

Rachel Tibbetts

From: Rebekah Morgan
Sent: 22 November 2023 09:54
To: Planning
Subject: FW: 22/01682/F: Land North of Manor Farm, Noke

Please capture in DEF

Consultation response from Ecology

With kind regards

Rebekah Morgan

Mrs Rebekah Morgan
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My normal working pattern is: Monday to Wednesday 8am to 2:00pm and Thursday/Friday 8am to 4pm.

Planning and Development services can be contacted as follows: Development Management - planning@cherwell-dc.gov.uk; Building Control - building.control@cherwell-dc.gov.uk; Planning Policy - planning.policy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk; Conservation - design.conservation@cherwell-dc.gov.uk. For the latest information on Planning and Development please visit www.cherwell.gov.uk

From: Charlotte Watkins <Charlotte.Watkins@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk>
Sent: Friday, November 17, 2023 2:19 PM
To: Rebekah Morgan <rebekah.morgan@cherwell-dc.gov.uk>
Subject: 22/01682/F: Land North of Manor Farm, Noke

22/01682/F: Land North of Manor Farm, Noke
Additional information

I have noted the applicants ecologist's response to my previous comments on this application and welcome the changes made to the proposed habitats on site (grassland maximised for biodiversity value) the commitment to mitigation for skylark, agreement to a condition for no visible lighting on site and the demonstration of a good level of net gain proposed in habitat biodiversity units on the site itself which would benefit some species. All these aspects could be conditioned.

The applicants have submitted a helpful plan showing the proximity of some solar farms to RSPB reserves across England and I accept therefore that there are precedents for solar farms sited within close proximity of designated wetland areas. I note however that for at least one of the sites illustrated the RSPB themselves strongly objected to the siting because of its proximity to the reserve and because it prevented the future expansion of the reserve (Objection to Cleeve Hill Solar Park 2019, RSPB). I could find no monitoring information on the impact that any of these functioning solar farms may have had.

There is very little information (in particular peer reviewed studies) from the UK as to whether concerns regarding the proximity of solar farms to protected sites are valid or unfounded. Those sites which support large numbers of red list bird species which include waders and waterfowl and migrating birds as at Otmoor are those generally the species thought to be most likely to be impacted however I accept there is no robust data on this. The last review from Natural England largely highlighted a lack of information.

- Evidence review of the impact of solar farms on birds, bats and general ecology (NEER012) 1st edition - 9th March 2017 Natural England: 'In the case of solar farms, there is almost no evidence and research into their ecological impacts is urgently needed' 'Quantifying the effect of solar PV developments as a function of distance to protected areas is equally as important as it would allow statutory bodies and ecological organisations to provide more detailed guidance on the placement of these developments where the conservation integrity of a protected area is potentially at risk.'
- An RSPB policy document (RSPB, 2014) stated that the RSPB advocate solar technologies, however recommends avoiding deployment in locations close to protected areas, or close to water features.
- A review by BSG Ecology – Potential ecological impacts of ground mounted photovoltaic solar panels 2019 stated: 'It follows that it is important to site solar farms away from important/sensitive aquatic invertebrate populations.' It then summarised that there is a lack of monitoring and information on the impacts on birds but that they are likely to be species specific.

It is my opinion therefore that in the absence of robust studies or clear guidance, there remains a level of unquantifiable risk of impact on protected species and sites due to the choice of location for this solar farm and that this risk must be taken into consideration with all other factors in any decision.

Its proximity to Otmoor LWS/RSPB nature reserve and the Otmoor SSSI which is among our districts most valuable ecological sites would not be the preferred site in ecological terms because of this despite the site itself being able to deliver a net gain over its current agricultural baseline. I also understood from a recent meeting with the applicants that the RSPB had plans to extend the Otmoor reserve into an area directly adjacent to the proposed solar farm site and so the siting of this solar farm could curtail future plans for extension of the nature reserve into the CTA.

Kind regards

Charlie

Dr Charlie Watkins

Ecology Officer

Communities Directorate

Cherwell District Council

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