

Solar PV Farms and Ecology: Developer Advice Note

July 2021



Wiltshire Council

All proposals for solar farms will be required to submit the following documents to support planning applications. It will not be possible to condition their submission after permission has been granted.

1. Survey – a report and annotated plan which identifies habitats across the site in accordance with the UK Habitats Classification System.

- Surveys must include a comprehensive desk study including a data search from WSBRC.
 - Have regard to [guidance documents](#) on Wiltshire Council website, especially for Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC.
- Survey **all** habitats within the zone of influence including boundary hedgerows and trees, even where these are to be retained
- All offsite areas proposed for enhancement must be suitably surveyed to produce a robust baseline
- Protected species surveys of all habitats with a function to support wildlife species, even where these habitats are proposed for retention, with particular reference to breeding birds (particularly ground nesting birds – establish baseline data such as number of nests of each species), badgers, dormice, GCN and bats, including Annex II species foraging habitat over grassland
- Assess impacts at site level and at wider landscape scale, following the CIEEM guidelines for ecological impact assessment.

2. Ecology Mitigation and Enhancement Plan (EMEP) – a scaled drawing showing all existing ecological features, together with mitigation and enhancement measures in relation to solar panel layout. Specify buffer distances, locations of new planting, sowing, and other permanent features, whether retained or created

- Follow the mitigation hierarchy
- Identify buffer distances for all features to be retained, following guidance e.g. for ancient woodland and SSSI (Natural England and Forestry Commission), main rivers (Environment Agency) and minor watercourses (Wiltshire Council drainage), BS 5837:2012: Trees in Relation to Construction
- Buffer areas must be semi-natural habitats and not include access tracks etc
- Use seed mixes appropriate for the intended aftercare and the management regime during the lifetime of the site. E.g. specific solar farm leys suitable for sheep grazing
- Ensure that the size, shape and location of habitat areas created for BNG are conducive to successful management of those habitats, e.g. ensure accessibility by appropriate machinery
- Use the Biodiversity Metric (current version) to demonstrate a net gain across the site, including land outside the application boundary where constraints preclude net gain within it. The unlocked spreadsheet must be submitted for review in support of the EMEP
- No artificial lighting of the site should be necessary during the operation phase, however if security lighting is deemed necessary, a lighting strategy including a lux plot must be submitted to the LPA for consideration. The lux plot should demonstrate that a level of 0.5 lux or less can be achieved at the edges of sensitive ecological features
- The mitigation and enhancement plan will also cover the decommissioning of the installation, outline principles for restoration and a suitable 5-year aftercare plan for the restored site.

- A detailed restoration plan will be agreed prior to the end of the planning permission for the installation
- Restoration of the site will immediately follow decommissioning of the installation and will adhere to the agreed restoration plan.

3. Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) – a report explaining how habitats will be managed during the operational phase of development. Evidence will be required to demonstrate how management will be delivered and to prove it will be effective.

- All management plans will be conditioned for the lifetime of the installation.
- All management prescriptions should demonstrate they will be deliverable.
 - Present evidence that the developer/landowner have agreed the management regime
 - Consider access for machinery required for management including turning space
 - If areas within the site are to be sown, will this be cut or grazed.
 - Is grazing feasible and agreed?
 - Is mowing physically possible?
 - If management includes mowing, make provision for collecting arisings
 - Is a separated area required for storing arisings?
 - Can arisings be composted? Will they need to be removed off-site?
- All areas of compensatory habitat must be managed for wildlife
- All management plans must reference a monitoring scheme (submitted as a separate document) and include a mechanism for adaptive management if either the management becomes unworkable or is shown to be ineffective in achieving the long-term objectives.
- The management plan will also cover the period of decommissioning at the end of the operational phase of the development.

4. Construction Ecology Management Plan (CEMP) – a report explaining how the construction works will be managed to avoid impacts and how compliance will be achieved on site.

- The CEMP must identify a suitably qualified ECoW who will oversee the construction works in relation to ecology with particular emphasis on:
 - Update of surveys as required prior to start of works, especially for badgers
 - Erection of the perimeter fence
 - Location of the site compound to avoid all sensitive retained habitat areas
 - Removal of hedgerows where agreed
 - Root protection zones for trees
 - Protection zones around trees supporting bat roosts
 - Regular, documented inspections of all buffer zones to check protective fencing and that these areas are kept clear of all construction vehicles, machinery and materials
 - Closure of badger setts where necessary
- The CEMP will identify all timing constraints on works e.g. in relation to breeding birds, hedgerow removal.

- If construction lighting is required, a strategy must be included in the CEMP which clearly demonstrates no impacts on sensitive, retained habitat features.
- The CEMP will make provision for protection of all wildlife identified as present or likely to be present within a zone of influence and will implement the precautionary principle at all times.
- The ECoW will complete a CEMP compliance document (Appendix 1) and submit this to the LPA within four weeks of the completion of construction.

5. Monitoring – a scheme of monitoring focused on the key aspects of the Ecological Mitigation Plan.

The monitoring scheme should comprise the following:

- Commitment to undertake surveys immediately following construction completion to establish the baseline for future monitoring.
- Identification of the key features to be monitored and methodology to be used.
- Monitoring targets with specific measurable thresholds for success for each key feature with remediation measures incorporated where necessary.
- Commitment to continue monitoring for the operational lifetime of the installation in years 1, 3, 5, 10, 25 and 40, and the 5-year aftercare plan following completion of restoration.
- Commitment to prepare a report after each monitoring exercise, relating findings to those of previous years and the intended targets. The report will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority within 6 months of each monitoring visit.