

Project Profile

Paytherden Solar Farm, Devon

Overview

BSG Ecology provided support to Lightrock Power in determining the scope of ecological survey, inputting to project design, and identifying opportunities for biodiversity gain at the Paytherden Solar Farm, Devon. The project was consented in July 2022.

Challenge

BSG Ecology was commissioned by LDA Design, working on behalf of Lightrock Power, to provide ecological support to the Paytherden Solar Farm, East Devon.

The proposed development area covered approximately 70 hectares of predominantly organically-grazed pasture. The main challenges associated with the scheme were achieving significant biodiversity gain (a client-driven aspiration to achieve a positive scheme in the absence of a district level biodiversity gain policy), avoiding potential impacts on horseshoe bats (which often feed on invertebrates associated with organic cattle dung) and minimising the potential of the project to affect badgers, which occur in abundance in the area. Other potential issues included loss of species-rich hedgerow and associated hedge banks, and impacts on otter associated with the River Clyst catchment.

Solution

The scope of baseline work was based on professional judgement and experience, as the district planning authority did not have an ecologist in post to discuss and agree the scope of work with.

An extended Phase 1 habitat survey was conducted during which the condition of the habitats present was assessed by an experienced botanical surveyor with reference to Natural England guidance (associated with the application of Defra Metric 3.0*). It was agreed with the landowner that during the operational phase of the development, land within the solar farm would be subject to very light (conservation) grazing using organic sheep. The predicted outcome through running the Metric will be a 23 % biodiversity gain.

Survey work found no evidence of significant use of the Site by horseshoe bats, indicating effects on them are likely to be very minor. Due to the abundance of badgers in the local landscape, survey of both the Site and surrounding farmland was completed. All the local main setts were identified, allowing their retention as part of the design process and building a wider understanding of badger distribution across the area. Some small setts will be closed under licence to allow construction, but clans should be largely unaffected by the proposals. Loss of hedgerow associated with the scheme will be minimal, and more than compensated by additional hedgerow planting, while effects on otter associated with tributaries of the Clyst will be minimised as a result of stand-offs from stream corridors.

The ecological assessment submitted as part of the planning application was accompanied by a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) in order to reduce the number of likely conditions and the uncertainty concerning the detailed design of the scheme.

Outcome

Paytherden Solar Farm was consented in July 2022.

Testimonial

"BSG Ecology were an integral and much valued part of the project team from inception to application determination, providing design layout inputs, a suite of species surveys, as well as advice on habitat creation and approaches to maximising biodiversity net gain across an organic farm."

Ed Salter, Principal Consultant, LDA Design

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*Defra Metric 3.0 has now been superseded by Metric 4.0