



Cheshire Wildlife Trust

Frodsham Solar DCO - EN010153

Written Representations

Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT)

19 December 2025

Summary

This written representation is submitted by Cheshire Wildlife Trust in response to the Development Consent Order (DCO) application for the Frodsham Solar Farm, with particular reference to the updated versions of the Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (oLEMP)¹, Outline Non-Breeding Bird Mitigation Strategy (oNBBMS), and Information to Inform HRA (IIHRA)², which were submitted at Procedural Deadline B.

While the Trust recognises the importance of renewable energy development, it is essential that such schemes are designed and assessed in a manner that is ecologically robust, transparent, and consistent with established principles of nature recovery and biodiversity protection.

Our concerns centre on the apparent disregard for fundamental ecological principles, notably those set out in the Lawton Review’s “more, bigger, better, and joined up” framework as well as on inconsistencies and deficiencies in the applicant’s narrative, evidence base, and methodologies. Taken together, we believe these issues call into question whether the proposed mitigation and compensation measures are capable of adequately addressing the scale and nature of habitat loss and disturbance, particularly for internationally important bird assemblages associated with the Mersey Estuary SPA and Ramsar site.

¹ Document Ref: EN010153/DR/7.13

² Document Ref: EN010153/DR/5.3

Disregard for basic ecological principles

One of the leading contemporary ecological principles in the UK was coined by John Lawton in his Making Space for Nature Report³ and is summed up as: more, bigger, better and joined up. These four goals can be sought after individually, but are most effective and lead to better nature recovery when attained in combination. They apply to individual wildlife sites as well as the ecological networks that connect them, and are foundational for habitat creation, restoration, and enhancement.

The Frodsham Solar Farm development is taking a “quality over quantity” approach (IIHRA 8.1.6), which might seem like an acceptable trade-off in most aspects of life, but not in the case of ecology. Smaller areas of better habitat sacrifice ‘bigger’, ‘more’, and ‘joined up’ for ‘better’, which does not lead to good results for nature’s recovery. The applicant’s approach assumes that enhancement compensates for a reduction in area, which goes against many ecological principles, particularly when it comes to wildlife conservation.

Consistently throughout the application, the destruction of habitats (and lack of compensation for some) is justified by their poor condition⁴. While it is true that Frodsham Marshes has been drained, ploughed, managed poorly, and developed on, this does not negate the value that the remaining habitats have as a last bastion of resources for numerous species. And from a conservation perspective, the size of the site is valuable in itself as it holds restoration potential, which would be removed by the Solar Farm and any future developments. If the site is developed on and the habitats are condensed to 53ha, no amount of enhancement or betterment of that area can compensate for the vastness that is lost.

The applicant claims that “it is considered that one hectare of optimally managed wetland provides disproportionately higher carrying capacity than one hectare of arable / improved or managed grassland due to its non-linear ecological value” (IIHRA 8.2.15). The applicant then absolves themselves from providing quantitative evidence by subsequently stating that “there is no agreed metric that exists to calculate what the non-linear habitat enhancements and additive mitigation being implemented as part of the NBBMA design”. The BNG metric, designed by Natural England, serves this exact purpose by assigning value to habitats based on their size, ecological importance, condition, considering their position in the ecological network as well as the time and effort required for creation. We encourage the applicants to refer to the BNG metric to back up their unsubstantiated claims.

³ [‘Making space for nature’: a review of England’s wildlife sites published today - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ Reedbeds in the BNG report 6.1.4, grasslands in the IIHRA 8.2.1

We also strongly disagree with the applicant's claims of additionality, which have been affirmed with renewed insistence in the newest version of the IIHRA. They state that "the approach to mitigation for FLL loss during the operational phase is deemed 'additive', whereby additional measures above those already enacted under FWF are implemented" (IIHRA 8.2.11). We disagree on the fundamental principle of additionality when it comes to ecological mitigation. Additionality means that if mitigation B were to suddenly cease, mitigation A would still be in effect. This is not the case in this instance. **The applicants are replacing mitigation instead of adding mitigation**, and this leads to an overall net loss for the wildlife as they are now only getting mitigation for one development instead of two, as well as the in-combination effects.

Inconsistencies in narrative

There are several major inconsistencies throughout the documents which have major bearings on the way that the development is portrayed to the Examining Authority, consultees, and the public.

For example, Cell 3 is referenced throughout the IIHRA and the oNBBMS as both being retained and enhanced⁵ as well as completely reengineered. If Cell 3 is to be completely reengineered, the whole area should be marked as lost in the BNG metric habitat baseline tab and created in the habitat creation tab. Enhancement is not the same as destruction and re-creation; it is whether the site stops serving its ecological function for any period of time.

Another example is the way the SADA (particularly Cells 1, 2, 5) is sometimes emphasised as being bad for birds when it is convenient to undervalue it⁶, and sometimes as being good for birds⁷. This contradiction is most apparent and concerning when it is stated that "during construction of the NBBMA, alternative habitats for SPA birds will be available through: i) All habitats within the SADA" (oNBBMS 8.2.6). If the rest of the SADA is expected to be used by all Cell 3 birds while Cell 3 is under construction, the rest of the SADA should be considered as ecologically valuable as Cell 3. This conclusion exposes the inadequacy of the proposed mitigation efforts.

Finally, there are several small "errors" throughout the various documents which, intentionally or not, serve to minimise the impacts of the development. The IIHRA still states that the Skylark Mitigation Area is 30ha (IIHRA 3.1.9), and the column headers in Table 8-1 include the hectarage of the NBBMA but not of 'Cells 1, 2, 5 + existing Cell

⁵ IIHRA 7.2.9, IIHRA 8.2.1, NBBMA Additive Mitigation column of Table 8-2

⁶ IIHRA 8.2.1, oNBBMS 1.7.7

⁷ ES Chapter 8 ornithology 8.6.14, IIHRA 8.2.2

3/NMMBA'. However, small issues like these provide nowhere near as much frustration as the lack of clarity, consistency, and coherence in the various methodologies as outlined below.

Unclear and incoherent methodology

Bird surveys⁸: The bird surveys are piecemeal, inconsistent across years, varying in extent and methodology. These surveys are the basis for the calculations and assertions made about the impacts and mitigation for birds. If the underlying data itself can't be trusted, how can the rest?

The 'Cleve Hill approach' (Annex 1 of oNBBMS): The introductory paragraph is unclear and incoherent, making it difficult to decipher how the calculations and assumptions have been made. Additionally, the revisions to the oNBBMS now state that "for the purposes of impact assessment, mitigation has been designed to account for all SPA bird use across the entire Order Limits" (2.1.1), but calculations do not seem to have been updated to reflect this. Furthermore, the original documents relating to the Cleve Hill calculations and methodology have not been made available, so it is difficult to assess the original scheme on which the Frodsham one is basing its mitigation. The Kent Wildlife Trust sent objections to the Cleve Hill Scheme⁹, so it is likely that we would disagree with the Cleve Hill approach and its application to this case both in principle and in specifics.

BNG metric and report: It is unclear which areas have been included in the BNG metric, and which have not. The BNG report¹⁰ fails to explain how the metric has been filled out, which habitats are retained, enhanced, and lost. There is no map to identify the individual parcels and how they correspond to the metric. There is no justification for how the metric was filled out, particularly with regard to the habitats under the solar panels and the loss and re-creation of Cell 3.

We would therefore like to request that the applicant submit additional or revised documents, as detailed below, to provide the incomplete or missing information outlined above. Without these, our ability to properly evaluate certain aspects of the application will be hindered, particularly those broached in the Written Questions.

- The complete and coherent methodology of the calculations undertaken to determine the mitigation required based on the 'Cleve Hill' approach. This should include:

⁸ Document Ref: EN010153/DR/6.2 Table 2-2

⁹ [Kent Wildlife Trust's Objection to Cleve Hill Solar Park DCO Application | Policy Commons](#)

¹⁰ Document Ref: EN010153/DR/7.12

- justification as to why only 3 species have been included instead of all SPA species identified earlier in the document.
- Citation of the “literature” used to inform the ‘bird days supported by each ha’.
- Clarification on the calculation of bird days.
- An Excel spreadsheet version of the BNG metric
- An updated BNG report to reflect the changes to the metric. This should also include:
 - Habitat condition assessment sheets that aren’t blank.
 - A map of all habitat parcels corresponding to the ‘habitat reference number’ column in the metric.
 - Justification as to why the UKHab guidance for defining habitats under solar panels¹¹ has been ignored, and which official guidance has been used instead.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust considers that the current application is undermined by flawed ecological assumptions, internal inconsistencies, and a lack of clarity and transparency in the methodologies used to assess impacts and design mitigation. The reliance on unsubstantiated claims of non-linear ecological value and additionality, coupled with unclear application of the BNG metric and incomplete or incoherent survey and calculation methods, prevents a confident conclusion that no adverse effects will arise, either alone or in combination. We therefore urge the Examining Authority to require the submission of additional and revised information, as outlined above, to enable a thorough, evidence-based assessment of the proposal.

¹¹ UKHab Ltd (2023). UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0 (at <https://www.ukhab.org>), section 83, pg. 326