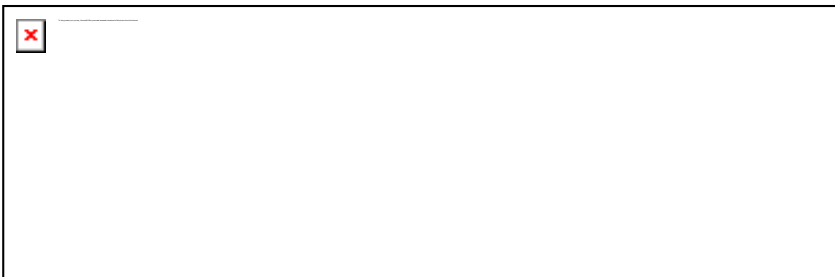
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Planning consultations- please send to

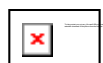
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2 Attachments



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